

Pewter At the Harvard Tercentenary

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FEW of the young men who sit at the tables in the splendid halls of the Houses of present-day Harvard know what pewter is. Still less do they realize how different was the life of the sizer,* when food for the commons was brought from the buttery on pewter platters.

Professor Samuel E. Morison, in his *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century*, tells of the feeding habits in the early days. Following morning prayers at 6:00, beer was sized at the buttery hatch, where the student consumed a piece of bread and a pot of beer. Tea, coffee and chocolate were unknown in Boston until the last quarter of the 17th century, and water was not considered potable. Dinner came at 11:00 a.m. At this meal pewter may have graced the high table, but students used wooden trenchers. An inventory of 1674, published in the Massachusetts Historical Collections, shows that there were then 52 pewter platters in the Harvard buttery. They were probably used to bring food to the table. For drinking, the diners must have used their own sizes and cues, for at that time the buttery had only two quart pots, four pint pots, four cue-cups and one tankard. All except the last were more or less defective. A "size"

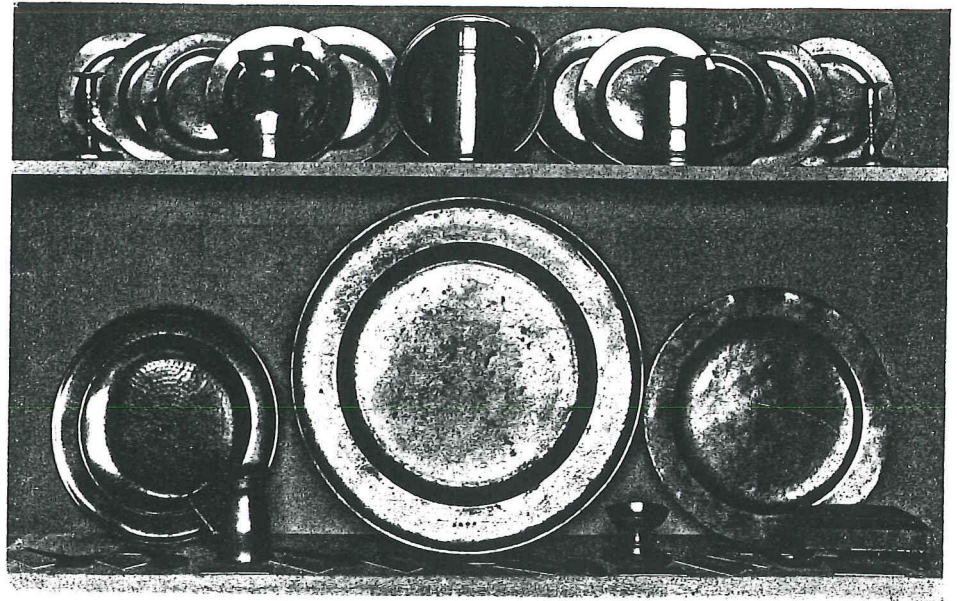


Fig. 2. Pewter such as was used by Harvard students, 1700-1750.

was a pint pot, a "cue" a half-pint. All of these must have been of pewter, for the inventory records no crockery at all.

Pewter was a small item in the remarkable collection of antiques displayed in connection with the Tercentenary Celebration. All the items shown were supposed to have some connection with Harvard or its graduates. When I was put in charge of the pewter section I was unable to find anything which had been used in the College at any time. I therefore prepared a small exhibit to show the sort of things that might have been used. The four photographs here reproduced give a short synopsis of the evolution of the use of pewter in America from 1636 to 1836,

so they may be worthy of permanent record.

1636 - 1700

Fig. 1: The first group shows plates, platters and chargers, both plain-brimmed and double-reeded, such as may have been used in the buttery. The largest one, lent by Mr. Chauncey C. Nash, probably belonged in the Winslow family. A standing cup, like the one on the middle of the top shelf, might have been used on special occasions although not, in Puritan Cambridge, as a chalice. At the left is a 17th century basin lent by Mr. Russel Kettell, and next to it is a pint measure that might well pass for a "size pot with lid." This belonged to Samuel Porter whose son, Aaron, was Harvard College, 1708. (It and the standish in fig. 2, are now the property of Dr. James Huntington, a descendant.) At the right are two splendid Stuart tankards, pint and quart sizes, lent by Mr. J. Ritchie Kimball. Wealthy students may have kept such tankards on the buttery bar. The set of measures below once belonged to the town of Cranberry Isles, Maine. The gallon, half-gallon, pint and gill have the bud thumb-piece of the 17th century; the quart and pint, the double-volute of the early 18th. They were lent by the late Professor William O. Sawtelle, and are now in the little museum he founded at Islesford. The spoons and cup-salt on the lower shelf of fig. 2 are typical of the period. The standish in fig. 2 belonged to Charles Phelps, father of Moses Phelps, Harvard College, 1791. In 1755 it was inventoried at 18 pence.

