Factual or Fabled?  
The Story of Fraser’s, WMF Fraser’s and William Fraser

By William P. Hood Jr. and Dorothea Burstyn

There is considerable confusion about the meaning of the name “Fraser” as applied to certain patterns of early post-World War II flatware imported into the United States from Europe. For example, some of Italian origin are marked “FRASER’S ITALY,” and others of German origin are marked “FRASER’S GERMANY,” “WMF FRAZER’S,” or just “FRASERS,” and to many observers it is not clear whether these marks denote a manufacturer or simply an importer/distributor and whether there was only one Fraser’s or more than one.

A prestigious publication has indicated, erroneously, that there was a house in San Francisco called Fraser’s which imported flatware. However, there were flatware importers named Fraser’s, Inc. across the San Francisco Bay in Berkeley and in New York. In advertisements in the trade journal The Jewelers’ Circular-Keystone (JCK) in late 1952, Fraser’s, Inc. of Berkeley acknowledged itself as the importer and distributor of several European patterns of flatware without crediting the maker of any. These included Form, designed 1949-1952 by Wilhelm Wagenfeld and made by WMF of Germany; Milano, designed in 1956 by Gio Ponti and made by Arthur Krupp Italy; and others from Italy, Germany and Denmark, makers unknown. The ad for Milano was repeated in the magazine Interiors in December of that year.

In The New Yorker magazine in 1956, Gordon Fraser (of Fraser’s, New York) announced the introduction of the stainless steel flatware pattern Motion, “his (italics added) latest and finest achievement in WMF Cromargan” (Figure 1). WMF is the German firm Württembergische Metallwarenfabrik [Württemberg Metal Wares Factory], and Cromargan is the registered name for this company’s stainless steel. In advertisements placed by prominent department stores in major American newspapers from the 1960s into the 1990s flatware and hollowware manufactured by WMF were attributed to Fraser, WMF Fraser and William Fraser.

Until recent years, on the Web site of the largest American china-silverware-glassware replacement service, the manufacturer of all WMF flatware patterns (stainless, silver-plate and solid silver) was listed as Fraser, William Silver. Patterns by Arthur Krupp Italy are still listed as Fraser Krupp, Arthur Krupp Flatware or Sambonet. The pattern identification book Stainless Flatware Guide, published in 1998 by that replacement service, organizes all flatware patterns made by WMF under the name of Fraser (William) and those made by Arthur Krupp Italy under the name of either Fraser Krupp or Sambonet (Italy).

Fig. 1. Advertisement in The New Yorker magazine, March 10, 1956, by Fraser’s of New York for Motion flatware, designed 1953-1955 by Wilhelm Wagenfeld (1900-1990) and manufactured for Fraser’s by WMF of Germany.
So who/what were Gordon Fraser, Fraser’s, WMF Fraser’s and William Fraser? And what was the connection, if any, between Fraser’s, Inc. in Berkeley and Fraser’s, Inc. in New York? Researching these questions turned up some fascinating answers, as well as surprising sidelights far removed from the world of dining implements. Let us begin our story in Berkeley. In 1947 Gordon Freeman Fraser (1914-2005) (with his brother Robert Douglas Fraser [1920-2000] as a silent partner) opened a small shop selling contemporary housewares called Fraser’s at 2491 Telegraph Avenue (near Dwight Way). The scope of the operation expanded to include an importing and wholesaling division, Fraser’s, Inc. (see later discussion), and within a few years business had increased to the point where the store had taken over three little shops next door. In 1952 the business moved to larger quarters at 2403 Telegraph Avenue (corner of Channing Way). The Berkeley telephone directory for 1954 listed three separate numbers under Fraser’s: a retail store at Telegraph and Channing Way, a wholesale office at 2409 Telegraph, and a wholesale warehouse at 3311 Adeline.

