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## CATAWBA POTTERS AND THEIR WORK

By M. R. HARRINGTON

Among the stony hills near the river that bears their name in York county, South Carolina, a remnant of the once numerous Catawba tribe of Indians may still be found. In this region hunting and fishing as a means of livelihood are things of the past, and the rocky soil of the little reservation can hardly support the population; while the labor markets round about are glutted with negroes who will work for almost nothing. These and other factors, notably the excellence of the ware itself, may help to explain the remarkable survival of the potters' craft among the Catawba, an industry which to-day forms the chief support of the tribe and the main occupation of nearly every household.

Using implements and methods that from their simplicity seem to have changed but little since prehistoric times, these Indians manufacture vessels and pipes which, on account of their beauty and oddity, find a ready sale at Rockhill and other neighboring towns. Alone among eastern Indians the Catawba have made their ceramic art an industry which has survived the years and the competition of machine-made wares.

It is my purpose in this article to describe the process of pottery-making as practised by the Catawba, but before doing so it might be well to say a few words about the people themselves as I found them. When I visited the reservation in June, 1908, while collecting ethnological specimens for George G. Heye, Esq., of New York City, I was informed that there are now nineteen houses occupied by the Catawba, fourteen of which are on the reservation, the others scattered about within a few miles. Living in these houses are ninety-eight Indians who might be called Catawba, and besides these one or two Cherokee. There are also several Catawba living with the Eastern Cherokee in North Carolina, and others, it is claimed, — isolated individuals and families — scattered in Utah, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and Mexico.



1a



1b



2a



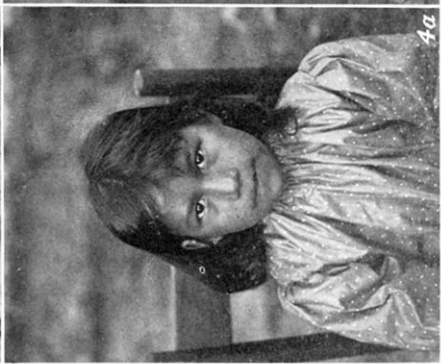
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3a



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4a



4b

CATAWBA TYPES

1, Billy Harris. 2, Ep. Harris. 3, Sarah Harris. 4, Fanny Harris.

Mooney, in his *Siouan Tribes of the East*, states that from time to time survivors of other eastern Siouan peoples have been absorbed by the Catawba; hence it is probable that the amalgamated blood of many tribes flows in the veins of the modern remnant. Certain it is that within recent years there has been some intermarriage with the Cherokee. There is also a considerable infusion of white blood noticeable in the tribe, but Indian color and features still predominate (pl. XVIII). No cases of negro admixture were observed, nor did inquiry elicit the information that such had ever taken place. The Catawba language is on the verge of becoming lost, for although remembered by the older Indians and many of those in middle life, it is rarely spoken, English being the language of daily use.

The majority of the Catawba belong to the Mormon Church, and have abandoned the old dances and ceremonies, which linger only in the memories of some of the older people. It is probable that descriptions of these may still be obtained, and texts of myths recorded; for I heard several myths in English from John Brown, at whose house I stayed. He had heard them in the Catawba language from his mother, Margaret Wiley, who is still living. The following myth — the only one I had the opportunity to record — may be considered typical:

“An old woman was gathering persimmons under [a tree in a valley, but was not satisfied with what she found. A Deer came along and inquired what she was doing. ‘Gathering persimmons,’ she replied. ‘How do you get them?’ asked the Deer. ‘I run and butt my head against the tree,’ was the reply; ‘if you will do it for me I shall give you some.’ The Deer went off and came running, striking his head against the tree. Only a few persimmons fell. ‘You must do it harder,’ said the woman. So the Deer went up the hill and ran down again, striking the tree so hard that his neck was broken and he fell dead.

“Then the woman wanted to skin and cut up the Deer. She made a cutting motion with one forefinger across the other.