All of the pieces in fig. 1 are English, and so are most of those in fig. 2. Little

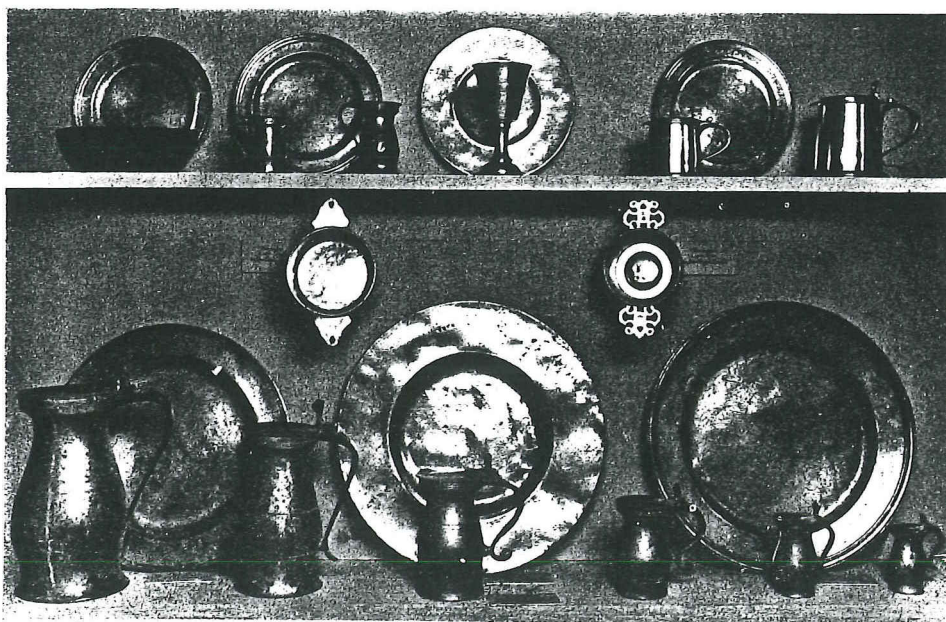


Fig. 1. Pewter such as may have been in the Harvard College buttery, 1636-1700.

*A sizer is a student in certain colleges who receives an allowance towards his college expenses.

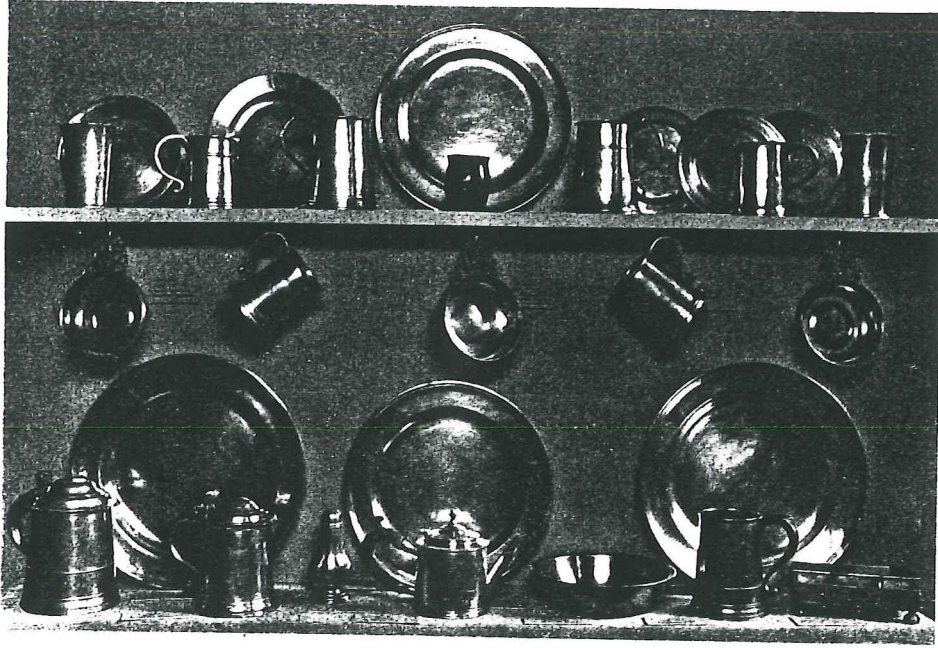


Fig. 3. Pewter such as wealthy Harvard students saw in their homes, 1750-1800.

pewter made in America before 1750 has survived.

