

THE MOUNT AMWELL NEWS

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www.mtamwell.org 703-549-2738

Gov. John's Silver Tankard

By David Reading

In Josiah Granville Leach's 1898 Memorials to the Reading Family¹ a silver tankard is described as a family heirloom certainly brought to this country by Col John Reading. A recent rediscovery of the tankard by the author and gracious cooperation of the current owner has allowed for a positive identification of the tankard that contradicts the origins as presented by Leach. The tankard was not brought to America by Col. John. It was made by Charles Le Roux in New York City between 1725 and 1745. It was clearly made for Gov. John and Mary Reading probably as a wedding or anniversary gift.

Provenance

Leach provides us with provenance up to 1898 as: *"Letters of administration on his estate were granted to his son, John Reading, 2 November, 1717, and in December following, an inventory of the personal estate was filed, a facsimile of which, taken from the probate records in the office of the Secretary of State of New Jersey is herewith interleaved. The "tankard" specified in the inventory was of silver, and bore the Reading arms.² It was probably an heirloom, and was certainly brought to this country by Colonel Reading. Upon his decease it became the property of his son John, who, in his will, bequeathed it to his grandson, John Reading. The latter, in his will, dated 20 October, 1815, thus disposed of it: "It is my wish, that the silver tankard given me by my grandfather Reading, and the family coat of arms, which I have, should not go out of the family. I therefore give and bequeath them to my eldest son John Reading, during his life, and after his death to my son Joseph, and if*



*The Reading Tankard
as depicted in Leach
1898.*

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he not be living at the time of my son John's death, then to my eldest son and eldest male descendants forever." The son John here mentioned died without issue, and the tankard became the property of Joseph, who gave the same to his son, Judge James Newell Reading, upon whose death it passed into the possession of his son, Henry Southard Reading, who now holds it, and from whom the accompanying portrait was obtained. "³

Henry Southard Reading was born in Lisbon, Illinois in 1842 and, according to Leach, died in Morris, Illinois in 1877. It is unknown why he infers that Henry S. was living in 1898 when he published his *Memorials*. In any event the tankard clearly passed on to his son, James Henry Reading (1867-1936) who relocated to California. The tankard then went to James Henry's oldest son John Ray. In 1948, James Newell Reading, John Rays' younger brother had the first grandson and laid claim to the tankard. In 1949, John Ray had a son Paul Ray, and the tankard was returned to John Ray. It passed to Paul Ray Reading (1949-) and finally to his son Shawn Ray Reading (1974-) who currently has it.⁴ The author visited Shawn, his wife Theresa, and his sister Kimberly in October of this year and had the opportunity to view the tankard first hand. Theresa took several photographs which were used to identify the tankard's origins. Positive Identification was made based on style, hallmarks, and owner specific engraving.

Style

The Reading tankard has a slightly tapered body with a wide sweeping handle. It has a raised flat lid. The lip is crenelated (notched) and engraved. The base has wide splayed molding. The thumb piece is a cocoon shape commonly used in New York rather than earlier Ram's horn shape⁵. It has a plain oval handle terminal⁶. The style details would suggest that the tankard was made in New York City in the first half of the 18th century

Hallmarks

England passed a statute in 1697 that required all Goldsmiths (Silversmiths) to mark their objects with four hallmarks; 1) a sterling mark, 2) the assay town, 3) a date letter, and 4) a maker's mark. The mandatory use of hallmarks necessitated the establishment of assay offices to certify the sterling content. The British refused to allow assay offices in America. As Martha Gandy Fales, the renowned author and lecturer on American silver, tells us, "Consequently, there are no real hallmarks on America silver, only maker's marks ... And, throughout the colonial period one frequently finds the maker's mark struck four times on a single of piece silver, giving the illusion of a full sequence of English hallmarks."⁷

The Reading tankard has four identical makers' marks; one on each side of the handle and two on the hinge plate. This suggests that the tankard was made in America after 1697. The makers mark appears as CR, but upon closer examination, it can be seen as CLR with L conjoined with the C and R. Two American silver experts, Jeanne Sloane, Head of Silver Department, Christie's in New York⁸ and Ann Gillooly from Robert Jackson /Ann Gillooly, Inc., Danboro, Pennsylvania⁹ have independently identified the mark as that of Charles Le Roux, who was active in New York City from 1710 to 1745. He apprenticed under his father, Bartholomew Le Roux. Martha Gandy Fales tells us "Bartholomew Le Roux was one of the first of the Huguenot émigrés to come to New York, where he became a freeman of the city in 1687."¹⁰

