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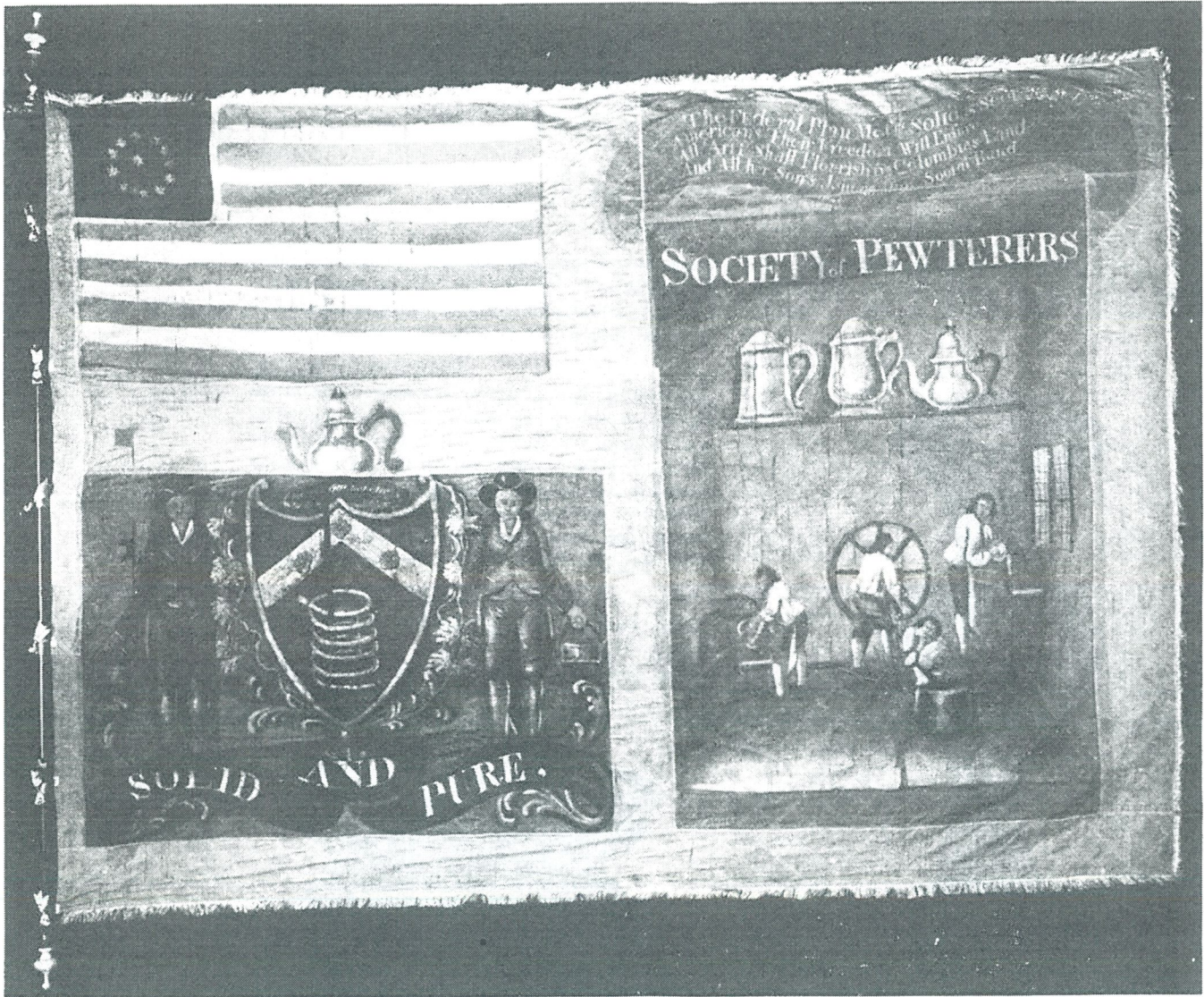


Fig. 1 — BANNER OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY OF PEWTERERS (1788)
Carried in the Federal Procession held in New York, July 23, 1788.
Owned by the New York Historical Society.

Casual Notes on American Pewter

By THE EDITOR

IN his notes on American pewter published in *ANTIQUES* for October, 1925, Howard Herschel Corterell emphasizes the fact that, in Colonial America, no such guild or company of pewterers existed as that which, for some centuries in England, exercised an almost tyrannous authority over its members—their methods of manufacture and their personal behavior. Yet it would have been strange if something of the guild spirit of the home country had not been carried into the individualistic new world by immigrant craftsmen, and by them retained in sufficient potency to become assertive in the unanimous good fellowship of festal occasions.*

*On the participation of the English trades guilds in national and local pageants of all kinds see Navarro, *Causeries on English Pewter*, p. 72; or, the source of the material, Welch, *History of the Pewterers Company* (1902).

