Cherokee Pottery

People of One Fire

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Stamped Pot, c. 900-1500AD:
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Cherokee people who have been living in the southeastern portion of North America have had a working relationship with the earth for more than 3000 years. They took clay deposits from the Smokey Mountains and surrounding areas and taught themselves how to shape, decorate, mold and fire this material to be used for utilitarian, ceremonial and decorative uses. The Cherokees continue to hold this relationship today. The local clays of the Southern Appalachians has been transformed into cooking pots, bowls, pipes, water jugs and more. The designs and styles have changed and evolved while always using the old as their foundation. The passion and tradition of Cherokee people taking a natural resource and creating beauty with their hands continues.

*Cherokee Pottery, People of One Fire*, was inspired through the partnership of Cherokee potters who create by looking to their ancestors for inspiration while looking ahead and taking the next direction for an art form that has survived European contact, disease, removal from their homelands and family. The concept for the pottery exhibit and this catalog came from a class that was taught in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, in 2006. Eastern Band of the Cherokees artist, Joel Queen and master potter Tamara Beane came to Cherokee Nation artist Jane Osti’s studio and held a week long class sharing traditional building, design and firing techniques with Cherokee potters in Oklahoma. The class symbolized more than just your average art class. The sharing and partnerships that came together continued a tradition of passing a portion of the Cherokee culture from one family member to the next. Alliances of artists and partners build appreciation and education about the art form and culture of the Cherokee people. Each new person who learns from at least one piece in this exhibit builds appreciation of Cherokee art like the clay coils that are stacked to create this wonderful pottery. I am confident the success of the *Cherokee Pottery, People of One Fire* Exhibit will inspire others to realize sharing knowledge, working together and removing boundaries creates a successful future for everyone. This exhibit is dedicated to the artists that have made it their passion to share a portion of their culture with the world.

I. Mickel Yantz  
Museum Curator  
Cherokee Heritage Center
Above: Dallas Pot c. 1200 AD; Cherokee Heritage Center.
Right: I'm a BlowFish Two by Crystal Hanna, 2006; Cherokee Heritage Center
In 1908, Harrington spent a month in the Cherokee communities of the Qualla Boundary to document and collect examples of Cherokee material culture for the Museum of the American Indian (Heye Foundation). During his visit, Harrington attended dances and ballplays, purchased baskets, blowguns, scratchers and moccasins, and commissioned Iwi Katâlsta to produce pottery vessels “in the old style.” Katâlsta, who was born around the time of the Cherokee removal of 1838, learned the potter’s craft from her mother, who was born at the old town of Kituhwa around 1803. By the time Harrington came to Qualla in 1908, Katâlsta had dealt with ethnographers and curio collectors for more than 20 years, building “old style” vessels for academics while younger potters made “new style” Catawba-influenced wares for tourists. Harrington’s work with Katâlsta is especially important because he seized what appeared to be the last opportunity to document an unbroken Cherokee ceramic tradition that had lasted more than 500 years.

In 1888, W.H. Holmes of the Bureau of American Ethnology requested that James Mooney investigate and report upon the state of contemporary Cherokee pottery. Mooney’s detailed notes identify Iwi Katâlsta and her mother, Katâlsta, as primary conservators of the ancient art. Holmes states:

[In 1888] Mr. Mooney found that although the making of pottery had fallen into disuse among the Cherokees, three women were still skilled in the art. The names of these potters are Uhyûníi, then 75 years of age, Katâlsta, about 85 years of age, and Ewi Katâlsta, daughter of the last named and about 50 years old. Cherokee processes differ from the Catawba, or more properly, perhaps, did differ, in two principal points, namely, a, the application of a black glossy color by smother-firing, and b, the application of ornamental
Above: Pigeon Series by Tamara Beane c.500BC to AD 200, 2006; Cherokee Heritage Center.
Right: Modern Potters’ tools including: scraper, needle tool, pattern paddle, mudtools, smoothing stones and sticks.
designs to the exterior of the vessel by means of figured paddles or stamps. The employment of incised decoration was more common among the Cherokees than among the Catawbas.

