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Archaeological Society

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A Proposed Descriptive Typology for North Carolina Colonowares

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Colonoware is a name given to a broad category of locally produced, unglazed, handmade ceramics that appear on historic period sites from the contact era (16th and 17th centuries) into the early 19th century. Different types of colonoware have been, and continue to be, identified in the British Colonial sphere from as far north as Delaware to as far south as South Carolina and Georgia. Colonowares can and do vary greatly based on their geographic distribution. In North Carolina, sherds of colonoware have been recovered on a number of sites, including the historic towns of Halifax, Bath, New Bern, and Brunswick Town, and at the King Bazemore House at Hope Plantation. Colonoware has also been identified in the western piedmont on several 18th-century sites in Mecklenburg and Gaston counties.

The origin of this ware has been and continues to be a matter of debate. In the first serious study of colonoware, Noël Hume (1962) noted the similarity in paste and temper to later prehistoric and historic Native American pottery in Virginia, and surmised Native Americans made this ware. Noël Hume also noted it was likely used only by individuals of the lowest economic social class who could not afford to acquire European-made wares. It has since been proposed that this ware was not only used but also made by enslaved African-Americans. This theory first arose as a result of Stanley South's excavations at Fort Moultrie, a Revolutionary War fort in South Carolina, where he noted the remarkable similarity of the ware to West African pottery (South 1974:185-186). Leland Ferguson (1980, 1992) has similarly argued the ware can be traced to African pottery traditions. Most recently, Daniel Mouer of Virginia Commonwealth University and others have argued that while the primary context of these wares has been in areas where African-Americans either lived or had access (i.e., a kitchen or quarter), to date there has been no documentary or

archaeological evidence to demonstrate sole manufacture by African-Americans (Mouer et al. 1999).

As no single cultural origin or parent ceramic tradition has been identified or documented for this geographically diverse ware, proposing a formal typology is problematic. The only commonly shared traits of this ware include hand building, being low fired, and the absence of glaze. Some of the vessels strongly mirror European forms, while others are simple, hemispheric bowls. Given these limitations, I propose here a more descriptive typology based on differences in temper and vessel wall thickness. Based on North Carolina colonowares reported by South (1959), Phelps (1980), Loftfield and Stoner (1997), Kirchen et al. (2001), and Beaman (2001), as well as descriptions provided by Linda F. Carnes-McNaughton, Charles Ewen, Alan May, and Loretta Lautzenheiser in White and Heath (1995), three different localized varieties have been identified and form the basis of this proposed descriptive typology.

The first type of colonoware is the most commonly recovered. It has a moderately thick body (5-7 mm). The paste contains small amounts of fine sand and occasionally grit but is generally without temper (i.e., a tempering agent was not deliberately added). Surface treatments noted on this type include plain, burnished, and incised. The undecorated variety of this colonoware type was first termed "Brunswick Plain" by South (1959:81) following its identification during the excavations at Brunswick Town (31BW376**). Similarly, South (1959:79-81) coined the burnished variety as "Brunswick Burnished." Incised decorations were recently noted on several vessels in the artifact assemblage from Morley Jeffers Williams' excavation of Tryon Palace in the 1950s (Beaman 2000). Figure 1 illustrates a plain surface bowl form from this collection with this single, incised line in a swag motif around the

exterior rim. Examples of this type have been found at Brunswick Town (from the Edward Scott House, Leach-Jobson House, Judge Maurice Moore House, and the Hepburn-Reonalds House), New Bern (Tryon Palace and the United Carolina Bank Site [31CV183**]), Edenton ("The Homestead" [31CO79**]), Halifax (Lot 55) and the King Bazemore House at Hope Plantation (31BR187**).

location of a Catawba occupation in the proto-historic period. Colonoware at this site strongly suggests a Native American connection to the manufacture and use of this type.

As colonoware varies vary highly, the three descriptive types presented here should be used as a general guide to the classification of North Carolina colonowares. Such a guide allows for a comparison of types recovered on other archaeological sites in the state and provides examples by which new types may be defined. Additionally, this preliminary typology suggests the adoption of a common, descriptive style of describing colonoware types based on vessel wall thickness, temper, description, and form. Reporting colonowares in this fashion will allow researchers a broader base of comparison than simply treating colonoware as a singular artifact type, as this limiting factor has been historically and remains an all too common practice. While the debate over the parental traditions of colonoware continues, it is hoped that as more historic period sites are excavated and more sherds of colonoware are identified in North Carolina, this preliminary descriptive typology of colonoware may be further refined as researchers pursue the on-going questions of the origins, functions, and cultural meanings of colonoware in colonial society.

