





# ANTIQUÉ COLLECTING in AMERICA

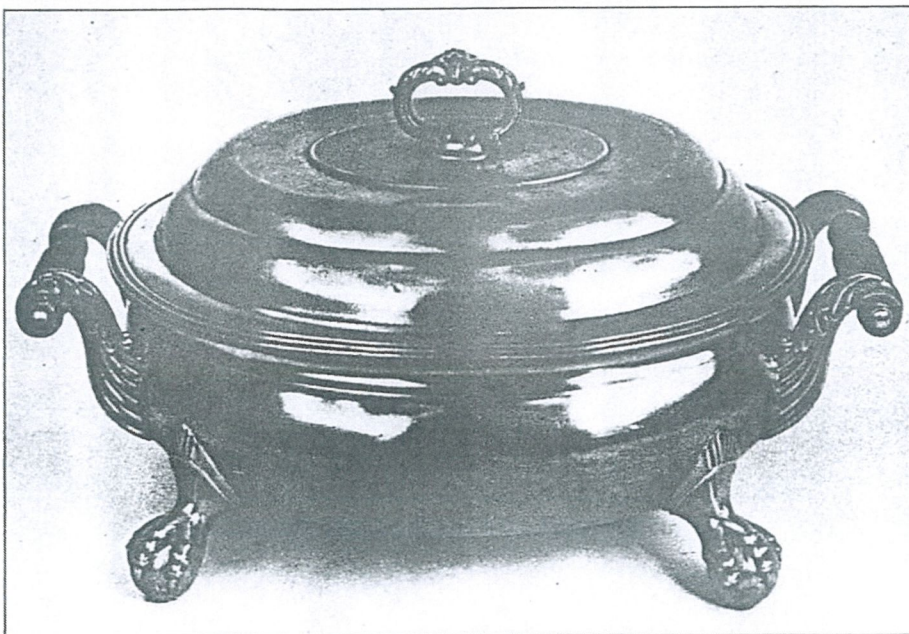
Think of 'early America' or 'Olde England' in terms of antiques and, along with cupboards of rugged oak and stout walnut chairs, you will want to add the image of mellow pewter – for pewter gave a warm metallic gleam to the dark austerity of 17th and most 18th century interiors.

Antique pewter has only been of recognised artistic value for about 80 or 90 years, in fact, it only started to be ardently collected in the 1920s. Limited amounts of English and American pewter, and a lesser amount of Continental, will be found in antique shops everywhere, but even though it was once in daily use in every prosperous household, there is not a great deal of top quality available. Most of it has found its way into museums and important collections. Dealers who are specialists like Thomas D. and Constance R. Williams of Litchfield, Connecticut and Price Glover in New York have the most outstanding selections. Prices are generally reasonable going from \$75 to \$5,000 depending on age, size, maker and the importance of a piece as well as its pewter quality.

Usually simple shaped, nobly-proportioned and boasting the burnish of time and use, antique pewter is generally found limited to a range of basic forms. Plates and platters (including the out-size chargers), flacons, tankards and beakers (and tumblers) comprise many of the most familiar with bowls, porringers, pitchers, tea and coffee pots and candlesticks not far behind. Then there are numbers of spoons and ladles. Of course, there were many other forms made but they were not as commonplace and were usually ecclesiastic or decorative, such as chalices, patens, ewers, urns, lamps, inkwells, boxes and other containers.

### Marks and symbols

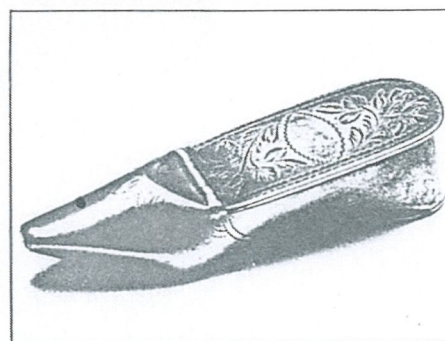
Pewter, like silver, was marked to identify the maker. But the marks were unlike the sterling hallmarks in appearance although there was a cer-



**Above**  
English tureen by Thomas Compton, London. 13 1/2 inches long, circa 1810; THOMAS D. AND CONSTANCE R. WILLIAMS, Litchfield, Connecticut.