Following Mooney, other ethnographers and collectors began winding their way to the Katâlsta for “old style” pottery. Frederick Starr, then of the Peabody Museum, visited Qualla Boundary to purchase ethnographic objects and retain demonstrators for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Some of Katâlsta’s vessels were exhibited at the fair, and then found their way into the collections of the University of Chicago’s Field Museum.

Archaeologists now characterize Katâlsta’s wares as part of the Qualla ceramic series (Egloff 1967; Keel 1976), a rubric that encompasses more than 500 years of Cherokee pottery from southwestern North Carolina. Originally formulated by Egloff to describe the late prehistoric and early historic era pottery from the Cherokee Middle Towns area (upper Little Tennessee River basin), the Qualla ceramic series.

The inclusive Qualla ceramic series is directly comparable to Tugalo (sixteenth century) and Estateoe (eighteenth century) phase ceramics of northeastern Georgia (Hally 1986), and Boyd ceramics (nineteenth century) of north-central Georgia (Caldwell 1955), and Galt wares (nineteenth century) of northwestern Georgia (Baker 1970; Caldwell 1955, Garrow 1979). All of these wares are associated with protohistoric or historic era Cherokee occupations.

Dickens (1979) derives the Qualla series from the Pisgah ceramic series, a South Appalachian Mississippian ware group that occurs primarily to the north of the documented Qualla phase area, within the French
Above: Cooking Pot by Joel Queen, 2005; Cherokee Heritage Center.
Right: Untitled, 2006 by Tera McCoy; Courtesy of Artist.
Broad and upper Catawba river basins (Dickens 1976; Holden 1966; Moore 1981) Expanding upon Dickens’ work, Ward and Davis (1999) posit a tripartite subdivision of the Qualla phase, with the Early Qualla phase predating A.D.1450, a Middle Qualla phase (ca. A.D.1450–1700) subsuming Dickens’ early phase, and a Late Qualla phase (ca. A.D. 1700–1838) encompassing the era of sustained European contact. The Early Qualla phase (pre-A.D. 1450) was postulated to address mounting evidence that the Qualla phase was not a direct derivative of the Pisgah phase, but rather an in situ development in the upper Little Tennessee and Hiwassee River basins. Recent analyses have shed more light upon the earliest wares of the Qualla ceramic series and its immediate antecedents. Materials recovered in testing at 31JK291, the Cherokee Casino site, document an early fifteenth-century village occupation (Riggs et al. 1997), and ceramics associated with it are consistent with the Qualla series. These wares are grit-tempered, with rectilinear complicated-stamped, check-stamped, or plain/burnished surfaces, smudged, burnished interiors, and simple rims. This small sample of early fifteenth-century ceramics differs from the Qualla series only in the absence of elaborated rims and incised cazuela forms.

Slightly later contexts (ca. A.D. 1420) documented at the Coweeta Creek site (31Ma34) yielded similar stamped, grit tempered wares which exhibit the first known instances of appliquéd rimstrips—ceramic hallmarks that clearly constitute early examples of the Qualla series (Wilson and Rodning 2002).

More recent comparisons of Middle and Late Qualla phase samples from Coweeta Creek reveal several points of contrast. Middle Qualla phase jars are characterized by extremely everted rim forms; most are stamped with varieties of the curvilinear motif. Incised cazuela forms are common and exhibit a wide range of Lamar Bold Incised motifs. Late Qualla phase jars from Coweeta Creek (ca. A.D. 1700–1838)
1700–1730) tend to have only slightly everted rims, and rectilinear complicated-stamped motifs appear much more commonly. Cazuela bowl forms and, concomitantly, incised decorations are much less common in the Late Qualla phase samples and probably disappear around 1740.

