

PEWTER

OF THE CONNECTICUT VALLEY



THE CONNECTICUT VALLEY
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

MAY 2nd THROUGH MAY 31st, 1948 · SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

INTRODUCTION

New England is particularly rich in pewter history. Though Boston may have been the cradle, its workshop was certainly the Connecticut Valley. All along the river, from Springfield, Vermont, to Greenfield, Massachusetts, Hartford and Middletown, Connecticut, much of the finest pewter of the early 18th and 19th centuries was produced. The highly prized eagle touches of such pewterers as Samuel Pierce, the Danforths and Boardmans, testify to the patriotic fervor of that Revolutionary period. The excellent forms of this old pewter provides the basic designs for that which is currently produced.

Pewter largely made up the tableware of our earliest settlers, who imported it from England and then later made their own. It was used until superseded by china, which cost less. However there are other reasons for its decline in popularity — the main one being that it is not of an enduring nature, melting when subject to heat, and becoming easily misshapen by hard usage.

The Connecticut Valley Historical Museum has undertaken to assemble a noteworthy exhibition of Connecticut Valley Pewter from some of America's outstanding Pewter Collections. In this exhibit the history of pewter in the valley may be traced, pewterers related to the places they worked, marks identified and forms studied. All this is to add to the appreciation of American Pewter, whose makers attained such excellence in their workshops along the banks of the Connecticut River.

JULIETTE TOMLINSON.

PEWTERERS

SPRINGFIELD, VERMONT

RICHARD LEE, SR. — 1747-1823

Born in Rhode Island, his whole life seems to have been one of suffering, at least according to his own accounts. He spent most of it wandering and working throughout New England. There is no mention of his pewter until he settled in Grafton, New Hampshire, where he wrote, "My next object was pewtering with my son." Where he learned the trade is a mystery. Pursued by misfortune, which seemed to keep right on his heels, he was one of those people who seemed never to settle down. He died in Springfield, Vermont.

RICHARD LEE, JR. — 1775-

Born in Rehoboth, Massachusetts, he accompanied his father on his many trips. He later settled in Springfield, Vermont, where he spent most of his life making pewter. He is perhaps best known for his small butter plates and his porringers which are most unusual. The date and place of his death are unknown, although pieces of his work have been found in the vicinity of Providence, Rhode Island. It may be assumed that he closed his days in the section of the country where he was born.

GREENFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

SAMUEL PIERCE — 1767-1840

Born in Middletown, he probably learned his trade with Joseph Danforth. He moved to Greenfield, Massachusetts, where he engaged in various enterprises, such as a river boatman on one of the river boats which went up and down the Connecticut. In spite of this he found time to make pewter and is best known for his 8 inch plates, flat dishes, christening basins, and various other pewter forms. He retired in 1831 and died in 1840 at the age of 72.

SAMUEL PIERCE'S TOOLS — These tools were discovered in a barn in Greenfield by Miss Julia D. S. Snow. They consist of moulds for porringer handles, burnishers, turning hooks, knurls, cutting tools and Samuel Pierce's die used for marking his pewter with its distinctive eagle touch.

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

FREDERICK BASSETT — 1740-1800

This pewterer was born in New York and spent the greater part of his life there. At some time during the Revolution he moved to Hartford, Connecticut, and purchased a house. He is best known for his flat-top tankards, quart basins, and flatware in various sizes. Later he returned to New York, where he died.

SAMUEL DANFORTH — 1774-1816

Born in Middletown, the youngest son of Thomas Danforth, he probably was apprenticed to his brothers. In 1795 he opened a shop of his own, specializing in flat dishes, deep dishes, plates, communion flagons, etc. He is considered a most successful pewterer. Besides having a large stock of finished metal on hand at his death, his estate was valued at over eleven thousand dollars, a substantial amount for that era.

THOMAS D. BOARDMAN — 1784-1873

This pewterer was born in Litchfield, son of Oliver Boardman and Sarah Danforth. His father moved to Hartford, where he probably apprenticed his son to his Uncle Samuel Danforth. Thomas became associated with his brother Sherman, and together they manufactured pewter, rather than Britannia ware which was later so popular, until Sherman's death in 1854.

ROCKY HILL, CONNECTICUT

THOMAS DANFORTH III — 1756-1840

Born in Middletown, the eldest son of Thomas Danforth II, he moved to Rocky Hill and worked there until opening a shop in Philadelphia in 1807. Probably none excelled this maker in the amount or quality of pewter, certainly not one of them has left as many examples of fine work. There is no question that he was very successful in Philadelphia, so it is hard to understand why he returned to Rocky Hill in 1813, where he remained until his death.

MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT

THOMAS DANFORTH II — 1731-1782

Born in Taunton, Massachusetts, he was apprenticed in his father's shop at Norwich, later moving to Middletown where he set up business for himself. He was not only the son and brother of a pewterer, but he had five sons who followed the trade. He is best known for his 7⁷/₈ inch and 9 inch and 9 3/16 inch plates with a smooth rim.

JOSEPH DANFORTH — 1758-1788

The second son of Thomas Danforth II, born in Middletown, worked with his father until the latter's death. He inherited one-half of the share of his father's moulds and continued with a shop of his own for six more years. Considering his short lifetime, it is amazing the amount of his pewter which has survived.

EDWARD DANFORTH — 1765-1830

The third son of Thomas was apprenticed to his father and completed his training under his brother Joseph. He made flatware which, with it's amusing lion touch, is considered rare. Also, he made beakers, basins, quart mugs, and porringers. He undoubtedly did not make any more pewter after he moved from Middletown to Hartford, where he died insolvent in 1830.