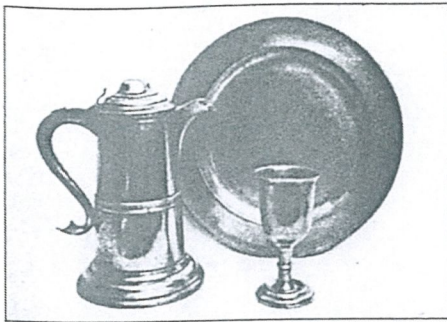
**Left**  
Compton touchmark and quality marks on the tureen.



**Left**  
Late 18th century George III flacon with patina of age, 13 inches high. \$1200; PRICE GLOVER, New York.

**Above**  
English slipper snuff box with engraved decoration, 3 3/4 inches long, circa 1800; PHILIP PEHLER, New York.





**Above**

American 15-inch platter by Henry Will, circa 1785, communion flagon, 12½ inches high, attributed to Reed and Barton, circa 1845 and chalice with same attribution, 7 inches high, circa 1845;

JAMES ABBE, JR., Oyster Bay, New York.



**Above**

Queen Anne pear-shaped teapot by Joseph Danforth of Middletown, Conn., 7¾ inches high, circa 1825;

THOMAS D. AND CONSTANCE R. WILLIAMS, Litchfield, Connecticut.

**Below**

Large English charger, 22 inches in diameter, circa 1685 and English George IV gallon pitcher, 9 inches high, circa 1820; PRICE GLOVER, New York.



tain amount of imitation. Date marks were not used on pewter. The touch marks or touches were always struck into the metal, never engraved. But pieces are often found with the initials or the crest of the owner engraved on them.

In England, as early as the 16th century, the mark of the Rose and Crown was used by members of the Fellowship or Guild. The X was also a widespread mark supposedly used for an extraordinary metal quality but its significance waned with time. However, it continued to be used all over Europe and even in the American colonies. Specific symbols to designate a maker are often found on English pieces such as a grasshopper, greyhound, bull, peacock, unicorn's head, anchor, tulip or a pair of hearts. These were usually combined with other devices such as palm leaves, stars, pillars or a crown and were often contained in a circle or oval. Symbols were used particularly if the maker's name suggested it, such as 'Bull', or if it were a common name like 'Smith' and there would be others with the same name.

Pewter was the earliest metal to be used for the table in any quantity by the general populace and what a boon it must have been! It was much used in Roman times. The tin mines of Devon and Cornwall always supplied ore to a large part of Europe, especially after the Roman invasion, as did the mines of Spain and Bohemia. Tin has also been mined in Indonesia, Malaya, China, the Belgian Congo and Bolivia.

### Tin, copper and lead

It has been said that ancient bronze consisted of a large amount of copper and a small amount of tin and pewter was just the reverse. But 'fine' pewter was made in the general proportions of 4 of tin to 1 of copper. But an addition of 10% lead was considered permissible. If 20% lead were added, it was 'less fine' and if this exceeded the 4 to 1 ratio with copper eliminated, it was called 'lay' or 'ley' metal. Old Roman pewter was said to contain 25% lead. Descriptions of the pewter alloys differ from one historian to another. Just as for making glass, porcelain or pottery, there are many variations in formulae. Bismuth was often

added in small amounts. Some pre-17th century pewter contained silver. This was not added but rather included because it could not be removed from the ore.

Later, antimony was added and this made a whiter, harder and more resonant metal that was given the name, Britannia. Britannia metal has never been as esteemed as pewter even though it provided many advantages. It became popular in the mid-19th century when pewter's use declined as ironstone earthenware took its place.