Late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century trends in Qualla series ceramics are well documented by assemblages recovered from sites along the Hiwassee River in Cherokee County, North Carolina (Riggs 1995, 1999). Samples from the post-1780 settlements of Cootlohee and Takwa’hi exhibit rectilinear complicated-stamped or check-stamped jars with notched or plain appliqué rimstrips and gently recurvate profiles. Prominent in these samples are tall, flaring-walled, flat-based pan forms, typically plain, but also check stamped or rectilinear complicated stamped. Pan rims are generally simple, but occasionally exhibit appliqué rimstrips. Hemispherical or slightly carinated bowls occur as minor elements in these samples. No decorative incision is observed in these samples, and curvilinear complicated-stamp motifs are rare.

Ceramics from documented Removal-era (ca. A.D. 1835-1838) household sites in the Hiwassee River Valley (e.g., John Christie, Chewkeeaskee, Sataka, and Brush Picker house sites) closely resemble late eighteenth-century wares from the same area, but exhibit even higher frequencies of check-stamped surfaces (>50%) and lack bowl forms. The widespread availability of cheap, mass-
produced containers probably spurred substantial narrowing of the traditional ceramic repertoire during the early nineteenth century. Cherokee spoliation claims for household goods lost as a result of the forced military removal of 1838 document traditional “hommony pots” and “dirt pans” in about 10% of Cherokee households in southwestern North Carolina.

Post-removal era Cherokee ceramics are best known from ethnographic collections assembled in the late nineteenth century. The vessels that Valentine purchased on Qualla Boundary in 1882, now housed by the University of North Carolina Research Laboratories of Archaeology, include ceramic jars, bowls, and pans with grit-tempered bodies, stamped exterior surfaces, and blackened, burnished interiors. The jars tend to be nearly hemispherical with little or no neck constriction and slightly flaring rims decorated with flattened appliqué rimstrips. Jar bases are slightly to prominently flattened and exhibit impressions from commercially made bowls or saucers used as forms in the building process. Exterior surfaces are check stamped or rectilinear complicated stamped; some specimens exhibit both treatments.

20th Century
Catawba potters, some of whom had lived among the Eastern Band Cherokees since 1840, made plain, burnished wares in a wide variety of forms. The Catawba pottery was thin and lightweight, and vessel types often mirrored commercially made mugs, pitchers, kettles, plates, and bowls. Some Catawba pottery was decorated with polychrome painted floral designs. For more than a century, Catawba potters had developed and refined a cottage industry in their homeland around Rock Hill, South Carolina, selling their tailored wares to Anglo-American and African-American customers as far afield as Charleston.
Above: Untitled by Amanda Swimmer, 1980’s; Cherokee Heritage Center.
Right: Legend of the Woodpecker by Joel Queen, 2006; Courtesy of artist.
Mooney observed that the Catawba style pottery was gaining currency among the Cherokees, while the old utilitarian Qualla pottery of Katâlsta was waning. The popularity of the Catawba-style pottery grew with the early development of the tourist trade on Qualla Boundary and the growth of a commercial context for pottery among the Cherokees.

White tourists preferred the more familiar, westernized Catawba wares, and Catawba and Cherokee potters were sensitive to such market demands. By the time of the first Cherokee Fall Fair in 1914, all of the pottery displayed in the crafts exhibits was burnished Catawba ware—diminutive vessels made for the tourist trade (Hill 1997:245). Susannah Harris Owl and Nettie Harris Owl, both accomplished Catawba potters and experienced entrepreneurs, led the commercialization of pottery at Qualla Boundary through the 1920s (Blumer 1987). Their success inspired a generation of Cherokee artists such as Maude Welch, Rebecca Youngbird, Lottie Stamper, Cora Wahneetah, Louise Bigmeat Maney, and Amanda Swimmer. These famed Cherokee potters used the Catawba-style wares as a point of departure, innovating new, individualistic styles that constitute the present-day Cherokee tradition. Their work has kept Cherokee ceramic arts vital and vibrant through periods of tremendous social, cultural, and economic change for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and their wares, sold to tourists and art collectors, have become definitive markers of Cherokee cultural identity for the outside world.

