

The Potter's Art: Alexandria Stoneware Pottery Design

Who made this pot?

PURPOSE

Students are challenged to identify attributes of the pottery of historic Alexandria to make assertions about manufacture technology, design and individual potter's work.

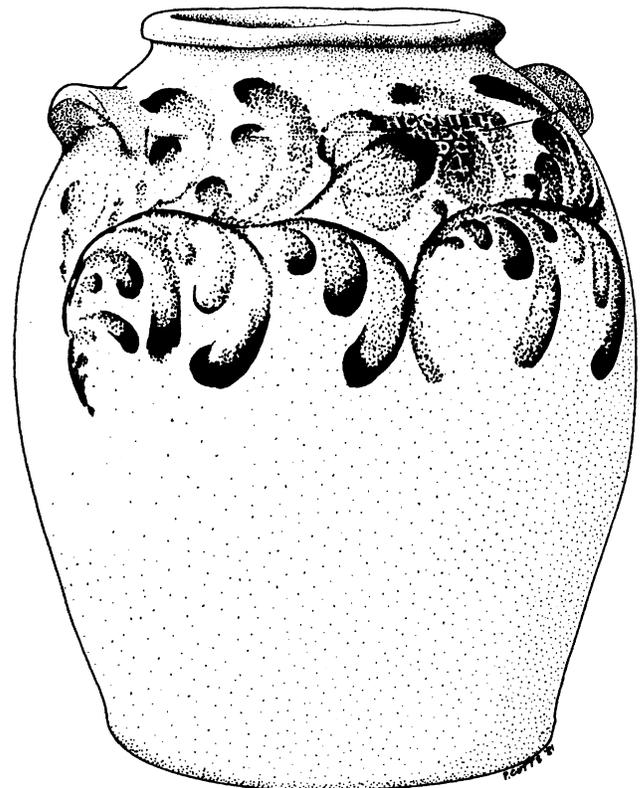
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The Student will

- identify the physical characteristics of Alexandria salt-glazed stoneware pottery—vessel shape, design motifs and potter's mark.
- identify artifacts based on pottery making technology and function.
- compare the use of salt-glazed stoneware pottery with modern food-storage containers.
- apply knowledge of pottery decoration to design a pottery motif.

SYNOPSIS

Students examine pots and sherds made by two Alexandria potters who produced salt-glazed stoneware in the 1800s. The shape and use of these pots are discussed and compared to modern containers. The decoration and potters' marks are analyzed to demonstrate how manufacturing techniques and decorative styles can be used to date a site. Students will then create their own stoneware pottery motif.



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Salt-glazed stoneware pottery was produced in Alexandria during the nineteenth century. These sturdy ceramic vessels were used for food preparation and storage. Today, in addition to paper and cardboard packages, we use metal tins, glass and plastic containers to store foods such as flour, sugar, pasta and other dry goods. We also bake and microwave foods in a variety of glass and ceramic vessels.

The Wilkes Street Pottery was the longest operating pottery in Alexandria. The Pottery was located on the site of what is today the Tannery House condominium, behind Shuman's Bakery. It passed through the hands of three different proprietors between 1813 and 1876. John B. Swann, Alexandria's first stoneware potter, operated the business until 1825. Hugh Smith, a merchant, bought the business and sold the stoneware in his King Street shop. He employed potters, including a freeman named David Jarbour, to produce the stoneware. Several other free blacks were employed by Smith, but their specific occupations are not known. Benedict C. Milburn leased the establishment from Smith in 1833 and bought it outright in 1841. After Milburn's death in 1867, his sons maintained the business until 1876.

The archaeological excavation of the Wilkes Street Pottery took place in 1977. Salt-glazed stoneware pottery sherds are also found in sites throughout Alexandria. However, the analysis of thousands of sherds from this site enables the City archaeologists to attribute specific vessel forms and decorations to the three periods of stoneware production. Thus, the site provides a record of Alexandria stoneware technology and stylistic development.



Many stoneware vessels were stamped with the name of the potter or merchant who distributed the wares. This marking device is analogous to the prominent markings of shopping bags as well as the proliferation of logos and designer signatures on a wide variety of products today.