“‘*Dēmētēcāsasa,*’ she repeated over and over, implying ‘I have no knife.’ A Wolf came along and heard her words. ‘I will tear up the deer for you,’ he said, ‘if you will give me half.’ ‘All

right,' said the woman, and the Wolf went to work. When the deer was all nicely divided, the woman said, 'Suppose something should come along making a noise like thunder — *trrrrrr!*' 'Don't say that,' cried the wolf, 'you frighten me!' Just then a flock of partridges flew up with a roaring sound — *trrrrrr!* which so frightened the Wolf that he ran away and left the woman with all the meat."

No Indian clothing, ornaments, or ceremonial paraphernalia could be found on the reservation, and the old industries, with the notable exception of pottery making, are practically extinct. Even old baskets were difficult to find. There is, so far as I could learn, only one basket maker — a man — among the Catawba to-day, and he rarely works at the trade. Basket fish-traps (*yīwasap*) are still sometimes made and used however. One flat basket of cane (*wa<sup>n</sup>sāwasap*), an old specimen said to have been a food dish, was obtained, of a type familiar among the Cherokee and other southeastern tribes, together with a few old splint baskets for general use, rectangular in form, made smaller at the top than at the bottom. Two bows (*itcká*) were also found, one about four feet long and the other a toy, both of the straight flat style almost universal among eastern Indians. The arrows (*wa<sup>n</sup>*) were made of cane. As no old blowgun (*wa<sup>n</sup>sābo'he'*) could be found, I had a new one made by a Catawba who remembered how the work was done. The tube he made of cane, about five feet long, rasping out the septa at the joints with a wooden rod tipped with tin; while the darts (*yēbwa<sup>n</sup>*) were made of wood wrapped with cotton at one end to make them fit snugly, the whole contrivance being in every respect similar to blowguns collected from the Mississippi Choctaw and the Koasati (Creeks) of Louisiana. Wooden ware was represented only by an oblong shallow tray (*ituskuspamutobá*) with projections to serve as handles on each end. No wooden mortars or pestles for crushing corn were seen.

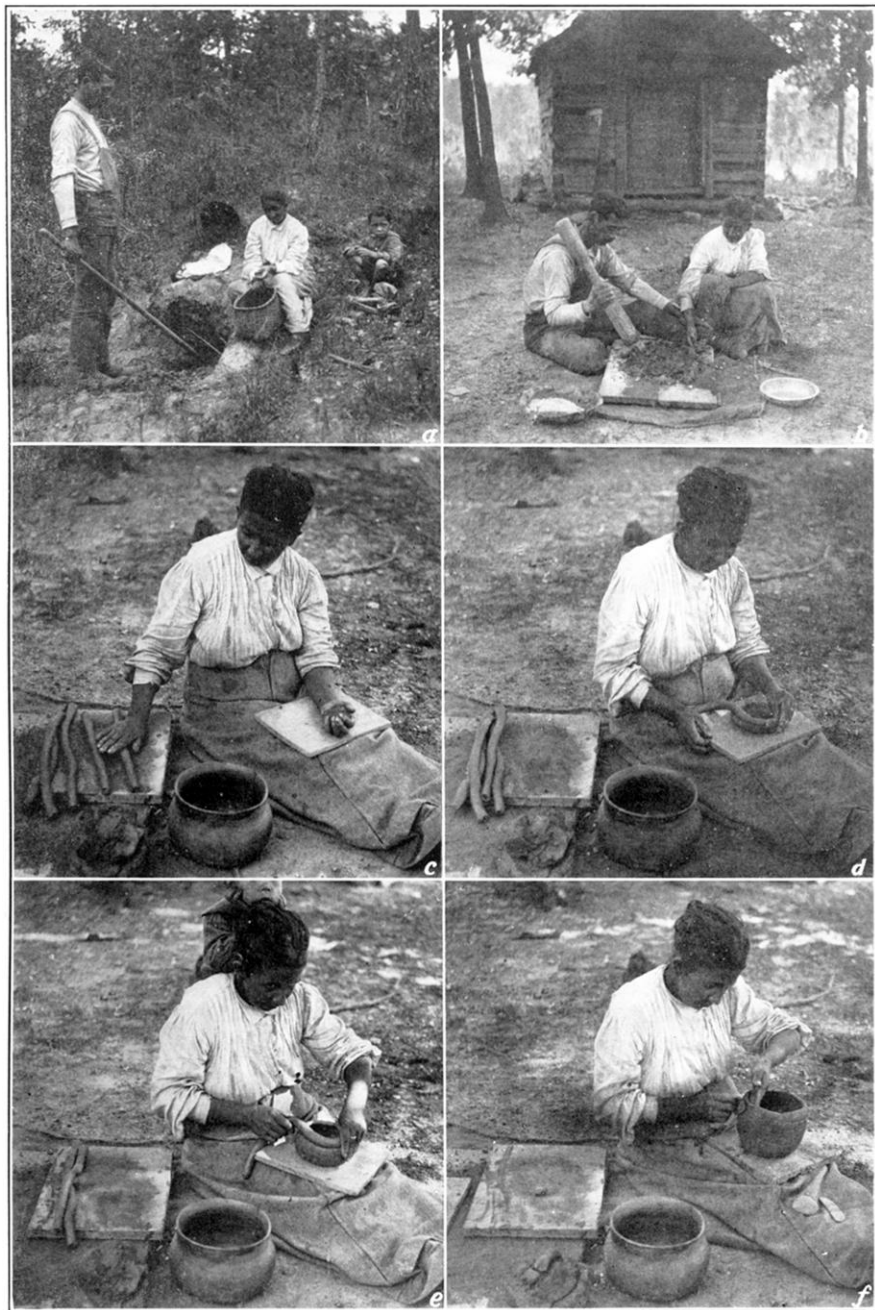
That the Catawba now use but little of their own pottery became clear when I inquired for old vessels that had seen actual service. A few such, and a few only, were obtained, comprising cooking pots (*túsyamüsē*) with and without legs, bowls (*túsui'*), and jars (*itúskī*) for keeping milk and other liquids, all more or less of old

