

The
PEWTER COLLECTORS' CLUB
of AMERICA



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TAUNTON NUMBER

The Reverend and Mrs. John P. Garfield have done for the Club the ideal thing. They invited us to come to Taunton to see Mr. Lester H. Vaughan make pewter; then gave us a history of the pewterers of their locality. They have made extensive, careful investigations which could only have been carried out by residents, and have unearthed much previously unknown material, adding new names to the list of American pewterers. The Publication Committee thanks and congratulates them, and hopes that others will follow their example.

TAUNTON PEWTER MAKERS

by Julia O. Garfield

Taunton was the home of two pre-Revolutionary pewterers: Thomas Danforth I and Richard Lee. Thomas Danforth's father was the fourth minister of the First Congregational Church in Taunton. He began his ministry in 1688. Mr. Samuel Emery, in *The Ministry of Taunton*, published a record of the children of Rev. Samuel Danforth and Hannah his wife, which was found "nearly illegible" on "a detached leaf of an old printed volume." The eighth

item in the list was "1703, May 22, Saturday, about 4 post meridiem, Thomas born, and baptized the day following." The church was located near the site of the present Unitarian Church on Church Green. The Rev. Samuel Danforth died Nov. 14, 1728, when Thomas was 25 years of age. He was reported to have "divided amongst his children a very large estate." His large farm, a part of which was a gift from his parishioners, lay along the Mill River, and the State Hospital is located on part of his land. John Joseph May, in *The Danforth Genealogy*, stated that Thomas Danforth married 11 June 1730, Sarah Leonard of Taunton, and that he was a brazier and pewterer by trade.

A map of Taunton was drawn by Morgan Cobb, "dated at Taunton May 28, 1728." On it, Mr. Danforth's house was located near Mill River, and the buildings labelled J. Danforth and T. Danforth were on or near the road leading north. As Thomas Danforth's marriage did not occur until two years after this map was drawn, may not the Thomas Danforth building have been his brazier's and pewterer's shop?

The first two of Thomas Danforth's children were born in Taunton. Thomas, the first son, who is known as Thomas Danforth II, was born June 2, 1731. "About 1733," Thomas Danforth moved to Norwich, Conn. Professor Laughlin says he probably retired from business in 1773, and his son John carried on the work of his shop. He died in Norwich in 1786.

Prof. Laughlin doubts the existence of any pewter made by Thomas Danforth I, except possibly pewter escutcheons on early "R. C.—Taunton" chests. The initials R. C. are those of Robert Crossman. Miss Ruth A. Crossman of Taunton has a child's chest which an authority on such objects attributed to Robert Crossman, although his initials are not on it. The chest has no escutcheons.

Harold G. Rugg, librarian of the Baker Library of Dartmouth College, discovered an autobiography of Richard Lee entitled *A Short Narrative of the Life of Mr. Richard Lee; containing a brief account of his Nativity, Conviction and Conversion—printed for the Author 1821*. In this narrative one has to sift historical data and items concerning pewter-making from the much larger mass of earthly misfortunes and spiritual strivings. He wrote: "I was born in Scituate, Providence Plantations, Jan. 27, 1747. Not long after, my father moved to Swansey, Mass. his native place where I was brought up." He lived also in Dighton, Dartmouth, Taunton and Rehoboth. His first son, Richard Jr., was born in Rehoboth May 6, 1775, the same year in which Richard Sr. enlisted at Rehoboth. His autobiography contains no reference to pewtering in Taunton. However, Mr. E. W. Porter in No. 3 of a series of *Metallic Sketches* published in the *Taunton Gazette*, March 31, 1906, stated that: "About 1770 Richard Lee commenced the making of buttons at Westville in Taunton, and tradition said he furnished many for the soldiers' uniforms in the army." Another article published in the *Taunton Gazette* of May 18, 1928, gave the same date, 1770, for Lee's opening of his shop in Westville, and said his buttons were supplied to the Continental troops. There is a persistent tradition in Taunton that Richard Lee made pewter buttons here, and one aged woman even directed us to the street on which Mr. Lee lived. "On the fifth of Sept 1809," Mr. Lee wrote in his autobiography, "I undertook a long journey, to Swanzey, Rehoboth, Dighton, Taunton and Dartmouth to see all my brothers and sisters living in these places these being the places of my nativity and where I had formerly lived." Richard Lee died March 26, 1823, in Springfield, Vt., where he is buried in the North Springfield cemetery. I am

omitting all mention of Lee's later work, of its high quality, its individuality, and the diversity of its forms, because only the buttons belong to Taunton.