Evidence in point is supplied by a painted silken banner, now belonging to the New York Historical Society, which was borne in the great Federal Parade held in New York City, July 23, 1788 in celebration of the ratification of the Federal Constitution (Fig. 1). In the *Historical Society Bulletin* for July, 1925, Sarah H. J. Simpson illustrates this banner in the course of a description of the Federal Parade as a whole.* The event thus described must have been highly picturesque. For the time being, at least, the members of virtually all the trades and professions of the city constituted themselves as societies.

**The Federal Procession in the City of New York*, by Sarah H. J. Simpson, *The New York Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin*, Vol. IX, No. 2. For permission to use this material and to reprint the photograph of the banner *ANTIQUES* acknowledges the courtesy of Alexander J. Wall, Librarian of the Society.

which not only occupied distinct places in the procession, but signaled their presence with symbolic or expository floats and significantly emblazoned banners. The tailors, for instance, paid their tribute of appreciation to Adam and Eve for that early indiscretion which gave first impulse to the sartorial art, by carrying a huge banner upon which appeared the primal pair, life size and attired in brief garments of fresh verdure. Accompanying this representation ran the explanatory legend *and they sewed fig leaves together*.

Blind to their dark future in the land of the free, the brewers made brave showing with a huge cask, within whose capacious interior foamed three hundred gallons of ale. The potters manned a float whereon the workings of their craft were depicted in full life—until, in an unfortunate moment, the equipment broke down, to the great detriment of pots and potters alike.

The pewterers appear to have been satisfied with a revealing banner of orange colored silk, which is described as follows:⁸

Underneath the colors of the United States are the pewterers' arms supported by two miners holding burning lamps. The motto *Solid and pure* is in gold letters. On the front of the flag are the words *Society of Pewterers*, and a representation of a pewterer's shop with different branches of the trade at work. Some of the work is finished. Above this are the following lines:

"The Federal plan most solid and secure
Americans their freedom will endure
All arts shall flourish in Columbia's land
And all her sons join as one social band."

This silken trophy, miraculously preserved for more than a century, came into possession of the New York Historical Society in 1923, as the gift of James S. Haring of Orangeburg, New York. Sadly dilapidated at the time of its donation, the flag has recently been restored and given a conspicuous position in the rooms of the Society.

The existence of this banner is, however, very far from constituting proof that a Society of Pewterers ever functioned as an active organization in New York City. Until further evidence, one way or another, is forthcoming, it may be safest to suggest only two rather obvious inferences: first, that, in 1788, there was in New York City a sufficient number of pewterers enjoying a prosperous trade to justify

⁸See the note above.

the making of a fairly expensive banner; second, that, for the time being, these men associated themselves for purposes of celebration in a manner honored by centuries of inescapable tradition.

To the student of early American pewter the banner will, perhaps, be particularly significant as an index of the fashions prevailing toward the close of the eighteenth century, for it displays four objects of household use—two tankards and two teapots—depicted in large scale

Without exception these pieces seem to support the statement previously made in *ANTIQUES* that styles in American pewter were close to half a century behind those current in England.

The double domed straight sided tankard shown on the shelf above the heads of the pewterers at work in their shop is, indeed—save for a slightly intensified tapering of the body—hardly to be distinguished from the English type of the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The pot-bellied tankard next to it would fall somewhat later, perhaps as late as 1750.

As for the teapots—the one on the shop shelf, and that which conventionally surmounts the coat of arms—who can speak with finality of them? Careful search through numerous works, both English and American, reveals little or no information concerning the form of pewter teapots until we reach the second quarter of the nineteenth century immortalized by Mr. Kerfoot as the "coffee pot era." If we would surmise concerning the appearance of eighteenth century pewter teapots, therefore, we must do so, apparently, on the basis of analogues in silver.

By 1780, or thereabouts, English silver teapots were displaying lids flat, or only slightly domical, straight spouts, and oval, hexagonal, or octagonal bodies with straight sides.⁹ During the previous quarter century the general form of silver teapots had been *globular*. The pear, or gourd shaped silver teapot, with a goose neck and highly domical lid, is distinctively of the period 1700-1725. What is true of the chronology of silver teapots in England is, doubtless, roughly true of pewter teapots of the same nationality. Yet the pewter specimens pictured by the

⁹De Navarro in his *Causeries*, referred to *supra*, illustrates a pewter teapaddy in this style, but no pot, p. 99, Plate I.



