

**NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE**  
**Office of Archives and History**  
**Department of Cultural Resources**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**R. F. Outen Pottery**

Matthews, Mecklenburg County, MK3151, Listed 4/24/2015

Nomination by Susan Mayer

Photographs by Susan Mayer, August 2014



Overall view



Kiln and workshop

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: R. F. Outen Pottery

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 430 Jefferson Street

City or town: Mathews State: NC County: Mecklenburg

Not For Publication:  N/A Vicinity:  N/A

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national      X statewide      \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A      \_\_\_ B      X C      \_\_\_ D

<p><b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b> <u>North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources</u> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p><b>Date</b></p>
--	--------------------

<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p><b>Signature of commenting official:</b></p>	<p><b>Date</b></p>
<p><b>Title :</b></p>	<p><b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

---

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

---

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

---

#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

---

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

---

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER/Rectangular downdraft kiln  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: Earth, Brick  
Walls: Brick  
Roof: Wood, Metal, Asphalt

---

### Summary Paragraph

The R. F. Outen Pottery is located on 1.48 acres within the town of Matthews in southeastern Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, at 430 Jefferson Street. Two legal parcels comprise the roughly triangular-shaped property. The pottery is located at the end of a dead-end paved residential street. Trees closely border Jefferson Street, and a small grassy driveway leads to the historic resources on the property. The property is heavily wooded with a small clearing that serves as vehicle parking to the east and south of the contributing resources. The topography slopes down from the northwest edge of the property to a small creek running along the eastern boundary of the property. Contributing resources consist of a one-story workshop with extensive shed additions, a detached brick kiln structure with a wood-framed shed roof, and a free-standing metal roofed clay storage shed, all built ca. 1952. All three are oriented north-south, with the kiln at the south end and the open storage shed at the north end of the aligned resources. The R. F. Outen Pottery has remained unchanged since the family ceased clay production on the property in the late 1980s.

---

### Narrative Description

The R. F. Outen Pottery is bordered on the south by Jefferson Street, a dead-end paved road which terminates in a loop at the property; on the east by the former residence of R. F. Outen constructed in 1947 at the corner of Jefferson and Alexander streets; on the north by Ames Street; and on the west by the Avington townhome development built ca. 2000. The buildings and structure are located on the southern portion of the roughly triangular-shaped parcel. The

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

property consists of two legal entities: a 1.12 acre parcel upon which the contributing resources sit, and a 0.36 acre parcel.

## **Inventory**

### **1. Kiln – Contributing Structure, ca. 1952**

R. F. Outen, along with a mason named Long (first name unknown), constructed the kiln. The rectangular brick kiln is approximately twenty two feet long and seven feet tall. The kiln is barrel vaulted with segmental-arch door openings located on the north elevation, which currently serves as the entrance, and south elevation, which is permanently sealed with brick. The door openings were bricked in each time the kiln was loaded and fired. The kiln originally featured six square brick chimneys approximately twenty inches wide by sixteen inches deep and fifteen feet tall, five of which have survived. The center chimney at the west elevation is no longer extant. The chimneys are not integrated into but are constructed flush with the kiln walls. A framework of L-shaped vertical and horizontal steel angles bolted into the brick walls and connected by threaded steel rods reinforces the structure.

The interiors of the kiln and chimneys were laid with high-temperature fire brick and common brick on the exterior. The top of the kiln is barrel vaulted and parged with mortar. The kiln was heated by four separate fuel oil burners, no longer extant, located in the kiln along the east wall. The piping for the burners, located along the exterior wall, passed through small, low, evenly-spaced arched openings in the east elevation. Piping includes copper fuel lines and larger iron pipes that channeled forced air to the burners. A blower apparatus located on the north elevation is still extant. The floor of the kiln is comprised of a layer of fire brick headers set atop rows of brick to form a cavity for downdraft air flow into the chimney openings at the dirt base of the kiln.

The kiln is protected by a wood-framed shed roof supported by square wood posts sitting atop the kiln wall. The wooden posts rest on the steel frame of the kiln and are anchored to the steel post with permanent clamps constructed of steel plates and threaded rods. The roof and wood framing over the kiln were completely replaced after 2007 by the owner.

### **2. R. F. Outen Pottery Workshop – Contributing Building, ca. 1952**

Rufus Outen also constructed the workshop. The workshop is a one-story front-gabled concrete block building approximately twenty-four feet long and fifty feet wide. It is three bays wide and four bays deep. The asphalt-shingle roof over the workshop is pierced west of the center ridge by a brick flue. The south elevation features a doorway centered in the façade with a flanking window to each side. The doorway and window openings are topped with wood lintels, and the door and windows are covered with plywood. The end gable is covered with wood weatherboards. The low-pitched roof is covered with asphalt shingles. An electrical meter box is located to the right of the doorway. The east elevation is four bays wide and contains four window openings. Originally, the window openings along this elevation contained a single two-

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

vertical-light sash but are now covered with metal panels. The entire length of the east elevation is sheltered by a low-sloped integrated roof shed addition. The shed roof is supported by eight posts, a mix of rough-sawn and round timbers. The shed addition shelters discarded building materials and various pieces of pottery equipment, including a potter's wheel attached to an early-model automobile transmission and a small pug mill. The north elevation is three bays wide with an entrance slightly off-center. Three wall openings on the north elevation served as a window on the left end, a door in the center, and a pass-through portal at the right end which allowed for the movement of the clay from the clay storage shed into the hammer mill located inside the workshop. The appearance of this elevation is similar to that of the south elevation, with a gabled end covered with wood weatherboards. The west elevation is four bays long with four covered window openings, and it is sheltered by a shed addition with a low-sloped 5-V metal integrated roof supported by a row of sawn posts. The shed addition currently shelters pottery molds for flower pots and discarded pieces of broken pottery.

The interior of the workshop has a high degree of integrity. The sash of all of the windows are visible from the interior. The room features a dirt floor and contains much of the equipment that was used when the pottery was in operation. This equipment includes two pug mills, a hammer mill, a potter's wheel, and a work table. Various tools used by Rufus, including wooden measuring scales used to determine the height of a pot and ball openers which helped open up a ball of clay to be pulled up into a pot, hang near the potter's wheel. The hammer mill, pug mills, and potter's wheel are located at the north end of the workshop. The work table, constructed of wood with a plywood top, is located in the center of the workshop and is approximately twelve feet long and two feet wide. The hammer mill, which is used to break up deposits of hard clay and rock, is mounted in a window opening at the northwest corner of the workshop and is accessed from both the interior and exterior of the building. Dried clay is deposited into a funnel opening at the top of a cylindrical steel drum, which contains thirty grinding blades that are driven by a side-mounted motor. The ground clay is then deposited inside the workshop. The pug mill combines dried clay with water and kneads the clay to a usable consistency. Two pug mills are inside the workshop. The first, sitting parallel to the north wall, is comprised of a cylindrical drum approximately seven feet long and thirty inches in diameter with a rectangular opening at the left to allow the insertion of wet clay, a large rotor lined with paddle blades, and an outlet at the right end for the extrusion of the prepared clay. A large open-air motor to the left of the pug mill drives the rotor. A second pug mill, sitting between the first pug mill and the potter's wheel, is oriented perpendicular to the north wall. It is smaller than its counterpart, being approximately five feet long and two feet in diameter. The motor sits at the north end, while the extrusion outlet is at the south end. A wooden plank sits atop discarded pieces of pottery and serves as a catcher for the extruded clay. A square wooden table is built on top of the pug mill. The potter's wheel sits in the northeast corner of the workshop. The wheel is mounted on a waist-high table, so the potter stands rather than sits. The speed of the wheel is controlled by a pedal at the floor. A large duct ventilation system and brick chimney are situated south of the larger pug mill.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

### **3. Clay Storage Shed – Contributing Structure, ca. 1952**

A large, tall freestanding clay storage shed was built immediately adjacent to the north elevation of the workshop. The shed is two bays wide and one bay deep. The metal shed roof is supported by three rows of treated round poles and slopes from east to west. Metal sheeting of various types forms a partial wall along the west elevation of the clay storage shed presumably to shelter the clay both from the weather and the slope of the property. Objects currently under the clay storage shed include a fuel tank as well as remnant piles of clay formerly used in the pottery.

