Antislavery Ceramics

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Francis Hinkle

Antislavery Ceramics (A minute read)
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Wedgwood, manufacturer, medallion, Staffordshire, England, 1787-1790, Jasperware, 1.5 x 1.25 in. (3.8 x 3.2 cm), Collection of Jim Dunlap

Ceramics have been used since the dawn of civilization to convey political and religious messages. Ancient Egyptians used the hieroglyphic cartouche to convey the name of the pharaoh. Ancient Greeks

The first vase shows Uncle Tom being draped in garlands of flowers by his owner's daughter, Eva, capturing a moment of interracial friendship that reflects Tom's humanity.

EVA DRESSING UNCLE TOM.

"There sat Tom, on a little mossy seat in the court, every one of his button-holes stuck full of cape jessamines, and Eva, gaily laughing, was hanging a wreath of roses round his neck."—Page 152.

The second vase shows Eliza carrying her son, Harry, leaping from ice floe to ice floe over the frozen Ohio River as they made their way to freedom. Its depiction of a desperate mother, risking all to protect her child, would have resonated with many in the 1800s who saw the creation of a safe, nurturing home as one of the main responsibilities of a woman.

ELIZA CROSSES THE OHIO ON THE FLOATING ICE.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) was one of the best-selling American novels of the nineteenth century and was one of the most influential attacks on slavery ever written. The novel generated an outpouring of books, plays, music, prints, and objects.

One reporter wrote that,

> "It should be noted among other favorable signs of the times, that artists, of all grades, now find it not only a congenial, but also a remunerative work to represent the creations of Mrs. Stowe's genius in pictures and statues … they have an established market value, and that people of wealth and taste now begin to seek such works as the ornaments of their parlors and chambers."

Combining delicately sculpted figures, two different types of gilding and rich enamel decoration, each of the vases is a tour-de-force of the potter's art. That a potter or retailer thought there was a market for such expensive figures conveying an anti-slavery message suggests that by 1860 the abolition movement was winning the battle for the hearts and minds of American citizens.

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3 Comments

Randy Boyer on April 1, 2020 at 2:09 pm

Reply

Excellent topic, photos are beautiful. I am a member of the Transferware Collectors Club and, with your permission, I would like to share this article with our members.

I have a special interest in this topic. I have a large collection that includes many pieces of "The Residence of the Late Richard Jordan" and have done a lot of research on him. Rev Jordan was born in 1756 on a farm in Surry, VA. He gained fame as an itinerant Quaker minister and as an outspoken abolitionist. He advocated against slavery to the state government of North Carolina, where he owned property. When he was willed slaves from the family farm, he set them free. Later, he became a farmer/Quaker meeting leader in Camden NJ. The bucolic scene in this pattern was drawn in 1825, and it became a transferware pattern potted by J. Heath & Co sometime between 1828-1841. The pattern was widely exported to the US, where many pieces of this pattern still exist, and Richard Jordan is a revered figure in Quaker history. Today the quaint farm and Quaker meeting house is in a slum in Camden, NJ, and Rev Jordan is buried there.

I invite anyone who is interested in more info about Richard Jordan or this transferware pattern to contact me.

John Fiske on April 1, 2020 at 3:14 pm

Reply

Thank you Robert. We're always delighted to share our articles with interested readers. Please tell your club members that they can receive DAJ twice a month for free by sending me their email address, **john@antiquesjournal.com**. Thanks, too, for sharing your research, I sure that we have readers who will be interested and will contact you.

John Fiske on April 1, 2020 at 3:04 pm

Reply

Dear Mr. Fiske,

I always enjoy the DAJ Newsletter and it is, perhaps, even more enjoyed and appreciated by many of us readers during these challenging times of Covid-19 quarantine. Thank you for continuing it.

This is a very small thing, but in reading the Antislavery Ceramics article, I thought it important to note that Colonial Williamsburg owns the sugar bowl pictured in the article. We have loaned the piece to the Reeves Center for the exhibition. I've included a link to CW's online record for the sugar bowl:
https://emuseum.history.org/objects/6978/sugar-dish

If it's possible for you to update the caption in the article for that piece so that it reads "Colonial Williamsburg Foundation," that would be great.

Thanks again for your always great newsletter.

My best,
Angelika (via Email)

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