

P378
.B64

~~LIBRARY~~
Montana State University
Bozeman

THE ARCHIE BRAY FOUNDATION
A CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN CLAY

by
Candace A. Bonawitz

A professional paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of
Master of Arts
in
Fine Art

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

May 1987

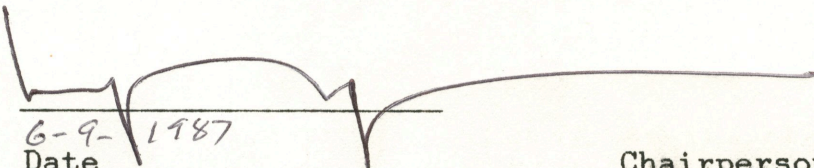
HHH P378
B64
~~7206~~
~~7276~~ NA 2540
B64

APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Candace A. Bonawitz

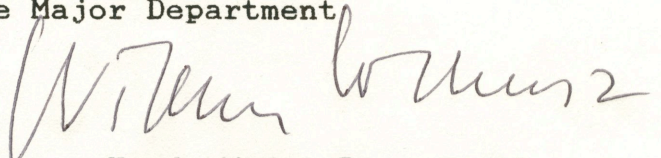
This paper has been read by each member of the graduate committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Fine Arts.


6-9-1987
Date
Committee

Chairperson, Graduate

Approved for the Major Department

6-9-1987
Date


Head, Major Department

STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this paper in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree at Montana State University, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library. Brief quotations from this paper are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of source is made.

Permission for extensive quotation from or reproduction of this paper may be granted by my major professor, or in his/her absence, by the Director of Libraries when, in the opinion of either, the proposed use of the material is for scholarly purposes. Any copying or use of the material in this paper for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Signature_____

Date_____

VITA

Candace A. Bonawitz was born on March 23, 1946, in Billings, Montana, the daughter of Margaret E. and James R. Felt. She attended grade school and high school in Billings and began her college training at the University of Montana. Candace received her B.A. in Art in 1971 from Eastern Washington University, Cheney, Washington. She began teaching art in Billings, Montana, in 1976 and since that time has continued to take evening classes at Eastern Montana College in Billings and attend summer school sessions at Montana State University. She took a year's leave of absence during 1982 to work on her Masters Degree at Montana State University. Candace has been active in her professional teaching association, the Montana Art Education Association, and served as Vice-President in 1981 and President during 1982. The summer of 1985 she received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities and spent six weeks studying Art History at the University of Pennsylvania. She is presently teaching art at Skyview High School in Billings, Montana.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to the following:
Rudy Autio who taught me the basics of ceramics and,
more importantly, got me excited about clay; Michael
Peed, Harold Schlotzhauer, Richard Helzer and Rick Pope
for their patience and encouragement as I began the
Masters Program; Kurt Weiser and Christy Lasater for
helping me with the research for this paper; Bernice
Boone and Virginia Walton for their encouragement and
help with research; and lastly, I thank my husband,
Jack, for his support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

FORWARD

CHAPTER 1

ARCHIE BRAY SR. (1951-1953)

The idea of the foundation is developed

The foundation is formed

The building is started

CHAPTER 2

PETER VOULKOS AND RUDY AUTIO (1951-1956)

Getting the foundation started

The tradition of visiting artists is started

The tradition of workshops is begun

The new addition

CHAPTER 3

JIM AND NAN MCKINNELL (1954-1957)

The changes initiated at the Bray

Special events that took place

The specific problems faced and the solutions

Jim and Nan leave in 1957

CHAPTER 4

GENE BUNKER (1957)

A brief history

A brief stay at the Bray

CHAPTER 5

KEN FERGUSON (1957-1964)

The continuing changes at the Bray

The special problems and the solutions

CHAPTER 6

DAVE SHANER (1964-1970)

A brief history

The financial pressures at the Bray

The Small Business Administration Forecloses

The Bray is Purchased

CHAPTER 7

DAVE AND JUDY CORNELL (1970-1976)

A brief history

The Glass-Blowing Studio

The Summer Sessions

Plans for Expansion

CHAPTER 8

KURT WEISER AND CHRISTY LASATER (1976-present)

Materials Manager is Hired

The brickyard is purchased

More Studio Space

Plans to Expand

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

I have worked as a potter since the fall of 1964 when I began my studies at the University of Montana as an art major. Rudy Autio was my advisor, and he enrolled me in his ceramics class. Through his guidance I gained a comprehensive understanding of the materials and techniques required to make high-fire stoneware.

The three years I spent at the University left me with a permanent love for clay. As Bernice Boone, an early advocate of the Archie Bray Foundation, stated, "Once the pottery bug bites, the victim wants to spend every spare minute at the wheel" (Boone 1960, pg. 20). I did not care if I was at the wheel; I just wanted to be working in the studio. Working with Rudy, who seldom used a wheel, I also learned to hand-build forms; and I liked how quickly I could build a pot.

It was during this time that I first heard about the Archie Bray Foundation. Rudy would talk of it, and the department ordered some materials from there, but my chief exposure came from my mother. She spent the winter in Helena, while my father was a legislator, and took a class from Dave Shaner at the Bray. I was interested in the foundation, but being a young, naive student, I did not realize the importance of the Bray at that time.

In 1970 while living in Spokane, Washington, I returned to college to finish my degree. I had completed all the required ceramics courses, but could not resist the urge and so enrolled in Bill Sage's ceramic class at Cheney, Washington. I was surprised to find out that the mention of being a student of Rudy's would cause the response I got from Bill Sage. He told me stories of shared times with Rudy and about visits to "The Bray." The experience of meeting ceramic artists, exchanging pleasantries and their discovering my connection to Montana ceramics eventually would lead to the question, "Well, have you been to the Archie Bray Foundation?"

My sense of pride in being a potter from Montana has continued to grow as my involvement in ceramics has grown. The Archie Bray Foundation has influenced the arts and crafts development of Montana, but even more it has become synonymous with excellence in the world of ceramic art. Because of my sense of pride and also because of the important contribution the Bray has made for all who enjoy the ceramic arts, I am writing about the people who have made the Bray more than just another institution.

FORWARD

The Archie Bray Foundation is a myth. It has never existed as an institution with money to grant. . . . [it] has always been people, not money (Senska 1982, pg. 32).

I have chosen to write about the Archie Bray Foundation by examining the people who have been directly involved with the creation and ongoing development of the Foundation. For the most part this will mean the past and present resident directors and those people who helped to manage the pottery.

My purpose in focusing on the people involved is obvious: it is the dedication and foresight of all these people that has set the Archie Bray Foundation above and beyond the hundreds of functioning potteries around the country. The Bray has become a legend where one man's dream has given many aspiring potters the chance to concentrate on their work, to grow artistically, and to contribute to the growth of the Bray. The professional commitment of these ceramicists has been tremendous. The job of keeping the Bray functional is almost sacred. The history of the Foundation is full of excitement, sadness, fulfillment, and dreams. There is much to learn from the people who have kept Archie Bray Sr.'s dream of a "nice place to work" a reality some 35 years later.

CHAPTER 1

ARCHIE BRAY, SR.

Archie Bray, Sr. was born in 1886 in Helena, Montana. He attended school in Helena for his primary and secondary education, and then enrolled at Ohio State University where he received his undergraduate degree in ceramic engineering. He returned to Helena to help his father manage the brickyard shortly after graduating and within two years of his return to Helena, Bray was foreman of the brickyard. When his father died in 1931, Archie Bray, Sr. found himself not only the manager of a large business, but also, the president. Even though Bray spent his childhood surrounded by the business his interests went far beyond just running a brickyard. In fact, Archie Bray, Sr. had quite a battle with his parents on his choice of a career. Archie Bray, Jr. tells the story about his father, Archie Bray, Sr., wanting to be a doctor and his parents wanting him to study to be a ceramic engineer. Evidently the battle ended with Bray being forced to stand against a willow tree while his father used a buggy whip to remove his shirt! From that point on it was understood that Bray, Sr. would be a ceramic engineer. His son goes on to say that the only compromise in his father's life was taking piano

lessons (Holt, "Archie Bray, Jr."). Apparently he learned to play the piano rather well and as an adult brought famous concert artists to Helena, helped sponsor the community theater group, and was president of the community concert group (Senska 1982, pg. 33). He was a true patron of the arts, but these activities were not enough for Archie; he had a dream in which he envisioned the pottery as the nucleus of an art center which he planned for the grounds of his brickyard. He wanted not only a pottery, but also a studio for all types of artists and a small theater for performing artists (Boone 1960, pg. 20).

The actual planning of the Foundation began when two friends of Archie's paid him a visit at the brickyard. The guests were Peter Meloy and his brother Henry. They were both artists and wanted to talk to Bray about firing some pots in his large kilns. Bray then discussed his ideas with them. The dream started to develop during Archie Bray's future discussions, which included Branson Stevenson, a businessman and artist from Great Falls, and Peter Meloy, a lawyer and potter. The men discussed all the possibilities and problems that could occur. One such discussion is recorded in a letter written by Archie Bray, Sr. to Branson Stevenson in 1951.

