

EARLY AMERICAN
COMMUNION SILVER

"The First Church of Christ in Stratford"

Congregational

Stratford, Connecticut - 1639-1974

The Early American Communion Silver

A Priceless Heritage

“To Have and To Hold Forever”

Compiled by

Alma G. Fowler

Harriet B. Blakeman

Elizabeth R. Harding

Photographs by
Jack Wardman

Chart by
Einar Larson

Second Edition
1974

Dedicated

To the memory of Catharine T. Mitchell

whose generous gift to the church

made it possible for the church

to retain forever these expressions of faith.

Proceeds for Memorial Funds of the Church

During the early development of this country, we learn, from wills and inventories of the period, that silver, or plate, was held in high esteem.

Cotton Mather in his "Magnalia" in 1702, describing the great sacrifice of a woman who forsook her home in order to worship as she pleased, pointed out that she left behind, "her friends, her *plate*, her house, and all".

The term plate is derived from the Spanish word, *plata*, for silver.

Throughout New England, especially in Boston, it was considered that extravagance and ostentation were in poor taste, as well as sinful. Silver was made to be used, not to be displayed, as was the case in England.

The common forms of the silver utensils of the seventeenth century that have survived are the spoon, porringer, caudle cup, beaker, chalice or standing cup, tankard and flagon.

Spoons and porringers were used by young and old alike and both were favorite christening and wedding gifts. Judging from the number of porringers that have come down to us today they must have been considered indispensable in New England households. They were shallow bowls averaging about five inches across with a pierced handle — the piercing done to prevent the handle from becoming too hot if the contents of the bowl were heated. When presented to a bridal pair they were usually marked with the first letter of the given name of each and the first letter of the surname elevated between, as *A^MI* — those of Arthur and Johannah Mason who were married in 1655. *I* was customarily used for *J* in that century.

The caudle cup is a two-handled drinking cup which was used for wine, beer and caudle: "a warm drink for the sick made of wine or ale mixed with gruel, sugar and spices and sometimes eggs". This bulbous cup with contracted neck was made almost exclusively in New England and was most popular between 1655-1675. When a caudle cup full of wine was raised and tilted by its two handles there had to be a nice adjustment of weight. That American silversmiths achieved this adjustment repeatedly is proof of their skill.

Through the ages the art of the goldsmith or silversmith has always been an important and revered craft. In this country it was left to the individual to prepare his silver and he was trusted that its quality would not be less than the standard for fine silver. A maker usually stamped his wares with his individual mark. At first, he used his initials within a varying form and later he used his name. The word "Coin" was used in the last century and about 1865 the word "Sterling" denoted the correct standard. Everyone is familiar with the place Paul Revere (1735-1818) held in history. Jeremiah Dummer (1645-1718), the maker of our standing cup, was born 90 years before Paul Revere.

The American silversmith of early days generally received his material in the form of coins. There were no banks then and people had to keep their savings in paper money or in coin, often termed "hard money". For safety's sake it was desirable to convert such coin into wrought plate which, in the case of theft, could be identified by its maker's mark and its engravings. The objects could be reconverted into coins without much loss. In thrifty house-

holds, the principal reserve capital was in the form of cups, porringers and tankards. Some of these were presented or bequeathed to the churches as offerings of devout Christian men and women.

At first, New England churches had little Communion plate because Non-Conformists looked with disfavor upon anything that savored too much of ritual.

Our church is distinguished in that it possesses nine pieces of early American Communion Silver: one standing cup, six caudle cups, two beakers. Their makers, all from Boston, were the leading silversmiths of the colonies. The makers, dates and donors of our two silver-plated flagons, of a much later date, have not been ascertained.

Decorated cups are rare, and their variations are interesting. In point of numbers, they are completely outdone by the plain ones. E. Albert Jones, for example, found fifty-seven plain cups, out of the total of sixty-five that he recorded as belonging to early American churches. We have four plain ones and two rare decorated ones.

The main reason for the importance of this early silver is not its scarcity, but the singular clarity with which it points out the character and thought of those who made it and for whom it was made. These silver objects give us a direct insight into the mental flexibility and creative capacity of the Colonists of this era and contradict, or modify, many generally accepted notions of their provincialism and self-imposed austerity.

The first Boston silversmiths were Robert Sanderson, 1608-1693, and John Hull, 1624-1683. John Hull, the son of a blacksmith, came, as a child, from England and learned his father's trade. Later, he became a silversmith thus turning from artisan to artist.

In 1652, in direct defiance to the Crown, the General Court of Massachusetts Bay ordered the establishment of a mint and appointed John Hull to be mint master and treasurer. He selected Robert Sanderson to be his partner. They coined willow, oak and pine tree shillings and two, three and six penny pieces.

In 1659 Hull wrote in his diary published by the Massachusetts Historical Society, "I received into my house Jeremie Dummer and Samuel Paddy to serve me as apprentices for eight years. The Lord make me faithful in discharge of this new trust committed to me and let His blessing be to me and to them".

