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A PEWTER DISCOVERY

By ADELBERT C. ABBOTT

Dr. Abbott, a Syracuse physician, is chiefly interested in early ghting devices, but since he "collects nothing later than the whale oil-camphene period," he writes, "it became a bit discouraging." He has therefore enlarged his field to include American pewter.

HENRY WILL (c. 1735-1802) does not appear to have made much ecclesiastical pewter. At any rate, pieces in this category bearing his touch are extremely rare. It was therefore an event of outstanding importance, some years ago, when Louis G. Myers found the magnificent flagon by Henry Will now in the Mabel Brady Garvan Collection at Yale.

I was recently invited to Cambridge, in upper New York, to see the pewter collection at the Historical House. What was my amazement to discover there a second flagon with Henry Will's touch, identical in form and practically so in measurement with the one in the Garvan collection. Even without the touch, one could recognize it because of its unusual design, differing from the flagons of all other American pewterers.

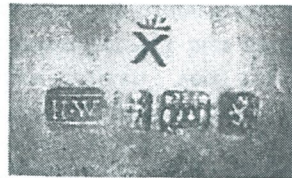
Ledlie I. Laughlin has a theory which might explain this difference in the design of Will's flagons. He suggests that Will probably did not have flagon molds, or molds for flagon handles. These were expensive and not frequently used. To make a flagon, therefore, he may have superimposed one tankard body on another and applied a tankard handle. A study of the design seems to bear out Mr. Laughlin's theory. However they were made, the Will flagons in their sublime dignity are the finest American examples of ecclesiastical pewter.

Accompanying the flagon at Cambridge was an unidentified chalice. The inner base had suffered damage, and a crudely made repair had obliterated whatever mark might have been there the touch is usually found. According to local history, both the flagon and chalice, with a paten of English make, had been in use at the Cambridge United Presbyterian Church in 1791, but there are no records to show when the pieces were bought or from whom.

Judging from the slenderness of the stem, the chalice is American rather than English or Scottish. The double lines of tooling on the cup and stem suggest a possible New York source. It has some resemblance to an unmarked chalice found



HENRY WILL MARKS.



HENRY WILL FLAGON; height, 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches; base, 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches. CHALICE accompanying the flagon; height, 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches; base, 4 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches. Illustrations from Historical House, Cambridge, New York.

with the Colonel William Will flagon and tentatively attributed to him (Laughlin, Plate XXXVI, fig. 240). The pewter of the brothers Will shows many similarities in design. Since no other chalice by Henry Will is known, this would be a find of considerable antiquarian importance.

Intrigued by the possibility, I sought the advice of Ledlie Laughlin, whose comments I am privileged to quote: "The chalice may very well have been made by Henry Will also. The cup or bowl appears to be of exactly the same shape as those which Peter Young and Timothy Bridgen made, and I have always believed that Young served his apprenticeship with Henry Will. . . . It is noteworthy also that the diameter of the top of the cup and the diameter of the bottom of the stand are approximately the same as in Young's chalices. There is a difference in height but this apparently was because the base of the pictured chalice is relatively low whereas Young built up a sort of circular step-pyramid on which the stem rested. . . . It seems to me that a simpler stem and base might be expected on a Henry Will chalice than on that of later makers. . . . He never seems to have used any ornamentation where a plain surface or simple lines would serve. Furthermore, the paired lines of tooling which are found on bowl and stem appear on many pieces of New York hollowware. All in all, I think a good case could be made for the probability that Henry Will was the maker."

The pewter collection at Cambridge includes other important pieces. There is a very fine flagon and two chalices by Peter Young (c. 1749-1813), once used at the United Presbyterian Church at Coila, a neighboring village. Another flagon, undoubtedly English, was used by one of the early congregations, and there are several pieces of flatware reported to have been buried during the Revolution.

The Historical House was started some twenty years ago by the local chapter of the D. A. R. Their organization is unique. There are no dues, and all the residents of Cambridge are considered to be members. Fine work has been done in preserving the town's historical relics.



FLAGON AND CHALICE BY PETER YOUNG, both with the PY touch enclosed in a saw-toothed circle. Height of flagon, 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches; base, 5 inches. Height of chalice, 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches; base, 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches.