

## VMHC Public Catalog Record, one record per page



**Object Number:** 2003.317.1

**Title:** Pottery, Small Yellow-Red Clay Figure of a Human Skull

**Date:** 19th C.

**Description:** Small, yellow-red, clay figure of a human skull, molded over an internal wire core, and marked with inscriptions. Given by Christopher Fennell, who included with his donation an article and a dissertation discussing the significance of this artifact as recorded in the excavation report. This small figure of a human skull, made from local clay in Loudoun County, was found during excavation of an early 1800s house where a farm family of English and German ancestry owned enslaved African Americans. The skull was found six inches underground, beneath the floorboards of the small house, about midway between the two doorway entrances. On the upper back of the skull are raised crossed lines forming an X. The initials R, M (or perhaps H), S, and D appear in raised clay between the arms of the X. The skull with its raised inscription was sculpted as a single form; then the clay was fired at a low temperature. A variety of explanations for this object have been considered, but the most persuasive is that it was part of a malevolent curse derived from either an African American or German American folk tradition. Such objects, which were usually created and deployed in secret, have rarely been uncovered.

**Dimensions:** Depth: 0.375 in, Length: 0.375 in, Width: 0.625 in

**Credit Line:** Gift of Christopher C. Fennell