

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED AUG 22 1977  
DATE ENTERED JUL 24 1978

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC  
Cornelison Pottery  
AND/OR COMMON  
Bybee Pottery

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER  
Highway 52 East  
CITY, TOWN  
Bybee  
STATE  
Kentucky  
VICINITY OF  
COUNTY  
Madison  
CODE  
021  
CODE  
151  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
5  
NOT FOR PUBLICATION

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY  | OWNERSHIP                                   | STATUS  | PRESENT USE                                    |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT               | <input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED        | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE           |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE | <input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED                 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE              | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH               | <input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS           | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE                   | <b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>                   | <b>ACCESSIBLE</b>                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT                 | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT            |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED   | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED          | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL            |
|   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> NO                         | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY              |
|   |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM                |
|   |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> PARK                  |
|   |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE     |
|   |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS             |
|   |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC            |
|   |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION        |
|   |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:                |

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME  
Mr. Walter Cornelison  
STREET & NUMBER  
Bybee Post Office  
CITY, TOWN  
Bybee  
VICINITY OF  
STATE  
Kentucky

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
Madison County Courthouse  
STREET & NUMBER  
CITY, TOWN  
Richmond  
STATE  
Kentucky

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE  
Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky  
DATE  
1970  
DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS  
Kentucky Heritage Commission  
CITY, TOWN  
Frankfort  
STATE  
Kentucky 40601  
FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Situated in the small rural community of Bybee, in the rolling Bluegrass county of Madison, the Bybee Pottery complex is one of the oldest continuously operating potteries west of the Alleghenies. Architecturally, the structural component of the operation must be viewed as modest, for it was intended to be purely functional. The oldest structural unit of the complex is a rectangular log building containing solid walnut beams. It is here that the basic clay is transformed into raw ware, the first manufacturing step. Essentially, this is the sole component of any architectural significance. This structure has undergone a series of additions but fortunately no visible alterations, except the gradual accumulation of several inches of clay on the floor, the result of over a century's potting.

Added to this original log portion are extensions of simple vertical siding and board and batten. These later additions create an overall rustic barn-like appearance. The main building of the company has, through the construction of additions, taken on an overall U-shaped form, as shown in the attached sketch map. The sole roofing material protecting all major buildings is raised-seam metal. The northernmost section of this unit is utilized for offices, display of wares, and sales. The central section is currently the location of a modern, thermostatically controlled kiln which is heated to the necessary temperature by gas burners. Before natural gas was used, fuel oil was the heating source. Today the majority of the Bybee products are fired at 2,200 degrees Fahrenheit for 24 hours. Prior to the construction of the more modern kilns, a type descriptively labeled "beehive" was used.

These were common in the country throughout the nineteenth century with some surviving into the present century at smaller operations such as Bybee. The beehive kiln at this operation was obviously constructed of firebrick. This special-use brick was created by mixing sawdust with the basic clay. When subjected to the high temperatures of firing, the sawdust would burn out, leaving a porous product which could withstand the extremely high temperatures of the kiln. This early kiln type was originally fired with wood and later with coal. Measuring twenty-five feet in diameter and ten feet in height, this type was of a downdraft configuration, a situation created by a tunnel with chimney. This kiln was located just west of the present one, within the center of the existing U-shaped building complex. It was phased out by more modern types and was no longer in operation by the late 1940s. Today, nothing remains of this historic kiln and it is felt by the owner that even archaeological investigations would prove quite useless due to the completeness of the demolition and cleanup.

Located off the southern side of the main complex is a small stone addition with a lean-to type roof, also covered in raised-seam metal. This small, interesting portion of the building was originally used as the clay storage vault.

