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The pewterers of eighteenth-century New York

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THE PEWTERERS of New York were, as a group, the ablest makers in the Colonies, producing the widest variety in shape and the highest quality in design and finish, if judgment be based upon a survey of their recorded surviving output. Pennsylvania alone may have some right to dispute such a claim, but, after all, two of that colony's finest craftsmen, Colonel William Will and Cornelius Bradford, were born in New York and learned their trade there.

It is a rather amazing coincidence that New York's earliest pewterer of record, Thomas Burroughs Sr. (freeman 1678-d.1703), had been trained in Bristol, England, by Thomas Paschall Sr. (1635-1718), Philadelphia's first pewterer.

Fig. 1. Quart tankard with flat top and crenate lip. Height over all, 7 3/16 inches. The drum has been tastefully engraved with the cipher of the owners within a floral design. Touch 1., 582 (touch numbers throughout refer to illustrations in the author's *Pewter in America, Its Makers and Their Marks;* Barre, Massachusetts, 1969 and 1970). William Bradford Jr. (New York, w. 1719-1758). *Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum.*

Fig. 2. Quart tankard with flat cover and crenate lip. Height 6 5/16 inches.
Touch 1., 483, John Will (New York, w. 1752-c.1774). Probably unique among American pewter tankards because of the medallion illustrating a Biblical scene let into center of lid. *Collection of Donald Noble.*

Fig. 3. Detail of lid of Figure 2. The medallion, 1 1/4 inches in diameter, shows the prophet Elijah being fed by an angel of the Lord and by a raven.

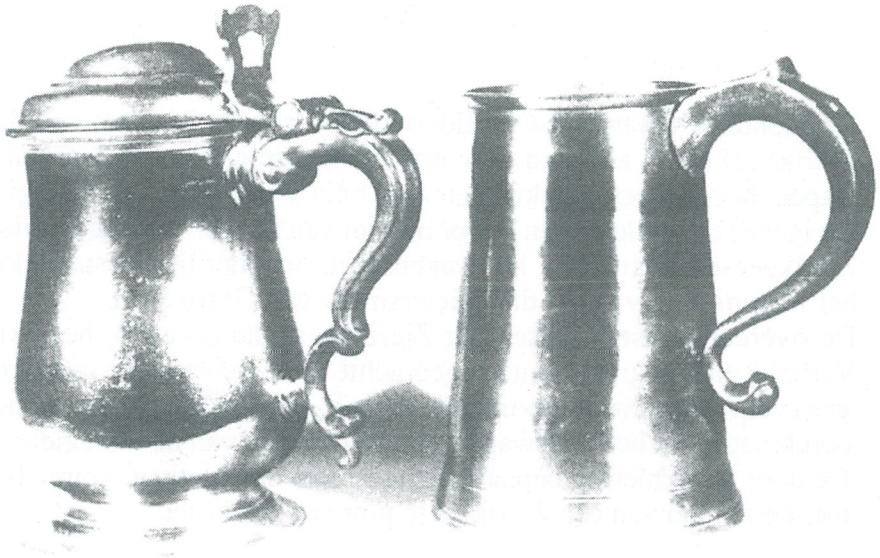

Fig. 4. *Left:* Bellied quart tankard with double-dome cover, chair-back open thumbpiece, and broken double-C handle, atypically marked near handle at rim. Height 7⅛ inches over all. Touch L. 483, John Will. Only known New York tankard of this design. *Right:* Quart pot by the same maker with same touch. Height 6¼ inches. Unusual among New York mugs in that it has no fillet on drum. *Collection of William M. Goss Jr.*

Burroughs seems to have left England a few years before his master, but stopped off at Boston for a time—perhaps several years—before settling in New York.

This newly found maker's story was related recently in Helen Burr Smith's interesting article entitled "A New I. B. Silversmith and Two Unrecorded Pewterers," which appeared in the *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* for January 1968 (pp. 81-85). Although no example of the pewter made by either Paschall or Burroughs is known, the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art owns an exceedingly handsome lidded porringer in silver, attributed to John Coney of Boston, which is engraved with the initials of Thomas Burroughs and his first wife, Mary, together with the date 1680. It was apparently acquired by Burroughs during his sojourn in Boston, perhaps upon the occasion of his first marriage. By Thomas' will it was specifically bequeathed to his only daughter, Mary, through whose line it descended to Sylvester Dering, a great-great-great-grandson of the immigrant. Mr. Dering presented the porringer to the museum along with its complete pedigree. This magnificent vessel is pictured on page 310 of Francis H. Bigelow's *Historic Silver of the Colonies and Its Makers* (New York, 1917).