In 1952 another import house opened in Berkeley, this one at 2033 University Avenue. Named W. J. Milligan Imports, it imported and retailed “Scandinavian furniture, dinnerware, glassware, stainless steel, [and] ceramics,” as well as merchandise from other countries. In 1954 the owner, William John Milligan (1924-2004), bought out the Fraser’s retail store, closing his business on University Avenue and moving to the corner of Telegraph and Channing Way, where he continued business under the Fraser’s name (Figure 2). According to Milligan’s widow, Mrs. Florrie Milligan, at some point the Fraser brothers had


3. Ibid., vol. 123, no. 2 (November 1952), 167.

4. Ibid., vol. 123, no. 1 (October 1952), 178.


7. Cromargan was registered by WMF in 1930 as its brand of a special chrome-nickel steel (V2A) developed by Krupp Germany in 1912 and then licensed for use by WMF (150 Years of WMF, 1855-2003 (Geislingen, Germany: WMF Aktiengesellschaft, 2003), 5, 23, 35, 86.


13. For Fraser (William): ibid., 117-137; for Fraser Krupp: ibid., 137-138; for Sambonet: ibid., 494-498. Arthur Krupp Italy and Sambonet are now both subsidiaries of the Paderno Group Italy.

14. Some of the information in this paragraph comes from Gordon Freeman Fraser’s CV (see note 23) and some from Todd Oppenheimer, “Fraser’s—Telegraph institution closing soon,” The Daily Californian [the UC Berkeley campus newspaper], November 22, 1978.


16. William Milligan was born in Mexico but was reared in Denmark before immigrating to Canada and then to the United States. He graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in business. After marrying in 1949, he and his wife Florrie moved to Denmark, where Mr. Milligan was employed in the oil business. Mrs. Milligan was not happy there and eventually returned to Berkeley before her husband did. To accommodate a Danish friend of Mr. Milligan’s who needed space for goods she was importing from Denmark, Mrs. Milligan opened the import house on University Avenue in her husband’s name—without asking his permission. He did not find out about this until he returned from Denmark but agreed to continue the operation. Although he had developed an appreciation for good contemporary design in his youth in Denmark, Mr. Milligan had never contemplated importing and selling contemporary furnishings until his wife’s actions (Mrs. Florrie Milligan: telephone interview with William Hood October 11, 2006).
split their ownership, Gordon taking control of the import and wholesale division and Robert the retail, and it was Robert who had put the retail Fraser’s up for sale. The import/wholesale business had not been on the market.¹⁷

As it had under the Frasers, under Milligan’s management the store enjoyed an excellent reputation in the region for the quality and range of its merchandise in the contemporary style. Items offered varied from stainless steel house wares and tableware by WMF and by Cohr of Denmark to hand wrought silverware by California silversmiths Porter Blanchard (1886 -1973) and Allan Adler (1916 -2003) and furniture designed by architect Charles Eames (1907-1978) and his designer wife Ray (1912 -1988). The firm’s 1958 Christmas catalogue boasted: “Fraser’s selection of stainless steel flatware [is] rated by experts as the most comprehensive, the most famous on the entire West Coast.”¹⁸

Business was quite good initially but began to slip in the late sixties/early seventies, possibly because modern design began to go out of fashion. Other likely factors were physical deterioration of the Telegraph Avenue neighborhood and political and social unrest at nearby University of California (UC), the store’s show windows being repeatedly trashed due to student demonstrations that turned violent.¹⁹ After one last big Christmas holiday sale in 1978, Fraser’s closed in January 1979.²⁰

Let us now return to the brothers Fraser. They were two of the three offspring of Lovett Kenzie Fraser (1880-1969), a native Californian who was for many years the public prosecutor in Albany, California, following which he practiced law in Oakland; and of Birdie Freeman Fraser (1878-1969), who was born in Minnesota and was a teacher and housewife.²¹

Virtually nothing is known of the first-born, Lovett Kenzie Fraser Jr. (1910 -1957). The third child, Robert Douglas Fraser, was born in Oakland on April 9, 1920. He became successively an army aviation flight instructor during World War II, a lawyer, small-business owner (Fraser’s of Berkeley), banker, major real estate developer and film producer. According to his candidly and colorfully written obituary,²² Robert Douglas won $20,000 in a poker game while working for Pan American Airways and later used this money to put himself through law school at UC, Berkeley. Classmates recalled his selling parking spaces during home football games in parking lots he did not own.