types, but differing from most prehistoric forms in having flat instead of rounded bottoms. Some of these are shown in plate XXIII. One pitcher ("pitcū") of the modern trade form, but which had been in use, was collected. The trade ware consists mainly of vases, pitchers, flower-pots, and fancy pieces of different shapes, sometimes decorated with incised geometric designs or life forms modeled in relief or in the round, but usually relying for effect upon their graceful form. Most of the vessels made to sell exhibit very little Indian character in form or design, ancestral patterns having been sacrificed to the demands of the trade.

Pipes (*wimīsū*) are an important product of the Catawba potter. For home use a simple pipe with a little incised decoration is preferred — sometimes of old Indian type, sometimes made in imitation of the clay and briar pipes bought at the stores. For trade, a popular pattern is the so-called "peace pipe," a tiny decorated pot provided with four or more stem holes, while another trade form is called the "chicken comb." This may be descended from an old type. A very popular commercial design takes the form of a conventional Indian head crowned with feathers.

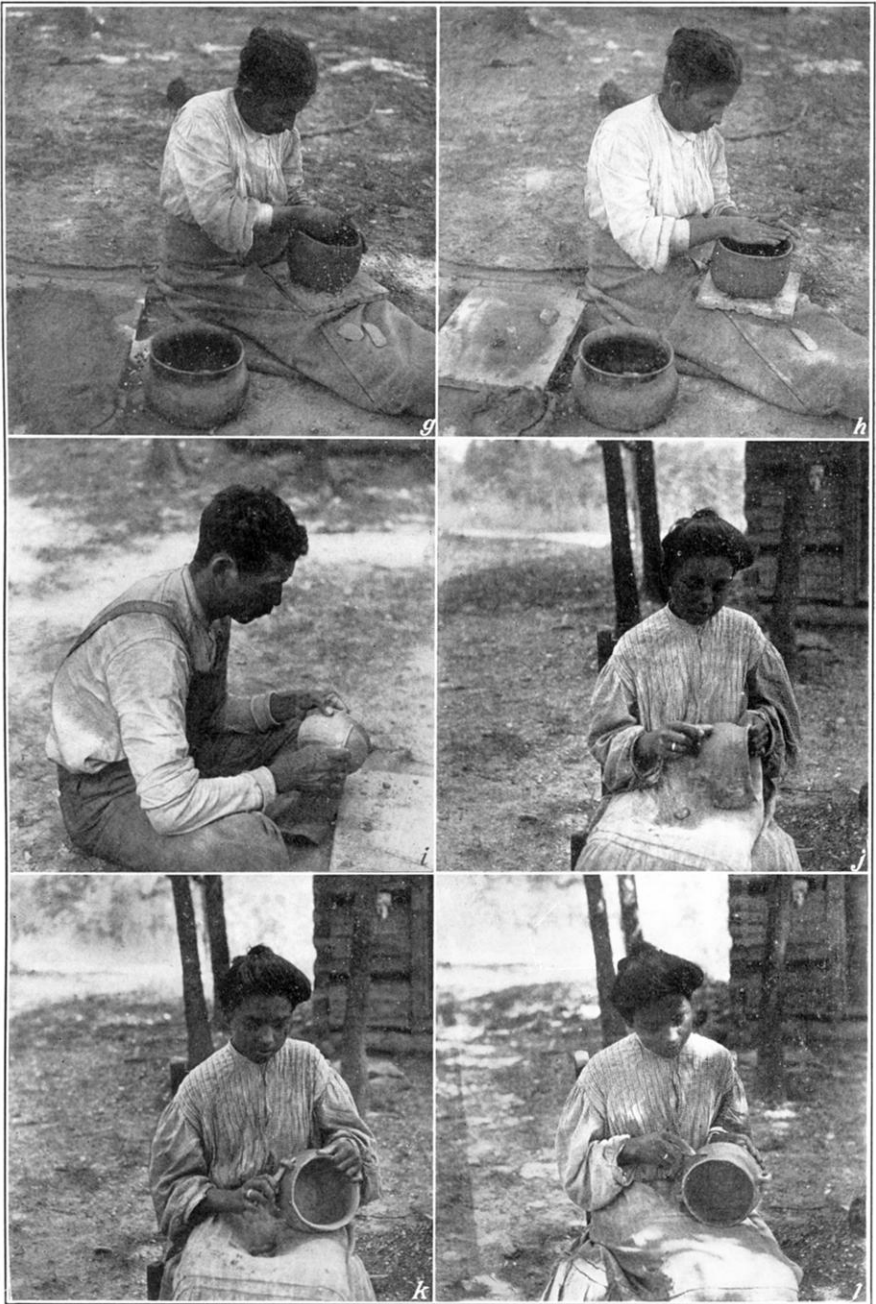