And so I say--Problems--Think about them, Branson, and when you come down let's have a real discussion about the whole picture. Somehow let's keep it all on the plane we dreamed--let's be practical too, let's keep it all in good fun--to roll along with the whole idea built around--'a place to work for all who are seriously interested in any of the ceramic arts.' To be high standards--to keep it nice--that it may always be a delight to turn to--to walk inside the pottery and leave outside somewhere--outside the big gate--uptown--anywhere--the cares of everyday. Each time we walk in the door to walk into a place of art--of simple things, not problems, good people all tuned to the right spirit of intention; the buildings; the carrying on and forwarding of intentions, the aims and the life of the foundation.

Can we do it?

What a joy it is to do it.

Good Night,

Archie (Weiser et. al., Vol. VIII, pg.47)

After all their planning they decided to start the project with a pottery in the corner of one of the drying sheds. Bray cleared some space under the line shaft, (a large shaft that stretched the length of the brickyard which was powered by a steam engine, and in turn powered most of the brickyard equipment) where there used to be a flower pot machine" (Holt, "Archie Bray, Jr."). For equipment, they started out with two electric kilns and some Denver kick wheels. They would fire a lot of their work in the large beehive kilns used by the brickyard to fire the bricks and tiles (Holt, "Rudy Autio").

"To handle the affairs of the pottery Mr. Bray formed a non-profit, educational corporation called the Archie Bray Foundation, the trustees of which were at that time Mr. Bray, Peter Meloy, and Branson Stevenson" (Boone 1960, pg. 20). The directors stated their purpose was "Making available for all who seriously interested in any of the branch of the Ceramic Arts, a fine place to work" (Weiser et. al., Vol. VIII, pg. 48).

To build the pottery Bray needed workers so during the summer of 1951 he hired two recent graduates from Montana State University, then known as Montana State College. The two were Rudy Autio and Peter Voulkos who were recommended to him by the Meloy brothers. They were hired to work in the brickyard during the day and, in turn, could use the new studio space for their pottery and sculpture at night. Rudy Autio states that cone 10 stoneware was becoming the "big thing" so they gladly helped Bray by laying brick, building one of the first downdraft kilns in North America, and organizing the supplies for the pottery (Holt, "Rudy Autio").

Many people besides Rudy Autio and Peter Voulkos were eager to share in Archie's dream. Bray supplied the money and all sorts of people supplied the labor. Among those who helped lay brick were Kelly Wong, (an undergraduate at Montana State College with Voulkos and

Autio, who also worked at the brickyard), Jessie Wilber, Maxine Blackmer, Stevenson, and Meloy.

In fact, so many amateurs laid brick for those walls, it's a wonder they remain standing. But the experts managed to compensate for the wavering rows, and the roof plate landed on a level course (Senska 1982, pg. 33).

Bray had been saving bricks that he thought were particularly beautiful so those bricks, along with some tiles made by Wilber and Stevenson were used on the front wall and form a rich mosaic pattern. One of the tiles was inscribed with the words often repeated by Archie, "Lots of brick to lay, Branson, lots of brick to lay" (Boone 1960, pg. 20). He continued the practice of saving tiles after the pottery got underway by having every celebrity sign a tile, it was then fired and placed in a collection (Holt, "Peter Voulkos").

Not all of the Bray family shared Bray's enthusiasm for the foundation. Branson Stevenson tells the story of an incident with Bray's mother.

Archie's mother, she was the grand old lady, well, she wasn't too fond of the idea, Archie told me. She came out there one day when Archie was instructing me on how to lay tile on the stack and I was laying them up there. She said, "What are you doing young man?" I said, "I'm laying a tile up there where Archie told me to." About that time the brickyard opened and she said, "Ah, they're making brick, good." And she walked away with her cane (Holt, "Branson Stevenson").

As the pottery building was being constructed, plans were also being made for a celebration to dedicate the pottery coinciding with Bray's birthday. By October the first phase of the building was complete: it included a showroom, a workroom, a clay-mixing and kiln room, and the first gas-fired kiln in the state.

A feast of champagne, oysters on the half shell, fine cheeses and other delicacies, served in a small brick building on the outskirts of Helena, October 20, 1951, marked the opening of "The Pottery" (Laurel Outlook 1951, pg. 20).

After the building was complete, it was decided by the board of directors to offer a membership for a fee of \$10.00. This membership entitled the owner the privilege of the use of the pottery for life. Bernice Boone, a Helena resident about to retire from the Internal Revenue Service, was the first "card-carrying member". Boone had been fascinated by a pottery throwing demonstration at a Montana Institute of the Arts meeting given by Peter Voulkos and decided to check out what was happening at the foundation. She learned how to throw by taking lessons at the pottery and became one of the biggest supporters. She not only kept the place clean, but kept the books and records and gave financial help in the subsequent trying years (Senska 1982, pg. 33).

CHAPTER 2

PETER VOULKOS (1951-1954) AND RUDY AUTIO (1951-1957)

Peter Voulkos and Rudy Autio are both native Montanans and two of the first students to study under Francis Senska, a pioneer in ceramic education, at what was then Montana State College in Bozeman, Montana. Autio states that Frances had an excellent background. She had worked with Mia Grotell at Cranbrook and with Marguerite Wildenhain at Pond Farm and was very knowledgeable about clay. Senska says that "Voulkos was notable for not being in class. He would come back with a sack of clay and say he'd been prospecting, but I knew he'd been fishing" (Senska 1982, pg. 41). Peter's first choice of a career was architecture. He then tried painting and sculpture, and he mentions that he only took the ceramics class because it was required. "I didn't want to play around in any mud--but as soon as I did I just fell in love with it and that was it--I got started" (Holt, "Peter Voulkos"). Voulkos says his father and mother were puzzled as to why anyone should leave a "profitable, established family enterprise" [his parents owned a restaurant in Bozeman] for something as uncertain as a career in the arts (Seattle Times 1954, pg. 11). After finishing his undergraduate work at Montana State

College and just beginning to work with clay, he attended the California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, California. He wanted to get more experience with clay and learn how to use a gas-fired kiln, since there were only small electric kilns at Montana State College while he was there. He got into trouble with the staff and students during his stay at California. They accused him of using all the clay and "hogging" the kilns. The situation became so serious the president of the college paid him a visit and asked him to lower his firing temperature, make smaller forms and generally put "ridiculous" limitations on him. Luckily, he was about to graduate so the situation was quickly resolved (Holt, "Peter Voulkos").

Rudy Autio, the son of a Finnish miner, says that his family had a strong crafts tradition and, therefore, did not question his desire to be an artist. He did his graduate work at Washington State University, Pullman, Washington, with Harriet Middleton. Autio feels that he is strongly influenced by the painting of Pollock and DeKooning, sculptures of Morini and Naguchi, and Toltec-Aztec pottery. His early work was generally large architectural murals carved into leatherhard brick. Autio states, "The figurative element has always been a part of my work. I have never felt totally comfortable with sheer

abstraction--the image remains most important to me" (Autio Vol. VIII, pg.38).

It was a real treat for Autio and Voulkos to have all the clay they wanted, the freedom to work all night, and no one complaining about what they wanted to make. Autio and Voulkos approached their work differently. Voulkos has been described as flamboyant, while Autio was quiet and took his time on each project (Holt, "Archie Bray, Jr."). Voulkos basically threw on the wheel at this time, sticking to more classical forms, while Autio was making plaques and sculptural forms for buildings. Voulkos once said to Rudy, "You'd make a ceramic hamburger if there was enough money in it." Autio adds, "Of course ten years later people were--It's kinda funny" (Holt, "Rudy Autio").

After that first summer in the brickyard, both men returned to their respective graduate schools to finish up their masters degrees. Voulkos recommended that Mr. Bray hire Lillian Boshcen to manage the pottery while he was finishing school. Voulkos had worked with her during his first year at graduate school, so the

First of the competent instructors at the center is Miss Lillian Boshcen, a native of North Carolina, who has received her Master's degree in ceramics and who has exhibited at some of the most outstanding invitational and national shows. She has studied at the California College of Arts and Crafts, Mills College, and San Francisco School of Fine Arts (Lindley 1977, pg. 70).

Bernice Boone states that when Boshcen arrived at the Bray she brought her Siamese cat and a good kick wheel. Both the cat and the kick wheel were welcome additions and several more kick wheels were built like the one she had brought. Boshcen worked very hard at getting the pottery ready for the opening and subsequent classes. "She spent days and nights painting the interior, cleaning windows and otherwise making the place attractive for visitors" (Boone 1960, pg. 21).

Apparently Boshcen was a hardworker but she had a hard time getting along with Archie. Voulkos describes him as being "very macho" and looking like a "gruff old guy" until one got to know him. Evidently Bray could not tolerate a woman with her own ideas about how to run the pottery; and the situation became so intolerable that she left (Holt, "Peter Voulkos").

