

AFRO-CRUZAN POTTERY A NEW STYLE OF COLONIAL EARTHENWARE FROM ST. CROIX

By Richard T. Gartley

A distinctive kind of earthenware used in St. Croix during historic times has recently been recognized. In the course of a survey of historic sites in central St. Croix, the author found pottery of this style at every one of them on which there was evidence of a late 18th or early 19th century occupation. In some respects it resembles local aboriginal earthenware, and has been confused with it in the past, but the resemblances are superficial. Afro-Cruzan ware differs greatly from the wheel-turned, glazed European pottery of its time. It is speculated that it was made locally by Africans and their descendants. A locally made earthenware similar to Afro-Cruzan ware has also been found at Hull Bay in St. Thomas and Bordeaux Mountain in St. John (Gary S. Vescelius, personal communication), as well as in St. Kitts (Ivor Noël Hume, personal communication), St. Vincent (Bullen and Bullen 1972), and St. Martin (Alfredo E. Figueredo, personal communication). Similar pottery has been reported recently from Jamaica, and its discoverer, R. Duncan Mathewson (1972) has labelled it 'Afro-Jamaican' ware. Following his lead, the pottery from St. Croix will be referred to as 'Afro-Cruzan' ware.

Earthenwares are still being made in the West Indies. Items made in Nevis and the Dominican Republic are now imported to St. Croix. These vessels come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, none of which resemble the Afro-Cruzan ware. Nevis pottery is coarse, thick (approximately 15 mm) and red in color. Dominican pottery is well made with a polished exterior and is red-orange.

Morphology

Afro-Cruzan ware is an unglazed earthenware, hand-modeled and fired in open hearths. Coil breaks have not been observed. Surface color ranges from tan through dark brown to black. The core is usually gray. Both surfaces are smoothed. The interior commonly bears fine striations, which are horizontal near the mouth. Greater attention was given to the exterior finish: outside surfaces are sometimes highly polished. Wall thickness varies from as little as 4 mm to as much as 13 mm, but is typically about 6 or 7 mm. Lips are rounded, and vessel walls tend to taper near the rim to about half their normal thickness.

Two olla types are known, both of them flat-bottomed. Type 1, the second most common is hemispherically shaped (Fig. 1-D). Type 2, the most common, has a constricted neck with a flaring rim (Fig. 1-A, B, & C). For both of the olla types, mean diameters at the rim are calculated to have been about 19 cm with

a range of 15 to 25 cm. Though most of the sherds collected to date come from ollas, a few shallow bowl fragments are also known. They were approximately 35 cm in diameter. The shape they represent constitutes Type 3 (Fig. 1E). One loop handle is known. This handle, circular in cross section, was attached obliquely below the mouth of an uniquely shaped vessel. (Rim profiles from the various sites are shown in Figs. 2, 3 and 4.)

Distribution

Afro-Cruzan pottery has been found at sites on Estates Bonne Esperance, Pearl, Anguilla, Spanish Town, Windsor, Slob, Profit, Upper Bethlehem, Judith's Fancy and Lebanon. At the Pearl 1 site, a 10 m² area inside the foundations of what appeared to have been a blacksmith shop was excavated in 1975. Grading operations had exposed the foundations, and the work was done on a salvage basis. Thirty-one sherds of Afro-Cruzan pottery were found, in association with 39 European and Oriental sherds (including examples of British lead-glazed slipware, British pearlware and Chinese export porcelain). For the latter, a mean date of 1767 A.D. was calculated, using Stanley South's method (South 1977). This is a mean date of manufacture (M).

A midden, exposed in a roadcut on Estate Upper Bethlehem contained Afro-Cruzan, British and Chinese sherds. The British types included creamware, debased salt-glazed 'Scratch blue', lead-glazed slipware, blue and white delftware, and 'bead and reel' salt-glazed stoneware. According to South's method, M = 1747 A.D.

Afro-Cruzan pottery was also encountered in excavating a small ruined building on Estate Windsor. In the lower levels of the two excavated squares, European ceramics: *e.g.*, British creamware, delftware and lead-glazed earthenware occurred in association with Afro-Cruzan ware, but the latter predominated: there were 249 Afro-Cruzan sherds, versus 99 of European origin. For the European ceramics from the lower levels M = 1776 A.D. The majority of the Type 2 rims appear to be distinctive in cross-section from the Type 2 rims occurring on other sites. (See Fig. 3). Larger collections are needed to determine whether or not this apparent difference is significant.