Again according to his obituary, in the mid-fifties Robert Douglas and a partner bought out a failing local savings bank for only $4,000 and began to specialize in making lucrative high-interest construction loans. Profits from sale of the bank allowed him to build El Cerrito Plaza, one of the Bay area’s first big shopping malls. He went on to construct the massive San Francisco Fontana Twin Towers, embroiled in controversy because of their height, and to engage in large real estate development projects in Hawaii and in the South Pacific. He participated in a yacht race from Los Angeles to Tahiti in 1956 and

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Fig. 2. Fraser’s retail store, corner Telegraph Avenue and Channing Way, Berkeley, circa 1978. Photo by Betty Marvin. Courtesy of the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association (BAHA).
even lived for a time in the fifties in Tahiti, where he produced several movies. His documentary on the artist Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) titled Rebe in Paradise was nominated for an Academy Award in the 33rd Annual Academy Awards (1960).

Robert Douglas Fraser died after a long illness at his Sonoma County home in Penngrove, CA on August 5, 2000. As far as is known, he had no professional or commercial connection with flatware except during his brief ownership of Fraser's of Berkeley.

The second son of Lovett and Birdeean Fraser, Gordon Freeman Fraser, was born in San Francisco on September 28, 1914. He studied German in Berlin and Munich in the early 1930s and later attended Modesto (CA) Junior College. He graduated from UC Berkeley in June 1937 with a degree in finance (Figure 3). He re-entered UC Berkeley that fall to study secondary education, graduating in the spring of 1939 and, according to his curriculum vitae (CV), having achieved "Lifetime Secondary Teaching Credentials" that permitted him to teach in high schools and junior colleges in California. He taught before and after World War II but during the war years was employed at the Richmond (CA) Shipyards in the capacity of a ship's electrician and later as assistant to the general manager. In 1945-1946 he worked in the military prison system on Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay, where he "became a defender of marines in court cases." Sources indicate that it was Gordon Fraser's idea to open the retail store. He perceived there was a need for modern furnishings for the modern houses that were being built, especially in California. "Young architects were beginning to design a simpler kind of home, but there was nothing on the market to put inside them. This was during the time when people still had tassels on their lampshades and beads on their handbags." Striving to emphasize form over decoration, the store set about buying American household objects as "blanks" before they were decorated. In this effort it was joined by other retailers in order to gain purchasing clout. In 1948 Gordon Fraser traveled to the trade show in Hanover, Germany, and made contacts with various manufacturers. During the next few years he made several more trips abroad to extend his contacts and to establish himself as a distributor of the modernist wares that were starting to come out of Europe. "New products were developed for the American market—flatware, hollowware, china and glass." A brief item in the December

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17. Ibid.
18. A copy of this catalogue is in the personal collection of Anthony Bruce.
21. Some of this information is included in Gordon Freeman Fraser's CV (see note 23), some comes from census records of 1920 and 1930 and some from the California birth and death indexes. It is interesting that, in his CV, Gordon makes no mention of his brother Robert Douglas.
23. Gordon Freeman Fraser's CV (in German), n.p., was kindly supplied to us by Heribert Klaucke, a representative of the Verein für Gesundheit und Persönlichkeitsentfaltung (VGF) (see later discussion in text) and former publisher of many of Fraser's writings. When this document was written (or finished) is not stated, but it had to have been between 2000, the last dated entry, and 2005, the year of Fraser's death.
24. Ibid. This claim seems dubious, since Fraser had no training that would have qualified him to fill such a role. There are other statements in Fraser's CV that seem self-serving and are doubtful if not clearly inaccurate.
25. Comments of the Fraser's store manager, a Mrs. McKinnon, quoted in Todd Oppenheimer, op. cit.
26. CV.
1952 issue of JCK announcing personnel appointments at Fraser’s, Inc. and Fraser’s of Berkeley went on to say that the importing and wholesale division was now represented in ten mid-western states by a firm in Chicago’s Merchandise Mart, where the company’s “lines of modern china, glass, stainless steel, and silver-plated flatware” were on display.  

