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GEORGE CHRISTIAN GEBELEIN:
THE CRAFT AND BUSINESS OF A "MODERN PAUL REVERE"

by
Alexandra Deutsch

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Early
American Culture

Summer 1995

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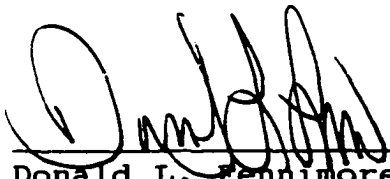
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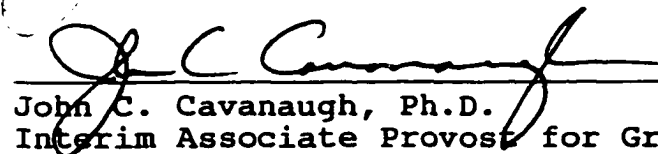
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ABSTRACT

This study re-examines the craft and business practices of George Christian Gebelein (1878-1945), the Boston silversmith. As a young man, Gebelein trained under elder silversmiths who instilled the value of fine, handcrafted silver in their apprentice. Working during the early twentieth century, Gebelein participated in the arts and crafts movement, a powerful aesthetic movement that advocated a return to handcraftsmanship. In 1909, Gebelein opened his own shop and began developing a "business-like method" that allowed him to create the handcrafted silver he valued while still maintaining a profitable business. By incorporating antiques and silver produced by other silver companies into his inventory and selectively employing industrial production techniques, Gebelein was able to run a money-making business for over thirty years. His mystique as a craftsman, expert, and scholar of silver and metal objects drew customers, collectors, craftsmen, and curators to his shop and won him the title, "the modern Paul Revere."

Introduction
A NEW LOOK AT A CRAFTSMAN

George Christian Gebelein (1878-1945), described by some as "the modern Paul Revere," is most often remembered for the fine, handcrafted silver designed and created in his Boston shop. His special commission work survives at numerous universities and churches, and his special-order silverwork dots the collections of many major museums throughout the country. Memories of Gebelein linger in the minds of Bostonians who recall his Chestnut Street shop, his knowledge of eighteenth-century silver, and his reproduction silver designs.

While this study looks at the roots of Gebelein's craftsmanship, it also offers a re-examination of Gebelein as businessman, a persona rarely associated with the famous Boston silversmith. From 1909 to 1945, his business survived two depressions, two wars, and a panoply of changing social and economic currents. When other small craft shops failed in the 1920s and 1930s, Gebelein's business endured, growing and continuing to meet the demands of his customers.

Through an exploration of Gebelein's business records, advertising, and correspondence, this paper considers the complex nature of Gebelein's craft and his business practices. Moreover, it suggests a new way of looking at silversmiths working during the early twentieth century--individuals who have long been revered solely for their handcrafted metal objects. As this exploration of Gebelein reveals, practicality and economics motivated shrewd and successful craftsman to rely upon the convenience and speed of industrial production techniques. In a larger context, this investigation of Gebelein is also a reexamination of arts and crafts rhetoric, a philosophy that was more prescriptive than practical.

Chapter 1

THE EARLY YEARS: 1878-1903

George Christian Gebelein was born in Wustenberg, Oberfranken, Bavaria Germany in 1878 (fig. 1). Moved by the civil strife within the German empire, Gebelein's father immigrated to the United States in the same year, settling in a predominantly Germanic community in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he prepared for the arrival of his wife and nine-month old son. Gebelein's childhood was spent in Cambridge, studying at the Harvard Grammar School until his graduation on June 26, 1893. Schooled in the merits of diligence and ambition, Gebelein sought permanent work immediately after graduation, first designing textiles for the William Worsted Company in Lawrence, Massachusetts and then accepting an apprenticeship at Goodnow and Jenks, a Boston silver company.¹ There, at age fourteen, Gebelein discovered his

¹ Goodnow & Jenks, established in 1893, was the successor to Kennard & Jenks. The company manufactured mostly hollowware. Walter R. Goodnow, formerly of Bigelow, Kennard & Company, provided the financial backing for the company and Lewis E. Jenks fueled the creative-aspects and production of the business. In 1904-1905,

passion for hand-crafted silver and awakened a life-long fascination with silver design and technology. At Goodnow and Jenks, Gebelein learned from elder craftsmen trained during the early nineteenth-century, craftsmen who instilled the value of handcraftsmanship in their apprentice. Among his mentors, Gebelein noted Adolph Krass and George Hamilton, "silversmiths of prominence during the last part of the nineteenth century in the trade."²

At nineteen, Gebelein traveled to Forest Hills, New Jersey, and began work at the new Tiffany factory. Although he was originally denied a position because of his age, Gebelein's ingenuity and technical skill, acquired and fostered at Goodnow and Jenks, gained him a position in the company. His first test at Tiffany was the creation of an "elaborate design in silver to overlay a glass bowl,"³ a project that required creativity as well

Jenks resigned and left for the Wm. B. Durgin Company, where Gebelein would eventually work. For more detailed information about Goodnow and Jenks, see Dorothy T. Rainwater, Encyclopedia of America Silver Manufacturers, 3rd edition. (West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1986) 69.

² George C. Gebelein, interview, Ruth Moss Interviews, WAAB, Boston, 7 March 1938, in the Gebelein Silversmiths, Inc. Papers (#90.375) in the collections of the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Michigan. Hereafter referred to as Gebelein Papers, HFM.

³ Charles Venable, Silver in America, 1840-1940: A Century of Splendor (NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1995) 260.

as deft craftsmanship. During the two and a half years Gebelein worked at Tiffany, he saw his work exhibited at L'Exposition Universale in Paris in 1900 and again at the Pan-American Exposition in 1901.⁴ At only twenty-one, Gebelein learned the importance of exposing his work to the public and the thrill of sharing his craftsmanship with an appreciative audience. Later in his career as an independent craftsman and businessman, Gebelein seized every opportunity to exhibit his work and make his name and skill known throughout the United States and Europe.

From 1901-1903, Gebelein worked for the William B. Durgin Company in Concord, Massachusetts.⁵ William Durgin opened his company in 1853, producing sterling flatware, gold, silver-plated tableware, and jewelry for over fifty years.⁶ By the time Gebelein joined Durgin, the company was a large-scale commercial operation where

⁴ For biographical overview of Gebelein's early years see Margaretha Gebelein, George Christian Gebelein, Boston Silversmith, 1878-1945 (Lunenburg, VA: The Stinehouse Press, 1970).

⁵ After his departure from Tiffany's, Gebelein worked briefly at Sheibler & Company in Brooklyn. In 1902 Gebelein left Durgin briefly and worked at Skilton, Richards & Parris in Boston. Gebelein recorded where he worked in the first page of his *Time Book* in the Gebelein Papers, HFM.

⁶ Rainwater 51. After Gorham purchased the company in 1905, they continued to operate the factory in Concord until 1931, later moving the business to Providence, Rhode Island.

silversmithing processes were divided into restricted specialties and industrial techniques speeded production.⁷ During the three years Gebelein spent at Durgin, he learned his trade from craftsmen who instilled the value of hand-craftsmanship in their young pupil. At the same time, he gained exposure to the necessity and realities of commercial, industrialized silver production. These lessons--the value of hand-craftsmanship and the practicality of mechanically-aided production--shaped Gebelein's understanding of his craft and formed the foundation for his future success as a silversmith.

Working at the turn of the century, Gebelein found himself in the midst of a powerful movement in America, the movement towards a revaluation of craftsmanship and the artistry of the craftsman. His career began just as the British ideas of the Arts and Crafts movement were traveling across the Atlantic. No other movement contributed as greatly to a new valuation of the decorative arts in America. A brief overview of the Arts and Crafts movement provides the context for Gebelein's philosophy of craftsmanship which celebrated simplicity

⁷ Elenita C. Chickering, Arthur J. Stone, 1847-1938: Designer and Silversmith (Boston: Boston Athenaeum, 1994) 5. Arthur Stone, the silversmith most often associated with early twentieth-century silver made in Boston, also began his career at Durgin.

and integrity of design.⁸ Furthermore, from the roots of Arts and Crafts rhetoric sprung the Colonial Revival movement in America, a cultural and social force integral to the development of Gebelein's craft and aesthetic ideal.

⁸ For a comprehensive discussion of the Arts and Crafts movement and sources related to the period of 1890s through the 1920s see Cheryl A. Robertson, "The Arts and Crafts Movement in America," Decorative Arts and Household Furnishings in America, 1650-1920: An Annotated Bibliography, eds. Kenneth L. Ames and Gerald W. R. Ward (Winterthur, DE: The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1989) 343-357.

