

THE GADROON

Newsletter of the South Carolina Silver Society, Inc.
Early Fall 2017

...TO SOLVE A MYSTERY

William Gregg was a jeweler and silversmith in Columbia from 1824 until 1831 and in Charleston, in partnership with Nathaniel Hayden and H. Sydney Hayden, from 1838 until 1852. Afterward, according to Burton's *South Carolina Silversmiths*, he devoted himself to the development of cotton mills and is remembered as one of the South's great industrialists.

In January of 2015, while doing research at the archives of the Gregg-Graniteville Library on the University of South Carolina-Aiken campus, an artifact was revealed that is usually housed deep in their collections. The object was a mid-19th century quilt including a provenance card that raised a lot of questions. Who created the quilt and how did it end up in the collections? What unfolded is an amazing detective story. Using knowledge gleaned from the research conducted on the textile mill village of Graniteville, South Carolina, and collaborations with local historical societies, museums, and libraries the answers revealed themselves and the quilt's creator. The researchers will explain how they solved the mystery.

Members of the South Carolina Silver Society and the public are invited to bring silver by William Gregg or by Hayden, Gregg & Co. A discussion of the silver will follow.

The meeting will begin at 2:00 PM, Saturday, September 30, 2017, in Historic Columbia's Robert Mills Carriage House located at 1616 Blanding Street. Presenters will be George Wingard, Archaeologist, Savannah River Archaeological Research Program and Deborah Tritt, Reference Librarian and Coordinator of the Gregg-Graniteville Archives, Gregg-Graniteville Library, University of South Carolina -Aiken.

SCSS MEMBERS CONTINUE SILVER PROJECT AT WHITE HOMESTEAD

On Monday, August 14 2017, six members of the South Carolina Silver Society made another trip to Fort Mill to continue the service project documenting the silver collection at the White Homestead. Ann Evans, White Homestead archivist and curator, greeted Judy Anderson, Henry Brown, Kay Durham, Jane Barnhill, James Brannock, and Frank White and again expressed genuine appreciation for the work being done by the society. Ms. Evans noted that based on advice from the SCSS, some important pieces of silver from The Homestead had been sent to Charleston for restoration.

The group worked around the large kitchen service table weighing, documenting, and photographing silver from the vault that holds a portion of the family's extensive collection. Among the highlights that day was a beautiful salad bowl and servers in Tiffany's Tomato Vine pattern. Also, the group discovered several pieces of South Carolina silver by silversmiths Alexander Young, Thomas Radcliffe and William Carrington.

Although this was the third trip to the White Homestead, there is still more silver to be documented so another trip is planned for early next year. Watch your e-mail for further information.

In addition to being useful to the Springs family, this project provides an opportunity to learn more about the silver collection of a prominent South Carolina family - a collection that grew and changed over time and was used daily. It also offers SCSS members a time of fellowship and getting to know each other better plus getting to see and handle some unique silver pieces.

CAMDEN MUSEUM TO HOST ALEXANDER YOUNG EXHIBIT

The following, written by Katherine Richardson, is from the Camden Chronicle-Independent.

From 1807 until his death in 1856, Camden was the home of an extraordinarily talented and intelligent individual named Alexander Young. He was born November 23, 1783, in Auchtermuchty, Fifeshire, Scotland to parents Andrew and Jane Young. He came to America in 1799 at the age of 16 and trained with the Baltimore silversmith, George Graham. Young came to South Carolina in 1801, according to his naturalization papers, and by at least 1807, he was in Camden.

Records show he and his wife, Elizabeth Rowe, bought Camden lot 186 in 1807. Their home stood on the northwestern corner of Laurens and Mill Street where the King Haigler Apartments now stand.

Young had expertise in chemistry, metaphysics, and natural philosophy. He was an avid rare book collector. Young owned a bookstore with stock for sale, but according to Col. William Shannon, his rare books were a treasure he kept in a private section of the store. If he so favored a visitor to the shop, "he would carry a willing listener ... and let him taste of them as an old 'bon vivant' would let one taste of his wine." His business ventures were diversified, and included selling watches, jewelry, cutlery, and patent medicines.

He also made clocks. There is a tall-case clock here in Camden that was made by him, one of two known Alexander Young clocks. Young was elected to serve as the first keeper of the Camden town clock when it was purchased in 1824. He invented a mechanism that made the clock strike the hour automatically or ring a fire alarm. Young tended this clock, which is now at the Camden Archives and Museum, until the end of his life. His son, George Graham, succeeded his father in this community-minded task. In all, the Youngs were Camden's clock keepers for 70 years.

