

The Osborns and Their Redware

From South Danvers, Massachusetts to Loudon, New Hampshire

By MADELINE OSBORNE MERRILL

PUBLISHED works on early American potters, as well as biographical reviews of members of the Osborn family in New Hampshire, not only lack proof of the connection with the parent family in Danvers, Massachusetts, but make incorrect statements about the same, owing to the lack of vital records. For example, *The Magazine Antiques* (February, 1931, p. 123), in an article entitled "The Osborne Pottery at Gonic, New Hampshire" by F. H. Norton and V. J. Duplin, Jr., reports:

The great-grandfather of the present William A. Osborne is stated on page 12, volume 21, of the *Biographical Review, Strafford and Belknap Counties*, to have been a Quaker immigrant who settled somewhere in the neighborhood of Salem, Massachusetts. On page 556 of the same volume he is called John, of Pittsfield, New Hampshire. It seems probable that the first reference is the more accurate, as Salem was, at one time, quite a pottery centre. The grandfather was Elijah, who, it is stated, was probably born in Salem, and there learned the potter's trade. Yet no trace of an Elijah Osborne can be found in Essex County records around this time.

The mystery as to the background of the New Hampshire Osborns is also repeated in the excellent book by Lura Woodside Watkins, *Early New England Potters and Their Wares*, for in chapter 16 she writes under "North of Concord,"

Jacob Osborn
Abigail Osborn

born March 29, 1750
born July 13, 1750

died March 1, 1824 aged 74 yrs.
died Dec. 1, 1844 aged 94 yr. 4 mo.

¹ Jacob Osborn's⁴ Bible in possession of the author.

"Even before 1800 the Osbornes were at work in Loudon. Their early history is shrouded in the mists of uncertainty." There are also statements made about John Simpson Osborn of Loudon and Boscawen, New Hampshire, which I will clarify.

Therefore, before these statements become fact, I would like to document the link. The name was spelled without the *e* until recent generations. The published genealogical work, *Boston and Eastern Massachusetts* (Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1908, Vol. IV, pages 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015) gives a good lineage record of the Osborns.

The Salem-Danvers, Massachusetts, line from which the family north of Concord, New Hampshire, stems is covered from William,¹ John,² Jacob,³ to Jacob.⁴ It is this Jacob Osborn,⁴ born March 29, 1750, who left Danvers and established his home and pottery on a high hill in East Loudon, close to the town line of Pittsfield. His Bible as well as Salem, Massachusetts, vital records agree as to the date of birth. He married at Amesbury Quaker Meeting in July, 1775, Abigail Simpson, daughter of Sheriff Andrew Simpson of Nottingham, New Hampshire, and the genealogical data on them from their Bible¹ is as follows:

children: (born in Loudon,
New Hampshire)

Anna Osborn	born July 29, 1776	died 1778
Elijah Osborn	born May 24, 1778	
Jacob Osborn	born Jan. 16, 1780	died April 6, 1866
Anna Osborn	born Feb. 1, 1782	
Micajah Osborn	born June 2, 1784	
Abigail Osborn	born July 19, 1787	died Oct. 3, 1831
John Simpson Osborn	born May 3, 1790	died Oct. 1, 1818
Joshua Osborn	born July 2, 1792	died Nov. 21, 1875
Hannah Osborn	born April 25, 1795	died Jan. 1875

Jacob and Abigail Osborn raised five sons and three daughters, one daughter having died in infancy. His sons and grandsons worked at the potters' trade in their younger days, but only two of his sons, Elijah and John Simpson Osborn, made it their life's work, the others leaving it for farming.

The *Antiques* article gives a very comprehensive account of Elijah Osborn, Jr.'s, pottery at Gonic, New Hampshire. That of his uncle, John Simpson Osborn, is not as well known, but will be covered later in this article. The above records, however, will connect Jacob and Elijah, of Loudon and Gonic, New Hampshire, with their forebears, the Osborns, potters, of Salem and Danvers, Massachusetts.

