
Contemporary Corner

Fred J. Pulsifer — Pewterer

by Dorothy Patten



FOR many years, no tangible evidence of the craftsmanship of early colonial pewterers was ever found. Eventually, remnants were uncovered in excavations at Jamestown, Virginia, and the first pieces definitely attributable to early craftsmen are dated at about 1725. The record of Richard Graves, who opened a pewterer's shop in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1635 is the earliest reference to this craft in the colonies.

Thus, the centuries-old history of these beloved and sought-after pieces from all parts of the world is a rather short one in America. While the craftsmen of an earlier day rarely became wealthy, their works are treasured today more than they could ever have dreamed.

Today, there are few true pewter craftsmen in the United States. More than a century ago, it became a dying art which found few young men interested in serving apprenticeships. A steady increase in the use of ceramics, glass and tinware, produced *en masse* and at reasonable cost, had its effect on the distinguished art.

English pewterers developed a pewter composition of tin, antimony and copper that proved durable and eliminated the mold method of producing pieces, and by 1850, the development of the spinning method using sheets of the metal was being used almost

Beginnings of a handsome pewter bowl are at the metal-working lathe in the workshop of craftsman Fred J. Pulsifer, Exeter, N. H., who says that his favorite corncob pipe helps him work.

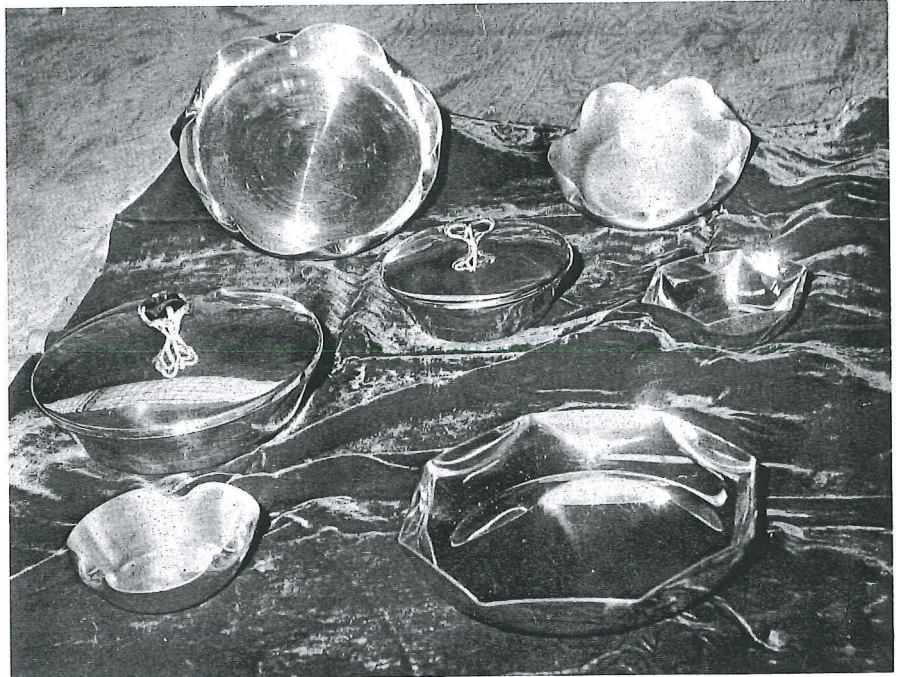
exclusively by those still devoted to the craft.

Today, pewter- the- traditional is being given a new look by an Exeter, New Hampshire, man who last summer began spinning after a long interest in the craft.

Fred J. Pulsifer, 22 Auburn Street, is a multi-trade man, with an inventive turn of mind, and his skills as an electrician, woodworker, millright, mechanic and machinist have stood him in good stead as he assembled and built the machinery and tools needed to begin spinning pewter.

He was encouraged in his aspirations by the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, which provides outlets in its own shops throughout the Granite State for hundreds of crafts people whose work represents all media. Pulsifer's work was the center of a special exhibit during November 1969 at the Exeter Crafts Center in his home town.

Few women spin pewter, because it requires considerable strength and pressure as the flat



Mirror finish on pewter pieces is achieved with painstaking polishing and buffing. Note unusual knobs on covers. Free-formed prongs hold sparkling stones or smooth glass pieces.

circlet or disc of pewter is pressed against a spinning chuck on a metal-working lathe. Special forming tools are used for shapings, and the best finished pieces bear no spinning marks, inside or out, unless intentional.

"FJP-Pewter" is the hallmark in the Exeter man for his designs.

"Pewter is still a popular metal after centuries of use," he said. "It's costly because of the tin it contains. But consider this: Silver costs about twelve times as much."

Pulsifer first designs the item to scale on paper, then proceeds to make a chuck or form of wood or aluminum, over which the flat metal piece will be formed during spinning and tool work on the lathe.

He has produced covered dishes in two sizes, handsome rounded and fluted bowls and handled trays, and he is currently working on a design for a 9½-inch round tray and various types of candleholders.

He often attaches a unique knob which he designed using colored glass pieces, held by roughly formed pewter prongs which provide elegant contrasts to the mirror-like finishes on his pieces.

This highly reflective finish is difficult to achieve on pewter be-

cause of the softness of the metal, but Pulsifer feels its beauty merits the extra work.

His designs are new-as-tomorrow, and the bright, smooth finishes, handsome shapes and the appealing appearance achieved by his hand-crafted methods make his product collectibles for tomorrow.

He has no interest in reproducing traditional pieces, feeling that pewter has a place in designs of today, as well as the traditional pieces in which they served so well. Instead, as a new craftsman, he is beginning his own line, which is distinctively contemporary and calculated to appeal to the young, and young-in-heart, because of its clean, functional lines and easy-case qualities.



Pulsifer has been interested in the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen for many years, and has helped set up the annual fair for the past twelve years, always feeling he would like to join the craftsmen in the popular exhibit held in the New Hampshire Lakes Region each year.

Last summer, the Exeter man was there with his pewter, winning acclaim for his designs.

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