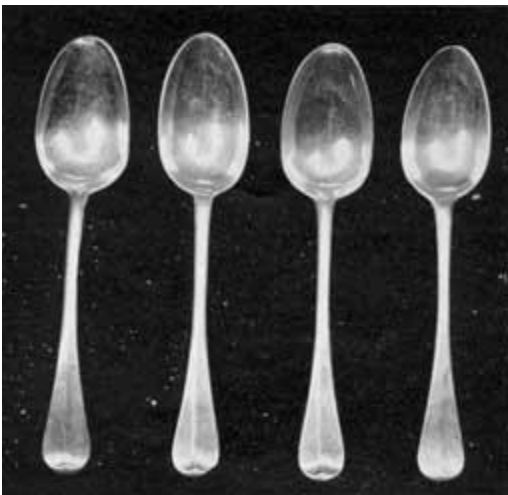


## Flashback: William Cario, Father and Son, Colonial Silversmiths

By Stephen Decatur

*This article details the history of the life and work of silversmith William Cario and his son of the same name. Little information about the two men had been previously known in the years before this article was published. It originally appeared in the September 1941 issue of American Collector magazine, a publication which ran from 1933-1948 and served antique collectors and dealers.*

Although the work of the early American silversmith William Cario had been well and favorably known to collectors for over half a century, nothing was known of the gentleman himself until comparatively recently. Even his place of residence was a matter of uncertainty, and perhaps a greater conflict of authorities existed concerning it than about that of any other fellow craftsman of the period. Now, however, much has been learned regarding his life and, in fact, evidence has come to light which seems to make it certain that actually there were two silversmiths of the name — doubtless father and son.



Tablespoons, by Cario: Three of these spoons bear the touch mark of W. Cario and the other that of Benjamin Burt. Obviously, the latter was a replacement made at a later date. Although these spoons are engraved with various initials, they are part of a set originally made by Cario.

Prior to these discoveries, Cario was variously assigned to Philadelphia, Boston, Portsmouth, or New York. The latter city was the most favored for his home and it was the only place connected with Cario with any appearance of definiteness, it being said that the silversmith was born there in 1721 with sometimes the additional statement that he was made a freeman there in 1742.

But three years ago several indisputable facts concerning him were found, among them proof that he had worked in Portsmouth, and in Newmarket, New Hampshire, during much of his life at least. This information was quickly supplemented by the researches of Mrs. Helen Burr Smith, through whose efforts the complete story of the latter part of the silversmith's life was made available. However, amid the data assembled there were certain facts which could not easily be reconciled with each other particularly conflicting were the indications regarding Cario's age. Consequently, a further investigation has been conducted, with the result that something can be said of William Cario, Senior, a hitherto unknown silversmith, although the information is still far from complete.

Cario is an uncommon name and, since one Michael Cario, an Englishman who had served his apprenticeship in London, was a silversmith first in New York and later in Philadelphia in the approximate period 1728-1745, it is easy to understand why it was thought that a William Cario, also a silversmith, belonged to one or the other of those places. It is possible, too, that a child of this name was born in New York in 1721, although a reasonably careful search has failed to reveal any record of it or, for that matter, any confirmation of the story that a man of this name was made a freeman there in 1742. However, these points are unimportant, since in any event such a person could not have been either one of the silversmiths. But it would seem probable that a relationship existed between Michael and the two Williams, father and son.

The first clue to the true identification of William Cario — the silversmith whose work was known — came when attention was drawn to an old tombstone in the ancient Point of Graves burying ground in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The inscription on it states that it marks the resting place of “Mrs. Abigail Cario, wife to Mr. William Cario, died Sept. 17, 1767.”

This occurrence of a name identical with that of the silversmith prompted an investigation of local records and evidence was quickly forthcoming to show that they were one and the same. At the same time, several examples of his work were seen which were traced to original ownership in Portsmouth or its vicinity.



The Atkinson Silver Waiter: Shown here is the underside of this piece of English hallmarked silver with the engraving by William Cario. Recorded on it are the names, dates of death and ages of forty-eight Portsmouth residents from 1740 to 1771 at whose funerals Theodore Atkinson, as a pallbearer, received mourning rings. Evidently he sold these, bought this waiter and had the names of the people whose rings he had received engraved on the back. This engraving also includes the lettering "W. Cario — Sculp."

The proof that the gentleman of Portsmouth was the silversmith may be found in a deed of 1765 covering the disposal of the estate of William Pevey, or Peavy, of Portsmouth. (N. H. Deeds, Vol. 91, fol. 417.) It shows that Pevey's daughter, Abigail, was the wife of William Cario who is referred to as a "goldsmith." The marriage of the couple took place in Boston and the record of their marriage intentions may be found in the Boston records under date of July 5, 1759. While no documentary evidence has appeared to show the date at which Cario reached Portsmouth, silver articles made by him for residents of that town have been seen which confidently may be dated prior to 1760, and his marriage to a Portsmouth girl in 1759 is a further indication that he was there sometime before that date. In any event, the history of his life after 1760 is clear.

