

## FROM CUP TO SAUCER TO CUP PLATE

by  
Mary Louise Gutman

Who invented the Cup Plate? We know that the purpose of these little plates was to keep a person's linen from being soiled, or, lacking a cloth, her table from being marred. We know that the size of these plates are between 3" and 4 1/4", give or take a fraction. We have learned that in some few circles in England, and much more prevalent in America, it was the custom to pour one's tea from the cup into the saucer, so it would cool more quickly, and then to drink directly from the saucer. The cup was then placed on the cup plate. Also, to be remembered, in the 18th and early 19th Centuries, many cups were handleless, making them too hot to handle.

According to one source, the first cup plates were of china and manufactured by all the European potteries. "Most of them were made to match sets". I shall not write about the Continent in this article, but in England these plates were made almost entirely of earthenware, and not "of made to match sets". I have a collection of Lustre Cup Plates, none of which belonged to a set, and I have seen numerous tea sets, as well as dinner sets and desert services, none with accompanying cup plates. According to their owners, those illustrated here, were not from sets either, nor had they seen any others that were.

There is no doubt that many English potters were making cup plates along with their regular line of table and other wares, in order to capture the lucrative United States trade. Staffordshire manufacturers, in particular, were turning out these "Anglo-American" wares by the shipload, and sending them from the Western seaport City of Liverpool to the Eastern Seaboard cities of the United States. Along with the potters mentioned in the illustrations, I would like to mention several other names, who, we know made a great deal for export. William Adams & Sons, Davenport (with the famous anchor mark), Ralph Stevenson, Joseph Stubbs,

William Ridgway, and last but not least, the Wedgwoods.

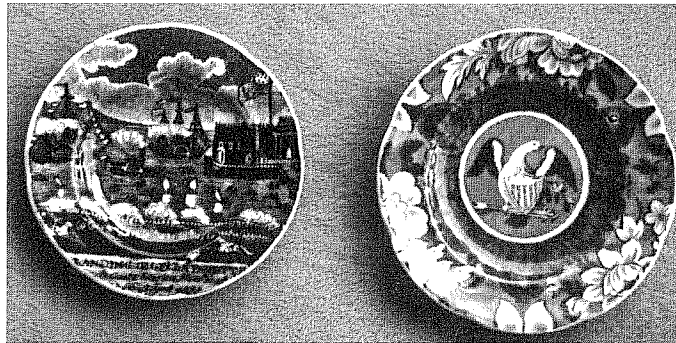
It was natural that many of the subjects used were of historical content, such as busts of Washington and Clay, as well as American views and places commemorating important events. These potters also made some very colorful

designs which were particularly popular with the Pennsylvania Dutch. A group of these are illustrated and described in this article, and most were made during the first half of the 19th Century, the largest output coming after the War of 1812. I would like to mention one cup plate not illustrated here, it is part of the Leon Collection of English Yellow Glazed earthenware at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. It is a 3" cup

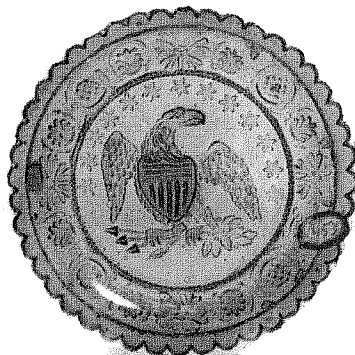
plate "a crude version of the Great Seal of the United States". It has the impressed mark, ENOCH WOOD AND SONS, BURSLEM, dating it between 1818 and 1830.

Cup plate collecting in the United States reached its peak in the 1930s and 1940s. One of the largest and most famous collectors was William Randolph Hearst, the Newspaper Magnate. It was estimated he had over 1,000 cup plates. Mr. Hearst collected "Historical Blue" as well as pressed glass cup plates, which brings us to another very large area of this subject.

Referring back to my original question: "Who invented the cup plate?", we do not know the 'who' of the original earthenware ones made in England, but we do know the origins of the pressed glass ones made in the United States. Here when people refer to cup plates, I believe the first thing that comes to mind are those of pressed glass, made by the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company in the small town of Sandwich, Massachusetts. This plant was started in 1825 by Deming Jarvis who had invented the pressing machine a year earlier. The site was chosen, not because of sand, but because of timber. There was a large amount



Two dark blue Historical Staffordshire cup plates, on the left a 3 1/2" d "Landing of Lafayette" by R. and J. Clews. On the right is an extremely rare "Arms of the United States" by an Unknown Maker. This view appears only on tea services and cup plates



A spectacular sapphire blue Eagle cup plate attributed to Pittsburgh, circa 1840.