Essex County, Massachusetts, can well claim to be the first permanent center of the pottery industry. Potters tend to settle in the same localities, largely because of the need for a supply of good clay, and fine clay deposits were in the Danvers-Salem area. In 1639 the town of Salem granted ten acres of land to Lawrence Southwick, William Osborne, Ananias Conklin and Obediah Holmes for the purpose of producing pottery and glass. Conklin and Holmes, along with the manufacture of glass, disappeared, but William Southwick and Joseph Osborne were making pottery in the same location a hundred years later, and their descendants carried on the making of redware for several generations. William Osborne's pottery was in existence in 1742, remained in the Osborn hands until 1860 and was still operating in 1939. The Os-

borns, like many of the other South Danvers potters, were Quakers and intermarried a great deal with the Quaker families of Buffums, Southwicks, Burtons and Buxtons. This intermarriage within the sect strengthened the bonds of trade. It was a rule of the Quaker persuasion that their members should marry only among themselves; failure to do so "turned them out of meeting." Given family names were commonly carried from one generation to another.

The trade of potter ran through generations of the same family due to the fact that few crafts required so long and specialized an apprenticeship. Therefore, when a pottery was found in some isolated town, it could almost with certainty be traced back to an earlier pottery as seldom could a man claim to be a master potter in less than seven years' training in the craft. And so it was with the Osborns.

By 1775, seventy-five potteries were operating in the two towns of Danvers and Peabody. The best known of the potter families were the Osborns, seventeen of whom were master potters. It was in this year that Jacob Osborn⁴ married Abigail Simpson in Amesbury Quaker Meeting. Abigail was the daughter of Andrew Simpson of Nottingham, New Hamp-

FAMILY RECORD.	
BIRTHS.	DEATHS.
Jacob Osborn born March 29 th 1756	Jacob Osborn died March 10 1824 age 74
Abigail Osborn b. July 13 ^d 1756	John Osborn died October 10 1818
Anna Osborn born July 29 1776	Abigail Osborn died October 20 1831
Elijah Osborn born May 29 1778	Abigail Osborn died December 10 1877 age 91
Jacob Osborn born January 16 ^d 1780	Jacob Osborn died April 6 th 1866.
Anna Osborn born February 10 1782	
Micajah Osborn born June 20 1784	
Abigail Osborn born July 19 ^d 1787	
John S Osborn born May 20 1790	
Asahua Osborn born July 20 1792	
Hannah Osborn born April 25 ^d 1795	

BIRTH RECORDS ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIP AND IDENTITY OF
OSBORN POTTERS

Family Bible of Jacob Osborn⁴ in possession of Madeline Osborne Merrill,
Saugus, Massachusetts.

Photograph by Richard Merrill.

shire, called "Old Sheriff Simpson," and it was he who willed away "one half a brass kettle."² Abigail and Jacob Osborn settled on a high hill in Loudon, referred to as "Upper City," close by the town of Pittsfield. It is here that Jacob built his

1885. Thus, Jacob is the link connecting the New Hampshire family of Osborns to the family in Danvers and Salem, Massachusetts. For more verification, the will of Jacob Osborn³ of Danvers, Essex County, Massachusetts, gives



TWO PIECES OF REDWARE WITH DARK BROWN GLAZE MADE IN THE BOSCAWEN, NEW HAMPSHIRE, POTTERY (1813-1819) OF JOHN SIMPSON OSBORN,⁵ SON OF POTTER JACOB OSBORN⁴ OF LOUDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Pottery in possession of Mrs. Frank Johnson of Boscawen, great-granddaughter of John Simpson Osborn.

Photograph by Richard Merrill.

home and pottery, raised his family and died. His sons built homes nearby and today the hill is called Osborn Hill. He was progenitor of the Osborns in that area of New Hampshire and his descendants produced redware in New Hampshire for over one hundred years, until

² Family records of Mrs. Frank Johnson of Boscawen, New Hampshire.

to his son Jacob⁴ of Loudon, New Hampshire, land in Danvers. In turn, Jacob Osborn⁴ of Loudon, New Hampshire, willed in 1824 four acres of land in Danvers, Massachusetts, to his son, John Simpson Osborn.

A part of Canterbury, New Hampshire, the town of Loudon was incorporated in 1773, being set off into a district

parish. There seems to be no record left as to why Jacob left Danvers and settled in Loudon. Perhaps the Danvers area was overproducing pottery and there was an opportunity for a potter in the newly formed town of Loudon. It is said that the hilltops had an attraction for people

born the road that lays between him and Watson's Corner, and the reserve to the brook and one rod over said brook, four rods wide, by his giving the town a receipt in full."