Within a year after the death of Abigail, a William Cairo married Lydia Coxcroft. The nuptials took place in the South Church in Portsmouth, whose records further reveal the baptisms of four children born to the couple between 1769 and 1774. During these years the silversmith seems to have taken an active interest in the affairs of his community; his name appears on several petitions to the Governor and Council of New Hampshire and he was also a signer of that curious and interesting document of 1772 entitled "Protest against Theatrical Performances" which is now in the care of the New Hampshire Historical Society.

About 1774 or 1775 Cario removed to Newmarket, a small but then flourishing town fifteen miles inland from Portsmouth. In 1776 he signed the "Association Test" there, proving his adherence to the patriot cause, and his name appears on several petitions of its inhabitants drawn up during the ensuing fifteen years.

In 1790 he bought land in Newfields, a part of Newmarket, from Stephen Hardy, the father of another silversmith then working in Portsmouth. The silversmith's house on this property is still standing and, undoubtedly, he had his workshop in its ell. There he died in 1809 and the inventory of this estate discloses not only a long list of silversmith's tools and materials, but a supply of pewter as well, so that apparently he worked in this metal as well as in silver. It was said of him that "in 1809 he was among the last of our townsmen to wear the gentlemen's short clothes and knee buckles."

So far, nothing has been mentioned which is inconsistent with his having been born in 1721. However, the following obituary was printed in the Portsmouth Gazette of August 1, 1809: "Died — At Newmarket on the 20th of July very suddenly. Mr. William Cario, formerly of Portsmouth, aged 75, leaving a wife and one child to mourn the loss.

"To highly paint the character of a deceased friend appears superfluous; suffice it to say Mr. Cario has been the kind husband, indulgent parent and affectionate friend to his numerous acquaintances, which, with many other pleasing traits in his character, rendered him worthy of imitation."



Communion Cup, by Cario: Made by William Cario II, it was a bequest to the church in Newmarket, New Hampshire, where this silversmith worked after leaving Portsmouth. The inscription reads: "The Gift of Deacon Joseph Judkins, to the Church in Newmarket, by his Last Will 1770."

As ages in such notices were generally given in round numbers, this would indicate that Cario was born about 1735, unless an error was made. However, two advertisements appeared in Boston newspapers which are given in *The Arts and Crafts in New England*, by George Frances Dow. Quoting from that work, the earliest reads: "Wilham Cario — By applying to Mr. Cario, Jeweller, may be seen a Silver Spoon that was taken up in the Street about three weeks ago and has not been advertised. — Boston, Mar. 7/14, 1737."

The second says: "Notice is hereby given, that William Cario is removed from his late Dwelling near the Rev. Dr. Colman's Meeting House, to the South End of the Town over against the White Swan, where all sorts of Jeweller's work is made & sold after the best and newest Manner, likewise fine Sword Blades, and Canes Sold and mounted there. — Boston, Oct. 23/30, 1738."

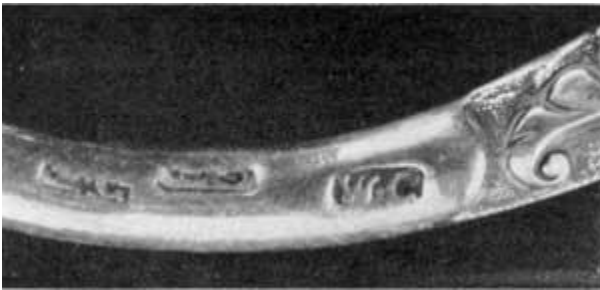
These advertisements make it clear that a William Cario, a jeweler and silversmith, had a shop of his own in Boston as early as the first month of 1738. He could hardly have been less than twenty-five years of age at that time and so born not later than 1712. Thus, if this silversmith be the same as the one of Newmarket, the latter must have been close to one hundred years of age at the time of his death rather than aged seventy-five as stated in the obituary. It would seem that such an advanced age would have been mentioned in the death notice; furthermore, at such an age, the silversmith could not have been actively engaged at his trade as his inventory implies.

Thus, the existence of two William Carios is indicated and this is confirmed, with every appearance of certainty, through two newly found bits of information. The first is an entry in the "Vital Records of Newbury, Massachusetts" recording the marriage on September 5, 1735, of William Cario and Mary Ann Pollard, "both of Boston."

Undoubtedly, this refers to the jeweler of Boston and, on the face of it, implies a runaway marriage. The date, 1735, is too close to the year of birth of William Cario of Portsmouth and Newmarket, as stated in his obituary, to be a mere coincidence; in all probability he was the son of this couple and so was aged about seventy-three at his death, rather than seventy-five, a small discrepancy almost to be expected.

