

Moore Silver Exhibited

By BRADFORD F. SWAN

ONE OF THE GREAT collections of early American silver, and certainly the foremost private collection of the work of Rhode Island's Colonial silversmiths, is currently on exhibition at the Rhode Island Historical Society, 52 Power St. It is the collection of Cornelius C. Moore, Newport lawyer, and it contains an astonishing array of objects, especially in the field of hollowware.

Just about every famous Rhode Island silversmith of colonial times is represented in the collection, and for good measure there are outstanding pieces by outstanding makers from the other American colonies—a half-dozen matching tablespoons by Paul Revere, for instance; a tankard and a covered sugar-bowl (or sugar container) by Myer Myers of New York, a cup by Jacob Hurd of Boston, and similar rarities.

But, for Rhode Islanders, the chief interest will lie in the exceptional pieces by silversmiths of this colony. There are no fewer than eight Newport porringers in the display, one of them made by Arnold Collins, generally held to be the first silversmith of note who worked at Newport. (He made a silver anchor-and-Hope seal for the colony as early as 1702.) This porringer was acquired by Mr. Moore in Nice, France, where it probably had been taken by some member of the French expeditionary force which came to America as our allies in the Revolution.

Another early Rhode Island silversmith represented in the collection is John Coddington of Newport, who lived from 1690 to 1743. The Moore collection contains a matching pair of silver cups that is probably a unique set; even single cups by Coddington are excessively rare. The Coddington cups are another instance of Mr. Moore's far-ranging search for Rhode Island silver; they were purchased at auction in London. It has been conjectured that they got to England either with some Loyalist family that fled Newport at the time of the Revolution or were taken across the Atlantic by some member of the British forces.

One Rhode Island silversmith whose career as a scowlaw makes intriguing read-

ing was Samuel Casey of South Kingstown. A master craftsman and a masterly counterfeiter who operated in and around Little Rest—as Kingston was known in those days—he was in and out of jail with astonishing frequency and several times faced the severe punishment the law provided for convicted counterfeiters.

His output is as highly prized for its esthetic quality as for the romantic career of its maker. The Moore collection contains two teapots, a beautiful little creamer, and two tankards by Casey; any private collection would be distinguished by the presence of just one of these five pieces.

The Newport silversmiths represented in the Moore collection include Thomas Arnold, Samuel Vernon (widely held to be Rhode Island's finest colonial silversmith), Daniel Russell, Jonathan Clarke, Thomas Coverly, John Coddington, Jonathan Otis, William S. Nichols, Benjamin Brenton (whose work is very rare), Arnold Collins, and Benjamin Burt. The only Providence silversmith whose work is in this exhibition is Walter Cornell.

Two pairs of sauce-boats by Stephen Emery of Boston, a tea service by John Vernon of New York, shakers by John and Benjamin Burt of Boston, a cup by Moody Russell of Barnstable, a tankard by Simeon Soumain of New York, a creamer by Samuel Minott of Concord, a salver by Joseph Richardson of Philadelphia, a teapot by Joseph Smith of Boston, a coffee pot by Joel Sayre of New York, a tankard by John Edwards of Boston, a covered porringer by Peter Van Dyke of New York, three spoons by Daniel Van Voorhis of Philadelphia, a creamer by Paul Revere, and dredgers by Andrew Oliver and Jacob Hurd of Boston are among the outstanding pieces on display.

Not since the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, assembled its Rhode Island Tercentenary loan exhibition of Rhode Island silver in 1935 has there been a comparable display of this state's early silversmithing, and it should be added that in the case of this exhibition from the Moore collection every piece shown is noteworthy for its quality and rarity—and in some instances as a masterpiece.