#### **A General Statement about Potential Archaeology**

The structures are closely related to the surrounding environment. Archaeological remains such as trash/water pits, privies, wells, and other structural remains which may be present can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the contributing structures. Information concerning early- to mid-twentieth century rural crafts production, as well as structural details, is often only evident in the archaeological record. Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the structures. At this time, no investigation has been done to discover these remains, but it is likely that they exist, and this should be considered in any development of the property.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

---

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY

ARCHITECTURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1952-1965

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1952

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Outen, Rufus Franklin

Long, (first name unknown), mason

\_\_\_\_\_

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

### Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The R. F. Outen Pottery in Matthews, built ca. 1952, is an important handmade pottery operation during the mid-twentieth century. Rufus F. Outen was trained by his father, William Outen, who in turn learned his craft from a line of traditional potters extending back to mid-nineteenth century in nearby Union County, North Carolina. Outen built the kiln, workshop, and clay storage shed following his departure from the Matthews Pottery, a commercial pottery which had been started by his father in 1922. During the 1950s and 1960s, Outen produced utilitarian folk pottery at a time when many small potteries in North Carolina focused on the production and sale of thrown art pottery. Among the products Outen hand-produced were stoneware churns, pitchers, and rabbit watering bowls typically glazed in commercially-available Albany slip. In comparison, the Matthews Pottery, which was demolished in the 1980s, was a large-scale producer of cast and machine-stamped pottery, especially flower pots. The R. F. Outen Pottery operated until Outen's retirement in 1976, however, the period of significance extends to 1965, as the pottery is not of exceptional significance after the fifty-year date.

The R. F. Outen Pottery is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Industry within the context of Matthews. The property has retained all of the resources associated with pottery: the brick kiln, concrete block workshop, and open clay storage shed. The R. F. Outen Pottery is also significant on a statewide level under Criterion C in the area of Architecture for its oil-burning rectangular downdraft kiln, a distinctive kiln design utilized by mid-twentieth century potters in North Carolina. The kiln has retained the features associated with the downdraft kiln type, including five of the original six chimneys for ventilation.

### Historic Context

#### Early North Carolina Piedmont Pottery

As noted in a 1947 article about North Carolina's pottery industry by M. R. Dunnagan, editor of the North Carolina Employment Services Commission magazine, "the art of pottery-making, ancient and honorable skill, is interwoven with the history of North Carolina."<sup>1</sup> Pottery has been made for millennia in North Carolina. Members of the Catawba Nation made pottery during the Woodland Period. With European settlement, the Piedmont with its abundant clay became the center of pottery production in North Carolina. Lead-glazed earthenware, a relatively fragile and potentially toxic ware, dominated the early North Carolina pottery trade during the eighteenth century, much of it produced by the Moravians, most notably Gottfried Aust. Updraft beehive kilns, which were round with an opening in the center of the roof, were popular with earthenware potters.<sup>2</sup> During the nineteenth century, stoneware largely replaced earthenware in North Carolina. The earliest stoneware in North Carolina was imported from northeastern states such as Massachusetts and overseas from England. During the first half of the nineteenth century,

---

<sup>1</sup> M. R. Dunnagan, "Pottery Making, Ancient Art, Increasing in State," *The E.S.C. Quarterly* 5, Nos. 2-3 (Spring-Summer 1947), 53.

<sup>2</sup> Charles G. Zug III, *Turners and Burners: The Folk Potters of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 200.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

stoneware began to be produced in large numbers in North Carolina. Stoneware has many advantages over the more primitive earthenware pottery. Because stoneware is vitrified, it takes on a very hard, inert, glass-like state when fired and is stronger, more durable, and non-porous. Stoneware requires a higher temperature fire (around 2,400 degrees Fahrenheit versus 1,800 degrees for earthenware), and while the clay required for earthenware could be found close to the surface, stoneware clay required deeper excavations.<sup>3</sup>

Pottery production was similar regardless of the type of glaze employed. Clay was dug by hand and had to be ground to a usable consistency, which usually was done with an animal (horse, mule, or oxen) powered mill. The pottery would then be turned on a foot-powered wheel, commonly known as a kickwheel, a specialized skill acquired after years of practice which often involved an apprenticeship. The pottery typically was fired in a crossdraft groundhog kiln, which was a long, low kiln partially dug into the ground with a firebox at one end and a chimney at the other. Locally-made stoneware was an invaluable product in the nineteenth century. In the Piedmont of North Carolina, there were no practical or available alternatives to the jars, jugs, crocks, pots and pitchers produced by the local potters.<sup>4</sup>

Pre-nineteenth century North Carolina stoneware is divided into two categories: salt glaze and alkaline glaze. Salt glazing requires that salt be poured into the kiln when the fire has reached its highest temperatures. The extreme heat vaporizes the salt which fuses with the clay forming a hard glaze. Salt glaze pottery production dominated the eastern part of the state, where salt was more abundant. The greatest concentration of salt glaze pottery was in Moore and Randolph counties. Notable practitioners of salt glaze pottery included Chester Webster (1799-1882) and the Craven family, which began with patriarch Peter (1712-1791) and continued for nine generations, all of Randolph County. Moore and Randolph counties' location between Fayetteville and Salem along the Old Plank Road, a major trade route, also contributed to the large number of potters in the vicinity. Alkaline-glazed stoneware dominated the state from Gaston County on westward to the mountains from about 1810 until the Civil War.<sup>5</sup> This glaze, comprised of wood ash, water, and clay, is applied to the pottery before being fired. In the Catawba River Valley near Vale, Daniel Seagle (ca. 1805-1867) began producing alkaline glazed pottery in the 1830s. Only two early nineteenth century Mecklenburg County potters has been documented. William Goodwin recorded an indenture for his apprentice, seven-year-old Matthew Ormand, in 1802.<sup>6</sup> Mecklenburg County fell into a void between the centers of the salt and alkaline glazing traditions in the late nineteenth century. In the 1850s, however, the foundations of what would become Matthews' pottery industry would form in adjacent Union County.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Stewart Gray, "Survey and Research Report on the R. F. Outen Pottery," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, December 1, 2011, <http://landmarkscommission.org/S&Rs%20Alphabetical%20Order/Surveys&rOutenPottery.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara S. Perry, ed., *North Carolina Pottery: The Collection of the Mint Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 6-8, 14; Nancy Sweezy, *Raised in Clay* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 60.

<sup>5</sup> Sweezy, 54.

