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## **African-American Archaeology and Colonowares from the Charleston Judicial Center Site (38CH1708)**

**By J. W. Joseph, PhD, RPA  
New South Associates**

New South Associates has completed the results of a multi-year investigation of the Charleston Judicial Center Site, 38CH1708, in South Carolina. Located on Broad Street between King and Meeting Streets, this site was in the heart of the old city, lying just outside the walls of the fortified town in an area that was settled in the 1720s.

Archaeological work made use of machine stripping to expose large blocks with an emphasis on recovering information about the site's colonial landscape and material culture. This work revealed that the colonial yards devoted considerable space to the raising of crops and livestock and that the immediate rear yards of colonial homes were both workspaces and residential space for African-American workers. Numerous pit features were found that contained large quantities of colonial artifacts. These pit features represent storage pits for vegetable crops as well as other functions and are themselves associated with African-American landscapes in the lowcountry and have been found in large numbers during excavations of African-American villages sites on lowcountry plantations. Excavation of these pit features resulted in the recovery of a quantity of African-American/Native American Colonowares, with a total of 1,228 Colonoware sherds recovered, including a number of partially reconstructed vessels (click on the images to see larger illustrations).



Approximately 85% of the site's colonial deposits contained Colonowares. Most of the features that contained Colonowares also contained datable European ceramics and Stan South's Mean Ceramic Date formula (South 1977) was used to determine dates for each feature and to also chart the distribution of Colonoware by decade. This analysis revealed that of the total Colonoware assemblage, 1.07% came from features dating to the 1720s, 3.83% from features dating to the 1730s, 37.52% from features dating to the 1740s, and 38.25% from features dating to the 1750s. Features dating from the 1760s produced 10.29% of the Colonoware. The percentage contribution of Colonowares decreased dramatically after this date, with 1770s features producing only 0.55% of the Colonoware, 1780s features only 0.09%, 1790s features 2.91% and features postdating 1800 6.56%. Colonoware itself was very much a critical element of colonial deposits in Charleston. Looking at its distribution from another perspective, Colonoware accounted for 34.29% of all of the ceramics from 1720s contexts, 15.97% of the ceramics

from 1730s contexts, 25.96% of the ceramics from the 1740s, 12.06% of the ceramics from the 1750s, and 8.39% of all of the ceramics from the 1760s. By the 1790s Colonoware would represent only 6.58% of the total ceramics and by the 1800s it would drop to 2.46% representation.

The Colonowares found at the Judicial Center site were obviously made for sale or trade as there is no evidence that Colonoware was made on the Judicial Center site. The majority of the Colonowares found by the project were most likely purchased from Charleston's markets, one of which was located nearby at Broad and Meeting Street. The colonial Colonowares are polished and burnished and fall closest to type descriptions developed for Catawba Indian wares of the late 1700s, however, the Colonowares from the Judicial Center Site were not made by the Catawba's, who, as a confederation of displaced Native American tribes, did not come into existence until the 1770s. There was very little interaction between free Native Americans and the Charleston markets during this period (ca. 1720-1760), but there is abundant evidence of the participation of enslaved African-Americans in the market economy, and the Colonowares found at the Judicial Center site are thus believed to have been made by both enslaved African-Americans and Native Americans for sale at market. The interpretation that much of the Colonoware found in Colonial Charleston was produced by African Americans and distributed through the markets has previously been made by Brian Crane as part of his doctoral research utilizing Colonoware collections from Charleston's Heyward Washington House. Work at the Judicial Center Site suggests that in essence there were three "types" of Colonoware: 1) a thicker, less refined ware made by enslaved African-Americans for their own use on plantation villages; 2) a thinner, polished and/or burnished ware made by enslaved African-American and Native Americans for trade or sale to the Charleston markets and colonial planters; and 3) a thin walled burnished ware made by the Catawba Indians for sale during their trading visits to the lowcountry in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Further discussion of this analysis and suggested revisions of the Colonoware typology are presented by Joseph (2004a and 2004b).



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