ANDREW GAUTIER'S SILVER BOWL

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Today historic Trinity Church Parish, in the City of New York, may look back on more than two hundred and fifty years of prosperous existence. It came into being during the reign of King William III; the Charter was signed by Governor Fletcher May 6, 1697. In 1705 Queen Anne gave to the parish a grant of land lying west of Broadway and extending from Fulton to Christopher Street "for the benefit of said Church and other pious users." From that time forward the fortunes and value of holdings of the Parish have steadily increased. A brief study of its history, however, shows that this progress has not been without some misfortunes. Perhaps one of the most serious was the destruction of the original church by fire in 1776. However we are concerned here with yet another holocaust that would have been even more disastrous but for the quick thinking and bravery of a handful of men.

The history of the church reveals that a school had been supported in part by Trinity Church since 1709, but until 1748 the rooms were in all probability rented. In that year the vestry authorized construction of the New Free School building adjacent to the church. It was fated to be of short duration, for on the night of February 23, 1750, a fire occurred in the recently completed edifice. A contemporary account from the Post-Boy of February 26, 1750, gives us a brief but rather complete description.

"New-York, February 26. Friday Morning last about 4 o’Clock, a violent Fire broke out in the new Free-School-House, Kept by Mr. Joseph Hildreth, Clerk of Trinity Church in this City; which got to such a Height before it was discovered, as to render it impossible to save it from being entirely destroyed; . . . and tho’ it stood at a considerable Distance from the Church, yet the Flames ascended so high, and carried with them such Abundance of live Coals, as to put the Church in imminent Danger, particularly the Steeple; which was set on Fire five several Times, almost at the Top, what
little Wind there was setting directly on it; notwithstanding which, by the good Providence of God, and the Diligence and Activity of a few Persons within who broke Holes through, it was happily extinguished, and preserved: . . . There was scarce any Thing saved out of the house, from the Fury of the Fire; and we are assured, besides a great deal of Furniture and other Things, the Records of the Church are entirely consumed. The whole Loss Sustain’d, is supposed to be near Two Thousand Pounds Value.”

Recently there has come to light an important commemorative bowl that affords us an interesting vignette of the fire two hundred years ago, for its actual history begins on this fateful evening. Naturally the vestry lost little time in appointing a committee to investigate the tragedy completely. The minutes of a meeting of the rector, churchwardens, and vestrymen of Trinity Parish held March 1, 1749, and a report therein of the committee gives us first mention of the owner of the bowl and his part in saving the church.

“The Committee Appointed the 23. of February last to Enquire who were Active and Serviceable in a particular manner at putting out the fire on the Spire of Trinity Church Reported that on their Enquiry they were Informed that Davis Hunt was the first Man in the Spire of the Steeple and he put out the two Lowermost fires being assisted by a fat Man whose Name he does not know and he soon went away. Andrew Gotier and Francis Davison put out the uppermost Flame in the Spire, and Gotier and David Robison a Tobacconist put out the third flame in the Spire. Mr. Davison put out the flames on the Cornish with one Cornelius McCarty who was also very Active there. Mr. Thippin the Blockmaker was all the time on the Roof of the Church and Mr. Gotier was also there for sometime with him. that this Information was Given them by Gotier, Davison, Hunt and Mr. Jandine

BELOW: Silver bowl made by Adrian Bancker (1703-1772), New York. The engraved scene shows the fire that destroyed Trinity Church school and damaged the steeple. Anonymous Loan, 1950.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Detail from an engraving after William Burgis showing New York from Brooklyn Heights, about 1716. The old Trinity Church steeple is at the left. Lent by Edward W. C. Arnold
WHEREUPON it was Ordered that the two Church Wardens Mr. Holland, Mr. Chambers, Mr. Marston and Mr. Reade or any four of them be a Committee to meet the Severall Persons, and to Distribute among them the Sum of Fifty pounds as they shall think Convenient, and that they Return them the thanks of this Board for their Good Service.

It is evident that very soon thereafter Mr. Gautier entered the shop of Adrian Bancker, silversmith, with his share of the reward money and commissioned Bancker to fashion the coins into the little silver bowl illustrated above. Upon its completion it was appropriately engraved with a most realistic interpretation of the scene during the fire.

There can be discerned the blazing New Free School House, the sparks flying high in the wind straight to the church steeple. A few faint lines seem to depict our hero leaning from the lofty steeple to douse the roof with water. Below, the tiny fire engine pumps a rather ineffectual stream of water onto the doomed school building. The inscription underneath gives the date 49/50 because two calendars were in use.

The bowl itself is a stout one and plainly wrought with a slightly everted lip, gently rounded sides, and a simple molded foot. On the base is incised the weight, 17½ ounces, above the initials age (for Andrew and his wife, Elizabeth). It is stamped twice with the maker's mark ab in an oval. Years of polishing have only served to improve the original mellow "skin."

Andrew Gautier was gainfully employed as a Windsor chairmaker. In The New-York Gazette or Weekly Post-Boy of April 18, 1765, he advertises,

"To be sold by Andrew Gauteir in Princes Street, opposite Mr. David Provouyst's in Broad Street; A large and neat assortment of Windsor Chairs, ..." Several chairs bearing his label are known.

A further search of records show he enjoyed the position of alderman as late as 1770. However he retired to New Jersey just prior to the Revolution. For it is in the New Jersey Archives, Abstracts of Wills, vol. vi, p. 160, that we find a last public mention of his bowl:

"1776, Sept. 29. Gautier, Andrew, of Acquackanonk, Essex Co., Esq.; will of, Eldest son, Andrew, my silver bowl, which was presented to me by Trinity Church of New York, for my assistance at the fire of the school house and church."