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The Philadelphia Silversmith

By
A. William Ball

AND SOME NOTES ABOUT
THE BALTIMORE SILVERSMITH,
WM. BALL

William Ball

Philadelphia Silversmith



Wm Ball

W. H. G. G. G. G. G.
1811

William Ball, Philadelphia silversmith, from the cover page of *The Free Mason's magazine*, May 1811, Vol. 1-No. 2.

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1993

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Dedicated to Berenice Mueller Ball. "Bernie" as she was known, came to Chester County in 1927 from St. Joseph, Missouri. It was my good luck to meet her and make her my wife in 1930. From then until she died in 1991 she adopted and shared all my own interests and pursuits and was loved by everyone who knew her.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much of the background history of William Ball, silversmith of Philadelphia, was gathered by my wife, the late Berenice M. Ball. It was her intention to write a novel, using historic facts, about his life and life at the time in Philadelphia.

My only intention in this pamphlet is to show who he was and what marks he used so present and future collectors will have some new information. It is surprising how much help is needed when any study of this sort is undertaken. I would like now to thank those persons and associations that were most helpful to my late wife some years ago, and to me more recently.

Special thanks go to Louise Conway Belden for her research of Ball marks and ideas for this pamphlet; Jack Evans for his article in the *Pewter Collectors Club* bulletin, February 1961; and J. O. Reese for his article in the same club bulletin of December 1988 in which he shows a mark of William Ball of Philadelphia on pewter.

The First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, The Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Winterthur Museum Libraries supplied photographs and permission to publish here.

Phoebe Phillips Prime of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; Whitfield J. Bell of Yale University Library; John D. Kilbourne of Maryland Historical Society; Mrs. M. W. Goldsborough of the Baltimore Museum of Art; Mrs. Yves Henry Buhler of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; James Dallett of the American Museum in Britain; and the Masonic Lodge of Philadelphia—these persons and museums helped over a long period of time starting in 1960.



This great chalice was made by William Ball of Philadelphia in 1762. The first Baptist Church of Philadelphia ordered it and it is still owned by them. It is prominently displayed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art at the present time as a part of their large collection of local and other silver.

William Ball

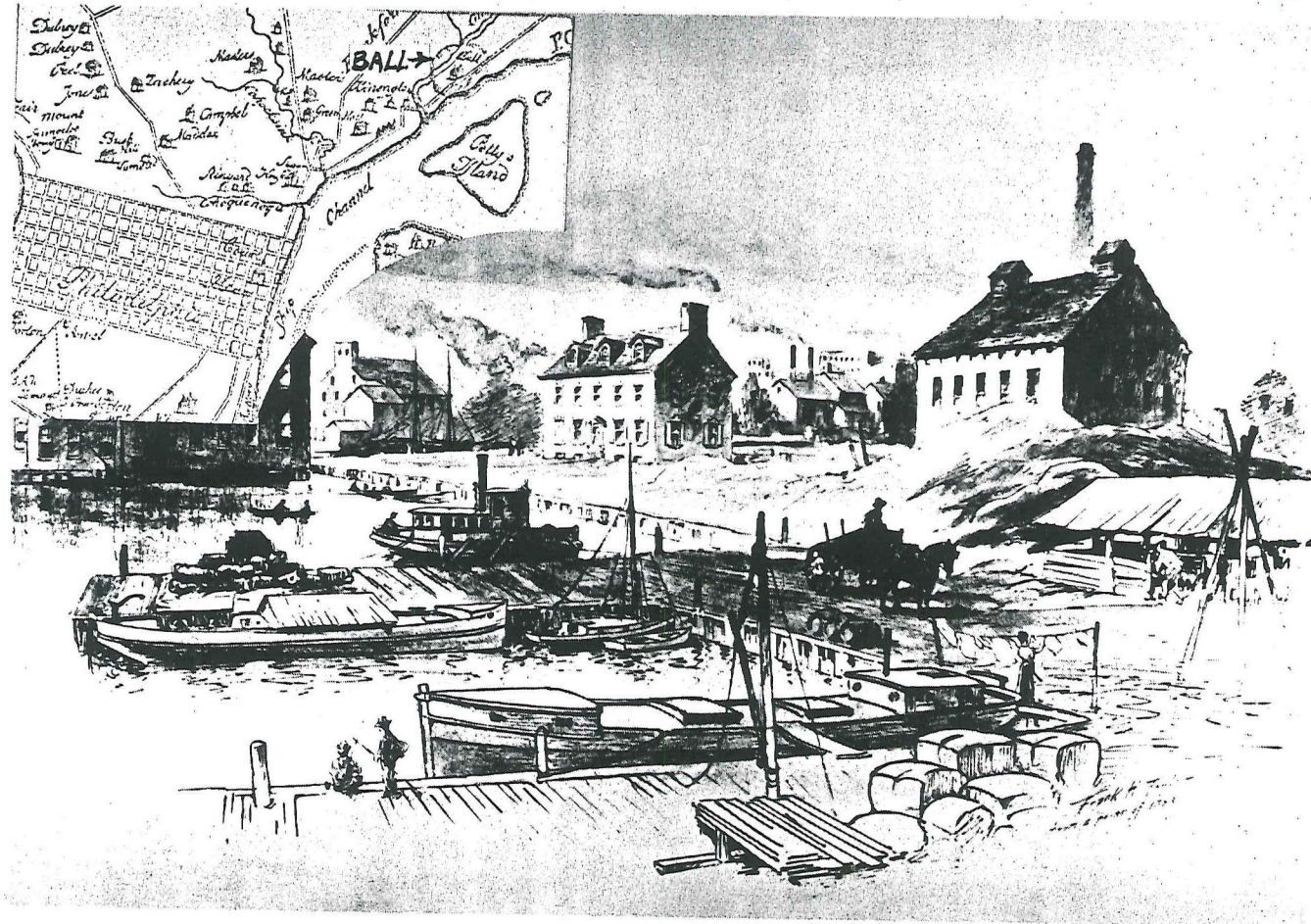
Philadelphia Silversmith

WILLIAM BALL, the Philadelphia silver and goldsmith as he is called to distinguish him from William Ball, the Baltimore silversmith, was born at Hope Manor, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on October 6, 1729; the first son of William Ball of Devonshire, England and Mary, daughter of the Reverend William White of Newport, Rhode Island.

