



“SUGAR AND SPICE . . .”

BY JOSEPH DOWNS
Curator of the American Wing



In the North American colonies, sugar and spice, tea and coffee were scarce luxuries from the Indies, sparingly used and carefully husbanded. Well before the mild, hot beverages were widely used, sugar from the Barbadoes was in demand to sweeten wine or to give a pleasant disguise to unpalatable dishes, as Polonius suggests in his remark: “With . . . pious action we do sugar o’er the devil himself.”

Among the finest colonial silver that was made at the start of the eighteenth century are seven oval sugar boxes. Six of them were made in Boston by two famous silversmiths, John Coney and Edward Winslow; the seventh, illustrated above, by the little-known but no less

expert Daniel Greenough. The fluting he so cunningly adapted to it is a unique design.

Greenough was born in Massachusetts and probably was apprenticed to an unknown silversmith there. About 1715 he married Abigail Eliot in Newcastle, New Hampshire, and made the sugar box for his wealthy parents-in-law, Robert and Sarah Eliot. There are records of other silver by him, but it still awaits discovery. Sometime after his second marriage in 1722, Captain Greenough returned to Massachusetts; he died at Bradford in 1745.

ABOVE: *Silver sugar box by Daniel Greenough, Newcastle, New Hampshire, about 1715. Rogers Fund, 1946*



Silver caudle cup by William Cowell, Boston, about 1715. Dodge Fund, 1945



The caudle cup took its name from a warm drink of wine or ale mixed with gruel, sugar, spices, and sometimes eggs, which was especially intended to comfort the sick but was not denied to the healthy. Shakespeare questions its benign effect in a speech by Apemantus in *Timon of Athens*:

“Will the cold brook
Candied with ice, caudle thy morning taste
To cure thy o’er-night’s surfeit?”

In New England, caudle cups, along with tankards and porringers, were the earliest form of domestic silver and were mentioned in wills in 1658. They repeated the gourd-shaped English models, as did President Holyoke’s cup at Harvard, with flowering scrolls and amorini embossed upon the surbase and tiny human heads surmounting the cast handles. Although the oldest caudle cups were intended for domestic use, as the monograms on many of them

indicate, a few survive that were made by Robert Sanderson and Jeremiah Dummer in Boston well before 1700 as presentation pieces for New England churches.

The cup shown above is the latest in design, the vigorous early forms having been refined by a new generation of silversmiths. The maker, William Cowell, who was born in Boston in 1682, the son of a blacksmith, was among the last to work in the seventeenth-century tradition. The lightness of the reversed fluting on the surbase and the delicacy of the handles reveal the difference in silver design between the Pilgrim Century and those that came after it. The ownership likewise has a link with staunch Puritan Boston, as the cup descended through various branches of the Mather family. Timothy Mather, a brother of Increase, married Elizabeth Atherton; she had a niece of the same name who was christened in 1683, and the monogram *E A* engraved on the base of the cup is probably hers.



Silver teapot by Peter Van Dyck, New York, about 1710. Rogers Fund, 1947



No hip-roofed or step-gabled building now stands of those that once crowded Manhattan in William Burgis's famous engraving of the city in 1719, but fortunately there remain some mobile documents of that day, like this piece of silver, that give exact evidence of our early cultural history.

The oldest known American silver teapot, made by Jacob Boelen about 1700 in Manhattan for the Phillipse family and now on loan in the Museum, is globular in body, with a flattened dome cover, a form derived from Chinese porcelain models of the K'ang Hsi period. The teapot above, made about ten years later, is among the first of the pear shapes. It is a distinguished design, phlegmatic in outline, with a curve that deepened sharply in other pieces in the following decade or two. The perfect balance of each of its parts and the

restrained ornament of the cut-card work overlaying the cover are hallmarks of a most skilled artisan. Near the handle is the touch P V D in a trefoil, the first of several used by Peter Van Dyck.

Van Dyck was born in New York in 1684 and was apprenticed to the Huguenot silversmith Bartholomew Le Roux, who later became his father-in-law. Until his death in 1750, he turned out numerous pieces of excellent silver and gold and also found time to act as constable and assessor.

The engraved arms on the teapot are those of Myndert Schuyler, who was born in Beverwyck in 1672 and lived to be an octogenarian. He held many offices in church and state; he served as a colonel in the militia, was twice mayor of Albany, and was active in peace negotiations with the Seneca Indians during the French and Indian Wars.