

# Anthony Rasch

## *From Silversmith to Citizen*

BY CHRISTINA KEYSER

**B**avarian-born silversmith and merchant Anthony Rasch von Tauffkirchen (ca.1780–1858) belonged to a generation of silversmiths in the United States who endured its volatile economy during the first half of the nineteenth century. His career matured and, at times, floundered alongside that of the young republic's. The financial panics of 1819 and 1837 bankrupted luxury goods merchants across the country, Rasch included. After his second bankruptcy he relied on his skills and personal connections to sustain him. By the 1850s, Anthony Rasch was no longer wealthy, he was a leading citizen of New Orleans.

Rasch's beginnings in Bavaria are still obscure. He was likely born at the Castle Kleeberg around 1780, the second son of Maximilian, Count von Tauffkirchen, and his third wife, Gertrude, a commoner. Rasch's mother passed away soon after his birth, and his father quickly remarried. With no hope of an inheritance, his membership

full of economic opportunity. By 1806, Rasch had joined Holy Trinity Catholic Church, the first German-speaking Catholic congregation in America, where it is likely he met Jean Simon Chaudron (1758–1846), a French-Catholic émigré with a prosperous luxury wares store and an ideal associate for the young silversmith. Rasch was working in Chaudron's shop by 1807, and the pair formalized their silversmithing partnership in 1809, with Rasch in charge of their manufactory on the west bank of the Schuylkill River and Chaudron running the retail shop in the city. The 1810 federal census recorded twenty-seven people living and working at Rasch's manufactory, the largest household in the township.<sup>2</sup>

During his partnership with Chaudron from 1809 to 1812, Rasch crafted a variety of silverwares sold as far away as New York and Virginia. Today, tea and coffee services made for Philadelphia's elite families are the most regular survivals (Fig. 1). Rasch relied heavily on sheet silver, decorative die-rolled borders, and cast ball feet for these objects. Each piece is usually stamped with two banner marks, "CHAUDRON'S & RASCH" and "STER•AMERI•MAN•"—an abbreviation for "Sterling, American Manufacture." This use of a quality mark is one of the earliest instances known in the United States. After their partnership dissolved in 1812, Rasch created his own maker's mark and sterling standard mark, "ANT<sup>Y</sup>. RASCH" and "STERLING SIL<sup>R</sup>," and relocated to 118 High Street, where he continued to craft fine silver objects for local patrons (Fig. 2). Although Rasch only used the quality mark for at most two years after going into business for himself, he continued to mark his pieces "ANT<sup>Y</sup>. RASCH" into 1817.<sup>3</sup>

By 1817, Anthony Rasch was partnered with George Willig Jr. (ca. 1795–ca. 1860), likely a journeyman in Rasch's shop. With an infusion of borrowed capital from Willig's father, George Willig Sr. (1764–1851), the business flourished. They made large, handwrought sterling silver pieces with applied cast ornament for well-known families in Boston, Maryland, and Philadelphia. They also crafted more affordable goods for a wider market, including cups, goblets, and flatware, marking their wares, "A.RASCH & C<sup>O</sup>." and sometimes including a second mark, "PHILADELPHIA" (Fig. 3).<sup>4</sup>

Anthony Rasch's wife, Johanna Margaret Bidel Rasch (ca. 1780–1818) died on November 23, 1818.<sup>5</sup> Soon thereafter, in May of 1819, Rasch married Mary Adelaide Fortune (ca. 1789–1853).<sup>6</sup> Mary's



**Fig 1:** Bartram coffee service, Simon Chaudron (1758–1846) and Anthony Rasch (ca. 1780–1858), Philadelphia, 1809–1812. Silver, wood. Hot water pot: H. 8½, W. 11½, D. 5 in. Courtesy of a private collection. The coffee service is engraved with the Bartram family coat-of-arms and the initials "AB." It was likely made for Ann Bartram (1741–1824) of Philadelphia, daughter of the Quaker botanist, John Bartram.

in the esteemed Tauffkirchen family probably eased his entry into one of the goldsmithing workshops in the nearby town of Passau. The Napoleonic Wars ravaging the region and its economy probably forced Rasch to seek out new markets for his skills once his training was completed. On April 16, 1804, Anthony Rasch, "goldsmith," arrived with his wife in Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup>