The Catawba use the following implements, which I consider of native origin, in manufacturing pottery: a wooden pestle (*yēbr̄to*) about 2 ½ feet long, shown in use in pl. XIX, *b*; mussel (*Unio* sp.) shells (*nulcrē*); modelers (*wade*) cut out of gourd in circular or oval form, others of wood (*yēbitūsikawa*); combined cutting and piercing implements of cane (*wasā*); a wooden tool (*simpa*) for boring pipe-stems; very smooth fine-grained waterworn pebbles for rubbing stones (*inhr̄*), and polished bone implements resembling blunt awls (*nusap*), while of doubtful origin are pipe molds (*wimīsūmpadēa*). (See pl. XXIII.) Modern tools used are a hoe for digging the clay, various bits of board used in rolling and as bases for modeling, iron knives, and wire and coins for decorating.

Two kinds of clay are used — a fine-grained stiff variety called "pipe clay" (*wimīsūto*), and a coarse, lighter, crumbly kind known as "pan clay" (*tōtūs*). Three mines of pan clay are known on and near the reservation, and five of pipe clay. In mining clay the Indians merely dig down through the surface soil a few inches or feet into the underlying stratum of clay, work this hole for a time



CATAWBA POTTERY MAKING

*a*, Digging the Clay. *b*, Pounding the Clay. *c*, Rolling the Coils. *d*, Applying the First Coil. *e*, A Later Stage in Coiling. *f*, Blending the Coils, Outside.



CATAWBA POTTERY MAKING

*g*, Blending the Coils, Inside. *h*, Shaping the Rim. *i*, Scraping. *j*, Rubbing with Pebble. *k*, Rubbing with Bone Implement. *l*, Decorating.