Second, a silver mounted sword has been seen, which dates circa 1740-1745, and which originally was owned by a gentleman of Portsmouth. It bears a hitherto unrecorded silversmith's mark, WC, in rectangle with clipped corners. Considering the date of this sword, its place of ownership, Cario's advertisement in the Boston newspaper, and the fact that the initial mark of William Cario of Portsmouth and Newmarket is known, together with the improbability of the new mark belonging to another New England silversmith with the same initials — since all their marks are believed to be known — it may be confidently assumed that this new mark can belong only to William Cario, Senior.

It will be observed that the marriage intention record of William Cario and Abigail Pevey in 1759 makes no mention of "Junior." Although by no means conclusive, this might mean that the older man was then dead, unless, indeed, this was a second marriage of William, Senior, rather than the first marriage of his son, an hypothesis which in some respects seems the more reasonable. In any event, the elder was dead by 1769 when the younger man began to sign petitions without any "Junior" to his signature. But nothing has as yet been found to indicate where the older man lived before he appeared in Boston in 1735; it is entirely possible that he was born in New York. The sword suggests that he later moved to Portsmouth and there is another pointer in the same direction.



Mark of William Cario: These are the initials WC in clipped rectangle. This mark is from the Peirce sword. Two imperfect impressions of the same mark can be seen at the left.

In the possession of the New Hampshire Historical Society is a massive silver waiter which was originally owned by Theodore Atkinson, 1697-1779, a resident of Portsmouth and for many years a member of the Governor's Council of New Hampshire. The tray is English, made in 1750, and on it are engraved the names of forty-eight individuals with the dates of their deaths, ranging from 1740 to 1771. The engraving is signed "W. Cario — Sculp."

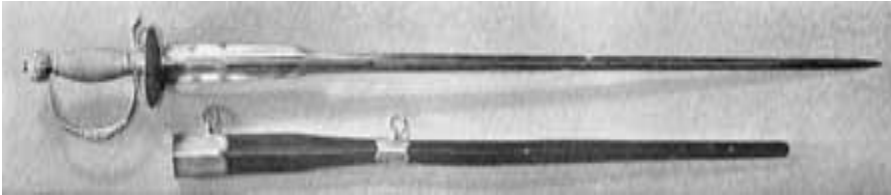
It is not probable that Atkinson would have established such a memorial on an old tray, hence it would seem that the list was begun when it was new — that is, about 1751, at a time when William, Junior, was too young to have done the work. If this be the case, then the engraving was begun, at least, by William, Senior, and since the article would not have been carried back, and forth between Portsmouth and Boston, it follows that the silversmith was living in the former place.

Incidentally Atkinson's choice of names for inclusion on his waiter has been the subject of speculation for at least a century. In the second volume of Brewster's Rambles about Portsmouth, published in 1869, there is an extended account of this tray, and the author then remarked: "It will be seen that neither the death of his (i. e. Atkinson's) son nor of his wife has been noticed. He alludes to the death of one of Governor Benning Wentworth's sons, and omits those of the other two. He also omits the death of Governor Benning's first wife. Those acquainted with the history of Portsmouth will notice that he omits husbands and notices wives, and vice versa. Indeed, the most interesting point in this matter is to get at the standard of qualification for record upon the waiter."

As a possible explanation of this puzzle it is suggested that the names represent persons at whose funerals Atkinson, a man of great personal popularity, received gold funeral rings. It is, of course, general knowledge that such articles were presented with a thorough understanding that the recipients, who were, in general, the pallbearers and a few other intimates, would eventually dispose of them. The list has twenty names up to and including 1750, the year in which the

waiter was made, and if these represented rings, it is quite probable that their combined value would have purchased the tray and paid for the first engraving.

From time to time thereafter, Atkinson could have had more engraving done as partial payment for other rings. The waiter would thus be a permanent, consolidated memento. This theory, of course, easily explains the omission of names from the list which otherwise might be expected to appear, since Atkinson might well have been out of town when a funeral occurred. Besides, he probably would not have been asked to be a pallbearer for every member of the various families represented.



Sword, with Silver Hilt and Scabbard Mountings by William Cario I: Made between 1740-1745 for a member of the Peirce family of Portsmouth, this is the only specimen that has been found so far bearing the touch-mark of the elder Cario.

Therefore, the two craftsmen, from present knowledge, may be summarized as follows: William Cario, Senior, born circa 1712; died before 1769. Worked in Boston 1735-1738 and later in Portsmouth. His touch-mark was probably W.C, capital initials with pellet between in rectangle with clipped corners. This is illustrated from the hilt of the Peirce sword.

The other Cario touch-marks, all of which are undoubtedly those of William Cario, Junior, born circa 1736; died 1809, who worked in Portsmouth 1758-1775 and in Newmarket 1775-1809, are: (A) Initial W.C in rectangle with pellet between. (B) Initial and surname in capital letters with pellet between in serrate rectangle. (C) Initial and surname with pellet between, large and small capitals, in rectangle with enlarged front end.

Note: this last mark has not been seen by the writer on silver articles of a later date than circa 1770, although such may exist. Thus there is a possibility that this mark may belong to William, Senior.