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TEAPOT, BY SAUNDERS PITMAN, PROVIDENCE, R. I., 1732-1804

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

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VOL. XXXIII JULY, 1940 No. 3

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Rhode Island Silversmiths

DOROTHY NEEDHAM CASEY

Rhode Island, although territorially the smallest state in the Union, has been one of the largest in its contribution to the development of this country. According to history this state was one of the first in colonization and one of the most persistent in its struggles as an English Colony. Later, determined to establish independence, it declared its freedom two months prior to the other colonies. Active in the conflict was General Nathanael Greene, second to none but General Washington and one whom we proudly claim as a native son. In cultural activities, Rhode Island ranked among the foremost, but in no field better than in that of art. Gilbert Stuart, a native of our state, is acknowledged one of the greatest of the American portrait painters, while Edward Greene Malbone, also a Rhode Islander, gained fame as a miniature artist.

Not only in the fine arts are we able to claim distinction, but in the applied arts as well. John Goddard, the famous cabinetmaker of Newport, is the craftsman whom every furniture connoisseur wishes to name as the maker of his

secretary or chest of drawers. The Newport School of cabinetmakers including, besides Goddard, Job Townsend, the father-in-law of Goddard, and John Townsend, together with other members of these families, have earned for themselves meritable reputations.

The silversmiths of Newport were outstanding in their craft and were the veritable founders of the great jewelry and silver industries which have been developed to such an extent in Providence during the last century and a half. Unfortunately the wealth of Newport was somewhat dispersed when the British seized the city and occupied it for about three years during the American Revolution. Some of the Yankees retreated to Providence, while others fled to neighboring states. With the exodus of the Newport patriots, opportunities arose for the founding of industries in Providence, where some of them settled.

The English Colonies encouraged trade with the West Indies, and as a consequence, much Spanish coin was brought to New England. With no banks to insure the security of their money, many people, fearful of having it stolen, took the coins to silversmiths and had them made into pieces of hollowware. These pieces could, of course, be much more easily identified than coins and flatware, and thus loss by theft was less likely.

Some of our early silver was presented to churches for use in communion services, and as a result, many of our Rhode Island churches are extremely rich in this early craft.

While many pieces have been carefully preserved as family heirlooms, teaset and other matching pieces have been unfortunately separated for distribution among heirs. This mistake has often been made, and much interest as well as monetary value has been lost because of a reluctance to give up what one had a legal right to claim.

Those who wished to be fashionable in the style of their silver had their old pieces melted and remodeled in the fashion of the day by contemporary silversmiths. In some instances the original pieces were not completely destroyed,

but were converted from tankards to water pitchers or coffeepots by the addition of lips. Each period sponsored a style of its own and while all do not equal in beauty, it is far better to accept the styles as they are than to interrupt the development of the pieces with alterations.

Rhode Island was most fortunate to have outstanding silversmiths in both Newport and Kingston during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. With more wealth in Newport during this period than in New York, the early craftsmen prospered, and fortunately many of their examples have survived to our day.

Arnold Collins was one of the most noteworthy of the early Rhode Island silversmiths and in 1690, made the seal, "Anchor and Hope," for the state emblem. A fine example



TANKARD, BY ARNOLD COLLINS, NEWPORT, R. I.,
WORKED 1690—DIED 1735
Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

of his work is a flat-topped tankard with a body tapering toward the base. Near the molding at the base is a band of inverted heart-shaped devices in cut-card work. This type of decoration more closely resembles that made in New York. Inserted in the lid is a French écu bearing a portrait of Louis XV, King of France and Navarre. The tip for the hollow, S-shaped handle is decorated with a crest and the Latin and Gaelic inscriptions, *Through difficulty*. The maker's mark, the only guarantee that the silver was of good quality, was formed of Collins' initials, AC, within a rectangle. In England, it has been obligatory for centuries to impress silver with a government assay, date letter and city mark. By these marks, the owners have been assured of sterling quality. Frequently the silversmiths added their own initials. Here, in America, there was no legal standard and although the silver preserved to us presents an appearance of high quality, it may vary somewhat. However, analyses have proved that our early silversmiths must have been men of integrity.