A sample collected from the surface of the Profit site includes a considerable amount of Afro-Cruzan ware. That sample cannot be dated as surely as the three aforementioned assemblages. It may represent an extended period of occupation (*c.* 1740-1900 A.D.). Surface collections were made in two separate washed out areas at Judith's Fancy. Area B was dated at 1805 (M). Area A at 1762 (M). All three vessel types are represented.

European sherds occurring at the above sites and used in the dating of the sites

are given in Table 2.

Type 2 vessels predominate at 4 of the 5 sites: Pearl, Windsor, Judith's Fancy and Profit, occurring almost exclusively at Pearl and Windsor. The collection from Upper Bethlehem, the earliest site, is unusual in that it is the only site which had a majority of Type 1 vessels. It appears based upon this site that Type 1 vessels were most popular in the earlier part of the period under consideration.

The evidence from the aforementioned sites is consistent in dating Afro-Cruzan pottery to the period from the mid 18th Century to the very beginning of the 19th Century. This was the period when the importation of slaves reached its peak on St. Croix. It seems very likely that some of these slaves were potters, that they brought their own distinctive manufacturing techniques with them, and that Afro-Cruzan ware was their product. If Afro-Cruzan ware was indeed made by newly arrived blacks, it should be expected to resemble West African pottery of the same period.

It is possible that the apparent differences in relative popularity of the rim types at the various sites may represent factors other than time. There may be sampling errors involved as the collections are not large. This source of error would be eliminated as larger samples become available. The type preference may have varied from estate to estate, rather than as a function of time.

Conclusion

Afro-Cruzan ware was definitely in widespread use on St. Croix in the second half of the 18th Century. The production and use of this pottery continued an unknown number of years into the 19th Century. The large amounts found point to St. Croix as the place of manufacture, but no direct evidence is available. More work is needed to determine the place or places where this pottery was made, better to define changes in style as a function of time and relationships to African ceramics.

Bibliography

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TABLE 1

Frequency of Various Types of Afro-Cruzan Pottery in Dated Assemblages
From Five Sites in Central St. Croix

Site	M	Type 1		Type 2		Type 3		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Upper Bethlehem	1747	28	71.1	10	26.3	1	2.6	38	100.0
Judith's Fancy A	1762	10	33.33	19	63.33	1	3.33	30	100.0
Pearl 1	1767	3	17.6	14	82.3	0	0	17	100.0
Windsor 3	1776	5	21.7	14	60.9	4	17.4	23	100.1
Judith's Fancy B	1805	5	41.66	7	58.33	0	0	12	100.0
Profit	1820	7	33.3	14	66.7	0	0	21	100.0

Notes: M = estimated mean date of manufacture of associated European and Oriental pottery.

The figures for Windsor 3 refer solely to the material from the lower levels of the two excavations at that site. Though the mean date for the surface collection from Profit falls in the early 19th Century, it should be emphasized that the collection probably represents a very long time span (c.1740-1900).

TABLE 2

European Ceramics Occurring at the Dated Sites						
Date Range	Median Date	Ceramic type name	Quantity			
			Upper Beth.	Pearl 1	Windsor 3	Judith's Fancy A B
Brown		STONEWARE				
c. 1820-1900 +	1860	Brown stoneware bottles for ink, beer, etc.				
c. 1700-1810	1755	Shiny brown stoneware		1	2	5
c. 1690-1775	1733	British brown stoneware		1	4	5
White						
c. 1740-1765	1753	Moulded white salt-glazed stoneware	1			
c. 1744-1775	1760	'Scratch blue' white salt-glazed stoneware	1			
Other						
c. 1763-1775	1769	Engine-turned unglazed red stoneware		1		
Slipware		EARTHENWARE				
c. 1670-1795	1733	Lead glazed slipware (combed yellow)				
c. 1670-1795	1733	Misc. lead glazed slipware	4	13	9	17
						12

Refined									
c. 1820-1900 +	1860	Whiteware						9	
c. 1795-1890	1843	Mocha							31 1
Coarse									
c. 1745-1780	1753	Iberian storage jars						1	
Tin-enamelled									
c. 1620-1720	1750	(18th cent.) Decorated delftware	3					3	2
	1670	English delftware (blue dash chargers)	1						
Creamware									
c. 1780-1815	1798	'Annular wares' creamware						2	1
c. 1775-1820	1798	Lighter yellow creamware						7	17
c. 1762-1820	1791	Creamware	7	8			19	16	11
c. 1765-1815	1790	Transfer printed creamware					1		
Pearlware									
c. 1795-1890	1843	Mocha						1	5
c. 1795-1840	1818	Transfer-printed pearlware						4	
c. 1795-1815	1805	Underglaze polychrome pearlware						2	1
c. 1790-1820	1805	'Annular wares' pearlware						2	
c. 1780-1820	1800	Underglaze blue hand painted pearlware						2	1
c. 1780-1830	1805	Blue and green edged pearlware						5	1
c. 1780-1830	1805	Undecorated pearlware						6	9
								15	3

For ceramic type descriptions see Noël Hume 1970

(Editor's Note: Profit was left out because it is a mixed surface scatter.)

