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Fig. 1—FLAGON, PLATE, AND LAMP  
By William Calder (1822)

## American Pewter and Pewterers

*From 1654-1849*

By FREDERIC FAIRCHILD SHERMAN

THE earliest verified dates known in connection with the manufacture of pewter in this country are 1654, when Thomas Bumstead was working in Boston; 1665, on the will of Henry Shrimpton, a brazier and pewterer of that city; 1673 when John Cromer was working there, and 1687, when Thomas Clarke was working in the same city. From these dates it is safe to assume that the first American pewter was made in Boston.

The earliest pewter alloy was probably a mixture of tin and lead, in the proportion of four to one, and the process was to cast the metal in the desired form and then finish the articles with hand tools, and later with the lathe. Small objects, only, such as spoons, plates, basins and mugs, were turned out in the early days; and a few brass molds for the casting of spoons, dating from before 1750, made by John Moulinier of New York and others are still extant.

The early pewter is invariably to be identified by the characteristics of early silverware; a "Rat-tail" spoon with an upturned handle, for instance, dating from about 1750. Other means of assuring one's self of the early date of native pewter are the softness of the metal which may be easily bent; the absence of a "mark" or "touch," and of any engraving or embossing, which, as a rule, is found on foreign pieces only; the hammer marks on the under side of the curve between the body and the rim of plates, basins and platters, and the flat base of mugs, tankards, pitchers and similar pieces. Some early native spoons, it is true, show the shell form at the end of the handle on the bottom of the bowl, but other than that and the simple knobs on the covers of tea and coffee pots and the scroll handles, of these utensils nothing in the way of ornamentation is found on American pewter. Foreign

pieces on the other hand are frequently elaborately engraved and embossed and often bear an owner's initials, or a date, and sometimes both.

From 1700 to 1750 most of the pewter produced in the Colonies was, in all probability, a household product. Immediately thereafter it was often made by itinerant craftsmen, who travelled about the sparsely settled country with their molds and metals and supplied the inhabitants of the houses at which they stopped with such objects as were required. Payment therefore consisted of board and lodging and a modest compensation in cash. About 1775, the output of the manufacturers, who were now established in practically all of the cities and larger towns, was distributed through the outlying districts by peddlers travelling in carts, whose stock included also brass and tin, iron and copper ware. The manufacture of pewter buttons, which curiously enough are now rarely found, began in Revolutionary days and thereafter for a number of years buttons were made in great quantities.

There is a tradition in the family of Mrs. W. G. Staples of Westport, Conn., who owns a fine old flagon, unmarked, but made by Frederick Bassett of New York, that would indicate that one, at least, of the native pewterers was marking his pieces prior to the Revolution. This flagon originally belonged to Deliverance Bennett, from whom it descended in direct line to its present owner. The remainder of the Bennett-Bassett pewter, now owned by another descendant, is all marked. Deliverance Bennett was one of the patriots at Fairfield, Connecticut, who gathered to repel the advance of the British soldiers in April, 1777, when on their way to burn the town of Danbury where the Continental supplies were stored.

During the first years of the nineteenth century the pew-



terers generally began to mark their products with a "touch," which, in virtually every instance, consists of the maker's name or initials, generally includes the place of manufacture and, sometimes, some sort of decorative device such as an eagle, bust of Washington, star or shield. Other makers invented hall marks similar to those on English pewter, which still had a large sale in the newly born republic.

Many of the native craftsmen in pewter did other things as well. In the earliest times most silversmiths made pewter, and later some pewterers were iron and brass workers, and one, at least, was a plumber. The most pretentious of their products in pewter were the communion sets made for churches, consisting usually of a flagon, two chalices and a platter. The possession of one of these sets enables one to display, to real advantage, the artistry of the early makers. A very good set of a rather late date, from an old Methodist church in Saybrook, Connecticut, now destroyed, is owned by Mr. T. T. Wermore of that town. It is the work of Boardman & Hart, who were working in New York in 1828. The Whale-oil Lamp, which is the only form of native invention in pewter, follows in importance. With the exception of these lamps, the forms of all American pewter objects are borrowed from the native silversmiths, who, in turn, copied most of their forms from foreign pieces or from designs coming into the country with the steady flow of immigration. Three fine pairs of Whale-oil Lamps by Roswell Gleason of Dorchester,

Massachusetts, working about 1830; by William Calder of Providence, Rhode Island, working about 1824 and by Smith & Co., are illustrated, besides a single lamp by Capen & Molineaux of New York, who were working early in the nineteenth century.

