Classical Decorative Arts of Philadelphia

BY ELIZABETH FELD & STUART P. FELD

Pair of vase-shaped pitchers with floral decoration, Tucker Factories (active 1826–1838), Philadelphia, Pa., circa 1826–1838. Porcelain, painted and gilded. H. (to top of handles) 9M\zn in. Collection of Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York.

This pair of pitchers, decorated on the front and back with polychrome floral bouquets within gilt laurel wreaths tied with bowknots, and with elaborately gilded borders, stars, leaves, and musical trophies, represents the epitome of Tucker production of this type. They were included in the landmark Tucker exhibition organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1957. An identical pair of pitchers is in the collection of American decorative arts at Bayou Bend, Houston, the former home of Miss Ima Hogg.

Although most of the "fancy goods," or accessories, such as glass, ceramics, and lighting, used in wealthy American homes in the first few decades of the nineteenth century were traditionally imported, household goods of excellent quality were beginning to be manufactured in the United States by this time. By the late 1820s, when Anthony Gabriel Quervelle, Charles White, and Joseph Barry were making their own brand of neoclassical furniture in Philadelphia, a group of local firms was also producing fine quality silver, glass, lighting, and ceramics that rivaled much of what was being imported, either by traveling Americans or through such local retailing firms as Louis Veron & Company, Philadelphia, Baldwin Gardiner, first of Philadelphia and later New York, and Jones, Lows & Ball of Boston.

Since the seventeenth century, silversmiths had been active in eastern seaboard centers like Boston, New York, Philadelphia,

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Monumental urn depicting two dramatic scenes, Tucker Factories (active 1826–1838), Philadelphia, Pa., circa 1832–1838. Porcelain, painted and gilded, with applied gilt-bronze handles, and an iron and brass tie-rod for assembly. H. 22, D. 8½, W. (through the handles) 12⅛ in. Collection of Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York.

This vase, depicting two dramatic scenes painted in polychrome, is one of the six largest and most elaborate pieces known to have been produced by the Tucker Factories. Two identical pairs of vases, one with views of the Schuylkill waterworks and dam at Fairmount, Philadelphia, and a second with floral decoration, are in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, while a sixth vase with views of Sedgley and a view from Springland, the printmaker William Birch's estate on the Delaware River, is in a rivate collection.

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and Baltimore. But in the neoclassical period of the early nineteenth century, Philadelphia emerged as the center of the silver trade in the United States, with Fletcher and Gardiner (and Thomas Fletcher working alone after Sidney Gardiner's death in 1827), Simon Chaudron, Anthony Rasch, Harvey Lewis, and Edward Lownes turning out silver of extraordinary quality. Drawing upon English Regency and French Empire prototypes, these and other silversmiths created a distinct Philadelphia style that stands apart, stylistically and qualitatively, from silver made elsewhere in the United States at the time. They worked not only for a local market, but for clients at a considerable distance as well. For example, Fletcher and Gardiner, who started out in Boston in 1808 before moving to Philadelphia in 1811, continued to serve Bostonians for another generation, and Anthony Rasch was called upon to execute the plate for the elaborate residence that David and Miriam Sears built at 42 Beacon Street, Boston, about 1819.

In the ceramics field, a profusion of French and English porcelain, both utilitarian and decorative, was imported, as very little porcelain was made in the United States until the second quarter of the nineteenth century, when the Tucker Factories of Philadelphia began operation in 1826 and became the first moderately successful manufacturer of porcelain in the United States. They produced a wide variety of table and ornamental wares, from small, generic, and practical pieces, with little or no ornamentation, to larger, more carefully crafted decorative objects inspired by English Regency and French "Old Paris" prototypes.