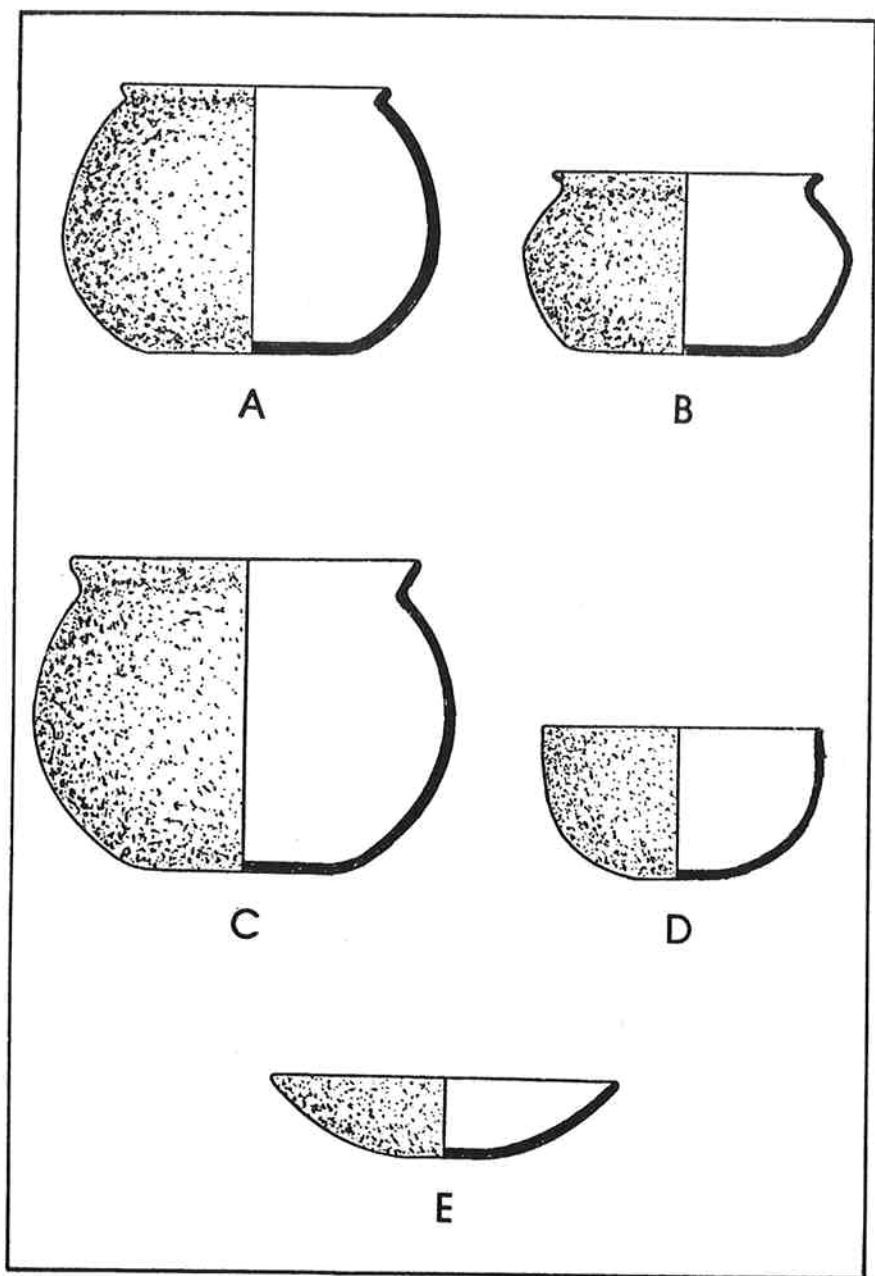


FIGURE 1

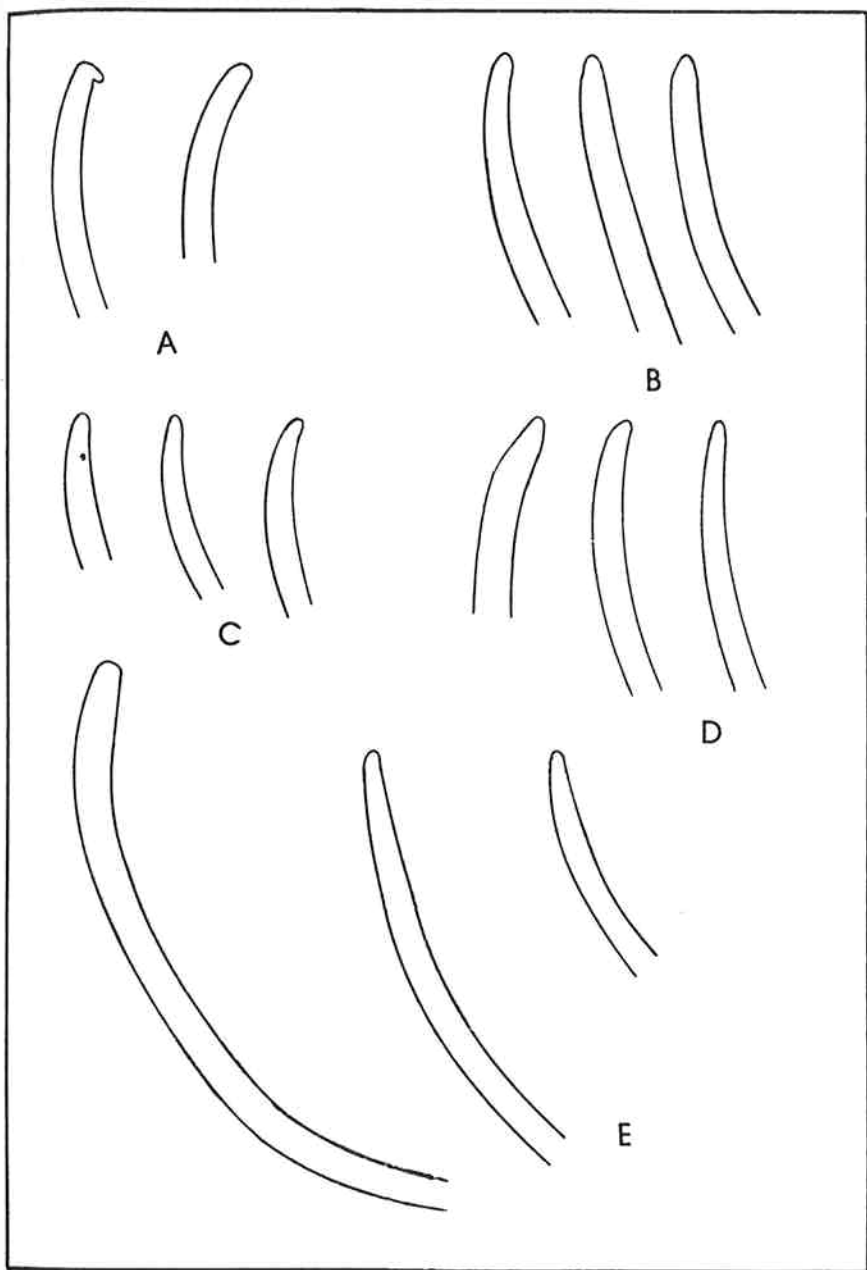