A major port of entry for Germanic immigrants, Philadelphia was

father lent Rasch money to support his floundering business. The contraction of America's financial system after the War of 1812 and the run on the banks in 1819 ruined many of Philadelphia's merchants and silversmiths. In July of 1819, Rasch and Willig declared insolvency and by September they were auctioning off "One large Rolling Mill, one small [mill] for Jewellery, a complete set of Stamps, for making Threaded Spoons and Forks, with a number of Patterns, Scotch, and Pumice Stone."<sup>7</sup> Rasch also auctioned off almost all of his household wares including "elegant Brussels Carpeting, Sideboard, Fancy Chairs...Card Tables, Looking Glasses, Prints, [and an] elegant Fort Piano."<sup>8</sup> In November 1819, with little hope of reviving his business interests in Philadelphia, Rasch left behind his pregnant wife and four children and set sail for the fast-growing, immigrant-friendly port city of New Orleans.

He advertised his new silversmithing business in January of 1820, proposing to execute "conformably to either FRENCH or ENGLISH taste: complete setts or services of Silver Ware" and asking "of a generous public that portion of patronage to which his skill as a workman and conduct as a citizen may entitle him."<sup>9</sup> Rasch garnered the patronage he sought, retrieved his family from Philadelphia in November of 1820, and called New Orleans his home for the rest of his life.<sup>10</sup>

Rasch's late Philadelphia silver and early New Orleans silver is almost indistinguishable, suggesting he brought patterns and molds with him to New Orleans. A teaspoon made in Philadelphia and a dessert fork made in New Orleans (Figs. 4

and 5) have fiddle-shaped handles that are almost identical, with a beaded border enclosing a cluster of grapes and foliage. Cast elements on Rasch's pitchers are also consistent. The eagle-head handle with a ram's-head terminus on one of Rasch's New Orleans pitchers can also be found on his Philadelphia made silver (Figs. 6, 6a).

As Rasch settled into his new life, he fashioned himself as a merchant and not a craftsman. In March 1821, he supplied the city of New Orleans with 200 street lamps for which he was paid \$900 in May 1822. Rasch was selling Saratoga Water, imported from New York, in 1826. And in 1827, he advertised as an agent for the Kentucky firm of Sutton and Graham, offering for sale their "celebrated Harrodsburgh Mineral Water." In the same 1827 newspaper, Rasch promoted the "economy and safety" of "new[ly] invented night lamps."<sup>11</sup>

In the 1820s, Rasch's Vieux Carré home was at the center of the city's flourishing commercial district. Intimately involved with the Catholic Church in New Orleans, he increased his social standing by fundraising for the city's Catholic boys' orphanage and hosted lavish concerts in his garden for the institution's benefit. The city's French and English newspapers ran advertisements for the entertainments, requesting attendees show a "spirit of liberality corresponding with the generosity of Mr. Rasch."<sup>12</sup> In 1831, Rasch solidified his position in New Orleans society with the purchase of 75 Chartres Street, next door to his original residence, from where he continued to fundraise for the orphanage (Fig. 7). He operated his store on the first floor, using the two upper stories and the interior courtyard for living and entertaining space.



**Fig. 2:** Soup tureen by Anthony Rasch (ca. 1780–1858), Philadelphia, 1812–1814. Silver. H. 13<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub>, W. 9<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. Courtesy of a private collection. This is one of few objects to survive with Rasch's quality mark "STERLING SILVER." It is largely handwrought, with delicately cast grotesques for the handles and a large cast finial.

Between 1829 and 1836, Anthony Rasch was often away from his home acquiring goods for his “goldsmith, jewellery, and fancy store.”<sup>13</sup> A cargo list from Rasch’s 1829 trip to France includes eighteen cases, four trunks, two boxes, and one barrel of merchandise. After another transatlantic voyage in 1831, he advertised a “new and rich assortment of goods selected by himself in England, France, and Geneva.”<sup>14</sup> Unlike other retailers who relied on their European factors, Rasch personally selected the finest wares available for his customers. Rasch also returned with European curiosities that drew customers into his store. In 1831, Rasch exhibited a “splendid mechanism” — a musical clock contained in a vase with singing birds. Made by Pierre-Frederic Ingold and Frères Rochat, the clock became a tourist attraction, getting attention in papers as far away as Baltimore (Fig. 8):