1700 - 1750

Fig. 2: Ten of the plates in the upper row and two of the platters in the lower, have a definite Harvard connection, for they belonged to Nicholas Sever, Harvard College, 1701. He was a tutor from 1716 to 1728 and a Fellow of the Corporation in 1725. In 1728 he married the widow, Sarah Little of Kingston, Mass., and so acquired this pewter which was in her "hope chest" when she was the maiden Sarah Warren. Many Sever descendants were graduates of Harvard, among them Mr. Richard W. Hale, the present owner of much Sever pewter and silver. At the left below is one of the oldest surviving American pieces, a hammered platter made by Simon Edgell, who was a member of the Worshipful Company in London in 1709, but who was living in Philadelphia by 1713. The lender, Mr. Joseph France, has since presented it to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The lidless flagon at the middle of the upper shelf belonged to the Second Church of Ipswich in 1734. Although English in shape, the maker's initials, I N, suggest the silversmith, John Noyes of Boston. It was lent by Mr. Herbert Lawton. It is the typical flagon of Hogarth's contemporary etchings.

1750 - 1800

Fig. 3: Between these dates the pewter industry got well started in America but English pewter was still so popular that some pieces were included in the exhibition. The platter and beaker in the middle of the top row are thought to be Washingtoniana. The platter, by Frederick Bassett, bears Washington's crest.

The little beaker in front of it is one of the two known pieces of japanned American pewter. It was made by George Coldwell and is said to have been given by him to General Washington who eventually gave it to his colored body-servant, Billy. I told what is known about it in the *New York Sun* for September 12, 1936, and Mr. Laughlin has given a brief summary of the story. The episode as it came to Mr. Lewis A. Walter, who lent the piece, is that Coldwell had promised to deliver a variety of articles in time for the holiday festivities of, probably, 1797. It is alleged that Washington's temper, never the most placid, began to fail as December waned and nothing hap-

pened. Coldwell somehow heard of this, and, a few days before Christmas, appeared with the promised ware, and brought the beaker as a peace offering. At the right of the central platter (top shelf) is a plate that serves to introduce the one family of famous pewterers who can claim a connection with Harvard. This plate was made by Thomas Danforth of Taunton and Norwich, son of Samuel Danforth, Harvard College, 1683, and grandson of Samuel, Harvard College, 1647. Another plate, by Thomas Badger, has H. C. scratched on the back of the brim. It may once have served at the Harvard College commons.

At each end of the upper shelf are tall beakers by the enigmatical R B, whose workshop must have been near Boston. They were lent by Mr. William A. Young. The pint and quart pots are by R B, Gershom Jones, William Will and Peter Young and are typical of the period. Yankees were not satisfied with "arf pints." At the left in the bottom row are two splendid tankards by Frederick Bassett. The large one is of $3\frac{1}{2}$ pints, the other an Imperial quart. The combination of a high double dome with a serrate overhang was not used by English pewterers. These tankards were lent by the late Potter Palmer, III. The conical, straight-spouted teapot in the center is a rarity, one of the William Will pieces given by Mr. France to the Metropolitan Museum.

Fig. 4: The last illustration reflects the years of the greatest use of pewter and britannia in America, 1800-1836. This period might have been called the "porringer" rather than the "coffee-pot" era, a point I tried to emphasize, for the eye catches at once the Richard Lee porringer-basin in the center. Collectors will recognize the two Richardson sugar bowls

