I made this jar

Verses by Dave — an enslaved African American potter in South Carolina — inscribed on his ceramic vessels, 1830s-early 1860s

Born around 1800 in South Carolina, the enslaved man named Dave produced ceramic vessels in the pottery factories of several slave-owning families in Edgefield County, South Carolina, from his early teens until emancipation, after which he took the last name Drake and lived until ca. 1870. The verses below, on twenty-seven pots, comprise all the known verses composed by Dave and inscribed on his vessels.

Put every bit all between
surely this jar will hold 14

12 July 1834

Horses, mules and hogs-
all our cows is in the bogs-
there they shall ever stay
till the buzzards take them away

29 March 1836

A better thing I never saw
When I shot off the lions jaw

9 November 1836

Ladys & gentlemens shoes
Sell all you can & nothing you’ll loose

29 January 1840

Give me silver or; either gold
though they are dangerous; to our soul

27 July 1840

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

31 July 1840

Another trick is worst than this
Dearest Miss, spare me a kiss

26 August 1840

I wonder where is all my relations
Friendship to all - and every nation

16 August 1857

I made this jar for cash
thought its called lucre trash

22 August 1857
A pretty little girl on a virge
volc[a]nic mountain, how they burge

24 August 1857

I saw a leppard & a lions face
than I felt the need of – grace

3 November 1858

Making this jar: I had all thoughts
Lads & gentlemen: never out walks

30 January 1858

When Noble Dr. Landrum is dead
May Guardian angels visit his bed

14 April 1859

If you don’t listen at the bible
you will be lost

25 March 1859

Hive is eighteen; hundred + fifty nine
unto you all I fill in — cline

18 April 1859

I made this for our Sott
it will never – never – rott

31 March 1858

Good for lard or holding fresh meats
blest we were, when Peter saw the folded sheets

3 May 1859

This noble jar will hold 20
fill it with silver then you’ll have plenty

8 April 1858

Made at Stoney Bluff
for making lard enuff

13 May 1859

A very large jar which has four handles
pack it full of fresh meat - then light candles

12 April 1858

Great & noble jar
hold sheep goat and bear

13 May 1859

When you fill this jar with pork or beef
Scot will be there to get a peace

on the other side reads a dedication:
This jar is to Mr. Seglir
who keeps the bar in orangeburg
for Mr. Edwards a gentle man
who formerly kept Mr Thos bacons horses

21 April, 1858

The sun, moon and – stars
in the west are plenty of – bears

29 July 1858

The forth of July is surely come
to blow the fife = and beat the drum

4 July 1859

I saw a leopard & a lions face
then I felt, the need of grace

7 August 1860

A noble jar for pork or beef
then carry it a round to the indian chief

9 November 1860

I – made this Jar all of cross
If you don’t repent, you will be lost

3 May 1862