Probably the leading early Rhode Island silversmiths was another Newport craftsman, Samuel Vernon. He was born there in 1683 the son of Daniel and Ann (Dyer) Vernon and the great-grandson of Ann Hutchinson. She and her husband, William, migrated to Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1634. With others of her belief, she was banished from the colony and settled in Rhode Island in 1638. Later she was massacred in New York by the Indians. Her greatness was undoubtedly perpetuated in the success of several of her descendants who became silversmiths. Among them were possibly the greatest American silversmiths, Edward Winslow of Boston, and John Coddington of Newport, as well as Samuel Vernon.

Perhaps the work of Vernon is the most eagerly sought Rhode Island silver, and many fine examples of his hollow-ware prove his skill in this field. The pieces vary from tankards, beakers, patens and porringers to interesting flat-ware. A fork with two tines and bearing his mark is a great

rarity which has recently been purchased by the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design.

Vernon was also well-known for his assistance in helping to decide the boundary line between Massachusetts and New Hampshire in 1737. He belonged to a family skilled in designing and making silver, Edward Winslow being his



PORRINGER AND SPOON, BY SAMUEL VERNON,
NEWPORT, R. I., 1683-1737

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

second cousin. The mark of the latter bears the fleur-de-lis as does that of Vernon. SV, with this floral motif, appears sometimes within a rectangle, but more frequently within a heart-shaped device.

John Coddington, whose family records appeared in England in 1200, was born in Newport in 1690, the son of Nathaniel and Susanna (Hutchinson) Coddington. Not only was he, also, the great-grandson of Ann Hutchinson, but was the grandson of William Coddington, the first governor of the Colony of Rhode Island. With such an ancestry, it is not unnatural that he left a fine record as a statesman and silversmith. As a Member of the House of Deputies seven times between the years 1721 and 1729, a Clerk of the Assembly in 1723, 1727 and 1728, a Protho-



CUP, BY JOHN CODDINGTON, NEWPORT, R. I., 1690-1743
Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

notary, or chief notary, in 1727 and three times a Sheriff between 1733 and 1735, we wonder that he had any time to devote to his craft. In 1726 he was also a Colonel of the Militia.

Many pieces of his silver have been preserved to us and in the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, there are two fine pieces of hollowware, one a tankard with stepped and domed lid, and the other a cup with the lower section of the jug-shaped body embellished with gadrooning. The handle is of the S-shaped strap type. The maker's mark, IC within an emblem resembling a fruit, is impressed on both of these pieces. Coddington died in 1743 at fifty-three years of age.

Very few Providence silversmiths worked here in the middle of the eighteenth century. A craftsman about whose life very little is known was Joshua Doane, who died in 1753. A fine tankard by him of the plain type with the body flaring toward the base and interrupted by a mid-band may be seen in the Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Yale University. It has the stepped and domed lid surmounted by a finial, while the S-shaped handle terminates in a mask tip.

It is most interesting to know that not only did our American silversmiths work in silver, but occasionally in gold. Jonathan Clarke, who worked in Newport in 1734, made a small gold buckle for use on a suspender. Although so small as to be scarcely adequate to bear the maker's mark, IC within a rectangle, it is legibly impressed twice with the mark on the back. It is the property of Mr. Joseph Cushing of Providence and was lent by him to the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design for its Rhode Island Art Treasures Exhibition held during the past winter. Marked gold is very rare, and we seldom see these unusual pieces.

Another silversmith of whom little is known worked in Newport during the middle of the eighteenth century. He was Daniel Russell. Whenever his name is mentioned, the beautiful baptismal bowl made by him for Trinity Church

in Newport is immediately recalled. It was bequeathed by Nathaniel Kay, collector of royal customs in the town, and who made similar bequests to other Episcopal churches throughout the state in 1734. His great interest in the Episcopal Church was made evident when he, together with several others, presented a petition to Queen Anne in 1713 requesting that a bishop be appointed over the Church of England in the Colonies.

Another outstanding Newport craftsman who was born in 1723 in Sandwich, Massachusetts, was Jonathan Otis.