(continued)

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD  | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW |   |   |  |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC          | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC  | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING     | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499            | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC     | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION           | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW                    | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599            | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE             | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS              | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE             | <input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699            | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE            | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION              | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY               | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799            | <input type="checkbox"/> ART                     | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING            | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC                  | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER             |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE                | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY             | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION      |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-     | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY    | <input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT    | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)     |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION              |   |  |

SPECIFIC DATES c. 1845-log section

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Currently producing a durable, moderately-priced, practical ware, the Bybee Pottery is operated by the fifth generation of the Cornelison family and is one of few of its type left remaining in the state. Legend states that the operation was established in 1809, however no proof of this early date is currently obtainable. Sales records do prove its existence as early as 1845, making the pottery the oldest industry in Madison County (Todd 1968:57).

Having been continuously operated by the Cornelison family, now owned by Walter Cornelison, the fifth generation son at the pottery. His children are often on hand, offering assistance to the business, and creating the sixth generation of the family to be affiliated with it. The family itself has an interesting history, having come to America in 1647, the same time as Peter Stuyvesant. Photostatic records of the early layout of New Amsterdam, later to become New York City, indicate property lots of the Cornelison family. A descendent of these earliest Cornelisons in the country was one named Conrad who was to fight in the Revolution and settle in Virginia. Later he would move to South Carolina and eventually end up in Madison County, Kentucky, prior to 1809 (Brandeis, 1954). He settled on Otter Creek, approximately one mile from Bybee. As best can be determined, it was this Cornelison who was a farmer and making limited quantities of pottery in his spare time. This is likely the source of the legend which states that the Bybee Pottery operation dates to 1809. Conrad's son, James Eli, is reported to have founded the family pottery in 1845 (Ibid.)

As true with several smaller pottery operations, Bybee started virtually by accident, the result of an excellent local clay deposit. Founder James Eli realized that his farm contained a clay pit having an abundant supply of a white, soft, kaolin-type clay. The clay had been sun-bleached for thousands of years, exposed in an old bed of the Kentucky River. The clay has been reported to be one of the highest grades for potting purposes found in the entire country. James Eli realized that it was not necessary to clean the clay nor mix other substances with it for producing his wares. This clay also occurs in the neighboring county of Estill to the east. Area discussions indicate that the settlers at Fort Boonesborough traveled to this area for purposes of obtaining the clay for producing their own limited crude wares. Legend has it that the small community of Bybee was originally settled by these same people.

The current Cornelison family feels that there is a possibility that the earliest productions here may have been primarily brick and tile. Following this, came a general evolution in types of wares as took place at other potteries across the country.

(Continued)



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Cornelison Pottery

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Today, its primary function is basically storage. The cut sandstone has been dry-laid up to an even, horizontal level. The remainder of the area under the roof pitch is fashioned from vertical wooden siding. A small window with three lights is centered at the top of the southern stone wall.

To the rear, or west of the main building are four storage shed buildings, two of which are long narrow structures constructed parallel to the road (see site plan sketch). One of these is board and batten, while the westernmost one is of simple vertical siding. Two privies stand immediately south of this latter shed.

Other than the original log portion of the complex, the architecture at the Bybee Pottery remains very modest and simple. Located in its rural setting, the pottery and its limited additions are representative of a small family-owned operation of the nineteenth century.

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Earliest vessels were primarily heavy utilitarian types as the then existing market demanded. These included fruit jars, crocks, and other vessels produced as stoneware which was salt-glazed. This glazing, common on stoneware throughout the nineteenth century, was a relatively simple process. Salt was thrown into the kiln during the firing process and it was quickly vaporized. This gaseous salt then fell over the ceramic vessels in the kiln as a glaze, producing the final protective barrier. This type of glazing creates an orange-rind like pitted texture. This early ware would be replaced by later forms and variations known as "heavy handed" pieces. They were to receive this name from their thickness created by the potters, as opposed to more refined thinner pieces. These in turn gave way to the wares still being produced today, which will be discussed in the remainder of this section.