William Ball, Senior was born in Devonshire, England on September 12, 1686. His parents sailed to America shortly thereafter and settled in the Philadelphia area. When he was 41 years old or thereabout, he bought on March 21, 1728 "eight-hundred forty acres and the flats thereto pertaining" on the Delaware River, three miles north of Philadelphia. There on "Hope Farm" he and his wife raised three sons and three daughters, supporting them by means of farming the "plantation" and running a shop.

He died on September 8, 1740 leaving an estate whose inventory included "some silversmithing tools." No record of the shop location has been found. It seems to be a logical guess that the shop was run for the family after his death because ten years later his son took over the shop. His first business daybook entry is dated May 16, 1750 and the last entry in this daybook is August 16, 1762. Later daybooks may come to light some day. The shop was already well established, selling wholesale and retail lots of imported goods of many kinds.

Some of the early sales listed in the daybook include hogsheds of molasses, clock parts, lace, jewelry, shoe buckles,



Sketch marked "Frank H. Taylor from a print of 1853." The "Treaty Elm" grew on this location, see page 11.



Oval door plate, engraved "W. BALL NO. 41." Used on the door to his business on High Street, now Market Street, in Philadelphia.

sugar, rum, needles and pins, and also some Philadelphia-made items including silver and gold. We have found no record that William Ball was an apprentice to any silversmith, so the answer to how he learned his trade is unknown. It is a good guess that he tried his hand at his father's shop.

We do know that after 1750 he employed one or more silversmiths who worked in his shop. As he was first a businessman and trader, there is a good possibility that he himself never made any silver!

He advertised in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* of March 2, 1767 that he had "moved to 41 Front Street, the very next door to the London 'Coffee House' where he continues his business of manufacturing gold and silver¹ in all it's branches."

In summary, from the daybook as previously noted, he started business at the young age of 21 and progressed to a better location in the heart of the business section when he was 39 years old in 1767.

On June 11, 1771, William Ball married Elizabeth Byles. William was then 42 and his bride was 49. This was the first



Portrait of Thomas Byles, oil on canvas,
Handed down in the Ball family.

marriage for both William and Elizabeth. They died without children, which is not surprising considering Elizabeth's age.

Elizabeth Byles was the daughter of the well known Philadelphia pewterer, Thomas Byles², who died in 1770 leaving his estate to Elizabeth. William and Elizabeth Ball now owned a well established pewter business and some additional real estate within a block of William's location. A few years later he advertised in the *Pennsylvania Packet* of May 19, 1775 as follows:

"Just opened a new warehouse on Market Street, three doors below Hall and Sellers Printing Office, being the same place of the late Thomas Byles, pewterer and brazier."

Joseph O. Reese of Havertown, Pennsylvania, a friend of the author, has made a study of the Ball-Byles relationship. He owns a beautiful pewter lidded pitcher³ with a very clear William Ball mark on its bottom, as shown in the photograph. It can now be said with certainty that any silver with that mark was made by the Philadelphia silversmith, William Ball. Recently Mr. Reese was most fortunate in obtaining a pewter ladle with the identical Wm. Ball mark as used on the lidded pitcher. The style of this ladle is rounded and upturned with the mid-rib. Some William Ball marks have look-a-likes; more about that later.

Beside the mark "W. Ball" on the pewter pitcher and ladle noted above, we can be certain about another mark used by William Ball of Philadelphia. It is a small mark "W.B." in a close



Pewter pitcher and enlargement of the William Ball mark on the bottom.

These three marks are the author's interpretations of the marks of silversmiths Wm. Ball of Philadelphia and Wm. Ball of Baltimore.

Many marks on silver and many photos of marks were studied. There are other Ball marks, but only these were on silver known to have been the work of the silversmiths ascribed.

These are marks of Wm. Ball, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, born 1729, died 1810. Business dates 1750-1782.

The Top Mark "W. Ball" was also used on pewter.

A hand-drawn mark consisting of the letters 'W. BALL' in a stylized, outlined font, enclosed within a rectangular border.A hand-drawn mark consisting of the letters 'WB' in a stylized, outlined font, enclosed within a rectangular border.

A Comparison of this mark and the "lookalike" mark of the Baltimore silversmith, shown at bottom of page, brings out the following differences:

**Details on the mark of
William Ball of Philadelphia**

1. The left leg follows line of punch border on the letter W.
2. Very high cross bar to other leg of the letter W.
3. High period between "W" and "B".
4. Well defined "B" with top section as large as the bottom section.
5. Curved left leg on the letter "A", almost vertical left side top.
6. Heavy right side of leg on letter "A".
7. On letters "L" note heavy curve on inside bottoms, also no serif on first "L".
8. On letters "L" note heavy sections and narrow spacing.
9. The last "L" is at very end of the punch border.

This is the mark of Wm. Ball, Baltimore, Maryland. Business dates 1788-1815, when he died.