TWO CASTERS, BY JONATHAN OTIS,
NEWPORT, R. I., MIDDLETOWN, CONN., 1723-1791

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

At the time of the British occupation of Newport, he fled to Middletown, Connecticut, where he worked until his death in 1791. Casters, which were used for sprinkling sugar on to muffins, were frequently made by him. They were of the style known as the vase-shaped type and reflect the influence of the classic revival which was evident in all of our arts and crafts during the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Samuel Casey, son of Samuel and Dorcas (Ellis) Casey, was born probably in Newport about 1724. His grandfather, Thomas Casey, settled here about 1658. The parents of the silversmith lived in Newport for some time, later moved to North Kingstown and then to Exeter between 1740 and 1742. It was here that Casey was admitted as a freemen in 1745. In Exeter, he established himself as



ONE OF A PAIR OF CUPS, BY SAMUEL CASEY,
SOUTH KINGSTOWN, R. I.,
c. 1724-c. 1773

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

a silversmith, and a few years later, at Curtis Corners joined in partnership with his brother, Gideon. In 1763, when the latter moved to Warwick, he sold his interest in the property to Samuel. One year later, his house, together with its furnishings, burned causing a loss of approximately five thousand pounds.

After this disaster, Samuel moved to the Helme House in Little Rest, now known as Kingston, where he continued to work for nearly six years. It was here that he began his counterfeiting of Spanish coins. After being convicted of this crime and sentenced to hang, he was freed from prison by a number of friends who broke into the jail and released him. Despite the efforts of the authorities to locate him, he was never seen after his escape, although it is believed that several residents of Little Rest were quite aware of his whereabouts.

Casey was probably the greatest Rhode Island silversmith of that period. Great variety is found in his hollowware — porringers, casters, cups, creamers and teapots. An outstanding piece, historically, is a tankard made by him for presentation to Ezra Stiles when he resigned his Tutorship at Yale College in 1755. Two beautifully wrought pieces, still in Rhode Island, are pear-shaped teapots. One was made for Abigail Robinson, whose initials and arms appear on the side in elaborate engraving. It is the property of Mrs. Everitte St. John Chaffee of Providence. A similar piece is owned by the Newport Historical Society.

Gideon Casey, the brother of Samuel, never attained such fame. Although in partnership with his brother for a decade, scarcely any examples of Gideon's work can be found. Two spoons with the shell and drop on the back of the bowl are included in the famous Mabel Brady Garvan Collection. These bear the maker's mark, G: CASEY within a rectangle, on the back of the handle.

John Hancock, possessing the same name as the great American statesman, was born in Charlestown, Massachusetts, in 1732, the son of John and Susanna (Chickering)

Hancock. He finally came to Providence and in 1760 was married to Martha Sparhawk. Little more information than this can be found relating to him, except the fine remaining examples of his work. A beautiful tankard with mid-band and flame finial is in the Clearwater Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was wrought by him from silver coin for Benjamin Wyman of Woburn, Massachusetts.

Henry Pitman settled in Nassau, New Providence, one of the Bahama Islands, about 1666. His son, John, married Mary Saunders and after the burning of the town by French and Spaniards in July 1703, moved to Newport in 1710. So much misfortune resulted in the early deaths of this couple in 1711. These were the ancestors of Saunders Pitman, a Providence silversmith. He worked in a three story house on the west side of North Main Street. In a quotation from *Mechanics Festival and Historic Sketches — Providence 1860*, we read, "Industrious in his business,



CREAMER, BY SAUNDERS PITMAN,
PROVIDENCE, R. I., 1732-1804

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

punctual in his dealings, and exemplary in his morals, he uniformly sustained, through life, a fair and unimpeached character."

He was a very prolific craftsman, and many pieces still exist as evidence of his excellent work. One of the most interesting and unique pieces is a large water pitcher with bulbous body and hawk's beak lip. It is the property of the Estate of Nathaniel Herreshoff of Bristol. His teapots, creamers and flatware were very popular in the vicinity of Providence.

Two boat-shaped sauce boats, each with three hoof feet and long lip, are beautifully wrought pieces by Thomas Arnold of Newport. He was born in 1739 and died in 1828. These fine pieces are the property of Mr. William Davis Miller of Wakefield.

Another interesting piece by Arnold is a saucepan with a wooden handle at right angles to the lip. It is on exhibition in the Mabel Brady Garvan Collection. Pear-shaped creamers, mounted on cabriole legs, introducing the curves of the rococo style, and flatware may also be found bearing his mark, sometimes impressed with his initials, and occasionally with surname in full.

