

George G. Williams - Potter

George Williams was born in New York in 1803. He started his career working at the Clark Pottery in Athens, New York. In 1822 Nathan Clark sent him west to establish a pottery in Lyons NY, located on the Erie Canal about 40 miles east of Rochester.¹ In 1835 Clark opened another pottery in Mt. Morris, NY and send Williams there to run it. Mount Morris is located 38 miles south of Rochester.²



Figure 1 Salt-glazed cream pot from the Nathan Clark pottery in Lyons, NY, ca 1822 – 1835. This piece is one of a small handful of extant pieces from this pottery. From the collection of Damien and Bernie Davis.

The N. Clark pottery in Mount Morris was modest in size. The 1840 Industrial Census showed capital invested of \$5,000, five employees, and annual production of \$5,000. Most extant stoneware is stamped “MT. MORRIS / N. CLARK” with simple fern-style cobalt decorations.³

On September 22, 1846, a notice in the New York *Livingston County Whig* announced that George Williams had withdrawn from the N. Clark Pottery by mutual consent but that “Williams will carry on the business on his own account.” Ketchum attributes the reason - “quite possibly it was because it was well south of the major east-west routes, the Erie Canal and the Great-Western Turnpike.”⁴

By 1847 George Williams had moved with his family to the town of Whitewater, located deep in the Wisconsin Territory, where he purchased a half-interest in an earthenware pottery on Fremont Street. George’s oldest son James also worked as a potter at his father’s pottery.⁵ Whitewater is located 50 miles west of Milwaukee.

In 1854 George and James opened a second pottery in Whitewater that today is referred to as the “Depot Pottery” because it was across the street from the railroad depot. They produced the same type of lead glazed earthenware with similar Magnesium decorations as the Fremont Street Pottery, but unfortunately neither pottery marked their wares. They employed men with wagons with horse teams as well as rail to distribute their products. Both of Williams’s potteries were sizable operations, employing 15 to 25 men each.

In 1858 George and James sold out and left the potting business for good, possibly due in part to the severe recession called the “Panic of 1857” that probably contributed to the decision. Coincidentally, the pottery started by George’s brother or cousin Thomas, the Milwaukee Stone Ware Factory, closed around the same time.

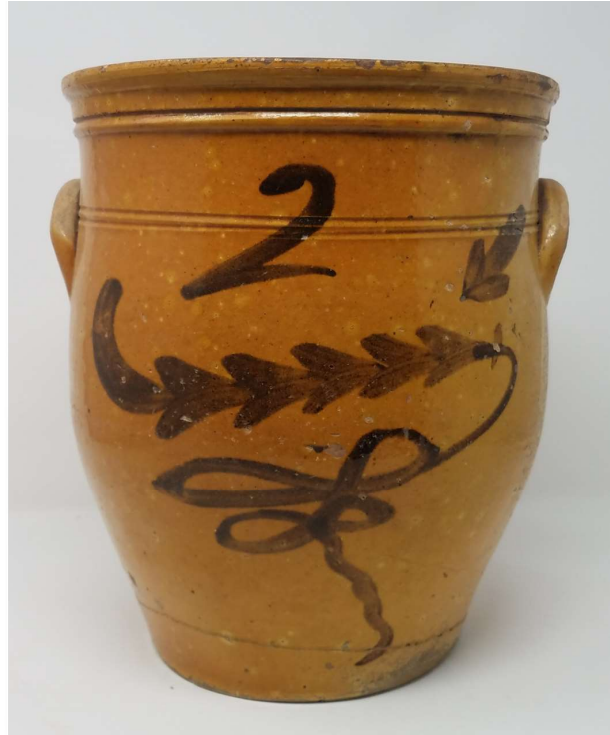


Figure 2 At left: Salt-glazed jar with cobalt fern motif stamped "MT. MORRIS." At right: Earthenware cream pot we attribute to the Fremont Pottery, Whitewater Wisconsin. George Williams transplanted his Fern motif to Whitewater in the Wisconsin Territory. From there it spread to the Depot earthenware pottery in Whitewater and then to the Baraboo earthenware pottery run by Phillip Pointon and his son Phillip, Jr. Note the slash at the base of the fern on both pieces.

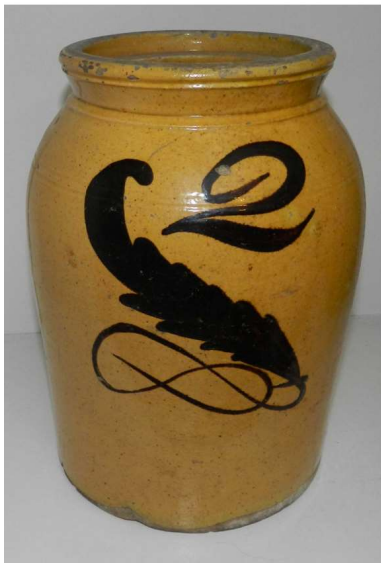


Figure 3 Three more examples of Whitewater earthenware with the fern decorations. Whitewater clay is mostly cream-colored, resulting in a yellow-colored glaze after firing, but glaze colors range from off-white to dark orange.

George sold his interest in the Fremont Street Pottery in 1858 to pursue other business interests. George is listed in the Census for Whitewater with an occupation of Postmaster in 1860, and Justice of the Peace in 1870. He died in Whitewater August 5, 1889, in Whitewater.

¹ Enterprising Waters: The History and Art of New York's Erie Canal By Brad L. Utter p106

² American Stoneware by Wm. Ketchum, Jr. p73

³ U.S. Census for Livingston Township, Livingston County NY 1840

⁴ *The Potters and Potteries of New York State*, Second Edition by William Ketchum, Jr.

⁵ www.madefromclay.org *Whitewater Depot Pottery and Whitewater – Fremont Street Pottery*