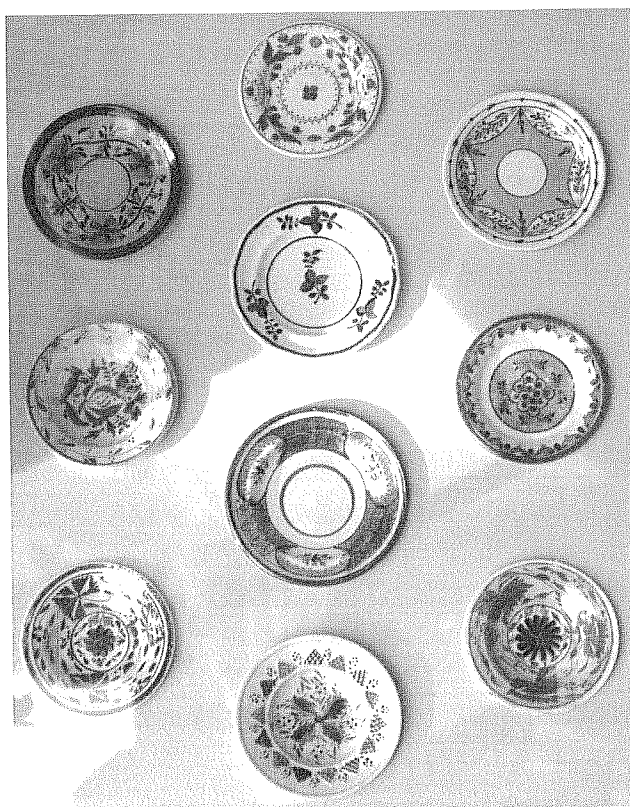
of this in the area, and wood was needed for fuel for the factory, as well as for building houses for the workmen.

The Company prospered from the beginning, as they turned out fine flint glass for all sorts of uses. There were, of course, full sets of glass made for the table, cut, etched and engraved, besides the pressed glass. By 1880 the Company was still doing good business, including export, but gradually it began running at a loss. The plant was closed in 1888 and has never been re-opened, its buildings torn down in 1920. On this site now stands the Sandwich Glass Museum. It is generally thought that Pressed Glass was the most important part of the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company. The name "Sandwich" has become *generic*, in spite of the fact that there were many more factories making pressed glass. In 1829 the New England Glass Company was founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and there has always been confusion between the production of the two Companies. According to the late Vincent Ortello, who was President of the Early American Glass Collectors Club when I discussed this with him, it is impossible to tell the difference between the glass made at these two New England factories. Not so with *some* of the glass cup plates made in the Mid-West plants. Their distinguishing characteristic is the "Bull's Eye" border found only on pressed glass made outside of New England.

The term "Mid-West" covers a large area, starting in Philadelphia and extending into Ohio. The



Some of the authors collection includes black and also blue transfer printed examples. Many of those illustrated above are pink lustre, highlighted in other enamel colors.

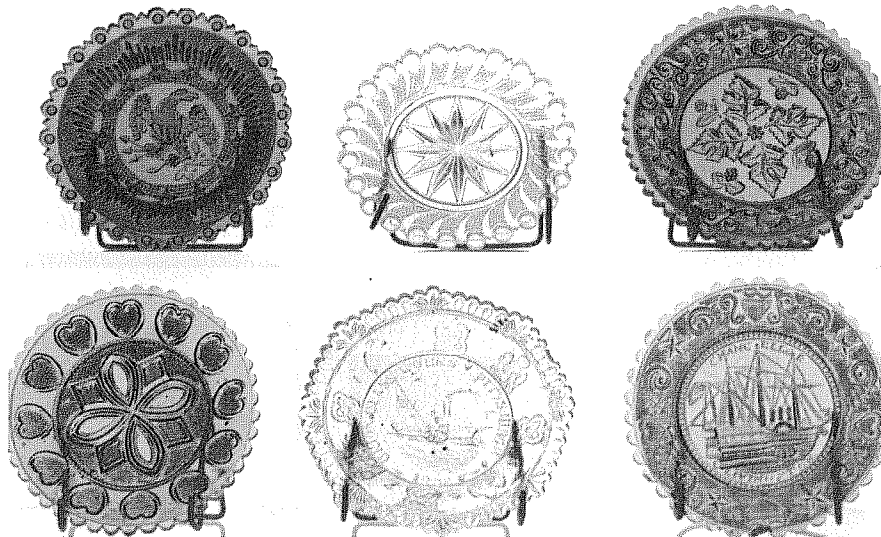


A nice group of pink lustre cup plates in various patterns. As you can see, the sizes vary (normally from 3" to 4 1/2").