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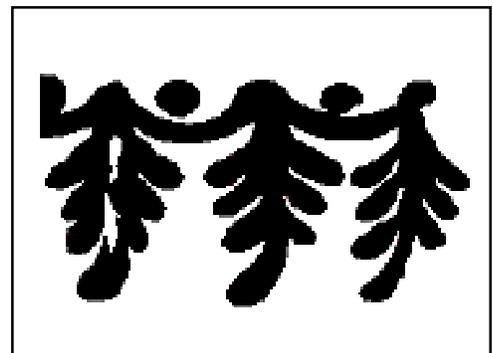
VOCABULARY (See Appendix I: Glossary for more words and definitions)

- **Archaeology**—The scientific study of the human past through excavation and related research.
- **Archaeologist**—A person who specializes in the study of material remains of past human life and activities.
- **Artifact**—An object made or modified by people.
- **Ceramics**—Pottery or objects of clay.
- **Firing**—The heating or baking of clay pots in a kiln in order to harden them.
- **Glaze**—A glassy, shiny coating applied on pottery.
- **Kiln**—An oven or furnace in which pottery is fired or baked.
- **Potter**—A person who makes pottery.
- **Potter's mark**—The name of the potter marked on the vessel.
- **Pottery**—Objects made from clay.
- **Potter's stamp**—A tool with lettering that was pressed into the clay to make the potter's mark.
- **Slip**—A solution of clay and water that can have added color and be used for decoration.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Docents will discuss the following topics with your students

- Have you ever seen pottery made? What are some ways that pottery can be formed?
- What types of containers do we prepare and store foods in today?
- Are the containers we use today decorated? Describe some of the decorations.

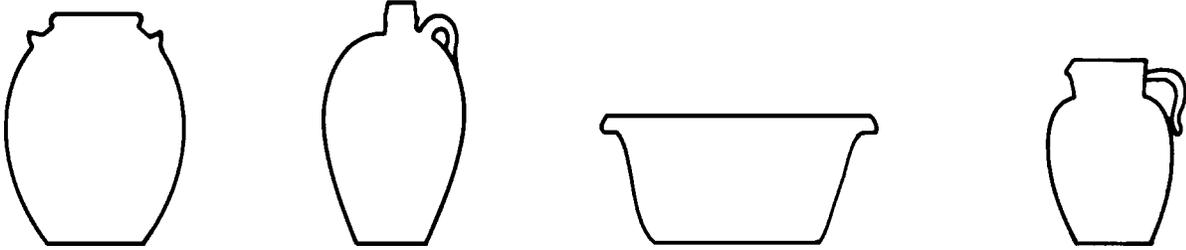


THE POTTERS' ART

I. SHAPE & USE:

1. What do you cook in and store food in today?

2. In the 1800s, stoneware pottery was used to cook and store food and drink. Look at your pottery sherd. What do you think it looked like before it broke? Circle one.



3. What do you think could have been stored in your container?

POTTERS' MARK & DECORATIONS:

H. Smith decorated his pottery using the broad lines of a paint brush. He produced pottery from 1825 - 1841.

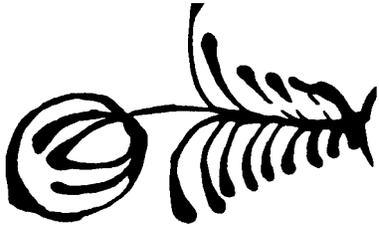
H. SMITH & CO.



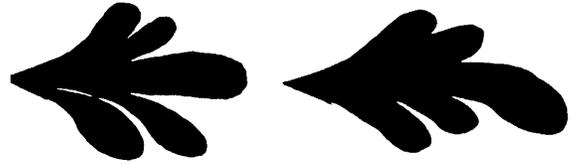
B.C. Milburn's designs were drawn using thin lines. He used a slip cup. He produced pottery from 1841 - 1876.

**B.C. MILBURN
ALEX^A**

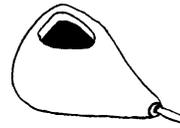




Circle the tool used to create this design.



Circle the tool used to create this design.



II. WHO MADE YOUR POTTERY?

1. Draw the design on your pottery sherd.

2. Were the lines on your pottery made with a brush or a slip cup?
How do you know?

3. Who made your pottery, H. Smith or B.C. Milburn?

3). When was your pottery created?

The Potters' Art

Name: _____

B. G. MILBURN,
 MANUFACTURER OF
STONEWARE, EARTHENWARE,
FLOWER POTS, STOVE PIPE COLLARS, & C.
 At the old established Potteries,
No. 127 Wilkes Street,
ALEXANDRIA, VA.