In the Spring of 1952 the operation moved into high gear. Voulkos returned with his wife Peggy Cone, a potter and enamelist. At first their bed was a mattress on the kiln room floor and they ate in the mess hall, but soon the hen house in back of the pottery was turned into a home for them. Autio and his wife Lela, a painter and their small son returned and found a little house in the neighborhood. Archie paid them a modest salary, but the proceeds from the sale of their work went to the foundation (Senska 1982, pg. 33).

During this time Autio began to work on large architectural murals. He would take big blocks of clay

and set them up on an easel and then cut out the relief areas. After the sections had dried they were glazed and then fired in the beehive kilns. Bray was very proud of Autio and wanted to help him all he could, so he would try to get Autio an architectural commission when he sold brick to the contractors in Montana.

Autio describes the situation: "Bray would tell architects and contractors, 'If you buy my brick I have a nice kid here who will make a nice plaque for your wall'" (Holt, "Rudy Autio").

As employees of the Western Clay Manufacturing Plant, Autio and Voulkos would help Bray in the brickyard along with the time spent making works of art. One task was helping Bray fire the beehive kilns. They didn't use pyrometric cones to decide when to salt the kilns; instead, they would measure the shrinkage of the clay bricks with a metal rod. The mass had to shrink six to seven inches. To take the measurement, Autio or Voulkos would have to walk on top of the huge kilns that were 1800-2000 degrees, or "red hot" inside. It was very dangerous work. Bray would finally decide when to salt the kiln by eyeing the atmosphere inside the kilns. Then Voulkos and Autio would go around the kilns and shovel in loads of salt and zinc. Autio states that they were working "eight days every week" (Holt, "Rudy Autio").

They began to make a line of work consisting of planters, ashtrays, small bowls, and teapots fired to stoneware temperatures. They wanted to make the pottery self-sufficient, so they made production work during the day and their own work at night. They had agents in several states, such as Texas and other states in the South East. The agents had a set of samples, and from these they would take orders and send them to the Foundation. Voulkos and Autio would make the work and then "go downtown and hunt the alleys of Helena for boxes and then go out in the fields and get a bunch of straw and pack them and send them out" (Holt, "Peter Voulkos"). This did not always work out as planned. Autio states that, "It was a losing proposition for the most part, but that was when we were first getting started. Archie Sr. picked up the bill, of course" (Holt, "Rudy Autio").

One painful financial lesson was described by Rudy.

We made fifty to sixty molds for planters. We used a jigger and sloppy clay, and it shaped the planter. We sold a lot of those, but we went broke on it because our principal dealer never paid us. We kept shipping the stuff all over the country at our expense, and he never paid his bills. So we were stuck with 1500-2000 of these things. Having done that for awhile really turned us off from the commercial aspect of running a pottery (Holt, "Rudy Autio").

The clay that Bray provided for Autio and Voulkos to use was the same clay that they dug for the brickyard. This clay was a local blue clay dug from the pits at Blossburg. Autio believes that the clay caused him many problems with his tiles and murals. It was too plastic (it did not hold its shape) and cracked very easily. The concentration of clay in the mixture was great for bricks, but not for art work (Holt, "Rudy Autio"). After much discussion with Bray it was decided to change to Kentucky ball clay and Denver fire clay. These refined materials had a higher ratio of fire clay and were less plastic than the local clay; therefore, the material could stand the high-fire temperatures necessary for good stoneware.

With an excellent potter and an equally excellent sculptor in charge, the pottery during 1952 was a beehive of activity. Pete's pots soon won him wide acclaim. He captured most of the prizes at the big ceramic shows, and all this brought much favorable publicity to the Foundation throughout the United States and Canada (Boone 1960, pg.21).

Voulkos' achievements made Bray very happy. He introduced Voulkos to a group of Rotarians as "one of the top pottery men in America today," and "the only man who has won first place awards with his pottery two successive years at the international exhibitions in Syracuse, New York" (The Independent Record 1952, pg. 4).

That fall Bray started to bring the visiting performers he had brought to Helena out to see the pottery in the midst of his brickyard. The Helena paper headed an article about this event with the title, "Marina Sveltova 'Tosses a Pot' at Bray Foundation as Do Other Members of Ballet Cast." The article reports,

She broke into gales of laughter as the pot took on a lopsided appearance under her fingers. When she was given a lump of clay to experiment with herself, it first resembled a dish, then a bowl, then an inside-out sombrero. When everyone roared at her efforts, she turned to Voulkos and quipped, "I bet you've never made a pot that looked like that!" He admitted he hadn't (The Independent Record 1952, pg. 5). (There is a picture of this scene in the 1980 issue of the Studio Potter, Vol. VIII).

Having celebrities visit the pottery was widely publicized and so the notoriety of the foundation started to grow. When Branson Stevenson heard that Bernard Leach, a famous English potter, was touring the United States with two equally famous Japanese potters, Shoji Hamada and Soetsu Yanagi, he decided to invite them to visit the Archie Bray Foundation. With this prestigious group the program of workshops conducted by famous artists was begun. "Leach's feisty opinions, Hamada's control of his clay and brushes, Yanagi's philosophy of the relationship of the craftsman to his work were all inspiring to potters who hadn't given

much thought to why they were doing what they were doing" (Senska 1982, pg. 33).

Both Autio and Voulkos have stated that the week-long workshop held by Hamada, Leach and Yanagi, in December of 1952, was the major event that influenced their work. Autio also states that the workshop "set the tone and direction" of the foundation for the years to come. He felt that Hamada really "opened their eyes" with the freedom and ease he used to handle the clay. Their direction before had been more "machine like." The pots were thrown symmetrically and then trimmed with precision. Now they were seeing a "master potter" throw with a looseness never seen before. The visitors gave lectures on Zen and the idea of "thusness" or letting things happen. This began to make sense as they watched Hamada throw "off the hump," a process of making several vessels out of one large mound of clay. They had never seen this done before (Holt, "Rudy Autio"). Voulkos talks about his experience with the workshop:

[Hamada] would sit on top of the kick wheel, and I would kick the wheel for him. He never kicked the wheel, he was used to a Japanese girl turning the wheel by hand. But he would tell me to kick faster or slower, so I just watched his hands, and it was a great experience. I mean it was unique. I doubt anyone else had that experience. . . . He had these small Buddha sort of hands--fat fingers--you know: the slip coming through his fingers, the facility he had, and tools.

He had typical Japanese tools, sticks and small sponges, and chamois. Things were small, eight to ten inches, but I especially liked when he would decorate with his brushes using slips right onto the greenware. And I'd never seen it before. . . . They were quite free, [the pots] not too distorted, but you could tell they were right off the wheel (Holt, "Peter Voulkos").

Many ceramic artists have come to Helena to work at the Bray as resident potters. Some stay for just a few days while others spend a summer, or even a few years working at the foundation. The first recorded residents were Manuel Neri, George McCullough and Doris Strachan.

The men were given beds in the bunkhouse and ate in the mess hall. They had all the space and clay they needed, but they also nipped brick, mixed clay, cut weeds and drove trucks. Doris lived at home in Helena. She mixed glazes, poured molds and swept floors in return for access to the clay and the excitement of the place. Archie was generous, but he also was a canny businessman (Senska 1982, pg. 33).

Several other well-known potters spent time at the Bray during the early years, such as Carlton Ball, Robert Sperry, Paul Volchening, Dean and Gib Strawn, and Ernie Kim. A woman named Muriel Guest from Winnipeg, Canada, hitch-hiked down to Helena in the winter of 1952 to work at the foundation. She came as a student and ended up being "a big help" to Autio after Voulkos left in 1954 (Holt, "Rudy Autio").

In January of 1953, Bray was injured in an accident in the brickyard. No one seemed to realize how serious the injury was, and all were shocked when they heard of his death on February 17. There was some question as to what would happen to the foundation, but the Bray family quickly reassured Autio and Voulkos that the family, especially his mother and sister, was determined to keep his dream alive (Boone 1960, pg. 22).

"Prior to the death of Mr. Bray a large addition to the pottery had been started but, because of his death, it had not been completed. Work was resumed on this and it was completed as a memorial to Mr. Bray by his wife" (Boone 1960, pg. 22). The addition had been planned as a studio for Rudy's large sculptural pieces.

The second workshop held at the Bray coincided with the opening of Rudy's new studio. In May of 1954 Margaret Wildenhain put on a very successful workshop attended by potters from as far away as Seattle and British Columbia.

Mrs. Wildenhain, recognized as one of the world's great potters, was born in Lyon, France, and received her training at the Bauhaus in Weimer, Germany. She came to the United States in 1940, and after two years of teaching in Oakland at the California College of Arts and Crafts, she has lived and has her workshop near Grunneville, California (Great Falls Tribune 1954, pg. 12).

