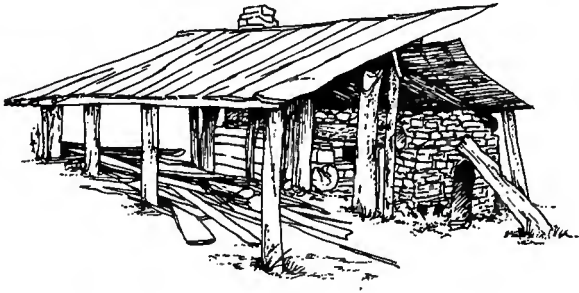


The Meaders
Family
North Georgia Potters

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in barrels or in four gallon churns, where they kept almost indefinitely. Arie preferred barrels because the wood let the moisture escape, thereby avoiding a slick, watery buildup. To cook the bleached fruit, Arie's mother shoveled coals onto her fireplace hearth, atop which she set a stoneware pot. The fruit was spooned into the vessel, which was already filled with hot water to prevent its cracking on contact with the coals, and was left to steam and cook through.

Apples were also sun-dried like berries, salted to deter worms, and stored away in handspun cotton sacks.⁶ Later, they were cooked in sorghum syrup in a one-gallon pitcher and the resultant apple butter processed in fruit cans in the manner described earlier.⁷

One final domestic activity, in a sense related to food, was the manufacturing of soap. Hard soap and washing powder were luxuries unknown to Arie Meaders's family before 1912. Instead, the Waldrops, like their neighbors, washed their dishes and clothes and scrubbed their floors with homemade lye soap. In making the soap, the family collected fireplace ashes through the winter in an ash hopper. From mid-February through March, Arie poured branch water through the ash hopper until sufficient amounts of lye dripped from a spout at the lower end into a waiting stoneware pitcher. When enough was collected to make a wash pot full of soap, Arie's mother would boil it until the concentrated end-product was "strong enough to take the hide off her tongue."⁸ Scrap meat and skins were added to the boiling lye and stirred until dissolved. Once cooled, the resultant soft soap was spooned into a tightly-constructed wooden box made for the purpose. There it was allowed to "age."

During the fall, this same lye was also used to make corn hominy, a special treat for Arie. Arie's mother boiled her corn kernels in the lye until their skins fell away. Following that, the corn was washed, cooked again, and then stored in a four-gallon churn. When the family wanted to eat it, the hominy had to be baked in a baking oven and then pounded to fine bits with an iron mallet. Afterwards, it was cooked before the fireplace in a skillet of bacon drippings.

JUGS

Probably the ware form most identified with the southern pottery trade is the jug. Jugs, of course, were widely manufactured for a thriving spirits industry all during the last century and accounted for a

large share of the potters' business. Even after prohibition was declared in the state of Georgia in 1907, illicit distillers ("moonshiners" or "blockaders") continued to patronize White County artisans.⁹

Most whiskey jugs were turned in the one-gallon size, with a small mouth and tapered neck to seat the cob stopper correctly. Cheever Meaders turned a few two-handled jugs in the five-gallon size for the specific purpose of hauling moonshine, but these were a custom item. His brother, Wiley, likewise manufactured five- and six-gallon mixing churns for the same clientele; because of their large size, he was paid an inflated ten cents a gallon for his extra labor.

Whiskey jugs, like meat-preserving churns, demanded a high standard of work in terms of strength and nonpermeability. They were, therefore, carefully turned and took the potters' best glazes. Cheever was especially proud of his jugs as the following account indicates:

Fella lived back up here named Powers. I made him a bunch of jugs one time. He wanted twenty, said he wanted to put twenty gallons of corn whiskey in 'em. Hell, I made 'em until they held. And he got 'em, filled 'em up, and was back in the hollers there somewhere. And it was pretty hard to pack them out, and he simply put 'em in a stump hole. Fella went home and taken typhoid fever, and it was eight weeks before he seen 'em again. And he said they held, never lost a drop out of them twenty jugs.

Besides serving as whiskey containers, stoneware jugs were used by farmers as water canteens. They also functioned as sorghum syrup receptacles. These *syrup jugs*, in sizes ranging from a half-gallon to three gallons, were manufactured in formidable numbers by White County potters and were stored away by their customers until cane harvest time (see fig. 41). Like fruit jars, however, the vessels were eventually replaced by a commercial product (in this case, cheap tin ware) and ultimately disappeared from the potters' stock-in-trade.

Another specialized jug was the poultry fountain, locally called a *chicken jug*. Early versions of these unusual vessels had clay-plugged mouths and a lip pinched out around their bottoms for a drinking trough. They were filled through the lip and then set upright in the poultry yard. Later chicken waterers had a small side hole near the bottom for a feeder, plus a separate walled dish for a base.