His CV indicates that sometime between 1948 and 1953 Gordon Fraser extended his import and wholesale business to New York, while maintaining a branch in Berkeley. A telephone listing for Fraser’s, Inc. first appeared in the Manhattan White Pages in 1953-1954. The address was 53 W. 53rd Street. In 1955-1956 the address changed to 225 Fifth Avenue. From 1956-1957 through 1967-1968 the address was 236 Fifth Avenue, which is at 27th Street, a traditional location for tabletop and giftware wholesalers. The dates given by Fraser for establishing his business in New York and the use of the name Fraser’s, Inc. in the telephone directory of 1953-1954 notwithstanding, a certificate of incorporation for Fraser’s, Inc. at 225 Fifth Avenue was not filed with the New York Secretary of State until July 7, 1955 (see Figure 4). The application was signed by three directors; Gordon Fraser’s name did not appear. However, “Gordon F. Fraser” signed on November 23, 1955, an amendment to the certificate of incorporation that was filed November 25, 1955, certifying himself to be the holder of all the outstanding shares of stock of Fraser’s, Inc.

By 1958 the Fraser’s wholesale business had expanded to the point where it had salesmen working in all forty-eight states (Alaska and Hawaii had not yet achieved statehood). Imports included flatware patterns made by Krupp Italy such as Gio Ponti’s 1951 Ponti (Figures 5, 5a) and 1956 Domus (Figures 6, 6a), as well as others by C. Hugo Pott of Germany. Whether or not the arrangements with these companies were exclusive and exactly how long they continued has not been determined. As noted by Charles Venable, Fraser’s was also an importer of several important lines of German porcelain.

In 1954 WMF bought 49% of the shares of Fraser’s, Inc., Fraser retaining the other 51%. In 1959 he sold the rest of the Fraser’s shares to WMF, in a filing on January 5, 1967, an amendment to the original certificate of incorporation changed the name of Fraser’s, Inc. to WMF Fraser’s, Inc., which then on December 18, 1968, was merged into WMF of America, Inc. This last had been formed from two entities identified in a WMF organizational chart as American holding.

![Diagram](image-url)
Figs. 5, 5a. Ponti flatware, designed 1951 by Gio Ponti (1891-1979) and manufactured by Arthur Krupp Italy for Fraser’s. Left-to-right: table fork, 7 3/8 in.; table knife, 7 3/8 in.; soup spoon, 7 in.; teaspoon, 5 7/8 in. The detail shows the marks on the stem reverse of the fork. All illustrated flatware is in the collection of William Hood, and all flatware photography is by Thomas R. DeBrock.

Figs. 6, 6a. Domus flatware, designed 1956 by Gio Ponti and manufactured by Arthur Krupp Italy for Fraser’s. Left-to-right: table fork, 8 1/2 in.; table knife, 8 5/8 in.; teaspoon, 6 5/8 in. The detail shows the marks on the stem reverse of the fork.
Figs. 7, 7a. Line flatware, designed 1953 by Kurt Mayer (1894-1981) and manufactured by WMF for Fraser’s. Left-to-right: salad/dessert fork, 6 1/2 in.; table fork, 7 9/16 in.; table knife, 8 3/8 in.; dessert/soup spoon, 7 1/4 in.; teaspoon, 6 1/8 in. The detail shows the marks on the stem reverse of the table fork. None of the Line pieces we have observed has been marked with "Fraser’s," but boxes holding five-piece place settings are marked "WMF / FRASER’S® / STAINLESS."

Figs. 8, 8a. Form flatware, designed 1941-1942 and 1949-1952 by Wilhelm Wagenfeld and manufactured by WMF for Fraser’s. Left-to-right: salad/dessert fork, 6 3/4 in.; table fork, 7 7/16 in.; table knife, 8 5/16 in.; dessert/soup spoon 7 1/4 in. The detail shows the marks on the blade and handle reverse.
companies (Figure 4). As late as 1986, in a brochure titled "WMF Fraser's" published by WMF of America, Inc., the company indicated that it was still distributing its many products in the United States under multiple trade names, including stainless steel hollowware and flatware under the name of "Fraser's".

