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ANDREW THOMPSON: ALBANY PEWTERER

By CLIFTON BLAKE

Mr. Blake's antiquarian interests include, in addition to pewter, early American glass and folk art. He has previously contributed to ANTIQUES on the subject of primitive paintings.

THE RECENT DISCOVERY of a fine 8-inch pewter basin, marked *Thompson/Albany*, adds a hitherto entirely unknown name to the list of early American pewterers. A search of the Albany public records has enabled us to identify the maker of the basin as Andrew Thompson, pewterer, coppersmith, white metalsmith, and merchant.

It seems probable that Thompson came to Albany in 1811. The earliest mention of him appears in the Index to the Public Records of the City of Albany: "The Property 58 Lion Street to Sand Street was granted to Andrew Thompson by Mordecai Lester and wife on July 31, 1811." (The "58" is a lot number, not a street number.)

The acquisition of a place of business would normally be among the first concerns of a newly arrived tradesman. It is possible, of course, that Thompson was born and brought up in Albany, but if so it is hard to see where he might have learned the pewterer's trade as well as he obviously did. Timothy Brigden is not listed as a pewterer until 1816 and was almost too young a man to have served as Thompson's master. It is fairly certain that Peter Young did not actively engage in making pewter after his disastrous fire of 1797, fourteen years before Thompson first appears. And it is quite unlikely that Spencer Stafford—whose diverse interests included the sale of pewter that sometimes bore his name, though made by other men—maintained a fully equipped pewter-making establishment where Thompson could have spent his apprenticeship.

The following advertisement appeared on November 6, 1812, in *The Albany Gazette*:

Tin plates, sheet iron, &c. For sale, at Thompson's Still Manufactory, Lion Street, near Capitol

21 box Tin plate 1-3x
4 do double do

2 tons Sheet Iron single, double and treble, roll, Brass kettles assorted, Stills with copper and pewter worms of all sizes warranted. Copper globes and sheet iron Boilers for patent stills made at short notice.

Thompson's notice appears frequently in the *Gazette* during the year 1813. The Albany Directory for that year lists "Andrew Thompson, coppersmith, 17 Lion Street." The following year, however, he had evidently moved to new quarters; his address is given as 115 State Street. For the next two years it is "117 State Street"—which may indicate that Thompson's business premises had expanded to include the property next door. The Lion Street property was transferred on January 2, 1817, to one George Hawkins.

When he moved, Andrew

Thompson also changed his advertisement. On October 20, 1814, and several times during 1815, the following notice appeared in the *Gazette*:

Andrew Thompson, at his Manufactory, No. 117 State-street Will make to order, Stills with copper or pewter worms, Steam Boilers of P. M. Hawley's patent, or of any other description. Brass and copper castings of every description, Black and White Smith's work &c. Where he will keep on hand, an assortment of Stills and Worms, Clothiers and Hatters Kettles; Pewter Ware; Stoves and Stove Pipes— which he will sell as low as can be bought in the city.

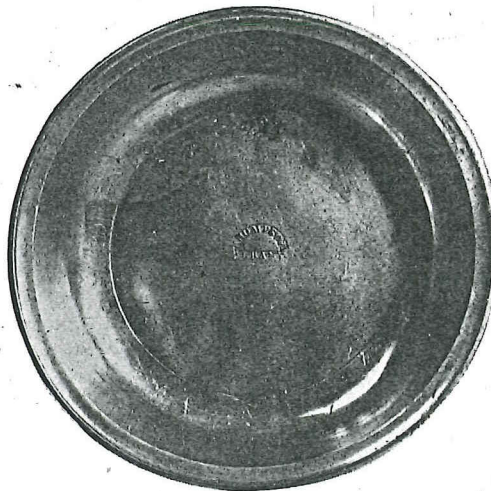
The Directories for 1815 and 1816 mention also a "William Thompson." The listing reads "Andrew and William Thompson, coppersmiths." No information has been found regarding him. He may possibly have been a brother.

On January 1, 1815, Andrew Thompson married Sally Musier of Albany. The ceremony was performed by the Reverend Mr. Neill of the Presbyterian Church. A notice of the wedding appeared in *The Albany Argus* on January 3.

After 1817, when he transferred the Lion Street property, there is no further mention of Andrew Thompson, coppersmith, though on August 11, 1828, Letters of Administration were granted to a "Mary Thompson, widow of Andrew, late of the town of Bethlehem, Albany Co., decd." It hardly seems likely that this could refer to our Andrew Thompson, for two reasons. In the first place, there is no record of the death of his wife, Sally, and his marriage to Mary. It would seem odd that a man long active commercially in Albany itself should be referred to as "late" of the small nearby town of Bethlehem. We should also expect the trade classification "Coppersmith" to appear after his name. Nevertheless, further light may be shed on the matter by an investigation of the records of Bethlehem, and of Watervliet, from which the town of Bethlehem was created as a separate township in 1793.

So far, all we know definitely about Andrew Thompson is that he was active in Albany from about 1811 to 1817. He is a worthy addition to the group of Albany pewterers. Like silversmith Brigden, bell-founder Curtiss, and jack-of-all trades Stafford, he had diverse interests, and was only secondarily a pewterer. But he was a good pewterer, as an examination of his basin will prove. No higher praise could be given it than to say that the metal compares favorably with that made by Daniel Curtiss, who began to make pewter in Albany soon after Thompson apparently stopped making it. Thompson's touch, though unornamented, is forthright and perfectly proportioned.

Note: For this information I am mainly indebted to the researches of H. V. Button, one of the earliest serious students of American pewter. It was Mr. Button who, acting on a hint from Mr. Laughlin, first identified the great Albany pewterer, Timothy Brigden.—C. B.



THE PEWTER BASIN made by Andrew Thompson of Albany. Owned by the Albany Institute of History and Art. Photograph courtesy Sim & Company, Troy.