

Paul Revere Tea Set

Artist: Paul Revere, Jr.

Date: 1792

Medium: Decorative Arts and Utilitarian Objects, Metalwork

Size: 6 1/8 x 3 9/16 x 5 3/4 in. (15.56 x 9.05 x 14.61 cm)

Accession #: 60.22.1



Description:

Coin silver tea service, Federal Style, consisting of: teapot and lid; stand for teapot; tea caddy with hinged lid, fitted with lock and key; stand for teacaddy; covered sugar urn; cream pitcher; shell-shaped tea scoop; tea or punch strainer; pair of sugar tongs with shell-shaped ends; teaspoons. Fluted design with engraved and pricked swags and medallions containing the monogram of John and Mehitable Templeman and all bearing Revere hall mark.

Paul Revere II learned silversmithing from his father's workshop. He was the oldest of 7 children and took over for his father at 20 years of age, upon his father's death in 1754. When there wasn't demand for silver work during the Seven Years' War with the French (1756-63), he became an engraver, at one point printing paper money for the Provincial Congress. He also practiced dentistry, specializing in making false teeth. A patriot of the American Revolution, he is known for his famous ride to Lexington to warn the people that the British were coming. This event was later immortalized in a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Paul Revere's Ride".

During the Revolutionary War, he served as a Lieutenant Colonel of an artillery regiment. At this time he setup a powder mill and cast cannon for the Continental Army. After the war, he went into trade in addition to keeping up his silversmithing. He traded clothing, paper and pencils,

among other things, and started a foundry for casting bells and parts for ships. He also setup the first rolling mill for sheet copper in America. Both the ship "Constitution" and the dome of the Massachusetts State House were sheathed with his rolled copper. He stopped silversmithing in 1806 and died in 1818.

Revere is known to have made 50 teapots, but only 6 with matching creamer and sugar bowl, and only one of those before 1790. So, this one is very special: it is the most complete Revere tea set known. The punch strainer is by Revere, but not originally for this service. Also, there is only one other tea caddy known to be by Paul Revere. This one still has its original key. The tea shell, used to measure tea, is the only known one by Revere. The teaspoons have only recently been reunited with the service.

Tea is a sign of politeness, hospitality and wealth. It required distinctive manners and special equipment. A matching silver service was a sign of high prestige. It wasn't common until after American independence. Before that time, people used the pieces they had, not relying upon a perfect match. Matching silver well reflects the expense of tea at that time, as does a tea caddy with a key to lock up the treasure when not being used. Often, tea would be served first, followed by punch, a less expensive beverage. Hence, the inclusion of a punch strainer.

Our tea set indicates luxury, but also shows the power of industry. It is made from coin silver (melted down coins), so is a measure of wealth in many ways. Coin silver is slightly less pure than sterling. This coin silver was made into rolled sheet silver to save time and money, then was formed and fluted to give added structural strength. Bright cutting (shallow gouging cuts) was used to form floral and drapery motifs so as not to weaken the structure. Feet and finials were cast in molds. As Revere was a successful capitalist, making his fortune in trade and from rolled sheet copper and casting bells, this concern for industry makes sense.

This set follows federal style, the one chosen to showcase the young country's arts. Closely tied to the classical, using Greek themes, this style reflects a tie to the earliest democracy known. The fluted sides of the pieces are like fluted columns. The creamer is in a Roman helmet shape, while the sugar bowl is a classical urn. Swags and tassels are common classical embellishments that appear on this set.

This set made for John and Mehitable Templeman and was passed down to their descendants. It was split up among different parts of the family and reunited here, after being purchased from the descendants by Mr. and Mrs. James Ford Bell. Jackie Kennedy borrowed this from the MIA to use at the White House 1961-62.

Tours

- American Art/Made in America
- Highlights of the Collection
- People and Places
- Classical Tradition
- Decorative Arts: Beauty in the Useful
- How Was it Made?
- MN Collectors and Their Stories
- could fit many more, too

Information

ArtsconnectEd has great resources, including the docent manual info.

<http://www.paulreverehouse.org/ride/poem.shtml> (thank you Kay for this link!)
<http://www.artsmia.org/education/teacher-resources/objectinfofocus.cfm?v=85>
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rvre/hd_rvre.htm

Unfortunately, I did not find anything of interest at the Boston MFA site - doesn't seem to have research, just collections.