FIGURE 2

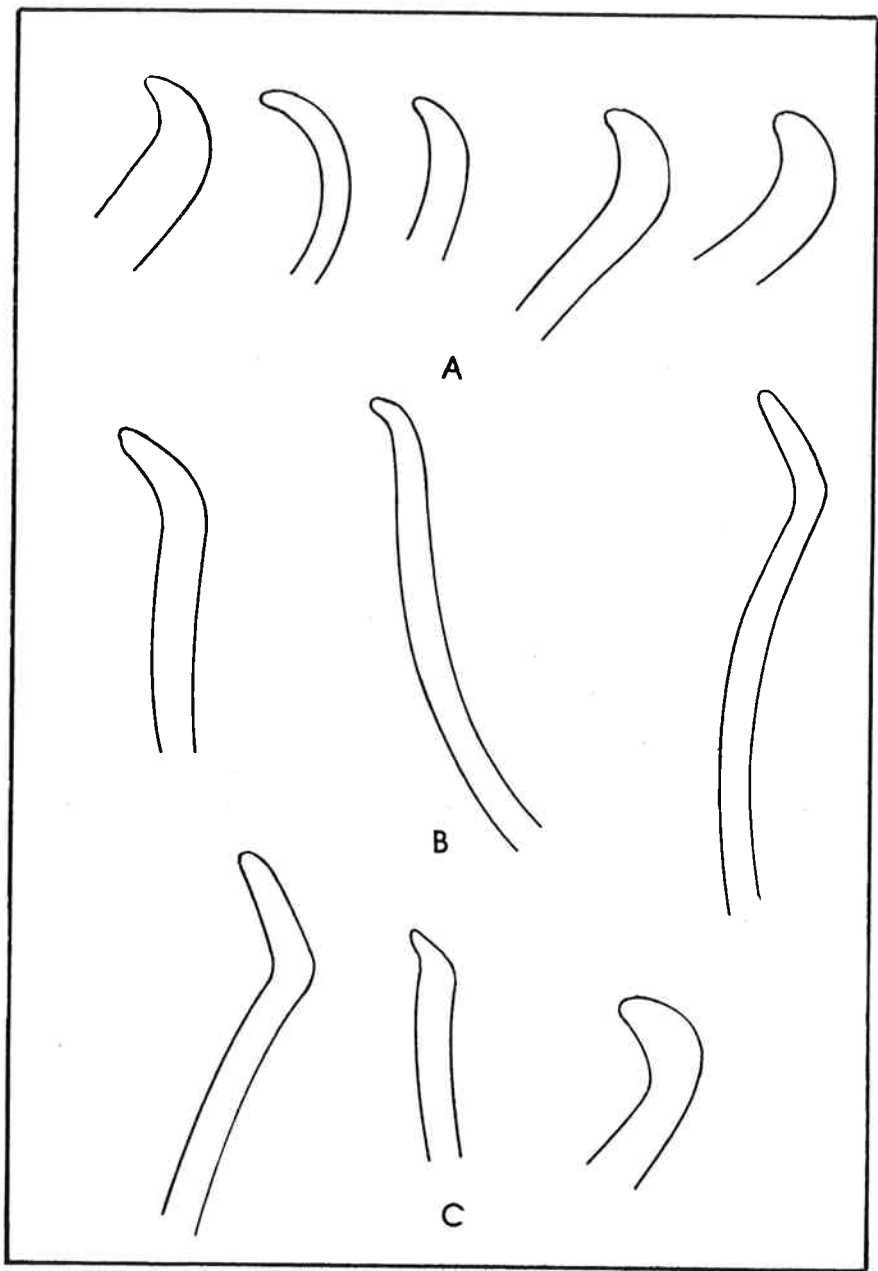