largest factories were in and around Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. According to "American Glass Cup Plates", by Ruth Webb Lee and James H. Rose, these plates were divided into two groups "Historicals" and "Conventionals". The former covered "Busts, Log Cabins, Ships, Monuments and Eagles". There are some 58 plates displaying the Eagle, and nearly all are variations of the design on the Great Seal of the United States. There are only two busts known of George Washington, however, there are 6 to 10 different versions of Henry Clay, who was a famous politician in the Mid 19th Century, but never became President. There are some of President William Henry Harrison in the so-called "Log Cabin" group. I would like to mention one design which will be of interest to English readers, that of Queen Victoria. Many were made in the United States for export to England, and some were made in England for export to America, as well as for home consumption.

Cup plates, as with most other commodities, have appreciated enormously in value. The pressed glass ones even more than those made of earthenware. When they were first produced in the 19th Century, most of them used to sell for less than \$1.00. They then went up to several dollars or a little more in the 1930s and 1940s when cup plate collecting became the rage. At an Antiques Show I recently attended, some had "gone thru the roof". I bought the pressed glass one of the American Eagle for \$28.00, and found afterwards (from Ruth Webb Lee's book) that it is a reproduction, probably made in 1922.<sup>(1)</sup> The same dealer had an emerald green plate, with a ship design for \$ 1,500.00 and one of cobalt blue for \$2,100.00. As to the earthenware cup plates, I can find no reference as to what they sold for when they were first made in the 19th Century, but in the 1930s and 1940s they were selling from \$20.00 upwards to \$150.00 for some

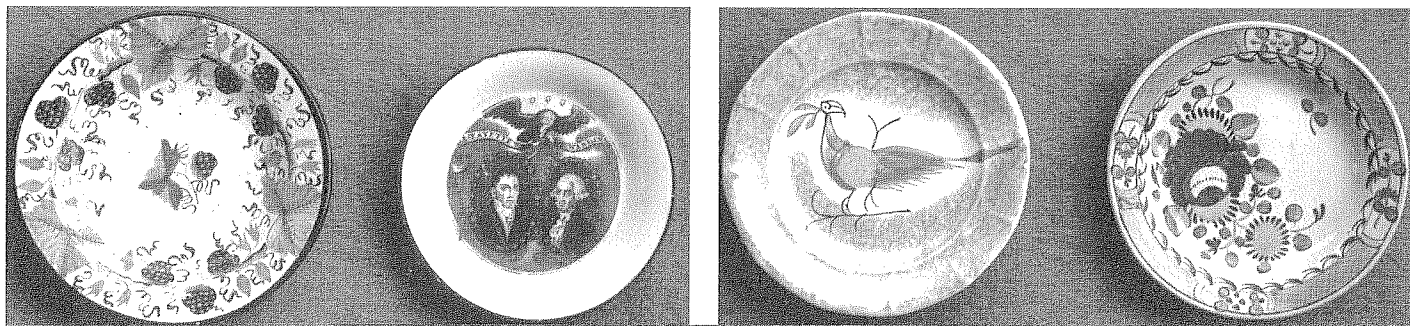
historicals. I checked out these plates at the Antiques Show, as well as at a shop in New York, and there was the same wide range of prices, as with the glass ones. I bought a 3 3/4" impressed Davenport with Anchor, of an inconsequential view, for \$30.00. Another dealer was selling "Historical Blues and Gaudy Dutch" from \$475.00 up. The Clews "Landing of Lafayette," illustrated here, was priced at \$525.00, a Ridgway "Philadelphia



Six of the finest glass cup plates with the top left a Pittsburgh eagle in blue with the bulls eye border, a clear "peacock eye" attributed to Philadelphia and a green floral Eastern plate. The bottom row has an electric blue heart, an extremely rare "Union Glass Works" and a green "Chancellor Livingston" ship plate

might suddenly become quite wealthy, as well as delighting in your finds.