LIST OF PRICES STONEWARE, PER DOZEN :

Pint, 60 cts.; Quart, \$1.; Half gallon, \$1 33 $\frac{1}{4}$; Gallon, \$2; 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ gallons, \$3; Two gallons, \$4; Three gallons, \$6; Four gallons, \$8; Five gallons, \$10; Six gallons, \$12.

COVERED WARE--CHURNS, BUTTER JARS, PANS, & C.:

Half gallon, \$2; Gallon, \$2 40; 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ gallons, \$4; Two gallons, \$5 40; Three gallons, \$7 20; Four gallons, \$9 60; Five gallons, \$12; Six gallons, \$14 40.

FRUIT JARS, WITH CORK AND CEMENT:

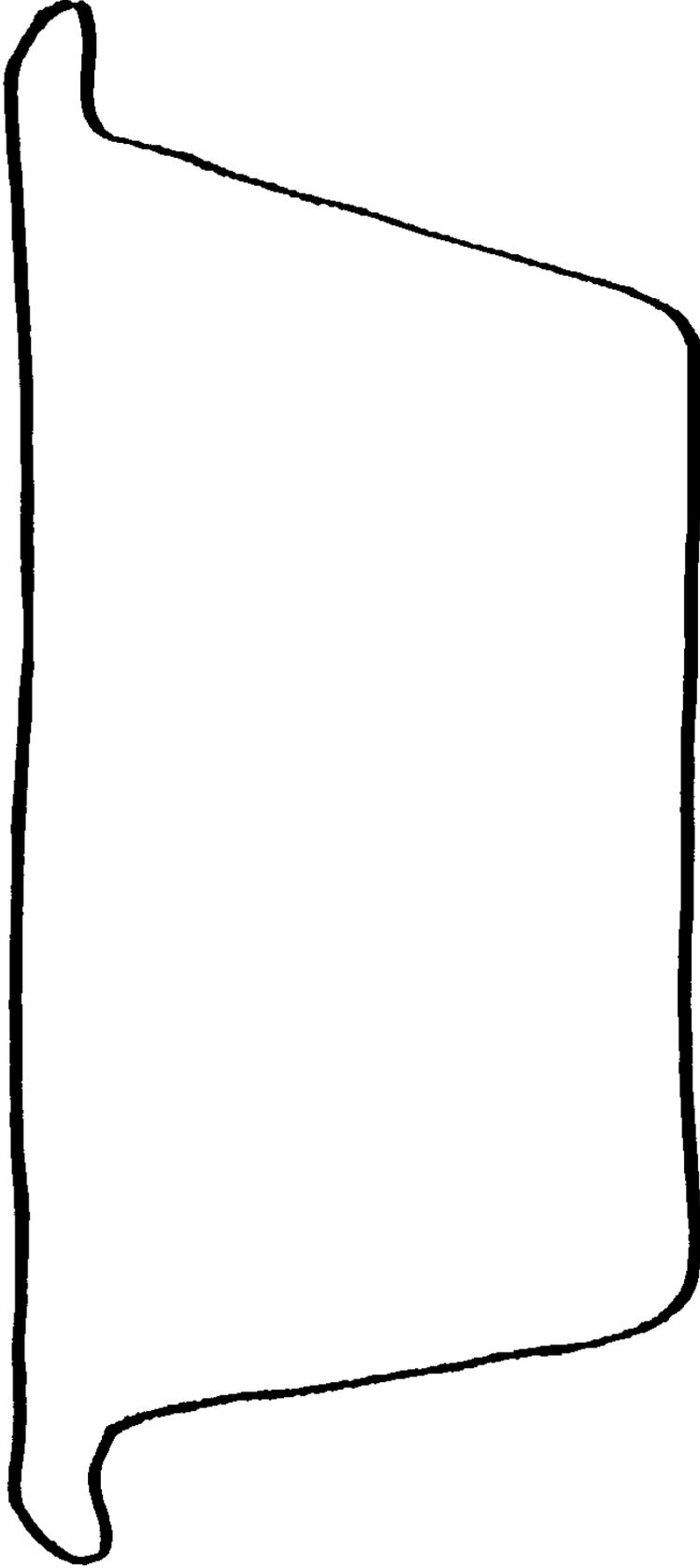
Pint, \$1; Quart, \$1 33 $\frac{1}{4}$; Half gallon, \$1 75; Gallon, \$2 00.