<sup>6</sup> Zug, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Dunnagan, 53; Perry, 3, 15.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

## The Outen Family and the Piedmont Pottery Tradition

The foundation of the pottery industry in Matthews follows the development of the Gay-Broom-Outen family lineage in the southern Piedmont. Potters came into Union County, North Carolina, from South Carolina in the mid-nineteenth century. The Gay family arrived in the Union County community of Alton in the 1850s. Thomas Gay (1838-1909) married Mary W. Broom, daughter of occasional potter Andrew Broom, in 1857 and established himself as a farmer as well as a jeweler and clock repairman. A family legend recounts that, probably following Thomas' service in the Confederate army during the Civil War, James Gryce, an itinerant Native American farmhand and potter, appeared at the Gay homestead seeking work in trade for room and board.<sup>8</sup> During his residence with the Gay family, Gryce taught Thomas, and probably his brother Isaac (1835-1909), the art of salt-glaze pottery. Thomas then began manufacturing pottery for trade with his Scotch-Irish neighbors. Thomas's son George Coburn Gay (1871-1954) took over his father's pottery business in the 1890s.<sup>9</sup>

Nimrod Broom (1842-1912), the younger brother of Thomas's wife, was trained by both Andrew Broom as well as Thomas Gay. Together with his wife Susan, Nimrod produced pottery and operated a store in the Alton community. Of their nine children, only one son, James Calvin Broome<sup>10</sup> (1869-1957), continued in the family business. In 1888, James married Nettie Elizabeth Outen, daughter of Joseph Outen. Jug Jim, a nickname acquired by James due to his production of jugs for the Monroe Distillery, continued to operate a pottery until 1946, when his children convinced him to retire. According to research by Charles Helms, Jug Jim was the last traditional potter in Union County, North Carolina. Jug Jim utilized a wood-fired groundhog kiln in his production of salt-glazed pottery. The kiln measured thirty-two feet long and eight feet wide and stood four feet tall at the peak of the arched roof. A chimney stood at one end, and six small holes along each side of the kiln allowed for the insertion of salt for salt glazing during the firing process. Broome reconstructed his kiln three times over the years due to structural failures during firing, and the third kiln was successfully utilized for nearly twenty years.<sup>11</sup>

William Franklin Outen (1871-1947), brother to Nettie Elizabeth Outen Broome, was born in Union County. His grandfather Absolom Outen had moved his family to Union County from Lancaster, South Carolina, in the 1850s. Nimrod Broom trained William, who worked with Jug Jim in Monroe making salt-glazed stoneware. William operated a small pottery until around 1900 when he moved to South Carolina, citing unfavorable business conditions in Union County.

---

<sup>8</sup> Charles Zug posits that the Gryce story was only a family legend, one that was common to southern pottery families, and that Gay's pottery ability was learned either in South Carolina or in Union County from other known potters Murphey Usery and Hugh Starnes. Zug, 66.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Douglas Helms, *An historical study of folk potters in and around Alton Community of Union County, North Carolina, from 1800-1950: with emphasis on the pottery of 'Jug Jim' Broome,* thesis, East Carolina University, 1974, 3-9; Mark Hewitt and Nancy Sweezy, *The Potter's Eye: Art and Tradition in North Carolina Pottery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 97.

<sup>10</sup> James added an "e" to Broom between 1908 and 1910 because he did not like the similarity to the household tool. Helms, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Helms, 13-26.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

William became known in upstate South Carolina for his pottery. He established potteries at various times between 1900 and 1920 in Sumter, Lancaster, Catawba Junction, and Cheraw.<sup>12</sup> At the Catawba Junction location, William used a wood-fired groundhog kiln.<sup>13</sup> The town of Camden, South Carolina, went so far as to designate a choice site near a local cotton mill for a potential Outen pottery in 1912.<sup>14</sup> However, William found the business climate as difficult as that in Union County, especially following World War I. William finally settled in Matthews in nearby Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, in 1922 where he established Matthews Pottery at the corner of Charles and Shelby streets.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike other Mecklenburg County towns, the growth of Matthews was not predicated upon textile mills. The town, with a population of 378 in 1900 that saw very slow growth until the later twentieth century, served as a stagecoach and later railroad stop between Charlotte and Monroe in Union County.<sup>16</sup> Cotton and timber were the primary cash crops, and the town had no industry. The most notable enterprises in Matthews in the first twenty years of the twentieth century were mercantile establishments. However, the arrival of William Outen and subsequent establishment of Matthews Pottery gave the town its first manufacturing business.<sup>17</sup> Outen's choice of Matthews as a location for his business may be attributed to the abundance of available clay in the area as well as its location between the city of Charlotte and his family in Union County. As noted in a 1928 article in the *Mecklenburg Times*, "the clay he finds around Matthews is very fine for the vases and flower pots in which he specializes, and his business is steadily growing all the time."<sup>18</sup>

Matthews and Mecklenburg County existed in a "ceramic no man's land" between the salt glazing tradition of the Piedmont and the alkaline glaze tradition of the Catawba River Valley. William was trained in the salt-glaze tradition which also was practiced by his cousin Jug Jim Broome. North Carolina folk potters were adverse to change, yet in Matthews it appears that William abandoned the salt glaze and began to employ the Bristol glaze, a glaze developed in England in the first half of the nineteenth century that gave pottery a white or white-mottled finish. Unlike salt and alkaline glazes, the Bristol glaze required commercially-produced components. William combined feldspar, whiting (calcium carbonate), ball clay (kaolinitic sedimentary clay), and zinc and tin oxides to produce his Bristol glaze. While the exact reason William switched from salt to the Bristol glaze is unknown, one possibility may have been to stay competitive with the factory-made pottery coming out of the North. The Kennedy family, traditional potters in Wilkesboro, adopted the Bristol glaze in the 1920s to compete with the

<sup>12</sup> "Pottery at Matthews Is Unique Mecklenburg County Industry," *Mecklenburg Times*, August 2, 1928.

<sup>13</sup> Charles R. Mack, *Talking with Turners: Conversations with Southern Folk Potters* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 162.

<sup>14</sup> "May Locate in Camden," *The State*, January 28, 1912.

<sup>15</sup> Helms, 15; Zug, 66; Cinda K. Baldwin, *Great and Noble Jar: Traditional Stoneware of South Carolina* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993): 139.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Mattson and William Huffman, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Rural Mecklenburg County, North Carolina," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Nomination Form, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Interior, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Paula Hartill Lester, *Discover Matthews: From Cotton to Corporate* (Matthews, NC: Town of Matthews Tourism Council, 1999): 6-8.

<sup>18</sup> "Pottery at Matthews Is Unique Mecklenburg County Industry," *Mecklenburg Times*, August 2, 1928.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

white factory-made pottery coming out of Ohio. Additionally, salt glaze was known to be less uniform on the stoneware pottery than the commercial glazes. While aesthetics may have also contributed to Outen's transition from salt glaze to Bristol glaze, kilns used to produce salt-glazed wares typically had a shorter lifespan. The sodium vapors produced by the melting salt gradually deteriorated the structural kiln bricks, leading many kilns such as Jug Jim Broome's to collapse during firing.<sup>19</sup>

William sought to boost his production through the utilization of new technologies. During his tenure in Cheraw, South Carolina, William began using electricity to power the machine in his shop. Kiln design also changed, and William adopted the rectangular kiln at Matthews Pottery in 1928.<sup>20</sup> Rectangular downdraft kilns, also known as walk-in kilns, allowed for increased production and ease of loading and unloading. According to pottery expert Daniel Rhodes, "The downdraft kiln avoids most of the disadvantages of other systems and may be considered the ultimate development in fuel burning kilns."<sup>21</sup> The groundhog kiln was not best suited to large-scale production potteries. The low ceiling made loading the kiln difficult and time-consuming, and the placement of a single firebox at one end of the kiln contributed to uneven temperatures throughout the kiln during firing.<sup>22</sup> The Matthews Pottery used coal to fire its rectangular kiln, which had multiple chimneys unlike most rectangular kilns. Most likely, the increased number of chimneys was due to the large size of the kiln.<sup>23</sup>