References cited on page 34.
Above: Red and White Bottle by Anna Mitchell, 2006; Courtesy of artist.
Revitalizing Cherokee Pottery
By Barbara R. Duncan

“I’m particularly pleased to be doing this because in my community nobody else makes pottery and it’s getting lost, so it’s important to me to learn to bring it back—not just so I can do it but so I can teach somebody else to do it. I’m just so pleased. And I guess it kind of keeps us in touch with our past, our heritage, to be able to see pots that have been made, the designs, and how hard they must have worked. This is who we are: our language, our pots, our baskets.”
Shirley Oswalt, Snowbird Community

The Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation has the longest continuing pottery tradition in its original homeland of any tribe in the United States. For at least three thousand years, people in the southern Appalachians have used local clays of different colors to make functional and beautiful pottery. The origins of Cherokee pottery like the origins of weaving, language, and the people themselves- are the subject of myth and legend. The first pottery was created by a Cherokee woman who observed a wasp making a mud house that was impervious to fire and water, according to Louise Bigmeet Maney, who was a Beloved Woman and sixth generation potter.

Cherokee Pottery in the Twentieth Century
In the twentieth century, however, Cherokee pottery traditions changed in response to the preferences of tourists. The Eastern Band actively sought outside visitors for economic development beginning with the Fall Fair of 1914. These visitors bought the small, burnished, pots created by Catawba women among the tribe, and Cherokee potters were quick to adapt. Throughout the twentieth century, Cherokee potters combined elements of Cherokee and Catawba styles to make small pinch pots and coiled pots that were open-fired at low heat. They made them Cherokee by incising Cherokee syllabary characters on them, and by using traditional Cherokee designs like the Friendship pattern, or impressing them with peach pits. They adapted pan-Indian forms like the wedding vase. They reproduced southeastern forms like the effigy oil lamps found at Moundville and other Mississippian centers. Some Cherokee potters in the late twentieth century experimented with Japanese raku techniques, contemporary pottery forms, and southwestern black pottery.

But throughout the twentieth century Cherokee potters continued to carve and use wooden paddles to stamp pottery. Although this strand
4500 years ago
Pottery using moss as temper was made on the Carolina Coast

700 BC
People began creating pottery in the Southern Appalachians of North America

2900 years ago
Pottery was first created using carved pattern paddles by the Cherokees

900 AD
Painted pots of black and white, red and white and effigy pots were created

1300 AD
Qualla style pottery begins a style of Cherokee pottery still used today

1700-1800’s
Pottery continues after contact through ceremonial uses at stomp dances and for utilitarian functions in North Carolina and the Indian Territory
**1800-1900’s**
Ewi Katalsta continues creating pottery passed to her by her Mother in North Carolina.

**1940-60’s**
Pottery begins to be taught at Sequoyah School systems in Tahlequah, OK, Qualla Arts and Crafts Gallery opens in Cherokee, NC and Anna Mitchell begins exhibiting throughout the country.

**1980-90’s**
Modern Masters educate others on Cherokee pottery. Louise Bigmeet Maney and her family open her gallery in Cherokee, NC. Bill Glass Jr. and Jane Osti travel to national Indian art festivals to market their art, but teach in Oklahoma.

**21st Century**
Cherokee pottery is alive with the newest generation. The Cherokee Pottery Guild formed in 2003 to work and revitalize Cherokee pottery through education. Joel Queen’s class in Oklahoma in 2006, brought an explosion to pottery and is being seen around the country with artist like Melissa Maney and P.J. Gilliam Stewart.
of tradition was not at the forefront in gift shops and at the Fall Fair, it did survive as an ongoing tradition. Eva Catolster’s pottery making in this tradition was documented by James Mooney about 1890 and M.R. Harrington in 1908. This way of making pottery was practiced at home by the grandparents of June Stamper Smith, Joel Queen, and others.

