

obs 5/2/2

It has long been acknowledged that in the first decades of our colonization the goldsmiths were ~~truly~~ artists in their field. The first of them and many subsequent ones were trained in their native countries and continued in the Colonies a proud and honorable craft which in the Middle Ages ranked among the major arts. The apprentice system of England and many European countries prevailed in the Colonies almost from the outset but whereas the Guilds in the Old World governed the craft, we may proudly note that our goldsmiths in the early days of the Colony were under no supervision and ^{indeed} rarely needed any.

In the Old World the goldsmith was ~~legally~~ ^{by law} required to take his product to the Guild Hall to be assayed and stamped as proof of its quality. There was never any supervision in ^{not then} early colonial days. (In fact, at a Boston Town Meeting in 1670 it was ruled "that care be taken all ware made of pewter or silver whether brought to the country or made here be of just alloy".) However, ~~it~~ ^{it} was left to the individual worker to prepare his silver so that its quality would not be less than the sterling standard of .925 fine silver. Marking was not required in the Colonies, but it was customary for the artist to stamp his wares with his individual mark, first by initial in a distinctive punch and later his name. In England, as I have ^{previously} stated, the goldsmith was required ^(by law) to take each piece to the Guild Hall to receive his individual mark, ^(rightly) called Hall Marks since they were stamped at the Hall. That is the basis for the name--hall mark.

New England was the first settlement by approximately a generation to have goldsmiths at work, for within the decade of the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, London trained goldsmiths settled there. Robert Sanderson is the oldest whose work has survived mostly, however, in partnership with John Hull.

The goldsmith's vigor and assurance in his craft are a measure of his independence, for combining the highest skill with the prestige of working in a precious metal, and often fulfilling the function of a banker in his community, he was an aristocrat among craftsmen and therefore a leading member of the increasingly powerful group who played such an important part in the development of American patterns of life in the eighteenth century and as a group identified themselves most actively with the cause of liberty. The sturdiness and variety of colonial silver express the taste of the chief patrons of the craftsmen, the solid merchants and conservative men of affairs who were largely responsible for the growing wealth of the colonies through the commerce and maritime activity soon to become the economic lifeblood of a struggling young republic.

The apprenticeship system as followed in England continued as the practice of the goldsmiths in New England. The apprenticeship was of long duration from seven to nine years.

The study of American silver leads you into many fields of interest and profit. One of these is history in general.

Another is history in some of its subdivisions--economic, social, esthetic, but most important it leads to better understanding and appreciation of the ethos of culture of America. (The dictionary definition of the word ethos is the character sentiment or disposition of a community of people; the spirit which actuates manners and customs. Perhaps it can be better comprehended by the phrase, American Way of Life.) American culture is so thoroughly imposed in the works of American goldsmiths that it has given to their product a typical identity and it can't be mistaken for that of any other country. True other nations may have influenced the design of workmanship, but the distinctiveness created was preserved. A contributing cause for this distinctiveness was the American spirit expressed by goldsmiths and the ingenuity and native skill demanded of them.

A study of American silver in connection with certain phases of American history establishes that it is the record of the economic and esthetic life of the Colonies. At the very outset cups, tankers, beakers, and porridges and other household utensils were made out of the silver outlined by the owner in trade or commerce as well. In general household silver became an indication of the owner's financial status and also an indication of his manner of living. Pride of position led him to have initials engraved on his silver and these together with the maker's marks often were an invaluable help to the genealogists and historians.