Fig. 2 — EARLY PEWTER TEAPOT (eighteenth century)

The pot, marked on the bottom *IP* in a circle is probably of English make. The wooden burton of the lid has been restored. The handle appears to be original. This teapot is an heirloom piece, owned by Mrs. Harry E. Allen.

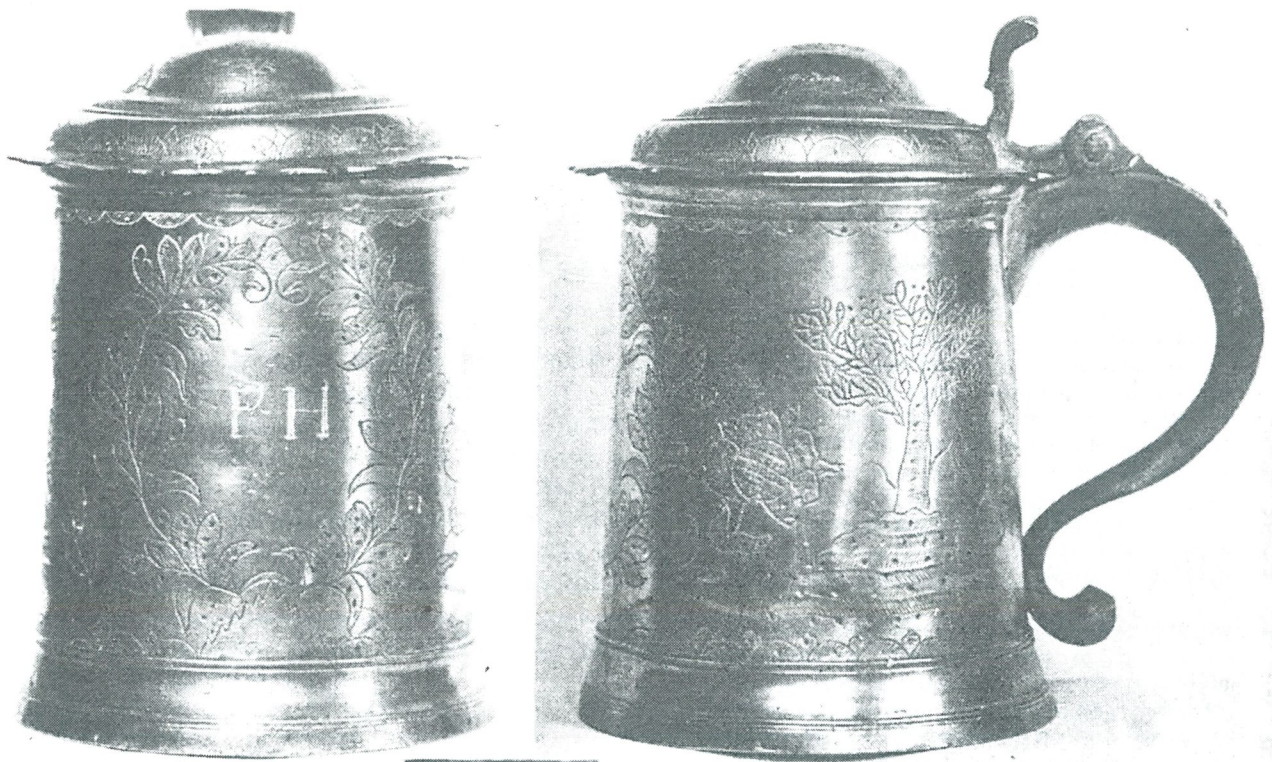


Fig. 3—QUART TANKARD BY JOHN WILL (eighteenth century)

The tankard is shown in two positions, the letter to display its elaborate wrigglework decoration. The mark *PH*, in a circle on the bottom of the tankard, within, is likewise reproduced.

Owned by Mrs. J. Insley Blair.

A RARE TANKARD

Quite the rarest known American pewter tankard, and perhaps the rarest known specimen of American pewter of any kind, is the specimen here illustrated (*Fig. 3*). For some time past it has been owned by Mrs. J. Insley Blair, of Tuxedo, New York; yet its probable American origin was not until recently suspected.

The tankard stands better than six inches high, and displays the double domed lid with serrated edge, and the bulb finial handle, which, in England, characterize tankards of the first quarter of the eighteenth century, and, in America, are discoverable in somewhat indiscriminate use at any time during the century.

The remarkable feature of this tankard is, however, the elaborate "wriggle work" decoration with which its outer surface is covered. This design consists of scalloped edgings within whose confines appear a tree upon an eminence, and an elaborate scroll-framed reserve for monogram or cypher. From the side of the scroll spring conventionalized roses, and, here and there upon the pewter, appear forms strongly reminiscent of the familiar tulip pattern.

