

The Bandera PROPHEET

January 26, 2021

Today in Texas history
First piece of McDade pottery produced

By Bandera Spirits of Texas

On Jan. 26, 1893, Robert L. Williams produced the first piece of ware in the new McDade Pottery plant. The plant was the successor to a "jug shop" begun in 1853 in the vicinity of what is now Bastrop State Park. It was moved to McDade in the late 1870s, and Williams, who was experienced in ceramic processes and recognized the potential for McDade clay, bought the business in 1890. He built a new plant that covered three acres, complete with two brick beehive kilns, clay-grinding equipment, and a railroad siding.

He continued the potter's-wheel turning of specialty items and the production of food-storage vessels and housewares, but also added new products. Williams invented an extrusion press with assorted sizes of dies for the rapid production of flowerpots and other hollowware.

The pottery business sold to nurseries and florists throughout Texas and also in Louisiana, Arkansas and Oklahoma. In the beginning Williams had to accept produce in barter for the ceramics, and he began the McDade Mercantile Company to provide a market for bartered goods and to serve the McDade townspeople.

The advent of electric and gas-flame heating and of cast-plastic substitutes for heavy ceramics reduced the demand for pottery products. The greatest blow to the business was the loss of the aggressive management of Williams, who died in 1923. The business was continued on a reduced scale by his son, Albert Payne Williams Sr., until World War II.