Elijah Osborn,⁵ son of Jacob,⁴ maintained the family pottery at Loudon, his



LARGE REDWARE POT WITH GLAZED INTERIOR MADE AT THE OSBORN POTTERY IN LOUDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Family piece handed down to the present owner, Madeline Osborn Merrill, of Saugus, Massachusetts, a descendant of potter Jacob Osborn⁴ of Loudon, New Hampshire.

Photograph by Richard Merrill.

from the coast and, wherever they could locate on one and still be near a source of power, they did. This was so in "Upper City." It was a settlement of some importance as it was on a stage route, boasted a tavern, several shops and stores.³

From the town records of Loudon in 1785 we read, "voted to give Jacob Os-

³ E. Harold Young, *History of Pittsfield, New Hampshire* (1953).

father having died in 1824. He married Margaret Green of Pittsfield, daughter of Mehitable and Nathan Green. They were the parents of nine children, named in his will which was filed at the Merrimack County Courthouse, Concord, New Hampshire, and drawn on May 20, 1857. The children were Green, John Simpson, Elijah, Mehitable Lowell, Abigail Rollins, Margaret Merrill, Jemima

Carr, Jacob and Anna Sawyer. How long Elijah, Sr., operated the pottery at Loudon is unknown. At the time of his death in 1864, nothing is mentioned about it. Earlier, his father Jacob⁴ had willed Elijah⁵ "land to begin at the middle of well. . . ." It was in this area that the pottery was located. The operation of the Jacob Osborn Pottery at Loudon ended with his son, Elijah.⁵ However, it was through this son, Elijah, Sr.,⁵ that pottery making in New Hampshire continued at the pottery established by his son, Elijah Osborn, Jr.,⁶ at Gonic.

Although now filled in, the cellar hole of the pottery at Loudon was still visible as late as 1933. None of the redware made by the Osborns is marked. One other son of Elijah,⁵ and a brother of Elijah, Jr.,⁶ named Green Osborn,⁶ worked for a while at his father's trade. However, this he soon abandoned and turned his attention to the cultivation of his father's farm.

In the intervening years since the Osborn potteries have ceased to exist, the two Elijah Osborns, father and son, seem to have merged into one as far as memory and published records are concerned. This may be due to the fact that the son predeceased the father, who lived to be eighty-three years of age. Members of the Loudon and Pittsfield Osborns still know of the father, dubbed "Old Potter Osborn," but the son who moved away to Gonic, and died at the age of fifty-five years, seems to have been forgotten, probably due to the distance which was so much greater in the early 1800's than it would be today.

Jacob Osborn's land in Loudon is still owned by his descendants. The area where the pottery was built is today sown with fragments of their redware, and younger members of the family clear broken bits of pottery from their gardens as they cultivate.

The homestead, built in 1775, was still standing in the early 1930's. It was insulated with birch bark, which showed through breaks in the weathered clapboards. One of the unique features of the house was a large wooden "lazy Susan" painted red which was suspended from the ceiling and overhung the stairs descending into the cellar. Half doors opened to give access to it from the kitchen and just a twist of the disc would bring the wanted article to hand. This Cape-type house had wooden inside shutters at the windows, paneling and fireplaces throughout. As it was deserted in its last years in Loudon, it became forlorn and shabby. Yet, its charm could not be hidden. It was purchased by Mr. G. Holden Greene, carefully moved to the State of Massachusetts and reassembled.

The Osborne Pottery at Gonic, New Hampshire, subject for the article in the February, 1931, issue of *The Magazine Antiques* is, perhaps, the best known of those operated by this family. Whether or not Elijah⁵ of Loudon, helped in its establishment is a question. That his son, Elijah Osborn, Jr.,⁶ did found it, is certain.

Elijah Osborn, Jr.,⁶ born on January 6, 1806, at Loudon, married, December 6, 1831, Mary Lane, daughter of James and Leah (Prescott) Lane of Pittsfield. Both families were Quakers. The marriage is recorded in New Hampshire Vital Records and more information is given in *William Lane of Boston, Massachusetts, 1648* by the Reverends Chapman and Fitts, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1891, page 60. She was born in Pittsfield, April 24, 1804, and at the time of their deaths, both were residents of the Gonic section of Rochester, New Hampshire. Their children are as follows: James L.,⁷ born March 26, 1833, John H.,⁷ born August 13, 1836, and Leah Marie,⁷ born February 26, 1839.

