

Hilton, Ernest Auburn ^[1]

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by Robert O. Conway, 1988

20 Sept. 1879–28 Sept. 1948



A 1940 cup by Ernest Auburn Hilton, decorated with raised white dogwood blossoms. "Cup, Accession #: H.1969.144.14."

1940. North Carolina Museum of History.

^[2]Ernest Auburn Hilton, master potter, was born in Catawba County ^[3] near Hickory, the son of John Wesley Helton (or Hilton), a farmer and manufacturer of jugs. The family lived in the first section of the state to be known as "Jugtown" ^[4], a region some eight miles square in Catawba and Lincoln ^[5] counties. Ernest began making pottery under the direction of his father when he was eight, and within four years he was throwing one-quart jars and jugs on the potter's wheel. After working for a time with relatives in Catawba and Iredell counties, in 1934 he established his own pottery four miles west of Marion in McDowell County ^[6]. He turned the basic pieces himself while his wife, Clara Maude Cobb, and their daughters, Tommie, Lera, Ernestine, and Mozell, applied the glazes and decorations.

The Hilton pottery ^[7] became noted for its dogwood patterns, featuring raised white dogwood ^[8] blossoms on a dark beige background. Hilton also produced blue-edge pottery (cobalt blue on beige) resembling the wares of colonial days. He created painted nature scenes as well as numerous designs of vases, flower pots, pitchers, and sets of dishes. The pottery was fired in a groundhog kiln and coated with ground-up Coca Cola bottles, his favorite glaze. He used local clay, of course, but also some from Enka, Morganton, Seagrove ^[9], Spruce Pine, and Statesville. Hilton experimented with different clays, mixing "long" clay from the east with "short" clay from the west to give more life and color to his pieces. His work has been the subject of a number of exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and the North Carolina Museum of History ^[10] in Raleigh.

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Additional Resources:

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"Plate, Accession #: [H.1978.47.23](#) ^[15]." 1935-1945. North Carolina Museum of History. (accessed April 25, 2014).

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