A hand-drawn mark consisting of the letters 'W. BALL' in a stylized, outlined font, enclosed within a rectangular border.

fitting outline. This is the mark used on a chalice (see illustration) ordered by the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia in 1762. I quote from their minutes:

"July 3, 1762, decided to purchase a silver chalice."

It is noted in William Ball's daybook that he was called upon to make the chalice. Church records also state that he was paid for the chalice after December 4, 1762. Unfortunately it was kept polished by loving fingers in the church and the marks are not clear.

However, Louise Conway Belden's *Marks of American Silversmiths in the Ineson-Bissell Collection* shows on page 46 a mark on a spoon that is the same mark William Ball used on the chalice.

A note about marks usually found on silver, pewter and metal work in general: they were made by a hand-held punch and struck with a hammer. This is a very inaccurate way to make a mark. Although the punch may be perfect, keep in mind that the place where the mark was to be made was not. As a rule, the flatness, solidity and hardness varied from piece to piece. This is the reason why marks differ so much.

Each punch was handmade. Some may have been forced—red hot—into a die, but even if made by this method, each one would make a mark unlike its mate. It was not until after the Civil War that machinery was developed that could make exact copies of such items.

Eighteenth century craftsmen were well able to make fine dies in which a punch could be developed. However, there was no reason to use a die because only one punch was needed. Regular "letter stamps" make "sunken" letters. Our early silversmiths used "raised" letters on their work, and it is quite likely each man made his own punch.

The use of a die can probably be left off the list of typical methods used to make punches. This leaves two other methods with variations that were used. A difficult way was to cut the

letters "into" the end of a blank punch and then trim around them for the outline wanted. A second and easier way was to make a single "letter punch" which can then be driven into a red hot blank punch. Any number of letter punches could be used as needed to make a single punch for marking. When all the letters are impressed, the outline could be finished as desired. It would then be hardened and tempered before using.

It can be observed when checking the marks, especially with long names, that the second method of making the punch was used. Good examples of this are illustrated in *Silversmiths of Lancaster, Pennsylvania* by Vivian S. Gerstell, published in 1972.

Reasons abound as to why one maker had more than one punch: breakage, loss or misplacement, the need to use a smaller or larger mark, or merely a wish to change the mark.

We do not know how many punches William Ball of Philadelphia used during his business life, but we do know he used two and that he used both of these marks on at least one spoon. Kovel lists four marks while other authors list more. Each time a book about marks is published, errors are found and then corrected.

There are quite a few corrections necessary to "Ball Myths." One of the myths began in a very fine, early book about American silver. The author stated that William Ball of Baltimore was the son of William Ball of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Today we have proof⁴ that there were no relationships or family ties of any sort. Unfortunately, this statement was repeated by many later authors who accepted it as a fact.

The Baltimore William Ball was a fine craftsman who made some of the best silver in America. He was born in England in 1763 and had a brother Jacob, also born in England. The brother settled in Wilmington, Delaware and William settled in Baltimore. He married Elizabeth Dukehart of Baltimore and was a silversmith from 1788 to 1815 when he died. In short, he made

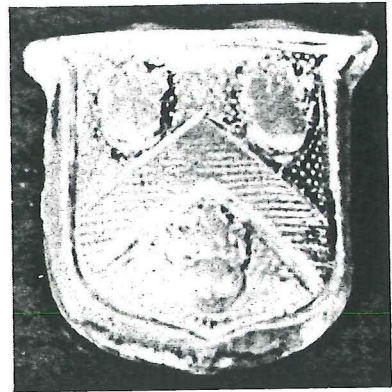
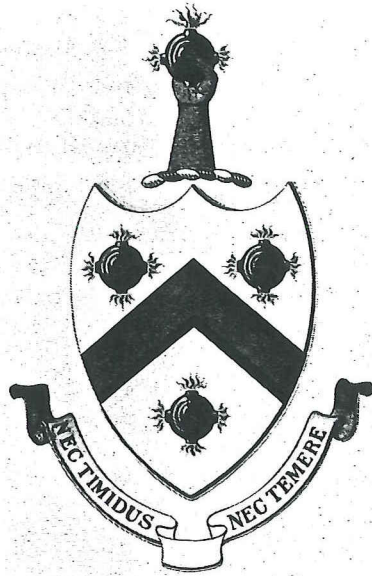
his first silver 38 years after William Ball of Philadelphia was well established. Baltimore was the only city in America that established an assay office (1814-1830); William Ball of Baltimore used that office.

Let's return to William Ball, silversmith of Philadelphia, and his life as a citizen. He and his two brothers, Joseph born February 10, 1731 and Samuel born July 11, 1738, and one sister, Anna born May 3, 1736 lived at Hope Manor. When William was 11 years old, his father died (September 8, 1740) leaving a will that, in addition to providing for his widow, left all of the land to his children.

William, being the oldest son, must have taken part in the running of the plantation. Money seemed not to be a problem. I quote from a letter in 1898 from Mrs. George B. W. Ball to Sallie Kitchen:

"The old Richmond [Hope Manor] property, of which you have heard, and of which we all have had a share is going to destruction. On that property many years ago was built near the river a brick mansion⁵ where all the children were born. Your Aunt Harriet now owns the orange satin damask curtains which graced the windows there."⁶

The road was never paved, making driving rough and dangerous. The widow Ball (William's mother) had a four horse carriage which I have seen, and often heard mother talk about. It was painted bright canary color and lined with a deep shade of light blue cloth with a hammes cloth of same color, and the livery of coachman and footman the same, corded with yellow. The carriage had four steps which folded in when not in use and opened to the ground by the footman when needed. The



Wm. Ball, of Devon, England Armiger, merchant and planter was born September 12, 1686, he came to Philadelphia in the early 1700s. This was his coat-of arms (left), passed on to his son Wm. Ball, The Philadelphia silversmith, who, we believe, made the harness ornament (above) of silver for his own use, using the "Ball" arms design.

footman stood up behind the carriage holding onto downhangers.