SPLENDID MECHANISM — Mr. A. Rasch, well known to our citizens for his enterprise, has imported from France a most splendid clock, made in Paris by a Genevean [*sic*] about 70 years of age. It may be seen at his store.... The whole is a finished, very ingenious and costly piece of work, well worthy the attention of the curious.<sup>15</sup>

By now more a businessman than a silver-smith, Rasch still, crafted smaller silver objects and fittings for the “fancy articles” he sold in his store and still made, if infrequently, the large presentation pieces and tea services that had been a staple of his Philadelphia career. Cups, beakers, lids for cowry shell snuff boxes (Fig. 9), glass-lined salts (Fig. 10), and flatware, are among the most frequent survivals from New Orleans and were likely his best-selling wares.

The Panic of 1837, along with the attending bank contractions and his own overextended credit, eventually sent Rasch back into insolvency. Rasch utilized the Louisiana courts to recover his debts, but many of his debtors had already declared bankruptcy. In 1842, he applied for relief from his creditors, and three years later, his home, his property, and most of his belongings were auctioned at a public sale. This time, at the age of 65, Rasch did not start a new business and a new life elsewhere, as he had in 1819. His daughters had married upstanding members of New Orleans society, and his sons-in-law cushioned his finan-



**Fig. 3:** Goblet by Anthony Rasch (ca. 1780–1858) and George Willig Jr. (ca. 1795–ca.1860), Philadelphia, 1817–1819. Silver. H. 5¾ in. Courtesy of a private collection. The later engraving on this goblet reads: “Pres<sup>t</sup> by G. Willig to/ his sister Anna Maria/ Oct: 20<sup>th</sup> 1829.” On that date, Ms. Willig (1811–1831) married Benjamin R. Lummis. Similar goblets without engraving or with different inscriptions survive in private collections and at the Yale University Art Gallery.



**Fig. 4:** Teaspoon by Anthony Rasch (ca. 1780–1858) and George Willig Jr. (ca. 1795–ca.1860), Philadelphia, 1817–1819. Silver. L. 5¾ in. Louisiana State University Museum of Art, 82.2a-d; gift of the Friends of the LSU MOA; photo courtesy of Kevin Duffy, Louisiana State University Museum of Art.



**Fig. 5:** Dessert fork by Anthony Rasch (ca. 1780–1858) New Orleans, ca. 1820–1830. Silver. L. 6¼ in. Louisiana State University Museum of Art, 95.10; gift of Michael Weller, San Francisco; photo courtesy of Kevin Duffy, Louisiana State University Museum of Art. Marked “A.RASCH” and “N.ORLEANS,” this fork has almost the exact same pattern as Rasch’s earlier teaspoon.



**Fig. 6:** Water pitcher by Anthony Rasch (ca. 1780–1858), New Orleans, ca. 1820–1830. Silver. H. 16½ in. Courtesy of the Ruth J. Nutt collection; photo courtesy of Thomas R. Nutt. Marked “A.RASCH” and “N.ORLEANS;” the eagle-head handle on this pitcher is extremely similar to a Philadelphia-made pitcher owned by the Historic New Orleans Collection.



**Fig. 6a:** Detail of the ram's-head terminus on figure 6.



cial blows by purchasing his home, his slaves, and his store, and provided him with a comfortable existence for the remainder of his life. With his family's support, he returned his focus to the two constants in his life — the Catholic Church and silversmithing.

On January 20, 1849, Rasch reminded the citizens of New Orleans that “he continues to manufacture every variety of Gold and Silver Ware, and to set Diamonds in the most approved style.”<sup>16</sup> Attempting his hand at the Rococo Revival style popular in the mid-nineteenth century, his efforts are evidenced by a presentation water pitcher made for a local Jewish society (Fig. 11). Although impressive for its size, the pitcher lacks the crisp repoussé and neat finishing of his earlier work.