Of all the Meaderses' jugs, none has engendered greater interest among collectors than their *face jugs* (fig. 42). The introduction of the

Face jugs.

Figure 42a. *The jugs in this photograph were made in 1967 and 1968. The smallest is by Cheever, the other two, by Lanier. (Photo by Ralph Rinzler, 1979.)*



Figure 42b. *These later jugs were made by Lanier a decade after those in the above picture. (Photo by Robert Sayers, 1979.)*

form in White County is generally credited to Gillsville potter Will Hewell, who worked in the area periodically between 1910 and 1940. The Browns, who worked around Cleveland in 1920 and 1921, also knew the form, and Brown family descendants continue today to make face jugs at a pottery near Asheville, North Carolina. That Cheever Meaders recalls as a boy seeing a three-foot example occupying a corner of his grandfather's porch may mean that face jugs have even deeper roots in the region.

Thus the local origin of the form remains a mystery. In an engaging aside, Lanier Meaders muses that the ultimate origin of the face jug may lie with the Viking adventurers of the North Atlantic: "They settled most of the world anyhow, they were a seagoing people. And all their ships, you know, wooden ships, had some kind of a head on them: a dragon or bird head or some kind of animal."

In view of their popularity with customers, it is surprising that these intriguing jugs were never considered as more than ephemera by family members. Cheever, ever the production potter, disliked the time spent modeling the faces and complained that his fingers were "too stiff" for the chore: "People ask for 'em, but I ain't fooling with it much. Don't like to make 'em. Too much work. If I make one, set it off, and time I get it decorated and fixed up, I could turn two or three other pieces of some kind. I could turn two pitchers, and I never have yet made enough pitchers."

Cheever continued to manufacture face jugs in his last year primarily because they were profitable. His pieces retained a primitive simplicity with their rough, unshaped eyebrows, their pinched-off clay noses, and their china and ceramic tile teeth. In marked contrast to these are the face jugs presently being made by his son, Lanier.

Lanier Meaders's attitude toward his specialty jugs is almost as cavalier as his father's: "Well, they're nothing except to make somebody mad with. They can be used for that pretty well. Tell a fella it had his picture, you'd have to fight him after he's seen it. They're about the ugliest thing a person can make." On the other hand, since around 1969 Lanier has taken great care with his modeling. Approaching "sculptural realism" (though still grossly exaggerated), his jugs now have caved-in cheeks, quartz eyes, and finely detailed lips, ears, and eyebrows. Each vessel has its own "personality," conveying a great deal of the maker's wit and talent. Some of Lanier's

more unusual pieces include horned “devil jugs” (jack-o-lantern-type jugs with perforated features allowing a candle to show through), two-faced Janus jugs, and comical wig stands. For the sake of diversity, the younger Meaders enjoys caricaturing real-life individuals, among them the famous (Field Marshall Montgomery) and the not so famous (a customer at the Cleveland laundromat).

Since 1969 Lanier has signed the bottoms of most of his face jugs in script with the occasional addition of CLEVELAND, GEORGIA. Lest he be accused of taking his work too seriously, he rejoins, “People want something that is no good, something that they can’t use up except to just sit around and look at it.” As for his face jugs, “they have no earthly value at all.”

OTHER TRADITIONAL WARE

Miscellaneous oddments made by the Meaders family and their neighbors in times past have included gallon bed-pans (*slop jars*) turned for the local hostleries; miniature versions of the standard jugs, crocks, and pitchers for children’s play; and unglazed pipe bowls. Neighbor potter Guy Dorsey remembered sitting in front of his burning kiln as a youth, chunking the firebox, and leisurely fashioning pipes in a lead mold: “Then the next time I burnt, you could just fill a flower jar full of them, burn a peck of them at a time. Then you get one of these creek bank canes for a stem. Man, there’s been many a pound of homemade tobacco burned in them.” Guy also recalled rolling clay into balls and firing them for marbles: “You know, I used to think that if we could get ahold of a set of store-bought marbles, we’d fly!”

Cheever Meaders also manufactured large numbers of red earthenware flowerpots, much like those in common use today. The unglazed pots were hauled to hardware stores in the larger towns and were a trade staple. Cheever continued through the 1940s to make this sort of ware, at one time selling most of his produce to a florist in Cleveland.

NONTRADITIONAL WARE

With the accretion of small changes in the regional economy and in people’s lifeways, the Meaderses’ market for traditional stoneware experienced a considerable decline. The end of subsistence farming