Chapter 2

ROOTS OF GEBELEIN'S EDUCATION: ARTS AND CRAFTS PHILOSOPHY

The beginning of the Arts and Crafts movement in England is most often associated with the writings of John Ruskin and William Morris. Writing in the 1860s and 1870s, these reformers advocated a return to the purer craftsmanship of pre-Industrial history. Their aesthetic ideas and fear of mechanized society, however, date back even earlier to the 1820s and 30s. In 1829, the *Edinburgh Review* published Carlyle's 'Signs of the Time' in which he lamented, "On every hand the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier inanimate one."⁹ Carlyle was among an emerging group of critics who foresaw machines replacing men. Seven years later, A. W. N. Pugin published Contrasts, a heavily illustrated text which contrasted the "decay of taste" in modern London architecture with the superior expression of taste and

⁹ Thomas Carlyle, "The Signs of the Times," *Edinburgh Review* (1829) as quoted in Gillian Naylor, The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, Ideals, and Influences on Design Theory (London: Trefoil Publications, Ltd., 1990) 12.

morality in Gothic structures. Pugin located the height of society in the fifteenth century, before the "modernization" of the Renaissance. His pivotal texts associated the modern world and its material creations with spiritual decay, an idea underlying Arts and Crafts theory.

Building upon Pugin's association between morality and design, Charles Ruskin critiqued the visual arts. His thirty-nine volume work, entitled Modern Painters, judged art and architecture on their socially and spiritually beneficial content, writing, "the sight of them [art and architecture] may contribute to the mental health, power and pleasure"¹⁰ of the viewer. Art and architecture constructed with hands rather than machines accomplished these effects. In Ruskinian rhetoric, the craftsman is placed above his creation while his work is celebrated as an expression and extension of the craftsman's own nature. A fine object was emblematic of a fine craftsman, conversely, a "deceitful" object, one that purported to be something other than it actually was, represented the alienation of the craftsman from his creation. In an overtly religious moment, Ruskin expressed the belief that "he who would form his creations of his own mind by any other instrument than his own hand, would also, if he

¹⁰ Naylor 24.

might, give grinding organs to Heaven's angel" ¹¹

The "grinding organs" Ruskin scorned are the machines of the industrial age which produced objects that faultily mimicked hand-made objects and eradicated the creativity of their maker. Ruskin believed that industrialized labor reduced the craftsman to a mere machine, sapping both his or her individuality and creativity.

Moving from Ruskin to William Morris, the celebration of hand-work, the craftsman, and art's morality continued. Morris, a Ruskinian disciple, was both a poet and a decorative artist. Through his writings and his artistic productions, Morris gave expression to Ruskin's plea for "the universal practice of handicraft." ¹² In 1861, the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Co., Fine Art Workman in Painting, Carving, Furniture, and Metals, opened its doors, offering the public a range of decorative arts for domestic use. What distinguished Morris's project from the efforts of previous design reformers was his uncompromising commitment to superior hand-craftsmanship and to the revival of forgotten craft-techniques.

¹¹ Eileen Boris, "Art and Labor: John Ruskin, William Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal in America, 1876-1915," diss., Brown University, 1981, 15.

¹² Boris 23.

His philosophy was both romantic in its celebration of the past and modern in its valuation of simplicity and function. Inspired by Ruskin's veneration of the craftsman and his own socialistic fervor, Morris sought to elevate the status of the skilled workman by completely rejecting industrial practices. Unfortunately, it was this turning away from industry which eventually led to the demise of Morris's project. Hand-crafted objects demanded labor-intensive techniques and ultimately acquired high prices. Middle-class consumers, the individuals Morris wanted to serve, could not afford his objects. Here lies the central paradox of the Arts and Crafts movement in England--its rejection of industrialization ultimately paralyzed its potential success. If no one could afford hand-craftsmanship, then neither the craftsman nor the consumer benefitted from its moral and social virtues. Morris's own question, "what business have we with art at all, unless all can share it?"¹³ ironically foreshadowed the failure of his own ambitions.

While the arts and crafts ideology of Morris and Ruskin opposed industrialization, American intellectuals and craftsmen who followed their writings recognized the practical aid industry offered the movement. Drawing upon

¹³ Boris 26.

English rhetoric, American arts and crafts proponents promoted hand-crafted decorative arts, produced by the single craftsman. Borrowing from the ideas of Morris and Ruskin, America's arts and crafts advocates called for a revaluation of the craftsman and rejection of industrialism. Contrary to this rhetoric, arts and crafts craftsmen often relied upon industrial techniques to create their goods. When the Jeweler's Circular magazine visited the Boston Handicraft Shop (of which Gebelein was a member), the reporter observed, "a jeweler or silversmith who made the inspection expecting to find radical departures from modern methods might be disappointed."¹⁴ Even in a shop where handcraftsmanship was the primary object, the practicality of mechanized production triumphed. In reality, most objects produced in the arts and crafts spirit were "hybrids" made by various hands and various machines.¹⁵ Although craftsmanship divorced from the aid of machines was a readily saleable myth, it was not a profitable undertaking.

Industrialism did not undermine the moral message of these objects, nor did it reduce the craftsman to a

¹⁴ Venable 266.

¹⁵ Leslie Greene Bowman, American Arts and Crafts: "Virtue in Design" (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1990) 33.

mindless automaton. Rather, industry allowed arts and crafts manufacturers to create and supply the thriving market for affordable, "artistically envisioned" objects. Writing of the mutually-beneficial relationship between industry and hand-craftsmanship, Gustav Stickley, one of America's leading arts and crafts figures, wrote:

In the revolt against the utter lack of vitality or of artistic quality in the great mass of machine-made products that owe their existence solely to the artificial demand created by commercialism, enthusiasts for the revival of the handicrafts have not only allowed themselves to be carried to an extreme in the opposite direction, but have fallen into the selfsame sin against the true craftsmanship¹⁶

This passage, published in The Craftsman in 1901, reveals Stickley's interpretation and synthesis of ideas he learned from the writings of Ruskin and Morris. Stickley's concern for the craftsman, his interest in functional and pleasing design, and his focus on an object's artistic quality were derived from the international movement; however, his willingness to incorporate industrial techniques was uniquely American. Although industry could play a role in artistic production, the craftsman, rather than the factory worker, emerged a celebrated figure in American arts and crafts

¹⁶ Gustav Stickley, "The Use and Abuse of Machinery, and its Relation to the Arts and Crafts," The Craftsman, An Anthology, ed. Barry Sanders (Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1978) 186.

philosophy. It was this newly inspired reverance for the craftsman that influenced the development of Gebelein's career from his first apprenticeship until his death in 1945.

Chapter 3

COLONIAL REVIVALISM AND ARTS AND CRAFTS RHETORIC: GEBELEIN'S INTELLECTUAL AND CREATIVE ROOTS

Beginning in the 1870s in America, a nation-wide nostalgia for the past developed. With the centennial of America's independence in 1876, the seeds of colonial revivalism began to grow. Re-enactments of historic events, such as Washington's inauguration and Revolutionary battles, heritage societies, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Colonial Dames Society, characterized the early years of the movement. Looking back to the days before factories, Victorian Americans found the nostalgic figure of the colonial craftsman and a romantic vision of life before mechanization. A pervading idolization of colonial American objects developed as wealthy, American collectors and established museums turned their attention away from European antiques and began to seek American objects for their collections. "Antiquers" and curators valued seventeenth and eighteenth-century American "relics" as

monuments to both the nation's dignified past and the skills of early craftsmen.

To late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century Americans, the term "colonial" meant the period before 1840 and the onset of Victorianism. Any object described as "colonial" was "anti-modern," "anti-industrial," and essentially anti-Victorian.¹⁷ Francis H. Bigelow expressed this prevalent attitude in 1917 when he remarked, "the colonial period up to the beginning of the nineteenth century" represents silver of merit "after which date little silver worthy of mention was produced by the silversmiths."¹⁸ Two years earlier, Ekin Wallick noted, "in the very short space of ten years we have successfully emerged from the influences of the Early Victorian era, a period of abortions both in the building and decorating of houses." He continued, "we can now look back on this period with keen disgust."¹⁹

Americans "mythologized" the simpler days and ways of Colonial life, casting "colonial objects" into relics

¹⁷ Kenneth L. Ames, introduction, The Colonial Revival in America, ed. Alan Axelrod (NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 1985) 11.