By 1839, Elijah Osborn, Jr.⁶ (Elijah, Sr.,⁵ Jacob,⁴ Jacob,³ John,² William¹) had established the well-known Osborn Pottery at Gonic, a part of the town of Rochester, lying twenty-five miles southwest of Loudon, site of the pottery of his father and grandfather. The Osborns were not the first potters there as Franklin McDuffee's *History of the Town of*

It is colorfully glazed in yellow-brown shading to green. There is also at Sturbridge a butter churn inscribed "Lucinda Osborn June 25, 1822," probably from Danvers.

Elijah Osborn, Jr.,⁶ with his son, James L., born March 26, 1833, carried on the work at Gonic. Perhaps his son, John H., born August 13, 1836,



HOUSE BUILT BY POTTER JACOB OSBORN⁴ IN 1775 ON OSBORN HILL IN LOUDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

From a photograph of 1930. The pottery was nearby.

Rochester, New Hampshire, tells us that in 1826 there were twenty-six dwellings in the village, a cotton factory with four carding machines doing a large business in dressing country cloth, a scythe factory with a trip hammer, besides *two potteries* and several stores.

Fine examples of early redware may be seen at Sturbridge Village, Massachusetts, among which is a pottery foot warmer attributed to the Osborn Pottery at Gonic.

also helped at the trade. With the death of the father on June 17, 1861, the brothers James L. and John H. "continued the business as partners until about 1875, when they separated. Thereafter, James, with the help of his son William, maintained the ancestral pottery probably until 1885, when machine-made ware caused competition to become severe." William A. Osborne, who was still living at the pottery (1931) on Jenness

Road in Gonic, was born in 1856. "Although he helped his father at the pottery, he was not trained in the potter's art; for the older man foresaw the coming of the machine product, and realized that it would soon make his own trade unprofitable."⁴

Benjamin E. Osborn⁸ of Rochester, New Hampshire, son of James L.⁷ and

glaze used by the Gonic potters was of a mottled yellow and green color, and they also lined some of their wares with a lead glaze, made by grinding sand and red leading together, and adding a coloring oxide. Medium-sized milk pans sold for twenty cents; cups for ten cents, and large jars from forty to fifty cents each. Because the articles had to be kept cheap,



FIELD STONE MARKED "J. O." IN FAMILY BURYING PLOT BEHIND THE HOME OF JACOB OSBORN⁴ AT LOUDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Photograph by Richard Merrill.

grandson of Elijah, Jr.,⁶ was a farmer and potter. He was probably last of his line to work at the trade.

The red-burning glacial clay used by the Osborns at Gonic came from local deposits. While the Gonic Kilns were active, 250 to 300 pieces were fired in one burn. Some of the pieces were graceful and beautifully glazed. A characteristic

⁴ "The Osborne Pottery at Gonic, N. H.," *Antiques* (Feb. 1931), p. 123.

the body and the glazes were fired together in one burn. By applying a second glaze of another color in blotches and allowing it to dry before burning again, the potters achieved mottled effects on their wares.

The Osborne family did little to advertise their wares other than to dump broken scrap in the front yard to indicate to passers-by that a pottery was operating there. Save for what was sold on the site,

their wares were distributed by wagon among general stores in the surrounding towns of Rochester, Dover, Farmington, Somersworth, Berwick and Barrington.

The wheel top of *lignum vitae*, used at Gonic, is still in possession of the family. It has a smooth depression worn in its surface—a surface that has held everything in ceramics from teacups to five-gallon jars.

* * *

There is little information written on the second son of Jacob Osborn⁴ who chose to follow his father's trade and who, in 1813, established his own pottery at Boscawen, New Hampshire. He was John Simpson Osborn,⁵ born on the family homestead in Loudon, New Hampshire, on May 3, 1790 (see Bible illustration). He is not to be confused with his nephew, of the same name, son of his brother Elijah.⁵ On January 17, 1813, he bought the Carter homestead of Daniel Carter, Sr., and erected a pottery parallel to the street below the house on Boscawen Plains. The house is standing today.

The pottery he erected was a long, large building with a door and window to the north, double doors and windows on the west. The north door opened into a good-sized room. At the left of the door, broad stairs led to a chamber which occupied approximately one third of the building. In this upper room the crockery which was to be sold was stored. The south end of the building held the kiln where the pottery, which included milk pans, pitchers, crocks and assorted wares, was baked.