Widow Ball would drive through the city at times with three or four children dressed in red or blue or other colors with white ruffles on neck and sleeves, looking almost like a bouquet. This was thought very stylish and it was. Widow Ball was a handsome woman and always dressed elegantly. Canary colored coaches and gigs were all the style in those days."

This was the kind of life that William knew when he was a young man. At age 21 he had his own business and, by purchase or inheritance, he soon owned most of the original tract and continued to live in Hope Manor. A family member wrote that he went back and forth in a boat. This was, of course,

the best way to go because both his home and his shop in town were a stones throw from the water.

Near Hope Manor, on a fence line separating the Palmer-Ball estates, was the Penn Treaty Elm. It blew down in 1810, the year William Ball died. This was a well known tree and many persons asked for wood from it. The Ball family, according to family legend, had a set of Sheraton fancy chairs and also some smaller items made from the wood. One arm chair and a lap desk are known to the author. Some items originally used in Hope Manor are noted in Horner's *Blue Book*.

As previously mentioned, 1771 was the year William Ball married Elizabeth Byles. Shortly after the death of her father, Thomas Byles, pewterer, William and Elizabeth took over the pewter business and William moved his own business to the Byles location, Forty One High Street. On May 2, 1782, toward the end of his business life, William Ball held an auction sale of pewter molds and tools.⁷

In 1792 he lived on the south side of Spruce Street, between Front and Second Streets. He may have bought and moved into that house when he married Elizabeth. A door knocker from their home was handed down in the family⁸ (see illustration). Although this is a popular design, it is unusual because it is silver plated. Do not confuse the word "plated" with today's usage. Plated work of those days was done with a thin sheet of silver overlaid onto a base metal. Although there are no silver marks on the knocker, it was more likely than not plated in William Ball's shop.

In the Philadelphia parade to celebrate the new Constitution of the United States in 1788, William Ball, the senior member of the goldsmiths and silversmiths, led the group carrying a golden urn. Behind him came Joseph Gee and John Germon with a white silk banner bearing the silversmith's arms on one side and the motto "Justitia Virtutum Regina" on the other side.

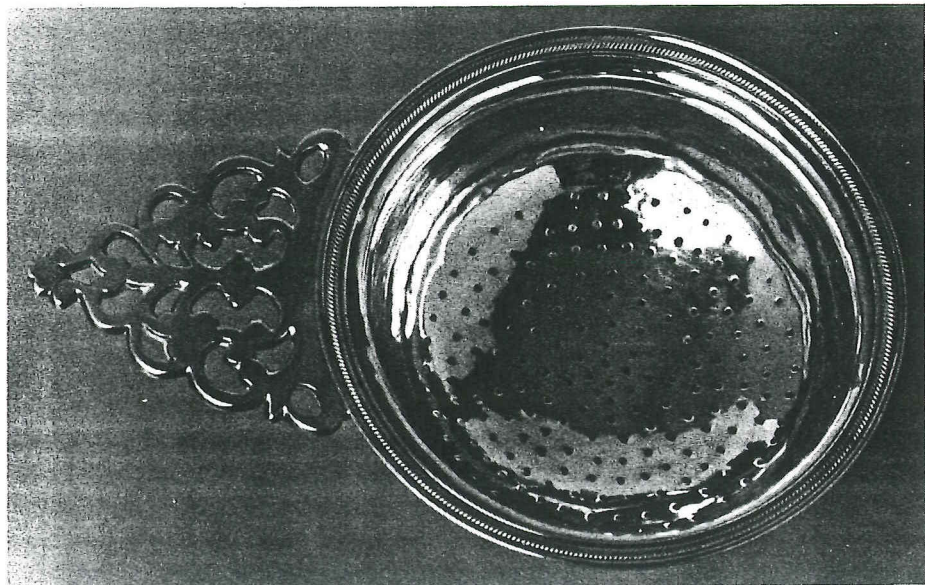
William Ball was the "first Provincial Grand Master" of the



