

## Museum Around the Corner

### The Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

#### Dave the Potter ©

David Drake, Dave the Potter, and Dave the Slave are several names known for an amazingly talented man of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In a 2008 article by Leonard Todd we learn, “Dave was born into slavery in 1801 in the Edgefield District of South Carolina. His first owner was a young man, Harvey Drake who was in business with his uncle, Dr. Abner Landrum. He had opened a pottery factory just a mile outside the town of Edgefield and created a village, which he called Pottersville.

“Dave was put to work in the factory while he was still in his teens and taught how to turn stoneware vessels – jugs, pitchers, churns, storage jars – all in great demand on plantations across South Carolina.”

As Dave grew older, he began to learn how to read, a skill that was stiffly frowned upon, and laws were actually enacted that fined or jailed whites or others who taught enslaved people to read. Being a religious man, Harvey Drake taught Dave to read, so he could have access to the Bible. It wasn't long before Dave began to inscribe short poems or Bible verses on his pots. “I made this Jar, all of cross. If, you don't repent, you will be lost.” In this act of extraordinary courage, Dave was showing the world that he could read and write.

Harvey Drake died and Dave was purchased by Rueben Drake. Not long after, Dave suffered a terrible accident. When he was about thirty-five years of age, he got drunk, and was sprawled across the railroad tracks. A train ran over him and cut off his leg. Dave was no longer able to operate the foot treadle that moved the potter's wheel. Fearing his talent would be lost forever, he despaired, but soon realized that there was another slave whose arms were crippled, but whose legs were strong. They teamed up to continue turning out pots of great usefulness, as they discovered their renewed purpose – productivity – the only measure of worth in the slavery system.

Dave was then bought by Reverend John Landrum, and later by his son, Franklin Landrum. Again, from the article by Leonard Todd, “This was the beginning of one of the most difficult periods in Dave's life. He was faced with a series of events, including three murders, that strained relations between slaves and slave owners of the area. Perhaps most difficult for Dave was the suicide of one of the women who worked in the pottery with him, following her whipping by Franklin Landrum...No poems by Dave have been found from this period, which led many to suspect that he was forbidden to write.”

Eventually Dave was lent to Lewis Miles, who lived close by. By 1840, Dave began to inscribe the initials “L.M.” on his pots along with his poetry and Bible verses. He even bravely wrote, “Dave” on many of his works. By February 10, 1840, Dave may have been entertaining affectionate feelings for a certain someone, for he wrote on a pot, “whats better than Kissing,

while we are both fishing". Another on August 26 reads, "another trick is worst than this + Dearest miss: spare me a Kiss+". Although proper punctuation escaped him, his meaning is clear.

The 1998 exhibition "The Life and Works of the Enslaved African American Potter, Dave" at University of South Carolina's McKissick Museum was the first exhibition devoted solely to Dave's pottery.

The Museum was gifted with one of Dave's pots in 2016. The inscription reads, "March 31, 1852 Dave". Many thanks to the Lachicotte Family Partnership for this generous gift. Come by the Museum to see it in our first floor Gallery.