Joseph Perkins, son of Edward and Elizabeth (Brenton) Perkins, was born in South Kingstown in 1749. Governor William Brenton was his great-grandfather. Perkins' occupations were quite varied as he was a merchant, gunsmith and silversmith of Little Rest. In addition to these duties he served for one year in 1781 with the Kingston Reds, an independent company of the militia. He died in 1789 in the fortieth year of his age. Since he was interested chiefly in mercantile pursuits, we find his work as a silversmith was retarded. This is evidenced by a failure to find a greater variety and number of pieces, his silverware being comprised principally of flatware such as buckles and spoons.

Thomas Coverly, although listed only as a silversmith of Newburyport, Massachusetts, has been reported to have worked in Newport in 1760. A can, a drinking vessel with

a bulbous body and double scroll handle, is an interesting piece by him in the Collection of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design. His mark, T. COVERLY within a rectangle, is impressed on the base.

Another Newport silversmith who was born in 1753 was Daniel Rogers, chosen deputy to the Assembly from Newport in 1792, the year of his death. Porringers, cans and flatware appear today as evidence of his skill as a silversmith.

A silversmith who was born in Wickford in 1730 was William Waite, the son of Benjamin and Abigail (Hall) Waite. Not only was he a craftsman, but was also a preacher of the gospel in the Baptist ministry. Although listed as a silversmith with his mark, W: WAITE within a rectangle, I have not yet seen a piece wrought by him. Since he later moved to Cambridge, New York, one might find examples of his work in that vicinity.

His brother, John Waite, is represented by many fine pieces. He, also, was born in Wickford. His great-grandfather, Samuel, was one of the original landholders in this town. John probably went to live at the home of his elder brother, Dr. Benjamin Waite, in South Kingstown, and while there, became apprenticed to Samuel Casey.

"He was one of the petitioners to the Assembly for a charter for an independent company of militia under the name of the 'Kingston Reds.' The charter was granted in the October Session, 1775, and within less than one year Waite had become Captain and remained in command until May of the year 1799

". . . . In May, 1787, he was appointed as the Fifth Justice of the Supreme Court of the State, but for reasons now unknown he declined. Nine years later he was again appointed to the Bench, this time as a Justice of the Common Pleas of Washington County and this time he accepted and retained this position until 1799, the same year that he resigned as commander of the Kingston Reds. He was a

Justice of the Peace from 1791 to 1796 and from 1799 until his death on October 19, 1817."¹

An interesting pair of sugar tongs attributed to him by Mr. William Davis Miller, the owner, are of the early bow type. The arms are nicely designed with undulating leaf scrolls and terminate in shell tips. Instead of the usual marks, I. WAITE or J. WAITE, J. W. within a rectangle is impressed on each arm. Porringers, creamers and flatware were also made by him.

Nathaniel Helme, son of Judge James and Esther (Powell) Helme, was the great-grandson of Gabriel Bernon, a Huguenot of North Kingstown. Despite the fact that his family possessed wealth, Nathaniel was an enterprising young man and produced some beautiful pieces of silver. Undoubtedly he would have achieved great success had his career not been interrupted by death early in life, he having died in South Kingstown in 1789 in the twenty-ninth year of his age.

Because of this, few pieces remain from which to judge his work. A porringer with a keyhole handle is the property of Mr. Frank Mauran, Jr., of Providence.

Ezekiel Burr, a Providence craftsman, who was born in 1764, produced much flatware — ladles and spoons of great variety may be found bearing his mark. In 1792, he was in business with his brother, William, and maintained a shop a little south of the Baptist Meeting House.

Another Providence silversmith was Calvin Wheaton, who worked in gold and silver in 1790 in a shop opposite Governor Fenner's house and in 1791 at the sign of the Clock opposite the Friend's Meeting House. A beautiful serving spoon, large enough to serve the Thanksgiving dinner, is in the Collection of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design. It is decorated with the bright-cut engraving which became so popular at the close of the eighteenth century.

¹See "The Silversmiths of Little Rest," by William Davis Miller.

Seril Dodge was a Providence gold- and silversmith as well as a watch- and clockmaker. He maintained a shop in 1788 just north of the Baptist Meeting House on North Main Street and was particularly well-known for the shoe buckles which he wrought. A little creamer with an urn-shaped body and splay base was made by him of the silver buttons from Esek Hopkins' uniform. It is now owned by Mrs. Elizabeth C. Babbitt of Boston. Later, Seril Dodge moved to Pomfret, Connecticut, where he died in 1802.