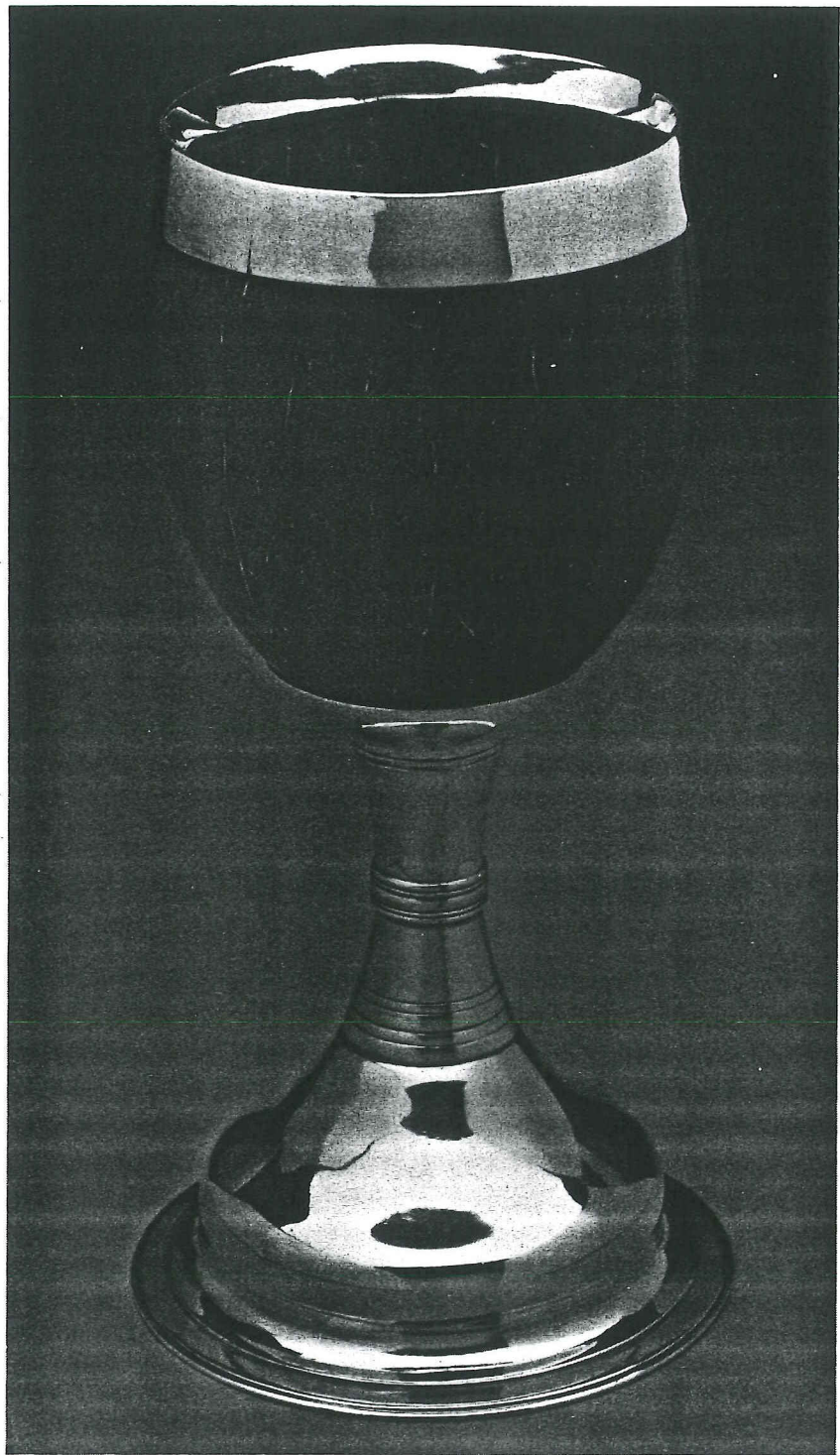
Door knocker featured in *Historic Preservation* magazine.

Pennsylvania Grand Lodge of Masons, and served as Grand Master of Pennsylvania Lodge Number Two from 1750 to 1763. He joined "Ancients Lodge" in 1760 and served as Grand Master from 1761 to 1781 and was later called upon to serve as Grand Master for 1795. He died in 1810 and was buried with full Masonic honors at the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia. His remains are now in the Ball family vault at Laurel Hill.

Note that the only marks shown in this study are the documented ones. More study is needed to sort out other Ball, William Ball or W. B. marks. Proof that a mark was used by a particular silversmith is very hard to come by. If you have any knowledge, leads, corrections or additions that will help in any way, please contact the author. He can be reached through the firm of Ball and Ball, 463 West Lincoln Highway, Exton, Pennsylvania 19341.



William Ball, Philadelphia, tea strainer.



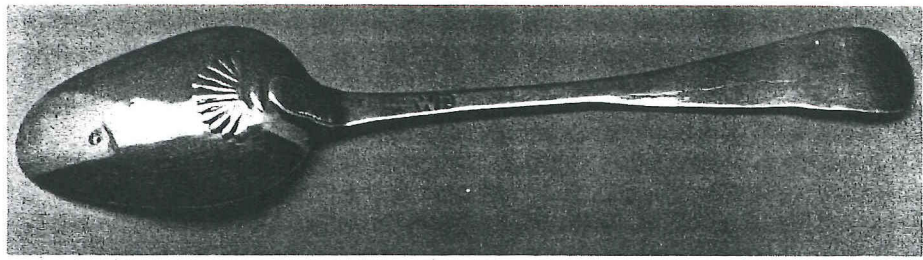
Mounted coconut shell made by William Ball of Philadelphia.

ANCESTRALLY SPEAKING

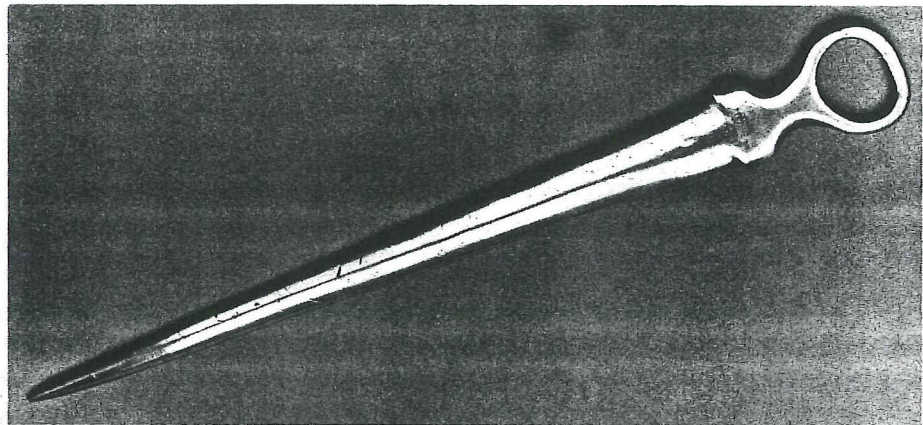
My ancestor, Wm. Ball, arminger, merchant and planter, bought Hope Manor in 1728. It was three miles up the Delaware River from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His wife was Mary, the daughter of Rev. Wm. White of Newport, Rhode Island. They had three sons and one daughter (there were also two sons and twin daughters all of whom died at less than six years of age). The first son was William, born in 1729, who became the silversmith. The second son was Joseph born in 1731. The daughter was Anna born May 3, 1736 and married to John Gibson.