## CATAWBA POTTERY MAKING

*m*, Preliminary Heating of Vessels. *n*, Vessels Inverted upon the Embers. *o*, Firing Vessels

until it becomes troublesome to keep free of water, then abandon it and begin another one near by. The appearance of these abandoned clay pits reminds me of similar excavations I have seen over clay deposits near the sites of ancient Iroquois villages.

The modern Catawba dig the clay from the pits with a common hoe (pl. XIX, *a*), pick it over to remove foreign substances, and carry it home in sacks.

The following account of pottery-making is merely the description of what I saw and heard while staying in the reservation at the home of John Brown, a Catawba, and the photographs (pl. XIX-XXII) show him, his wife, and their eldest daughter at their accustomed tasks.

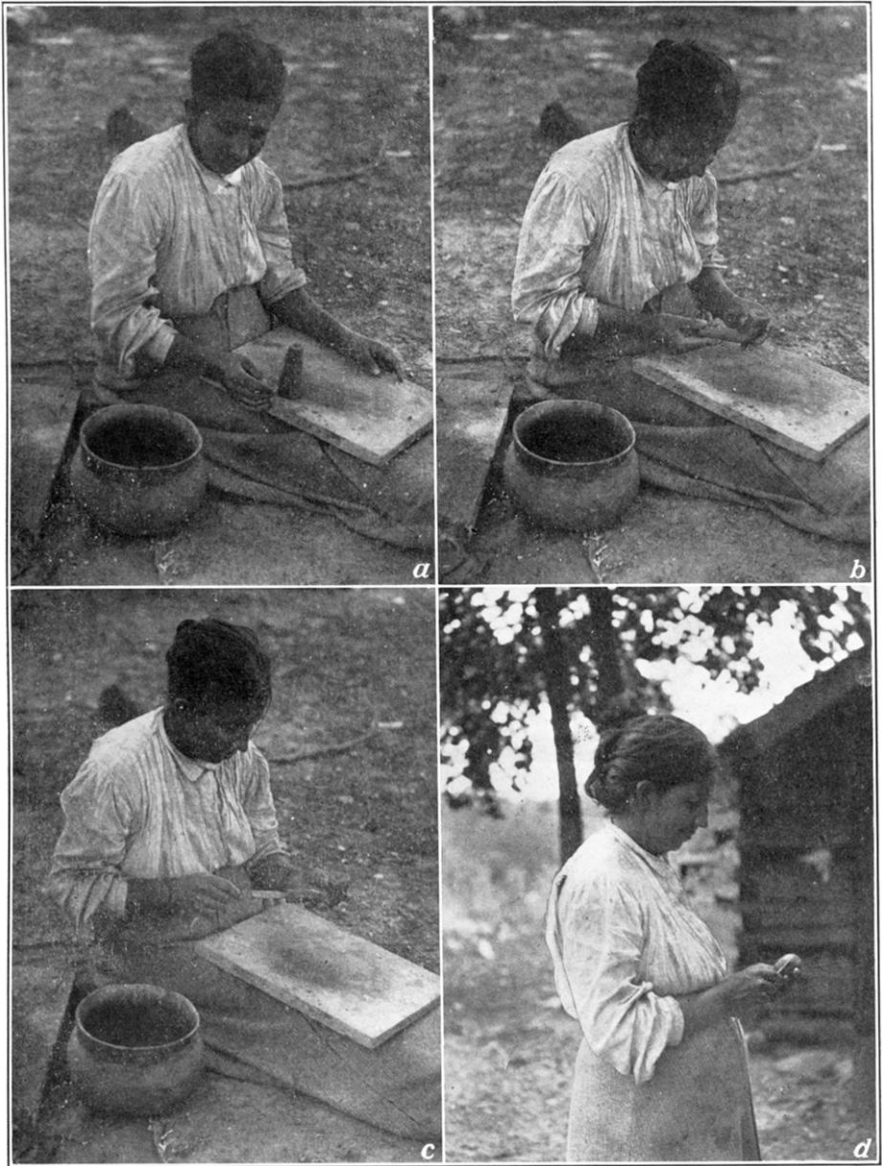
When the material had been brought in, John placed some of the moist pipe clay upon a little platform of boards, and began to pound it with his pestle, as shown in pl. XIX, *b*. As the clay flattened and spread under this vigorous treatment his wife turned it back toward the center of the board, deftly picking out bits of stick and stone the while. As the pounding continued, dry pan clay and water were added until the proper proportions — about two parts of pan clay to one of pipe clay — were reached, and the mass had attained the proper consistency. No tempering material was used. This done, the clay was divided into little wads, which Mrs Brown laid upon a plank and rolled out into long cylinders with her hand, as shown in pl. XIX, *c*. Then deftly shaping a little disk of clay to serve as the bottom of the future vessel, she laid it upon another piece of board and coiled upon it one of her clay rolls (*d*), which she pinched fast with wet fingers. Another and another roll followed, each one pinched fast to the last until a rude pot form was made (*e*). Moistening her musselshell, the potter began to blend the coils on the outside, always smoothing the clay upward. As shown in *f*, while smoothing any part of the wall of the embryo jar she supported it on the inside with her other hand. Still using the shell, and from time to time a bit of gourd, both kept wet in a vessel of water standing near, she then blended and smoothed the inside of the vessel in similar fashion (pl. XX, *g*). During these processes the jar was seen to increase gradually in size as its walls became thinner, until at last, the smoothing finished, it had attained