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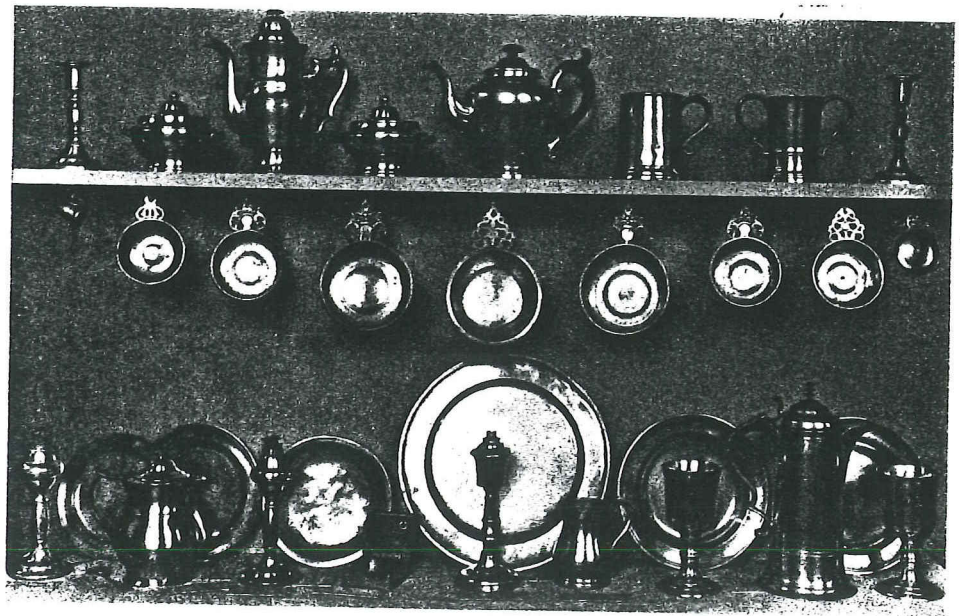


Fig. 4. Pewter such as was in daily or church use, 1800-1836.

Traveling About

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, N. Y. Exhibitions in May and June: "Bi-centennial of the Discovery of Pompeii"—till May 23; "A Chinese Spring Festival Painting"—opens May 14; "Recent Purchases for the Cloisters" (at the Cloisters, Ft. Tyron Park)—opens May 20; "Chinese Patterned Silks," originals and reproductions—June 4-June 27; "Turn of the Centuries: Portraits, Jewels and Accessories" (at the Costume Institute—opens June 18.

THE WORCESTER (MASS.) ART MUSEUM is celebrating its 50th Anniversary. In 1896 a public-spirited citizen of Worcester, Stephen Salisbury III, donated a tract of land and \$100,000 for a building and its maintenance. In 1898 the Museum was opened to the public. The donor also named the Museum as residuary legatee in his will, and in 1906 the museum found itself endowed with about \$3,000,000 free of any restrictions. During its early years, John Greene Hayward, a trustee served, as director. On his death, Frederick S. Pratt, another trustee, served as acting director pending the appointment of Philip J. Gentner as director in 1908. Gentner was succeeded by Raymond Wyer in 1918. From 1926 to 1930 George W. Eggers was director; he is now head of the department of art at the College of the City of New York. His successor, Francis Henry Taylor, served until 1940 when he became director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, N. Y. Charles H. Sawyer, director from 1940 to 1947, is now director of the division of arts and dean of the school of fine arts at Yale University. The present director, George L. Stout, was head of the department of conservation at the Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University, from 1933 until assuming his post at Worcester.

The Worcester Museum has always been known for its progressive policy. Worcester became a center of modern art years before the New York Museum of Modern Art came into being. Yet it did not neglect to acquire masterpieces of older art. Francis Henry Taylor broadened the liberal trend with an art school, lectures, gallery talks, concerts and circulating exhibitions; under his direction the collections of the Museum were arranged in chronological order. As part of the celebrations to commemorate the 50th anniversary, a loan exhibition, "Art of Europe of the 16th and 17th Centuries," will be on view until May 31. A new handbook of the Museum collections, illustrated with 133 selected examples of sculpture, paintings and decorative arts, is being published in May, the regular edition at \$2.50, a limited edition, \$4.50.

THE VALENTINE MUSEUM, Richmond, Va., will celebrate its 50th anniversary this autumn. The spring issue of the Museum *Bulletin* carries on its cover a colored lithograph reproduction of a "Captain of the Blues" in full dress uniform in Capitol Square. It was published in 1841 by Huddy and Duval of Philadelphia.

COLONIAL WILLIAMSBRUG informs us about the checking and recording of a large number of objects acquired recently by the curator, James L. Cogar, in the course of extended travels through England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. These antiques will be installed as further accurate refurnishings of the 18th century buildings. In a dusty garret in Devon, Mr. Cogar was fortunate to find a collection of 18th century bottles of the type used in the Governor's Palace at Williamsburg.