The last son, Samuel, is my direct ancestor. He was born July 11, 1738 and married Mary, daughter of Francis Harris of Wilmington, Delaware, in 1771. On down the line was Joseph H. Ball, Esq., born July 4, 1776 and then Joseph Ingles Ball born February 13, 1807.

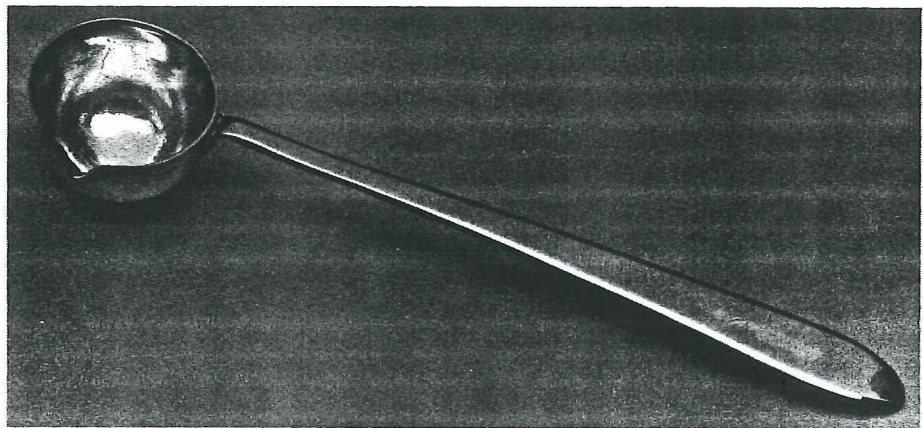
Next was Joseph Ball, Barrister, born 1842. He married Sarah, daughter of Rev. John R. Price of Laurel Locks Farm of Pottstown, Pennsylvania. Their third son, Arthur William Ball, M.D. was my father.



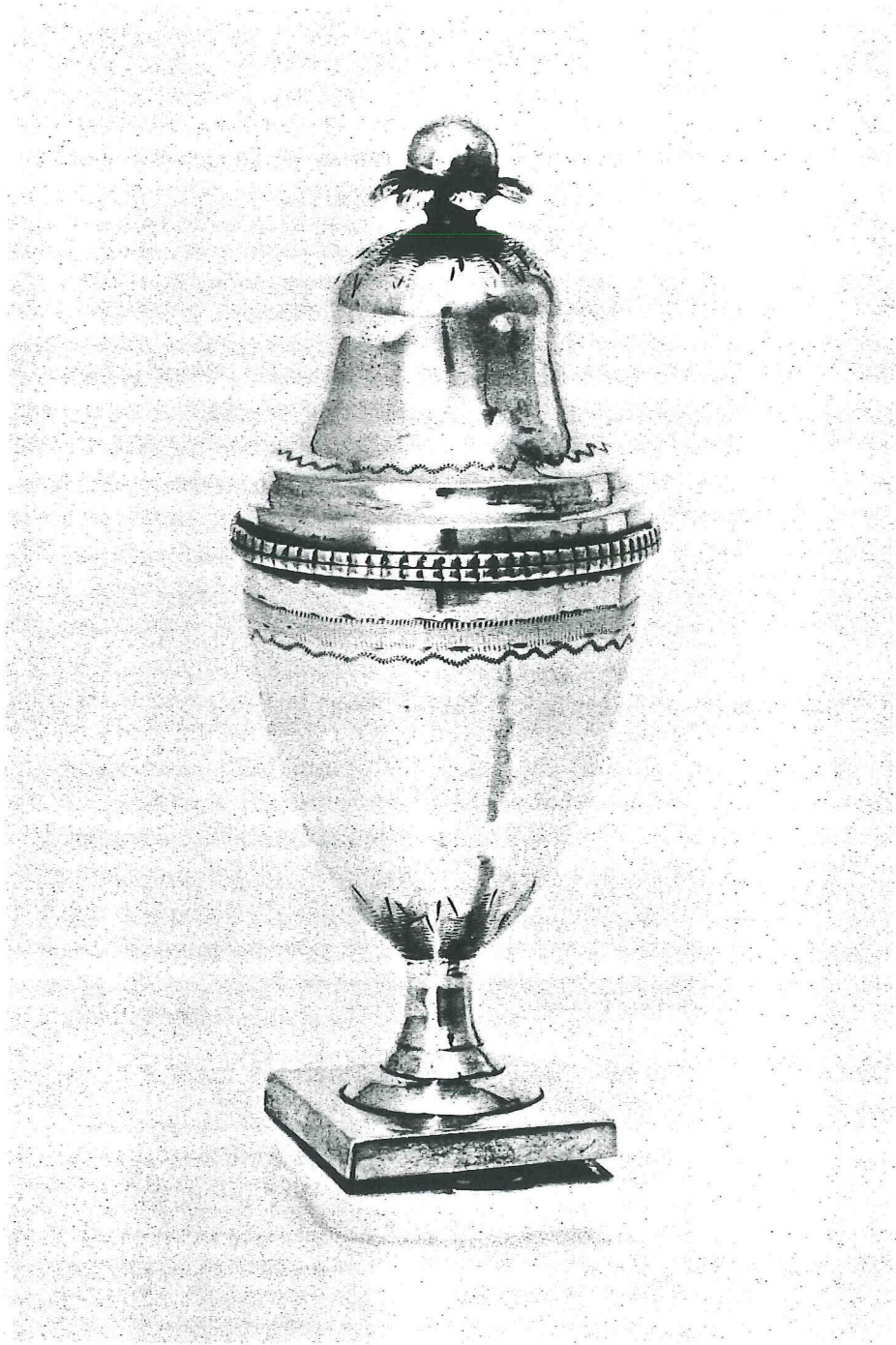
Small tea spoon with shell ornament with the "WB" mark.



