“Little Wash” and His Big Crock

By James L. Murphy

The faint cobalt stenciling is a little difficult to read but after more than 100 years still remains decipherable as “G. W. Brown/Roseville, O./20.” As such, it is possibly the only known marked example of stoneware produced by stoneware potter George Washington Brown.

Twenty gallon stoneware crocks were not unheard of during this period, though throwing them on a potter’s wheel required considerable skill, and even larger, 30 and 50 gallon crocks still occasionally surface at farm sales and antique auctions.

G. W. Brown was George Washington Brown, one of three men of that name who lived in the Roseville area. Brown family genealogist Carole Williams (Williams 2004; pers. comm. August 11, 2008) has nicely sorted them out:

1. George Washington Brown (1824-1900), son of Joseph Brown, married Lucy Pemberton and was “an energetic, astute businessman and investor... his business ventures included a lumber mill and brick kiln.” According to his obituary, “When the manufacture of stoneware in this territory assumed proportions and the railroad facilities allowed, he was among the first dealers in that article and placed millions of gallons of the product on the market, at a handsome profit... He built the Brown Block and the Bank Building, his handsome residence on Main street, the row of dwellings at the south end of Main street, the large warehouse building in the vicinity and was the moving spirit in the construction of several other residence properties in the town.” Note that he was a dealer in stoneware.

2. George Washington Brown (1842–1912) son of William Brown and nephew of the above G. W. Brown. This G. W. Brown married Caroline Pemberton, the elder sister of Lucy Pemberton Brown. No doubt partly because “Lucy’s husband” and “Caroline’s husband” would probably not do in those days, Lucy Pemberton’s husband was known as “Big Wash” and Caroline Pemberton Brown’s as “Little Wash.” It was “Little Wash” who was the potter.

3. George Washington Brown (1861–1916) nephew of No. 1 G. W. Brown, was the son of James E. Brown and brother of Sarah “Sadie” McCoy. With his father, this G. W. Brown operated a general store on the northwest corner of First and Main Streets in Roseville (Murphy and Williams, 2008).

The earliest reference we have to the G. W. Brown pottery is the 1866 atlas of Muskingum County, which locates it on
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the east side of the road (County Road 87) in the
SE ¼ SE 14/ section 10, Clay Township. Local
histories indicate that the pottery was “remodeled”
in 1878. The 1880 population census lists the 38
year old potter and wife Caroline, while the 1880
manufacturing schedule indicates he had four hired
hands, producing $2,600 worth of stoneware annu­
ally. The pottery was still in operation in 1897, pro­
ducing cooking ware, with eight males and two fe­
male employed. The 1900 census lists him as a
“farmer,” though this does not mean the pottery was
no longer active. It is included in the 1918 Sanborn
Fire Insurance maps but was no longer in operation
by that time.

Because “Big Wash” operated a “stoneware de­
pot” in Roseville and much of the ware he shipped
was undoubtedly derived from his nephew, it might
be questionable whether the stenciled label referred
to the manufacturer or the dealer; in either case, it
seems clear that this “big crock” was made at the
stoneware pottery of “Little Wash.”

An article in the “Zanesville Times Signal” of
October 4, 1940, mentions the pottery of Washing­
ton Brown and the 1878 date for rebuilding, as well
as the fact that his grandson, Robert Brown, was
then (1940) operating the Mohawk Novelty Pot­
tery in Roseville. Robert Brown (1895-1965) was
the son of Orvil Odell Brown (1873-1951), who
produced and sold an eight-piece set beautiful light­
blue-glazed cooking ware (Murphy, 2005).

Until about twenty years ago, the site of “Little
Wash’s” pottery dump or waster pile remained un­
disturbed and was an important archaeological site.
Unfortunately, it was on the edge of an Ohio Dept.
of Reclamation reclamation project and despite
warnings of the archaeological consultant (Murphy
1992), was completely destroyed by an ODNR
“subcontractor.”

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