¹⁸ Francis H. Bigelow, Historic Silver in the Colonies (Norwood, MA: Norwood Press, 1917) 30.

¹⁹ Ekin Wallick, The Small House for a Moderate Income (NY: Hearst International Library Company, 1915) 11.

or "emblems of ancestral piety."²⁰ This impulse to elevate "colonial objects" to relic-status documents the need to re-affirm values and beliefs perceived as central to the American identity.²¹ In The Lure of Antiques, Anthony Dyer described the "atmospheric" effect "the presence of relics of bygone days, reminders of the intimate home life of our forefathers, creates" ²² Like Washington's inkstand and Martha Washington's tea table, both displayed in honor of the Washington Inaugural Centennial of 1889, colonial objects became patriotic emblems representative of America's unique national style.

Furniture and silver, among all the decorative arts, were powerfully influenced by colonial revivalism. Silver, with its inherent value, its affiliations with "old, established" families, and its domestic associations, suited the character of the colonial revival. In 1895, a book entitled The Silver Punch Bowl Made by Paul Revere to Commemorate a Vote of the Honorable House of Representatives of the Massachusetts Bay Colony

²⁰ William Rhoads, "Colonial Revival and American Craft: Nationalism and the Opposition to Multicultural and Regional Traditions," Revivals! Diverse Traditions. ed. Janet Kardon (NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1994) 41.

²¹ Axelrod 14.

²² Walter A. Dyer, The Lure of the Antique (NY: The Century Company, 1910) 4.

in 1768 reproduced a series of articles originally printed in the Boston Sunday Herald. The book addresses an audience familiar with the value of early American silver, beginning:

All my readers know how absolutely without a price a piece of Revere silverware is to-day, how scarce it is, and how our antiquaries and collectors would almost sell their souls to possess even a spoon that came from the hands of the grand old silversmith.²³

Patriotism coupled with the thrill of acquisition, motivated the early generations of collectors and revivalists. Dyer rhapsodized about the experience of using a colonial relic, writing, "...I have yet to find the American, however, practical minded, who can hold in his hand his great-great-grandmother's Betty lamp or sit in his great-grandfather's Windsor chair without some slight sentiment." According to Dyer, "you covet the old candlestick on the wooden mantel ..." for its historic associations, its inherent "realness."²⁴ A modern candlestick marred by the scars of machines could not compete.

²³ Benjamin F. Stevens, The Silver Punch Bowl Made by Paul Revere to Commemorate a Vote of the Honorable House of Representatives of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1768 (Boston: Nathan Sawyer & Sons, 1895) 4.

²⁴ Dyer 3.

A desire to return to the real object, the genuine hand-crafted article, united the Colonial revival and the arts and crafts movement in America. Particularly in Boston, the center of Gebelein's training, a dialogue developed between the two aesthetic ideals. Like the Arts and Crafts movement, Colonial Revivalism rejected the dominant role industrialization played in modern society and called for a return to the ideas and values of an earlier cultural epoch.

For arts and crafts enthusiasts, the golden age was represented by pre-industrial craftsmanship, whereas for the colonial revivalists the golden age was represented by America's pre-industrial past. Nostalgia for long-forgotten times and a devotion to hand-craftsmanship united these two efforts. In 1899, the Boston Society of Arts and Crafts exhibition featured displays of contemporary and "old" arts and crafts which invited critics, craftsmen, and the general public to judge the new against the standards of the old. Together, the rise of anti-industrial/anti-modern sentiment visible in the arts and crafts movement and the burst of patriotic sentiment evident in the colonial revival advocated a cultural looking back. This rhetoric of revivalism later played a central role in Gebelein's advertising. Gebelein, like many craftsman working during the early

twentieth-century, tapped into the spirit of nationalism, and anti-industrialism expressed by colonial and craft revivalists and used it to appeal to consumers seeking a return to the purer aesthetics of the past.

While handicrafts shops sprouted up in America's major cities, colonial revivalists actively promoted the memory of early America. The seam uniting these two movements is evidenced in both writings and objects dating to the early twentieth century. Interior designers of the day freely advocated arts and crafts sun-rooms or living rooms while also suggesting colonial kitchens or dining rooms. Stickley himself, created mission furniture in the arts and crafts style as well as "ladder-backed", rush-seated chairs in the "colonial mode." Mary C. Knight, well-known arts and crafts silversmith, also executed tea services and flatware sets inspired by Colonial models.²⁵ Mary Warren Dennett and A. A. Carey, leaders in the Arts and Crafts Society, Boston, both suggested a return to the American Colonial period when "the union of art and democracy" and the individuality of the craftsman remained uncompromised.²⁶ Like other aesthetic critics active during the arts and crafts movement, Warren Dennett and

²⁵ Beverly Kay Brandt, "'Mutually Helpful Relations': Architects, Craftsmen, and the Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston," diss., Boston University, 1985, 161.

²⁶ Brandt 190.

Carey recognized a similarity between the unadorned forms of the arts and crafts style and colonial American designs.

Gebelein, like his peers, employed both aesthetics in his metalwork. In 1901, while working at Durgin, Gebelein recorded devoting 120 hours in three weeks to an "old colonial kettle," while in the same year he worked on numerous arts and crafts style objects (fig. 2). Thus, although modernist instincts incline scholars to perceive a clear distinction between these two movements, the objects and artisans associated with the two styles defy rigid categorization. During the first decade of the twentieth century, all the design influences alive in England poured into America, creating an eclecticism in American arts and crafts and colonial revival products.²⁷ A writer for The Keystone²⁸ observed the mixture of aesthetic influences active in colonial revival silver produced by artists in the SACB. Critiquing Gebelein's "water ewer," Keystone noted:

²⁷ Rosalie Berberian, "The Society of Arts and Crafts of Boston and its Master Silversmiths," Arts and Crafts Quarterly Magazine 4:1(1991): 20.

²⁸ The Keystone, a trade journal, reported news of exhibitions, graduations, and prizes awarded to students. Janet Kardon, ed., The Ideal Home: The History of Twentieth-Century American Craft, 1900-1920 (NY: Harry N. Abrams Press, 1993): 14.

In Mr. Gebelein's small piece, the Georgian note obscures the true colonial, since the object is a ewer of Italian Renaissance design; the sacrificial wine vessel of the Greek being of course the original model, with the height much reduced, the paunch expanded, and the throat widened [like] the artists of Cellini's time.²⁹

An arts and crafts reverence for classical forms, coupled with a nod to American colonial taste, found expression in Gebelein's object. The ewer represented the dialogue between arts and crafts ideas and colonial revival aesthetics. By combining and harmonizing two aesthetics, Gebelein represented the philosophical origin of his craftsmanship and influence of his early training. Moreover, the sketch of the ewer with its multiple aesthetic influences attests to Gebelein's insight into the varied tastes of the times.

²⁹ "Colonial Art Revised," The Keystone Oct. 1906: 1696. A clipping of this article survives in the Gebelein Papers, HFM.

Chapter 4

GETTING INVOLVED: GEBELEIN, 1903-1909

During the early period of Gebelein's career, he maintained records of the objects he created and repaired. His first *Time Book* includes sketches of objects, their weight, the number of hours he devoted to them and their price. In the fashion of an eighteenth-century silversmith, Gebelein included recipes for "tin solder," sketches of various tools, and the profits he received.

This *Time Book* documents the design vocabulary and the education in craftsmanship Gebelein received; it is a portrait of a young craftsman, gradually acquiring the skills and aesthetic sense that would later shape his career as an independent silversmith. Moreover, his sketches document the array of objects, ranging from simple, Colonial Revival designs to more elaborate, ornamented forms, Gebelein undertook while working for Durgin. Although in later years, Gebelein produced primarily unadorned reproduction wares, his *Time Book* documents his ability to produce technically challenging and comparatively opulent objects (fig. 3).

In 1903, Gebelein entered Boston's developing arts and crafts community, joining the Arts and Crafts Society of Boston³⁰ and The Handicraft Shop. The Handicraft Shop, an establishment devoted to silversmithing, enameling, and tooling leather, was run under the auspices of the Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston. Begun in 1901 by Arthur Astor Carey, the head of the SACB, and Mary Ware Dennet, an artist interested in reviving the skill of gilding leather, the shop was organized for the promotion and protection of handcraftsmanship. Dennett's mission "that every worker be both designer and craftsman ... [like] the workers of old" was in keeping with arts and crafts principles.³¹ Carey, the financial backer of the project, wanted to create a community within the shop, an environment where craftsmen shared ideas and technical expertise.³²

Gebelein's education continued during the years he worked in The Handicraft Shop. There, he was surrounded by a community of craftsmen, as well as a community of ideas. Ideological division troubled the Handicraft Shop and the SACB throughout Gebelein's years in the co-

³⁰ Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston, is hereafter referred to as the SACB.

