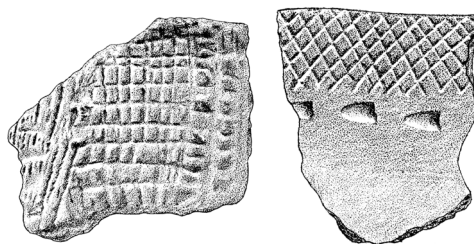


Many early pottery vessels were started using a mold such as a wooden bowl, basket, or another pot, to form the lower part of the vessel. The clay was paddled over the mold, allowed to firm up a bit, and was then removed. The upper part of the pot was built up by adding belts or coils, which were paddled and formed into the desired shape. The wooden pottery paddles were often wrapped with cord to keep them from sticking to the moist clay.



After drying thoroughly, pots were fired. Pottery firing must be carefully controlled. There is no evidence that Native Americans in the Midwest used kilns; pots were probably fired in open fires or in pits.

Some of the earliest pottery made in North America, dating to around 3500 years ago, has been found on sites of the Nebo Hill culture in northwestern Missouri. These pots were poorly fired, and the clay was mixed with shredded grass and other plant material. By about 2400 years ago native people in Missouri lived in small villages, grew starchy and oily seed crops and gourds, hunted wild game, and gathered wild plant foods. This is a time archaeologists call the Early Woodland period (600–200 B.C.). Pottery making became widespread. The need for rigid containers to store and to cook seed harvests may have prompted the adoption of ceramic vessels.



Pottery is made from naturally occurring clay. Because clay shrinks when it dries, some other material needs to be mixed with the moist clay to prevent pots from cracking. This material, called temper, can be sand, crushed limestone or other rock, burned and pulverized mussel shell, crushed potsherds (called grog), or in the case of the Nebo Hill pottery, vegetive material.



Native American Pottery in Missouri

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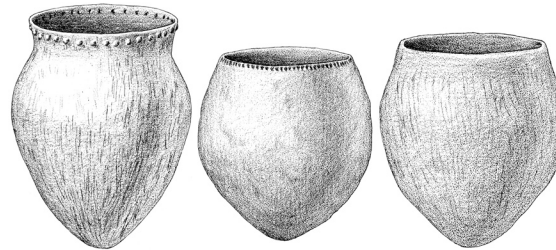


Pottery has been given names based on wall thickness, surface treatment, decoration, and temper. Black Sand, Marion thick, and Tchula are some of the Early Woodland types found in Missouri. Some of the decorations on Early Woodland pottery include stamping, woven-net impressions, incised lines, pinching, and bossing. Pots made throughout most of the Woodland period exhibit cord-roughened or partially smoothed-over cord-roughened exteriors. This surface treatment was left by the cord-wrapped paddles used to form the vessels.



There exists an even greater variety of Middle Woodland (200 B.C.–A.D. 450) pottery types, with cross-hatched rims, stamping, bossing, and zoning being the most common decorative treatments. Some of the Middle Woodland pottery types found in Missouri bear strong resemblance to Havana (Illinois) and Hopewell (Ohio) types to the east.

Throughout 2000 years of experience with forming and firing clay into vessels, native potters developed new vessel forms, new decorative treatments, and also shifted to alternative tempering agents. Early and Middle Woodland pottery typically was tempered with crushed igneous rock or sand. Grog and crushed-limestone temper became popular in the Late Woodland period. Vessel walls become distinctively thinner over time.



Sometime in the Late Woodland period (A.D. 450–900) potters in the Ozarks may have started using shell for temper, and this trait later spread through the Midwest. Some of the names given to Late Woodland pottery types include Baytown, Barnes, Weaver, and Maramec Spring. Bowls and jars are the most common vessels throughout Missouri during the Woodland period.

The change to shell temper was followed shortly by an explosion of new vessel forms during the Mississippian period (A.D. 900–1600). Water bottles; animal and human effigy bowls, jars, and bottles; jars with strap and loop handles; plates; portrait, or head pots; and miniature or toy versions of many of these forms occur during the Middle and Late Mississippian periods. Names for Mississippian pottery types include



Ramey, O'Byam, Matthews, Nodena, Campbell, and Walls. An abundance of pottery sherds on a site suggests the presence of a substantial settlement with permanent features such as house posts or wall trenches, storage and trash pits, and sheet middens, which are somewhat like our modern landfills.

Archaeologists can sometimes recognize an imported vessel from one that was locally produced by studying the paste and temper inclusions. Pottery provided important advantages for food storage, preparation, and cooking. In addition to its functional aspects, pottery can also provide information about how people conveyed their social identity and spirituality through incised, engraved, or painted designs on pottery vessels.