In one important field, the manufacture of the lidded tankard, the New York makers were pre-eminent among the pewterers of the Colonies. They have left us a greater number with a wider range in size and a far greater variety in design than the pewterers of all of the other colonies put together. What's more, only in New York was the aristocrat of American tankards made—the flat-lid tankard with a crenate lip, a prize to which every collector aspires. True, the form was made by Cornelius Bradford (w.1752-1785), a pewterer who spent most of his working years in Philadelphia, but Bradford was born in New York and presumably trained in his father's shop there. This handsome design was not only indigenous to New York; it must have been a stock form with every New York shop of any pretensions, at least during the period from 1740 to 1765.

Collections today include tankards with flat lid and crenate lip bearing the touches of not less than nine different New York makers, and the actual number may be even greater. Just such a tankard, handsomely and artistically engraved to include a cipher of the initials of the owner within an elaborate border, is illustrated as Figure 1. Inside, on the bottom, is a touch of William Bradford Jr. (w. 1719-1758). One of Bradford's contemporaries, Joseph Leddell Jr. (w.1740-1754), advertised in the *New-York Gazette* in 1752 that . . . "He [Leddell] also Engraves on Steel, Iron, Gold, Silver, Copper, Brass, Pewter, Ivory or Turtle-Shell in a neat Manner, and reasonably. . . ." Leddell may have been the capable decorator of Bradford's fine tankard.

Most unusual of all such tankards was one made by John Will, who worked in New York from 1752 to about 1774. Centered on the flat lid and set in below the surface is a medallion one and one-quarter inches in diameter with a depiction in bas-relief of the prophet Elijah being fed by an angel of the Lord and by a raven. That tankard, shown as Figure 2, is probably unique among American tankards, because of the raised decoration with a Biblical theme. The medallion itself, shown at approximately actual size, appears as Figure 3. One wonders from what old German engraving Will took the design.

John Will, as we now know, was a very religious man. When he first arrived in New York he and his family joined the Reformed Dutch Church, but in 1763 he was apparently the leader of a group that broke away to establish the German Reformed Congregation of New York, and, until his death about 1774, Will appears in the records as that church's senior elder.

Whether the tankard was made for use in that or some other church or as a special order or gift for one of Will's religious friends is not known. Its value and interest would be even greater if it had been inscribed.

In England, tankards with this flat top and crenate lip are termed Stuart tankards. They were in use there during the last half of the seve teenth centry, but about 1710 the flat top became obsole nd was replaced by a lid with double dome—a much les osing design. In New York the Stuart

tankard was still being made in 1760 and probably as late as 1775.

Not all New York tankards with flat lids had crenate lips. The plain flat lid without crenation was made contemporaneously with the more elaborate design by such men as John (w.1752-c.1774) and Henry Will (w.1761-1793), Peter Young (w.1775-1795), and William Elsworth (w.1767-1798), to name a few.

Many of the New York pewterers who continued to make the outmoded flat-top tankards were also equipped to make tankards with the double-dome cover currently in vogue in England. This cover is found both on the normal cylindrical, or drum-shape, tankard body and on the bellied, or tulip-shape, body. The latter, however, was not a common form in New York. To date, John Will is the only New York pewterer who is known to have made bellied quart tankards. An example is illustrated in Figure 4, along with a quart mug by the same maker. The tankard is unusual, too, as far as New York tankards go, for its double-C handle and open thumbpiece; it is the only known New York tankard of this design.

The unusual feature of Will's quart pot is its lack of the heavy rib, or fillet, encircling the drum which appears on practically all New York mugs (or pots, as they were termed in the inventories). This fillet is found on almost all the pots of John and Henry Will, of all of the Bassetts (members of this family were active in New York 1718-1800), and of William Kirby (w.1760-1793), and it is not found on pots of the other colonies.