Mr. Porter in his *Metallic Sketches* also wrote that in 1790 Samuel Porter and his three sons, Lincoln, Samuel, and Edmond, made pewter buttons in Taunton, having learned the trade from Richard Lee in Westville. About 1800 they opened a spoon and button shop, later adding inkwells and doubtless other articles. In the exhibit of marked American pewter at the Twentieth Century Club in Boston in 1925, one item was a quart mug, six inches high, marked Samuel Porter. Mr. E. W. Porter also stated that Joseph Strange had a small shop for making spoons on his farm, which is now a part of the State Hospital grounds. At an exhibit of pewter which was held at Historical Hall in Taunton by the Lydia Cobb Chapter of the D. A. R. in 1911, Mr. E. W. Porter, author of *Metallic Sketches*, exhibited a salt spoon which he attributed to this Joseph Strange, 1800, and also three pewter buttons which he believed were made in Taunton in 1790.

In 1818, Henry Stephenson had a shop in which he made what was called "Fancy Work and Novelties" in pewter. The only articles Mr. Porter mentioned were heads of canes. Mr. Stephenson had a nephew, a sailor, who brought him from one voyage a large quantity of bamboo. This he cut into cane lengths, and fitted them with pewter heads. The round heads were turned upon a foot lathe. Other heads he cast in forms of animals. Mr. Porter was evidently not an entomologist, for the only animal he mentioned was a bumble bee. Mr. Stephenson caught bumble bees and other insects, made plaster moulds of them, and then pewter casts. He is said to have built up an extensive trade.

The names of Porter, Strange and Stephenson do not appear in standard works on American pewter. They were the little men of Taunton's pewter craft. Probably they did not spend their entire lives in making pewter. We know of but one marked piece made by them, but they did supply some of the needs and even some of the vanities of Taunton people. They are a part of the local picture, from buttons to bumble bees.

SOURCES

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Richard Lee, Pewterer, by Homer E. Keyes and Harold G. Rugg, *Antiques*, vol. 13, pp. 493-5.
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TAUNTON BRITANNIA MAKERS

by Rev. John P. Garfield

The influences which shaped the movement from pewter to britannia in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, both in Great Britain and in America, were both social and economic. Tastes and ideals were shifting, partly because of increase in material wealth, but perhaps more because of the spiritual and intellectual changes which were taking place. World-wide trade

brought not only new goods and more money, but also new information and ideas which stimulated thought.

This was the beginning of the end for makers of cheap metal tableware, for china was rapidly taking its place, and people were no longer satisfied with the old-fashioned models. The public demanded something new, as it has done ever since. This feeling for change came upon the English before it affected North America, and their metal workers responded by inventing a modified pewter, sheets of which could be spun in any desired shape on a lathe, releasing the workers from the rigid formalism of moulds. Someone named this metal Britannia, an early example of the use of a trade name to sell something which was really nothing more than a high-grade variant of an old familiar product.

Pewterers in this country did not at first adopt the new practice, probably because they did not know the exact composition of the new metal. According to Edmund W. Porter, who contributed a series of articles to the *Taunton Gazette*, published under the general title of *Metallic Sketches* between Mar. 19, 1906 and Sept. 28, 1907, the first britannia made in North America was produced in Taunton in the shop of Crossman and Babbitt.