Lighting, too, was a major import

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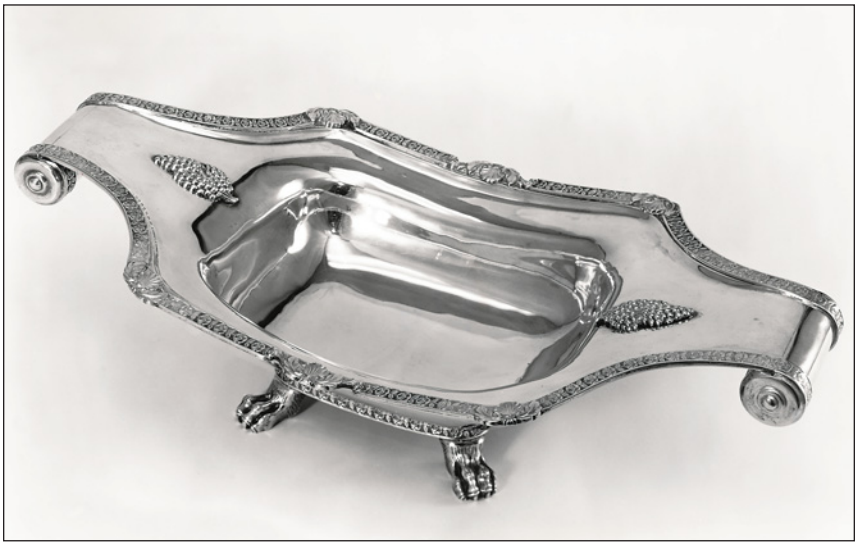
Pair of small columnar sinumbra lamps, Cornelius & Company (active 1827–1831), Philadelphia, Pa., circa 1827–1831. Gilt bronze and brass, with lamp mechanism and glass shades, blown, frosted, and wheel cut, and glass chimneys. H. (to top of chimneys) 19⅝ in. Signed (on upper side of the iron weight mounted under the base of each): "C C C 90." Collection of Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York.

This pair of miniature sinumbra lamps, looking to English designs of the early to mid-1820s that were largely made in the metalworking center of Birmingham, England, stands at the beginning of the production of lighting by the Cornelius firm. Another signed pair, looking more to a French prototype, is in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. Other American manufacturers of lamps of this type were the New England Glass Company of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and William Carleton of Boston.

Pair of Argand lamps, Cornelius & Son (active 1831–39), Philadelphia, Pa., about 1835. Gilt bronze and brass, with lamp mechanism and glass shades, blown, frosted, and wheel cut, and glass chimneys. H. 20½, W. 11 in. Courtesy of Carswell Rush Berlin, New York.

Pair of double Argand lamps, Thomas Messenger & Sons, Birmingham, England (active 1797–1920), circa 1830. Retailed by Louis Veron & Company, Philadelphia, Pa. Inscribed (with embossed brass label applied to tube): LOUIS VERON & Co. / PHILADELPHIA. Courtesy of Carswell Rush Berlin, New York.

For many years, the presence of brass labels embossed with American names on a substantial number of Argand lamps led to the assumption that these lamps were actually made in the United States. The discovery, however, of manufacturers' names cast into internal weights and other hidden parts has confirmed that many of them were made abroad, by such firms as Thomas Messenger & Sons of Birmingham, England, and were visibly marked with the names of their intended American retailers. The retailer of this pair of lamps (lower right) was French émigré Louis Veron, a purveyor of fashionable furnishings on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. Veron was also an interior designer and was responsible for the 1829 redecoration of the East Room in the White House during Andrew Jackson's administration.



Bread basket, Thomas Fletcher (1787–1866) and Sidney Gardiner (1785/7–1827), Philadelphia, Pa. (active together 1811–1827), circa 1815–1820. Silver. L. 16⅛, W. 8⅝, H. 4¼ in. Signed and inscribed (on the bottom, twice): FLETCHER & GARDINER / PHILADA. Collection of Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York.

Fletcher & Gardiner of Philadelphia was the leading silversmithing firm in America during the later neoclassical period. Following Sidney Gardiner's early death in 1827, Thomas Fletcher worked alone. Among the most interesting pieces they produced were baskets of a variety of shapes, of which only about a dozen examples have been recorded. This basket follows the unusual shape of a pair of baskets (at the Maryland Historical Society) that are included in the service made by Fletcher and Gardiner in 1817 for presentation by the citizens of Baltimore to Commodore John Rogers for his heroic acts in the successful defense of Baltimore during the War of 1812.

Thomas Fletcher, Design for a water pitcher, circa 1835. Pen and brown ink on cream wove paper. 19⅞ x 12 in. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Elisha Whittelsey Collection; The Elisha Whittelsey Fund. 1953 (53.652.20). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Following the early death of Sidney Gardiner in 1827, Thomas Fletcher continued to produce silver of ultimate quality. This ewer is almost identical to one depicted in a drawing from the Fletcher & Gardiner / Thomas Fletcher firm in the collection of the Department of Drawings and Prints at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (above). The ewer differs from the drawing in its absence of the band of scrolls, probably intending to be repousséd ("chased," as the drawing notes) that encircles the neck of the ewer in the drawing. Also missing are the inverted leaves around the stem of the base. Fletcher, anticipating that his clientele might like to determine the amount of ornamentation, specified, at the right of the drawing, the variations he could provide: "45 oz. each ... $2.50 chased," or "40 oz. each ... at $2.25 plain neck and foot," as per the present example, which weighs, not surprisingly, 39 troy oz. 8 dwts. But the shape of the ewer is identical, and the band of acanthus leaves around the body and the four die-rolled borders that encircle the lip, the shoulder, the stand, and the base are all exactly the same.