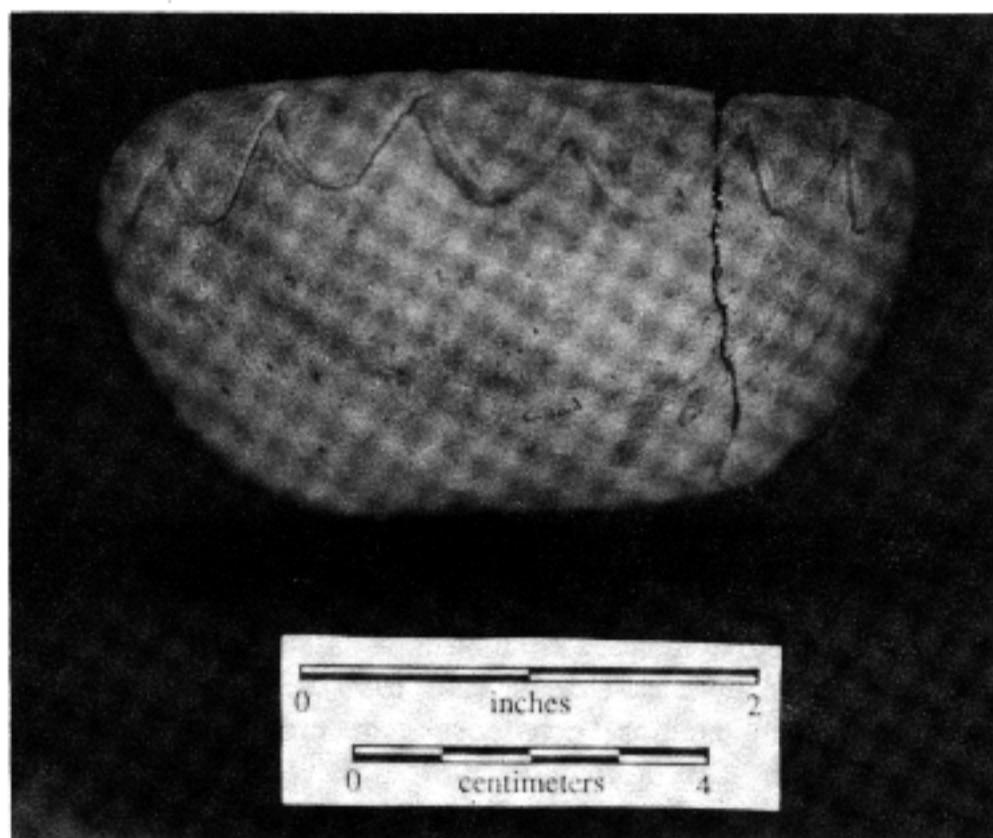


Figure 1. A colonoware bowl from the Tryon Palace artifact assemblage with a moderately thick body, a small amount of fine sand temper in the paste, a plain surface, and a single, incised line in a swag motif around the exterior rim.

The second type appears to be very similar to Binford's (1965) Courtland ware, with a thinner body (4-5 mm thick) and a fine burnished exterior. It contains small amounts of micaceous fine sand but, like the first type, is generally without temper. Many examples of this type have a buff or tan colored paste. The predominance of European forms appear most common in this type, such as a cup found in a privy pit from the 2nd Jail in Halifax and scalloped edging on a bowl from the King Bazemore House. One sherd from the Palmer-Marsh House in Bath illustrated a punctate design on the rim, a photograph of which appears in *South's Guide to Ceramic Types at Brunswick Town* (1959:84). Several sherds from Tryon Palace were incised in a complex swag drape, made with a serrated or multiple-toothed comb, around the exterior rim of a bowl (Figure 2). Additional sherds of this type were recovered from the Brunswick Town investigations, but should not be confused with Brunswick Burnished, which has a thicker body.