After Bray died there was no more talk about a large center for the arts. The pottery "was doing all right" but the times were tough. In the fall of 1954 Voulkos was invited to head up a new ceramics department at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, so he left the Bray. With his leaving the foundation lost their primary production potter. There were also problems within the brickyard. "Archie Bray Jr.'s lack of experience in the business led to problems with clay quality and disasters in drying and firing. With help from the Small Business Administration, he invested in a tunnel kiln, which was not economically sound in a area where brick was becoming less popular. The threat of bankruptcy chilled the brickyard" (Senska 1982, pg. 34). (Due, in part, to an earthquake that had caused considerable damage to several brick homes and buildings in the Helena area (Holt, "Rudy Autio").

CHAPTER 3

JIM AND NAN McKINNELL 1954-1957

James and Nan McKinnell, who had attended the Wildenhain workshop, decided that the foundation was, indeed, "a fine place to work" and stayed three years, until 1957. As free-lance potters, they sold their work independently. [They chose not to work on the same basis as the director, but sold their work through the Bray and paid a percentage of the sales to the Bray.] They were then hired as teachers by the foundation. . . . [T]heir hard work, along with that of the Autios and whatever support Archie, Jr. could provide, kept the pottery going, even though the brickyard was slipping financially (Senska 1982, pg. 34).

By the time the McKinnells reached the Bray they were well-trained, proficient potters. Nan started her training in clay at the University of Washington and ended up with her MFA in Ceramics in 1948. Jim received his Masters Degree in Ceramic Engineering at the University of Washington but remarked to Martin Holt that he got introduced to clay in West Virginia (Holt, "Jim and Nan McKinnell").

After finishing their schooling, they were married; and Nan joined Jim in Baltimore where he was employed. Using their savings and some money Jim had coming from the G.I. Bill, they soon left for two years traveling and studying in Europe. They spent time in Paris at the Ecole Metiers d' Art. This school did not

encourage female students, so they found a man who would teach them the basics of using the potters wheel (such as tapping on center, throwing and trimming) for \$1.00 a lesson for the two of them. At this time they were using low fire earthenware clay (Holt, "Jim and Nan McKinnell").

After several months in France, they left for Cornwall, England, to work with Michael Leach, the son of Bernard Leach. They spent three months learning about production throwing of once-fired redware or slipware (Holt, "Jim and Nan McKinnell").

The next stop was Scotland, working with Katie Horsman. She taught them about high-temperature salt firing (Holt, "Jim and Nan McKinnell").

After sixteen months of studying and touring, Nan and Jim returned to the United States and settled in Boulder, Colorado. Jim had a job teaching extension classes at the University. They kept very busy making cone 04 earthenware, building kilns, and testing glazes. The pay, however, just was not enough to make ends meet, especially since they were expecting their first child. Therefore Jim applied for a job working for a geological surveyor and was hired (Holt, "Jim and Nan McKinnell").

After the birth of their daughter, they packed up and started traveling from Wyoming to Texas building

kilns with loose bricks they could pack with them (commonly called loose-brick kilns because the bricks were not permanently attached together) and testing local clays every time they would stop (Holt, "Jim and Nan McKinnell").

After an accident that resulted in a hernia for Jim, it was decided that they would quit the surveyor's job and return to Seattle and work for Boeing. It was at this time that they heard about the Archie Bray Foundation from Peggy Voulkos, a former student of Nan's. Voulkos and his wife Peggy were visiting in Seattle and told them about the Bray and the upcoming workshop with Marguerite Wildenhain (Holt, "Jim and Nan McKinnell").

Nan and Jim say that the time they spent in Montana was remarkable. Voulkos gave a mini-workshop before the Wildenhain workshop started. People were very interested to see what Voulkos could do, because he was reputed to be the best "thrower" in the United States. His work at this time was described as "strong, direct, and large" (Holt, "Jim and Nan McKinnell").

They go on to describe the Wildenhain workshop by saying that she also was very direct in her approach to working with the clay. She showed up for the workshop with six tools in her back pocket and part of her new

book. Jim described an interesting incident that occurred when Marguerite was reading from the first chapter to the participants. Archie Bray, Sr.'s mother was attending the workshop and, after Wildenhain had been reading for some time, the elderly Mrs. Bray, with a loud booming voice inquired, "When is she going to stop?" Apparently Margaurite took off her glasses, looked all around the room, and then continued reading (Holt, "Jim and Nan McKinnell").

There were around 42 participants in the workshop, and they all spent time throwing; then Wildenhain would critique the work with a "no holds barred" attitude. She was described by the McKinnells as being very strong-minded and direct. Nan and Jim stayed three weeks and decided to make a move to Montana to take advantage of the fine facilities at the Foundation (Holt, "Jim and Nan McKinnell").

The McKinnells describe the last three months of Pete's work at the foundation as "interesting and lively". Voulkos wanted to make as much work as possible to help the finances of the Bray before he left. They needed to start making the pottery carry its own weight financially. He would work at night, and in the morning, when people came for their classes, the wheels were covered with "large immovable pots" (Holt, "Jim and Nan McKinnell").

When asked about their own work at that time, Nan said they were learning about stoneware that summer. They felt the Bray was very stimulating because of Pete's influence, the large working space, and all the people coming and going. Even the climate influenced the drying and helped them set up a routine for working. Jim also commented on how much he enjoyed taking some education classes at Carroll College. He felt the humanities courses were some of the best he had ever taken (Holt, "Jim and Nan McKinnell").

The McKinnells found that the Archie Bray Foundation offered them a variety of opportunities. . . . [T]he Archie Bray was a transition between one way of life and another, a chance to try a new mode without committing a great deal of capital. . . ." (Senska 1982, pg. 34). The foundation was willing to let the McKinnells free-lance.

[They] taught the classes, at the same time producing pottery on their own for sale. They made fine functional stoneware, skillfully decorated, which found ready sale and they soon had difficulty in keeping up with their orders. Jim, who is a ceramic engineer, found time to test clays for the brickyard, a service that the pottery had not previously been able to offer (Boone 1960, pg. 23).

When asked what made the Archie Bray Foundation a significant pottery in the 1950's, Jim McKinnell answered that there were very few potters, outside of

Voulkos, working on the wheel throwing high-fire stoneware at that time. Nan and Jim both mentioned that many women would come over from Seattle every year, bringing with them their "bottles of effervescences" and entertain Voulkos when they could. Pete, in return would make sure the ladies were properly received. These people wanted to see what was going on with his work and at the Bray. Besides all the creative activity and the lively atmosphere, the Bray was one of the few places in the region that had several wheels. Jim felt they had the best looking stoneware body in the area plus Voulkos had an intuitive way of getting good results from the kiln. Voulkos did all the firing. He would stack his pots where he wanted them and then fill in around with other people's work. He would then fire the kiln--basically from his head--to get the results he wanted. When he left, no one really knew how to fire the kiln successfully (Holt, "Nan and Jim McKinnell").

During the summer of 1955 Voulkos returned to the Bray just to do his personal work. Voulkos wanted the glazes the students and other potters were using to be different from his, so they spent about 1000 hours just testing glazes. Carlton Ball was also there that summer working under a Fulbright grant. He was busy

testing glazes and throwing pots and generally helping the students (Boone 1960, pg. 23).

Nan and Jim invited their former teacher, Katie Horsman, to travel to Montana and present a workshop at the Foundation.

Early in September of 1955 another workshop was held, the chief instructor this time being Katie Horsman, a potter from Edinburgh, Scotland, who had been teaching at a summer session at the University of Colorado. The McKinnells had studied under her while in Europe and were instrumental in arranging for her visit there. She talked about how running a pottery was handled in England and Scotland. She also did some throwing and distorted the pots. Pete, Autio and the McKinnells also assisted at this workshop, which was well attended (Boone 1960, pg. 23).

During the second summer the McKinnells were at the Bray, they were also scheduled to teach a summer school session on Fiadalgo Island at Ruth Pennington Summer School of Art.

We started building loose-brick experimental kilns in one of the back rooms. We tried a three chamber, settled on a two chamber. We carried the bricks in the back of our red truck and set up the kiln and the whole studio at Quaker Cove, taught a number of weeks, and packed it all up again and brought it all back to Montana. It was probably the first loose-brick double chamber kiln ever built. We increased the size the next year, and it fired even better. To fire the kiln we used propane weed-burners, flexible rubber hoses, 100 pound tanks of propane, and it worked fine (Holt, "Nan McKinnell").

The activities continued along the same lines as before during 1955 and 1956. Jim was doing research

for the brickyard because the quality of the clay at the pits was deteriorating, and he tried to find some solutions. Jim felt that Archie Bray, Jr. basically ignored his suggestions. Doris Strachan was working on her Masters degree under the supervision of the University of Montana. She was developing the use of natural clays as glazes, and the McKinnells continued to teach classes (Boone 1960, pg. 23 and Holt, "Nan and Jim McKinnell").

