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PEWTER COMMUNION SERVICE of the Salem Lutheran Church, Aaronsburg, Pennsylvania (1789-1794). Made by William Will of Philadelphia and presented by Aaron Levy. All engraved *Das Geschenk zu denen Deutschen Gemeinden in Aaronsburg von Aron Levy*. Bowl only is marked (see detail). Height of chalice, $7\frac{13}{16}$ inches; diameter, $3\frac{9}{16}$ inches. Height of pitcher, $10\frac{3}{4}$ inches; diameter, 5 inches. Height of flagon, $13\frac{11}{16}$ inches; diameter, $5\frac{5}{16}$ inches. Diameter of bowl, $10\frac{3}{16}$ inches; depth, $1\frac{1}{16}$ inches. Photographs by Nittany Studio.

NEW FINDS IN OLD PEWTER BY WILLIAM WILL

The Aaronsburg Communion Service

By PAUL M. AUMAN

Even after all the fruitful study that has been made of American pewter, new discoveries are still being made. Though the communion service discussed here was illustrated in the popular press at the time of Aaronsburg's celebration last fall, its importance as an addition to the known work of William Will has not before been emphasized. Mr. Auman, a Pennsylvanian, here gives its historical background, and Mr. Laughlin, author of *Pewter in America*, offers his specialized comment on the set, which he says seems the most noteworthy "find" in American pewter in the past ten years.

ON OCTOBER 23, 1949, the little village of Aaronsburg, in Centre County, Pennsylvania, was the scene of a special observance "to focus national attention on this outstanding, historical example of the interdependence of all races and creeds." Aaronsburg, near the geographical center of Pennsylvania, was founded in 1786 by Aaron Levy, who had hoped to see it become the capital of the Commonwealth. The recent celebration centered in the Salem Lutheran Church, built on land deeded to its members by Aaron Levy, com-

pleting 150 years of continuous worship. The "Aaronsburg story" was widely publicized at the time, with emphasis, appropriately, on its religious and humanitarian significance. It has a sidelight, however, of distinctly antiquarian importance.

Besides providing land for a church building, Levy commissioned the Philadelphia pewterer, Colonel William Will, to make a communion service for what was to be a united church of the Lutheran and Reformed congregations. Plans for the Union Church failed, but the Lutherans erected the Salem Lutheran Church. The pewter communion service was given to them.

In 1852 the original Salem Lutheran Church was torn down and replaced by the present building. Between 1869 and 1877 the latter was remodeled and, perhaps accidentally, the communion service was enclosed within a platform on which the pulpit stood. There it remained until 1917, when the church was again remodeled and workmen, tearing out the platform, found the forgotten pewter.

The set consists of four pieces, chalice, pitcher or ewer

flagon, and bowl. Each is engraved *Das Geschenke zu denen Deutschen Gemeinden in Aaronsburg von Aron Levy* (the gift of Aaron Levy to the German congregations in Aaronsburg). On the bottom of the bowl Will's eagle touch is struck twice, and once his touch *Wm. WILL/PHILADELPHIA* in scroll. Though this is the only piece of the set that is marked, there seems little doubt that all four were made by William Will. Their date can be set between 1789, when Levy granted the ground to the Lutheran congregation (the date of the Union Church agreement is unknown), and 1794, when the Union Church plan had been abandoned and the cornerstone of the Salem Lutheran Church was laid.

Comment on the Communion Service by Ledlie I. Laughlin

I had not heard of this communion set previously and hope that there may be other equally interesting sets hidden away in other country churches. As far as can be discovered from the photograph there seems to be no reason at all for questioning the Church's ascription of this set to the shop of Colonel William Will, Philadelphia, for the period from 1789-1794. I presume that this cannot be confirmed by a surviving bill of sale or other church record.

We might wish that the maker had seen fit to mark all four pieces, instead of the basin alone, but there can be no doubt that Will made the flagon and pitcher and we need not hesitate greatly about attributing the chalice to him also.

At that same period Peter Young, who probably had been an apprentice of Henry Will, William's older brother, was making, in Albany, chalices with bases of similar design, but with a cup of greater flare and a stem of less accentuated outline. To my mind what strengthens the attribution of this unmarked chalice to William Will is the shape of the bowl, which is simply a reproduction, reduced in scale, of the bowl of its companion flagon. Some may feel, as I do, that had the bowl been placed upon a plainer stem, one of more gently modulated contours, the composition as a whole would have been simpler and more dignified. It furnishes, however, another American pewter chalice variant and nothing in the design is foreign to what might have been looked for from William Will.

The flagon and pitcher need no maker's touches to identify the shop from which they came. Unique though each may be in American pewter, both express the individuality of, and exhibit the characteristics which have always been associated with, William Will's work. On each we find the beaded decoration of the knurling tool on rims or joints, just as it appears on Will's teapots and coffeepots.