After selling out to WMF, Gordon Fraser continued as an advisor, working on a film about the company and being involved in designs for flatware. Throughout his association with WMF he had a significant impact on the firm’s flatware production. Although WMF had been using Krupp’s V2A stainless steel since 1927—three years before the name Cromargan was registered, the company had not fully exploited the commercial potential of the metal. It had been incorporated into knife blades and turned into kitchen wares but had been little used for dining implements. WMF’s flatware patterns had been predominantly silver-plated, with a lesser percentage in solid silver. The patterns had also been very traditional in design, being created by the very conservative artistic director Kurt Mayer (1894-1981). In the 1950s, Gordon Fraser placed orders with WMF for flatware patterns in stainless steel and of contemporary styling for sale in America. These proved to be quite successful, and many, such as the 3800 Line (Figures 7, 7a), were also marketed by the company in Germany and other European countries (see the table). Eventually sales of WMF’s stainless flatware outstripped those of its silver-plated and solid silver.

The designer Wilhelm Wagenfeld (1900-1990), perhaps best known for his metal work with the Weimar Bauhaus 1923-1925 and glassware for Jenaer Schott and Genossen and others later, began to design for WMF in 1949. However, early on few of his designs were put into production because they were too avant-garde or required expensive retooling that the company could not afford. Work on Wagenfeld’s first flatware design—the 3600 Form (Figures 8, 8a), which had been started in 1941-1942, was resumed in 1949 and finished in 1952. Form was intended to be produced in silver-plate. But when Fraser saw it—still not fully developed and locked away in a cabinet, he said “This is the design for America” and placed a large order for it in stainless steel. Even Wagenfeld was surprised by how well this turned out. In a letter to Fraser dated April 22, 1952, Wagenfeld wrote: “I have seen the finished [Form] flatware executed in steel... and am as delighted as if it were not my work. Its beauty and easy-handling make me forget all the shortcomings that had so preoccupied me before. I must say that you are right; the execution in steel is so much better than the silver-plated version, which represents only a substitute, having a place in time when we were not familiar with [the merits of] stainless steel.”

At Fraser’s request, WMF added to its flatware lines certain forms popular in America but unknown in Germany. Fraser even contributed directly to the design of several flatware patterns. One was 4100 Laurel (Figures 9, 9a), Fraser collaborating with Mayer and with Heinz Pfeiffer, another staff designer. Laurel was offered with two forms of the knife handle—straight and curved; Fraser is said to have been responsible for the curved model. In early 1955, Fraser wrote asking for enlargement of the teaspoon of 4200 Motion (Figures 10, 10a), and later that year visited Wagenfeld’s studio to make


38. This time lapse reflected how meticulously Wagenfeld analyzed every aspect of a flatware design. He evaluated the handles of silver prototypes by touch as well as by sight, then “sifting, smoothing, hammering and bending” as necessary. Thus he combined a sense of the beautiful with a handicraft solution for the perfected product (Altgeld-Peters, vol. 1, 61). As Wagenfeld explained to Fraser in a letter of January 14, 1952, he created the ideal bowl for the Form soup spoon by applying color on the inside of the prototype bowl and then simulated lip action as if eating. Where the color was untouched, the bowl was too deep, and where the color was wiped away the bowl was too shallow (ibid., 63). The resulting bowl was almost round and very flat.


suggestions for alterations in the knife blade.\textsuperscript{45} Well-pleased with the final result, Fraser wrote from New York to Wagenfeld on March 6, 1956: "Your Motion flatware has arrived, and this week we ran an introductory ad in one of the leading journals here—The New Yorker [see Figure 1]. I think this flatware is an example of your creativity and combines utility and beauty harmoniously."\textsuperscript{46} With Kurt Mayer, Fraser designed the 4700 Stuart pattern (introduced 1957), which was created exclusively for the American market.\textsuperscript{47}

Fraser's, Inc. of Berkeley and New York were the exclusive importers and distributors of WMF flatware and hollowware in the United States from the early 1950s, and Gordon Fraser can be credited with opening up the American market to the German flatware industry, most especially WMF. And, in accordance with German business tradition, WMF continued to make use of Fraser's good name and reputation long after their ties were separated.\textsuperscript{48} Yet, curiously, an official history of WMF published by the company in 2003 makes no mention of Gordon Fraser, Fraser's, Inc. or even WMF Fraser's.\textsuperscript{49}

In 1960 Gordon Fraser married Margot Immoor, a native of Bremen, Germany, who had immigrated to Canada.\textsuperscript{50} They met in Germany through mutual friends when she was on vacation and he was there on business. For the first two years of their marriage, they lived in Geislingen, home of WMF, during which time not only Gordon but also Mrs. Fraser influenced the design of several flatware patterns. On an extensive visit to Germany/Europe with Gordon in 1966, Mrs. Fraser discovered that wearing
Birkenstock sandals relieved her chronically aching feet. Gordon assisted her in establishing the American distributorship for Birkenstock, and she went on to be very successful in this business.\textsuperscript{51} The couple divorced in 1970.