Foremost, though, Alexander Young was a master silversmith. His known silver pieces range from elegant silver punch ladles, to silver goblets, from beautifully balanced flatware to a masterful Federal period French Empire teapot and creamer. Perhaps his most famous piece here in Camden was the silver trowel he crafted for Gen. Lafayette to use when laying the cornerstone for the DeKalb monument in front of Bethesda Presbyterian Church in 1825. The trowel was for a long time in the

possession of the Masons of Kershaw Lodge No. 29 in Camden. In 1893, it was sold to the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free Masons of South Carolina in Columbia.

Young also made the six coin silver Masonic "jewels" belonging to the Camden Lodge. These jewels are symbolic shapes used in Masonic rites and ceremonies and were donated for safe keeping to Camden Archives and Museum in 2006. His silver stands in high regard to this day, commanding impressive prices when discovered at auctions and estate sales.

Alexander Young was a public spirited man, involved the affairs of his community. An avid Presbyterian, he served on the committee to acquire the lot for Bethesda Presbyterian Church in 1820.

Two years later he helped supervise the construction of the church, designed by renowned architect Robert Mills.

Alexander and Elizabeth Young raised their family of five sons and two daughters in Camden. Alexander Young passed away in Camden on May 30, 1856, at the age of 73. He is buried in the Young plot at the Quaker Cemetery

From August 28, 2017, through January 19, 2018, the Camden Archives and Museum will feature an exhibit of Alexander Young's silver and focus on the life of this talented man who chose to spend the vast part of his adult life in Camden. A master craftsman, a brilliant mind and a public servant -- come celebrate this man of Camden's past. The Camden Archives and Museum is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays. Admission is free. For more information, call (803) 425-6050.

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S SILVER HAS AN INTERESTING HISTORY

The 1800 estate inventory of Mount Vernon represents over 40 years of George and Martha Washington's purchases of furniture, porcelain, and silver. The inventory included silver tableware George Washington purchased for his Revolutionary War camp table, as well as the silver plated wine coolers and sterling silver bottle roller he ordered for the presidential dining table.

The history of many of the Washington's belongings ends with this terse and often cryptic list.

The silver, however, remained in Martha Washington's care after her husband's death and has a rich story that continues into the 21st century. In her will Martha Washington bequeathed "*all the silver plate of every kind of which I shall die possessed, together with the two large plated cooler the four small plated coolers with the bottle castors,*" to her grandson, George Washington Parke Custis.

Residing at Arlington House, 14 miles north of Mount Vernon, George Washington Parke Custis cherished the silver and other relics from his grandparents, George and Martha Washington. His daughter, Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee, inherited this collection as well as Arlington House, where she had grown up among the material legacies of George Washington. At the start of the Civil War, Mary Custis Lee lived at Arlington House with her husband, Robert E. Lee, and three of their seven children.

Unfortunately, this idyllic picture did not last. On April 22, 1861, Lee rode away from Arlington House for the last time. Leaving behind his wife and children, he traveled to Richmond and accepted command of Virginia's forces.

The state had severed ties with the Union just five days earlier and America's Civil War was just a breath away. General Lee knew that Arlington was a strategic and symbolic target for the Union forces, proudly situated on the heights overlooking Washington, D.C. Soon after his departure, he urged his wife to be ready to evacuate: "*I think therefore you had better prepare all things for removal, that is the plate, pictures, &c., & be prepared at any moment.*"

In her memoirs, Mary Custis Lee wrote that "*the family plate so long treasured, especially that portion of it which my Father inherited from Mt Vernon was first secured.*"

With Federal troops advancing on Northern Virginia, the flatware engraved with Washington's crest, the large wine coolers, and even the bottle rollers were packed into trunks and sent first to Alexandria, and then to Richmond. General Lee forwarded them to the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington for safekeeping.

With the family silver safely out of reach of the Union troops, Mrs. Lee readied Arlington House for the impending occupation. She sent the family portraits and George Washington's bed to Ravensworth, her aunt's home in Fairfax County, where she would spend part of her time during the war. The books were locked in closets and

the "*Cincinnati & State China from Mt Vernon was carefully put away & nailed up in boxes in the cellar.*" Believing the family's prized possessions were safe, she and her children abandoned the mansion.

On May 23, 1861, Federal troops crossed the Potomac River and occupied Arlington Heights and the Lees' home. Major General Charles Sandford wrote on May 28: "*Finding the mansion vacated by the family, I stated to some of the servants left there that... I would, by occupying it myself, be responsible for the perfect care and security of the house and everything in and about it.*" He did not keep his promise.