³¹ Leighton 32.

³² Brandt 159-63.

operative. By 1905, Ware Dennett left the SACB, frustrated by the society's obsession with things rather than men and their social and economic freedoms. Interpretations of the "craftsman ideal" varied within the SACB; to focus on objects or the workers, aesthetics or economics, remained the central points of conflict among the society's leaders. Situated amidst these debates, Gebelein formulated his own interpretation of the "craftsman ideal," evolving an ideology that synthesized and distilled the cacophony of arguments around him. While he embraced the principles of the past, the pragmatic doctrine of the SACB influenced him throughout his career.

During the early years of Gebelein's involvement with the Society, he received philosophical lessons which served him later in his roles as craftsman and a businessman. In a file dating to his years at The Handicraft Shop, Gebelein saved an essay entitled "The Principle of Handicraft," printed in Handicraft, the publication of the SACB. From its first publication in 1901 until its last in 1904, the preface of every issue was devoted to this essay outlining the "Motives, Conditions, Artistic Co-operation, Social Co-Operation and Resulting Aim" of Handicraft. Carey, Frederic Whiting, and Langford Warren composed these goals "as a means of

increasing clearness of thought and community of sentiment" among arts and crafts followers.³³ These ideas formed the groundwork for Gebelein's philosophical "ideals" which emphasized the individuality and achievements of the craftsman and the superiority of handcraftsmanship.³⁴ Between 1902 and 1904, twenty-four issues of Handicraft were published; throughout this period, the "Principles" remained unchanged, despite the dissent they provoked. Reviewing the criticism generated by the "Principles," it grows evident that the "Principles" in the minds of many arts and crafts reformers represented "ideals" rather than attainable realities.

Economic and social realities demanded that, when necessary, craftsmen turn to inexpensive, time-efficient industrial techniques. Conversely, when feasible, craftsmen should follow and strive towards the ideals of individualized handcraftsmanship. While some members of the SACB steadfastly denied the value of industrial

³³ Brandt 171.

³⁴ The five points outlined included: the belief that the "craftsman's ability [should be] used as a whole, and not subdivided for commercial purposes," that the designer and the workman, "when ... not united in the same person, ... should work together," that the "reciprocal service and co-operation" lay behind patronage, and that "the results aimed at are the training of the true craftsmen, the fostering of his or her individuality, and the raising of standards of beauty in objects of use."

techniques, the introductory essay to the 1907 catalogue of the Society's Triennial Exhibition decisively supports the merits of modern industry. The foreword states,

... there are conditions of this age and this must be accepted. To deny certain facilities which twentieth century methods and scientific discoveries have placed at the disposal of the craftsman would be unintelligent; to seek to restore the surroundings and methods of work under which medieval craftsmen produced their masterpieces would be only a gesture defeating its own purpose.³⁵

Immersed in these debates, Gebelein, like other craftsmen and SACB leaders, recognized both the philosophical significance and the mundane impracticality of these tenets. In later years, Gebelein returned to these principles, selectively employing them in his shop and incorporating them into his advertising.

The Handicraft Shop and the SACB were more than just philosophical and aesthetics forums to Gebelein. Both organizations allowed craftsmen to exhibit and sell their objects. Beverly Brandt suggests that many craftsmen joined the SACB primarily to take advantage of the Showroom, a sales gallery where SACB craftsmen

³⁵ H. Langford Warren, foreword, Catalogue for the Decennial Exhibition of the Society of Arts and Crafts, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1907 in the Society of Arts and Crafts Records, Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston, Microfilm #320 in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

displayed their objects.³⁶ During his years in the Handicraft Shop, Gebelein acquired numerous patrons who later became important customers of his Chestnut Street shop. Through his interactions with other arts and crafts societies, such as the Arts and Crafts Society of Detroit, the Arts and Crafts Society of Chicago, and the Arts and Crafts Society of Portland, Gebelein's work became known beyond the borders of New England.

Members of the various societies often enlisted Gebelein to create special order items, such as "The Carey Tea Set" for Arthur Astor Carey, long-time supporter of the SACB.³⁷ Impressed by his superior workmanship, Carey recommended Gebelein to his relation, Countess Alfred von Oberndorff of London. The commission Gebelein accepted represented one of the greatest challenges a silversmith could undertake--the fashioning of an oval tray, twenty by twenty-eight inches in size.³⁸ In addition, his *Time Book* records a coffee service he designed and made for von

³⁶ Brandt 199.

³⁷ The "Carey" style of tea service became one of the standard designs Gebelein used for over thirty years. In May of 1905, Gebelein sketched the spout for the "Carey" tea pot in his *Time Book* and recorded estimates for the cost of the service, including the tray for \$80, the tea pot for \$75, the sugar bowl for \$30, the cream for \$30, the waste bowl for \$25, and the sugar tongs for \$10. The *Time Book* is in the Gebelein Papers, HFM.

³⁸ Leighton 42.

Oberndorff which included a coffee pot, a sugar bowl and a creamer. According to Gebelein's notation, eighteen gauge sheet silver was used to create the sugar and creamer. This type of sheet silver allowed him to form the objects by seaming the metal together, a time-efficient method, dating back to the late eighteenth century in America. In contrast, the sixty-six hours he devoted to the coffee pot suggests that the form was hammered out from a solid billet of silver.

Even in a prestigious commission like this one, Gebelein economized on time by hand-hammering only one object in the set. He, like many other silversmiths working in the arts and craft tradition, believed in using modern production techniques as long as they did not compromise the design integrity of the object. As the manager of the Handicraft Shop (where Gebelein maintained his bench) commented, "We use modern implements whenever we can and whenever their use will not interfere with our purpose."³⁹ In the case of the sugar bowl and creamer, seaming rather than hammering up the ovoid forms did little to diminish the aesthetic quality of the design.

Through his relationship with Carey, Gebelein forged a customer relationship with von Oberndorff that marked only the first of his contacts with European

³⁹ Venable 266.

customers. By the late 1920s, Gebelein's foreign clientele extended beyond Europe to include Russia and Asia, a fact he noted in his correspondence with potential customers abroad. Writing to a customer in Peru, Gebelein explained, "It is interesting to note that our circulars this spring have been scattered from this little shop to a list of inquirers at points including all of the United States, Alaska, the Hawaiian Islands, the Philippines, and even the Sudan in Africa."⁴⁰

A Boston silver shop with ties beyond the North American continent attracted customers and added to the cultivated mystic Gebelein, his wares, and his shop, gradually acquired. Furthermore, at a time when American decorative arts were still viewed with an eye always cocked to "superior" European examples, Gebelein's connections with European patrons heightened the merit of his uniquely American silver designs.⁴¹

In addition to his connections abroad, Gebelein became increasingly involved with other small craft shops. Customers from Oregon to New York purchased the wares he consigned to crafts shops like the Gotham Craft Shop in

⁴⁰ Gebelein, "To Mrs. Thomas G. Moore," 7 March 1933, Gebelein Papers, HFM.

⁴¹ For background into the changing attitude towards American decorative arts from 1850-1930, see Elizabeth Stillinger, The Antiquers (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1980).

Aiken, South Carolina, the Bakers Handicraft Shop in Springfield, Massachusetts, the Arts and Crafts Shop in Washington, D.C, and The Shop of Fine Arts and Industries in Portland, Oregon. Although largely unknown today, these small craft workshops sprouted up during the early twentieth-century as the wave of revivalism washed across the country. Gebelein rode that wave and used its momentum to promote the fine craftsmanship of his wares. By 1906, three years after he joined the Handicraft Shop, Gebelein's *Time Book* records numerous commissions, some of which he consigned to other craft shops and some of which he sold directly to local patrons.

Through his correspondence with other shops, Gebelein learned how tastes varied outside of New England⁴² and what objects sold successfully regardless of where he consigned them. Small and medium-size waste bowls, inspired by Colonial forms and enlivened with

⁴² In 1926, the Arts and Crafts Society of Detroit wrote to Gebelein, "Here much stuff is sold in the shops with decided hammer marks and in fact hammering of that kind has come to be associated with inferior goods. On the other hand, the tiny almost invisible hammer marks, which show on handmade solid silver, is carefully looked for and admired. It is the difference between a fine, delicate, suggestive thing and one which is too obvious." Surprised, Gebelein responded, "Your reference to the hammer marks is interesting as it indicates that in one part of the country they are not popular while in another section the individuals clamor for the same." Arts and Crafts Society, Detroit, "To Mr. Gebelein," July 1926, Gebelein Papers, HFM.

untempered hammer marks, sold consistently well throughout the period from 1905-1910. For example, in 1910 Gebelein's correspondence documents consignments of waste bowls to The Shop of Fine Arts and Industries, to the Arts and Crafts Studio in Washington, D.C., and to the SACB. These bowls, produced in copper, silver, silver lined with copper, and in one documented instance, gold, remained one of Gebelein's most well-known products throughout his career.

