

## Summertime in the Old Edgefield District

Carl Steen, Diachronic Research Foundation

Did I mention it was hotter than Hades this May and June? A University of Illinois field school under the direction of Ph.D. candidate George Calfas excavated the kiln at the Pottersville site (38ED11) from late May to July 1. George will give more details, but I will share my impressions.

Pottersville was established around 1810 by Dr. Abner Landrum. He was credited by Robert Mills (1826) with developing the stoneware industry in the Old Edgefield District. The town was also the site of a print shop, carriage maker, blacksmith and tannery, among others. From Landrum it passed through several hands, finally ending up in the possession of Governor Francis W. Pickens in the 1850s.

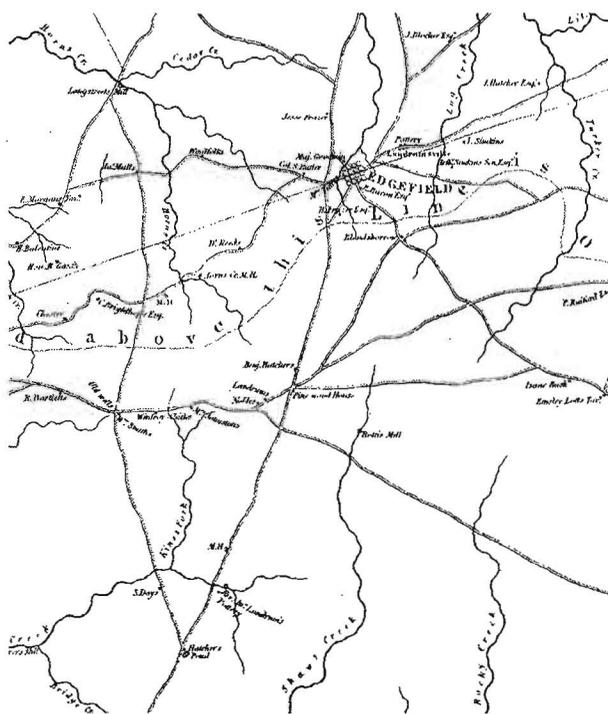


Figure 1: Robert Mills Atlas (1826).

The kiln site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in the 1970s, and it has been protected by the landowners. At the beginning of the field season, it was thought that there might be a typical groundhog type cross draft kiln – or more likely a series of them that were constructed over time. Once the vegetation was cleared from the landform something very different became evident. Two long walls with a depression in the center stretched from the bottom of the hill to the top. When the work was done, we found that the firebox, ware chamber walls, and chimney form a structure over 32m (105 feet) long. Most groundhog kilns are less than 10m long (Espenshade

2002). These walls are about 4m apart (12 feet). So this clearly isn't a groundhog kiln, but it may be their precursor. This stands as one of the largest kilns ever excavated, anywhere.

Excavations were aimed at uncovering the firebox, chimney, and the kiln interior. With a kiln this size it is possible that separate chambers and stoke holes could be found, but the excavations have not produced evidence of this. Thus it appears that this is a climbing tunnel kiln like a Japanese Anagama type kiln with a single chamber. The temperature would vary considerably from one end to the other, and the chamber appears to be constricted at the chimney end to direct the flow of hot air. It is possible that bisque wares and bricks, which require less heat than stoneware, were placed at the far end. I'm looking forward to George's dissertation.

My role at Pottersville was mostly advisory – that is, standing around in the shade watching the students move tons of rock (used for buttressing the walls) and firebrick until my advice was needed, which was maybe once a day. So I decided to use the down time to take a look at 38AK497, the Reverend John Landrum site. This site was recorded in 1987 (Castille et al. 1988) and acquired as a Heritage Preserve by the SC Department of Natural Resources' Heritage Trust Program in the 1990s. It is shown on the 1816 draft of the Mills Atlas map of Edgefield District. Thus it is one of the earliest known potteries in the area. I believe that much of the development of alkaline glazes and stoneware making occurred here (as discussed elsewhere in this volume).

My plan was to excavate 50 cm test units in the area of a possible workshop, and to look for a second kiln. One was known, but another area also yielded numerous waster sherds and pieces of kiln brick. This was successful. A test unit exposed a burned, prepared firebrick clay floor, and others close by yielded impressive numbers of waster sherds and kiln remains. Ground hog kilns tend to run up slope, but the excavation of a one by seven meter trench suggest that this one runs parallel to the slope. One brick wall and a wide expanse of a burned floor were exposed, but the second wall appears to be missing. By the end of June it was clear that this kiln was a minimum of 16 m (about 52 feet) long and 3.5 m (11 feet) across. One end runs beneath a road, and the other runs off of the heritage preserve onto private land, so its full extent is not known. Given its size, this may be the prototype for the Pottersville kiln. Further work will be needed if this kiln is to be understood.

Excavations in the workshop area produced artifacts suggesting the presence of a building and people – nails, glass, and other domestic artifacts. More important, one of the units contained lenses of washed in sand, and a lens



Figure 2: A 50 cm test unit with kiln floor exposed.



Figure 3: Kiln floor exposed in 1x7m trench. Note unburned soil in the far end, exterior of kiln.

of gray potting clay at the base. This might be the site of a pug mill, for milling clay (see Burrison 1983:273) or a clay storage area. Further excavations may produce the evidence of a pottery shop and other associated structures that we seek.

Another aspect of the planned work is to explore the area of Reverend Landrum's house. This is marked by a large cellar depression and footing stones. Five meter interval shovel tests were excavated on either side of the cellar hole, and through the cellar itself. These were not as productive as I had hoped, yielding relatively few domestic artifacts. They did produce large amounts of plaster, nails, and window glass, both of which indicate the relatively high status of Reverend Landrum. This is a lesson that can be applied at other sites.

As part of the non-industrial focus of the University of Illinois field school, students led by Brooke Kenline, a USC graduate student excavated shovel tests in the area of a suspected slave cabin at the edge of the yard, north of the main house (see Kenline's article, this volume). These produced domestic artifacts and architectural materials which suggest that the building was a dwelling rather than a barn or some other support structure. Interestingly,

examples of alkaline glazed plates, cups, bowls and other domestic wares were also found. Brooke has also been searching for worker house sites at Pottersville. Further excavations are planned, and she will write a masters thesis that summarizes the results.

We South Carolina citizens owe our thanks to George Calfas and his crew of Illini, as well as to two local volunteers, Madeline McCarty and Nancy Kempf, who spent the entire field season helping to move literally tons of brick, rock and soil from the kiln in an open horse pasture in temperatures that were always over 90, and for three days over a hundred degrees. They worked hard and were surprisingly cheerful in adverse conditions.

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Jodi A. Barnes, Editor

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