In the Piedmont, small pottery operations that adhered to traditional methods and materials found themselves threatened in the twentieth century. Importation of cheap metal, glass, and other factory-made storage containers from the northeast and Ohio hurt the business of the local potters. In addition, the advent of Prohibition impacted the rural pottery industry since many potters had contracted with local distillers to make jugs for whiskey and other spirits. Thus, small potteries that had endured the poor economy following World War I sought new markets for their goods. Jacques Busbee (1870-1947) and Juliana Busbee (1876-1962), artists and art connoisseurs native to Raleigh, established Jugtown Pottery at Seagrove, Moore County, in 1921 to capitalize upon the Arts and Crafts movement sweeping the country. The pottery produced at Jugtown utilized Asian forms and glazes but with the addition of salt in the glazes.<sup>24</sup> Art pottery, or pottery produced for aesthetic rather than utilitarian purposes, became more popular with the public. Small potteries began marketing their wares to tourists and house and kitchenware shops. For instance, in 1932 the J. B. Cole Pottery in Montgomery County offered a catalog of over 500 items ranging from pitchers to candlesticks. The physical size of the products offered was small in comparison to the traditional pottery of churns, jugs, and other large pots. As North Carolina pottery historian Charles G. Zug III noted, "pottery was now designed to be seen and not merely used."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Zug, 196-197, 227; Interview with Frank Outen, by Susan V. Mayer, March 12, 2014; Helms, 23.

<sup>20</sup> "Pottery at Matthews."

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Rhodes, *Kilns: Design, Construction, and Operation* (Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1968): 72.

<sup>22</sup> Sweezy, 66.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Frank Outen, by Susan V. Mayer, November 25, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> M. Ruth Little, "Jugtown Pottery," National Register Nomination Form, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Interior, 1999); Sweezy, 221.

<sup>25</sup> Zug, 390.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

In the 1940s, potteries such as the Kennedy Pottery in Wilkesboro and the Outen family's Matthews Pottery turned almost exclusively to creating machine-stamped flower pots. In his 1947 article, M. R. Dunnagan mentions some art pottery was produced at the Matthews Pottery, though the two flower pot-stamping machines accounted for a great deal of product. The unglazed flower pots, which became more in demand, provided higher profit margins in comparison to glazed pottery.<sup>26</sup> By the end of World War II, the pottery industry in North Carolina primarily consisted of either larger commercial plants like Matthews Pottery or small art potters. A few notable traditional folk potters continued to practice during this period, including A. R. Cole Pottery in Sanford, Teague Pottery in Robbins, and C. C. Cole Pottery and Melvin Owens Pottery in Steeds.<sup>27</sup>

### **R. F. Outen Pottery<sup>28</sup>**

William Franklin Outen's son, Rufus Franklin Outen, was born in 1905 in York County, South Carolina. The seventh of nine children, he learned the traditional salt-glaze pottery trade from both his father and uncle "Jug Jim" Broome. Along with his brothers Jesse (1894-1962) and Gordon (1903-1976), Rufus worked in his father's potteries from an early age. Perhaps to establish himself as an independent potter, Rufus Outen moved to Marion, Virginia, in the late 1920s to work at a pottery. But with the onset of the Great Depression, Rufus returned to the Matthews Pottery before April 1930 and ran the business alongside his father and brother Gordon. Shortly thereafter in 1934, Matthews Pottery began to produce machine-stamped flower pots while Rufus continued to throw pots in the traditional manner. William transferred ownership of Matthews Pottery to his sons Gordon and Rufus in 1944; he died in 1947 at the age of 76. Rufus and Gordon continued to jointly own the pottery until 1952, when Rufus sold his share in the business for \$6000 to nephew Horace Ratterree, son of Rufus's sister Lina Mae Outen Ratterree. From family accounts, it may be inferred that the brothers differed in their preferred pottery production; Gordon wanted to focus upon mechanical manufacturing while Rufus found value in the continuation of hand-thrown utilitarian pottery. Thus, Rufus elected to start his own business.<sup>29</sup>

Rufus built his workshop ca. 1952 on Jefferson Street west of and behind a concrete masonry unit house he constructed in 1947 on Alexander Street on the edge of Matthews.<sup>30</sup> For the kiln, Rufus chose a vaulted above-ground rectangular downdraft design. His kiln design was similar to the one used at the Matthews Pottery; Rufus was a production potter and preferred a kiln in which stacking was easy. He received help from a mason named Long (first name unknown) and

---

<sup>26</sup> Mack, 83.

<sup>27</sup> Dunnagan, "Pottery Making," 53-55. The Dunnagan article notes that a request for information letter was sent to "Auten and Son, Pottery" in Matthews, but no response was received.

<sup>28</sup> Rufus operated the pottery under this name according to company letterhead in possession of his son, Frank Outen.

<sup>29</sup> 1930 U.S. Census; "Matthews Pottery: A Work in Clay," *Charlotte Observer*, June 6, 1990; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1114, Pages 241-243; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1555, Page 86.

<sup>30</sup> The house is constructed of concrete blocks with wood (now vinyl) siding. Later owners expanded the house substantially, and the house has not retained its historical integrity.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

consulted with an engineer through the process of building and fine-tuning the kiln. The vault was formed with wood framing and was built with several layers of fire brick, which is specially formulated to withstand the high temperatures of pottery firing. Standard brick could not withstand the heat, and potters who constructed kilns with the incorrect type of brick found their pots covered with melted brick following a firing.<sup>31</sup> The kiln featured six chimneys when built and was fed by forced air and fuel oil (either heating oil or diesel fuel) piped from a two thousand gallon oil tank formerly located to the south of the kiln. Though initially gravity fed, Rufus later added to the feeder line a small pump, scavenged from a refrigeration system, to improve fuel delivery. The process of perfecting the kiln involved trial and error. The four interior burners, the air flow, the fuel flow, and the exhaust draft all had to be modified until the kiln functioned optimally. This process took years, and Rufus's children recall that "months of work" were ruined as he tinkered with the kiln design. Once the kiln was adjusted properly, Rufus lost very few pots in the kiln for the rest of his career.<sup>32</sup>

The first step in pottery production was the location and procurement of quality clay. Clay was dug locally from locations around Matthews and Weddington in the Welch's Mine area as well as in the South Carolina towns of Van Wyck and Peachland. The clay needed to be free of rocks, and thus many clay deposits were unusable. Rufus and his helpers would shovel the clay into the back of a truck and deliver it to the pottery, depositing the clay under a shed directly behind the workshop so the raw clay could dry. The clay had to be dried before being processed in the hammer mill, which crushed any rocky deposits. An opening through the wall of the workshop allowed Rufus or a helper to feed the clay from the shed into the hammer mill. After being processed in the hammer mill, water was added to the dry clay and then fed into the pug mill (Figure 2). The pug mill extruded clay that was ready to work. Once the clay was worked to an appropriate consistency, the helpers would make "balls" of clay that Rufus would turn on a wheel. Once turned, the pieces, known as greenware, would be carefully placed on drying shelves that literally filled the workshop (Figures 3 and 4). His family recalls that their father would turn pieces for approximately one month in order to produce enough pottery to fill the kiln.<sup>33</sup>

The next step for the stoneware was the glaze. In the early years of his business, like his father, Rufus Outen concocted and used a Bristol glaze. He also experimented with the salt glaze utilized by his uncle "Jug Jim," but found it to be less uniform on the stoneware. In his workshop Rufus built a motorized mixing vat to mix the glaze ingredients. Sometime in the late 1950s, Rufus began to use Albany slip, a commercially produced glazing compound that gave pottery a deep brown color. Rufus's son, Frank, believes that his father switched because the Albany slip was simple to use and the finish was popular with the customers. Albany slip came in a bag and was simply mixed in a trough. Each piece would be dipped in the trough to coat the greenware with the glazing compound. The pottery would then be set on temporary shelving to dry, and the