It has been virtually impossible for most collectors to know just what alloys make up their various pewter pieces. Analyses can now be made scientifically, however, and the pewter collection at Winterthur, for example, has been tested and recorded. There are mixed views as to the desirability of retaining the patina of age. If a piece is very old, then the darkened patina will seem intrinsic to its historical value. Nevertheless, the housewife of the 18th century kept her pewter cleaned and polished until it shone like silver and was very proud of its gleaming beauty.

Chinese and Japanese pewter, known for 2000 years, always contained lead but was used only for decorative or temple purposes. It was skillfully handled and often inlaid with other metals—gold, brass, copper—and jade or ivory. Oriental pewter was made in such items as altar pieces, incense burners and candlesticks, and if any was transported to Europe, it did not seem to influence European development.

### European and American

European and early American pewter was chiefly a domestic or tavern ware. It withstood hard daily usage before the advent of domestic earthenware and was a considerable step-up from woodenware which was mainly used up to the 16th century. Silver, of course, was only affordable by the rich as was porcelain when it came along in the 18th century. Pewter was not allowed for ecclesiastical use in the earliest days but times of austerity caused a relaxation of this rule. However, the chalice for the sacrament originally had to be lined with a precious metal. As time went on, there was





a great deal of pewter made for the church.

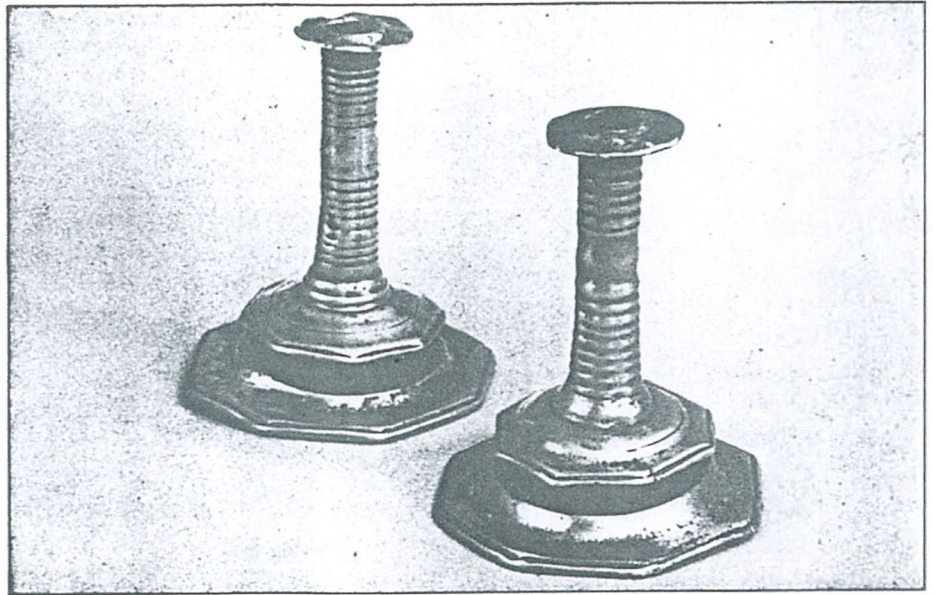
Early French pewter was often decorated with relief forms and progressed through the style characteristics of the Louis XIV, XV and XVI periods. German pewter, at its best, was known as 'Edelzinn' or 'noble pewter'. It was highly decorative and not made in forms for domestic use. However, pewter does not lend itself to ornate treatment very well and some of this work seem pretentious for the metal. Much pewter was made in Germany, Holland, Switzerland and Scandinavia. But the finest was undoubtedly the English and great quantities were exported to the Continent and the American colonies. It is known that there were over a thousand pewterers working in England between the 1500s and 1800s, in fact, there were over 600 touchmarks recorded with the Guild between 1673 and 1824, a span of 151 years.

Most pewter was cast from bronze or gunmetal moulds. Castings could also be made from gypsum, sand or stone. The bronze moulds were expensive and only the most successful pewterers could own many. They could, however, be rented from the Guild. This is believed to account for the great homogeneity of pewter design. Turning on a lathe or spinning from flat sheets was frowned on until the Britannia metal became popular and then it was freely done. But the lathe was used to smooth and polish cast pieces.