William Crossman was born in Taunton, Sept. 19, 1794, and learned the jeweler's trade. Emery, in his history of Taunton, states that Crossman went to Castleton, Vermont, where he engaged in business for two years. This was in 1820, when he was 26 years old. What he did there we do not know, but he undoubtedly became acquainted with, and possibly worked for, Ebenezer Southmayd, pewterer, erstwhile of Middletown, Conn. In 1822, Crossman returned to Taunton, and with Isaac Babbitt, then just 21, began the manufacture of pewter inkwells, picture frames, and lather boxes. They appear to have had a store for the sale of jewelry, and probably other products, on Main St., and did their pewtering at the rear. The metal was cast in moulds and skimmed on a foot lathe. Crossman is described as a "good mechanic," but Babbitt had something more, an inquiring mind. He was interested in metallurgy, and resolved to learn the secret of the new pewter which could be spun into shape. He therefore began experimenting with various alloys of tin. Two other Taunton men took an interest in Babbitt's efforts. One was Edmond Porter, whose father Samuel had made pewter buttons for the army during the Revolution, the other William West. They happened to be at the shop on the day when Babbitt finally got the right composition for his metal. West turned the jewelers rolls, while Porter and Babbitt guided the plate which proved to be the first sheet of britannia produced in this country. This was early in 1824, the date of the beginning of the britannia industry in North America.

Quantity production was now possible, but haste was made slowly. Capital had to be raised to buy rolls and lathes, and men had to be trained. The first step was to secure room and power in Deacon Ballard's fulling mill on Spring St., where they worked with five or six hands during 1825. Elias Strange made machinery for them in his old shop on Washington St., and David Porter supplied dies and moulds. As business increased, they erected a brick building on what is now Fayette St., soon after 1825. It has only recently been torn down. William W. Porter was foreman in the new shop, and 15 men were employed. When the first tea set was completed and exhibited at their store on Main St., traffic was blocked by the crowds. The teapot was stamped in

lead dies under a screw press, and its body was fluted in the English manner. Eighteen sets were made, some of which survive.

For a while the industry prospered, and its early history was one of expansion, as britannia supplanted the outmoded pewter and held its own against the rapidly rising wave of china ware. An epoch-making event in 1831 was an order for 10,000 sperm oil lamps, a sale which kept the shop busy for months. It was also while the firm was on Fayette St. that Charles E. Barton, brother of Mrs. Crossman, came from Bristol, Rhode Island, as an apprentice.

The subsequent history of the firm, till electroplating was introduced in 1848, is summarized below, with some of the reasons for the changes in name and personnel. The great depression of the early 1830's almost wrecked the business, but although Babbitt and Crossman were gone, men they had trained carried along with the plant and equipment.

- 1822 First association of Babbitt and Crossman. Pewterers and (probably) jewelers.
- 1824 Babbitt and Crossman began making britannia in partnership.
- 1828 Babbitt, Crossman and Co. William Allen West brought capital into the firm.
- 1830 Crossman, West, and Leonard. Babbitt retired from the firm, but remained as superintendent for a time. In 1839 he was employed by the South Boston Iron Works. Zephaniah Leonard owned the Hopewell water power, which was needed.
- 1830 Oct. Taunton Britannia Mfg. Co. A larger factory and lease of the Hopewell water privilege acquired.
- 1833 Taunton Britannia Mfg. Co. closed. Hired by Crossman and Pratt for a short period. Financial troubles throughout the country.
- 1834 Taunton Britannia Mfg. Co. failed. Plant sold to Horatio Leonard, who was then owner of the Hopewell water power.
- 1835 Reed and Barton. Henry G. Reed and Charles E. Barton, two of the workmen of the Taunton Britannia Mfg. Co., leased the plant and tools from Mr. Leonard.
- 1837 Leonard, Reed and Barton. Gustavus Leonard, then owner of the water power, added to firm, which received the Reed gold medal of the American Institute in New York. Making of real pewter dropped, and coffin plates added.
- 1845 Reed and Barton. Mr. Leonard died. Silver plating introduced in 1848.

At various times since 1850, britannia ware has been made in Taunton, and in fact it is still being produced. In a later article the writer will assemble the names and dates of these firms.