The most interesting and significant aspect of such an operation would be the production of the ceramics themselves and at Bybee the process remains virtually unchanged. Once the high quality clay is dug at the pit approximately two miles from Bybee, it is mixed with water and ground. This process was accomplished by horsepower at a pug mill during the 1800s and up until the 1950s. This operation was quite similar to the historic sorghum mill, with a single horse walking in a tight circular path. The clay was mixed or "folded" by cutting blades which forced it down from the top, creating a mixture of uniform consistency. This process is carried out with power equipment today, however. Once the clay is so prepared, it is placed in a storage vault where its moisture and plastic qualities are properly maintained. The clay is next wedged, or kneaded, to beat out any possible air that may be trapped in it. The clay necessary to produce a single vessel or piece is carefully weighed to insure uniformity. This is followed by the actual "throwing" of the ware on the potter's wheel. This is the familiar scene which has been witnessed for centuries in association with the creation of ceramic vessels. Once finished on the wheel, it is sliced off at its base with a thin wire. It is next set on a tray to dry, causing the new greenware to become "leather" hard. Once final smoothing of the ware is completed, it is ready for glazing and its trip through the kiln.

Approximately six hundred pounds of clay are used in one day at the Bybee Pottery. All glazes are created on location and include teal or "bluegrass" green, Dubonnet red, light blue, gold, yellow, and the well-known Bybee blue. The current sales room proudly displays a variety of these earthenware vessels and objects including bowls, batter bowls, pie pans, casseroles, pots, mugs, ashtrays, plates, and small animal figurines to mention a few.

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As modest as this small, family operation has remained, the reputation of their products is nationally known. The ware has been shipped to all states within the continental United States, and is sold in both state and national parks across the country.

At the same location, the Cornelison family continues to operate Madison County's oldest industry with a tradition maintained for six generations. The Bybee Pottery represents a facet of the early industrial history of the state which has virtually vanished. Due to its ability to present an educational experience for the visiting public and also its unquestioned historical significance, this site must be viewed as an important component of Kentucky's cultural heritage.

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"Bybee Pottery." Circular presented to visitors.

Campbell, Lois. "Kentucky's Bybee Pottery a Landmark of Pioneer Days." The Tri-State Trader, October 31, 1970.

Doris, J. T. and M. W. Glimpses of Historic Madison County, Kentucky. Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1955.

Engle, Fred Allen. "Madison's Oldest Industry Is Pottery." The Madison County Post, July 22, 1970.

Kentucky State Gazetteer. 1879-1880, p. 654.  
\_\_\_\_\_. 1883-1884, p. 894.

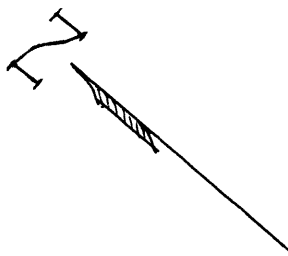
Niles, Rena. Kentucky Profiles, July 9, 1939.

Thompson, Sharon. "Potter's Wheel Turned by Fifth Generation." Lexington Herald Leader, July 21, 1974, p. G-6.

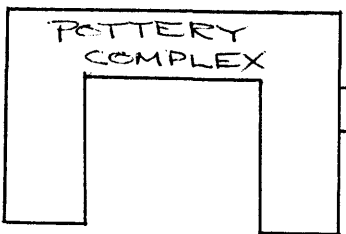
Todd, Russel I. This is Boone Country. Louisville: Gateway Press, Inc., 1968, p. 57.

Personal Interviews with Mr. Walter Cornelison.

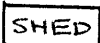




HWY #52



STONE ADDITION (CLAY VAULT)



SHED (FORMER PUG MILL)



BOARD & BATTEN SHED



SHED

PRIVIES

# BYBEE POTTERY

MADISON COUNTY,  
KENTUCKY

TO BRASSFIELD

NO SCALE : FOR LOCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY.

10 DEC 76 FTW

MAP #2

Cornelison Pottery  
Bybee  
Madison County  
Kentucky

JUL 24 1978

AUG 22 1977

Sketch Map  
Frederick Wilson  
No Scale, December 1976  
Map 2.