Gordon Fraser had a most unexpected second career later in his life. A document of 1982, written in the third person but believed to have been written by Fraser himself, says that as early as the age of 49 (i.e., in 1963 or 1964) he became aware that he possessed supernatural powers.\textsuperscript{52} These allowed him to gain „access to all fundamental knowledge“ and to sense metaphysical vibrations transmitted by human brains that were indicators of intelligence and properties of character, which Fraser perceived as representing the make-up of the human soul. The former Mrs. Fraser recalls that in the mid-1960s Gordon confided he was being directed by voices. She urged him to seek psychiatric consultation, but he refused. However, she was able to arrange for him to attend a dinner party at which a psychiatrist was also a guest. From his conversation with Fraser, the psychiatrist concluded that Gordon was likely schizophrenic. Earlier Gordon had been little interested in religion, but in the late sixties he became more interested and began to express increasingly esoteric religious views.\textsuperscript{53}

In an entry in his CV dated 1963-1971, Fraser states: „For personal reasons I developed a strong interest in health matters.\textsuperscript{54}“ This prompted him to visit various hospitals and

41. Heinz Scheiffele telephone interview.
42. Although Fraser’s interest was limited to stainless steel flatware, some of these patterns were later marketed in Europe and America in silver plate or solid silver.
43. Initially Fraser was not given any credit for his contribution to Laurel, but this was changed after Fraser contacted the WMF legal department (Heinz Scheiffele, op. cit.).
44. Altgeld-Peters, vol. I, 66. Wagenfeld complained that the design infringed on Motiv. Fraser admitted this but said that additional ideas had come from Gio Ponti and himself. Probably through Fraser’s knowledge, the curved knife handle was influenced by the handle of Tofte Silversmiths’ sterling Contour, designed in 1950 by Robert J. King (b. 1917) and John Van Koert (1912-1998). For pictures and discussion of this pattern see Jewel Stern, Modernism in American Silver: 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Design, eds. Kevin W. Tucker and Charles L. Venable (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Dallas Museum of Art, 2006), 197-199, 375 (entry 256).
47. Ibid, 408 (footnote).
49. 150 Years of WMF: 1853-2003.
52. This document appears as the last (unnumbered) page in Gordon Freeman Fraser’s pamphlet Ein Sicherer Weg zur Optimalen Gesundheit (A Sure Fire Way to Optimal Health) Munich: SGP, 1982).
53. Mrs. Margot Fraser telephone interview.
54. CV. In a published interview with Gordon Fraser in 1992, it was stated that at one time he had been „gravely ill“ and that his condition worsened with treatment (Rosel Fennel, “Portrait of Gordon Freeman Fraser—nutritionist and advisor in life matters,” Süddeutsche Zeitung, March 5, 1992). In her telephone interview, the former Mrs. Fraser said that for many years Gordon was convinced he had a liver disorder. But, although he may have had an abnormal liver function blood test, he never had a clinically significant hepatic problem.
pharmaceutical manufacturers, both in the United States and in Europe. These explorations were primarily concerned with alternative medical therapies (naturopathy, homeopathy, herbal medicine, fasting, etc.). Fraser wrote articles for *Let’s Live*, an American health and preventive medicine magazine, and lectured on behalf of the National Health Foundation, a group promoting health-freedom issues.

In 1971 he traveled again to Europe—this time never to return to the U.S.—in response to an “urge to begin a new phase in his life,” to fulfill what he perceived as an “important vocation” in Europe. He first traveled to Italy to research the natural healing powers of the mud baths on the island of Ischia (off the coast of Italy near Naples). He then toured and lectured throughout Europe, especially in Germany. In 1982 he co-founded and became a board member of an organization known as Studienkurs für Gesundheit und Persönlichkeitsentfaltung [Study Circle for Health and Self-Development] (SGP), based first in Munich, then in Arnsberg and finally in Meschede, in the state of Nordrhein-Westfalen.