The scalloped edgings are suggestive of something familiar, yet difficult, at first glance, to identify. If, however, the reader will turn to *ANTIQUES* for November, 1924, he may quite naturally conclude that these roughly engraved scallops are derivatives of the leaf borders with which the Dutch silversmiths of New York were so fond of adorning their fine tankards. Indeed, the engraving as a whole smacks strongly of Dutch influence—the same influence, perhaps, which prompted the fantastic wriggle

American pewterers upon their gala banner of 1788 are of the primitive Queen Anne form which flourished abroad fully sixty years earlier.* Almost precisely such a teapot, apparently English made, now owned by Mrs. Harry F. Allen of Norwood, Massachusetts, has long been an heirloom in her family. Its mark is *PH* in a beaded circle on the bottom. The form of the letters suggests the early eighteenth century. This teapot is here illustrated (*Fig. 2*). Save for its greater refinement of spout, it is virtually identical in design with the pair of pots pictured in the pewterers' banner of the Federal Procession.

Oddly enough, the Britannia ware makers, during the coffee pot era of the 1830's and 1840's, appear to have drawn the inspiration for their designs largely from the pewter forms popular during the first quarter of 1700. Reference to Kerfoot's *American Pewter* will reveal innumerable, pear shaped, duck necked coffee pots and teapots of the 1830-1840 period. Yet these late examples are, in so many essentials, different from their early prototypes that confusion between the two should be easily avoided by the reasonably accurate observer who has learned to make comparison on the basis of differences rather than resemblances.

*For excellent illustrations of English silver teapots see W. W. Watts, *Old English Silver*, New York, Scribners, 1924, Plates 72b, 73a, 73b, 74b, 107a, 107b, 107c.

work decoration of certain English pewter of the Stuart period," and which is observable in New York silver of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The crudely formed initials *P. W.*, which, doubtless, are the sign manual of some owner of the piece, are hardly to be accounted as a part of the original engraving.

After observing the traces of a possible New York Dutch influence in the decoration of this obviously Anglo-American tankard belonging to Mrs. Blair, it is encouraging to discover, stamped on the bottom within, the maker's mark, a small circle enclosing the initials *W. W.* These initials are already familiar to readers of *ANTIQUES* through encounter with them on Herbert Lawton's plate, pictured and described in the April, 1923, number and again considered in the recent October number.²⁸ They are, if *ANTIQUES* is correctly informed, the mark of John Will, father of Henry Will of New York City. Henry Will was a listed pewterer, according to Mr. Kerfoot, in 1793. Presumably he was active as early as 1762. What still earlier dates should be assigned to John Will, the father, we may, in due course, learn from researches now being conducted by Louis G. Myers.²⁹

A SAMUEL DANFORTH BOWL

Another rare piece of early American pewter, hitherto unpublished, is the bowl pictured in the Frontispiece and now owned by the Right Reverend James DeWolf Perry, Bishop of Rhode Island. When originally presented to Bishop Perry, some few years since, this bowl, accompanied by a small pewter flagon, was reported to have come from a church in Ridgefield, Connecticut. Both were assumed to be of the same origin, and both were placed in the Bishop's private oratory, where, indeed, they are discoverable today.

Obviously, however, the little flagon, or measure, which stands but five and three-quarters inches in height, is neither American nor English. It is either continental or of that intermediate persuasion which comes from the Channel Islands. But the bowl is clearly marked on the

bottom, within, with the stamp of Samuel Danforth, of Hartford, Connecticut.

This particular Danforth appears to have been active shortly subsequent to the Revolution and to have expressed his patriotic ardor as an American citizen by using his "touch" as a medium for playing numerous variations upon the device of an eagle. That particular eagle manifestation which appears in Bishop Perry's bowl is closely similar to that illustrated in Figure 133 of Kerfoot's *American Pewter*. To Danforth's versatility Figure 140 in the same book bears witness; for here are plates, shallow and deep, a porringer, a quart mug, a basin and a small beaker.

To this list we may now add this really noble bowl, with its well formed foot, its massive reeded column where on the basin rests with the stability of an Italian fountain. None of the connoisseurs of American pewter who have examined the photograph of this bowl—and they are several—has been able to cite a similar example. The piece appears to be *sui generis*, and to have been made upon special order.

