

North Devon Earthenwares in Delaware

Both types of North Devon wares represent a minority ceramic type within colonial assemblages from Delaware sites. This initial assessment was derived from collections-based research utilizing artifact assemblages curated as part of the Delaware State Archaeological Collections. These site assemblages came from avocational collecting activities as well as from professional investigations. Concern at first was that this ceramic type's scarcity in Delaware assemblages may be a function of sample bias resulting from incomplete and skewed collecting rationales. However, examination of colonial ceramic assemblages from recent professional investigations continues to find that North Devon wares remain scarce, if not absent. Of the many site investigations that have been conducted in recent years, in only two cases, the McKean/Cochran Site, and in the 2007 investigations at a site in Sussex County, has this ware been recovered.

North Devon ceramics are frequently encountered in Chesapeake ceramic assemblages, including those from Maryland's Eastern Shore. However, they are comparatively scarce in Delaware assemblages recovered from sites a relatively short distance away. This difference is made more striking when considering the close economic ties that existed between Bristol, with that city's connections to the production centers of North Devon wares at Barnstable and Biddeford, and the Province of Pennsylvania, to which Delaware was annexed early in the establishment of the Penn proprietorship in the 1680s.

In contrast to the ware's absence on Delaware colonial sites, the largest single assemblage of North Devon Gravel-Tempered Earthenware from Delaware actually post-dates the colonial period. A minimum of five or six vessels are among the large ceramic assemblage recovered from the HMB *DeBraak*, which was lost off the Delaware coast in May of 1798. Although absent from American terrestrial sites after the early eighteenth century, the presence of this ceramic type aboard the *DeBraak* indicates it was still produced, distributed, and used well into the late eighteenth century.

North Devon Gravel-Tempered Earthenware

Occurring in each of Delaware's three counties, this earthenware has been recovered from only six sites statewide. Site locations are mainly in estuarial environments on the low coastal plain. However, one site, 7K-E-78, is located on the high coastal plain in a very interior setting adjacent to the headwaters of the Choptank River in western Kent County, Delaware.

Small sherd size in several cases hinders accurate vessel form determination; however, a minimum of seven vessels (exclusive of the *DeBraak* assemblage) has been determined. They have come mainly from plowzone contexts, but three have come from features- a storage jar from the Townsend Site (7S-G-2) and a second storage jar and bowl from the McKean/Cochran Site (7NC-F-13). The forms recognized to date in Delaware are principally bowls with thickened rims and ovoid storage jars.

The recovered gravel-tempered earthenwares generally conform to the established type description. Fabric is of an orange-tan color, with in some cases a gray center that was the product of a reduced firing environment. Significant amounts of gravel tempering are also present. Lead glaze on interior and exterior surfaces is of an irregular, greenish-brown color.

[Click here to view images of these North Devon gravel-tempered earthenware.](#)

North Devon Smooth Earthenware

No examples of the distinctive gravel-free variety of the North Devon wares have been recovered from colonial period sites in Delaware.

North Devon Sgraffito Earthenware

No examples of North Devon sgraffito earthenware have been recovered from colonial period sites in Delaware. The only known example with an attributed Delaware provenience is an intact harvest jug now in the ceramic collection of the Winterthur Museum. The absence of this ware type in Delaware assemblages was first recognized during the examination of extant archaeological collections, and has been confirmed by this ware's continued absence from ceramic assemblages recovered during more recent investigations.

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Acknowledgements

Image of Storage Vessel from the Townsend Site, Courtesy Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History/ Bonnie C. Lilienfeld, Deputy Chair, Division of Home and Community Life

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