Isaac Babbitt is known as the inventor of the metal which bears his name. There seems to be no doubt that this alloy, similar in composition to britannia, was first used in the bearings of the big rolls in Babbitt and Crossman's shop in Taunton. Edmund W. Porter, in the *Sketches* mentioned above, rather indirectly introduced the statement it was his own father, W. W. Porter, who made the discovery while he was foreman for Babbitt and Crossman. The patent seems to have been issued to Babbitt while he was employed as foreman for the Algiers Foundry and Ordnance Works in South Boston. It was elsewhere stated that the patent was merely on a device for holding the metal in place.

Edmund Porter was a manufacturing jeweler at Aurora, Illinois, and 75 years of age when he wrote the *Sketches* which constitute the authority for some of the information in this article. He was born in Taunton, and lived there for many years, and since none of his statements was contradicted during the months which elapsed between the publication of the first and last of his articles, it may be presumed that his memory served him well.

ELIJAH BRAMAN OF TAUNTON

Mr. George S. Gibb, in a note published in *Antiques* in November 1941, states that Elijah Braman worked for the Taunton Britannia Mfg. Co., from 1831-1834, and then apparently went into business for himself, probably in Taunton. He had business dealings with his former employers and Leonard, Reed and Barton until 1840. Braman was born in Norton. It would be interesting to know exactly where he worked, and what he made besides caster stands.

MRS. FITZGERALD'S COLLECTION

On June 10th the Club was invited to attend the opening of the new Pewter room of Mrs. Stephen S. FitzGerald in Weston. The president, Mr. Paul J. Franklin, presided, and Dr. Madelaine R. Brown, Mrs. Paul J. Franklin, Mr. Charles F. Montgomery, and Professor Percy E. Raymond spoke on various aspects of the collection thus opened for inspection. Although Mrs. FitzGerald has been collecting only a few years, she has brought together a remarkably fine assemblage, richest perhaps in New England pewter, but with New York, Albany, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Fayetteville, N. C., makers well represented. Some 40 of her choicest pieces are on exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, but there are several "uniques" in the hundreds now shown together for the first time. It is probably the best collection of American pewter in the Boston district, and afforded the Club an unusual opportunity for comparative study.

Dr. Brown, herself a specialist on Rhode Island pewter, spoke about the pieces made in that State. She called attention to the almost complete series of porringers, illustrating the solid handled type of the Newport makers, and the pierced or "flowered" sort made in Providence. The latter has come to be known as the Rhode Island handle, in spite of the fact that it originated in Middletown, Conn., with Thomas Danforth and Jacob Whitmore. A rare porringer was that of William Billings, with the Rhode Island anchor touch; but still more striking was the unique Melville specimen with the porcupine. Dr. Brown also made a contribution to the solution of the George Richardson puzzle by showing a teapot with the Boston type of name-touch, which was exactly like one owned by Mrs. FitzGerald but stamped with the Rhode Island Cranston mark.

Mrs. Franklin introduced the subject of Connecticut pewter by pointing out the dominance of the Danforth family not only in that State, but in the whole industry as far south as Georgia. They and their associates and descendants made, or trained the men who made, a large proportion of the surviving marked American pewter, at least 75 per cent of it, Mr. Laughlin states. A unique from this family in Mrs. FitzGerald's collection is a gill mug with Samuel Danforth's eagle, and rare pieces are a pair of dolphin-handled porringers attributed to John Danforth, and quart mugs by Thomas and Joseph Danforth.

Mr. Montgomery emphasized especially the difference between New England and New York pewter. The latter, he said, was heavier, sturdier, and more English than that of New England, and he was able to demonstrate it with mugs, tankards, and plates in the collection. This difference might be due partly to the fact that the New York pewterers were a bit old-fashioned, for as compared with the English models, their tankards were in many cases 50 or 75 years out of style when they were made. But their pewterers were good, honest craftsmen who gave full value in metal, and who conscientiously hammered their plates, a thing few New Englanders bothered to do. The only bit of Dutch influence observable in New York is the presence of a few tall, graceful beakers, which were imitated later at Hartford.

New York influence extended to Albany in one direction and to Philadelphia in the other. It was shown particularly by Peter Young tankards in the first city, and broad fillets on some of the Philadelphia tankards and mugs.