Having a prospering business in Boscawen, on May 21, 1816, John married

Mary, the daughter of Daniel Carter, Sr., and Mary (Atkinson) Carter of that town. On October 1, 1818, when only twenty-eight years of age, he died of typhus fever. At the time of his death he had a thousand dollars' worth of pottery to be baked. His widow, Mary Carter Osborn, hired someone to fire the earthenware which he burned and spoiled.

John Simpson Osborn's great-granddaughter, Mrs. Frank Johnson (nee Edith Durgin) of Boscawen, to whom I am indebted for information and records of her line of Osborns, has the inventory and auction list of the estate at the time of his death. He was worth about \$2,500, which, in those days, was considerable for a young man, indicating that he was successful as a potter. On June 18, 1819, Abigail Simpson Osborn, only child of John Simpson Osborn, was born after the death of her father. Among the papers of Mrs. Johnson is one from Elijah Osborn, of Loudon, to his sister-in-law, Mary, inviting "thee come over." He asked his niece, Abigail, to come to Loudon to teach school and get acquainted with the relatives of her father. This she did.

The tragic death of John Simpson Osborn cut short a promising career. Pieces of his redware, in possession of Mrs. Johnson, are dark brown, almost black in their glaze.

The hard simplicity of early New England life is reflected in their redware. The Osborn potteries have passed from the scene after operating for more than two hundred years. Yet, today, with the keen interest in the early crafts, the collector finds pleasure, as once did the housewife, in acquiring pieces of this early ware.

ANCESTRY OF THE OSBORN FAMILY WHO FOUNDED POTTERIES IN
LOUDON, BOSCAWEN AND GONIC, NEW HAMPSHIRE

WILLIAM OSBORN of Salem, Colony of Massachusetts Bay, Puritan, immigrant ancestor of a notable family, first appears there in 1630, made a freeman May 22, 1639.

William Osborn,¹ probably son of William, the immigrant, was born about 1640, died in Salem, January, 1728-1729. Married Hannah, born 1640, died 1721, daughter of Captain John Burton of Salem. Quakers.

John Osborn,² second child of William and Hannah (Burton) Osborn. Born Salem, August 27, 1677, died August, 1744. Married, second, Hannah Buffum, daughter of Caleb Buffum of Salem. Both Quakers.

Jacob Osborn,³ son of John Osborn, was born September 4, 1719, at Salem (now Peabody, Massachusetts), died between April 20 and December 6, 1773. He married Anna, daughter of Joshua and Damaris Purinton.

Jacob Osborn,⁴ son of Jacob and Anna (Purinton), born in Salem, Massachusetts, March 29, 1750. Married Abigail Simpson of Nottingham, New Hampshire, and moved to Loudon, New Hampshire, establishing a pottery there in 1775. Sons Elijah and John Simpson became potters. Jacob Osborn died in 1824, son Elijah continued pottery.

Elijah Osborn,⁵ son of Jacob and Abigail (Simpson) Osborn, born at Loudon, New Hampshire, May 24, 1778, married Margaret Green of Pittsfield, New Hampshire. Sons Green and Elijah, Jr., became potters. Elijah Osborn died in 1864, son Green operating pottery for short time.

John Simpson Osborn,⁵ son of Jacob and Abigail (Simpson) Osborn, born at Loudon, New Hampshire, May 3, 1790. Married Mary Carter of Boscawen, May 21, 1816. Founded a pottery at Boscawen, New Hampshire. Died at Boscawen, New Hampshire, October 1, 1818, aged 28 years. Daughter born after his death: Abigail Simpson Osborn born June 18, 1819.

Elijah Osborn, Jr.,⁶ son of Elijah Osborn and Margaret (Green) of Loudon, New Hampshire. He was born there January 6, 1806. Married Mary Lane of Pittsfield, New Hampshire, December 6, 1831. Founded the well-known Osborn Pottery at Gonic, New Hampshire. He died June 17, 1861, at Gonic. Sons James L. and John H. became potters.

*James L.*⁷ and *John H.*⁷ *Osborn*, sons of Elijah Osborn, Jr.,⁶ and Mary (Lane) Osborn, born March 26, 1833, and August 13, 1836, respectively. They continued the pottery at Gonic as partners until 1875, when they separated. Then James L., with the help of his son *William Osborn*,⁸ maintained the business until 1885.

*Benjamin E. Osborn*⁸ of Rochester, New Hampshire, son of James L.,⁷ is also listed as a farmer and potter. He and William Osborn,⁸ both sons of James L. Osborn,⁷ were probably the last in their line to work at their ancestor's trade.