Most of the silver Rasch crafted toward the end of his career had only modest decorative elements. This is true of a silver ciborium and two silver communion plates recently discovered in a vault of St. Louis Cathedral, Anthony Rasch's home church in New Orleans they are marked “A. RASCH.” and are the only pieces of Catholic silver made by Rasch known to survive (Fig. 12). The communion silver is simply adorned with beaded and gadrooned borders, and each piece is engraved with the phrase “Church of St. Louis.” Rasch made these objects during the 1840s or 1850s, his most active period of involvement with the Catholic Church.<sup>17</sup>

When St. Mary's Orphan Asylum for Boys needed a new building, Rasch took an active role in fundraising and in the oversight of the institution. He placed newspaper advertisements in 1849 and 1855 requesting that New Orleanians donate funds to the orphanage.<sup>18</sup>



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**Fig. 8:** Musical and singing bird double-dialed urn timepiece with chronometer escapement by Pierre-Frédéric Ingold (1787–1878) and bird mechanism attributed to Frères Rochat (active 1810–1835), Paris, 1834. Ormolu, brass, silver, wood. H. approx. 3 ft. Image courtesy of Sotheby's New York, the *Masterpieces from the Time Museum* sale, Part II, lot 215, June 19, 2002. This impressive timepiece is similar to the one Rasch imported from Paris in 1831. The small birds begin singing and moving after the music has stopped.


**Fig. 9:** Snuff box by Anthony Rasch (ca. 1780–1858), Philadelphia or New Orleans, 1813–1858. Silver, cowry shell. L. 3½ in. Courtesy of the Clark Art Institute, 2003.4.260. This snuff box, marked “A. RASCH” on the lid, is typical of the “fancy articles” that Rasch sold in his stores in Philadelphia and New Orleans.

**Fig. 10:** Pair of salts by Anthony Rasch (ca. 1780–1858), New Orleans, ca. 1820–1840. Silver. L. 4 in. Courtesy of the Holden family collection. Both salts are marked “A. RASCH” and “N. ORLEANS.” A similar pair with their original glass liners sold at Pook & Pook Inc. on September 26, 2008, lot 348.

**Fig. 7:** Anthony Rasch's store and residence between 1831–1858, at 75 (now 315) Chartres Street, New Orleans. Author's photograph.