In August of 1956 another well-attended workshop was held. The instructor this time was Antonio Prieto, head of the Ceramics Department at Mills College, Oakland, California. Mr. Prieto proved to be an excellent instructor and provided for those attending a very interesting and entertaining three days (Boone 1960, pg. 24).

In 1957 the McKinnells left Helena to set up a pottery in Deerfield, Massachusetts. They are presently working in the Ceramics Department at Loretta Heights College in Denver, Colorado (Holt, "Jim McKinnell").

CHAPTER 4

EUGENE BUNKER (1956-1957)

Eugene Bunker, a former student from Montana State College, became the resident potter after Autio left.

"Gene had previously spent some time at the Foundation experimenting with glazes and assisting Voulkos and Autio in the work of the pottery. After leaving there he had attended Mills College where he had secured his Masters Degree in Fine Arts" (Boone 1960, pg. 25).

Bunker's work was greatly influenced at the time by Voulkos' work. After Voulkos would make several forms, Bunker would come in, take a good look, and then try to make basically the same piece. "He did use a lot of porcelain clay which Voulkos seldom used, so there were obvious differences, too" (Holt, "Jim McKinnell").

"Gene was an excellent potter and continued the operation of the pottery much along the same lines as had previous managers" (Boone 1960, pg.25). He stayed at the pottery for about one year, and then personal problems and illness forced Bunker to be away from the pottery for some time.

During his absence volunteers attempted to carry on the classes and to otherwise look after the affairs of the pottery. This was a period of uncertainty and from this set-back recovery was slow. When Gene was able to

return he soon resigned, and again we were without a manager (Boone 1960, pg. 25).

At about this time Jim McKinnell was traveling across the country and he stopped in at Alfred University and met Ken Ferguson. McKinnell was very impressed with Ferguson so he urged Archie Bray, Jr. to hire Ferguson to replace the vacancy left by Bunker and to take charge of the pottery (Holt, "Jim McKinnell").

CHAPTER 5

KEN FERGUSON (1958-1964)

Ken Ferguson, born in Elwood, Indiana, studied Art at Carnegie Tech from 1948 to 1952. When he left, he had a job as a stained-glass window designer. Before he could get started, he was drafted and ended up in Japan. When he returned in 1954, he still had the same job offer and quickly decided that "stained glass was not for me." He was in a real dilemma as to what to do; he decided to go back to school to become a teacher. He ended up taking the required crafts course. He chose clay because he liked the instructor, Wesley Mills, and soon discovered that, "Boy, this is for me." He taught in the public schools for a year and decided he just could not take it--he did not have the temperament for it. His instructor, Mills, said, "Go to Alfred!" (Holt, "Ken Ferguson").

Ferguson packed up with his wife Gertrude, their small son, and a note from Wesley Mills to Charlie Harder at Alfred University. With only the note as an introduction, he was accepted at Alfred. He worked with Harder, Val Cushing, Ted Randell, and John Wood, a film-maker. Just as he was finished with his graduate program, he heard about the job at the Archie Bray Foundation from Jim McKinnell. He described his decision to go to the Bray by saying

Jim McKinnell set me up with Archie Bray Jr.
For some reason he thought I was suited to
come to Archie Bray. God, I just didn't even

doubt for a minute that I should try it. I didn't ask about money--anything. I'd heard that Voulkos had been there, and Autio, so I figured this was good enough for me. I ought to try that (Holt, "Ken Ferguson").

Apparently the grounds and resident director's house were poorly maintained when the Fergusons arriv''''ed. Ferguson commented that they "refused to live in the place" until it was cleaned. He and his family lived in a backroom of the pottery. Meanwhile, Archie, Jr. sent some men over from the brickyard to clean the house and make some improvements. While the house was being cleaned, Ferguson attacked the weeds and generally cleaned the area around the pottery. Ferguson felt that their refusal to live in the house and their work on the grounds had impressed Bray, and helped establish a good working relationship between the two men.

Ferguson did a lot of work for Archie Bray, Jr. He was having trouble keeping a manager in the brickyard, so Ferguson tried to help him by testing clay.

I'd get clay in the morning, put it in a dry pan, crush it up, make a test bar and dry it as fast as I could. With a infra-red light I'd put it in a glow-bar kiln, fire as fast as I could and check to see the shrinkage, color, and how much barium it took to get rid of the scum. So it was simple. I took an interest in the brickyard--learned a lot--I played a balancing act--walked on egg-shells--get along with Archie--make

pots--get along with people--back and forth
(Holt, "Ken Ferguson").

Because Ferguson was not a native Montanan, as had been previous directors, he felt he was not accepted immediately by the people of Helena. Ferguson also felt pressure from Archie, Jr. to make the pottery pay. "I was the first guy from out of the state. You know, it had been Rudy and Pete. McKinnells were free-lance potters here, and I was the first guy. And Archie sort of let the word out--if this guy doesn't make it, I'm really going to close the place up and make it a machine shop" (Holt, "Ken Ferguson"). Ferguson stated that it wasn't costing Archie much to support the pottery; about \$300. a month in salary, free room, and free gas. Their living quarters were very sparse, a remodeled chicken coop, which was later enlarged by one room. At about that time the financial problems of the brickyard became critical.

"[Archie] hired a brick engineer; but he hired him too late, debts were too high, clay was poor, the quality of the brick was poor, and the bricks just were not coming out fast enough." Archie Jr. decided to abandon the business in 1960. This meant, after less than two years, Ferguson was left with a struggling pottery, and a brickyard that was essentially closed (Holt, "Ken Ferguson").

Ferguson felt, financial problems aside, there were several positive things happening to him while he adjusted to his new position.

The first summer I went over to Missoula and met Pete and Rudy. They were a tough act to follow and at the time I didn't understand anything about clay. I really learned here. I was thirty years old, married with one small child. I was also an 'Easterner' trying to fill Autio's and Voulkos's shoes. Their presence was still felt, and I was as much in awe of them as were the members. I had first to learn how to get along with the people at the Foundation and how to manage the shop. And you know, Rudy was the saint and Pete the hero. . . . [Y]ou couldn't do anything without the locals standing and watching and saying, "Well, Pete didn't do it that way; try it Pete's way." I don't know why, but it didn't bother me that much at the time. Then I met Pete, and he treated me real nice and Rudy was so nice--how could you not like him! So I heard all the stories about Pete; the McKinnell's problems getting along with Archie. . . I just listened. My background helped me to balance getting along with all the different types of people at the Foundation. The stories about the place are good, some of them are funny, some of them give you a lot of insight into the place (Holt, "Ken Ferguson").

While Ferguson was gaining a better understanding of what his position was at the pottery the problems at the brickyard culminated and it became clear that the brickyard would fold.

Now the pottery had to break even; there was no one to pick up a deficit. Ferguson was big and strong, a potter whose talent and reputation were steadily growing. With Gertrude's help he put the pottery on a paying basis, though the bank balance was down to \$50.00 at one point (Senska 1982, pg. 34).

Archie Bray, Jr. wanted to keep his father's dream alive; so before he left, he tried to separate the Foundation from the brickyard. Everyone had thought this had been done when the Foundation was formed, but they discovered that there were no papers that divided the two enterprises into separate entities. The pottery began to pay the brickyard a \$75. per month fee for gas and electricity, hoping to establish that the pottery was not a part of the brickyard. They were soon told that this would not hold up in court (Holt, "Ken Ferguson").

After the foreclosure by the Small Business Administration, the brickyard was silent and sad and the night watchman carried a gun. Ironically, the only life left on the property was in the sturdy pottery that people had originally thought of as Archie's folly (Senska 1982, pg. 34).

When asked about how working at the Archie Bray Foundation affected his work, Ferguson replied, "I became aware of my limitations and soon developed a rhythm of throwing, working and making functional pots. I had thoughts only of being a potter, not an artist" (Weiser et. al. Vol. VIII, pg. 51). Of his work Ferguson said,

The simplest statement that I can make about my pottery and why it is like it is would be that I consider myself an industrial designer fortunate enough to be able to complete my own designs. This pottery has taken the direction that form follows function which is by no means original, but it has been easy to

live and work by, especially when my duties as resident potter at the Archie Bray Foundation have forced me to divide my time between pots, teaching, and selling pottery supplies. Therefore, intellectualizing about my pottery has been a luxury I could ill afford. I have tried to be honest and sincere, no frills, no pretense at being an artist, only a working potter (The Independent Record 1964, pg.5)

And work he did. He says he often trimmed pots at night and worked six days a week managing the pottery and teaching classes. While Ferguson was director, the class size grew, and the students were "enthusiastic" and made good pottery. He worked hard to increase the production pottery sold through the Foundation, and there was more expansion of the facility and services at this time. A room was added to Ferguson's house; a sink was installed in the glaze room; a copper enameling space was provided; a new kiln was built; and through a loan by Bernice Boone for a large shipment of clay, the materials business was started (Boone 1960, pg. 25).