**Interest in Revitalization**

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the Cherokees, as well as other tribes, became more concerned about preserving their language, their dances and ceremonies, and their craft traditions. Potters were interested in learning about the older Cherokee styles of pottery. Through the Cherokee Heritage Trails project, the North Carolina Arts Council funded a two-day workshop at the Museum of the Cherokee Indian. Beverly Patterson, Brett Riggs and myself had been working on the Cherokee Heritage Trails project for several years, and were able to bring together a master potter as hands-on instructor, Cherokee potters as participants by invitation, along with providing space for working and firing at the museum. As examples we used Cherokee pots and potsherds from the Qualla series from the Research Archaeology Labs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and from the Museum of the Cherokee Indian.

During the two-day workshop, master ceramicist Tamara Beane showed a dozen Cherokee potters how to construct coiled, stamped pots using a wooden base. This was based on M.R. Harrington’s description of Eva Catolster’s method and on her own extensive experience creating reproductions of southeastern pottery from archaeological collections. Participants made cooking pots, cazuelas, and small bowls, using paddles carved by Tamara’s husband Larry. One of the demonstration pieces Beane brought with her was a cazuela bowl made from clay dug on the Qualla Boundary with a form, stamped pattern, and incised designs based on a fragment excavated at the Kituhwa Mound site.
The potters enjoyed working together over the two days, and several commented about what this meant to them. Bernadine George said, “This is just what I’ve been looking for.” Betty Maney said, “I’ve been searching for this.” Melissa Maney is a fourth-generation potter, and her grandmother’s pots were collected by the Smithsonian, including a reproduction of a traditional Cherokee pot with a conical bottom, impressed with corncobs. Melissa said, “This is so important to me. My grandmother used the paddles, but told me to find my own method, which I did. It’s wonderful to be able to come back to this.” By the end of the two days, everyone agreed that they wanted to continue.

The Museum of the Cherokee Indian became the home for this project. Since 2002, the museum has provided and continues to provide support to the Cherokee Potters Guild by fundraising and writing grants for the guild; administering grants; making contacts with festivals, museums, and events and arranging for potters to demonstrate and sell their work; hosting meetings; coordinating workshops, classes, and trips to museums; making collections available for potters to reproduce; maintaining a small permanent exhibit in the museum lobby; and buying potters’ work for the museum store.

**Cherokee Potters Guild**

In 2003, potters organized the Cherokee Potters Guild, under the auspices of the museum, and received funding from the Cherokee Preservation Foundation and support from the Museum of the Cherokee Indian. The guild’s mission is: “To revive the stamped pottery tradition, teach it to others, promote the pottery, set prices, and do research.” Members’ work is juried. Founding members were all enrolled members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians: Davy Arch, Bernadine George, Betty Maney, Melissa Maney, Shirley Oswalt, Joel Queen, Dean Reed, Alyne Stamper, Amanda Swimmer, and Mary Ann Thompson.

In the Guild’s first year, workshops were held, and more than forty Cherokee tribal members participated, including several school teachers who took these techniques to their students in the Cherokee schools. Potters perfected the art of making thin-walled pots that would stand the stress of being fired at high temperatures to make them waterproof. Potters traveled to demonstrate this style of pottery at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, and participated in other
events and shows in Oklahoma, Connecticut, Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina. In order to better understand Cherokee pottery, the museum sponsored a course with Western Carolina University, and brought in archaeologists from UNC Chapel Hill, University of Tennessee and University of Georgia to speak about their research.

**Defining Cherokee Pottery**

As potters began exploring different styles of pottery, they wanted to know what designs, forms, and decorations were Cherokee. In the archaeological literature, no pottery is actually called “Cherokee.” Archaeologists’ efforts to be precise in their descriptions of pottery traditions and their caution in assigning cultural affiliation serves their scholarly tradition well, but is not helpful to Cherokee potters who want to explore the many styles used by their ancestors over millennia.

Cherokee people generally feel that they have always been in the southern Appalachians, and that their territory covered parts of eight present day states (as described in Charles Royce’s map of 1884, also published in Mooney.) They generally feel comfortable claiming all the pottery styles of this area as Cherokee. But archaeologists’ designations for pottery styles in this area encompass many names, and they don’t agree that all of them are clearly linked to Cherokee culture.