---

<sup>31</sup> Deterioration of kilns was also a problem with early potters due to lack of sufficient brick. The melted brick on pots was referred to as "kiln drips" or "potters' tears." Hewitt and Sweezy, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Frank Outen, Elenore Outen Locke, and William Locke, by Stewart Gray, September 8, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> "Rufus Outen and R. F. Outen Pottery," *Matthews Record*, January 4, 2007; Outen interview, September 8, 2011; Outen interview, October 11, 2011.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

workshop would largely fill-up with the glaze-coated-greenware. Once dry, the pieces would be loaded into the kiln.<sup>34</sup>

Filling the kiln was an art. Rufus knew exactly where different pieces should be located in the kiln. The temperatures in the kiln varied, and different pieces needed different firing temperatures. The fragile greenware had to be stacked one piece on top of the other. Once the kiln was filled, Rufus would seal the kiln doors with mortared brick. His son Frank recalls that Rufus would wake before dawn on the day he would fire the kiln. The firing would begin early in the morning and last until noon the following day. The cool down would last at least an additional day. Opening the kiln too soon would result in cool cracking, signified by the popping noise as cracks formed in the pottery.<sup>35</sup>

When the kiln had cooled enough, it would be unloaded directly into the delivery truck. Packing the truck with the finished pieces was planned so that the pieces for the first delivery would be at the top of the load, and the deliverables for the final stop would be at the bottom of the load. For deliveries, Rufus would use the same truck that he used to haul clay. A layer of straw was laid on the truck bed, and pieces were set in the straw. Layers of straw were added to cushion the pieces from each other. The entire contents from the kiln would be loaded into a single truckload. A longtime smoker, Rufus once lost a load of pottery, as well as a 1960 Chevrolet flatbed truck, in a fire when one of his discarded cigarette butts landed in the dry straw during a delivery trip.<sup>36</sup>

Production capabilities of the R. F. Outen Pottery were determined by market demand. Rufus would make "selling trips" north as far as Wilkesboro and south as far as Greenville, South Carolina. On these selling trips, Outen would visit hardware stores and take orders for churns (his specialty), crocks, rabbit watering bowls and feeders, pots, and pitchers. When Outen had enough orders to fill the kiln, he would return home and begin turning the pieces. Known for his prolific production, Rufus specialized in stoneware churns and supposedly could turn 100 pieces a day. His nickname among some of the other potters was "Churn Turner." A reporter from the *Charlotte News* noted that Outen had produced 300 churn lids the day of their visit. As Outen noted, "I don't aim to set the world on fire, I work as I like to."<sup>37</sup>

Rufus adapted to the market. His sales trips through North and South Carolina dictated what he produced. Arguably, the decline in the production of traditional utilitarian pottery left him a niche to fill. Clients in rural areas demanded traditional utilitarian pottery such as churns. Rufus also turned non-traditional items, most notably rabbit watering bowls, heavy glazed bowls with sloping sides that would allow frozen water to rise up and not crack the vessel. Rufus also produced earthenware strawberry planters, wash pots, decorative pots and pitchers, and cooking vessels. Wilbur Armistead, owner of LeMaster's Design Center in Charlotte, commissioned

---

<sup>34</sup> Outen interview, September 8, 2011; Outen interview, October 11, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Outen interview, September 8, 2011; Outen interview, October 11, 2011; Outen interview, April 16, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Outen interview, September 8, 2011; Outen interview, October 11, 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Frank Outen, Elenore Outen Locke, and William Locke, by Stewart Gray, October 11, 2011; "Mr. Outen's an Artist Who Works with Clay," *Charlotte News*, December 16, 1968.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

Rufus to produce poulet fourmulaire (clay poultry cookers) for her shop after seeing the vessels on a trip to Paris.<sup>38</sup>

The two types of pottery production in Matthews during the 1950s and 1960s—hand-thrown utilitarian folk pottery at the R. F. Outen Pottery and machine-stamped unglazed flower pots at the Matthews Pottery—highlighted the divergent paths of the North Carolina pottery industry. The small size of the R. F. Outen Pottery contrasted with the Matthews Pottery, which employed ten to fifteen workers. Rufus had one or two part-time helpers, but he did most of the production work as well as the marketing. As with many small potteries in North Carolina, family comprised a major portion of the workforce. His wife Louise and four children helped out. Louise would create some decorative items or put legs on wash pots thrown by Rufus. Son Frank remembers working in the pottery from a young age, performing such tasks as digging and prepping clay and later making deliveries.<sup>39</sup> Similar family-oriented pottery operations were found in North Carolina. For instance, the Melvin Owens Pottery in Seagrove, Moore County, employed the labor of Melvin, who did the majority of the turning, his wife as the primary glazer, and six of their eight children.<sup>40</sup>

In comparison to his contemporaries, Rufus produced utilitarian folk pottery during a period in which other potters increasingly turned toward art pottery as a means of survival. He was quoted as saying, “I like making something useful.”<sup>41</sup> Dorothy Cole Auman, daughter of noted Randolph County potter C. C. Cole and co-owner of Seagrove Pottery, best described the pottery industry during the 1950s and 1960s, “People were picky. You were trying to appeal to them enough to buy. So you made many, many shapes. [...] It wasn’t that people ran over each other to buy your pottery... You grew up under struggle and defeat.”<sup>42</sup>

At Seagrove, for instance, Dorothy and Walter Auman produced decorative flat bowls in demand by their wholesale buyers. Interest in hand-turned folk pottery resurfaced in the late 1960s. The growth of potteries in the salt-glaze Seagrove area grew from seven in 1968 to over 100 in forty years.<sup>43</sup> Pottery historian Cinda Baldwin attributes this revival to the build up to the American bicentennial celebration in 1976 as well as expanded scholarly study of Southern folk pottery. Potteries flourished in their newfound popularity, though most produced art pottery demanded by tourists.<sup>44</sup>

The Matthews Pottery followed the trend and began offering unglazed hand-thrown garden pots in the early 1970s after over twenty years of only manufacturing machine-stamped flower pots. Students and graduates of Queens College (now University) in Charlotte were employed at the pottery to throw art pieces.<sup>45</sup> In comparison, Rufus did produce a few artistic pieces, though

<sup>38</sup> “Modern Gourmets Go Primitive,” *Charlotte News*, December 16, 1968.

<sup>39</sup> Outen interview, March 12, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Sweezy, 231.

<sup>41</sup> “Modern Gourmets.”

<sup>42</sup> Sweezy, 249.

<sup>43</sup> “Nancy Sweezy, Savior of Jugtown Pottery, Dies at 88,” *New York Times*, February 25, 2010.

<sup>44</sup> Baldwin, 187.