The printing of the first paper money was delegated to silversmiths, the first being John Coney.

Jeremiah "Jeremie" Dummer, 1645-1718, made this standing cup which is our oldest possession. It is in his characteristic design with its delightful counterpoise of plain and richly ornamented surfaces. The upper part of the inverted bell-shaped body is plain while the lower is spirally fluted; it is supported by a baluster stem with beading and chased leaves at the bottom and rests on a low base with a fluted edge.

His mark is a pellet between the letters I.D above a fleur-de-lis, within a heart. I for J.

The inscription is:

"Ex Dono A.D.
Sec Test^M IA"

Gift from Anna Dummer
(Hannah). According to
the will of Joshua Atwater.

Mary Blakeman, daughter of Adam Blakeman, first pastor of this church and of this town, married Joshua Atwater. Their daughter, Anna married Jeremiah Dummer who fashioned this cup for his wife because of a bequest in her father Joshua Atwater's will, dated 1676: "To the Church of Christ in Stratford whereof Mr. Israel Chauncey is pastor I give and bequeath a silver cup worth £5".



Standing Cup

Maker: Jeremiah Dummer 1645-1718



John Coney (1655-1722) who is thought to have learned his trade from Jeremiah Dummer made three of our caudle cups: the decorated one opposite and two plain ones.

He was the husband of Mary Atwater, daughter of Joshua and Mary (Blakeman) Atwater.

The decorated cup is the most unusual with its punched design on the bowl, which gives strength to the soft metal and its caryatid figures, the heads of which serve as thumb rests on the handles. The inscription on the bottom has not been identified.

His mark on the side is IC above a fleur-de-lis within a heart.

He taught Appolos Rivoire, who was the father of Paul Revere.





Caudle Cup

Maker: John Coney 1655-1722



John Coney's mark on the side of the cups is IC within a heart-shaped cartouch above a fleur-de-lis.

The cups are marked S:C.





Caudle Cup

Maker: John Coney 1655-1722

(1 of 2)



John Noyes 1674-1749 made our other two plain cups which are engraved on the bottom S + C traditionally signifying "Stratford Church". They are larger than those made by John Coney and their mellow beauty has been created by their maker's many tiny hammer marks which reflect light at different angles.

His mark, on the side of the cup, is IN over a maltese cross within a shield.





Caudle Cup

Maker: John Noyes 1674-1749

(1 of 2)



William Cowell, 1682-1736, made this our second decorated caudle cup, demonstrating a change in style from a bulbous to a straighter-sided cup. In decoration it is similar to our standing cup and rests on a distinct moulded base. It has solid scrolled handles notched on the shoulders.

His mark is WC surmounted by a star and pellets in a shaped shield.

The inscription reads: "The Gift of Deacon Th^o Wells to the *Fust* Church of Crist in Stratford".

Deacon Wells joined the church in 1684 and died 1719/20.

The following is an excerpt from his will: "Item: I give to the church of Stratford four pounds silver money".





Caudle Cup

Maker: William Cowell 1682-1736



Jacob Hurd, 1702-1758, made the two beakers.

His mark is his surname in capital letters in a very small rectangle.

He was a master of simplicity and restraint.

The beaker opposite has a straight body, curved lip and moulded base, with the following inscription in a circle:

"This cup was given to/The First Church/in Stratford by/Lue^t Jos^h Beach 1746".

Lieutenant Beach 1694-1759 joined the church in 1723. He wrote in his will: "Item: I give unto ye First Church of Christ in Stratford of which ye Rev. Mr. Gold is now Pastor 15 pounds".

The engraving was executed with skill and taste. Its primary purpose was for indicating ownership not for decoration.



Beaker

Maker: Jacob Hurd 1702/3-1758

HURD

This second beaker made by Jacob Hurd has a plain inverted bell-shaped body on a moulded base with this inscription in a laurel wreath:

“The Gift of/Lieu^t Eben^t Curtis/To the First Church/of Christ in/
Stratford 1752”.

Lieutenant Ebenezer Curtis, Sr., 1657-1751/52 joined the church in 1694.

Most of the silver of this period was ornate. These beakers are distinctive because of Hurd's daring to refrain from excessive ornamentation and relying for beauty on outline and fine moulding.

His mark, on this beaker, with only the first letter capitalized, is within an incomplete wavy cartouche.