Ewer, Thomas Fletcher (1787–1866; active 1827–42), Philadelphia, Pa., circa 1838. Silver. H. 13½ in. Signed and inscribed (with seal mark on the bottom): •T. FLETCHER•PHILAD. Inscribed (with engraving on inside rim of base): "From E. Carmick to Minerva Cenas. 1838." Collection of Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York.

Five piece tea/coffee service, Edward Lownes (1792–1834) and Henry Erwin, Philadelphia, Pa. (active as a partnership, 1816–17), circa 1816–1817. Silver Coffee pot: H. 9½ in. Signed (with touch on two pots and waste bowl): H. ERWIN; (on covered sugar bowl and creamer): E.LOWNES. Inscribed (with engraving, on the front of each piece): MWE. Collection of Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York.

This five piece coffee/tea service, consisting of a coffee pot, tea pot, covered sugar bowl, creamer, and waste bowl variously marked by Erwin and Lownes, is testimony to their short-lived partnership in the years 1816–1817. Henry Erwin is listed in the Philadelphia directories from 1817 to 1829 as a "silversmith" and in the period 1837 to 1842 as a "watchmaker." This set, with its considerable weight, its finely cast and wrought eagle spouts on the coffee and tea pots, and finials and medallions on the covers of the two pots and the sugar bowl, and its exquisite die-rolled borders, is typical of the best of Philadelphia production of the second decade of the nineteenth century.

Pair of clear glass fluid lamps, attributed to Union Flint Glass Works, Kensington, Philadelphia, Pa., circa 1835–1840. Glass, pressed and blown, cut and engraved, with brass collars. H. (to the top of the brass collars) 10½ in. Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. Photograph courtesy of Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York.

Very little is known about cut glass made in the United States during the period 1810–1840. The documentation of a group of early blown and cut glass formerly at the Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, New York, and now at the Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, New York, allows us to attribute the superb cutting found on a group of lamps, including the present examples—long assumed to be of New England origin—to the Union Flint Glass Works, also known as the Union Glass Works, and the Union Cut and Plain Glass Flint Glass Works, Philadelphia. This glass house, which is known to have produced blown, pressed, and cut glassware, specimens of which were exhibited at the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia, in 1827 and 1831, was founded in 1826, and dissolved in 1844, after having operated at a site in the Kensington section of Philadelphia on the Delaware River.

Nicolino Calyo (1799–1884), *View of Philadelphia from Camden, New Jersey,* circa 1838. Gouache on paper, 6⅜ x 8⅞ inches. Inscribed (across the bottom): "Philadelphia, from Camden." Collection of Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York.

Born in Naples, Italy, Nicolino Calyo found his way to America in search of artistic opportunity. His meticulously rendered works, in the precise topographical tradition of his time, closely captured the people and places of his travels. The present work, one of a series of cabinet-size gouaches that explores both a particular place as well as a narrative scene, is taken from the New Jersey side of the Delaware River, at the Camden terminus of the Camden-Philadelphia ferry, and shows, in miniature, a panoramic view of the Philadelphia skyline stretching peacefully along the riverfront.

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during the neoclassical period, with retailers offering a variety of wares, some from France but mostly from the metalworking center of Birmingham, England. But, again, locally Cornelius & Company of Philadelphia began operating in 1827, producing lighting fixtures first in a neoclassical mode and, later, in a succession of eclectic Victorian styles. Similarly, in 1826, the Union Flint Glass Company was founded in Philadelphia by glass men who had previously worked in Boston and New York. They produced blown and cut wares that rivaled those hitherto largely imported from England and Ireland.

Thus, during the early decades of the nineteenth century, the craftsmen and industries of Philadelphia became serious contributors and competitors in the marketplace for household decorative arts. The examples in this article offer a selection of objects that were produced locally, or, in one instance, made abroad on order for a Philadelphia retailer.

Father-daughter team ***Stuart P. Feld*** *and* ***Elizabeth Feld*** *own and run Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York, where they specialize in important American and European paintings of all periods and American decorative arts of the nineteenth century. They have curated several pivotal exhibitions on American decorative arts, accompanied by scholarly publications including* Boston in the Age of Neo-Classicism, 1810–1840 *and* In Pointed Style: The Gothic Revival in America. *Both Felds are themselves collectors of American Neo-Classical decorative arts.*