FIGURE 3

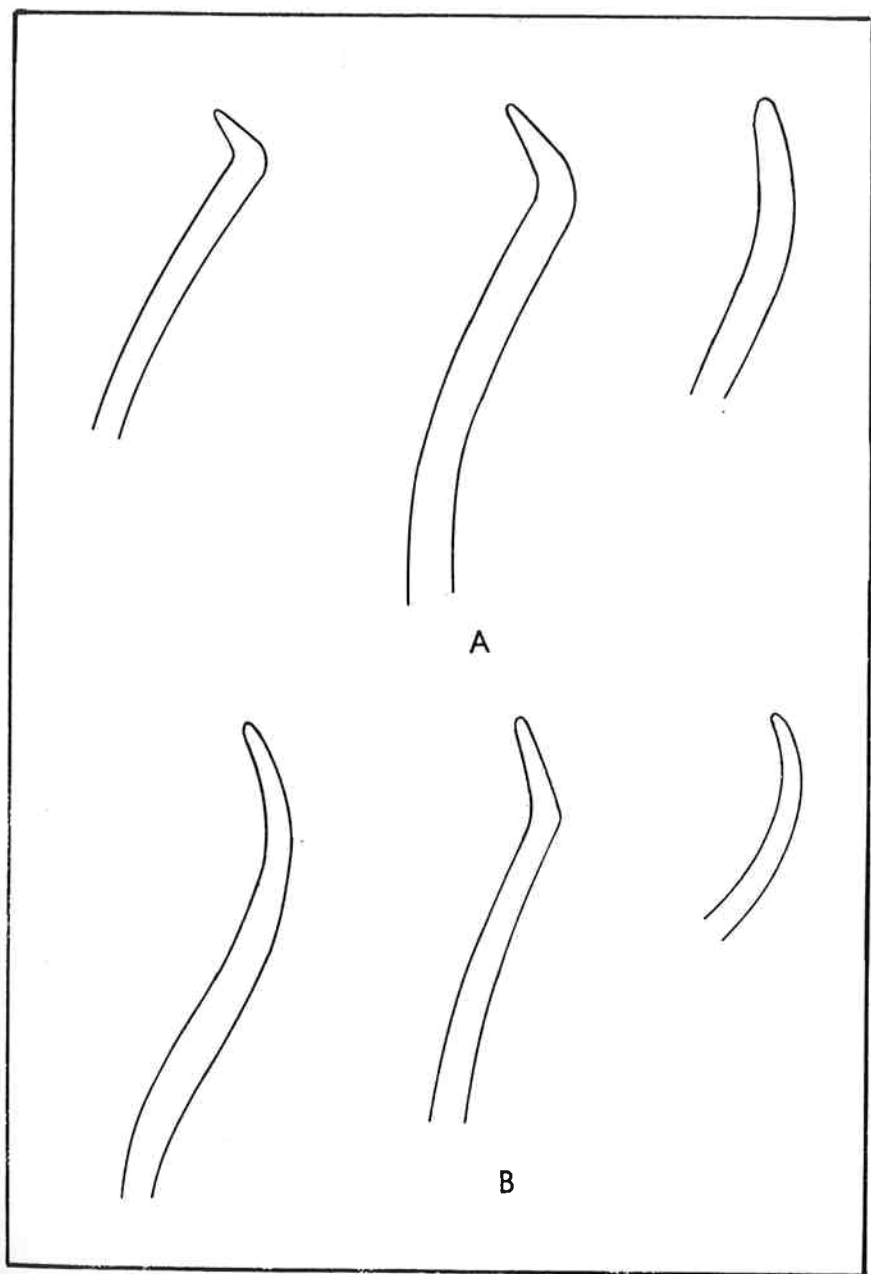


FIGURE 4