the desired dimensions. Then Mrs Brown leveled off the rim and bent it to suit her fancy (*h*), when the vessel was set away in an airy place to dry. If handles or legs are desired, holes are bored at the proper places with the cane knife when the vessel is dry enough to be firm, through which fresh clay rolls are thrust. When these have been clinched and smoothed on the inside, the protruding portions are modeled into neat handles, or legs, as the case may be. One or two days, depending upon the weather, are required to dry the ware before submitting it to the next process.

When a batch of vessels was dry, John Brown again took a hand in the work and scraped the surface of each one very carefully with iron and cane knives (pl. xx, *i*), reducing all irregularities and making the walls thinner. Much of the symmetry and attractiveness of the finished product depends upon the care with which this work is done. Frequently musselshells are used for scraping. When he had finished a vessel, John handed it to his daughter, who moistened it with a damp rag and rubbed it carefully all over with the waterworn pebble kept for that purpose, removing all trace of scraping (*j*). A fine polished surface may be produced, they told me, by patient use of this primitive tool. For rubbing around handles (*k*), legs, and other difficult places, she used a polished bone smoother, resembling closely the blunt awl-like bone implements sometimes found in archeological excavation on the sites of ancient Indian villages.

After the rubbing, and while the surface of the vessel was still damp, she decorated it with a simple geometric pattern, the lines of which were produced by drawing the edge of the cane knife firmly across the clay (pl. xx, *l*). The point of the cane was rarely used. In modern work a milled coin rolled along the clay takes the place of the old "roulette," or toothed wheel, and twisted wire is the up-to-date substitute for bark twine in making cord patterns.

Burning of pottery is now generally done in the house on the hearth of the large open fireplace, to avoid drafts; but some years ago the firing took place out of doors in a gully, or hollow, a still night being usually selected. The Browns arranged an old style out-door burning for my benefit, with the warning that, as a stiff breeze was blowing, some of the pieces might crack.



CATAWBA PIPE MAKING

*a*, The First Stage—a Clay Cylinder. *b*, Bending into Form. *c*, Perforating the Stem. *d*, Decorating.

The first step was to prop the vessels up around the fire, their mouths toward the blaze, as shown in pl. XXI, *m*. Here they remained for two or three hours, a peculiar black color spreading over them as they grew hotter and hotter. When this color had become uniform — a sign that they were hot enough — John raked the blazing brands out of the fire and inverted the vessels upon the coals and hot ashes (*n*) which were then pushed up around them and the whole covered thickly with pieces of dry bark pulled from old pine stumps, as shown in pl. XXI, *o*. When the bark had burned away, the red-hot vessels were pulled out and allowed to cool slowly around the fire. One had cracked, as predicted, and all the pieces were more or less mottled by drafts. The black color of the first heating, however, had given place to the typical reddish yellow of Catawba pottery. I was informed that when uniform shiny black color is desired, the ware, after the preliminary heating, is imbedded in bits of bark in a larger vessel of clay or iron, which is then inverted upon the glowing coals and covered with bark. After one or two hours the firing is complete and the vessels have acquired a brilliant black color which seems to penetrate their very substance.