In his classic work, *Aboriginal Pottery of the Eastern United States*, William Holmes says:

> A remnant of the Cherokee tribe now occupies a small reservation in Swain County, western North Carolina...what is of special interest is the fact that their ware has several points of analogy with the ancient stamped pottery of the South Appalachian province. Their ware retains more of the archaic elements of form than does that of the Catawbas, and the stamps they use in decoration are identical in many respects with those formerly used in the entire region extending from southern Florida to Virginia...much of the ancient stamped ware of northern Georgia, western North Carolina, and eastern Tennessee is probably theirs, for it is found on the sites known to have been long occupied by them. (1903:143)

Holmes also says that the use of complicated stamps is a
southeastern tradition, and found elsewhere only in some areas of central and south America. Cherokee potters deal with this question of cultural affiliation for pottery styles in several different ways, reflecting each individual’s approach to pottery. Some potters are very interested in making exact reproductions of pots from archaeological collections: the cazuela bowl from Kituhwa, fire pots, Mississippian effigy pottery, for example. Bernadine George has also reproduced and expanded on Alexander pottery from the Mississippi area, replicating a six-sided incised vessel and then creating a new design: a seven-sided vessel. Some potters are interested in using stamp patterns that clearly come from their immediate ancestors, reproducing, for example, a pattern from a sherd from the Birdtown Mound, or from an Eva Catolster pot at the Smithsonian. They have made pots using red and white slip, like those from Hiwassee Island, negative painting, and shell-tempered Overhills pottery, claiming all those as their own. Other Cherokee potters have learned traditional stamped pottery techniques and then used those to express their own creative vision.

Nearly all the potters have interpreted the Qualla tradition in their own way. Joel Queen began making heavily incised pots with dramatic designs. Melissa Maney continued her personal preference for delicate incising, but began creating very large pots decorated with her elegant, extensive incised designs. Bernadine George experimented with Mississippian effigy pottery with red and white clay slip, as well as the Alexander pots. Alyne Stamper, an instructor at Cherokee high school, became interested in reproducing effigy water bottles. At the same time, they all continued to make traditional Qualla cooking pots, cazuela bowls, and water bottles. Some experimented with smaller items to sell at shows, including stamped pendants for necklaces and earrings, decorative plates, and mugs. Tammy Beane said, “It’s like seeing the changes that archaeologists document, but watching the tradition change first-hand.”

Revitalization of traditions
From a folklorist’s point of view, I see that this generation of Cherokee potters has reached back into their own Cherokee pottery traditions to find forms, patterns, and a style that they are incorporating, through the same process of observation and imitation that always serves to pass on traditions. They are drawing from and bringing attention to a
Above: Pot by Jane Osti 2006; Courtesy of artist.
Right: Various Pots by BigMeet Family, 2005-6; Courtesy of artists.
variety of Cherokee pottery styles that have not been widely noticed except by archaeologists. They to feel that these are beautiful, elegant, interesting, and uniquely Cherokee.

“Now I see the old pieces in the museum and I say to myself, ‘Oh, I can do that!’” said Bernadine George, president of the Potters Guild. “I love the challenge of sitting down and re-creating an old-style pot. I keep conquering the challenges, one step at a time.” (Neal, 2004)

Traditions are constantly changing, however, as each new generation decides what to pass on to their children. Traditions are influenced by other groups, by mainstream culture, by changes in available resources, by new technology, and by individual vision and creativity. Revitalization happens when people consciously decide to build on their traditions by adding back elements from their own cultural heritage, or when a new vision becomes the accepted pattern. Revitalization movements succeed when they are meaningful to the people and have a function in their community and the larger world. In this case, the Cherokee people have decided to revitalize their pottery traditions by drawing on millennia of unique Cherokee traditions in the southern Appalachians. This revitalization has created pride among community members and an increased interest in pottery among young Cherokee people, as well as a connection between Eastern Band potters and those in Oklahoma among the Cherokee Nation and United Keetoowah Band.