Sometimes Gebelein sent design drawings rather than objects to his consignors, allowing him to tailor the wares to the precise demands of that shop's clientele. Jane Bartlett of the Arts and Crafts Studio in Washington, D.C. received drawings from Gebelein in 1915 along with a note from Gebelein indicating he was "open to suggestion on any work you have calls for."⁴³ Shop drawings often drawn to scale and hand-painted, bear the hasty marks of customers who wanted various changes made to Gebelein's original designs (fig. 4 & 5). Jean M. N. Brown, a customer from Utica, New York, returned Gebelein's drawings, informing him that she "changed" the lines of the cruet to indicate what she preferred.⁴⁴ Gebelein,

⁴³ Gebelein, "To Jane Bartlett," 20 October 1915, Gebelein Papers, HFM.

⁴⁴ Gebelein, "To Jean M. N. Brown," August 1914, in the Gebelein Papers, HFM.

complied with such requests even when the customer's taste dictated a departure from the historic model. As this example attests, Gebelein recognized that meeting the demands of his clientele was crucial to establishing a sound reputation and a profitable business.

In addition to the support Gebelein received from his growing list of customers, he also enjoyed recognition from his associations with various museums. In conjunction with Mary Knight, a fellow silversmith in the Handicraft Shop and member of the SACB, Gebelein exhibited several objects at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1905. Although objects Gebelein worked on at Tiffany were exhibited at the L'Exposition Universale in 1900 and the Pan-American Exposition in 1901, this exhibition marked the first time that objects with the Gebelein stamp were displayed at a museum. Nine years later, Gebelein exhibited thirteen objects at the Art Institute's Fifteenth Annual Exhibition of Applied Art and Original Designs for Decoration.⁴⁵ Through these expositions,

⁴⁵ Gebelein exhibited a silver bowl "of Colonial Design," "a silver cann," a silver compote with handles, a silver "after-dinner coffee pot," a silver tea pot, an engraved sugar bowl, a silver tea set, "a service plate, silver, fruit and flower design," copper bowl "silver-lined," a "silver porringer," and a "silver tea pot." These objects are listed in the Art Institute of Chicago Catalogue of the Fifteenth Annual Exhibition of Applied Art and Original Designs for Decorations, 1916 in the Archives of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Gebelein's name and his skill as a craftsman became known to a wider public, a fact that greatly benefitted his shop in later years.

From 1904-1905, the SACB made arrangements with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston to allow its working and student members unlimited access to the museum's collections.⁴⁶ Gebelein's fascination with early American silver designs was undoubtedly encouraged by his growing familiarity with the Museum of Fine Art's silver collection, known for its extensive holdings of seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth-century American silver. Several members of the Handicraft Shop, including Gebelein created plaster casts from silver objects in the museum and used those casts to reproduce the historic models.⁴⁷ The museum's holdings of Paul Revere silver particularly inspired Gebelein's attention.⁴⁸ In 1916, Gebelein exhibited a Revere-style bowl at the Arts and Crafts Gallery, Boston. A Boston Transcript reviewer admired Gebelein's "good silverwork,"

⁴⁶ Brandt 280.

⁴⁷ Brandt 328.

⁴⁸ Several casts Gebelein made from Museum of Fine Arts, Boston objects survive in the collections of the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, including a cast of the Edward Winslow sugar box, a cast of a Jacob Hurd tankard, and casts of a pair of Jeremiah Dummer candlesticks.

observing "How many Paul Revere's the arts and crafts movement has developed must be apparent from the silverwork brought forth in this display."⁴⁹ Modern silversmiths like Gebelein were as much scholars of silver history as craftsman. Creating reproductions of Colonial silver required an intimate knowledge of early American craftsmanship, design and history. A bowl inspired by Revere, "the most famous of all New England silversmiths"⁵⁰ communicated the craftman's understanding of America's historic past, its patriotism, and its distinguished craft tradition.

Gebelein was emerging as both silversmith and scholar, a persona that would later draw customers to his Chestnut Street shop. By 1916, Gebelein's reputation as a silver "expert" won him attention from curators and collectors alike. Edwin A. Barber, curator of The Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, invited Gebelein to contribute to an exhibition entitled, "Fake and Reproductions." In a letter dated March 11, 1916, Barber wrote, "Mr. Hollis French of Boston informed me

⁴⁹ "Paul Revere Revival," Boston Transcript 3 June 1916: n. pag.. This newspaper clipping survives in the Society of Arts and Crafts Records, Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston, Microfilm #320 in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁰ Mary H. Northend, Colonial Homes and their Furnishings (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1912) 225.

that you have devoted a good deal of attention to examining silver and detecting fakes" ⁵¹ French, a founding member of the Walpole Society and an avid collector of American silver, was among Gebelein's most prominent customers. ⁵² Thus, knowledge of Gebelein's expertise traveled through a network of museums and collectors, winning him prestige, notoriety, and respect.

His reputation as a scholar and his affiliations with established institutions like the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Fine Arts, and the Brooklyn Museum of Art, lent a cachet to his wares that suggested a Gebelein product was "museum-quality." Gebelein once wrote, "The same technique employed in fashioning of to-day's museum silver ... is that which we designate as true craftsmanship and continue to foster for the appreciation of a knowing clientele." ⁵³ His intimate knowledge of

⁵¹ Edwin A. Barber, "To Gebelein," 11 March 1916, Gebelein Papers, HFM. Barber and French were both founding members of the Walpole Society.

⁵² French appears on Gebelein's 1931 Christmas card list and numerous letters between French and Gebelein in the correspondence files in the Gebelein Papers at the Henry Ford Museum document their relationship. In 1940, when French gave over two hundred early silver objects to the Cleveland Art Museum, several of the objects in the collection were purchased at Gebelein's Chestnut Street shop. For a more detailed discussion of French see, Stillinger 146, 166-67.

⁵³ Gebelein, "To Ruth Weedon Moulton," 7 January 1938, Gebelein Papers, HFM.

early silver also reassured patrons that the Colonial-inspired designs Gebelein created were close to the "originals," even if they were not identical.

It is interesting to note, that during this period of Gebelein's career, many major museums were building and publicizing their collections of American decorative arts, particularly silver. In 1906, the same year Gebelein exhibited at the Art Institute in Chicago, the Museum of Fine Arts published American Silver, a catalogue of the museum's collection currently on exhibit. This was the first time a major museum accompanied an American decorative arts exhibition with a detailed, illustrated catalogue.⁵⁴ In it, Francis H. Bigelow, the collector who assembled the silver collection for the Museum of Fine Arts, observed, "To Americans, [American silver] has a far deeper interest [because] it represents the artistic conception and craftsmanship of the fathers by whose energy our country was developed and our Republic founded."⁵⁵ Clearly, patriotism, revivalism, and American silver were inextricably linked.

⁵⁴ Frederick Whiting of the SACB, strongly encouraged SACB members and students to see this exhibition; Gebelein undoubtedly attended, carrying away with him designs and motifs for future reproduction-style silver.

⁵⁵ Bigelow 2.

Interest in American decorative arts grew slowly and steadily, fueled by exhibitions that received more and more public attention. One year later the Catalogue of the Massachusetts Loan Exhibit which included a display of American silver, was published. Reflecting on the display of American silver and other decorative arts included in the Hudson-Fulton Exhibition of 1909, Judge A.T.

Clearwater, silver collector, commented, "To many of them, [seeing the collection of silver] was a revelation and has done much to stimulate the collecting of work of early American silversmiths."⁵⁶ By including American objects, Clearwater and other trustees of the MET, hoped to balanced the sizeable display of European paintings; American and European arts were suddenly balancing, rather than competing with each other.

In 1911, two years after Gebelein opened his shop, two significant catalogues were available, a Catalogue of Silver Used in New Jersey and the South, and American Church Silver⁵⁷ from the Museum of Fine Arts collection.

⁵⁶ Stillinger 136.