### The Guilds

Guilds were formed in the 14th century (in England as early as 1305 but official recognition came later in the century) for the purpose of protecting the secrets of the craft, maintaining high standards of workmanship and for social reasons. The Worshipful Company of Pewterers controlled every aspect of a craftsman's work from the apprentices (how many he had and how long their service) to the alloys he could use and the methods he was to employ. The Guild also sanctioned the use of touches and a record of them was kept on touch-plates by the Company.

Since American pewterers belonged to no Guilds, they could exercise considerably more freedom



but they worked in the English tradition. Most of the earliest received their training in England and English styles were naturally carried on. Styles changed very slowly on both sides of the ocean, probably owing to the dependence on expensive moulds.

Pre-Revolutionary War pewter is the rarest American category. During the British embargoes, tin ore was not exported to the colonies in an attempt to force the colonists to buy English pewterware. Undoubtedly, this resulted in early worn pieces being melted down and recast. Comparatively few marked spoons exist and although it is believed the established pewterers marked their spoons, a great quantity may have been melted down and recast by itinerant tinkers. Spoons would tend to wear out (the handles would bend out of shape or break off) sooner than other wares because of the soft quality of pewter. This is the reason, also, that there are very few branch candlesticks. The softer metal cannot easily support the weight of the branching arms as can brass or silver. Among the hundreds of known American pewterers are many prominent names - John and Frederick Bassett (father and son), Simon Edgell, John and Henry Will (father and son) and William Will, Roswell Gleason, Johann Heyne, Cornelius Bradford - but the Connecticut Danforth-Boardman clan, who were also salesmen and distributors *par excellence*, were by far the most prolific makers. This family with its many

### Above

Rare Charles II tapersticks, 4½ inches high, 1675-80; PRICE GLOVER, New York.

### Below

American deep dish by Samuel Danforth, 13 inches in diameter, circa 1800; JAMES ABEL, JR., Oyster Bay, New York.



branches were responsible for a good half of all old American pewter.

### Simple Decoration

Decoration on most pewter is simple. Raised lines or borders encircle plates and other pieces. Hammer marks in concentric circles often add a decorative texture. Some of the earliest candlesticks were made with rings or nodes on the stem which made them easier to hold. Later they progressed to baluster shapes. The thumb pieces of flagons and tankards, the knobs or finials of coffee and tea pots and the handles of porringers were the areas where decorative details were given full play. Incised or engraved decoration was sometimes added. 'Wriggled-work' was a popular technique where the cutting tool was jig-





Left & detail  
Dutch beaker with  
'wriggled-work'  
engraved decoration,  
5½ inches high,  
1690-1700;  
PRICE GLOVER,  
New York.



gled as it went its route creating attractive zigzag lines as the pattern emerged.

Applied decoration in the form of beaded strips for edges or trim was used as the neo-classic styles came in. But the strongest design feeling in a collection of pewter will usually be found in the basic shapes. The tapering column of a flagon, the beautiful pear-shape of a coffee pot, the purity of the canted line of a tankard contrasting with the wide brim and rounding top of its lid all impart a great dignity to this sturdy metal.

There are still a few European firms who continue to produce pewterware in their own old traditions, using some of their fine antique bronze moulds. The popularity of today's pewter (made in traditional styles) has never been greater. Our present economy is playing its part just as the economy did in the past. With silver prices so high, many American silver manufacturers have begun to produce expanded lines of traditionally-styled pewter.

#### Saleroom Prices

Within the last year, the highest prices for pewter at Christie's were realized at auctions in Holland when 3,000 florins (about \$1,200) were bid for an early 18th century French pear-shaped flagon. An 18th century Dutch Rembrandt flagon with scroll handle and shaped thumb

piece, 11¼ inches high, was sold for £340 (\$680) and an 18th century Continental shaving bowl with moulded rim and cut-out section, 11½ inches in diameter, was sold for £320 (\$640).