While the structure of the house remained largely intact, Union soldiers looted many of the Lee family's belongings. Even though General Irwin McDowell sent a significant portion of the Washington items to the U.S. Patent Office, these too were subject to the curious Federal troops occupying Arlington. Mrs. Lee later mused: "*How little could I foresee the nature of that enemy who were to pry into every corner of my house, & rob it of articles that even they should have held sacred.*"

It was not until June of 1864, as Union Army General David Hunter raided the Valley of Virginia, that these relics were in danger of falling into enemy hands. Although Mary Custis Lee openly worried about these possessions, her husband attempted to calm her fears, writing: "*It will be impossible to remove the silver, &c., from Lexington. It will incur more danger in removal than in remaining. It must bide its fate.*"

The silver was saved from destruction by the actions of Superintendent Smith and ordnance sergeant, John Hampsey. As General Hunter advanced on the town of Lexington, Smith arranged for Hampsey to bury the two large trunks that held the sacred Washington silver.

On Sunday, June 12, Union troops set fire to all of the public buildings on the VMI campus. Concealed beneath the earth's surface, the Lee's family heirlooms avoided destruction.

Robert E. Lee wrote to Superintendent Smith a few weeks later thanking him "for the care of the relics [he] so kindly undertook to guard" and also expressed gratitude to "the trusty friend who acted in the matter." As the war came to a close, Mrs. Lee wrote to Smith thanking him for his careful protection of their "silver and papers."

After the cessation of hostilities, Mary Custis Lee wished to return to Arlington House, but her hopes were crushed when she learned that

Federal troops had turned Arlington into a burial ground. With retirement to a quiet life at Arlington no longer an option, Robert E. Lee accepted the position of president of Washington College in Lexington that later became Washington and Lee University.

In the fall of 1865, as the Lees settled into their new home, they called upon their "trustworthy friend," John Hampsey, to help unearth the two large chests of buried treasure.

Hampsey escorted Robert E. Lee, Jr., to the site where the silver had been buried. The General's son later reminisced: *"I was sent out with him to dig it up and bring it in. We found it safe and sound, but black with mould and damp, useless for the time being, so my father opened his camp-chest and we used his forks, spoons, plates, etc., while his camp-stools supplied the deficiency in seats."*

In appreciation for his assistance, General Lee gave Hampsey an autographed picture of himself. On the back of this, Mary Custis Lee inscribed her gratitude for *"preserving by his faithfulness for me the most valuable property saved from Arlington."*

The Washington silver remained in the Lees' home at Washington College until Mary's death in 1873. While Mary Custis Lee bequeathed many of the family relics to her unmarried daughter, Mary, pieces of the Washington's silver descended to all branches of the family.

Over the course of the 20th century, a number of these descendants returned Washington's silver to his home and to the care of the Mt. Vernon Ladies Association. A few of the pieces, however, including the buried silver, remained elusive. Curators believed the silver was lost, yet hope continued that these objects would one day be rediscovered.

Good fortune struck in the summer of 2007, when two Custis descendants, Mary Lee Bowman and her brother Robert E. Lee IV, decided to open a pair of storage trunks that had long resided in a corner of Mrs. Bowman's basement. The trunks revealed a cache of George Washington's silver. Tucked away among mostly 19th-century artifacts was a large silver plated wine cooler and a silver bottle roller used by the Washingtons during the presidency and afterward at Mount Vernon. Two Revolutionary War spoons decorated with Washington's griffin crest were also sheltered in the trunks.

Mrs. Bowman and Mr. Lee immediately thought of Mount Vernon, where their loyalties

were already strongly established. Mrs. Bowman had served as an active member of The Founders, Washington Committee for Historic Mount Vernon, for more than two decades. Mr. Lee was a past member of both the Mount Vernon Inn Board and the Mount Vernon Advisory Committee, and his wife, Carew, served as the Vice Regent for Maryland from 1972-2006, and as Regent from 1996-1999.

Mrs. Bowman and Mr. Lee had previously donated family silver to Mount Vernon in the 1980s, so they were well aware of how important these additional discoveries would be to the collection.

Due to their generosity, after two centuries of traveling in and around Virginia, above and below ground, these remarkable pieces of Washington silver have found their way back home. These pieces of tableware highlight the care that Washington took in setting his Revolutionary War and presidential tables, and their long journey back to Mount Vernon emphasizes the enduring legacy of George Washington.

SCSS members may recall several years ago during a visit to the historic Borough House in Stateburg seeing a piece of Washington's silver engraved with the Washington family crest.

To learn more about the Washington family silver and see pictures, visit the Mount Vernon website and "click on" the "metals" section. <http://www.mountvernon.org/preservation/collections-holdings/browse-the-museum-collections/category/metals/5/>

SCSS MEMBERS ASKED TO SUBMIT IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS

Members are asked to submit any ideas for articles or other information that could be included in future issues of *The Gadroon* to Frank White at frankwhite@bellsouth.net.

SOUTH CAROLINA SILVER SOCIETY, INC.

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<http://southcarolinasilversociety.org>