This group wooed new members through distribution of leaflets in health food stores and by organizing group seminars at resort hotels in attractive places such as Ischia. At his lectures and seminars, Fraser presented himself as a nutrition expert and, blessed with deceptively youthful good looks (Figure 11) and friendly smooth manners, he found a receptive audience.

Fraser promoted a strict lacto-vegetarian diet (plus numerous supplements), emphasizing incorporation of sour-milk products, certain cheeses, olive and other vegetable oils, fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts and seeds.

To Fraser, proper nutrition was as important in nourishing the soul as it was the physical body. And his ostensibly health-based organization was, in fact, a cult founded on his esoteric religious views. Central to these was that salvation is achieved by full development of the soul, which requires passing through nine stages until perfection is achieved. The fifth stage of development is spent on earth, confronting and mastering 1500-1700 challenges on a daily basis.

Fraser conceived the universe as a complicated network of laws predating the creation of God, which took place 53 billion years ago. God is to be understood as a combination of an active male part (Godfather) and a passive female part (the Holy Ghost). Souls reaching developmental perfection (the first being that of Jesus Christ) unite with God to form the Holy Trinity and then actively contribute to the ultimate goal of guaranteeing perpetual existence of the universe. One and a quarter million years ago God created only 23 billion souls; it follows that not all persons have souls. Souls can move from one body to another. Not in his writings but reportedly taught by him was the concept that soul-
less individuals have no hope of salvation and serve only in the trials for those with souls. 

Illness is seen as a consequence of wrong decisions (such as improper diet) and incorrect behavior, which lead to a weakening of the body’s defenses and functions. Specific health problems have specific symbolic significance: heart and heart rhythm problems are caused by lack of love and friendships, allergies are the result of obstinate behavior, etc. Immunity against disease is a gained “talent” on which the soul has to work constantly.

All these odd ideas were cleverly packaged with sound advice for the improvement of manners, habits and physical appearance. Fraser stressed the importance of working to one’s full potential. In his view, happiness and love are consequences of correct behavior, and constant self-observation and self-criticism are necessary. This daily self-assessment puts considerable strain on believers.

In 1998 the SVG’s name was changed to Verein für Gesundheit und Persönlichkeitsentfaltung [Society for Health and Self-Development] (VGP). In 2000 Fraser relinquished his seat on the board, but continued as an advisor to and lecturer for the Verein. He was succeeded as leader of the organization by Christoph Pesendorfer. At last report, it was said that under the new leadership the VGP was moving away from Fraser’s religious teachings, concentrating on his recommended health regimen.

For many years Gordon Freeman Fraser had spent at least part of the year in the city of Barolo, on Ischia, and the rest of the time mainly in Germany. His last years were spent in the Munich area, where he died of pneumonia on October 18, 2005, at the age of 91.

And what of the mysterious William Fraser? We have found no evidence that there was ever any individual by this name connected with WMF, Fraser’s, Inc. of Berkeley, Fraser’s, Inc. of New York, WMF Fraser’s, Inc., or WMF of America, Inc.; nor was there ever any firm by this name. It appears that some firm or individual who was unfamiliar with what WMF stood for misinterpreted “WMF Fraser” as representing “William Fraser,” and the name stuck. Such name corruptions in the history of flatware are not unknown; Gorham Manufacturing Company’s Curio pattern was corrupted into Cairo in the nineteenth century, and the name stuck into the twenty-first. What we began as an attempt to clarify confusion in the names of importers/distributors and manufacturers of certain European flatware turned into an exposé of unexpected and even surprising facts about the principals involved. An old proverb says a scorpion lurks under every stone, but sometimes it’s only a stinging revelation.

Summary: This is an investigative report into the life and career of the American entrepreneur Gordon Freeman Fraser (1914-2005), who had a profound influence on the acceptance of contemporary-style stainless steel flatware in the United States. The report relies heavily on telephone interviews with four individuals having personal knowledge of the principals involved and on previously untranslated German-language sources. Beginning in 1947 as a retailer/importer in Berkeley, California, Fraser expanded to New York, where he established himself as a major importer of contemporary housewares from Europe, most particularly stainless steel flatware from Württembergische Metallwarenfabrik (WMF) of Geislingen, Germany. Fraser directly influenced the designs and output of WMF flatware. He had exclusive rights to the importation of WMF products for a number of years, and his name was well known within the flatware industry.

