

William Seaborn Becham
Boy Potter

Good morning. William Seaborn Becham is my gg-grandfather. Sebe as he was known was born in Crawford County in February 1853, the eldest child of John and Caroline Johnson Becham. During the spring and summer months, the family generally survived by farming but during the winter months they supplemented their income with pottery. Though considered an art form today, pottery was mostly utilitarian in the 1800's and served purposes like storage for food items, pitchers for milk & syrup and that kind of thing. By the time Sebe was born, pottery had been a part of the Becham family for many generations, children learning the trade from their parents & helping out at very early ages. The Becham extended family included the usual aunts, uncles, etc. and they all lived in close proximity in the Sandy Point area of Crawford County. Families that intermarried with the Bechams and whose names you might recognize include Marshall, Merritt, Walton and Pyles.

By 1861 when our country was torn by the War Between the States, Sebe had been joined by four siblings; 1 brother and 3 sisters. On May 3, 1862, his father John Becham along with John's three brothers, William, Wash and Jackson joined the Confederate Army signing up in Knoxville with Co. F, 57th Regiment GA Infantry, commonly called 'Braggs Rifles'. John would serve throughout the war, surrendering with his company in Greensboro, NC on Apr. 26, 1865. There would be few if any furloughs home and there would be no more children born to John & Caroline until after the War. Sebe, at 8 years old was man of the house.

One of John's brothers, George Washington 'Wash' Becham, was rejected by the Confederate army for medical reasons and by 1863 he was back at home in Knoxville. His service records state he had a 'rupture', what we today refer to as a hernia. However, Wash did not give up! He reapplied to the Confederate government and was rewarded with a contract to produce pottery for Confederate hospitals, his rank officially listed as "Private". He would use his talents to support his country to the best

of his ability. Of course, Wash still has this rupture problem, so he would need help making the pottery. His nephew, Sebe Becham, now 10 years of age would be that help. Can't you just picture this 10 year old helping his uncle dig the clay nearby and haul it back to the potting area. A mule would have been used to turn the mill to knead the clay, and clean impurities from it. Sebe would have helped with all this, likely leading that old mule around in a circle for hours on end. Wash & Sebe made pottery for Confederate hospitals and camps. Some of the vessels made for this purpose were bedpans, jugs, cups for drinking, spittoons, and larger containers that would have been kept in each ward to hold quantities of fresh water.

After the war, Seaborn continued to live on his parent's farm until his marriage on March 21, 1876 in Crawford County to Mary Elizabeth Harrell. She was the daughter of William Manny Harrell and his wife Julia Dickson Harrell. They attended church at Dixon Methodist on Sandy Point Rd., Molly's grandfather Benjamin Dickson being one of the founders of that church. Sebe and Molly lived on Sandy Point Road in Crawford County and Sebe had a pottery business behind their home, continuing to make pottery the rest of his life. One of his descendents has a little child size pitcher he made for his youngest daughter about 1905. He and Mary had eight children, seven of whom survived to adulthood. He died at his home on Jan. 17, 1918 at 64 years old and was buried at Old Bethel Church Cemetery where many of his family rest.

The detailed account of the beginning of Sebe's pottery career may have remained hidden and forgotten by time except that when his uncle, Wash Becham, made his second application for a Confederate pension, Sebe signed an affidavit to support his uncle's contribution to the Confederacy. His exact words were 'I know that he served....I was his assistant'.

I am very proud to claim William Seaborn Becham as my ancestor and thrilled that this year he is being inducted into the pottery hall of fame at this Festival. Thank you so much to everyone who had a part in making that happen. (prepared by Cheryl Aultman 2011)