Calder and Hamlin of Providence and John Trask of Boston were three of the best of the later New England craftsmen. Good examples of their work are illustrated from marked pieces in the collection of the writer. Candlesticks, porringers and the early Rat-tail spoons make interesting additions to a collection. A Betty lamp, common enough in iron, is the rarest of all pewter objects to find today. I have seen but one.

One should be careful in collecting not to purchase the later and harder "alloys," white metal and Britannia ware all of which were manufactured in large quantities, machine turned, from about 1825. Subsequent pieces of true pewter by the old makers, of even later date, are still fine;

and, even as late as 1849, two craftsmen, Henry Graves and Thaddeus Manning, were working in Middletown, Connecticut. It is doubtful if any craftsmen in pewter survived after the middle of the century, however.

For the guidance of the collector a *List of American Pewterers* considerably longer than any heretofore in print is added herewith.

#### CHECK LIST OF AMERICAN PEWTERERS

##### *Seventeenth Century*

- 1 Thomas Bumstead, Boston, 1654
- 2 Thomas Clarke, Boston, 1687
- 3 John Comer, Boston, 1678
- 4 Henry Shrimpton, Boston, 1665

##### *Eighteenth Century*

- 1 Richard Austin, Boston, 1796
- 2 Thomas Badger, Boston, 1789
- 3 Francis Bassett, New York, 1778
- 4 Frederick Bassett New York, 1778
- 5 George Coldwell, New York, 1792
- 6 Wm. I. Elsworth, New York, 1792
- 7 Philip Fields, New York, 1799
- 8 Andrew Green, Boston, 1789

- 9 Samuel Green, Boston, 1789
- 10 Thomas Green, Boston, 1789
- 11 Henry Grilley, Waterbury, Ct., 1790
- 12 Charlotte Hero, Philadelphia, 1796
- 13 William Kirby, New York, 1786
- 14 McEwen & Son, New York, 1794
- 15 Andre Michel, New York, 1796
- 16 Robert Pearce, New York, 1792
- 17 Paul Revere, Boston, 1770