⁵⁷ C. Louise Avery, Early American Silver (NY: The Century Co., 1930) xvi. According to the records of the Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston, E. Alfred Jones' Old Silver in American Churches was among the holdings in the Society's library. Considering Gebelein's interest and work in ecclesiastical silver, he undoubtedly was familiar with this work. Among the many ecclesiastical commissions he undertook were the communion services for the United States Naval Academy, West Point, New York, for St. Paul's

According to silver historian, C. Louis Avery, E. Alfred Jones, a scholar of English silver was "so impressed by the reports he received of Boston exhibitions" that he journeyed to America to study colonial silver. Jones eventually wrote another seminal early study of silver, entitled Old Silver in American Churches, published by the Colonial Dames Society in 1913. Together, silver scholarship and silver collecting developed, laying the aesthetic, and intellectual groundwork for Gebelein's mystic as craftsman and scholar.

In 1907, Gebelein's growing reputation gained him a customer who would eventually change his career. David Mason Little, a retired naval architect and a prominent Bostonian, commissioned Gebelein to make a silver tea service for his wife. Little's love of fine silver and interest in silversmithing motivated him to begin an informal apprenticeship under Gebelein. Over time, a comradeship developed between the two men, a friendship that eventually led to a business partnership in 1908. One year later, Little offered Gebelein the financial

Church, Dedham, Massachusetts, for the Chapel of William and Mary College, Williamsburg, Virginia, and for Philips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts. For a complete list of the Society's library holdings in 1916 see Brandt 234-237.

backing he needed to establish a shop on 79 Chestnut Street, "at the foot of Beacon Hill."⁵⁸

Gebelein's shop reflected his vision of himself as a craftsman carrying on the tradition first established in Boston by Jeremiah Dummer and Paul Revere (fig. 6). An undated ad for the shop described Gebelein as a "mastercraftsman whose career began with apprenticeship in direct line of trade descent from the early artisans of Boston."⁵⁹ Modern objects produced in a shop where the "romance of centuries" lingered, where the American craftsman (rather than the American machine) toiled, carried with them more than mere historical associations. These objects responded to the prevailing taste for historically "authentic" design.

A reproduction deemed "authentic" meant a modern "interpretation" of an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century form. Gebelein himself preferred to call his Adamesque tea services and his Revere bowls "interpretations" rather than exact reproductions. Unlike the collectors who patronized Gebelein's shop, few clients demanded exact reproductions or distinguished spun silver from superior

⁵⁸ Many advertisements for the Gebelein shop included this phrase, reminding potential customers that Gebelein's shop was situated in one of the most historic areas of the city.

⁵⁹ Undated advertisement in the Gebelein Papers, HFM.

hammered silver. As one customer wrote to Gebelein, "make the tray oval - oval trays hold better" or another wrote, "I am interested in the [John Coney] brazier. Can I use sterno with it?"⁶⁰ Practicality and functionalism often triumphed over historic accuracy. Interpretations of Colonial forms, whether in design or construction, or both, delighted and satisfied most Gebelein customers; furthermore, they were often cheaper and faster to produce. Blending "not-very-strict Colonial"⁶¹ style with decorative motifs from the arts and crafts movement and tempering the combination with simple outlines and sturdy proportions, Gebelein met his consumers' aesthetic sensibility.

The interpretive historicism apparent in many Gebelein objects is evidenced in the exaggerated proportions and attenuated acanthus leaves represented in a covered caudle cup in the collection of the Dallas Museum of Art (fig. 7). While Gebelein uses the historic model of an eighteenth-century caudle cup, he tempers the outline and enhances the decorative motifs in his object. Likewise, in a tea service in the collection of the Currier Gallery of Art, Gebelein tinkered with the outline

⁶⁰ This John Coney brazier is currently in the Mabel Brady Garvan Collection at Yale University Art Gallery.

⁶¹ Rhoads 43.

and proportions of a late eighteenth-century tea service, adapting them to the modern vision and taste of his client (fig. 8). Although less than "authentic" by late-twentieth-century standards, these design amalgamations appealed to consumers both aesthetically, intellectually, and practically (fig. 9). Unlike museum objects, Gebelein created objects that matched everyday needs and contemporary style.

Colonial forms, whether originals or reproductions, won admiration for their purity of line and uncomplicated ornamentation, characteristics favored by consumers still actively rejecting the over-wrought surfaces of Victorian design. Philosophically, silver objects acted like "temporal bridges" between the American past and present. In the mind of the consumer, colonial-inspired silver was not only a monument to the romanticized American past, it was a family heirloom, linking the present with the future. The ideal gift to commemorate any rite of passage, such as a wedding or a birthday, silver transmitted ideals and values from one generation to the next--ideas about heritage, Americanism, and gentility. The "authentic" silver object, despite the modern techniques used to produce it or the historical inaccuracies of its design, harmonized with the

productions of an age when sham and haste associated with industrialization did not exist.⁶²

The revivalistic atmosphere of his shop provided the ideal backdrop for the objects he produced and the persona he cultivated. Above the door of the Chestnut Street shop hung a colonial teapot with the words, "Gebelein Silversmith" and within the shop, (as their advertisement read) the "art of the Colonial craftsman" survived (fig. 10). The shop shelves were stocked with antique silver and the walls were bedecked with old tools, some of which he believed descended through the Revere family. In an interview with Ruth Moss, Gebelein spoke of his tools saying, "We have other primitive tools of this old craft that were used in the work shops of others nearby to Revere's in the vicinity of the Old State House."⁶³ One reporter for the Boston Transcript suggested, "if an old-time silversmith came in [to the shop] he could go right to work. He would be able to see before him everything he needed."⁶⁴ A steady "ring of hammers" combined to create an appealing atmosphere of

⁶² Venable 270.

⁶³ Ruth Moss Interviews, Gebelein Papers, HFM.

⁶⁴ W. E. Hutchinson, Jr., "Colonial Tradition of Boston's Eighteenth-Century," Boston Transcript 9 Oct. 1937: E1. Clipping of this article survives in the Gebelein Papers, HFM.

colonial days revisited and the vision of a bygone era. Years after the shop opened, House Beautiful described the romantic spirit of the past lingering on Chestnut Street.

You go through the door and you are in another world! A world of mastercraftsmanship where every piece of silver is fashioned by loving hands ... even the talk of these men is of the romance of centuries.⁶⁵

In a letter to a prospective customer, Gebelein wrote, "here are silversmiths working in the original manner and spirit, producing silver actually representative of the traditional craftsmanship known to past centuries and today otherwise surviving only in cherished possessions of museums and heirlooms of fortunate families."⁶⁶ This "timeless" backdrop of colonial days past and age-old craft traditions imparted the suggestion that, even though the object was new, it would become a modern day heirloom. It was this mystique, this glimpse of the past, that drew customers to the Gebelein shop and imbued a Gebelein object with the cachet of craftsmanship.

⁶⁵ House Beautiful May 1939. Clipping of this description in the Gebelein Papers, HFM.

⁶⁶ Gebelein "To Mrs. Bryan Conrad," 13 July 1936, Gebelein Papers, HFM.

Chapter 5

BUILDING A BUSINESS: 1910-1945

In 1912, Gebelein wrote to the Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston explaining his strategies as a craftsman and shop owner. Only three years after he opened his Chestnut Street shop, he wrote,

My business is growing both through advertising and through representative work being done in the arts and crafts movement at large. I am advertising publicly to a certain extent and I am striving to study out a business-like method which will put me and my business in the proper collaborating position to have the Society have the proper benefit of the sales made directly by the writer in his shop⁶⁷

Here lies a clue to the mind of Gebelein the businessman. While Gebelein asserts that he wanted to develop a successful business to benefit the Society of Arts and Crafts, he also undoubtedly wanted to establish a well-patronized, profitable business for himself. Gebelein's search for a "business-like method" continued well beyond 1912. In fact, it can be argued that his "method" was a constantly evolving business and craft philosophy,

⁶⁷ Gebelein "To the Arts and Crafts Society, Boston," 6 January 1912, Gebelein Papers, HFM.

changing with the economic, social, and aesthetic currents of the times. Although Gebelein did not elaborate upon his "business-like method," business records for the first years of the Chestnut Street shop document some of the strategies he practiced.