At Sotheby Parke Bernet, New York, sales of American pewter included a set of four candlesticks by Rufus Dunham, c. 1840, which went for \$750 last November. In May, 1975, a coffee pot by Sellew & Co., circa 1840, brought \$400, a beaker by Ashbil Griswold, circa 1825, \$450 and an 18th-century New England porringer with tab handle, \$700. Among Continental pewter pieces were several Judaica items including an 18th century German Passover dish, 14 inches in diameter, that was sold for \$1,400 last December.

#### Where to buy

Price Glover, New York, features mainly English pewter although there are a number of American and Continental examples in the collection. An extremely large charger, 22 inches in diameter, has a wide border with triple reeding, and bears a clear unidentified mark, circa 1685, \$1250. There is the only recorded pair of 17th century tapersticks - Charles II tapersticks with octagonal bases and octagonal collars just above them have a series of raised rings on the stem, 4¼ inches high, circa 1675-80, \$5000 the pair. A George III lidded flagon, marked Carpenter & Hamberger, 13 inches high, late 18th century, \$1200. A Continental (Dutch) beaker has a design of 'wriggled-work' portraying (probably) William and Mary, 1690-1700; 5½ inches high, \$450. An English George IV pitcher, probably from a naval vessel, bears an excise mark confirming the gallon capacity, 9 inches high, circa 1820, \$975.

Thomas D. and Constance R. Williams, Litchfield, Connecticut have a large collection of English, Continental and American pewter and currently show a tea pot in the Queen Anne pear-shape, made by Joseph Danforth of Middletown, Connecticut, circa 1825, 7¼ inches high, \$3200. An English pewter oval tureen with claw and ball feet has wooden side handles, by Thomas Compton, London, circa 1810, 13½ inches long, 9½ inches wide, 9¼ inches to top of

handle on lid. (This is like the one by the same maker owned by the Campbell Soup Museum), \$1800. An Irish set of seven haystack measures, from gallon to half noggin, by Joseph Austin & Sons of Cork, 2⅞ up to 11¼ inches high, \$4200 the set.

Lillian Blankley Cogan, Farmington, Connecticut deals in antiques of the early Pilgrim period and shows a rare small late 18th century round scone of tin with a reflector of thin rolled pewter under glass, 5 inches in diameter, \$1200. An English Monteth bowl, circa 1700, is \$3250. Two very small spice canisters are round with little screw-on lids, \$95 for the two. An 18th century English pewter tazza is about 8 inches in diameter, \$350.

James Abbe, Jr., Oyster Bay, New York offers an American deep dish by Samuel Danforth, 13 inches in diameter, circa 1800, \$475. An 18th century American 15-inch charger by Henry Will has had some restoration on the rim, \$600. An American communion flagon has a domed top, not signed but attributed to Reed and Barton, 1845, 12¼ inches high, \$700. A number of American beakers, not signed, are about 3½ inches high, approximately \$60 each.

Herbert Schiffer, Exton, Pennsylvania has a series of English platters or chargers with diameters of 16½ to 17¼ inches at \$175 (1780), \$180 (1810), \$275 (1810), and \$325 (1740). A wash basin is 13¼ inches in diameter, 3½ inches deep, 1760, \$395. An English pair of candlesticks, made in 1820, are 10¼ inches high, \$185. An American covered pitcher is unmarked, 8¾ inches high, \$350. A Philadelphia footed teapot by Williamson has a hinged lid with ebony knob, 10 inches high, \$295.

Philip Pfeifer, New York, has a few interesting pieces of pewter including an English plate (9½ inches in diameter) made by Samuel Ellis, circa 1760, and a bowl or porringer, also probably 18th century (5¾ inches in diameter, 3¼ inches high) that were given to St. Bride's Charity School in 1829 (the name and date is engraved on them), \$225. A pewter snuff box, circa 1800, in the form of a slipper is 3¼ inches long, \$225. There are also 19th century pewter whistles at \$35 to \$110.

HELEN HARRIS