

Searching For Enslaved Laborers At The Reverend John Landrum Site (38AK497)

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As part of the 2011 Edgefield Field School run by the University of Illinois, University of South Carolina, and Diachronic Research Foundation, archaeological investigations into the domestic locations of the enslaved laborers of the Old Edgefield District's pottery industry were conducted at the Reverend John Landrum site (38AK497) located in present-day Aiken County, South Carolina.

The pottery site is situated in the Big Horse Creek Section of the Old Edgefield District, located approximately 11 miles south of the Edgefield town center. Reverend John Landrum, a Baptist minister and brother of Pottersville founder, Abner Landrum, erected the pottery in the early 19th century. Due to its inclusion on the Robert Mills Map (Figure 1), it is believed to have been an established enterprise by 1817.

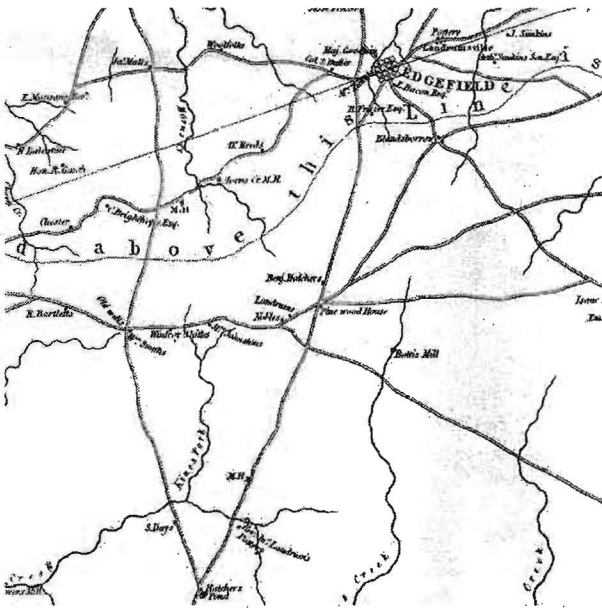


Figure 1: Mills' 1825 Atlas (originally surveyed in 1817) showing Rev. John Landrum's Pottery.

Slave labor played a major role in the success of the district's pottery production. In addition to turning vessels, African American slaves would have also participated in all stages of the production process including digging the clay, mixing the glazes, loading and unloading the kilns, as well as bringing the vessels to market. The enslaved pottery laborers have also been associated with the production of face jugs which are believed to exhibit African stylistic attributes. In an early 20th century interview, Colonel Davies, a pottery owner in Bath, South Carolina, noted that in their spare time workers were making "weird-looking

water jugs, roughly modeled on the front in the form of a grotesque human face" (Barber 1909:466). At the time of his death in 1847, Reverend John Landrum was recorded as owning 18 slaves and would have hired slaves from various other owners (Holcombe and Holcombe 1989).

In a 1987 preliminary survey of the approximately nine acre site, the ruins of the main Landrum house were located in addition to a saw mill on Little Horse Creek (Castille et al. 1988). The area between these two structures would have a high probability of containing the enslaved labor housing due to its spatial relationship to the main house, historic roads and production facilities including the kilns. During the initial survey, a surface concentration of stoneware was also discovered on a flat ridge north of the main house within the targeted area. A preliminary walkover survey in 2011 also discovered large ferruginous sandstone footing stones along with a possible chimney base. The ridge and its surrounding area were therefore selected for subsurface exploration.

A 30 m x 35 m grid was established in reference to the site datum. A total of 56 50 cm shovel test pits (STPs) were excavated to sterile soil or hard compacted clay (approximately 40 cm) in 5 m intervals. Units located within the vicinity of the ridge depression were highly productive and contained a large quantity of domestic and architectural artifacts including wrought nails, brick, window glass, an upholstery tack, gunflint, an agateware doorknob, a brass button, a blue glass bead, non-local ceramics including creamware and blue and polychrome hand painted pearlware, oyster fragments, and numerous animal bones and teeth.

In addition to utilitarian stoneware vessels such as jars and jugs, more unusual stoneware forms were also recovered including cups, bowls, plates, pitchers, goblets, and a possible ashtray that indicate the potters were making domestic items for personal use. A stoneware sherd with a dotted dark brown slip decoration traditionally attributed to the Thomas Chandler pottery was also recovered suggesting exchange between the potteries.

One STP within the ridge depression also contained a large concentration of charcoal that extended to a depth of 45 cm indicative of the location of the chimney firebox or perhaps a fire event in which the structure was burned and the chimney later collapsed into the structure's interior.

Two additional artifacts may point to a late 19th century occupation or site visitation including South Carolina dispensary bottle fragments and an oval pressed metal tag or pendant associated with the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, a fraternal organization originating in 18th century England. Further archival work, archaeological investigation and analysis are needed before further conclusions can be made.

Perhaps of greater interest, a stoneware face jug nose was also discovered in one of the STPs (Figures 2 and 3). The slightly crooked nose which angles to the right measures approximately 6.5 cm and has a dark brown alkaline glaze. Although no evidence of face jug production has been discovered at the site nor have any face jugs in collections been attributed to the Reverend John Landrum pottery, the dark brown alkaline glaze may be evidence that it was indeed produced on site.



Figure 2: 2011 Edgefield Field School student Amandine Castex screens artifacts. Courtesy of the author.

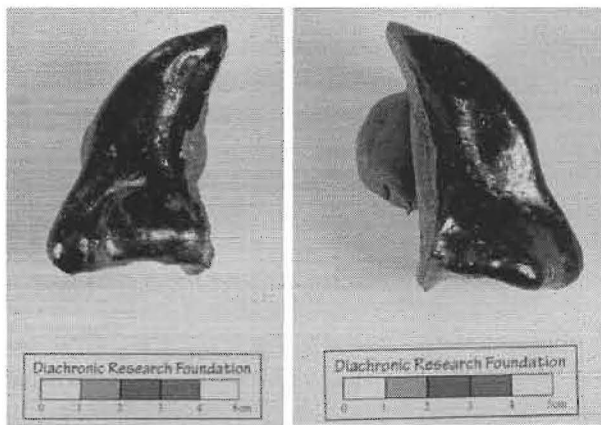


Figure 3: Side views of Face Jug Nose. Courtesy of Carl Steen.

Future excavations at the Reverend John Landrum site have been slated for the fall of 2011. Goals of the investigations include exploring additional possible locations of enslaved labor housing as well as determining whether face jugs were being produced on site.

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