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Fig. 1 — CYLINDRICAL TEAPOT BY WILLIAM WILL, PHILADELPHIA, 1795
 The eagle touch that appears on the inside of this pot is here reproduced for the first time.
 From the collection of the Honorable Richard S. Quigley

American Pewter as a Collectible

By P. G. PLATT

FOR some inconceivable reason, many persons believe that pewter was not made in America before the Federal era, and that, as Colonists, we employed only imported wares. It is now well known that pewtering was practiced in the Colonies at quite as early a date as was any other craft. Unfortunately, however, plentiful though the ware was in its day, virtually no examples antedating 1750 seem to have survived. To be sure, specimens of this date would be difficult to identify as certainly American. In 1750 we were, in effect, English, and touch marks at that time were probably identical with those used in the mother country. It is only when the name of the place of manufacture is included in a touch that positive ascription to a specific source is possible.

Collectors have asked me, in a rather bewildered way, "Why the tremendous value of American pewter, when the English product is so much finer in quality?" The answer should be obvious. The statement as to quality is not founded on fact. Some American pewter compares as favorably with the work of

English pewterers as does our furniture and silver with that of contemporary English craftsmen. Inspection of the superior examples by William Will here illustrated should go far to dispel any doubts regarding the ability of our pewterers, both to produce good metal and to handle it with due regard to design.

It is doubtful that any pewterer in America ever surpassed Colonel Will in versatility. My check list credits him with surviving items of the following kinds: communion flagons; coffeepots; teapots of two types; covered tankards of two types; quart mugs of two types; pint mugs; six-, eight-, and sixteen-inch plates; six-inch basins; tablespoons; and a warming plate. This list might be taken to indicate that William Will pewter is plentiful. On the contrary, though he was extremely versatile, Will's work is sufficiently rare to inspire pride in the hearts of those fortunate enough to own an example from his hand. The Colonel received \$150 each for "Tea Potts," \$25 for "Basons," and \$5 for tablespoons, in 1780. So it would appear that, after the values of today are relatively modest, even granting the

of coffee wares 1795 1802



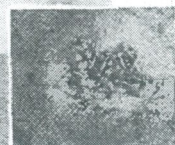
Fig. 2 — BULBOUS QUART MUG BY WILLIAM WILL.
The acanthus leaf handle is extremely rare, and is here well executed.
From the collection of Ledlie I. Laughlin



Fig. 4 — BARREL-SHAPED QUART MUG BY PARKS BOVD, PHILADELPHIA, 1800
A very pleasing adaptation of this form.
From the author's collection



Fig. 3 — URN-SHAPED COFFEPOY BY WILLIAM WILL.
This pot measures sixteen inches in height, and, by some critics, is considered the finest extant example of American pewter.
From the author's collection



MS. C. M. W. 1000. 5002



Fig. 5—RARE PORRINGER BY THOMAS DANFORTH THE THIRD, OF PHILADELPHIA From the author's collection



Fig. 6—SMALL BEAKER BY S. KILBOURN, BALTIMORE (early nineteenth century) From the collection of Leslie I. Laughlin



Fig. 7—PROVINCIAL PENNSYLVANIA PORRINGER, ATTRIBUTED TO SAMUEL PENNOCK From the collection of Mrs. J. Insley Blair



Fig. 8—TEAPOT BY G. RICHARDSON, BOSTON The exceptionally rare touch is also shown. From the author's collection

ll's 1780 charges were based on a greatly depreciated currency. A cylindrical teapot by William Will (*Fig. 1*) is as attractive design as contemporary silver. Both metal and workmanship are as fine as may be found in any land. An added feature of interest in this specimen is the small eagle head touch, which is unique in my experience. The bulbous quart mug by the same maker (*Fig. 2*) is also a masterpiece of workmanship, and the only American piece of its kind that has come to my attention. The double scrolled handle, with its imposed wreath and thus leaf, is beautifully designed, and highly successful in every respect. Probably the most superb piece of American pewter that has yet come to light is illustrated in Figure 3. This imposing sixteenth-century coffeepot by William Will seems beyond criticism in design, workmanship, and metal. Parks Boyd, who worked in Philadelphia a decade later, was another superior craftsman whose product was uniformly excellent in quality. The barrel-shaped mug shown in Figure 4 appears to be a form peculiar to him. It is pressed, on the inside, with the maker's small eagle touch.