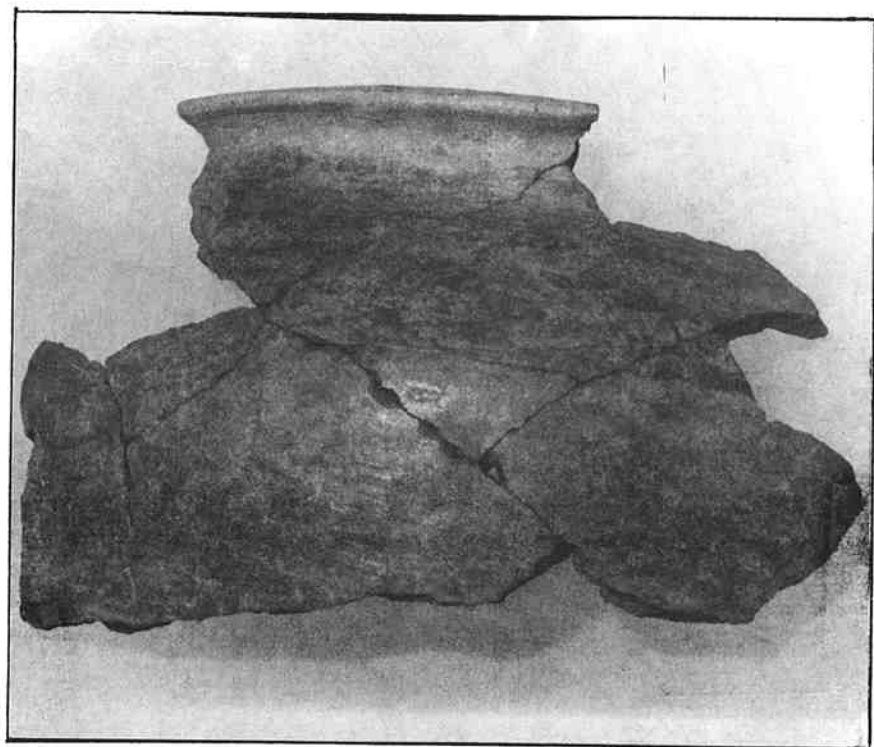


FIGURE 5
Type 2 rimsherd, Estate Windsor.

