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Another Bassett discovery

BY ADELBERT C. ABBOTT

THE DOME-TOP PEWTER tankard illustrated helps in untangling the problem of proper attribution of the several touches used by the pewtering Bassetts—Francis I, Francis II, and Frederick. In addition to the rare touch number 456 (Laughlin), this tankard bears a gift inscription dated *April 17 1766*.

If we assume, as it seems reasonable to do, that the tankard was newly made when purchased and inscribed, then the 1766 date eliminates Francis I as its maker, since he died in 1758. Frederick Bassett would have been only twenty-six years of age in 1766, and therefore, to paraphrase Gilbert and Sullivan, "hardly out of his indentures" as an apprentice pewterer. If in spite of this he was actually the maker, it is highly probable that he would have used his own early touch, number 465, such as Ledlie I. Laughlin has pointed out was relettered from John Bassett's die number 458 by changing the *I* to *F*.

With both Francis I and Frederick eliminated, it would appear that the touch number 456 seen on this tankard can with reasonable certainty be attributed to Francis Bassett II.

The proper attribution of the remaining Bassett touches concerning which some uncertainty still exists bids fair to be a difficult problem because of the close business affiliation and apparent joint use of molds by the members of this distinguished family of pewterers. Mr. Laughlin has pointed out to me, for instance, the strong probability that the handles of both his Frederick tankard and the one shown here by Francis II were cast in the same mold, since the same unevenly modulated curved line appears above the pendant bead at the top of the handle of each. Carefully taken measurements of the barrels of the Francis I tankard at the Brooklyn Museum, the Frederick tankard owned by Mr. Laughlin, and the Francis II tankard illustrated are to all intents and purposes identical, the minor differences in decorative detail simply reflecting the whim and fancy of the articular maker.

Perhaps we may anticipate finding more Bassett pieces with both touches and inscriptions which would more definitely indicate a proper attribution.



Detail of mark, number 456 in Ledlie I. Laughlin's *Pewter in America*.



Dome-top tankard here attributed to Francis Bassett II. *Author's collection.*

Detail of inscription, with date *April 17 1766*.