63. CV.
64. Dr. Hansjörg Hemminger: e-mail to Dorothea Burstyn, September 27, 2006. The organization is now called Verein für Gesundheit und Lebensfreude (Society for health and joy of life).
65. http://replacements.com/mfp3hist/fraser.htm. As late as 2008, the WMF company was labeled as Fraser (William) Silver.
years and played a key role in the eventual eclipse of silver and silver-plated flatware by stainless steel. The import mark "WMF Fraser's," which was continued even after Fraser sold out to WMF, was apparently misinterpreted as representing "William Fraser," to whom many American dealers erroneously attributed WMF products. After his retirement, Gordon Fraser moved to Europe, where, apparently afflicted with mental illness, he spent his declining years involved in a religious cult masquerading as a society promoting good health.

William P. Hood Jr., M.D., is a retired cardiologist and former university professor who has collected and studied flatware for twenty-five years. He is the principal author, with Roslyn Berlin and Edward Wawrynek, of Tiffany Silver Flatware, 1845-1905: When Dining Was an Art (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 2000; reprinted 2003), and has authored/coauthored more than fifty articles on silverware in the American publications The Magazine Antiques and Silver Magazine.

Dorothea Burstyn, Dr. phil., is an avid silver collector for more than 40 years and has published widely on the subject of silverware. She is responsible for translating all German-language publications, most of which have not been previously translated.

Many of the facts in this article were uncovered by researcher Kay O. Freeman of Philadelphia, for whose efforts we are exceedingly grateful.

Thanks are also due for the assistance provided by Anthony Bruce, Executive Director of the Berkeley (California) Architectural Heritage Association, and Jason Price and staff at Replacements, Ltd., Greensboro, North Carolina. And we are especially grateful to Mrs. William (Florrie) Milligan for sharing information about her late husband and to the former Mrs. Gordon (Margot) Fraser, Heribert Klaufe of the VGP and Heinz Scheiffele of WMF for sharing personal knowledge about Gordon Fraser.
Table: WMF flatware patterns marketed in stainless steel in the USA and Germany, 1952-1960*

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<tr>
<th>Model No.</th>
<th>Year Introduced**</th>
<th>Name in USA</th>
<th>Name in Germany</th>
<th>Reference††</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3600</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td><em>Form</em></td>
<td><em>Form</em></td>
<td>620-628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3800</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td><em>Line</em></td>
<td><em>Berlin</em></td>
<td>395-396</td>
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<tr>
<td>3900</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td><em>Serena</em></td>
<td><em>Oslo</em></td>
<td>397-398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4000</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td><em>Congress</em></td>
<td><em>Wien</em></td>
<td>403-404</td>
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<tr>
<td>4100</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td><em>Laurel</em>**</td>
<td><em>Stockholm</em></td>
<td>399-402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4200</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td><em>Motion</em></td>
<td><em>Atlanta</em>†</td>
<td>629-632</td>
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<tr>
<td>4800</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td><em>Continental</em></td>
<td><em>Hamburg</em></td>
<td>413-414</td>
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<tr>
<td>4900</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td><em>Meadow Brook</em></td>
<td><em>München</em></td>
<td>419-420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5200</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td><em>Pilgrim</em></td>
<td><em>Boston,</em> later <em>Saturn</em></td>
<td>417-418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5300</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td><em>Epicure</em></td>
<td><em>Washington,</em> also <em>Jupiter</em></td>
<td>425-426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*As can be seen from the table, most WMF flatware patterns in this period were named for cities, the majority of which were German or European, but a few were American. For unclear reasons, when the name used in Germany was an American city, the name chosen for marketing the pattern in the USA was something else.


† This list is not necessarily complete. Some of the patterns were marketed in Germany also in dinnware or solid silver.

‡ These are the dates when the patterns were introduced in Germany. Some were introduced earlier in the USA as an experiment.

***This pattern is still active and is now called Stockholm in both the United States and Germany.