Mr. Myers is inclined to doubt that it was originally intended specifically for christening purposes. Its considerable diameter, seven and five-eighths inches, and the thickness of the column, great enough to preclude a sure and ready grasp by the fingers of an officiating clergyman, lend some justification to this doubt. Some kind of serving dish the bowl may once have been, or a pedestal, after the manner of an Irish potato ring; but there seems no good ground to question that its sacramental associations have endured through a long period of years.³⁰

Mr. Kerfoot ranks Samuel Danforth's pewter as "good but not of the best quality." Whether in this he refers to material or to design is not quite clear. In any case, this bowl of Bishop Perry's would justify a considerable modification of the expressed opinion. The piece is, of course, later by many years than Mrs. Blair's tankard. It may perhaps be assigned to the first decade of 1800, during which period Mr. Kerfoot believes Samuel Danforth was active. Nevertheless, it deserves to rank with Mrs. Blair's tankard as among the few really distinguished examples of work evolved by a school of American craftsmen whose productions so far discovered are seldom notable for their distinction. This last general judgment is, however, one which may automatically be revised by a few more discoveries of pieces such as those here pictured.

³⁰A considerable investigation very kindly undertaken in Ridgefield, Connecticut, by a friend of *ANTIQUES* is failed to reveal any record of the Danforth bowl and its flagon companion in the history of any of the local churches.



FIG. 1.—SMALL COVERED MEASURE (1793)

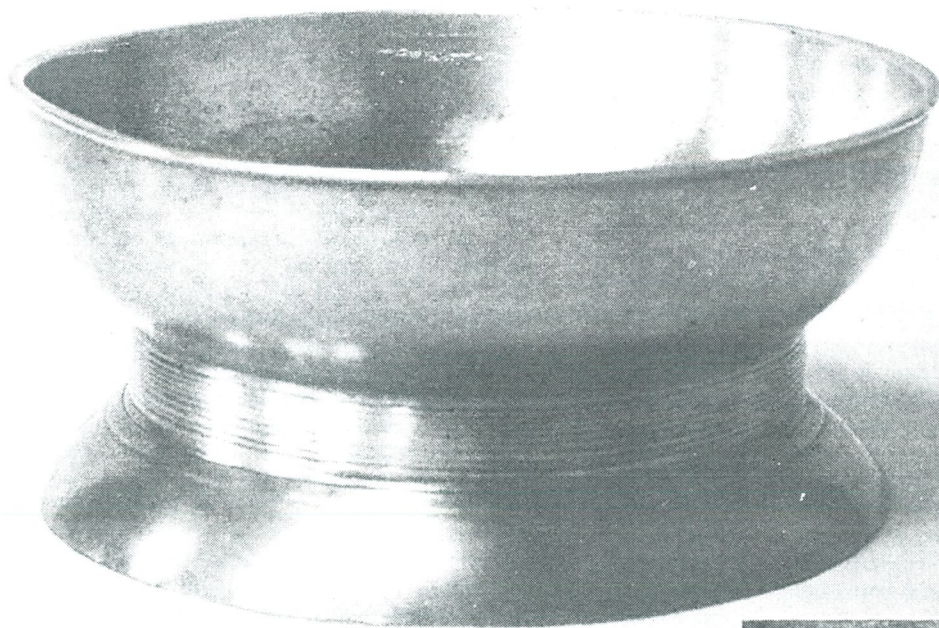
While this piece accompanied the Danforth bowl—shown in the Frontispiece—when the latter came into its present ownership, it is neither English nor American. It appears to be from the Channel Islands. Owned by the Right Reverend James De W. J. Perry, Tutor.

²⁸Concerning seventeenth century Dutch influence on the contemporary silver of England, Warrs, as above cited, p. 62, makes interesting remark. We may, of course, no more than assume that a similar influence was operating in the humbler field of pewter.

²⁹The photographing of this mark in the depths of a quart tankard is no mean testimony to the skill of Paul J. Weber who took the picture for *ANTIQUES*.

³⁰See *ANTIQUES*, Vol. VII, p. 167, and Vol. VIII, p. 216—particularly the footnote, where it is observed that the *W. W.* plate now belongs to Mr. Myers.

³¹Charles A. Calder, of Providence, owns a pewter plate marked with the full name of John Will, together with what appears to be a form of that eagle mark which Howard Herschel Cotterell, in his *Notions Taken of Old Pewter*, cites as an index of continental origin. In the case of a New York pewterer, however, such a mark, like the decorative crest of Mrs. Blair's tankard, would imply more than a sensitiveness to an English model.



A BOWL BY SAMUEL DANFORTH (c. 1800)

Perhaps originally a christening bowl; in any case an exceptionally fine example of early American pewter. The mark of Samuel Danforth, of Hartford, which occurs on the bottom of the bowl, within, is likewise reproduced.

Owned by the Right Reverend James DeWolfe Perry, Junior.