<sup>45</sup> Mack, 73, 119-120.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

these comprised a fraction of the output from the R. F. Outen Pottery and were mostly produced toward the end of his career in the 1970s. He thought so little about the unique nature of his craft that he typically did not sign his wares. This action may contribute to the lack of collectability of Rufus Outen pottery today.<sup>46</sup>

Rufus did not toil in obscurity, and in keeping with the emergent trend of folk pottery in the late 1960s, his work received increased local attention. Local TV personality Betty Feezer featured Rufus on her television show on Charlotte channel WBTV and filmed him performing his trade.<sup>47</sup> The public as well as local potters also took an interest in Rufus's work; he had many visitors tour his facilities. Local teachers would bring their classes to the R. F. Outen Pottery for a field trip. Interest in the fine arts manifested in the growth of college majors and programs in pottery and other forms of art. Pat Siderman, a ceramics instructor at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, would routinely visit the pottery and discuss the craft with Rufus. During this period, Rufus also taught pottery at Winthrop College in Rock Hill, South Carolina, for a short time.<sup>48</sup>

Rufus also contributed to the continuation of traditional pottery in upstate South Carolina. Outen and nephew Horace Ratterree, to whom Rufus had sold his share of the Matthews Pottery, acquired Bethune Pottery in Kershaw County, South Carolina, from Guy Daugherty in 1959. Daugherty, who bought the shop from its founder Oscar Brumbeloe, had operated the pottery since 1945. Outen and Ratterree hired Otto Brown, a fifth generation potter from Georgia, to turn ware for them. Brown had previously worked for Outen's father William at Matthews Pottery, turning pots during peak production times for two or three months of the year. The shop produced not only unglazed garden ware but also stoneware jugs and churns. The South Carolina pottery employed an oil-burning kiln similar to the kiln at the R. F. Outen Pottery. Outen and Ratterree sold Bethune Pottery around 1962, when Brown left to start his own pottery in nearby Chesterfield County, South Carolina. Brown operated his business until his death in 1980.<sup>49</sup>

Despite Rufus's love for pottery, years of hard manual labor took its toll. The process of producing pottery using traditional methods was strenuous. In a 1968 interview, Outen speaks of the labors of hand throwing: "It's hard work. But I wouldn't want to do anything else. There is something very satisfying about it. You can be nervous and worried when you start, but it melts away as you work. You use mind and muscles."<sup>50</sup>

In 1976 at the age of 71, Rufus Outen fired his last batch of pottery, the same year in which his wife Louise died. He continued to produce and sell pottery clay, among his clients were the art departments of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County schools. He also made deliveries for the Matthews Pottery and hunted clay deposits for Matthews Pottery and brick manufacturers such as Ashe Brick in Van Wyck, South Carolina. In 1983 he remarried, but died later that year from

<sup>46</sup> Zug, 16; Dunnagan, 54-55; Outen interview, October 11, 2011.

<sup>47</sup> Film of Rufus throwing pots exists from this feature and is available the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

<sup>48</sup> Outen interview, September 8, 2011; Outen interview, October 11, 2011; Outen interview, April 14, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Baldwin, 142; Mack, 73.

<sup>50</sup> "Mr. Outen's An Artist."

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

pneumonia. Family members continued to process and sell clay to local schools and potters for several more years, even receiving a phone call on the day of Rufus's funeral from a local school system ordering its clay for the year.<sup>51</sup>

With Rufus's retirement in 1976 and the end of Matthews Pottery production that same year, pottery production in Matthews ceased. Matthews Pottery continued as a pottery business by purchasing wares to be sold alongside silk flowers and outdoor decorative items. In 1989 the North Carolina Department of Transportation claimed eminent domain for the expansion of State Highway 51 over a portion of the former Matthews Pottery property. Kenneth Outen, son of Gordon and grandson of William, moved the business. The original kiln was torn down, leaving the R. F. Outen Pottery as the only visible remnant of the pottery industry in Matthews.<sup>52</sup>

Unfortunately, the timing of Rufus's retirement has relegated him to a forgotten corner of pottery history in North Carolina. Scholarly studies of the historic pottery industry in the state were ongoing during the later years of his practice and were published after his death. However, most of these studies highlighted potters still in practice. Nancy Sweezy, a director of the Jugtown Pottery in the 1960s and 1970s, conducted oral interviews of traditional folk potters throughout the South, culminating in publication of *Raised in Clay: The Southern Pottery Tradition* in 1984. Charles G. Zug III, emeritus professor of folklore and English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, authored numerous works on North Carolina pottery and folk art, most notably *Turners and Burners: The Folk Potters of North Carolina* in 1986. While an interview with Rufus was conducted by Zug, little in-depth information about either the R. F. Outen Pottery or Matthews Pottery is included.

In the nineteenth century, North Carolina was full of local potteries, but during the twentieth century traditional utilitarian pottery nearly vanished. Rufus's continued production of traditional utilitarian pottery, especially during the 1950s and early 1960s, contrasts with the transition of the North Carolina pottery industry to art pottery in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Locally-derived glazes were dropped in favor of pre-made factory glazes. In the Catawba River Valley, the Seagle family stopped producing alkaline-glazed pottery in 1892. To the east, the production of salt-glazed utilitarian pottery declined even as the craft of pottery was being revived. In the Seagrove area, outsiders who recognized the inherent beauty of the traditional pottery developed a new market for the pottery and encouraged a switch from the utilitarian work to the production of art pottery. For most of Rufus's career, he was an anachronism. Most traditional potteries in North Carolina either ceased or turned to art pottery by the end of World War II, before Rufus established his own pottery in Matthews. Despite the odds, he managed to make a living producing utilitarian pottery.<sup>53</sup> The R. F. Outen Pottery is the sole remaining pottery complex in the town of Matthews, which is located outside the major centers of North Carolina pottery in the Catawba River Valley and Seagrove areas. The well-preserved kiln and workshop, still containing the remains of Rufus's pottery pieces and original

---

<sup>51</sup> Outen interview, September 8, 2011; Outen interview, October 11, 2011.

<sup>52</sup> "Matthews Pottery: A Work in Clay," Mecklenburg County Deed Book 6158, Page 133.

<sup>53</sup> Gray.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

equipment, stand as excellent reminders of the twentieth century utilitarian pottery tradition in North Carolina.

### **Architectural Context: Kiln Design and Construction**

In early North Carolina pottery, the most widely used type of kiln was the crossdraft groundhog kiln. While the groundhog kiln was first developed in fifteenth century Germany, one of its first uses in America was by a German-trained potter at Jamestown, Virginia. The American southern variant simplified the flue system and used a smaller kiln since early nineteenth century potters typically practiced the trade part time. The groundhog kiln was essentially built underground and consisted of a large chamber where pottery is stacked for firing, a firebox at one end, and a chimney above the other end of the kiln that was underground. The kiln was usually constructed in the side of a slope, with the firebox at the foot of the slope. The chimney, arched roof, and face of the kiln are the only exposed surfaces. The face was open to allow for the potter to load unfired pottery. When the kiln was ready to fire, the opening was filled with firebrick. The typical groundhog kiln was approximately twenty feet long, eight feet wide, and had a ten foot chimney. While the groundhog kiln was well-insulated due to its underground design, the disadvantages of this kiln also stemmed from this configuration. Water would commonly fill up the firebox. Also, the placement of a singular firebox at one end of the firing chamber caused uneven firing of the pottery.<sup>54</sup>

The downdraft rectangular kiln became more popular in North Carolina during the 1920s due to its ability to meet the needs of production potters making decorative and horticultural wares. Also called a walk-in kiln, the rectangular kiln was taller than the groundhog kiln and required additional bracing to prevent its walls from collapsing under stress from heat expansion. Typically, vertical pipe bracing connected horizontally with threaded rods and bolts or chains provided added stability.<sup>55</sup> Rectangular kilns had a floating floor of firebrick with channels below to allow air circulation down toward the chimney flue located at the floor. Firebox placement in the rectangular kiln was dependent upon the type of fuel used for firing. Wood- or coal-fired kilns typically featured a single large firebox placed at one end of the kiln opposite of the chimney, not unlike the groundhog kiln. Kilns fired using gas or oil had multiple burners spaced evenly along the side walls with what author Daniel Rhodes describes as interior “bag” walls, or low brick walls around the firebox. These walls forced the heat to rise to the top of the kiln. The air space underneath the floating floor allowed for better air circulation, an improvement over the groundhog kiln.<sup>56</sup>

The kiln at the R. F. Outen Pottery, while featuring burners on one side of the kiln, is considered a downdraft kiln due to the path of air circulation down through the floor and out the chimneys in either side of the wall. Rufus constructed his kiln in 1952 with the help of a mason named Long (first name unknown) and consultation from an unnamed structural engineer. The vault of the rectangular kiln was formed with wood framing and was built with several layers of

<sup>54</sup> Zug, 200; Sweezy, 60, 66; Mack, 211.