FLOWER POTS AT VERY LOW PRICES.

A good supply of the above articles constantly on hand. Orders promptly attended to.
 [Gutter print]

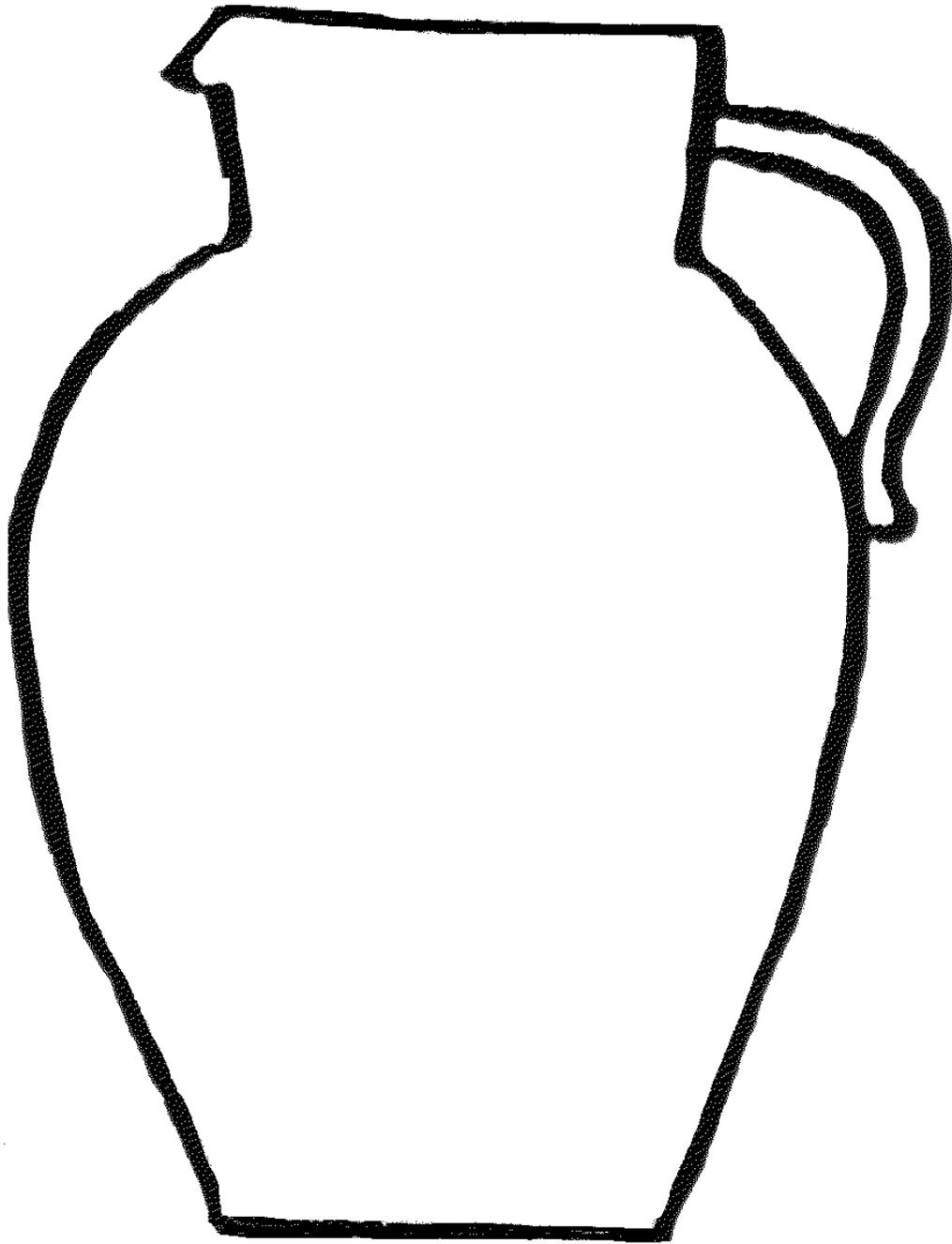
If you saw this advertisement for stoneware pottery, when do you think it could have been made?

How would it have been decorated?