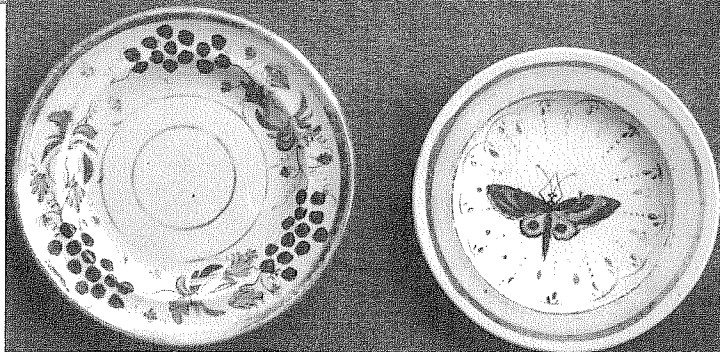
<sup>(1)</sup>Evidently many reproductions were being made in the 1920s and 1930s, some for the collectors, and others as new pieces for use as ashtrays as well as for souvenirs. The only sure thing about these reproductions is that they were not being made for their original purpose.



Above: a rare "strawberry" pattern in enamels and a black transfer "Washington and Lafayette"

Above: a light blue spatter cup plate with a peacock center and a "King's Rose" in red and green enamel.

Custom House" at \$950.00 and an ENOCH WOOD & SONS "Boston State House" at \$1,000.00. I suggest you search your cupboards and attics, and, if you can find cup plates, you



Left: a pink lustre plate impressed "Harley and Co.", next to a desirable pink lustre bordered Butterfly (painted over the glaze)

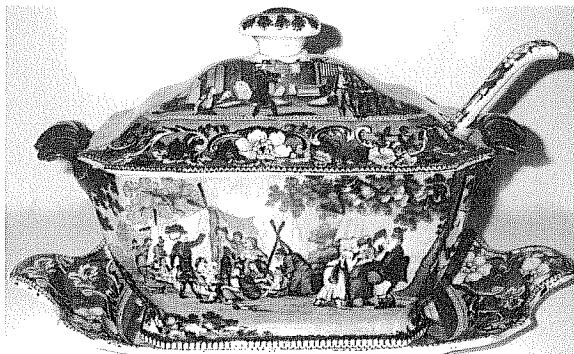
Photos by John Harbold, courtesy of Mrs. A. J. Gutman

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1500 E. College Way  
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Mount Vernon, WA 98273

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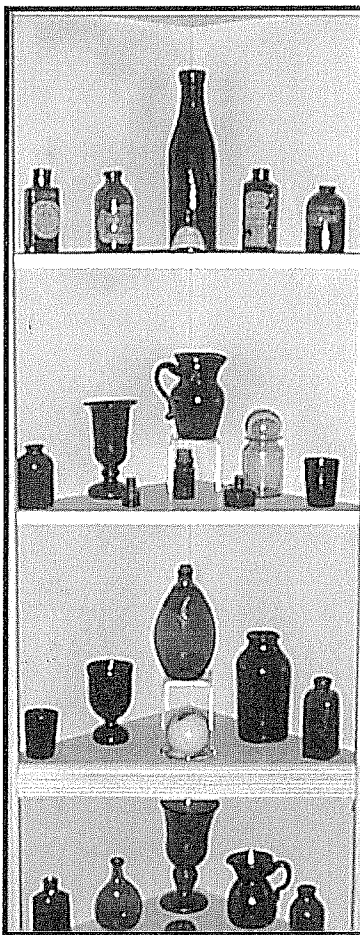


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## Meet the Collector

A Rapidly Enlarging Collection of New England Blown Glass

## Meet Rex Stark



King George I of the House of Washington? But for the man, it could have happened.

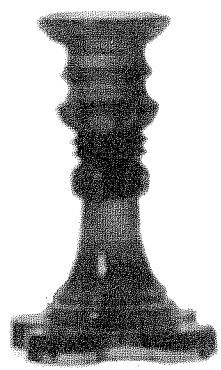
## What's Inside



Cup Plates - they are what they are. What are they?

## Going! Going! Gone!

Like the stock market, glass just keeps on going.



*Plus So Much More.....*