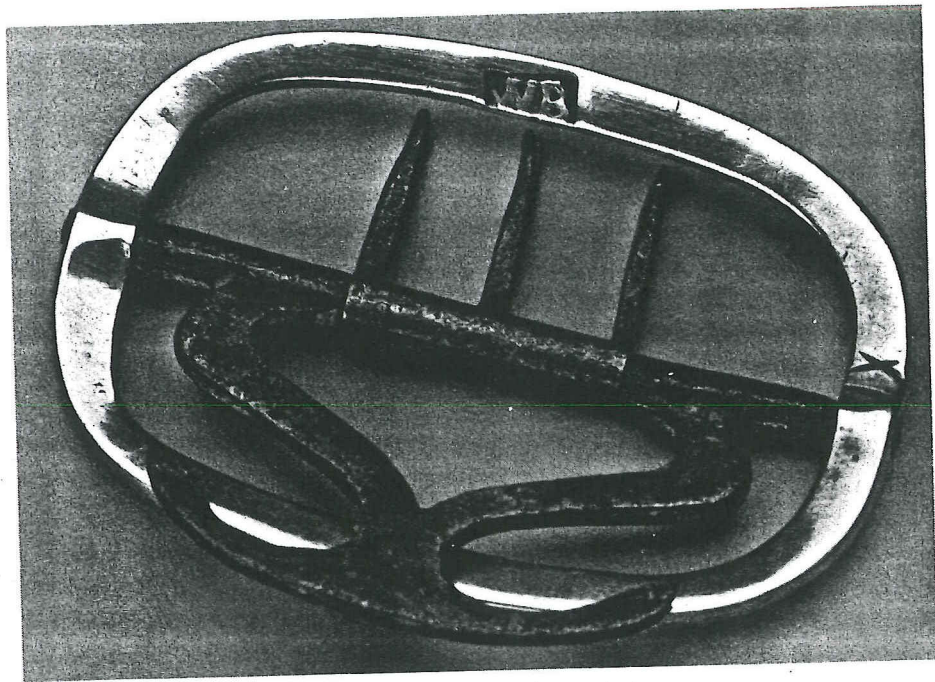
Skewer made by William Ball, Philadelphia.



Medicine dropper made by William Ball of Philadelphia.



Nutmeg grater made by William Ball of Philadelphia.



"WB" mark on this knee breeches buckle is the same mark that Wm. Ball, the Philadelphia silversmith, also used on the great chalice shown on page viii and the small tea spoon with shell ornament shown on page 16. A sketch of it will be found on page 6.



This is the only other Wm. Ball of Philadelphia mark that we are absolutely sure of. For more details, see page 6.



Wm. Ball, the Baltimore silversmith, also used a "quite alike" mark (above). His mark, that can now be distinguished from that of Wm. Ball of Philadelphia, is also sketched and analyzed on page 6.

APPENDIX

¹ Note the word "manufacturing." Usually silversmiths did not use this word in advertising their wares. William Ball was business man first; the silver trade was a sideline.

² Massachusetts Historical Society records show Thomas Byles was half brother to Mather Byles and an apprentice to Mr. Mann, brazier of Boston. His first pewter shop must have been in his hometown, Newport, Rhode Island, where he married Elizabeth White. They moved to Philadelphia where he bought property on High Street in 1738. I quote from *Pewter in America* by Laughlin:

"He carried a tremendous stock in a great variety of shapes and his molds alone weighed over half a ton. Although we can only surmise as to the extent of his business, available records indicate that Byles was one of the most important of the colonial pewterers."

The oil canvas of Thomas Byles was used in an article by Jack Evans in the *Pewter Collector's Club of America* bulletin No. 44, Feb. 1961, Vol. 4-5, in which he gives some history of the Byles and Ball families of Philadelphia.

³ This is a very important item in this study because William Ball of Philadelphia was the only "Ball" involved with pewter. He inherited the Byles pewter business and real estate when he married Thomas Byles' daughter, Elizabeth. But long before that he must have had a great interest in pewter because he sold, in his store, pewter made by Philadelphia pewterers and others.

One entry of special interest in his daybook of 1759 shows that he purchased over £90 worth of pewter from his future father-in-law, Thomas Byles. Twelve years later when he married Elizabeth Byles and took over that pewter business he continued it as indicated by the following advertisements:

Penna. Packet, No. 188, May 29, 1775

William Ball

Pewter, Hardware, Jewellery—&c.

Just opened and to be sold by William Ball at his New Ware house of Gold, Silver, Pewter, Copper and Brass Wares, the north side of Market Street, three doors below Hall and Sellers's Printing Office, being the place of the late Thomas Byles, Pewterer and Brasier, deceased, All the Stock in trade of the late Thomas Byles, consisting of pewter and hard metal dishes, plates,

basons, porringers, tankards, mugs, &c. of all sizes; sacrament cups, cullenders, barbers pots and basons, sealed measurers from a gallon to a jull, bottle cranes, pint pocket bottles, ink stands, tea and coffee pots, mustard and pepper casters, salts, sugar and chocolate bowls, wash basons, bed pans, close stool pans, chamber pots, urinals, &c. copper tea kettles, sauce pans, quart and pint mugs, large and small coffee pots, &c. brass kettles from a barrel to a quart, warming pans, boiling pots, chafing dishes, &c.