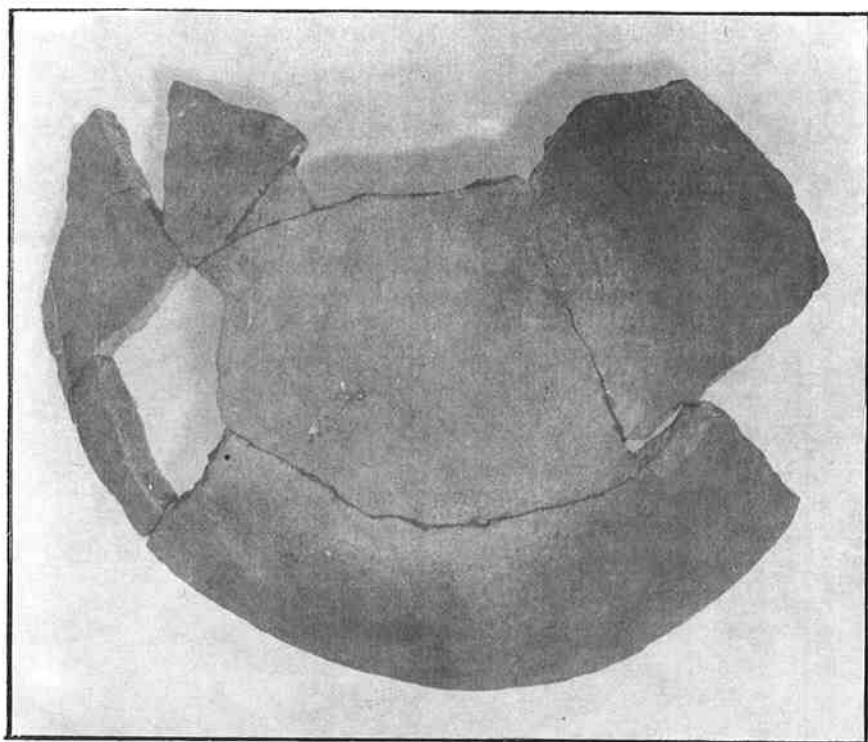


FIGURE 6
Flat base, Estate Windsor.

