

# Ceramics in America

*edited by Robert Hunter*



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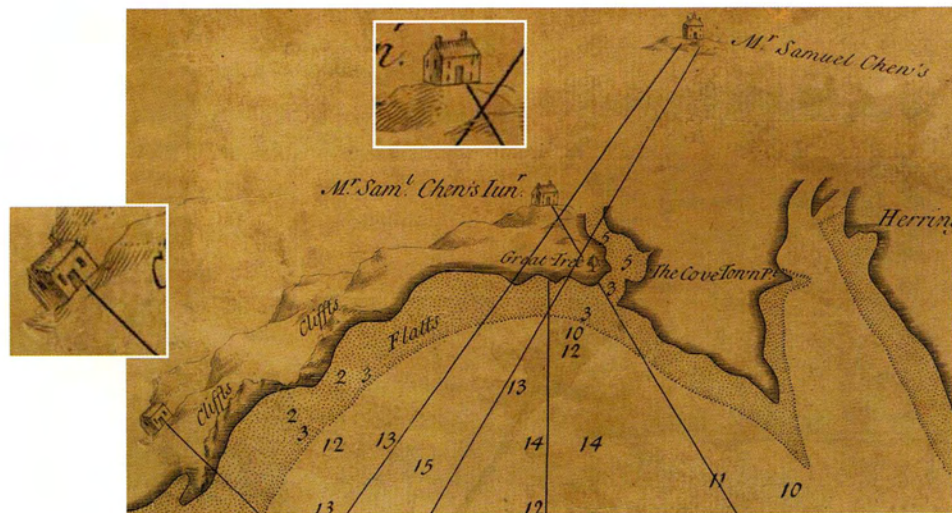
## An Unusual Drab- ware Strainer from the Chew Site, Anne Arundel County, Maryland

▼ BETWEEN 2000 and 2002 the Anne Arundel County Lost Towns Project conducted field investigations searching for traces of the mid-seventeenth-century town of Herrington, which led to the rediscovery of this “lost” town’s location.<sup>1</sup> A 2006 study searched for the home of Samuel Chew, one of the town’s founders and arguably its most prominent resident.<sup>2</sup>

An inset to the 1732 Hoxton map of the Chesapeake demonstrates how to avoid shoals and shallow water while sailing into Herring Bay. Navigating these tricky waters involved lining up the “Great Tree” with three structures, two of which were the homes of Samuel Chew Sr. and Samuel Chew Jr. The most prominent structure, the mansion of Chew Sr., is shown as a two-story building with hipped roof, paired chimneys, and a cupola (fig. 1), and the primary initial goal of the Lost Towns Project excavations was to discover the building’s footprint.

With the excavation of fifty-eight 5-foot-square test areas, that footprint is beginning to come into focus. The most significant discovery is that the

*Figure 1* Detail from 1732 Hoxton map showing the location of three homes, including those of the Chews. (Courtesy, Maryland State Archives.)



Chew mansion was far larger than anticipated. Its basic size—66 feet by 56 feet—places it among the largest known structures in the Chesapeake and, given its presumed construction date of circa 1690–1718, was apparently the largest building in both Maryland and Virginia when erected. Although there is still some question as to the exact construction date (a 1694 dated window lead may be the most definitive clue), there is no question about the date of its demise. The April 16, 1772, *Maryland Gazette* reported its “total destruction” by fire four days earlier.

Large quantities of artifacts were taken from the destruction and demolition levels, and the ceramics recovered range from high-end Chinese porcelains



*Figure 2* Strainer, probably Staffordshire, England, ca. 1745–1750. Drab salt-glazed stoneware. H. 2 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". (Courtesy, Lost Towns Project; photo, Shawn Sharpe.)



*Figure 3* Strainer, Staffordshire, England, ca. 1765–1775. White salt-glazed stoneware. H. 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". (Courtesy, Strawberry Banke Museum; photo, Tara Vose.)

to large utilitarian earthenware and stoneware vessels. A particularly intriguing artifact is a perforated, drab salt-glazed stoneware bowl-like object with white floral sprigging and touches of cobalt (fig. 2). Holes form both a concentric ring above the foot rim and a floral pattern on the base. The holes above the foot rim suggest that cloth or muslin was sewn in to further filter impurities from a liquid. The question is, what liquid was the vessel intended to strain?

In the collection of the Strawberry Banke Museum in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, is a white salt-glazed punch strainer (fig. 3) that is a close match to the stoneware “bowl” recovered at the Chew site. Popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, alcoholic punches were made from various combinations of rum or brandy, water, sugar, and citrus fruits and served from bowls made of porcelain, delftware, or silver. Often a pierced ladle was kept handy, to strain seeds and fruit. Silver punch strainers were small, one- or two-handled porringer-like vessels with rounded bases and, like most ceramic strainers, did not have foot rims.<sup>3</sup>

By the mid-eighteenth century white salt-glazed stoneware and delftware punch pots were used to serve the enlivening drink. The Chew strainer might have been used in conjunction with one of these punch pots, although its highly decorative nature suggests it was used in the drawing room, not the kitchen. Possibly it was used to strain sediment from popular fortified wines, such as port and Madeira; a strainer with sewn-in muslin would have been an excellent filter for wine dregs. The unfortunate lack of pictorial evidence of similar ceramic strainers in prints or paintings makes it impossible at this time to identify with certainty the use of the Chew example.

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