<sup>55</sup> Sweezy, 71.

<sup>56</sup> Sweezy, 72.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

fire brick. The kiln had six chimneys upon completion. Initially, Rufus had only three chimneys on the east elevation alongside the burners; however, the heat did not draw well and several firings of pottery were lost. The decision to add three additional chimneys on the west elevation was made, and the kiln fired successfully following their construction.<sup>57</sup> The kiln was fired using forced air and fuel oil piped from a two-thousand-gallon oil tank located to the south of the kiln. Initially the burners were gravity fed, but Rufus later added a small pump, scavenged from a refrigeration system, to improve fuel delivery through the feeder lines.<sup>58</sup>

Other contemporary potteries in North Carolina utilizing the oil-burning rectangular kiln design included Matthews Pottery, Jugtown Pottery and Seagrove Pottery in Seagrove, C. C. Cole Pottery and Melvin Owens Pottery in Steeds, and A. R. Cole Pottery in Sanford. However, the R. F. Outen Pottery kiln was different than its counterparts due to its six chimney design. Most rectangular kilns only had one chimney placed at the end of the kiln opposite the firebox or burners, producing airflow somewhat more akin to the traditional crossdraft groundhog kiln. With the burners placed on one long side of the kiln, they produced circular distribution of heat during firing. As noted by potter Robin Hopper, downdraft kilns would typically have burners on opposite sides. By incorporating three chimneys on either side of the kiln—three spaced between the four burners and three on the opposite side—Rufus manipulated the air circulation into a circular downdraft configuration.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, the kiln of the R. F. Outen Pottery meets Criterion C for its architectural significance as an example of the design and construction of the rectangular downdraft kiln used in twentieth century North Carolina pottery. While rectangular downdraft kilns contemporary to the Outen kiln remain in operation today in North Carolina, none are known to include multiple chimneys. The only similar rectangular kiln known in the state were the Matthews Pottery kilns, which are no longer extant.

---

<sup>57</sup> Outen interview, November 25, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Gray.

<sup>59</sup> Robin Hopper, *Making Marks: Discovering the Ceramic Surface* (Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 2004), 212.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

---

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Books

Baldwin, Cinda K. *Great and Noble Jar: Traditional Stoneware of South Carolina*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993.

Helms, Charles Douglas. *An historical study of folk potters in and around Alton Community of Union County, North Carolina, from 1800-1950, with emphasis on the pottery of "Jug Jim" Broome*. Thesis. East Carolina University, 1974.

Hewitt, Mark and Nancy Sweezy. *The Potter's Eye: Art and Tradition in North Carolina Pottery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Hopper, Robin. *Making Marks: Discovering the Ceramic Surface*. Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 2004.

Lester, Paula Hartill. *Discover Matthews: From Cotton to Corporate*. Matthews, NC: Town of Matthews Tourism Council, 1999.

Mack, Charles R. *Talking with Turners: Conversations with Southern Folk Potters*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006.

Perry, Barbara S., ed. *North Carolina Pottery: The Collection of the Mint Museums*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Rhodes, Daniel. *Kilns: Design, Construction, and Operation*. Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1968.

Sweezy, Nancy. *Raised in Clay: The Southern Pottery Tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Zug, Charles G. III. *Turners and Burners: The Folk Potters of North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986.

### Periodicals

Dunnagan, M. R. "Pottery Making, Ancient Art, Increasing in State." *The E.S.C. Quarterly* 5, Number 2-3 (Spring-Summer 1947): 53-55.

Hewitt, Mark. "Stuck in the Mud: The Folk Pottery of North Carolina." *Ceramic Record* 151 (January-February 1995): 30-33.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

“Matthews Pottery: A Work in Clay.” *Charlotte Observer*. June 6, 1990.

“May Locate in Camden.” *The State*. January 28, 1912.

“Modern Gourmets Go Primitive.” *Charlotte News*. December 16, 1968.

“Mr. Outen’s an Artist Who Works with Clay.” *Charlotte News*. December 16, 1968.

“Pottery at Matthews Is Unique Mecklenburg County Industry.” *Mecklenburg Times*.  
August 2, 1928.

“Rufus Outen and R. F. Outen Pottery.” *Matthews Record*. January 4, 2007.

### **Interviews**

Interview with Frank Outen, Elenore Outen Locke, and William Locke. Stewart Gray.  
September 8, 2011.

Interview with Frank Outen, Elenore Outen Locke, and William Locke. Stewart Gray.  
October 11, 2011.

Interview with Frank Outen. Susan V. Mayer. March 12, 2014.

Interview with Frank Outen. Susan V. Mayer. April 16, 2014.

Interview with Frank Outen. Susan V. Mayer. November 25, 2014.

### **Other Sources**

1930 U.S. Census.

Harpe, Jason. “Reinhardt-Craig House, Kiln, and Pottery Shop.” National Register of  
Historic Places Nomination Form. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior,  
2008.

Little, M. Ruth. “Jugtown Pottery.” National Register Nomination Form. Washington, DC:  
U.S. Department of Interior, 1999.

Mattson, Richard, and William Huffman. “Historic and Architectural Resources of Rural  
Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.” National Register of Historic Places Multiple  
Property Documentation Form. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Interior, 1990.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

---

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** MK3151 \_\_\_\_\_

---

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreege of Property** 1.48

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

Latitude: 35.115320

Longitude: -80.729035

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the 1.48 acres being nominated is delineated as shown on the attached Mecklenburg County Polaris tax map. The nominated property is comprised of two legal parcels, 227-023-13 and 227-023-19.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary encompasses 1.48 acres on two parcels. The two parcels were historically a single parcel associated with the R. F. Outen Pottery.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Susan V. Mayer  
organization: SVM Historical Consulting, LLC  
street & number: 4711 Water Oak Road  
city or town: Charlotte state: NC zip code: 28211  
e-mail susanvmayer@gmail.com  
telephone: 704-565-9596  
date: 11/26/2014

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: R. F. Outen Pottery

City or Vicinity: Matthews

County: Mecklenburg

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Susan V. Mayer

Date Photographed: May and June 2014; November 2014

Location of digital master images: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources,  
Raleigh, North Carolina

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1. View from Jefferson Street, looking north; 5/14
2. East elevation of kiln and south elevation of workshop, looking west; 5/14
3. South and east elevation of workshop, looking north; 5/14
4. Clay processing shed and north elevation of workshop, looking south; 5/14
5. Clay processing shed and west elevation of workshop, looking southeast; 5/14
6. West elevation of workshop, looking north; 11/14
7. Interior of workshop, looking north; 6/14
8. Interior of workshop, looking south; 6/14
9. North elevation of kiln, looking southwest; 11/14
10. West elevation of kiln, looking east; 11/14
11. South elevation of kiln, looking south; 11/14
12. Interior of kiln, looking south; 11/14

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

Photographer unknown for all images.