Figure 5 shows one of the finest of American church flagons, a vessel which only very recently has emerged from its hiding place after perhaps one hundred and fifty years of disuse. It is said to have been part of a service in a small church in western Connecticut. The maker was Philip Will (w.1760-1787), one of John's sons, who moved to Philadelphia in 1763 and spent most of his working years there, but was back in New York in 1766 and probably for a few years thereafter. Prior to the finding of this flagon by Oliver Deming in 1969, we had no certain knowledge that Philip Will had left behind, as testimony to his craftsmanship, any pewter other than a few small plates.

The body of this flagon is very similar in shape to those made by Philip's older brother, Henry. However, the unusual handle, which has no known counterpart in American pewter, is longer and better designed for the use to which it was to be put than Henry's short tankard handle. If one wants to be critical, Philip may be faulted for crowning the lid with a finial that seems too large and overly pretentious: a small classical urn atop the lid would have greatly improved the composition.

Figure 6 illustrates a rare and early form, a fluted presentation dish, said to have been made to hold sweetmeats. It was first illustrated in the January 1949 issue of ANTIQUES (p. 40) and commented upon by its then owner, Oliver Deming. The flutings were formed by hammering a cast circular disk of pewter over a shaped wooden block. Later the face was decorated with a formal border enclosing a floral circlet within which were engraved the initials, *G/Z M*, of the couple to whom the dish was to be given, along with the year of the presentation, *1732*. On its back is a worn but clearly decipherable touch of the first Francis Bassett (w.1718-1758). This is the earliest dated surviving dish of record made in New York, but it is later by perhaps thirty or forty years than the Edmund Dolbeare dishes made in Boston or Salem.

The largest and most imposing American chalice recorded is shown as Figure 7. This magnificent drinking vessel, now in the New Haven Colony Historical Society museum, was once in use by the West Haven Congregational Church. Inside its base is one of the initial touches of the elder Joseph Leddell (w.1711-1753), now confirmed to that maker because with the chalice was found a paten carrying two of Leddell's full-name touches.

Fig. 5. Unusually fine church flagon. Height over all, 12¾ inches. Touch L. 477 and 477a, the "hallmarks" of Philip Will (w.1760-1787); probably made in New York during his early years, c. 1760-1763. Said to have been used in a small church in western Connecticut. *Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Oliver W. Deming.*