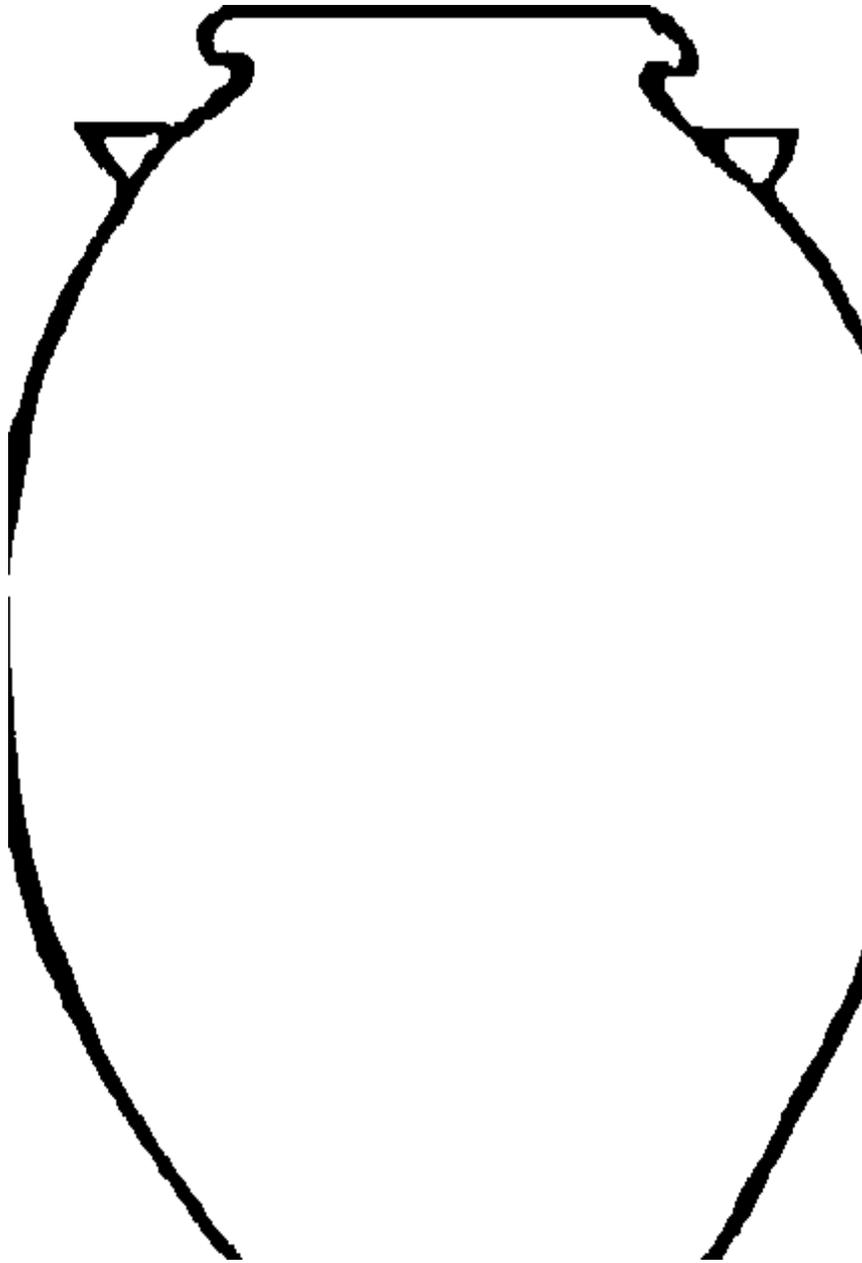
Stoneware Milk Pan

Salt-glazed stoneware pottery was produced in Alexandria from 1813 to 1876. These sturdy ceramic vessels were used for food preparation and storage. The Wilkes Street Pottery site was excavated 1977. The thousands of sherds found at this site provide a record of the technological and stylistic developments of Alexandria stoneware.