Nehemiah Dodge, a silversmith and jeweler as well, established himself in Providence about 1798. He was situated on North Main Street in a shop on the Roger Williams estate. There are examples of his flatware varying from pieces decorated with bright-cut engraving to those with coffin-shaped and fiddle back candles. These prove his merit as a silversmith, but he is, perhaps, of greater importance to Providence and its history as an early manufacturer of moderately-priced jewelry.

It was said of him, "He possessed great energy and activity, and the industry of a long life was crowned with success."

John C. Jenckes, whose record as a Christian could not possibly have been surpassed, was a silversmith who worked as an apprentice to John Gibbs in a shop on the corner of Westminster and Exchange Streets. After the death of Mr. Gibbs in 1798, Jenckes went into partnership with Eliza Gibbs, the widow. This continued for two years, and after that he carried on business alone on Friendship Street.

Another Providence silversmith was Pardon Miller, who died in 1800. Although most of the pieces by him were flatware, there is a lovely porringer with a keyhole handle bearing his mark and owned by Mrs. Robert L. Blackinton of Providence.

There were many more craftsmen of this period who produced silver, particularly flatware. Among them were Elnathan C. Brown, Christopher Burr, Walter Cornell, William Hamlin, B. H. Tisdale and Peleg Weeden.

George Baker, who worked in 1825 in Providence, wrought several teasetts. They were large in size and ornate in decoration. Beautiful gadrooning was usually overpowered by the heavy ungraceful shapes. Flower heads were frequently used as finials, while the bases were generally large and cumbersome. As a whole the pieces lacked the delicacy and excellent proportions, developed to such great extent in the eighteenth century. The love of simplicity among the Colonists and early Americans of the Republic continued for more than one hundred and fifty years. After all simple designs and shapes had been exhausted, extreme ornamentation was again introduced.

These craftsmen all helped to establish an industry in Providence that has continued to the present day. Not only was it the skill of these early Rhode Island silversmiths, but also their ideals and determination to succeed which helped to raise the industrial standard of this country.

Although, as already stated, no standard of silver existed in this country in the early days, the quality of the metal compares very favorably with the sterling quality demanded by England. Constant trade with the mother country brought about our adoption of the sterling quality about 1865, thus avoiding difficulties involved with the exchange.

Rhode Island has produced much beautiful silverware and is most fortunate in being able to claim among the native craftsmen so many whose reputations rank among the foremost of this country.

All of the cuts were lent to the Rhode Island Historical Society by the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design.

Journal of My Visit to the Eastward Commencing in August, 1781

By W. ROGERS

(Continued from Vol. XXXIII, p. 44)

N. B. Silas Winchester from Phil'a. being present was much chagrined when his Brother's Apostacy was in ye Course of our Proceedings descanted upon.

Thursday Sep: 13. Afr'n. Business being finished the preceding Day—Set out with Presid't. Manning early this Morning on our Return to Providence. Halted a Short Space at a Mr. Fisk's in Sturbridge. Dined at Mr. Coles, Woodjnk. Proceeded as far as Pomfret & Lodged at Mr. Benj: Thurber's—much fatigued.

Friday, Sept. 14. Dined at Seepatchet alias Gloucester. Got back to Providence just in the Evening. Went to Post Office & Recd. a Letter from Col. Miles of ye 28th Ult.: Informing me that my Family was well. Put up at Johnny's.

Saturday Sept. 15. Answer'd Mr. Stillman's Letter & wrote to Uncle Thurston & Brother Danl. Breakfasted at Nicholas Brown's with Mr. Ustic—Dined at Johnny's.

Sunday Sep: 16. Robt. came up this Morning from Coventry—Pursuant to Request preached Each part of ye Day in the Presbyterian Church, they being Destitute of a Minister. Put a Letter in Post Office for Col: Miles—Towards Ev'g. set out for Coventry with Robt., got to his house just after 9 o'clock.

Monday Sep: 17. Spent the Day at Bobby's—with whom Dined an agreeable Company.

Tuesday Sep: 18. Breakfasted at Mr. Jacob Green's—Between 11 & 12 o'clock set out with Robt. &c. for Greenwich. Went to ye Governor's & Dined, was to have preached