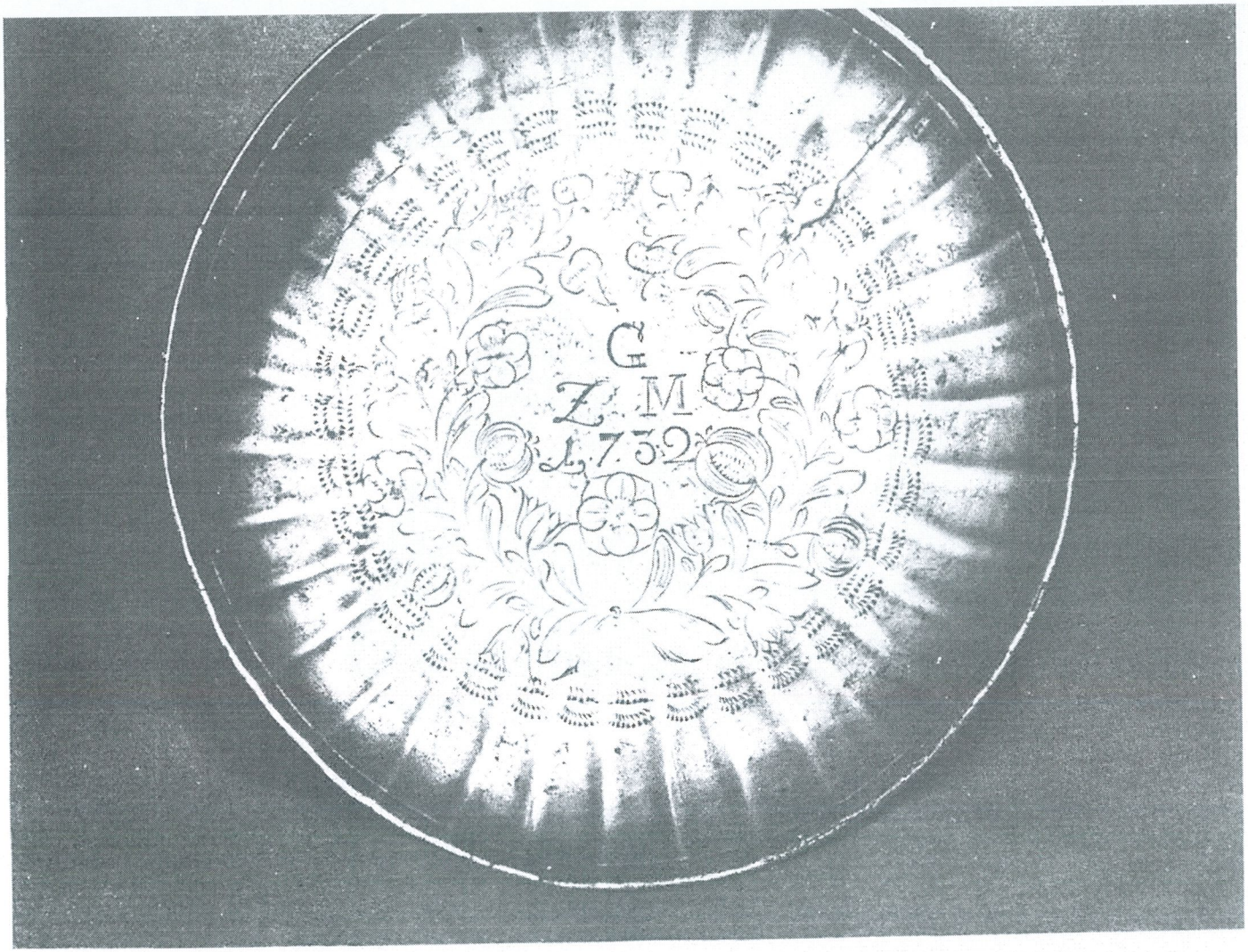

Fig. 6. Extremely rare presentation dish. Inscribed *G Z M 1732*. 8½ inches in diameter, with 33 flutings. Touch L. 461. Francis Bassett I (New York, w.1718-1758). *Collection of Dr. Joseph H. Kler; photograph by courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.*

Last of the pre-Revolutionary forms to be illustrated (Fig. 8) is a rare early teapot made by Frederick Bassett, whose career began in New York in 1761. The only other marked American teapot of this early form thus far reported is one of slightly simpler design made by one of the Francis Bassetts, either Frederick's older brother (w.1754-1799) or his uncle of the same name. The charm of the teapot's shape is enhanced by the engraving of the bird and floral motif on its body.

The final illustration shows a tea caddy made by that remarkable individualist George Coldwell, whom we can place in New York definitely in 1787, but who may have arrived there a number of years earlier. His known surviving work varies so greatly in form, design, and decoration from that of any of his New York contemporaries and predecessors that it seems all but certain that he did not receive his träining in New York. In *Old Pewter* (London, 1929) Howard H. Cotterell lists a George Coldwell as a pewterer in Cork, Ireland, in 1773. It is just possible that the Coldwell of Cork may be the man who turned up in New York some years later.

Although the New York Coldwell advertised the manufacture of the stock pewter forms which every shop made (mugs, measures, commodes, and so forth) and particularly stressed his ability to make candle molds in great variety, he is known to us through his surviving examples as a specialist in the manufacture of small boxes of various shapes and sizes, beakers, and canisters, which were usually neatly and tastefully decorated with graving tools and frequently were japanned. He has also left us spoons with patriotic designs cast in the handle, and lately two or three Federal-period teapots on four feet have come to light. The well-designed caddy in Figure 9 is a very pleasing composition, a typical expression of the feeling that pervades this man's work.

In this brief article it is not possible to do more than show and comment upon a few particularly meritorious examples of New York craftsmanship, but perhaps sufficient evidence has been presented to prove our original premise: the pewterers of no other colony have left us testimony to their abilities as impressive as that of the pewterers of New York.

Mr. Laughlin is the author of the American pewter collector's bible, *Pewter in America, Its Makers and Their Marks*, which was published in two volumes in 1940 by Houghton Mifflin Company and republished in 1969 in one volume, with marginal corrections, by Barre Publishers. A third volume, on which this article is based, is to be published shortly by Barre. Dates and attributions given here are as they will appear in the new volume.