While there is no question the "romance" of handcraftsmanship lingered on Chestnut Street, invoices in the Gebelein papers record a more modern vision of the shop. In 1910, only one year after the shop opened, Gebelein purchased large quantities of spinning tools and equipment. Walter W. Field, a Boston wood turner, sold Gebelein chucks and motors; wheels came from Howard S. Hunter. This equipment allowed Gebelein to spin silver, a process that involves placing a sheet of silver on a lathe and pressing it against a chuck to form it into the desired shape. An innovation of the industrial revolution, spinning largely replaced the process of hammering an object up from a single billet of silver because it allowed the silversmith to produce objects in considerably less time and at considerably less expense. Simple revival forms like Georgian-style salvers and Paul Revere inspired bowls were well-suited to mechanically-aided production which greatly increased the productivity of a small, three-employee shop like Gebelein's.

Like many arts and crafts/revivalist silversmiths, Gebelein often "camouflaged" the minute concentric rings characteristic of spun metal objects by applying "decorative" hammer marks to the body. The facets created by the hammer were left unplished as evidence of the "hand-wrought" character of the object. In a letter written by Arthur Gebelein, the silversmith's son, he reminisced about the process of making the famous Gebelein copper bowls. He recalls, "[the bowls] were annealed and pickled ... The next job was to hand hammer over the entire surface on the outside. This provided the hammer marks and helped obliterate the spinning marks."⁶⁸

Spinning these Revere-style bowls allowed Gebelein to offer customers less expensive wares which still bore the marks of handcraftsmanship; in this respect Gebelein achieved the aspiration of the arts and crafts movement to make high-quality goods accessible to a middle-class consumer. Moreover, the production and sale of less expensive, spun silver objects, whether produced in the shop or by other silversmiths, helped Gebelein maintain a profitable business. In fact, custom-ordered, hand-hammered silver comprised as little as ten percent of the total profits Gebelein received each year; the remainder

⁶⁸ Arthur D. Gebelein, "To Rachel J. Monfredo," 20 July 1992, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, curatorial object files.

of the profits were generated by spun silver, silver Gebelein retailed for other companies, and the antique silver Gebelein sold. Only by introducing other types of silver into his inventory could Gebelein continue to produce limited quantities of specialty, hand-hammered silver.

Another component of Gebelein's business-like method was the practice of jobbing out work to other craftsman. From the very beginning Gebelein sent out silver to engravers and chasers who could complete the work more efficiently and faster than Gebelein's shop could. Harold Small, a skilled engraver and independent craftsman, completed most of Gebelein's engraving work; his name is recorded on several shop drawings which incorporate complex engraved ornament. Albert T. Gunner, a spinner in Attleboro, Massachusetts provided Gebelein with spun bodies, supplementing the limited amount of spun work the Chestnut Street shop produced. In a tea service in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the cast handles were fabricated by P. Charles Machon at Goodnow and Jenks,⁶⁹ (coincidentally Gebelein's first employer), the engraving was executed by Harold Small, and the bodies were created in the shop (fig. 11).

⁶⁹ Wendy Kaplan, "The Art that is Life": The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920 (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987) 179.

While Gebelein still filled orders for entirely hand-wrought silver, designed and made in the shop,⁷⁰ he supplemented his business and profits in another way by utilizing the skills of other craftsmen. Not unlike an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century silversmith, Gebelein found ways to ease the burden of production. Putting the pragmatic doctrine of arts and crafts proponents into practice, Gebelein employed modern production techniques and the skills of other craftsmen to maintain a profitable and successful business.

This "business-like method" allowed Gebelein to make the hand-crafted silver he valued and extolled, while also making a profit. Although Gebelein promoted the "traditional craftsmanship" his shop practiced, hand-hammered, special order silver simply could not support a money-making operation. Silver objects fashioned entirely by hand required intense labor, often over one hundred hours work, and carried price tags that dazzled many of Gebelein's customers. Even Francis P. Garvan, the great American collector and client of Gebelein's shop,⁷¹

⁷⁰ According to Rainwater, Gebelein distinguished his entirely hand-wrought object by a different Gebelein mark. Whether customers were aware of the meaning of the various Gebelein marks seems unlikely. Rainwater 65.

⁷¹ Gebelein recognized the potential benefits his relationship with Garvan might bring. Foremost, Garvan was a prominent public figure whose noteworthy collecting garnered attention among New England's social elite.

expressed his surprise at the prices Gebelein charged for his hand-fashioned silver. For example, in 1928, Gebelein billed Garvan \$4500 dollars, \$300 dollars apiece, for fifteen reproductions of an eighteenth-century inkstand associated with the signing of the Declaration of Independence (fig. 12). For the 530 1/2 hours it took Gebelein and two craftsmen to create these inkstands, the financial remuneration Gebelein received was small.⁷² As this example attests, recreating the colonial craft method and exact colonial reproductions was not an economically-beneficial undertaking.

Gebelein, like any businessman, faced economic challenges throughout his career.⁷³ Although the picture

Garvan's correspondence with other major collectors and museums spread Gebelein's name among highly desirable circles. Just as Hollis French brought Gebelein to the attention of Edwin A. Barber, Garvan carried publicity and affluent customers in Gebelein's direction. On September 13, 1930, The Art News published Garvan's letter to the Yale University Officers, announcing the gift of his collection to the university. Among the silver objects in the Mabel Brady Garvan Collection at the Yale University Art Gallery are several objects purchased from Gebelein, including a pepper box, a snuff box, a tea caddy, a John Coney brazier.

⁷² Letters in the Gebelein Papers, HFM document the creation and sale of these inkstands.

⁷³ Gebelein, "To Arthur L. Curry," 3 May 1935, Gebelein Papers, HFM. Gebelein explained to Curry, the First Assistant Accessor for Boston, "The accumulation [in the shop] is the result of experiments in designs that have not been successful in finding purchasers, some of the pieces made over twenty-five years ago. ... In recent times I have tried to keep my shop with its few employees

of the shop presented so far suggests that Gebelein's "business-like method" remedied and accommodated for economically precarious situations, uncertain times befell Gebelein as they do all businessmen. The number of orders entering the Gebelein shop were consistently few. Between 1911 and 1912, only 436 orders for work were taken; in later years, the number of orders the shop received rarely exceeded 500.⁷⁴ Although the silversmiths in Gebelein's shop did not suffer from a lack of work, the profit margin for a business operating on this scale remained low. Large scale commissions, such as the Liberty Inkstands completed for Francis Garvan and the restoration of the Williamsburg Mace for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, brought sizeable profits into the shop. Furthermore, the publicity these commissions won for the shop, greatly enhanced both Gebelein's prestige and finances. In addition, the sales of antique silver boosted the shop's income, providing a somewhat steady flow of resources into the shop.

As early as the 1921, Gebelein began to incorporate silver and metal objects produced by other silver companies into his inventory. He recieved sizeable monthly shipments of objects produced by Gorham, Reed &

busy with special order work and repairs."

⁷⁴ Venable 266.

Barton, Currier & Roby, and International Silver Company and incorporated them into his inventory of silver produced in the shop. Gorham and Reed & Barton supplied Gebelein with flatware in their most popular patterns, while Currier and Roby used Gebelein as one of their primary retailers.

Objects survive with both the Currier and Roby and the Gebelein mark, explicitly documenting the relationship between the large silver company and the Gebelein shop. International Silver Company, on the other hand, stamped selected objects with the Gebelein mark, leaving their own house marks absent from the finished product.⁷⁵ International Silver Company was not the only silver company with Gebelein's stamp on hand to mark wares produced for his shop. A letter from Gebelein to the Old Newbury Crafters in Newburyport, Massachusetts, requested that they "kindly return our [the Gebelein] name stamp."⁷⁶ Sometimes Gebelein simply requested the company leave the objects blank as was the case when he wrote to the Early American Pewter Company for pewter bowls with no marks and

⁷⁵ Invoices from the years 1928-1939 stamped "NO HOUSE MARKS" indicate this in the Gebelein Papers, HFM.

⁷⁶ Gebelein, "To Old Newbury Crafters," 14 September 1922, Gebelein Papers, HFM.

no stamps."⁷⁷ These bowls were obviously stamped once they arrived in the shop, and thus, transformed into a Gebelein object.

In letters to potential customers, Gebelein frankly mentioned the option to buy less expensive objects made by other silver companies. Often a second or third response, but rarely a first, to a customer's inquiry mentioned less expensive options for the customer's consideration. Writing to a customer from Wisconsin, Gebelein explained, "There is another set of good quality in sterling silver that might interest you called "Early American" which, while not our own make, is one that we consider well designed and are always pleased to supply."⁷⁸ The "set" Gebelein recommended was undoubtedly machine-made, produced on a lathe rather than hand-hammered, a point that remains nebulous in the letter. What is most interesting about this letter, and other letters like it in the Gebelein papers, is the underlying suggestion that the more expensive service with the Gebelein stamp was handwrought, while the less expensive

⁷⁷ Gebelein, "To Early American Pewter Company," 26 July 1928, in the Gebelein Papers, HFM.