There were very few workshops held while Ferguson was resident potter. He felt "his most positive achievement during those lean years was trying to keep the doors open" (Weiser et. al. Vol. VIII, pg. 51). However, one workshop was recorded in a Helena paper with the headline, "Famed Woman Potter Has One-Day Workshop Here". The famous woman was Toshiko Takaezu,

an instructor at the Cleveland Art Institute. The article showed a picture of Toshiko creating "monumental hand-built pottery." She made a series of dome-like pots on the wheel and later stacked and bound them with wet clay (Henry 1963, pg. 21). Bernice Boone stated that the workshop did actually last more than one day. She knew this because Toshiko stayed at her home for several days, while the workshop continued, the exact number of days she could not recall (Boone 1987).

Ferguson and his wife Gertrude were beginning to feel isolated and frustrated by all the problems. They were looking to their future and realized it was time to start planning a move. Ferguson invited David Shaner and his wife Ann to join them "making pots and fighting the bureaucracy". When Ferguson left with his family to teach at the Kansas City Art Institute in 1964, Dave became the new director (Senska 1982, pg. 34).

When asked to explain why he thought the Bray was so successful Ferguson responded,

We [board members] try to understand why this place does better than so many other places that tried to copy it with the same ideas. We decided that the beauty of the place is that it's a good place for a few people to work; it's not that big. . . . [I]f you have a good potter here, his ego has to be strong. . . . [H]e is trying to do his number, and if he's not worried about his job

but he feels secure, he'll allow and attract good people to work with him. But not too many. You select them and have them work for two months, six months, one to two years, whatever. That's the clue, it's like a half-way house, not a teaching institution, not like a undergrad, and not like a graduate program. It's like a halfway house for somebody. . . . [The residents] have something going, and they just need a little help, a little time to light someplace for awhile and get involved with a sort of intense concentration of good pottery for awhile--or whatever. That's probably why it's so successful. I've seen places where there's money, they are near a lot of talented people, and it still doesn't work. You go in and see junk, and nine times out of ten it's because there's too many people around. The pottery attracts good people, if you give them space and let them work without any teaching being done. Everyone improves, and they acquire a professional confidence in themselves (Holt, "Ken Ferguson").

Ferguson took the time to reflect on the "good years" he spent as the resident potter at the Archie Bray Foundation, and he summed up his experiences by saying,

The dream of Archie Bray flourishes and still confounds observers and critics. My first years at the Foundation were survival and learning years, and later I too was caught up in that dream--a dream that I believe in more than ever now. I was lucky to be included in the history of the Archie Bray Foundation. I see it now as a "half-way" house for potters, a good place to work and then move on (Weiser et. al. Vol. VIII, pg. 51).

CHAPTER 6

DAVID SHANER (1964-1970)

"I came to pottery relatively late," Dave Shaner said. His undergraduate degree was in Art Education; and, as was the case with Ken Ferguson, Shaner was required to take a clay course to meet the prerequisites for his degree. Shaner attended State College in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, and he states that

When I left I really felt frustrated because I had a little bit of everything and not much of anything.

I knew even from that time that there was something good about clay. On Harold Mantz's suggestion I went up to Alfred University to look around, met Charlie Harder and some of the students there, and I was impressed. . . . I, like everyone else, was very strongly influenced by the "Alfred Style". I think that was a strong point at Alfred: teaching a sense for form. . . . During that first year, 1957, Ken Ferguson and Norm Schulman were the two big grad students, and both sort of took me under their wing (Shaner Vol. VIII, pg. 35).

After Shaner graduated from Alfred, he taught at the University of Illinois. At that time the University had eighty-five art instructors alone, not to mention all the other departments on the campus. Shaner stated that he felt as if he were at the "bottom of a big totem pole" (Shaner, Vol. VIII, pg. 35).

At about this time Ken Ferguson decided he needed to make a change within the year; so he decided to

invite Shaner to join him in the summer of 1963. Ferguson had asked Shaner to come and teach for a few weeks one summer and then for the whole summer the next year. He knew Shaner was familiar with the Bray--that he loved the place--and that he wanted to quit his job back east. Ferguson says

Boy, I knew I couldn't find anyone better. He really loved Montana, he had a good wife who'd support him and you know, won't say "Let's leave," and anything like that, and who will stick next to him. You know it's a pretty tough place to function. The people here really move in on you. You're over there giving them apple pie and coffee so much, and they really adopt you as their poor country cousin so to speak, or they adopt you as a friend, or potter, and you really don't have that much space (Holt, Ken Ferguson).

Shaner admits that it was not easy for him and his wife to decide to pack up and move to Montana. They were familiar with the Foundation and "appreciated" what Ferguson was doing; but they also knew how serious the financial situation was in the brickyard itself, and their salary would be low. Shaner said ". . . [W]e finally decided that was what we were going to do--if I was going to become a potter I'd better do it now" (Shaner, Vol. VIII, pg. 36).

When Shaner took over the total responsibilities of the resident potter from Ferguson, he was twenty-eight and felt that he had enough "energy to make the pots" and the "will to lose a few years to

pursue the goals of the foundation." This decision required a financial sacrifice on the Shaners' part, but Shaner felt that there were many rewards other than financial ones (Weiser et. al. Vol. VIII, pg. 51).

My salary was \$300. a month at the Foundation and the rent was \$125. in town, so it was pretty tight. When you sold pots the money went to the Foundation, you collected your salary, and everything was plowed back into keeping the whole operation going. I had received a Tiffany grant that summer so we put that money in the bank and when we ran out each month we would dip into it. That's how we survived the first year (Shaner, Vol. VIII, pg. 36).

Along with their personal financial problems, Shaner also had a great deal of stress trying to manage the finances of the Foundation. During the first two years of his residency, the Small Business Administration had the right to foreclose on both the pottery and the brickyard. He could never be sure when they might be locked out and all the equipment sold from under them (Senska 1982, pg.34).

The legal entanglements were frustrating, particularly in our dealings with the Small Business Administration which had assumed receivership when the brickyard went bankrupt. For five years the Bray Foundation lay in limbo, putting us in the position of being little more than squatters. Just when Senator Mansfield thought a deal to separate the Foundation from the brickyard would be possible, the bottom fell out. The government quickly put us on the public auction block--The physical property, including wheels and kilns all tagged to be sold to the highest bidder (Weiser et. al., Vol. VIII, pg. 51).

When the members of the Foundation found out that the auction they had been dreading was imminent, they organized under the leadership of Bernice Boone and sent out a plea for support to all the "friends" of the Bray.

A loyal family of former residents, former board members, former students and other friends had developed over the years. Some--like Sue Bovey and Joyce Mackay, who had originally been in the classes for legislators' wives--were financially and politically influential in the state. Others who were nationally prominent, like Mike Mansfield and Ray Dockstader, tried to persuade the Small Business Administration to let the pottery continue and to sell it separately from the brickyard, which was to be auctioned off. When Bernice Boone sent out a plea for support, all the friends of the Archie Bray were able to pledge enough money so that with the help of state businesses and private philanthropists recruited by Shaner, the people of the foundation were able to buy the pottery, including residences and warehouses. Once again the right person was on hand at a critical time (Senska 1982, pg. 34).

Bernice Boone recalled that about \$2,000. was pledged by the people she contacted by mail (Holt, "Bernice Boone"). This was not near what Shaner figured they needed to collect in order to keep the pottery operating. Mrs. George D. Anderson headed the drive to raise the funds to buy the facilities from the Small Business Administration. The sale price of \$16,500. was \$4,000. more than the foundation had raised. An anonymous "eleventh hour donor" pledged an

"extra large sum" at just the last moment, and the foundation received more than enough money to pay the government agency and drill a water well at the site (Great Falls Tribune 1965, pg. 5).

Besides the "eleventh hour donor," many hours were spent collecting money for the foundation. One historic event was an auction held in Helena at the Historical Museum. An exhibition of stoneware donated by sixteen former Archie Bray Foundation potters was auctioned off piece by piece. The collection contained ceramic works by Pete Voulkos, Rudy Autio, Maxine Blackmer, James and Nan McKinnell, Kenneth Ferguson, Fred Bauer, Patricia Warashina, Larry Elsner, Bill Sage, Donald Reitz, Harold Mantz, Frances Senska, Jo Reid, Peter Meloy, and Dave Shaner. There were five Montana artists who also contributed two-dimensional works: Robert DeWeese, Jesse Wilber, Branson Stevenson, Larry Hayes, and Mabel Bjork (Harper 1965, pg. 1).

An article titled "Potters Collect Pennies to Save Landmark" in the Missoulian on May 16, 1965, stated that the auction brought in more than \$2,000. The lengthy article described the nature and function of the Foundation and detailed the precarious position of the foundation. The article related that more money

was needed and donations could be sent directly to the Archie Bray Foundation (Beeder 1965, pg. 4).

Shaner describes the auction:

We succeeded in purchasing the buildings and contents through competitive bidding--and, by God, someone did bid against us! The money had to be paid in five days which we were fortunately able to do through generous donations by potters, students, and the local support from many fine people (Weiser et. al., Vol. VIII, pg. 51).