Unlike the first and second descriptive types, which are primarily found in the coastal plain region, the third and final type has been exclusively identified in Gaston and Mecklenburg counties. This style has thicker vessel walls (5-7 mm) with crushed quartz and sand tempering. Interior and exterior burnishing has been noted on all the sherds of this type. One of the sites where this type has been identified is the Crowders Creek Site (31GS55), the

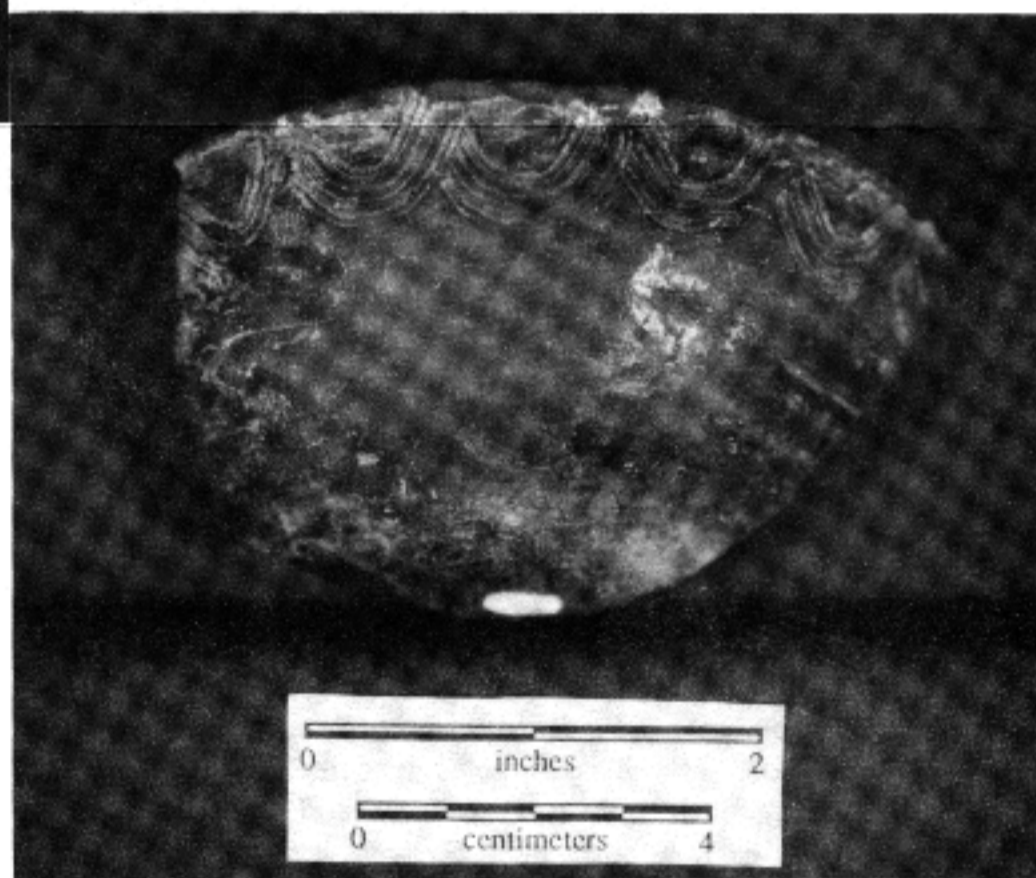


Figure 2. A rim sherd from a colonoware bowl of the second type, also from the Tryon Palace artifact assemblage, with a thin body and fine amounts of micaceous sand temper in the paste. The exterior is finely burnished with a complex swag drape around the exterior rim of a bowl.

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2001 NCAS Spring Meeting

The spring meeting of the North Carolina Archaeological Society was held in Fayetteville on May 18-19, 2001.

The Friday night reception was enjoyed by many at the Museum of the Cape Fear, which is a branch of the North Carolina Museum of History Division.

The Saturday meeting was held at the Overhills Historic District at Fort Bragg with the following speakers:

- Wayne Boyko, Fort Bragg Cultural Resources Program
"Introduction and Welcome"
- Bruce Idol, TRC Garrow & Associates
"Watershed Survey in the Sandhills"

Rob Benson, Southeastern Archaeological Services
"Uwharrie-Sandhills Interactions in Prehistory"

Ken Robinson, Wake Forest University
"Cape Fear Settlement Through the Centuries:
A Chronological Journey"

Lea Abbott, New South Associates
"Data Recovery at 31HT435: Settlement and Subsistence
in the Sandhills Uplands".

The speakers were followed by a wonderful lunch catered by Talbert's Catering of Southern Pines, then on to tours, slide presentations, and poster exhibits.

Let's give a big thanks to Wayne and Bev Boyko for organizing such a well attended meeting.

**NCAS Newsletter
Publication Schedule**

All NCAS members are encouraged to submit articles and news items to Dee Nelms, Associate Editor, for inclusion in the *Newsletter*. Please use the following cut-off dates as guides for your submissions:

Spring Issue	February 28
Summer Issue	May 31
Fall Issue	August 31
Winter Issue	November 30

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