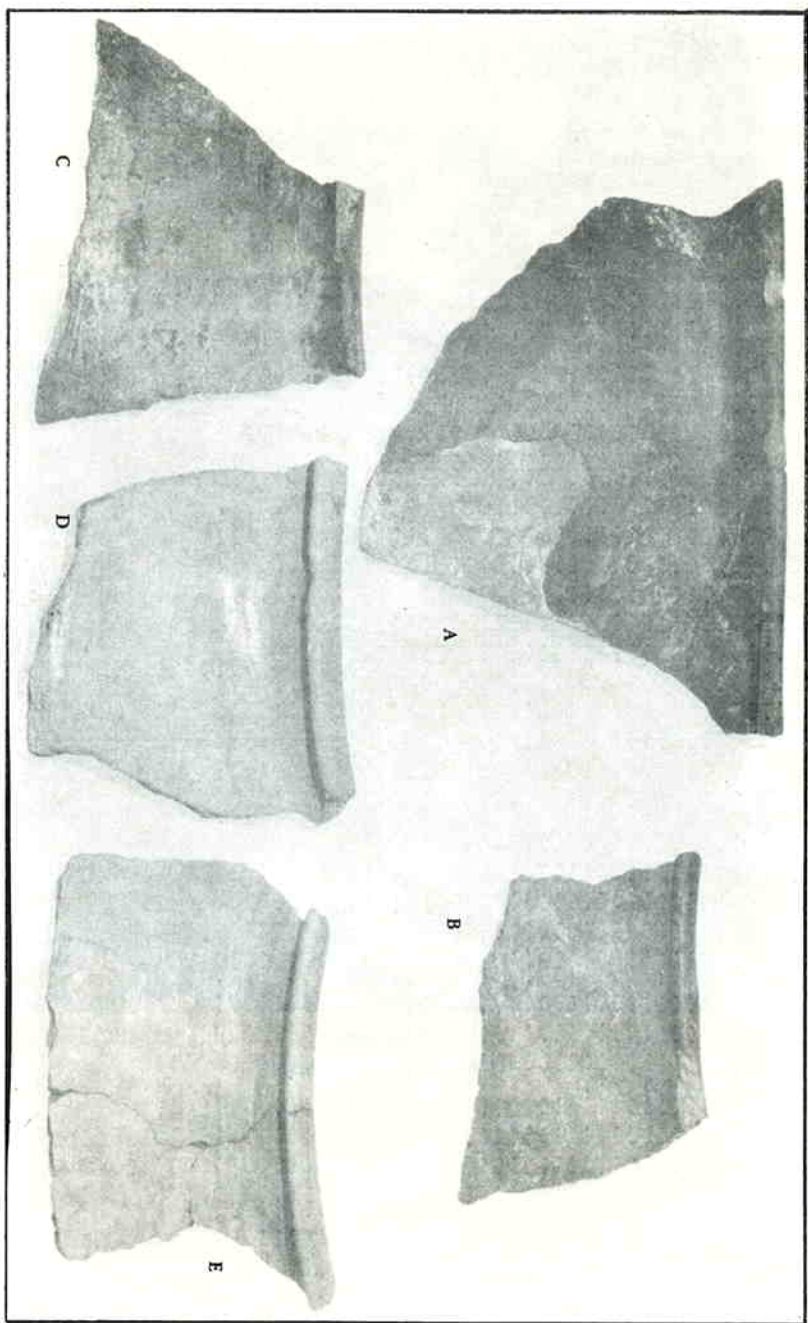


FIGURE 7
Type 2 rimsherds. A, Estate Upper Bechtelheim; B, Estate Windsor; C, Estate Windsor; D, Estate Windsor; E, Estate Windsor.

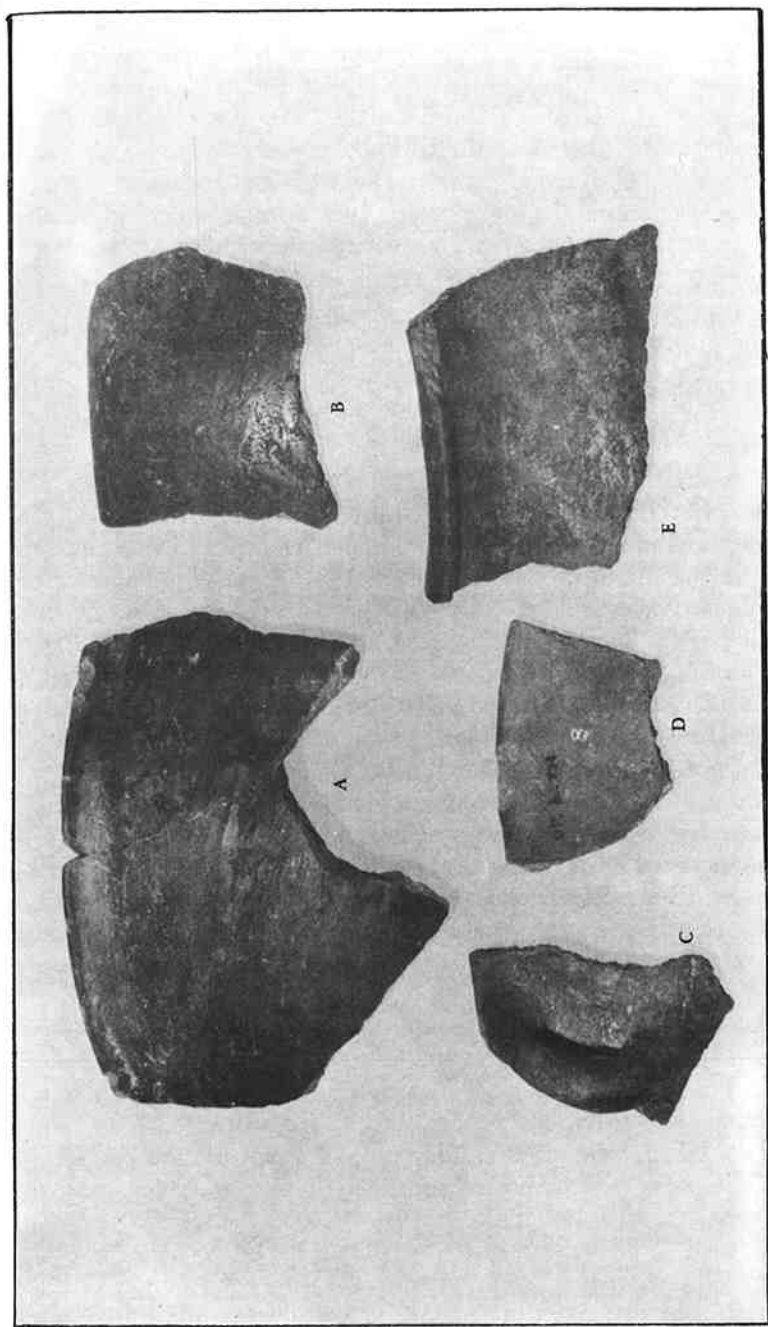


FIGURE 8

A, Type 2 rimsherd, Estate Upper Bethlehlem; B, Type 1 rimsherd, Estate Upper Bethlehlem; C, Unique handle on unique rimsherd, Estate Upper Bethlehlem; D, Type 3 rimsherd, Estate Upper Bethlehlem; E, Type 2 rimsherd, Estate Upper Bethlehlem.