

ETF

# Collector's choice: old pewter



Antique pieces from the collection of Thomas D. and Constance R. Williams

## Cylindrical tankard by Frederick Bassett

From 1765 to 1800, Bassett left many such examples with raised flat cover, crenated lip to cover, and hollow cast handle with delphin terminal, a form unique to New York makers.

**By Marilyn Hoffman**  
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"American pewter is the most actively sought of all metals," says Ronald A. De Silva, head of the American Decorative Arts department of Parke-Bernet auction galleries here. "It is now bringing prices equal to, or surpassing, early American silver, and is one of the most popular. It has both popular and collector appeal, and the rarer it becomes, the more interest in it appears to grow.

Prerevolutionary pewter is extremely rare, Mr. De Silva points out, because so much of it was melted down to make bullets for the colonials' guns, and also because the wearlife of pewter in regular household use then was about five years, after which it was taken to the local pewterer to be melted down and remolded into new utensils. The most abundant American pewter on the market today, says this expert, is the 19th-century pewter (called Britannia) that was made between 1815 and 1840.

Mr. De Silva cites an important upcoming sale for pewter collectors. At the gallery's American Heritage auctions, Nov. 15-17, the John J. Evans collection of pewter (up to 60 pieces) will come on the block.

It includes a rare American charger (platter) made by Edmund Dolbeare, who practiced his craft in Boston and Salem, Mass., after 1690. The charger is expected to bring between \$5,000 and \$8,000, but the price could soar far beyond. Other pieces in the collection are estimated to bring between \$100 and \$7,000.



From the collection of Thomas D. and Constance R. Williams

## Cylindrical tankard by Henry Will

The older brother of Col. William Will, Henry worked in New York and Albany from 1761 to 1793. This quart tankard has domed cover, hollow cast handle, and bud terminal.

unique to New York makers.



From the collection of Thomas D. and Constance R. Williams

### Tulip shape tankard by Col. William Will

Revolutionary movement organizer in Philadelphia, Colonel Will was a pewter craftsman from 1764 to 1798. This example shows domed cover, hollow cast handle, and bud terminal.

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Meanwhile, the some 550 members of the Pewter Collectors Club of America keep a watchful eye on such important sales as they try, in an era of ever-rising prices, to build their personal collections of this metal with its attractive soft sheen.

This now-famous pewter club will celebrate its 40th anniversary of founding in Boston next spring. Its president, the Rev. Clare Ingham, a former Congregational minister who is now on the public affairs staff of Western Connecticut State College in Danbury, Conn., feels that pewter-collecting, because of the economics involved, is more and more becoming a rich man's hobby.