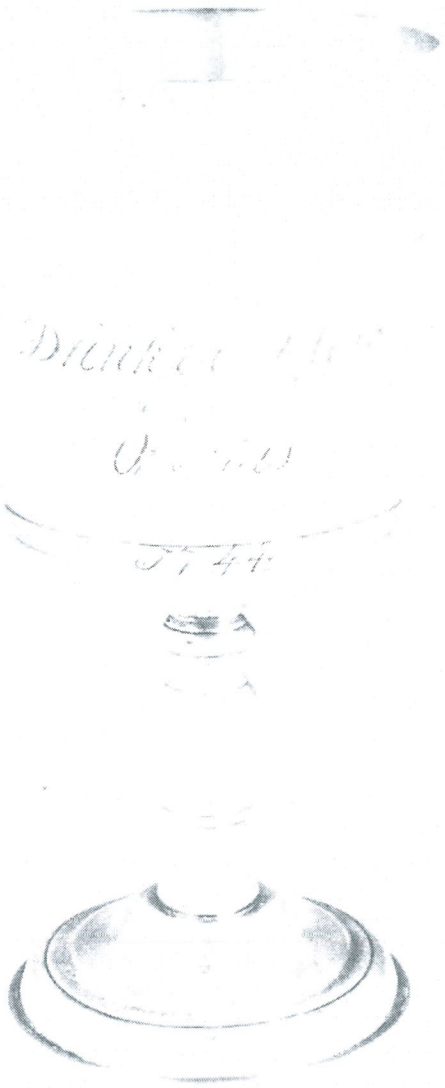

Fig. 7. Chalice of Christ Church Parish, West Haven, Connecticut. Height 10¼ inches over all.
Touch L. 856, Joseph Leddell Sr. (New York, w.1711-1753). Largest and one of the finest of surviving American chalices.
New Haven Colony Historical Society.

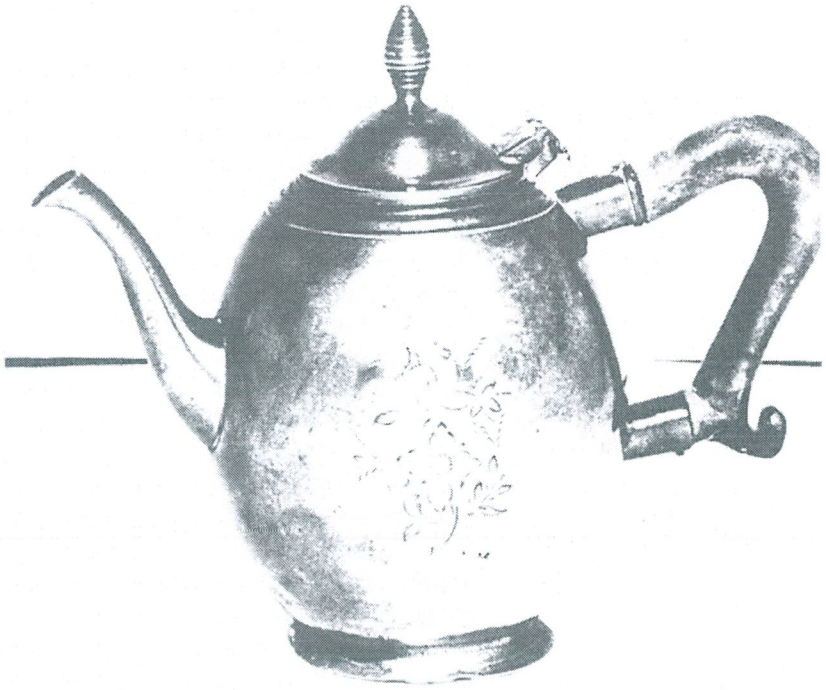

Fig. 8. Fine early teapot. Height over all, 7 inches.
Touch L. 465, Frederick Bassett (New York, w.1761-1800).
New Haven Colony Historical Society.

Fig. 9. Oval-lid tea caddy decorated with bright-cut engraving. Height with cover, 5½ inches. A handsome caddy embellished at top and bottom with bandings of classic design. Marked G. COLDWELL. N. YORK. Coldwell worked in New York from 1787 to 1811. *Photograph by courtesy of Thomas D. Williams.*