Even with all the financial pressure, Shaner continued the traditional workshops and developed a national reputation for his work. During 1964 and 1965 he received a purchase award from the St. Paul, Minnesota Art Center, and awards from the Henry Gallery in Seattle, the Oregon Ceramic Studio in Portland, and the Washington State Historical Museum, Olympia (Great Falls Tribune 1965, pg. 5).

Kurt Weiser, the current director of the Bray, gives Shaner credit for helping to shape the important position the Foundation holds in the history of ceramics by stating

It was David Shaner who received the first grant ever awarded to the craft by the National Endowment for the Arts. This enabled him to bring to the Foundation such potters as Val Cushing, Jun Kaneko, Chuck Hindes, Wayne Higby, Victor Babu, Mick Lamont and many others. Workshops were also arranged that brought Daniel Rhodes and Warren MacKenzie to the Foundation. In 1970, after seven energetic and immensely productive years, Shaner left to set up his

own pottery in Bigfork, Montana (Weiser et. al., Vol. VIII, pg. 48).

In summing up his experience at the Bray, Shaner said, "It was a hell of a lot of work--but the experience was as rich and the effect as long-lasting as anything I'd done before or since" (Shaner, Vol. VIII, pg. 36).

CHAPTER 7

DAVE AND JUDY CORNELL (1970-1976)

Dave and Judy Cornell both attended Alfred University in Alfred, New York. Both were working on Master of Fine Arts degrees with majors in ceramics--she minoring in sculpture, he in glassblowing. It was Dave's first trip east. Judy had never been west. They married in '68 and moved to Penland, North Carolina, where they were co-resident craftpersons at the Penland School of Craft (Metcalf 1976, pg. 43).

Dave and Judy had been working at Penland for about a year when Dave Shaner called and asked if they would be interested in taking over the management of the Foundation. Dave Cornell had worked at the Bray while he was a student at Montana State College, so he was familiar with Helena; but the move was not an easy decision for them. Since his work in Bozeman at the College, Dave had become seriously involved with glassblowing, and there was no studio space for that craft at the Bray. When the Board agreed to expand the facility to include a glassblowing studio, they accepted the offer (Holt, "Dave Cornell").

In an article in The Independent Record, Dave's drive to work with glass was described,

[Judy] shares her husband with a transparent mistress, for he is Dave, the glass-blower. But you can't watch him do his unique thing for a time yet because he waits on Uncle Sam for a grant to fireproof and ventilate his studio before he can build his furnace. To a

glass-blower such hopes are "pipedreams."
(Wynn 1970, pg. 22)

Cornell did build a glass studio with a grant from the Montana Arts Council; and while he waited for this project to finish, he spent the first year learning the "nuts and bolts" of running the Foundation. Ann Shaner stayed on for a while after the Cornells arrived and "answered any question he could come up with" about running the business (Holt, "Dave Cornell").

From their exciting experiences at Penland, the Archie Bray Foundation seemed too narrow an experience. Upon discovering that Archie Sr. had envisioned the Foundation to include many types of artistic media, Dave and Judy decided to expand the facility to accommodate other craft media. This decision also meant that the workload at the Bray would grow; so even though Cornell was "really the one asked to be director," they decided to divide up the responsibilities and be co-directors. Apparently the board had some problems allowing Judy to take over teaching the ceramic classes, making most of the pottery for sale, and making major decisions that affected the pottery. The wives of past directors had indeed been very important to the smooth running of the pottery, but the actual decisions were announced by the male director. Having been an equal to Dave at

Penland, this attitude was difficult, if not impossible, for Judy to understand. She stated that it was a stressful but growing period of time for her.

"One of the hardest parts of Montana for me was being accepted as an artist and a professional." As these adjustments were made, Dave and Judy slowly began to implement their vision of a broader art center (Holt, "Dave and Judy Cornell").

Some of the basics at the Bray have remained under Dave and Judy's guidance, and many major changes have been made. There is still an artist in residence program. According to Dave, "there are normally 8 potters and 3 glassblowers. We had 11 a year ago. They work here, rent studio space at minimal rent, and buy materials at cost. A residency lasts anywhere from six months to two years, a typical period is one year" (Metcalf 1970, pg. 43).

Under Dave and Judy, the residency program was defined so that there was a format to follow in applying. The prospective residents were required to submit slides of their work, a resume, letters of recommendation, and a statement of purpose. Using this format the new residents were chosen, "the idea being to have a varied group, not all doing the same type of work" (Holt, "Dave Cornell"). At this time there were many different kilns so one could do all the experimenting one wanted. "There were 3 electric, 2 gas, 2 salt, 1 wood fire, 1 primitive fire and 1 raku kiln" (Metcalf 1976, pg.43).

"One of Dave and Judy's innovations [was] to initiate summer sessions for advanced students with specific ceramic art disciplines" (Metcalf 1976, pg.43). "Summer classes brought an influx that speckled the grounds with bright tents" (Senska 1982, pg. 34). The summer sessions brought a mixed response from the Board and some problems with the facility. For example, the sewer system wasn't designed for large crowds and a much larger drain field had to be built. The two to three week programs were very intense. People were working night and day. By the end of the eleven week sessions, the residents were pretty well "burned-out" from the intense working and partying. Some of the local residents of Helena felt that their area was being taken over by all the advanced students. Taken as a whole, Judy felt that history would say that "the sessions added much more to the community than they took" (Holt, "Judy Cornell").

Another addition to the Bray by the Cornells was their holding six art exhibits yearly. They started the Christmas sale and shows that included many artists with mixed media. Along with the addition of glassblowing at the Bray, Dave set up a weaver and a woodworker. Another major change was altering the financial base of the Foundation by expanding the sales of supplies and equipment (Holt, "Dave Cornell").

When I asked Dave what a typical day at the Bray was like, he answered, "typically atypical." He feels his personal growth as an artist has been somewhat diminished because of the deluge of paperwork and human relations he faces daily. But he's the first to admit this is not all bad. "It's good in that I get to make my own mistakes. The Board of Directors has been very liberal in letting me run the Bray." Judy's work was gaining significant national recognition this year. She was selected to exhibit in 'One Hundred American Artists Commemorate the Bicentennial' co-sponsored by the Fairtree Gallery in New York City and the Xerox Corporation. She has also been selected by Scripps College in Claremont, California as one of the top five ceramic artists of the year (Metcalf 1976, pg. 43).

The Cornells were never satisfied with the status quo of the Foundation. Once they learned what Archie, Sr. had in mind, they too wanted to develop the old brickyard and turn it into a complete art center. They took several steps to try to acquire the brickyard, but the owners in Canada would not cooperate. They applied to the Montana Arts Council and received grants to develop a feasibility study, and a proposal was presented to the Board regarding the possibilities of developing the brickyard (Metcalf 1976, pg. 47). They never saw these plans materialize while they were the directors, but their plans became valuable documents for the next resident directors.

The Cornells planned to stay five years at the Bray. Dave said, "A place like this needs a change of leadership every so often. So in the back of our heads we're thinking of wrapping it up. We'll go somewhere else to

try something new, some new ideas. We're
overdue by a year" (Metcalf 1976, pg. 47).

CHAPTER 8

KURT WEISER AND CHRISTY LASATER (1976 to present)

"In the fall of 1976, Dave decided to set up his own workshop in Oregon, but stayed on until Spring to help Kurt and Christy Weiser get started operating the pottery" (Weiser et. al., Vol. VIII, pg. 48). When Kurt Weiser and his wife Christy Lasater, both former students of Ken Ferguson at the Kansas City Art Institute, took over the management of the foundation, they brought with them new and fresh ideas. Christy writes,

When we arrived in 1976, we felt the Bray needed a strong force of clay artists. At that time there was only one full-time artist, the local classes and two glass blowers (Lasater 1987, pg. 1).

The board has always had a policy to let the resident potter do things his own way and to support the director with advice when needed. So the Weisers were encouraged to change the style of the foundation as they saw fit. Under their leadership "The glass studio was taken out, the clay mixer moved, and six [ceramic] artists came from across the United States and one from Japan ready to work the summer of 1977. Now the Bray felt like a pottery" (Lasater 1987, pg. 1).

Kurt realized that the clay business was a very important part of the Foundation, but he also recognized that running it took too much time from his duties as director. Therefore, a position of materials manager was added; and Chip Clawson was hired to run the clay business. Having this position filled freed Kurt and Christy of that responsibility so they could concentrate on running the pottery with enough time to make their own pots. Along with these changes, some new kilns were built and "they have added a heat exchanger and duct system to take heat from the kilns to warm some of the studio spaces--a sign of the times" (Senska 1982, pg.34). This system of management seems to be working well. So well, that the Foundation is now closer than ever to fulfilling the dream of both Archie Bray, Sr., and the Cornells--expanding to become a cultural center.