The revitalization of Cherokee pottery has been driven by the potters themselves, but institutions and individuals have also played a part in this process. The interest of Cherokee adults, students, and elders in both North Carolina and Oklahoma as been the crucial factor in making this happen.

References cited on page 34.
Above: Sequoyah Pot by John Blackwood c. 1950's; Cherokee Heritage Center.
Right: Spiral Path by Gina Burnett, 2006; Courtesy of artist.
The Treaty of New Echota, in 1835, not only meant a change in the relocation of thousands of Cherokee citizens, but a change in environment and culture. Cherokees were ripped from their homes and only allowed to take a small portion of their belongings. The walk from Southeastern homelands to Indian Territory proved treacherous. As the days grew colder and the walk more difficult, they burned their few belongings for warmth or left them behind to lessen the burden. This difficult exodus saw few objects come to Indian Territory, and left no evidence of pottery.

Pottery, however, was kept alive through its use during Stomp Dances. Pots, dippers and water drums were constructed out of clay. The large pots were used for cooking the medicine used during ceremonies held at certain times of the year. The clay dippers were used by participants to drink the medicine. Some of the dippers were shaped similar to sea shells or a mask without eyes. The medicine pots and dippers were destroyed every year and new ones were recreated for the next season. Water drums created from clay, were small in size, approximately, seven inches across with a flat bottom. The drum typically had a skin of groundhog, raccoon, or deer stretched across the top and held in place with a leather strap below the rim. The water on the inside keep the skin moist. Unlike the medicine pot and dipper, the drums were not destroyed each year, but were used until they began to crack or break. Some drums also became family heirlooms, passed from one generation to the next.

Today, many elders in Oklahoma can recall their grandparents making or using ceramics in the household. Simple pinch pots and coil pots were used for utilitarian purposes and commonly never left the home. These pots were typically adorned with designs or decoration. Although, commercial utensils were readily available by this time, some families still did not have the means to purchase them, nor felt it necessary to purchase items that could be made in the home. This
Above: Melon Bottle by Victoria Mitchell Vazquez, 2006; Courtesy of artist.
Right: Bird Effigy by Christie Taylor Duschei, 2006; Courtesy of Pat and Jack Welch.
utilitarian use of ceramics was passed down to the children, but was used by fewer generations as commercial wares became cheaper and easier to acquire.

Commercial pottery was not seen by the general public until the 20th century. Like other schools, the School at Sequoyah taught the children of the Cherokee Nation the basics of writing, math and reading. It wasn’t until the 1930’s that the arts and crafts classes began growing with a strong showing of students participating in weaving and ceramics. One such student was Susie Swimmer who attended Sequoyah Indian Boarding School until her graduation in 1939. Swimmer became an expert at pottery using Georgia clay to create pieces including plates, cups and vases. Students were taught pottery techniques using slab, coil and pinch methods. Many of the vessels created by the students were very similar to the shapes used in the Cherokee homelands for centuries. Tall vessels, pots with handles and animal effigies were just a few.

The 1960’s brought a new point of view on human rights for American Indians and women. This new freedom inspired many Native artists throughout the country. One such artist was Anna Mitchell. Born in Jay, Oklahoma, Mitchell worked with Johnson-O’Malley Educational programs, designed to teach children about Cherokee culture through pottery. Lacking a pottery mentor, Anna began independent research in all the books she could find on Cherokee history, pottery and archeological information about traditional pottery methods and designs. Anna grew her techniques and started selling them to the public and entered them in Indian art competitions. By the 1980’s, Anna had displayed, sold and participated at the Santa Fe Indian Market in New Mexico and the Smithsonian Folklife Festivals in Washington, D.C. Anna’s passion for pottery was shared through her continuous teaching of other Cherokees in Oklahoma. This was true within her own family as well. Victoria Mitchell Vazquez, Anna’s daughter, has continued on the ceramic path set in motion by Anna and creates wonderful pieces based on traditional techniques.
Left: Portal Opening by Bill Glass, Jr. 2004; Courtesy of artist.