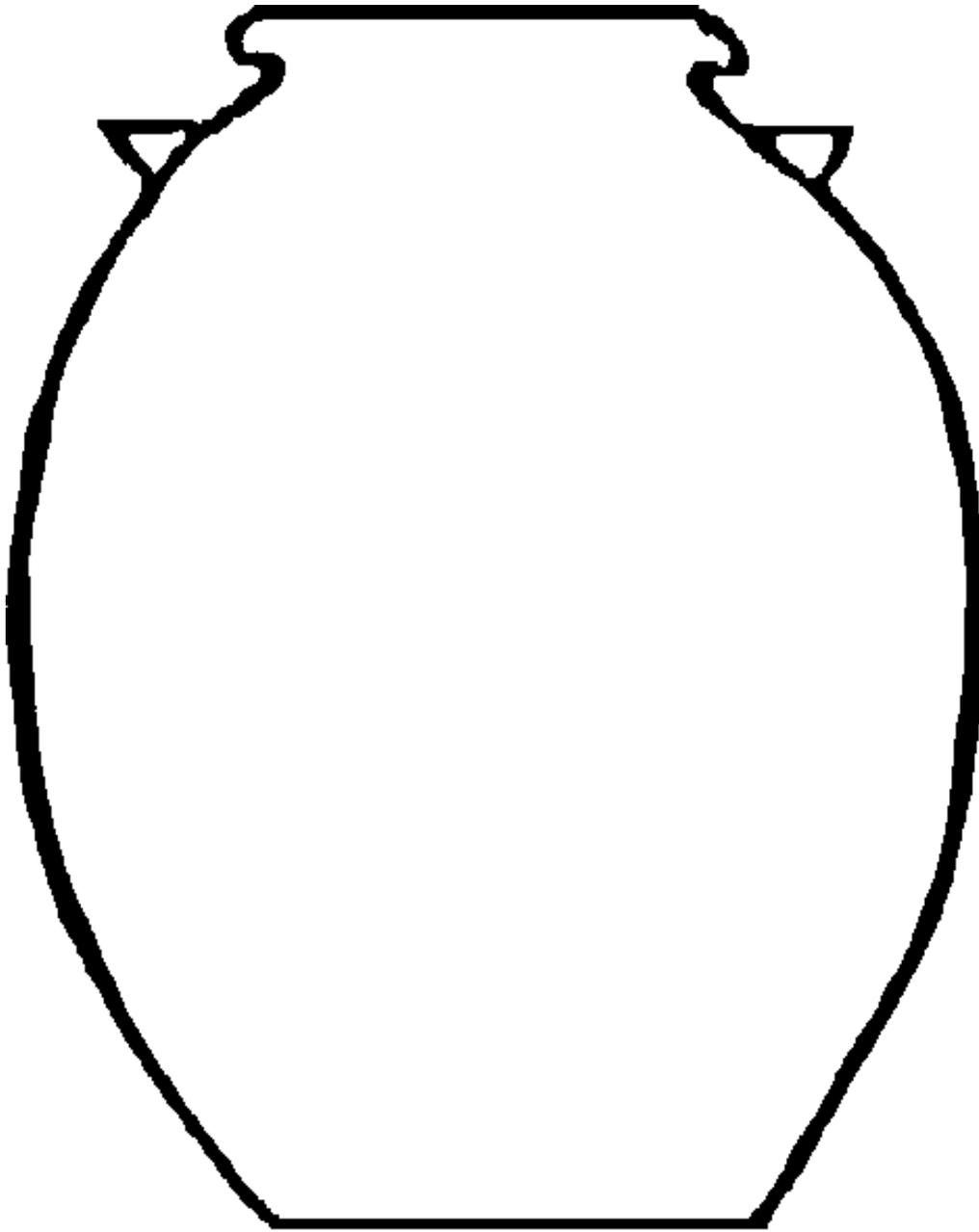
Stoneware Pitcher

Salt-glazed stoneware pottery was produced in Alexandria from 1813 to 1876. These sturdy ceramic vessels were used for food preparation and storage. The Wilkes Street Pottery site was excavated in 1977. The thousands of sherds found at this site provide a record of the technological and stylistic developments of Alexandria stoneware.



Stoneware Jug

Salt-glazed stoneware pottery was produced in Alexandria from 1813 to 1876. These sturdy ceramic vessels were used for food preparation and storage. The Wilkes Street Pottery site was excavated in 1977. The thousands of sherds found at this site provide a record of the technological and stylistic developments of Alexandria stoneware.



Stoneware Jar

Salt-glazed stoneware pottery was produced in Alexandria from 1813 to 1876. These sturdy ceramic vessels were used for food preparation and storage. The Wilkes Street Pottery site was excavated in 1977. The thousands of sherds found at this site provide a record of the technological and stylistic developments of Alexandria stoneware.