Thomas Danforth the second was prolific in pewterware; but the porringer shown in Figure 5 seems to be unique in three respects: the shape is Continental in derivation, and boasts a solid handle similar to that employed in Rhode Island; it is, so far as I know, the only porringer impressed with this touch mark; it also seems to be the only surviving example of a Philadelphia porringer. Somewhat allied to this interesting piece is the provincial Pennsylvania porringer bearing an initialed touch (*Fig. 6*). Unmarked porringers from this mold are not uncommon in Chester and Delaware counties, but a marked specimen is a distinct rarity. Indications point to the fact that Samuel Pennock of Kennett Square, maker of "Chairs, Reels, and Little Wheels," also made pewter, and the piece in question will be attributed to him until further notice. Students will serve the similarity of the s.p. porringer to that made by Joshua Kirk of York. The molds differ slightly in detail, however. Unmarked beakers are common; marked specimens by the maker are not exceptionally rare. That illustrated, by Kilbourn of Baltimore, is a splendid and unusual example

of this type of vessel (*Fig. 6*). George Richardson of Cranston, Rhode Island, was a productive worker of late date, and has entered pewterdom's Hall of Fame through the medium of his rather original and very beautiful little sugar bowls. (Some call them butter dishes.) It seems that, before locating in Cranston, Richardson worked for a short period in Boston. The fine teapot shown in Figure 8 bears the Boston touch, and, aside from that, is interesting because of its charming shape and quality. But the specimens thus marked are exceedingly rare.

Connecticut porringers with the initials I. G. cast in the handle appear often, yet the most abstemious pewter collector could not but look with favor upon a tankard so marked. The specimen illustrated in Figure 9 bears these initials, cast in the under side of the handle. Contrary to the conclusions of the late Mr. Kerfoot, I feel confident that they are the initials of the maker. This manner of marking was used occasionally in England; and it is logical to assume that it was continued in America.

That we have not yet reached a complete tabulation even of the later American pewterers is evident in the touch mark of O. Williams of Buffalo, reproduced for the first time in Figure 10. The touch is from the back of an eight-inch plate of fine quality, and is so similar to the small eagle touch of Boardman and Company that we may suspect Mr. Williams of having worked in Hartford before migrating to Buffalo.

The baptismal bowl by Samuel Danforth (*Fig. 11*) is one of the highly prized forms in pewter. This example is most "pewterlike" in shape, and typifies the basic soundness of design that appeals to every collector of the material. The bowl proper was, no doubt, cast in the maker's eight-inch basin mold, the rim partly turned off, and the foot added. The name of E. Whitehouse, pewterer is shrouded in mystery. Until recently no examples of his work were known to exist. It is with pleasure that I am here able to show one of a set of six dessert spoons of patriotic type, carrying the touch mark of this maker (*Fig. 12*). We may fairly credit these spoons to the first decade of the nineteenth century, but the home of Mr. Whitehouse still remains a mystery. That he was a first-rate craftsman is evidenced by the six spoons.



Fig. 9 — AMERICAN DOMED TANKARD, WITH THE INITIALS I. G. CAST IN THE HANDLE
From the author's collection

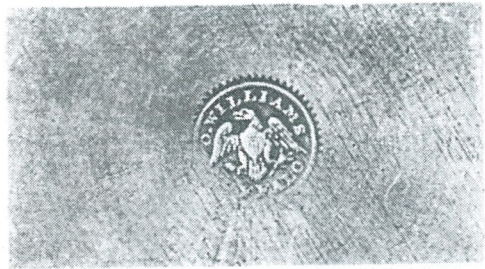


Fig. 10 — TOUCH MARK OF O. WILLIAMS
This mark appears on a nineteenth-century plate, eight inches in diameter.
From the collection of Ledlie I. Laughlin