Right: Dallas Pot c.1200; Cherokee Heritage Center.

Far Right: Dallas Pot by Nancy Enkey, 2006; Courtesy of artist.
Born in 1950 in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, Bill Glass, Jr. went outside the boundaries of the Cherokee Nation to learn the path his artwork would take. After studying at Central State University in Edmond Oklahoma, Glass spent two years at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Teachers not only taught Glass techniques in ceramics and sculpture, but they taught him there should be no boundaries to his art based on his heritage. Glass returned to Oklahoma in 1975 to work for the Cherokee Nation as director and art Instructor teaching other artists traditional and contemporary art techniques. Glass has been honored with numerous awards and credits including the Jerome Tiger Memorial Award, Five Civilized Tribes Museum, Red Earth and the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. Glass’s worked culminated with the commission of the public art entitled “Passage” by the city of Chattanooga, Tennessee in 2004. Glass and his equally talented son Demos, teamed together with three other Cherokee artists to establish the Cherokee Artists Gadugi, Inc. and created seven six foot stainless steel and clay medallions that are now displayed at Ross’s Landing on the Tennessee River in downtown Chattanooga. Bill and Demos were then commissioned to design discs for the entrance to the new Tulsa sports arena that will be completed in 2008.

Jane Osti started her art degree in San Francisco in the 1970’s. Ironically, she took every class offered except ceramics. She had no interest in pottery. With only a few credits needed to obtain her bachelor’s degree, she transferred to Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma specializing in painting. There she met Jerry Chotate in her first ceramics class, and never looked back. Osti continued her education earning a masters degree in Education. Anna Mitchell taught Osti the southeastern style of pottery in 1987. In 1991, Osti was accepted into her first art show, the Red Earth Art Festival in
Above: Uktena Pot by Trisha Eagle, 2006; Courtesy of artist.
Right: Frog Effigy by Stephen Wood, 2006; Courtesy of artist.
Oklahoma City and today has displayed her work at the Heard Indian Market, Santa Fe Indian Market and won numerous awards. In 2005, while teaching pottery from her studio, Osti won Grand Prize at the Cherokee Homecoming Art Show held at the Cherokee Heritage Center in Tahlequah, Oklahoma just months after being honored as a Living Treasure of the Cherokee Nation for her pottery. An interesting point in Osti’s family history was found in paperwork shown to her by her cousins and fellow potter, Jo Ann Rackliff-Richmond and Juanita Hermanns showing the word “potter” after the name of their ancestors who lived in Indian Territory in the 1800 and 1900’s. This was most likely written to explain the occupation of the person on the census.

History was created by a chance meeting of Cherokee potters at the Cherokee Archeological Conference at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC in 2005. Jane Osti, Lisa Rutherford, Tamara Beane and Joel Queen all met and started talking about a meeting of east and west to revitalize Cherokee pottery through a partnership never before seen. Funds were raised to bring Queen and master potter, Tamara Beane to Tahlequah, Oklahoma to share the techniques of pattern stamped pottery and the use of Georgia native clay. The class occurred in February 2006 at Jane Osti’s studio. Cherokee potters were chosen with the hope that the students would become potters and teachers and pass it on to others. The class brought together many of today’s wonderful potters for a week of sharing, partnership and friendship. It was this class that inspired the exhibit Cherokee Pottery, People of One Fire. Artists Joel Queen, Tamara Beane, Jane Osti, Nancy Enkey, Gina Burnett, Rachel Dew, Jo Ann Rackliff-Richmond, Lisa Rutherford, Trisha Eagle, Caroline Glen, Denise Chadoan, Anna Mitchell and Bill Glass all came together for a meeting of creativity and learning that will hopefully inspire generations of potters, insuring the survival of this Cherokee cultural tradition, to share with other Cherokee people and the world. Jane Osti states, “Cherokee pottery is our greatest historian, of how, where, and when we lived before written time.”
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