Figure 1. R. F. Outen Pottery kiln, 1968.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State



Figure 2. R. F. Outen unloading clay from the pug mill, 1968.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

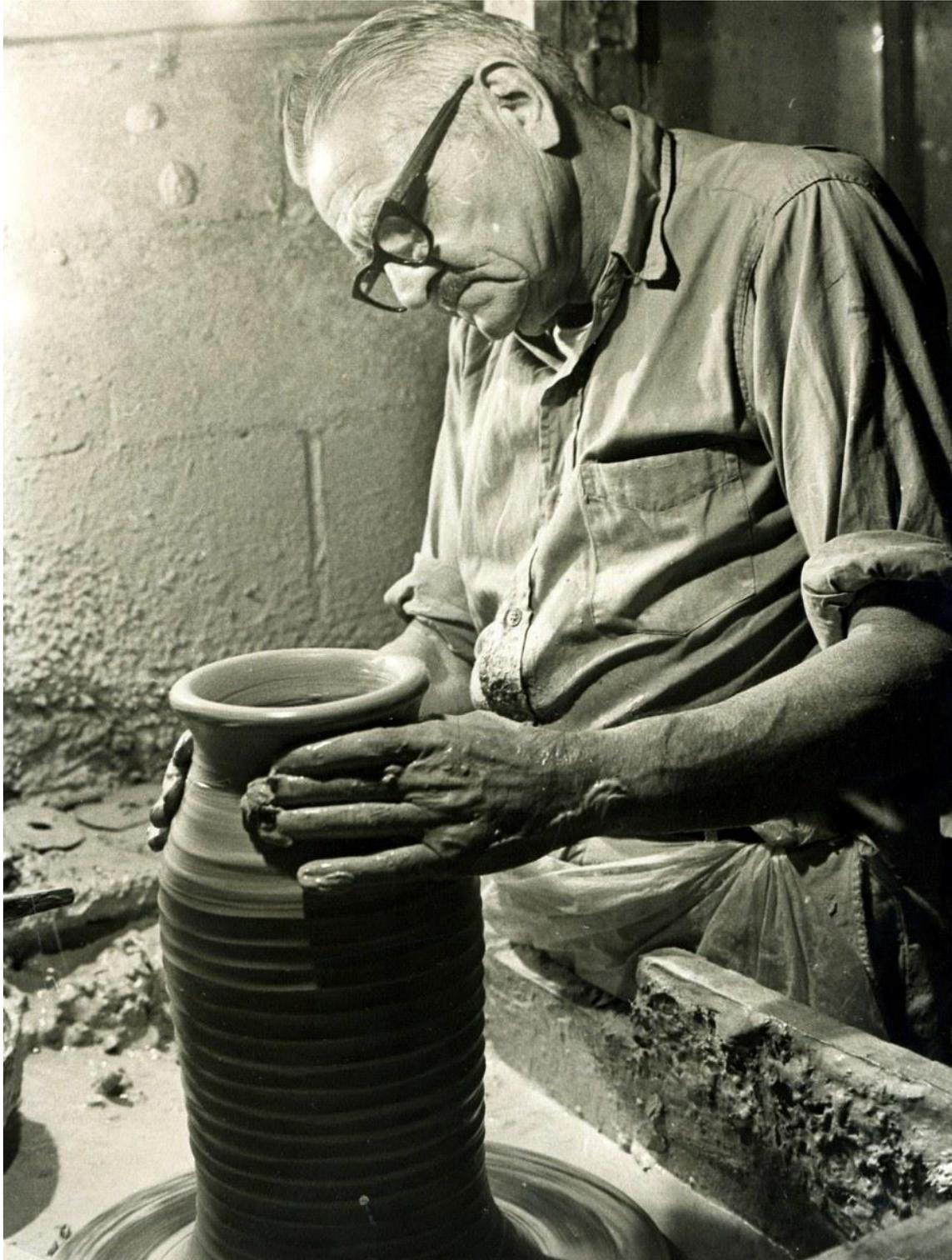


Figure 3. R. F. Outen throwing pot, 1968.

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

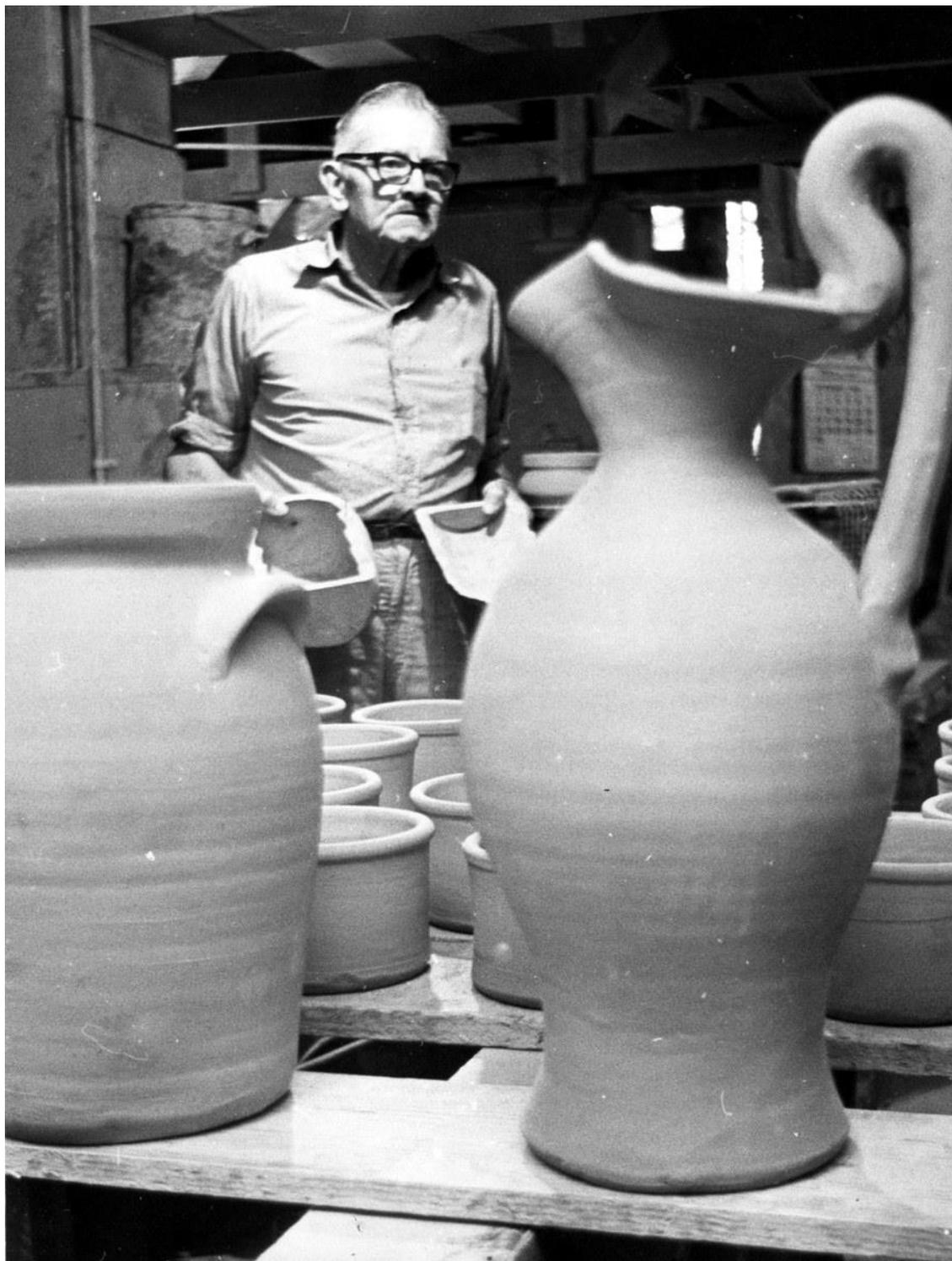


Figure 4. R. F. Outen holding a poulet formulaire (chicken cooker) and other greenware, 1968.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response

R. F. Outen Pottery  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg County, NC  
County and State

to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.