Beaker

Maker: Jacob Hurd 1702/3-1758

Hurd





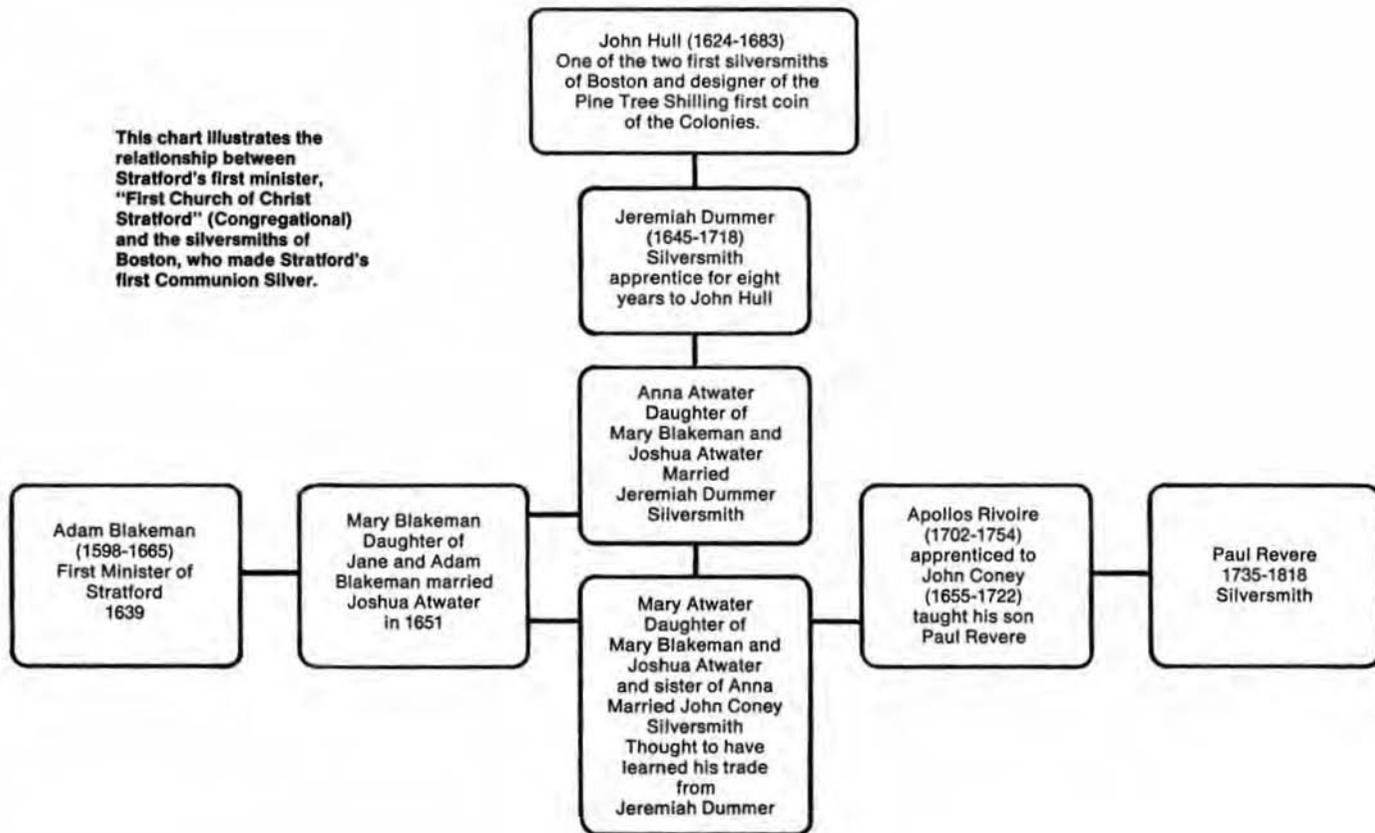
Flagons
Maker: Unknown

COMMUNION HYMN

The holy cup goes softly round,
 We break the blessed Bread,
And heads are bowed in prayer profound
 As in the years long fled.
These sacred rites we guard with care
But pray we still the ancient prayer?
Lord, may Thy living children pray
 To hold Thy faith as dear
As those who pointed out the way,
 Whose prayer still lingers here.
 Lord, of Thy largess we implore,
Give us their faith, but give us more!

Written by Mrs. Howard J. Curtis for the Fiftieth Anniversary Services of the Dedication of the Stratford Congregational Church, October 31, 1909.

This chart illustrates the relationship between Stratford's first minister, "First Church of Christ Stratford" (Congregational) and the silversmiths of Boston, who made Stratford's first Communion Silver.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Hull, John, *Diary*-Massachusetts Historical Society
- Forbes, Esther, *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In*,
Houghton Mifflin 1942
- Phillips, John Marshall, *Early American Silver*, Yale
University Art Gallery 1960
- Jones, E. Alfred, *The Old Silver of American Churches*. National
Society of Colonial Dames of America 1913
- Avery, C. Louise, *Early American Silver*, New York
Century 1930
- Buhler, Kathryn C., *Colonial Silversmiths*, Museum of
Fine Arts, Boston 1956
- Dictionary of American Biography*
- Okie, Howard Pitcher, *Old Silver and Old Sheffield Plate*
Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., New York 1940