Engraving

The Reading tankard has three distinct engravings, the coat-of-arms on the front body, the floral pattern on the front edge of the lid, and the monogram on the handle. The engraving on the lip is not very unique except that is indicative of a New York style.¹¹ Second, on the front of the tankard there is an engraving of the tankard's coat-of-arms. Close examination of the tankard's engraving confirms that this it is the same as that in the engraving in the Leach photo. This observation further establishes the provenance. It is also apparent that tankard coat-of-arms is the same as Col. Reading's seal (Leach, page 10). The Boar's head at the bottom of the seal is larger than the other two. This aberration (the boars heads normally are drawn the same size) is replicated in the engraving on the tankard. This suggests that the engraver worked from a copy of the seal that Gov. John certainly would have had access to.



*The Reading
Tankard
2007*

The third and most compelling engraving on the tankard is the monogram on the handle. It is a three letter pattern in block letters with vertical etchings. This technique became popular at the end of the 17th Century.¹² The letters "R", "I", and "M" are arranged in a triangular pattern with the "R" on the apex. It was also customary to place the husband's initial on the lower left and the wife's initial on the lower right. Consequently, the "R" is certainly Reading and "I" is the Roman "J" for John. The "M" is Mary. The monogram engraving suggests the tankard was a wedding or anniversary gift for Gov. John and Mary Ryerson who married in 1720.¹³



*Top: Known Charles
Le Roux Maker
mark*

*Bottom: Makers
mark from Reading
tankard*

Conclusion

For over 100 years it has been believed that the tankard was a family heirloom brought from England by Col John Reading. It is with a great deal of satisfaction that we can now say it was in fact made in New York City by the Huguenot silversmith Charles Le Roux between 1720 and 1745. This is not to disparage Josiah Leach's extraordinary work, but only that we have corrected the historical record. As a result, the tankard becomes an even more valuable and significant object of Reading family and American history.

Acknowledgments

- Madge Walsh of the Shasta Historical Society for her help in identifying Shawn Reading as the current owner of the tankard.
- Bill Luken for his vast amount of information and help and pointing me in the right direction.
- Shawn Reading for his hospitality, enthusiasm and curiosity about his treasured tankard.
- Theresa Reading for her excellent pictures.
- Ann Gilooly and Jeanne Sloan for their timely and

professional response to my inquiries.

- Frank Milwee of Washington, D.C. for expert help in gathering information on antique silver.

End notes

¹ Leach, Josiah Granville, *Genealogical and Biographical Memorials of the Reading, Howell, Yerkes, Watts, Latham, and Elkins Families*, Philadelphia, 1898

² Leach states that it was made of silver. However, the entry in the inventory reads: "Pewter Dishes, & Plates, Spoons, Tankard 04:15:03." No mention of silver.

³ Leach, p. 21

⁴ Luken Ph.D, William. E-mail to the author. 12 July 2007.

⁵ Fales, Martha Gandy, *Early American Silver for the Cautious Collector*, Funk and Wagnalls, New York, 1970, p. 137

⁶ Fales, p. 50

⁷ Fales, p. 247

⁸ Sloane, Jeanne. E-mail to the author. 29 October 2007.

⁹ Gilooly, Ann. E-mail to the author. 28 October 2007.

¹⁰ Fales, p. 190

¹¹ Fales, p. 137

¹² Fales, p. 235

¹³ Leach, p. 39.

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Phone:

703-549-2738

Fax:

703-519-6405

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Scenes from the Fall Meeting – Stockton Inn 13 Oct 2007



Freeholder George Muller, Marj Luken, Bill Luken, Dave Reading



Marj Luken, Allan Reading, Dave Reading



Allan Reading, Joan Phoenix, Jen Ellsworth



Nancy Herman, Ruth Meeker, Brian Murphy



L to R: Brian Murphy, Cindy Murphy, Nancy, Herman, Joan Phoenix, Ruth Meeker

Photos by Bill Luken and Dave Reading



Historic documents on display including original deed signed by Gov. John Reading. Thanks to Brian Murphy.