In 1985, twenty-one years after the bankruptcy, the Foundation was able to buy back the brickyard. Bill Porter and Ray Dockstader, members of the Board of Trustees, described it as a "dream come true." They considered the acquisition of the brickyard their "ticket to the future," with progress only revolving around money (Montana Gallery 1986).

Now money is not the problem it used to be. Chip Clawson has made the clay business very profitable.

The sales of materials provide one third of the operating capital, sales from the gift shop, tuition from the community classes, and an occasional grant provide the rest. At this time yearly sales from the materials business run between \$120,000 to \$130,000 per year (Montana Gallery 1986).

In the . . . years that Christie and I have been here we've been fortunate to have attracted a fine group of potters who have put an immense amount of time and energy into the place; building kilns, unloading railroad cars full of clay, clearing brush, making clay, and most importantly, making good pots (Weiser et. al., Vol. VIII, pg. 48).

Now with the increased space the Foundation is going to be able to provide room for six more full-time residents. The expansion plan now has the new studio space in the building that used to hold the clay business, and the latter has moved into one of the huge warehouses that was once part of the brickyard. There are plans for a building to house the permanent collection of pottery produced at the Foundation, and more plans, in the early stages, for music, dance, and other fine arts, such as painting studios. Already a saxophone artist has been playing inside the empty beehive kilns to groups of twenty to thirty people. The "sound is incredible" (Montana Gallery 1986).

During the first summer Kurt and Christy opened the new facilities, three resident artists made

sculptures using the materials left piled around the grounds by the Western Clay Company.

Kathryn Holt, one of the three, wrote a paper describing the work she, Robert Harrison, and David Vertacnik did during the summer of 1985. She described sculptures that refer back to the origin of the materials they used, making a link between the Foundation, the brickyard, and the landscape surrounding Helena (Holt 1985 pgs. 1-2).

Akio Takamori, another resident potter, has come and gone three separate times. He said that the Bray has provided a facility for him to work at while he decides what he wants to do (Montana Gallery 1986).

Christy Lasater commented on the atmosphere at the Bray in 1987.

At the Bray, Kurt works seven days a week and then some, one will never find the studios not in use. The studios are open 24 hours a day. The energy level at the Bray is always on.

Christy went on to say that they have worked with many clay artists since their first summer in 1977.

Including Kurt and Christy, there are twelve clay artists presently working at the Bray. The artists are working with the clay according to their own personal style. There is interaction between the artists discussing such things as the firing process, clay

bodies, and glaze materials; and they often coordinate the use of kilns.

An important attitude that one tends to find in the residents is one of dedication to working in clay no matter what the personal sacrifices may include.

Christy comments,

The Bray is a center for artists that do not want to work alone, but whom want to concentrate and dedicate most of their time and energy in working in clay no matter what it takes. The artists balance jobs downtown, teaching classes, running families, and running their studio at the Bray (Lasater 1987, pg. 2).

Lasater expressed an attitude about the Bray that closely paralleled one shared by Ken Ferguson. She agreed that the Bray is neither a college nor school, but a place where artists can concentrate on their treatment of clay, yet have the benefit of sharing ideas with others. "The Bray is where an artist can work out the imperfections and seek information needed to become the artist he or she is and then move on" (Lasater 1987 pg. 2).

Kurt goes on to say that the Foundation continues the tradition of providing work space for residents while supporting itself from the clay business and the gallery. Classes are still offered during the traditional school year, and the summer months "are left flexible for short-term workshops conducted by

visiting potters from around the country" (Weiser et.al., Vol. VIII, pg. 49).

In the ten years that Kurt and Christy have been working at the Bray, they have won various awards and been in many regional and national shows. The clay artists they have worked with have also "gone on to teach, set up studios, and many have received National Endowment Grants" (Lasater 1987, pg. 1). In 1981, Governor Ted Schwinden was asked to present the awards for the "Northern Rockies Clay 1981" show in Kalispell. Upon presenting the two top prizes to Kurt Weiser and Dave Shaner, he referred to them as the "Archie Bray mafia." Earlier in the year, the governor's annual award for the visual arts had been presented to Rudy Autio and the award for outstanding institution in the arts had gone to the Archie Bray Foundation (Senska 1982, pg. 34).

Kurt Weiser concluded, "I imagine that it would be somewhat of an understatement to say that a lot of good people have worked here. It's been the spirit and enthusiasm of these people that have kept it alive and made it more than just another place to make pottery" (Weiser et. al., Vol. VIII, pg. 49).

CONCLUSION

The Archie Bray Foundation has become a center of excellence in the world of ceramic art. It began with the dream of Archie Bray, Sr. to "provide a nice place to work" for ceramic artists. His dream has expanded far beyond the boundaries of a brickyard in a small mountain community to reach potters not only in the state of Montana, but from around the world. The once tiny pottery in the line shack of the brickyard has grown in both size and influence. The Foundation has become the "Center of the Universe" in clay.

This stature was not earned overnight. The growth and importance is due largely to the artists and members who have been dedicated, determined, and willing to sacrifice personal gain for the sake of the Foundation. Committed artists, like Pete Voulkos and Rudy Autio, were willing to risk their futures on Bray's dream; local townspeople, like Bernice Boone and Virginia Walton, were willing to give their time and money to also insure the success of the Foundation.

Voulkos and Autio, fresh from college and full of enthusiasm and ambition, needed a place to do their art work. Mr. Bray provided that place. These men used the Foundation just as Archie Bray, Sr. had envisioned.

As they became more experienced and their reputations as artists grew, they moved on and made room for others to have a chance for artistic experimentation and growth at the Foundation. This pattern has continued throughout the history of the Bray.

An important factor in the historical significance of the Bray is the way in which the residents have consistently continued to mature artistically and become mentors to aspiring potters. This pattern has given the Foundation credibility, created growth and change, and spread the reputation far and wide. One can not help but see the legacy which seems to follow one resident potter after another. The phenomenon is bigger than all of us. Christy Lasater sums it up by saying, "Good pots have always been made at the Bray Foundation since 1951. Quality work will always be made here, for 'the Bray is a fine place to work'" (Lasater 1987, pg. 2).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Autio, R. "Eleven Montana Potters." Studio Potter 8:1.
- Beeder, J. 1965. "Potters Collect Pennies to Save Landmark." The Missoulian May 16.
- Boone, B. 1960, "The Archie Bray Foundation and The Pottery." Quarterly of the Montana Institute of the Arts December 3.
- _____. 1987, Personal letter to the author. March 2.
- Callahan, M. 1954. "The Comeback of the Potter." The Seattle Times April 11.
- Great Falls Tribune. 1982. "Examples of Marguerite Wildenhain's Work." April 18.
- _____. 1966. "Anonymous Donor Saves Archie Bray Foundation." April 22.
- Harper, G. 1965. "Foundation Fighting for Survival." The Independent Record February 14.
- Harper, Mrs. G. 1965. "Archie Bray Foundation Fighting for Survival." The Independent Record February 14.
- Henry, O. 1963. "Famed Woman Potter Has One-Day Workshop Here." The Independent Record June 9.
- Holt, K. 1985. Personal Journal given to Kurt Weiser.
- Holt, M. 1977-1979. Taped conversations with the people directly involved with the development of the Archie Bray Foundation.
- The Independent Record. 1952. "Bray Foundation Work Explained At Rotary Club." June 26.
- _____. 1952. "Marina Svetlova 'Tosses a Pot' At Bray Foundation as Do Other Members of Ballet Cast." April 20.
- _____. 1964. "Helena Potter Has Exhibit In New York City Museum." June 16.

- Lasater, C. 1987, "Comments on the Bray." Personal letter to the author. March 11.
- Laurel Outlook. 1964. "Champagne feast opened pottery where famous potters worked." August 5.
- Lindley, V. 1951. "The Archie Bray Foundation." The Arts of Montana 1977.
- Metcalf, J. 1976. "Today At The Bray." Montana Arts 28:2.
- Montana Gallery. 1986. Montana Public Radio station tape of Kurt and Christy Weiser.
- Senska, F. 1982. "Pottery In A Brickyard." American Craft Feb-Mar.
- Shaner, D. "David Shaner Montana Conversation." Studio Potter August 1.
- Weiser, K. and C. "Eleven Montana Potters." Studio Potter 8:1.
- Weiser, K., Autio, R., McKinnell, J. and N., Ferguson, K., and D. Shaner. "The Archie Bray Foundation." Studio Potter 8:1.
- Wynn, L. 1970. "Potters Draw Craftsmen." The Independent Record June 14.

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES



3 1762 10080980 3

ACCOPRESS®

25070	YELLOW
25071	BLACK
25072	LIGHT BLUE
25073	DARK BLUE
25074	LIGHT GRAY
25075	LIGHT GREEN
25076	DARK GREEN
25077	TANGERINE
25078	RED
25079	EXECUTIVE RED

WITH WATER RESISTANT

PRESSTEX®

COVERS



ACCO INTERNATIONAL INC
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60649