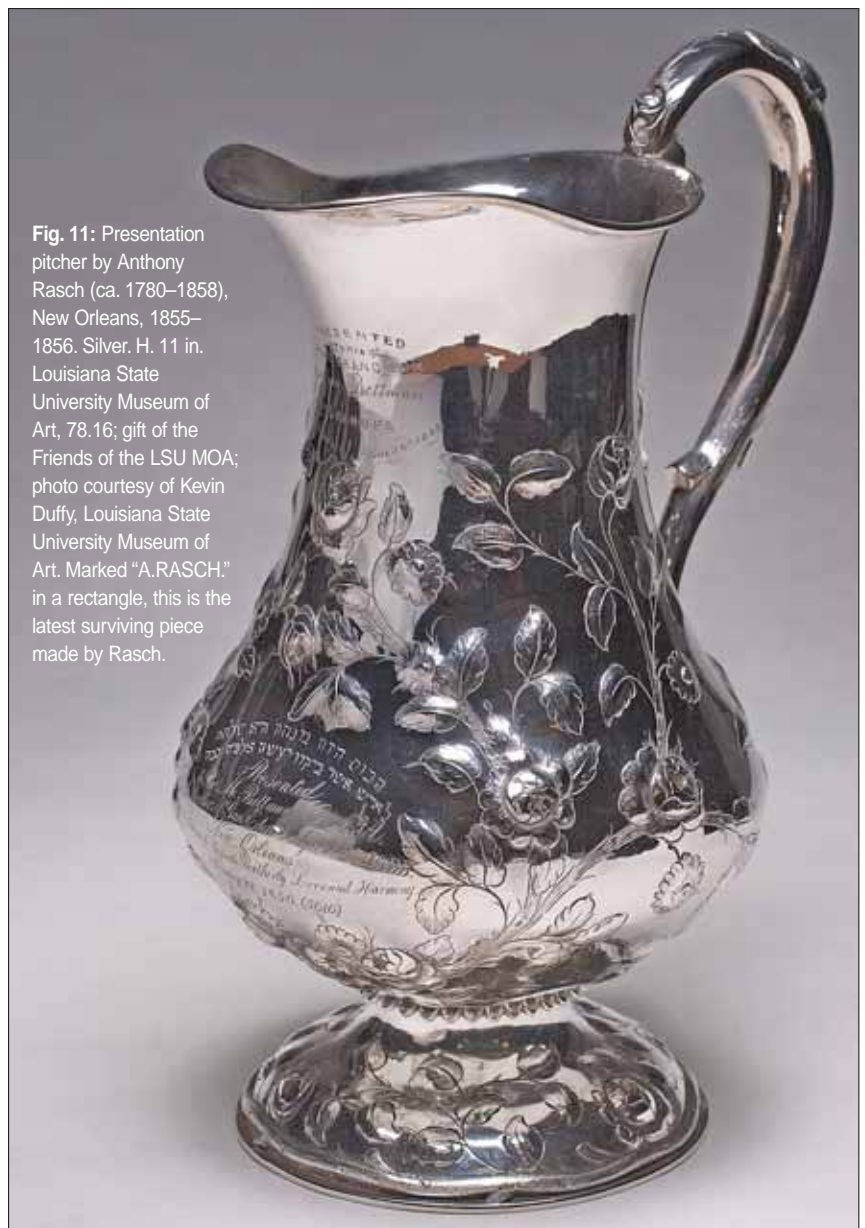


Letters from the 1840s show Rasch petitioning the Bishop of New Orleans for support and informing him of the Asylum's progress.<sup>19</sup>

When Anthony Rasch died on November 25, 1858, he was not remembered for the beautiful silver objects he crafted or the stylish wares he sold in his store. Instead, he was eulogized in his obituary for his "probity, integrity, charity, and benevolence."<sup>20</sup> Rasch may have arrived in the United States as a fashionable European silversmith, but he departed this life as an "old and respected citizen."<sup>21</sup> 

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2. United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Third Census of the United States, 1810* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1810).
3. Deborah Dependahl Waters, "Rich and Fashionable Goods: The Precious Metals Trades in Philadelphia, 1810–1840," in Donald L. Fennimore and Ann K. Wagner, *Silversmiths to the Nation: Thomas Fletcher and Sidney Gardiner, 1808–1842* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 2007), 26–28.
4. Rasch and Willig announced their partnership in November of 1817. *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, (November 24, 1817).
5. *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (November 25, 1818).
6. May 19, 1819, *Holy Trinity Baptismal and Marriage Registers, 1806–1820*.
7. *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (September 19, 1819).
8. Ibid.
9. *Louisiana Gazette* (January 21, 1820).
10. *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (November 2, 1820).
11. Tulane University Special Collections, New Orleans Municipal Papers (1782–1925), Box 13, Folder 13, "Mandat de Payment," (May 10, 1822); *Louisiana Advertiser* (September 13, 1826); *Louisiana Advertiser* (May 22, 1827).
12. *Louisiana Advertiser* (English edition) (June 20, 1827).
13. "Rash [sic] Anthony, goldsmith, jewellery and fancy store, 75 Chartres." *Michel's New Orleans Directory* (New Orleans, LA: 1834), 174.
14. Ancestry.com, *New Orleans Passenger Lists, 1820–1945*, Pearl, March 15, 1829, 1–2; New York Passenger Lists, 1820–1957, *Francis I*, November 10, 1831, 1–2. [database on-line] (Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2006).
15. *Baltimore Patriot*, (March 18, 1831).
16. *Louisiana Courier* (January 20, 1849).
17. Thanks are due to Rev. Msgr. Kern at the St. Louis Cathedral for uncovering and saving these valuable pieces of history.
18. *The Daily Picayune* (December 1, 1849); Ibid. (December 16, 1855).
19. Letters from Anthony Rasch to Bishop Blanc about the orphanage survive in the Notre Dame University Archives. "To The President of the Catholic Association for the Help of Orphans" (December 29, 1840); Anthony Rasch to Bishop A(nthony) Blanc (October 31, 1846).
20. *The Daily Picayune* (November 29, 1858).
21. Ibid.



**Fig. 11:** Presentation pitcher by Anthony Rasch (ca. 1780–1858), New Orleans, 1855–1856. Silver. H. 11 in. Louisiana State University Museum of Art, 78.16; gift of the Friends of the LSU MOA; photo courtesy of Kevin Duffy, Louisiana State University Museum of Art. Marked "A. RASCH." in a rectangle, this is the latest surviving piece made by Rasch.



**Fig. 12:** Ciborium and plates made by Anthony Rasch (ca. 1780–1858), New Orleans, ca. 1840–1858. Silver. Courtesy of the St. Louis Cathedral.