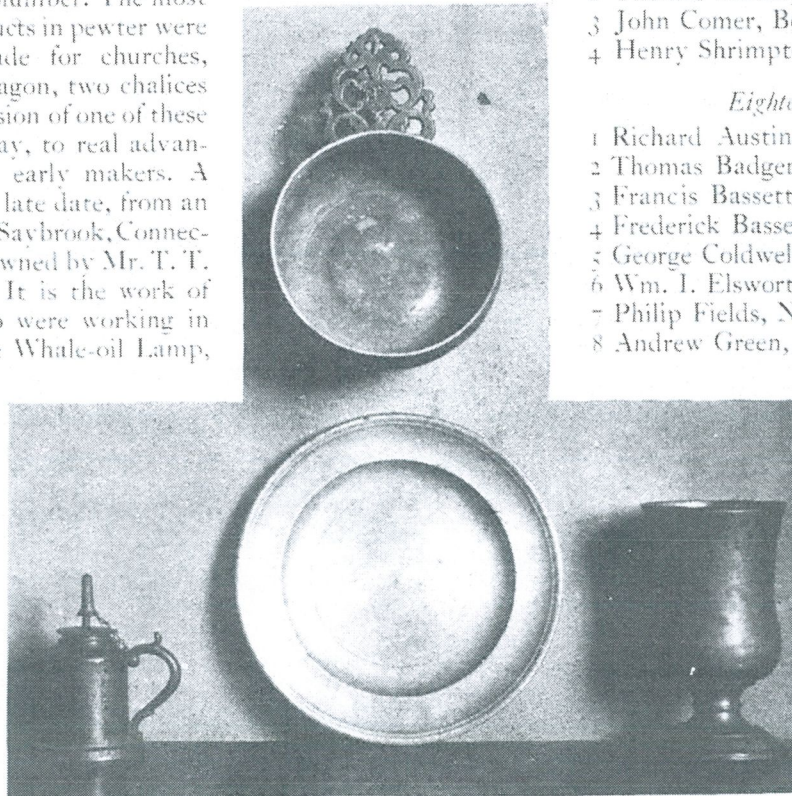


Fig. 2 — PEWTER BY VARIOUS CRAFTSMEN

The porringer by Samuel Hamlin (1820) of Providence; the plate by Samuel Danforth of New York; the lamp by Capen and Molineaux, also of New York; while the mug is by a Boston pewterer, John Trask (1826).

- 18 John Skinner, Boston, 1789
- 19 James Ward, Hartford, Ct., 1795
- 20 John Welch, Boston, 1796
- 21 Henry Will, New York, 1786
- 22 William Will, Philadelphia, 1796
- 23 G. Youle, New York, 1798

##### *Nineteenth Century*

- 1 S. Bast, New York, (?)
- 2 James Bird, New York, 1820
- 3 Boardman & Co., New York, 1824
- 4 Boardman & Hart, New York, 1828
- 5 Thomas D. Boardman, Hartford, Ct., 1826
- 6 William Calder, Providence, R. I., 1824
- 7 Capen & Molineaux, New York
- 8 D. Curtis, New York, (?)
- 9 Samuel Danforth, Hartford, Ct.
- 10 Fuller & Smith, Conn. (?)



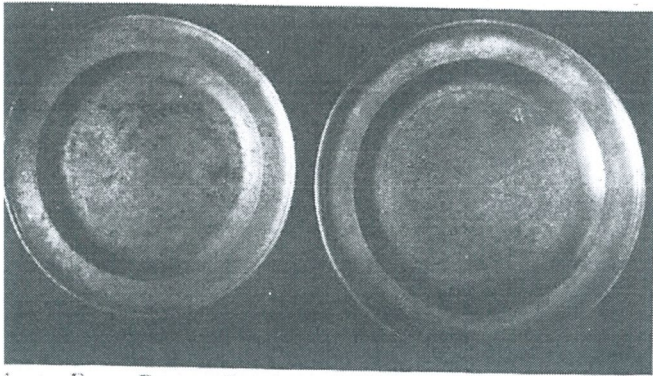


fig. 3 — EARLY PEWTER PLATES  
Made by Frederick Bassett, New York (1778).

- 1 Gerhardt & Co.
- 2 Roswell Gleason, Dorchester, Mass.
- 3 Henry Graves, Middletown, Ct., 1849
- 4 Hall & Cotton
- 5 Samuel E. Hamlin, Providence, R. I., 1820
- 6 Lucuis Hart, New York, 1828
- 7 Lafetra & Allaire, New York, 1815
- 8 D. (?) Locke, New York, 1825
- 9 Thaddeus Manning, Middletown, Ct., 1849
- 10 L. H. Pallthorp, Philadelphia
- 11 C. Parker, New York (?)
- 12 A. Porter, Southington, Ct.
- 13 F. Porter, Connecticut (?)
- 14 — Quilkin, Philadelphia (?)
- 15 George Richardson, Boston, 1825
- 16 G. Richardson, Cranston, R. I.
- 17 S. Rust, New York
- 18 Smith & Co., Connecticut (?)

- 29 John Trask, Boston, 1825
- 30 H. B. Ward, Guilford, Ct., 1820
- 31 Thomas Wildes, New York, 1832
- 32 Watts & Harton
- 33 Yale & Curtis, New York
- 34 Thomas Youle & Co., New York, 1811
- 35 Thomas Youle, New York, 1815

*Unidentified American Pewterers*

- 1 T. B. M. Co.
- 2 W. B. Mark: Anchor upright, W at left, B at right of shank between bar and hook.
- 3 W. R.—Mark: WR with Crown above.