He also has for Sale, as usual, an assortment of Plate and Jewellery; money scales and weights, wool cards, frying pans, steel coffee mills, 11 by 9 crown window glass, buck and swan shot and bullets, 8 and 16 ounce tacks, and clout nails, saddlers set, tuft nails and staples, brass handles and escutcheons, cloke pins, plated spurs, coral beads, chapes and tongues for buckles sorted, a large assortment of watch seals, watch keys and chains, watch and clock faces, ditto hour and minute hands, werges, watch glasses, miniature glasses, watch main springs, jewellers unset stones for buckles, buttons, &c. ditto garnet stones, white and red foile, death heads, brushes, crucibles and blue melting pots, putty, rotten and pumice stone, borax, &c. a quantity of old brass and copper. N.B. He wants to employ a journeyman silversmith that is a neat hammerman; also a Pewterer, if a good workman.

Penna. Evening Post, No. 310, Feb. 4, 1777

To be sold by William Ball, in Market street, opposite Laetitia court, a general assortment of pewter wares. Also copper coffee pots and mugs, brass kettles from one gallon to a quart, warming pans, watch mainsprings, keys and seals, clock corner pieces, hour and minute hands, shoe and knee buckle schapes and tongues, stone shoe and knee buckles set in silver, buckle and button stones, locket and miniature glasses, white foil, large and small garnets, diamond and common stone rings, stone earrings, stay pins, a large paste necklace and solitair, &c. Also a quantity of Seneca snakeroot, a few cocoa nuts, sal armoniac, borax, logwood, and a few tons of hay—Said Ball will give employ to a pewterer, to work up a quantity of pewter.

Obviously, Ball produced a lot of pewter after Thomas Byles died and had been making a lot of silver and some gold before that. Also, Byles seems to have been a large producer of pewter all of his business life. So why do we find marked examples so rarely?

⁴ Although William Ball advertised in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on May 28, 1761, that he intended to go to England, he must surely have changed his mind because he did not leave. In the February 19, 1761 *Pennsylvania Gazette* he states that he just got a new shipment from London on the "Ann," Captain McDougall, to be sold for very little cash or short credit. Part of the reason authors have thought that William Ball of Baltimore was a son of William Ball of Philadelphia was because of this advertisement. They put him in London where he was not. London is where William Ball of Baltimore was born on January 16, 1763. He had a brother Jacob, also born in London. Their parents were William and Rebecca Ball.

In silver books you will find the names of William Ball, Sr., and also William Ball, Jr. However, the "Sr." and "Jr." was never used by either man, even in real estate or court records. Further proof is found "Masonic Records" as stated in Julius F. Sachse's book, *Old Masonic Lodges of Pennsylvania*, 1912, and his book, *Free Masonry in Pennsylvania*, 1908. The following are some of the dates that William Ball attended meetings: September 28, 1762; February 8, 1763; April 12, June 24, October 26, December 27 of 1763; and February 2, 1764. In the papers "Masonic Career"; of William Ball, published by the committee on Masonic culture of the R. M. Grand Lodge F. and A. M. of Pennsylvania, it is stated that William Ball was active and paid dues from December 27, 1750 to June 24, 1763. Another statement, "William Ball served continuously from 1761 to 1782."

Other records show that he was not in England and therefore could not have had sons William and Jacob there. Two such records are: He had made a chalice for the Baptist Church of Philadelphia (and still part of their collection); and their records show that an order was drawn to pay William Ball, silversmith, for it on December 4, 1762 as follows:

" . . . agreed that B. Barns, clerk, draw an order on Mr. Loxley in favor of William Ball for 12-17-1763, being the sum which the chalice amounted besides J. Jones legacy and old silver cup."

It is also on record that he sold real estate in Wilmington, Delaware on October 15, 1763.

For some reason unknown to the author, some merchants of Philadelphia made up a greeting to John Penn dated November 21, 1763: Welcome, Best Wishes, etc. It was signed by William Ball, silversmith of Philadelphia. While some of the records given are not published, most of them can be found in some libraries and historical societies' files.

⁵ The mansion mentioned in Mrs. George Ball's letter is quite likely the one shown in the center of the lithograph on page 2 by Frank H. Taylor, marked "from a print of 1853."

⁶ These curtains are now in the parlor of one of the Fairmount Park mansions.

⁷ His final newspaper notice, no doubt signifying his retirement, was published in the *Pennsylvania Packet* on May 2, 1782:

"Silversmiths, Brasiers & Pewter Tools. To be sold at Public Vendue at the house [shop] of William Ball, the north side of Market-street, between Front and Second-streets, Thursday the 9th Day of May inst. The Sale to begin at 9 o'clock in the Forenoon—a general assortment of Silver smiths, Brasiers and Pewterers Tools—Among which are the following Articles, viz.—Two turning lathes, A variety of Turning Tools and Burnishers, a very large assortment of brass Moulds for Pewter dishes, plates, basons, tankards, mugs, porringers, &c."

⁸ See photograph illustrated in *Historic Preservation*, July–September 1978 in an article by the late Mrs. Ball, the author's wife, with a note from the editor:

"A writer and lecturer on preservation and antiques, Berenice M. Ball first became interested in door knockers when family inherited a silver overlaid knocker thought to be made by Philadelphia silversmith W. Ball (1729–1810). The original door knockers shown on page 28 were photographed at the Antique Hardware Museum of Ball and Ball."

Please see the author's request and address on page 13.