The design of the flagon is directly traceable to the coffeepot design—or vice versa. Several of the same molds were apparently used for both. Subject to confirmation by actual measurement, the foot of the flagon appears to be interchangeable with the coffeepot

base and the same can be said of the necks of both vessels. Again the lids, or covers, are from one mold but the graceful finial of the coffeepot has not been added on the flagon, an omission that is, perhaps, regrettable.

The spout was made from a mold designed for the spout of Will's earlier straight-sided flagons, one of which appears as figure 211 plate XXXI in *Pewter in America*. In the design of the later flagon the Colonel unfortunately added a button-like ornament at the base of the spout, a decoration which seems too large and too heavy and breaks the curving lines of the spout, instead of carrying the eye down to the less prominent and more pleasing tear-drop terminus of the earlier composition.

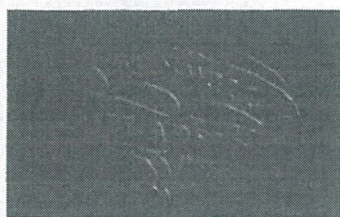
Whether it be fair to criticize at all Will's design of chalice or flagon, it is difficult to pick a flaw in the beautiful Aaronsburg pitcher, a shape which has no counterpart and bears no close resemblance to anything else in American pewter, yet is so exact what we might have expected of Colonel Will at his best.

Here again we see the base that was used so satisfyingly on Will's coffeepots and with it he uses the acanthus-leaf handle that adorned his tulip-shaped quart mugs. No doubt if one such mug were placed alongside the pitcher it could be immediately proved that both handles were from the same mold.

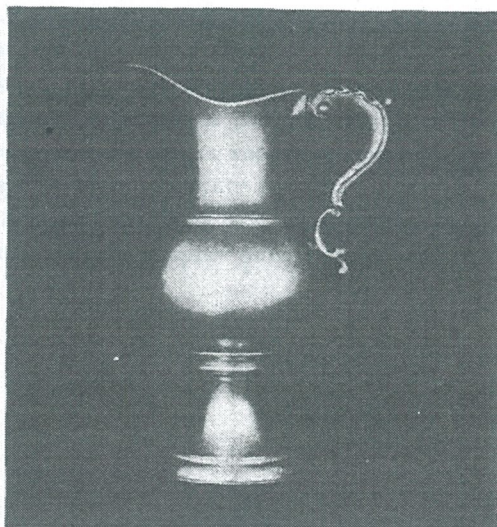
For the belly of the pitcher a new mold was probably required but even of this we cannot be certain. Although no William Will teapot of early design has been reported that would have had a bowl as large as the bowl of the pitcher appears to be, he may have made such a form and may have been able thus to convert it for other uses. In any event, he used just one mold, old or new, for the belly. Without sacrificing charm in the final composition Will made a design requiring the minimum of outlay in new molds. On his coffeepot base he placed a globe, truncated at top and bottom. The globe was formed by taking two castings from the same mold, suspending one and soldering them together at their greatest diameter.

The neck, spout, and handle-strut definitely called for new mold. These were so nicely designed that the resulting pitcher is one of the finest tributes to the art and craftsmanship of the American pewterer. The graceful sweeping curve of the top rim, from handle to tip of spout, recalls the tiny creamers of the Queen Anne period and the proportions and shape of the spout furnish just the proper balance to the opposing handle. Not only is the pitcher a work of art but it is a magnificent demonstration of what a real artist can do with a few simple forms and a knowledge of how to use them.

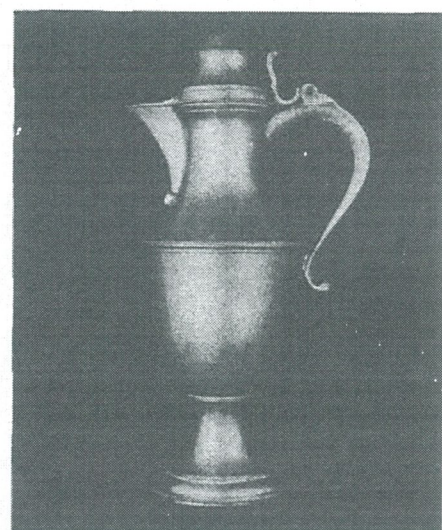
It would be interesting to know whether there is any surviving Philadelphia pitcher in silver which might have served as Will's model or whether the design was original with him. Whatever his inspiration, Will fashioned a pitcher of beauty and dignity. We can be very grateful to the little Lutheran Church at Aaronsburg for having preserved to this day this masterpiece of American pewter.



MARKS BY WILLIAM WILL, punched on bottom of bowl of Aaronsburg communion service.



PEWTER PITCHER OR EWER of Aaronsburg Communion Service.



PEWTER FLAGON of Aaronsburg Communion Service.