Fig. 11 — BAPTISMAL BOWL BY SAMUEL DANFORTH, HARTFORD

An exceedingly rare and desirable form. For a similar item, see ANTIQUES, January, 1926, page 10. From the collection of C. F. Hutchins

I have also seen one plain dessert spoon on which the initial E was included in the touch. Either Whitehouse produced over a very long period, or some britannia manufacturer of the same surname was working in Victorian times; for I recently came across a rather gruesome teapot of the late sixties, marked with an incised WHITEHOUSE touch. Some humor was lent to this inspection, as the owner was sure that the piece had graced the table of one of our early presidents.

No doubt, other provincial pewterers will be discovered in the future, together with a number of pre-Revolutionary workers who plied their trade in the cities before the days of directories. To the collector of American pewter, there is no thrill equal to that accompanying the discovery and identification of an example fashioned by some early craftsman who has hitherto been unknown.

But quite aside from the interest felt in touch marks and the lives of the craftsmen, there are, fortunately, still collectors who

acquire pewter through love of its soft sheen and its simple direct forms. Today, when china and silver or silver plate are omnipresent, it is perhaps difficult to visualize the days when pewter provided almost all domestic tableware. Generations of our ancestors used it extensively, with wooden vessels as substitute when pewter was unavailable. Only when the manufacture of pottery and porcelain was put on a commercial basis did it fall into disuse. It could not thereafter compete with the far cheaper product of the potters.

Some of the pewterers continued to ply their trade, but the metal, for the most part, had no longer the beautiful quality of the older pieces. Both the alloy and the shapes changed, to keep step with the times and the fashions. For a brief period britannia held sway, only to give way in its turn to white metal, which was used as a base for plating. The era of pewter seemed past.

Hence it is the more pleasing that its day has again dawned among collectors.

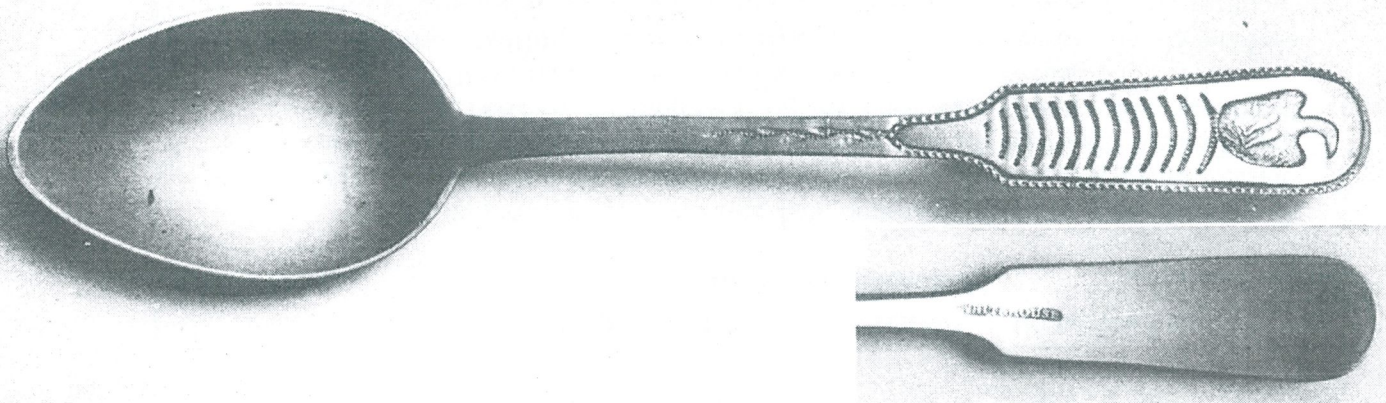


Fig. 12 — ONE OF SIX DESSERT SPOONS BY E. WHITEHOUSE

The touch is shown below. Formerly in the author's collection