

PRESS KIT

Returning What Was Stolen

DAVE THE POTTER LEGACY TRUST

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Who Is David Drake?

David Drake — known as Dave the Potter — was an enslaved man who worked in the alkaline-glazed stoneware potteries of Edgefield, South Carolina in the early-to-mid 19th century. A master craftsman, he produced massive clay vessels, some holding up to 40 gallons, used primarily for food storage.

What made Drake extraordinary was not just his skill — it was his defiance. He signed his pots with his name, "Dave," and inscribed many of them with rhyming couplets. Literacy was illegal for enslaved people. Dave committed this act over and over, hundreds of times, leaving a record of his humanity in clay.

Inscriptions include:

"I wonder where is all my relation / Friendship to all — and every nation"

"Dave belongs to Mr. Miles / wher the oven bakes & the pot biles"

Drake likely died in the 1870s as a free man. He left behind hundreds of surviving works now held by museums and private collectors across the United States. His descendants received nothing — until October 2025.

The Landmark Restitution

On October 29, 2025, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston announced a historic agreement with the known descendants of David Drake: the museum restored ownership of two of Drake's 1857 stoneware vessels — the "Poem Jar" and the "Signed Jar" — to his family.

This was the first time in U.S. history that an art institution applied ethical restitution principles to artwork created by an enslaved American.

Following the official transfer:

- The family sold "Poem Jar" back to the MFA so it could remain on public display
- The family retained ownership of "Signed Jar" and loaned it to the MFA under a long-term agreement
- The jars now bear a "certificate of ethical ownership"

"Our great-great-great-grandfather never got to own one single piece of his own pottery or to pass them on to his children and grandchildren. Today the museum does all it can to right that wrong."

— Pauline Baker

The Dave the Potter Legacy Trust

The Dave the Potter Legacy Trust LLC was established by David Drake's known descendants to:

- Advocate for the return of Drake's work from institutions that hold it
- Establish a legal and moral framework for ethical restitution of art created by enslaved Americans
- Preserve and amplify David Drake's story for future generations
- Unite known and unknown descendants under a common mission

The Trust is governed by five of Drake's oldest living heirs. Approximately 15 family members are currently involved, with outreach ongoing to identify additional descendants.

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Leadership Bios

Yaba Baker — President

Yaba Baker is a fourth-generation great-grandson of David Drake. An independent children's entertainment creator, author, and advocate based in Washington, DC, Yaba has led the public communications strategy for the Legacy Trust and has been a primary spokesperson in national and international media coverage.

A children's book author and founder of Just Like Me World — an entertainment brand focused on representation for Black and Brown children — Yaba brings a storyteller's instinct to the work of cultural justice. His mother, Pauline Baker (Drake's great-great-great-granddaughter), has been one of the Trust's most prominent family voices.

Media coverage includes: Associated Press, CNN, Smithsonian Magazine, Boston Globe, NPR, Washington Post, and others.

Follow Yaba and the family: @davethepotterfamily on Facebook, Instagram & TikTok

George C. Fatheree III — Legal Counsel

George C. Fatheree III is a Harvard-educated social impact attorney, entrepreneur, and founder of ORO Impact. He is best known for negotiating the landmark return of Bruce's Beach — the first time in U.S. history that land seized through racially motivated eminent domain was restored to a Black family, resulting in a \$20 million resolution in 2022.

As legal counsel to the Legacy Trust, Fatheree led negotiations with the MFA Boston and structured the restitution framework now being described by legal scholars as a potential model for the field.

Key Facts for Journalists

- David Drake created hundreds of signed stoneware vessels in Edgefield, SC — an act illegal under slavery laws of the time
- His descendants include Pauline Baker, Daisy Whitner, John Williams, and Priscilla Williams Carolina, among approximately 15 known family members currently involved in the Trust
- Family advocacy began in earnest after the 2022 “Hear Me Now” exhibition at MFA Boston and the Metropolitan Museum of Art
- The MFA Boston restitution (October 2025) is the first instance of ethical restitution for art made by an enslaved American
- The family is now engaging with additional institutions holding Drake's work
- Attorney George Fatheree came to this case fresh from his historic Bruce's Beach victory
- Dave Day — an annual celebration of Drake's legacy — was first held in Edgefield, SC in 2016, drawing nearly 30 descendants

Institutions Currently Holding Work by David Drake (partial list)

- Metropolitan Museum of Art — New York, NY
- Smithsonian American Art Museum — Washington, DC
- Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts — Winston-Salem, NC

SOCIAL MEDIA

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Media Contact & Approved Quotes

Media Contact

Dave the Potter Legacy Trust
press@davethepotter.org

President: Yaba Baker (available for interviews)

Legal Counsel: George C. Fatheree III (available for background briefings)

Social: @davethepotterfamily on Facebook, Instagram & TikTok

Approved Quotes for Publication

“He was denied the right to own what he made. When museums continue to hold his work without the family's consent, they extend the injury into the present.”

— Yaba Baker

“I don't think there's ever been an instance when a museum has applied principles of ethical restitution to artwork created by enslaved Americans — until now.”

— George C. Fatheree III

“I was telling the kids, inside this jar, I'm sure I'm feeling his tears, sweat drops off his face, his arms.”

— Daisy Whitner, 86, descendant of David Drake

“Our great-great-great-grandfather never got to own one single piece of his own pottery. Today the museum does all it can to right that wrong.”

— Pauline Baker

NOTE FOR EDITORS

High-resolution photography available upon request. Contact press@davethepotter.org.

*“The question is simple:
Is slavery wrong?
If yes, then it is time
to return these jars.”*

— Yaba Baker, President, Dave the Potter Legacy Trust

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