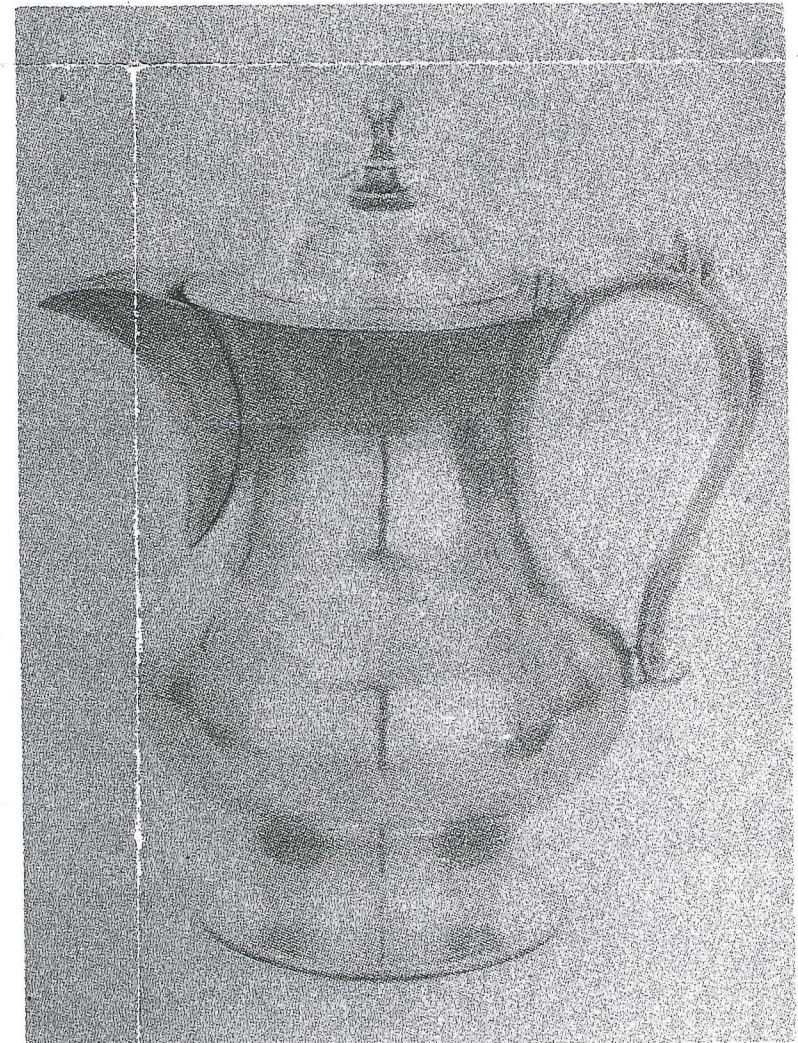
The Rev. Ingham began his collection of 275 pieces in 1956 — "because my wife was interested in the beauty of the forms and I was fascinated by the individual pewtermakers and by their touchmarks. At first we confined ourselves to American pewter, then expanded to 17th- and 18th-century English pieces, and eventually we included a few continental pieces."

Despite increasing prices, says the club president, it is still possible to discover treasures from time to time, "and this is what makes it all worthwhile and fun."

The dealer who is almost known as "Mr. Pewter" himself, is Thomas D. Williams of Litchfield, Conn. "Of course, pewter prices continue to go up," says Mr. Williams, "but the field isn't nearly as inflated as other collecting fields, and there are plenty of good values still to be had."

He feels prices have not risen exorbitantly, but admits he was shocked when a 1662 Charles II commemorative charger, which is one of 10 known to exist, brought \$5,800, or almost \$14,000, last July 25 at Sothe-

and bud terminal.



From Reed and Barton, silversmiths

### Modern replica of pewter cider pitcher

One of a collection of authentic early American reproductions, this piece is a re-creation of Roswell Gleason's original design.

by's auction gallery in London.

"English pewter prices have lagged far behind us for so long," this dealer continues, "that a sudden rise like this looks pretty staggering."

Mr. Williams today has a superb collection of American pewter, including fine early tankards that now sell from between \$5,000 and \$8,000. Still, he says, he would never discourage young people who want to

Young people today, he says, are buying 18th-century English plates at from \$50 to \$60, other unmarked English pewter, and American 19th-century pewter that is both attractive and not too expensive.

If you want to collect pewter, Mr. Williams warns, arm yourself with all the knowledge you can get. He recommends particularly Ledlie Irwin Laughlin's "Pewter in America, Vol. 1," which is published by the

collecting generally, in that it is historically important, has artistic merit, and is rare.

The first settlers brought their pewter in ships with them. From 1700 through the 1760's, English pewter came into the colonies in vast quantities. Being a soft alloy, made up of 88 percent tin, and 12 percent antimony, bismuth, copper, and sometimes lead, pewter utensils began to wear out after a few years of use.

damaged ware. Samuel Graves was operating in Salem, Mass., as early as 1685 and Joseph Copeland in Chuckatuck, Va., in 1670. These men, and numerous others, were trained before they came to American shores.

Many had brought, by smuggling or otherwise, their old molds and touchmarks. Most proceeded to make the same kind of pewter they had made in their native countries, training new

churches, and such humble items as nursing bottles, tinder boxes, and tavern measures. Of the whole world, Tom Williams claims, "the United States had the greatest pewterers. Hundreds of them worked here during the 17th and 18th centuries and well into the 19th century." He and other intelligent collectors like him, plus the research work which constantly goes forward by other members of the Pewter Collectors Club have made