⁷⁸ Gebelein, "To Arthur Bissel," n.d. 1935, Gebelein Papers, HFM. The tea service noted was by International Silver Company. In this instance, given Gebelein's frank acknowledgement that the service was not made in his shop, it is likely the service bore the International Silver Company marks.

service made outside the shop was industrially-produced. In reality, as evidenced by the invoices noted above, some objects stamped with the Gebelein mark were neither created in the Gebelein shop, nor hand-hammered. To the consumer who associated Gebelein with handcraftsmanship and knew little of silver technology, a spun bowl made by International Silver Company or the Peabody Craft Shop, but distinguished with the Gebelein mark was probably considered a hand-hammered creation.

Gebelein's advertising focused on the hand-hammered silver produced in the shop (fig. 13 & 14). His carefully constructed advertisements promoted the high-end of Gebelein's business, creating an association between hand-crafted silver and the Gebelein name. Thus, when a consumer purchased a silver or copper object from Gebelein, the assumption followed that the object was created in the Chestnut Street Shop by the skillful blows of the craftsman's hammer.

This observation suggests that perhaps Gebelein misled his customers. In actuality, he simply sold them a "mystique," the association between the Gebelein name and handcraftsmanship. As one advertisement from the 1930s reads, "Of the many visitors who seek out GEBELEIN'S at the foot of Boston's Beacon Hill, buyers are not an overwhelming majority. Collectors come to view our

unusual display of fine old pieces, curators of museums come to consult our library of rare works ...; possessors of precious ancestral silver come to Mr. Gebelein's expert advice on renewing or matching their treasures ... students come to see the miracle of the silversmith's art, which, with hammer and anvil, raises exquisite beauty from a flat disk of pure metal."⁷⁹ Moreover, this advertisement, and many others in the Gebelein's papers, describes the shop more like a museum than a place of business and Gebelein more like a scholar/expert than a silversmith.

This is the Gebelein mystique--a carefully constructed set of associations between Gebelein and fine silver, Gebelein and hand-hammered metals, Gebelein and expertise. As this advertisement suggests, another aspect of Gebelein's business-like method required the acquisition of a select clientele.⁸⁰ Through his correspondence and his advertising, Gebelein courted and

⁷⁹ From an undated advertisement in the Gebelein Papers, HFM.

⁸⁰ Gebelein's Christmas Card list of 1930, includes the names of several top collectors including Hollis French, Francis P. Garvan, and Charles A. Platt. In addition, Gebelein corresponded with Judge A.T. Clearwater whose collection eventually went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Edwin Barber of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Henry Francis du Pont whose collection of American decorative arts became the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum.

cultivated a client list that included some of the top museums and collectors in New England. Curators and great collectors carried their own cachet of knowledge and prestige and, by courting their patronage, Gebelein enhanced his reputation as an "expert." As another advertisement advised, "When buying antiques of Gebelein, the purchaser receives the benefit of many years of experience in the capacity of maker, collector,⁸¹ restorer, advisor, and observer in constant touch with the antique."⁸² Thus, a customer purchased an "idea" of handcraftsmanship, a material "representation" of the Gebelein cachet--as silversmith/scholar--when they acquired an object from the his shop.

Gebelein survived the stock market crash in 1920 and the depression of the 1930s largely because, as a reporter once noted in an unpublished article, most of his clients "were of landed wealth" and "all his investments

⁸¹ Gebelein began selling antique silver even before he established his own shop in 1909. Although customers knew of Gebelein as a dealer in antique metals from his advertising, the sale of the John Coney montieth, auctioned at Anderson Galleries, Inc., New York City in 1937, increased his notoriety as one of America's foremost dealers and collectors of fine silver. The montieth fetched \$30,000, the highest price ever paid for a piece of American silver. Two years later, the montieth entered the Mabel Brady Garvan Collection at the Yale University Art Gallery, again generating more publicity and attention for Gebelein.

⁸² Antiques Magazine (September 1928).

were in silver."⁸³ While numerous businesses closed their doors in 1921 and 1922, Gebelein reported to a friend, "we think we are very fortunate as far as the general business conditions are considered."⁸⁴ During the 1930s, Gebelein's shop endured, a remarkable achievement considering the large number of small craft shops that failed during those hard economic times. In 1931, he remarked to his friend Florence Knowlton at the Arts and Crafts Shop, Portland, "I am very busy making memorial services for churches ... a communion service for the Rockefeller Foundation at Colonial Williamsburg and a trophy for Harvard."⁸⁵ Thus, special orders kept Gebelein afloat during those difficult year when antiques sales flagged and "business was indefinate."⁸⁶

Gebelein's continued popularity and success during and after World War II, a period of overt anti-German sentiment, is even more surprising considering Gebelein

⁸³ Draft for this article written for the Yankee Magazine survives in the Gebelein Papers, HFM. The Gebelein family requested that the article remain unpublished because of their anxiety about discussing Gebelein's finances.

⁸⁴ Gebelein, "To Mrs. H. E. McMurray," 11 March 1922. Mrs. McMurray was an acquaintance of Katherine Pratt, the silversmith Gebelein worked with during his early years.

⁸⁵ Gebelein, "To Florence Knowlton," 14 August 1931, Gebelein Papers, HFM.

⁸⁶ Gebelein, "To Helen Clark Phillips," 1 October 1937, Gebelein Papers, HFM.

was a native of Germany.⁸⁷ His patriotism, expressed through his devotion to colonial American craft and his reverence for Paul Revere, America's great silversmith and patriot, probably helped diminish the significance of his German roots. Moreover, Gebelein created uniquely American metal objects, creations that embodied America's own nationalistic style. Much of the special commission work Gebelein created was for old, established American institutions like the Naval Academy at West Point, and prominent American universities, like Yale and Harvard. In 1928, he undertook a commission for the U.S.S. Lexington, a naval airplane carrier docked in Boston, which won him attention as both a silversmith and a patriot.⁸⁸ Although little documentation exists regarding Gebelein politics, he supported America's involvement in World War II by teaching certain metal work

⁸⁷ A letter Gebelein received attests to the strong consumer movement against purchasing any product made in Germany. In 1935, Rose Jutkovitz inquired about the Gebelein grape shears she saw illustrated in House Beautiful; however, she did not want them if they were made in Germany. Rose Jutkovitz, "To Gebelein," 2 January 1935, Gebelein Papers, HFM.

⁸⁸ The silver tea service he made for the ship, according to Gebelein's personal notes, interpreted the "ancient Greek urn-shape design which is most typical of the Revolutionary Period" and was inspired by a Paul Revere model."

processes to the United States Military.⁸⁹ These displays of patriotism, as well as Gebelein's reputation as a true American craftsman, obviously reduced his German background to an insignificant factor.

In the minds of his customers, Gebelein was a silversmith, patriot, scholar, and expert. Even today, New Englanders who remember Gebelein, recall him as a craftsman first and a businessman last. Despite this, Gebelein's shop practices and his "business-like method" serve as powerful examples of how the "ideals" of the arts and crafts movement were transformed by working craftsmen during the first decades of the twentieth century. By translating the popular aesthetic rhetorics of arts and crafts philosophy and colonial revivalism into marketable objects, Gebelein and other successful craftsmen served their consumer market and achieved success. By participating in the nationalistic rejection of European design and embracing American craft, he reached the patriotic psyche of his market. Consumerism and industrialization exerted undeniable influence of the craftsmen of the early twentieth century, a fact that deserves consideration when examining the objects they

⁸⁹ A document titled Notes on the Gebelein Shop From an Educational Standpoint and dating to 1935 records, "During the war - process taught to Lieut. Commanders regarding certain metal work processes." A reproduction of this document survives in the Gebelein Papers, HFM.

created. After his death in 1945, Bostonians commemorated Gebelein as the "modern Paul Revere,"⁹⁰ a title appropriate for a craftsman who used modern business strategies, advertising, and industrial techniques to maintain a profitable and significant silver-making business.

⁹⁰ Even today, Gebelein is proclaimed the "modern Paul Revere" by individuals who remember his shop and his craft. In Gebelein's "Customer Book," the shop's guest book, Kenneth Roberts wrote, "With heartiest admiration for a modern Paul Revere."

PLEASE NOTE

Materials in this document have not been filmed at the request of the author. They are available for consultation, however, in the author's university library.

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