Dr. Raymond called attention to the work of some of the Connecticut Yankees who "went south." They were represented in the collection by plates by Jehiel Johnson and Jacob Eggleston of Fayetteville, N. C., and by Samuel Kilbourn of Baltimore. Most of those who sought their fortunes below the Mason and Dixon line seem to have traveled light, for they appear to have had moulds for plates only. Kilbourn, however, made beakers and mugs. One of the latter was in the collection. Dr. Raymond pointed out the best American biggin he has seen, a large specimen made by Roswell Gleason of Dorchester. It retains not only the pewter ring, but the original net bag for holding the coffee. He also called attention to two unusual English pieces, a splendid decagonal plate by Thomas Bacon, circa 1730, and a spoon-mould of the period of 1690-1710. It produces wavy end spoons with scrolls beside the rat-tail, and is ornamented with a bust of the hook-nosed William the Third.

The collection is so large that only a few of the pieces could be mentioned in one afternoon. Further meetings will doubtless be enriched by accounts of its treasures.

P. E. Raymond.

HENRY JUSTUS ECK OF LONDON

A Memorial Read at the September Meeting.

When the Pewter Collectors' Club of America held an exhibition of old pewter in the Public Library of the City of Boston in 1935, Mr. Eck was master of The Worshipful Company of Pewterers of London. He at that time became a friend of the Pewter Club and continued his interest until the close of his life. It was due to Mr. Eck's friendship that The Worshipful Company presented to the Club Welch's two-volume history of their organization, the most comprehensive history ever written on their company, and a valuable book. Later, Mr. Eck presented to the Pewter Club the book "Two Halls," one of four copies of the history of the two buildings owned by the Worshipful Company, one dating before the Great Fire, one after. This book is now housed in the Rare Volume Department of the Public Library of Boston.

Mr. Eck's letters revealed an alert mind, keen interest in pewter, and a sympathetic personality. In the course of his profession as electrical engineer he once came to this country to attend a convention in Chicago. After that experience his interest in America and Americans was intensified. He well deserved the distinction of being an Honorary Member of the Pewter Club, and

very much appreciated the honor. He might have been an Honorary Member of the Rushlight Club also, as he collected old lighting devices and had studied them for many years. Some items from his collection and some American pewter lamps given him by an American friend, were presented by Mr. Eck to the Science Museum of South Kensington a few years before his death.

It is appropriate for us to honor a true friend with an expression of regret for his passing, and with words of sympathy for Mrs. Eck.

Edna T. Franklin.

MRS. JOHN R. MASON

It is with great regret that we record the passing of Mrs. Mason. From the time she joined, during our first year, she was a regular attendant at meetings, and at various times served on the Governing Board and Program Committee. Always cheerful, she added to the pleasure of the meetings by her enthusiasm over the "finds" of others, as much as over her own. She will be greatly missed.

P. E. Raymond.

NO MORE PEWTER OR BRITANNIA

Due to the shortage of tin, most of which has, in recent years, been imported from the Malayan region, the making of pewter and britannia has been suspended. Intensive efforts are now being made to increase the small production of tin on this continent.

ADDENDA ON TAUNTON BRITANNIA

Since my notes above were in type, Mr. George S. Gibb of the Harvard Business School has spent a day comparing notes with me. Mr. Gibb has been studying the beginnings of the britannia industry in this country in considerable detail, and finds evidence that some of Mr. Porter's recollections are not entirely accurate.

Mr. Gibb has learned that Crossman first took Babbitt into partnership in July, 1824, although the *Babbitt Genealogy* and the *Metallic Sketches* say 1822. The place of business was 3 Merchants Row, now Main Street.

Mr. Gibb also says that although it is true that the three young men discovered the alloy that could be spun in 1824, and started the business, nevertheless various other groups throughout this country had done the same thing even earlier. They, however, had carefully kept the trade secret. Crossman and Babbitt, then, although makers of the first britannia in Taunton, probably were not producers of the first sheets made in America.

John P. Garfield.