PAUL AND GERALD LANE have opened the "Homestead," a fine old house at Tivoli on the Hudson, Dutchess County, New York. It is the intention to use the old mansion as a setting to display all types of period furniture and art objects. Paul Lane is known as an authority on French art and is adviser to American museums. Gerald Lane has assembled an important collection of early 19th century American paintings.

THE NATIONAL SOCIETY OF AUTOGRAPH COLLECTORS has been formed. This Society includes collectors of manuscripts, letters, documents, autographs in the field of history, literature and any other field. The Society will publish a quarterly. The president is Dr. Joseph E. Fields, a prominent collector of Joliet, Ill. Secretary and editor of the quarterly is E. B. Long, author and collector. His address is 4013 No. Greenview Avenue, Chicago 13, Ill. The annual membership fee is \$5.00; \$25.00 for contributing members; \$100.00

for sustaining members. The first annual meeting of the Society will be held at the William L. Clements Library of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, May 17 and 18.

THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF TECHNICAL APPRAISERS (N. Y. Chapter) held a gala dinner at the Lotus Club in April, at which the aims and nation-wide activities of the Society were discussed. William J. Smyth, the chapter president, introduced the toastmaster of the evening, Edmund J. Clark. Charles Tobias was dinner chairman. The speakers included Ambrose J. Winder of Philadelphia, national president; C. J. Callahan of New York and Charles Messer Stow, antiques editor of the N. Y. *Sun*.

THE CARNEGIE MAGAZINE for April has an article on the Pittsburgh Chapter of the early American Glass Club, Pittsburgh, founded in 1939. The Chapter enjoys the encouragement of the Carnegie Institute.

MISS MARY BARTLETT COWDREY is collecting data on A. Rutherford, American painter, c. 1825-1851. She would welcome information as to his life and the whereabouts of his paintings. Address communications to AMERICAN COLLECTOR.

THE NEW YORK ANTIQUES FAIR, recently held at the Armory, Park Avenue and 34th Street, was noted for the quality and variety that made this show attractive. Outstanding were four displays of superb American furniture, also a special showing of English and Jewish religious silver, an exhibit of fine glass paper weights, another of fine American blown glass, and others of fine prints, American and English pewter, historical blue Staffordshire and iron implements. In addition there was the usual large array of pattern glass, decorative china, porcelain, useful furniture, jewelry, etc.

MRS. MARTHA CATHARINE KAROLIK, the well-known Boston art patron, died late in April at the age of 92. A daughter of John Amory and Martha Pickman Rogers Codman, she was descended from Massachusetts families that had been prominent since the 17th and 18th centuries. Among her great-great-grandfathers were Haskett Derby, merchant prince of Salem; John Amory, distinguished Boston merchant, and Benjamin Pickman, Revolutionary War colonel. In 1939, together with her husband, Maxim Karolik, she presented to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts the now-famous Karolik Collection of early American furniture, paintings, silver and decorative objects for which a new wing was added to the Museum. In January of this year Mr. and Mrs. Karolik presented to the Boston Museum a collection of 225 paintings by American artists of the period 1815-1865. This new gift has not yet been placed on exhibition. These collections will stand as a very fine monument of their high public service.

HOWARD F. PORTER, owner of The Old Print Exchange, N. Y. C., died on March 23. His special interest was American Prints. The business will carry on under the management of Mrs. Porter.

Harvard Pewter

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on the top shelf as britannia at its best. They were lent by Mrs. Melville T. Nichols, kin to the many Harvard Lawrences. The Richardson teapot between them is there as a suggestion as to why britannia fell into disrepute. The ample Gleason pot in the middle reminds us of cheer in the old days of large families. It is probable that none of the utensils in this illustration are of sorts used in the commons at Harvard but they are the kind of things with which students at the time were familiar at home. Candlesticks and whale-oil lamps were in universal use; pewter plates, platters and bowls still had their place, and a pewter communion service was owned by nearly every village church. Thomas Badger, Richard Austin, Gershom Jones, William Calder, Thomas Danforth, III, Roswell Gleason and the Boardmans are represented by various pieces. The communion set, by the Boardmans, was lent by Edward C. Wheeler, Jr. Space does not allow the cataloging of all the pieces or the listing of all the kindly people who allowed us to use the interesting articles shown in the four photographs, which were made by Mr. T. H. Hartley.