In the old days the fastidious housewife kept the pewter beautifully polished and it vied in beauty with the more expensive silver of her more fortunate neighbors. The metal is softer in texture, warmer in tone than silver, however, and has a far more pleasant "feel." Personally, I keep my own pewter in the condition in which I happen to find it. There is a real pleasure and satisfaction to me in contemplating the fine patina that distinguishes practically all of it. It would seem to me sinful to sacrifice this patina as it is the most obvious and the most attractive sort of evidence of the antiquity of the really old pieces. Of course if one really prefers to use his or her old pewter it is plainly necessary to keep it bright and polished as it was kept of old. In an old New England "salt-box" house, above the great fireplace, it makes a brave display on the mantel. One should be very careful in using pewter, never to put a coffee or teapot on a stove, nor to subject any of it to heat. It melts very easily and many a fine piece has been ruined by thoughtlessness in this way.

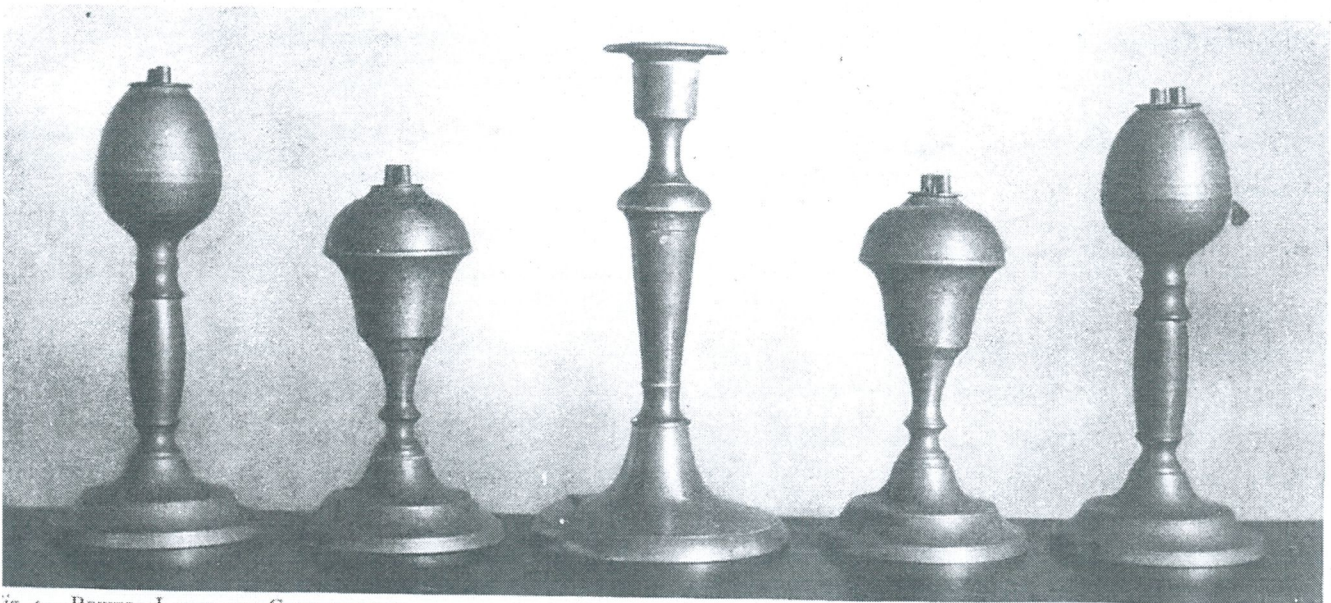


fig. 4 — PEWTER LAMPS AND CANDLESTICKS

The two outside lamps are by a Massachusetts pewterer, Roger Gleason. The smaller lamps by Smith & Co. of Connecticut, and the candlestick by Fuller and Smith, probably of Connecticut.