Thomas H. Williams – Potter

Thomas Williams was born in New York in 1813. By 1840 he was living in St. Morris Township in Livingston County, New York.[1] At the time he was 27 years old and had a wife and two children. At the same time, 37-year-old George G. Williams also lived in Mt. Morris and managed the Nathan Clark Pottery.[2] It is not known how these two were related, but the fact that Thomas Williams named a son "George G." is telling. An educated guess is that Thomas and George were brothers or first cousins. We found no record of Thomas's occupation in Mt. Morris but presumably he was working as a potter, possibly for George.

In about 1844 Thomas Williams's daughter Olieska was born in Michigan. Then in 1847, a son he named George G. was born in Ohio.[3] While living in the Akron area it seems he met William Sanderson who was engaged in supplying pottery to the Milwaukee market. According to the1847 *Pioneer History of Milwaukee* "*Mr. William Sanderson, late of Ohio, who has supplied this market with stone ware for several years past."*[4]

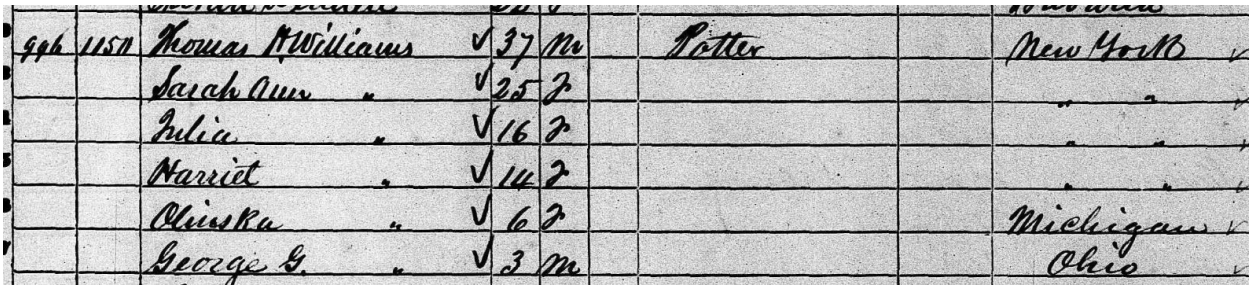
Decorations on stoneware made at the I.M. Mead pottery in Mogodore were probably painted by Thomas H. Williams. He and Sanderson moved with their families to Milwaukee in 1847. It seems likely that the two collaborated on the startup of the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory that opened about April, 1849.[5] Williams purchased the pottery together with James Wardner four months later. Then just three months after that he sold his ownership interest. However, it appears that Williams continued to work at the pottery up until about 1852 based on the decorations that appear on stoneware from that time period.

Figure 1 Churn at Left is stamped I. M. MEAD / MOGODORE, / OHIO,". The cream pot is from the Kenosha Museum collection and is not stamped but was found in Milwaukee. The pitcher is stamped "H. W. CHAMBERLAIN / SHEBOYGAN". At right: Cream pot stamped "O. F. BAKER & CO. / MILWAUKEE". We attribute all four pieces to Thomas H. Williams.

By 1850 Williams was still working as a potter in Milwaukee, probably still at the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory. The 1851/52 Milwaukee City Directory lists his occupation of "potter." At that time Otis Baker

owned the factory. It is not known where Thomas Williams went in the early 1850's after he left Milwaukee. We have not yet found a record of him between 1853 and 1873.

An 1873 Akron City directory lists him as a potter living on Williams Street and working as a potter.[6] A field jug bears his name[7] (*Figure 2*.) He continued living in Akron until the late 1870's when he passed away at the age of 64.[8]



996	1158	Thomas H. Williams	✓	37	M		Potter	New York
		Sarah Ann "	✓	25	F			"
		Julia "	✓	16	F			"
		Harriet "	✓	14	F			"
		Olinska "	✓	6	F			Michigan
		George G. "	✓	3	M			Ohio

Figure 2 The 1850 US Census for Milwaukee includes the Williams Family. He was still working as a potter, probably for Edwin Saph. His children's ages and places of birth provide clues about where he lived before he moved to Milwaukee from Ohio.

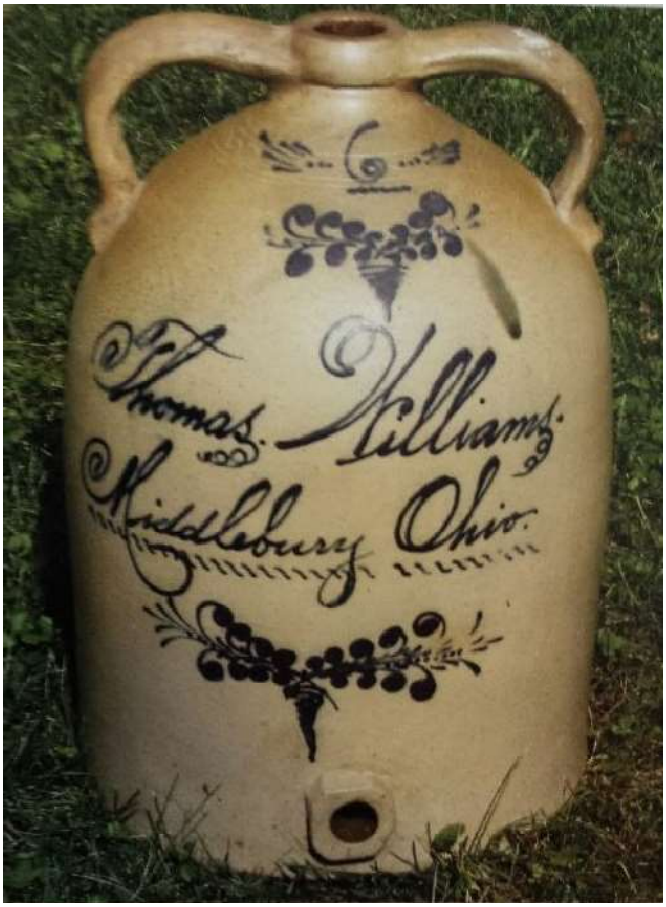


Figure 3 By 1873 Williams was living in the Akron area working as a potter. This field jug was probably either a presentation piece or was used in a retail store window to advertise his wares. He may have made the piece but the masterful slip-trailed decoration was done by an unknown, but highly skilled deorator. Similar decorations are found on other advertising stoneware from the area from the 1870's.

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[1] U.S. Census for Livingston Township, Livingston County, NY 1840
[2] *The Potters and Potteries of New York State* Second Edition by William Ketchum
[3] Milwaukee City Directory 1851/2
[4] Pioneer History of Milwaukee, 1847 by J. S. Buck
[5] MadeFromClay.org *Milwaukee Stoneware Factory*
[6] Akron City Directory 1873- 74 published by A. R. Talcott & Co.
[7] A History of Northeast Ohio Stoneware by F. Robert Treichler pp. 40 & 55
[8] 1879 Middlebury City Directory p. 98. Thomas Williams is listed as a "potter" living on "Williams Street."

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