WILLIAM DANFORTH — 1769-1820

The fifth son of the second Thomas, born in Middletown, worked most of his life at his trade. Although only his plates and his basins have been found, his inventory lists teapots, spoons, porringers, etc. It is difficult to understand why his pewter is much scarcer than that of his brothers, both of whom lived shorter lives.

JOSIAH DANFORTH — 1803-1872

This pewterer was born in Middletown, son of William Danforth. After the distribution of William's estate, Josiah, presumably an apprentice in his father's shop, received his share in pewterer's moulds. His pewter making probably dates from 1825. He is best known for the excellence of his porringers, which have a rib of reinforcement down the center line of the handle. He continued the manufacturing of pewter until February, 1837, when he sold his shop. His death occurred in Middletown, May, 1872.

JACOB WHITMORE — 1736-1825

Where he learned his trade is doubtful, but we do know that he was born in Middletown and served as an officer in the Revolution. He operated a shop in Middletown and served as Sealer of Weights and Measures for the town, a post which was always held by someone who worked in metal. His pewter was considered of English origin for some time, and it was not until recently that collectors realized his work was American.

AMOS TREADWAY — 1738-1814

There is a question as to which Amos Treadway was the pewterer. Amos Treadway Sr. was born in Colchester. He married Elizabeth Blake of the same town, and the second of their nine children was also christened Amos. Soon the family moved to Middletown. There both father and son were living with their families. Amos Jr. died in 1808, his father in 1814, and nothing in either probate gives evidence of pewter making. Therefore, for the time being positive identification of the pewter is waiting proof that still must exist. Mr. Laughlin feels that the elder Amos Treadway, a contemporary of Thomas Danforth II, was the pewterer. In a group of touches on a Treadway plate is an impression of the "Middletown" mark that is also on early examples of Danforth's pewter.

JACOB EGGLESTON — 1773-1813

Born in Middletown, he married the daughter of Jacob Whitmore, which leads us to believe that he probably served his apprenticeship in Mr. Whitmore's shop. Undoubtedly he later had an establishment of his own. In 1810 he left Middletown and moved South, where he purchased land in Fayetteville, North Carolina. He continued to make pewter and probably ran a general store for his living. He died in Fayetteville in 1813.

JEHIEL JOHNSON — 1784 or 1785-1833

Born in Middletown, his early life remains a mystery. September, 1815, marked the formation of a pewter-making firm,

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Johnson, Hall and Company. Jehiel left the firm in 1817 to join William Nott and Babcock. The latter soon left the enterprise, and the shops of Johnson and Nott, both in Middletown and Fayetteville, lasted only until July, 1819. Johnson presumably returned to Middletown and continued pewter making for a few years longer. He died in Middletown in 1833.

WILLIAM NOTT — 1789-

It appears that there were two William Notts, both masons, and both working in pewter in different towns at approximately the same period — William Nott of Wethersfield, and William Nott of Middletown. Each man had a son of the same name. We are interested in William, son of William Nott of Middletown, who was born February, 1789, and later moved to Fayetteville, North Carolina. Several William Nott plates have come to light in North Carolina, in some cases with "J. J." eagle-marked plates which are attributed to Jehiel Johnson. The William Nott plates are of good quality and are found in diameters of $7\frac{7}{8}$ inches and $8\frac{13}{16}$ inches. It is believed that all the known Nott pewter was made by the William of Middletown.

STEPHEN BARNES

Very little is known about this pewterer, although it may be assumed that he probably came from Middletown. His Eagle touch is of interest because it enables us to place him in history. It has fourteen stars in a circle above the eagle's head, and since Vermont entered the Union in 1791 as the fourteenth state and Kentucky came the next year, we can fix the date that his die was made. His pewter is typical of Connecticut makers, ever though below the average in quality.

NORWICH, CONNECTICUT

JOHN DANFORTH — 1741-

Born at Norwich, he was the youngest son of the senior Thomas Danforth. He worked for his father and carried on the business after the latter's retirement. He is known to have made flatware, porringers, and $13\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep dishes. As his father before him, John died insolvent. The date of his death is believed to be 1799.

PLACE OF WORK UNKNOWN

JAMES PORTER

This is another maker about whom very little material is available. However, he can be definitely placed in the Connecticut Valley, as he made narrow rim 11 inch dishes, a speciality of the region.

LIST OF LENDERS

MRS. IRVING BERG

EAST HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

MR. C. K. DAVIS, ESQ.

FAIRFIELD, CONNECTICUT

MR. OLIVER DEMING

WESTFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

MR. JOSEPH FRANCE

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

MRS. STEPHEN S. FITZGERALD

WESTON, MASSACHUSETTS

YALE UNIVERSITY

THE MABEL BRADY GARVIN COLLECTION

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

MR. CHARLES K. HUTCHINS

WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

MRS. JOHN JAMESON

CONCORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE

MR. LEDLIE I. LAUGHLIN

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

MRS. BERTRAM K. LITTLE

BROOKLINE, MASSACHUSETTS

MR. MARK LA FOUNTAIN

SPRINGFIELD, VERMONT

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

MRS. JOHN H. MITCHELL

LONGMEADOW, MASSACHUSETTS

MR. CHARLES F. MONTGOMERY

WALLINGFORD, CONNECTICUT

MR. MELVILLE T. NICHOLS

MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MR. RICHARD C. PAIGE

STURBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

MRS. CHARLES E. PINNEY

STAFFORD SPRINGS, CONNECTICUT

MRS. LUCIUS POTTER

GREENFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

MR. HENRY REARDON

FARMINGTON, CONNECTICUT

MR. ALLAN REITER

MALVERN, LONG ISLAND

MR. JOHN P. REMENSNYDER

METUCHEN, NEW JERSEY

MISS JULIA D. S. SNOW

GREENFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

