RECENT ACCESSIONS FOR THE AMERICAN WING

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The group of objects illustrated on the following pages have been acquired for the American Wing during the past few years. Different though they are, they are all examples of American craftsmanship at its best from the middle to the third quarter of the eighteenth century.

The first piece shown is a silver punch bowl of handsome proportions and a simplicity of design that is typically American. It was made about 1750 and was used as a racing trophy. Flat racing was one of the first sports enjoyed by the citizens of New York. The earliest track in the Colonies was set out on the Hempstead Plains on Long Island in 1665, and a silver trophy of about thirty years later is the oldest known one in existence. It is a two-handed bowl made by Jesse Kip, with a chased design and engraved with the owner's initials and the date 1699.

Our trophy has an engraving of a race horse that may prove to be the earliest in American art and an inscription connecting it with a particular event of the time, which gives it a special interest. On September 9, 1751, the Gazette or Weekly Post Boy published the following announcement of a flat race: “On the Eleventh of October next, the New York subscription plate will be run for, by any Horse, Mare or Gelding, bred in America that never won a plate before on this Island carrying eight Stone weight Saddle and Bridle, included, the best in these heats, two miles in Each Heat. Horses that are intended to run for this Plate are to be entered the Day before the Race with Adam Van Denberg, living on the Church Farm, the Entrance Money to be run for the Day after by any of the Horses except the winner, and those distanced.”

On October 15 the same paper carried this news item: “Thursday last the New York Subscription Plate was run for at the Church Farm, by five Horses, and won by a Horse belonging to Mr. Lewis Morris, Jun. . . .”

In commemoration of this victory the obviously pleased owner had engraved about the rim of his bowl the following inscription: “This Plate Won By a Horse Cal”, old Tenor Belonging To Lewis Morris, Jun., Octo, ye, 11, 1751.”

The silversmith who made this trophy must unfortunately remain unknown, as he neglected to mark his work, often the case with colonial craftsmen. The design is closely related to bowls made by Simeon Soumaine (1685-1750/51). Soumaine was a member of Trinity Church, which owned the farm where the race was run. He assisted the vestrymen by assaying gifts and performing other tasks ascribed to a silversmith. If he was the maker of our bowl, it must have been one of his last pieces, because of the date. A careful examination of the records of Trinity Church Parish and the minutes of the vestrymen and churchwardens fails to disclose any connection between this particular race meeting and Trinity Church. In all probability the farm was lent for the race without any idea of profit to the parish.

The intricately pierced silver basket illustrated beneath the trophy on the next page is a practically unique piece of colonial silver. Judging from the great number of European examples that have survived, such baskets, which were probably used for cake or fruit, were very popular on eighteenth-century tea and dining tables, and there is as yet no explanation for the rarity of American examples.

Our basket was made by Myer Myers (1723-1795), the celebrated New York silversmith, for Samuel and Susan Cornell, about 1760 or 1765. Cornell was a wealthy merchant of New York and South Carolina. From an eighteenth-century inscription on the base of the basket we learn that at a later date it was given to his daughter.
ABOVE: Brass andirons made by Paul Revere about 1790. BELOW: Plinth of one of the andirons with signature and a reprint of Revere's bookplate with his name. Bequest of Mrs. J. Insley Blair, 1952
A set of three knifeboxes made of finely grained mahogany veneered on whitewood. The silver mounts are by Lewis Fueter. New York, about 1770. Fueter’s mark on the base of one of the boxes is shown in the detail at the left. Morris K. Jesup Fund, 1954

Hannah: “Wedding present given Mrs. Herman LeRoy 19th October 1768.” Two other pieces, also with the monogram ss, were made by Myers for the Cornells, a mug in the Philip Hammerslough collection and a fine dish ring in the Yale University Gallery of Fine Arts. The dish ring is pierced in the same manner as our basket, and the two would serve admirably as companion pieces.

Knifeboxes were in wide use in the eighteenth century for safeguarding the sets of imported tableware. A contemporary account notes that in one particular household the silver-handled knives, forks, and spoons were taken out only when the meal began and were locked up by the master of the house immediately after being cleaned. Knifeboxes were usually made of shagreen and came from Europe with the silver they protected. The set illustrated above is rare in that it was made in America. The handsomely grained mahogany is veneered on whitewood, and the silver mounts have the mark of Lewis Fueter, son of the more famous silversmith Daniel Christian Fueter, who worked in partnership with his father in New York about 1770. The knifeboxes are exhibited on a marble-top serving table in the Van Rensselaer room. They were originally owned by the Stuyvesants, in whose family they have descended for generations.

Andirons are the most commonly found objects today that were cast in the brass foundry of Paul Revere, Jr., established in Boston in 1788. The American Wing has long had a pair with the foundry’s stamp, Revere and Son, Boston, on the back of the legs. They were made in 1788 or later and are copies of an earlier English design. A new pair is now on exhibition in the Alexandria alcove. Their design, with acorn finials, so-called coin, or penny, feet, and plain, round shafts, was also inspired by an earlier one, but they are particularly interesting because of the form and placing of their signature. Above the leaf cluster on the plinth of each appears the name Paul Revere engraved in script. A comparison of the lettering here with that on Revere’s bookplate, illustrated in the details on page 227, would certainly suggest that both were done by the hand of this versatile patriot.

Their history is not known, but one may guess that they were perhaps made for Revere’s own use. Conspicuous signatures, however, were not uncommon and often appear on such objects as brass clocks and sundials. In any case the fine lettering on our andirons adds to the beauty of the decoration.

Existing examples of eighteenth-century American crewelwork are most often in the form of bed furnishings, as coverlets and hangings were
A child's dress of linen and cotton, with a crewelwork pattern in wool of carnations, tulips, and other flowers. Mid xviii century. Rogers Fund, 1954
not subject to much wear and survived with minimal damage beyond the usual fading and soiling. It is extremely rare to find an article of embroidered clothing in good condition, like the child's dress illustrated on page 229. The pattern of carnations, tulips, and "exotic" flowers, a popular one, is worked in wool on linen and cotton. The flowers are done with the naive touch that distinguishes American needlework from European. The dress has no buttons or buttonholes and was probably worn over other garments, fastened at the waist with a sash.

The final piece illustrated is a little shaving dish, made in 1769. The potters of Pennsylvania were a very prolific group. Their gaily decorated scrafitto and slip wares were once to be seen on the cupboard racks of nearly every farmhouse throughout the Pennsylvania German countryside. Today surviving examples are still carefully treasured in their original homes. Our bowl came from an old house near Reading, in Berks County. Its unusual decoration and pre-Revolutionary date prevent an attribution to a well-known potter like David Spinner or George Huebner, who had such distinctive styles of decoration that their work may be readily identified without a signature of any sort. The shaving implements and flower sprays are applied in shades of terracotta, green, blue, and brown on a yellow ground. A free translation of the phrase around the rim is "Shave me beautiful and fine that I will please the beloved one of mine."

Pennsylvania German shaving dish, made in 1769. Rogers Fund, 1953