In making pipes, a thick roll, usually of pure pipe clay, is produced (pl. XXII, *a*); this is bent roughly into form (*b*) and the stem hole perforated with the slender end of the cane knife (*c*). It is then laid away, and when partly dry is trimmed and the bowl gouged out with an iron knife or an implement of cane. When perfectly dry it is moistened on the outside with a damp rag, polished with the rubbing stone, and decorated (*d*) with the cane knife or a bit of wire. Sometimes pipes, particularly the "Indian-head" style, are formed by pressing a roll of clay between the halves of a double pipe mold, greased or sprinkled with ashes to prevent sticking. Then the process goes on as before. Pipes are stacked up between two fires to receive their preliminary heating; but after this the burning takes place as with pottery, and the black color, which is more popular for pipes than for pottery, is produced in the same way, the pipes, after the preliminary heating, being packed into the containing vessel between layers of bark chips.

For making pipe molds an original model is shaped by hand,

and after being burned in the usual way is greased and forced down into a flattened cake of fresh clay until half imbedded; then the surface of the cake is also greased to prevent sticking, and another cake laid over and pressed down, forming a complete mold of the original pipe. When dry these half molds are removed from the model and burned; then they are ready for use (pl. XXIII, *o*, *p*).

Survivals of native ceramic art among the tribes east of the Mississippi are now very rare. It has been long abandoned by the Iroquois, and the northern tribes generally, although a few of the mixed-bloods on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, make a so-called "Indian pottery" for the tourist trade, from the gaudy-colored clays of Gay Head; but this is manufactured on a potter's wheel and can hardly be called a survival of the old native art. Moreover, I was informed, much of the ware sold as "Gay Head Indian pottery" is made by white men. The Pamunkey Indians of Virginia — a mixed-blood tribal remnant — still make a few earthen pipes, some of which are of old form, and all of which, I understand, are made by old-time methods to a great degree. The few vessels manufactured now by the Pamunkey for curio hunters are plainly crude attempts to resuscitate the art practised by the grandmothers of the present generation, who made and sold large quantities of ware for domestic use to their white and negro neighbors. This older pottery, judging from the single specimen I collected for Mr Heye, and others which I have seen, was tempered and shaped by native methods, but the forms are evidently of mixed or European origin.

The Seminole of Florida remember pottery, but I found no specimens among them. "Old pot, Indian got 'um long time ago, no good too much. Fall littly bit, break 'um." Such was old Crop-ear Charley's explanation, when I inquired why pottery was no longer made. No pottery was found among the Chitimacha of Louisiana, the last piece having been broken within ten or fifteen years; but among the Koasati, also in Louisiana, I found two excellent pieces of old types, although the art is no longer practised by them. The Choctaw of Mississippi have made no pottery for many years, and, as near as I could discover, the last piece kept by the Indians has been broken. The Eastern band of Cherokee in North Carolina still boasts a few old potters, but owing to the lack



CATAWBA POTTER'S TOOLS

*a, b*, Mussel (*Unio*) Shells. *c, d, e*, Gourd Implements. *f*, Wooden Implement. *g*, Iron Knife. *h, i*, Implements of Cane. *j*, Wooden Perforator. *k, l, m*, Smoothing Stones. *n, o, p*, Pipe Molds. *q, r*, Bone Implements.

CATAWBA POTTERY

*a, d, e, f*, Cooking Vessels. *b*, Jar for Water or Milk. *c*, Tripod Cooking Vessel. (George G. Heye Collection)

of demand for their product, the art has been practically abandoned. Cherokee vessels are, or were, made in rather crude and archaic forms, but like Catawba pottery usually differ from most prehistoric vessels in having flat instead of rounded bottoms. Like the prehistoric pottery of the southeastern states the recent Cherokee ware shows decoration applied with a carved paddle.

But, as I say, the ceramic art of the Cherokee is dying, while the other Eastern tribes retain little more than vestiges and memories. The Catawba alone possess the distinction of preserving, alive and vigorous, the potter's craft of their ancestors.

NEW YORK CITY.