

Two Daughters on a boat: an English piece with a Capital History

By Dorothea Burstyn and William Erik Voss

“The Gift of Miss Mariah Clinton to Geo Ann Clinton Oneale”

“The Gift of Miss Maria Clinton to Georgiana Clinton Oneale”

These interesting inscriptions made me buy this English mid-eighteenth century little pap boat (Fig.1) despite its obvious shortcoming of apparently having no master mark and the nagging question if the handle might have been added later. While most pap boats do not have handles and are mostly equipped with a flat and pointed extension to the rim to make them easier to hold, handled examples do however exist.¹ Contemporary handles are either in the form of a long straight stem or a vertical loop of a somewhat flat metal strip. Since the form of the



¹ Harold Newman: An Illustrated Dictionary of Silverware, Thames & Hudson, London 1987, entry "pap-boat". In this connection also see: Mary Spaulding and Penny Welch: Nurturing Yesterday's Child, Toronto 1994 by Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc. 92 ff.

handle seems correct and the patina of the handle and body of the pap boat in question match, it can safely be assumed that the handle is not a later addition. Pap boats were utilitarian items used for feeding babies or invalids with pap – a mixture of bread cooked in milk, either in a denser consistency of porridge or more liquid – hence the spouted end. The form surfaced in the first quarter of the eighteenth century in England and America. Most pap boats are unadorned and made out of thinly rolled silver sheets; earlier pap boats do not even have applied mounts of later examples to strengthen the flimsy silver edges. Pap boats were also used in Catholic, Anglican, Episcopalian and Church of England infant baptismal ceremonies² and they were often given as christening presents.

Since the inscriptions neither contain a place nor date, I wondered if the real persons behind these names could ever be identified. I decided to upload photos of the pap boat to one of the forums in the SMPub Silver Salon (www.smpub.com), where the moderator WEV (William Erik Voss) is known for doing excellent work on establishing definite lists of American silversmiths and genealogical research. This has lead to a partnership writing this article. What follows is based on information gathered from various genealogical and historical database sources.³

We believe the donor of this pap boat was Maria Clinton (1785 – 1829), daughter of Vice President George Clinton and his wife Sarah Cornelia (Tappen) Clinton. Clinton, serving under President James Madison as he had under John Adams, arrived at Washington DC in time for the opening of the congressional session on November 4, 1811, for what would be his last term in office. He took up lodgings at the Franklin House, a favorite meeting place for politicians of all stripes. The tavern and boarding house, located at the northeast corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 21st Street, was run by William and Rhoda

² Email Dr. Peter Kaellgren, curator for Western Art, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Sept.10th, 2007. Since the Dr. Drake collection of pediatric artifacts has recently been transferred from the Medical Museum in Toronto to the ROM, the ROM has a very representative group of pap boats in its collection.

³ <http://www.familysearch.org>; <http://worldconnect.genealogy.rootsweb.com>

O'Neale.⁴ In a town where, then as now, personal connections were as important as counted votes, the affable Irishman and his energetic wife were well-known and well-liked.

The Vice President took ill soon after his arrival and died after a lengthy illness in his bed at the Franklin House. Maria Clinton was at her father's bedside during this painful time and witnesses described her grief over her father's death as heartbreaking. It is obvious that the O'Neales had been Clinton's principal caretakers. Maria promptly paid \$ 700 for the cost of boarding and also gave the O'Neales a breast pin containing a lock of Clinton's hair.⁵ The O'Neales named their fifth child, Georgiana Clinton Oneale, in memory of the Vice President. The gift of a pap boat by Maria Clinton would seem a further token of gratitude and friendship. Given the masses of English silver imported to America in the eighteenth century, the pap boat may have even been a family heirloom. The exact birth date of the recipient– Georgiana Clinton Oneale (O'Neale) – is not known, but it must have been a little before or very soon after Clinton's death on April 20th 1812, because the last O'Neale's child, John, was born a bare nine months later, on December 25th of the same year. The gift itself was given sometime before September 22, 1812, the date of Maria's marriage to Stephen David Beekman.

The O'Neales had six children⁶ all of whom – except for their eldest daughter – lived predictable, maybe even happy lives. Georgiana was married on July 23, 1829 to Rev. French Strothers Evans and died, only 26 years old, on March 18, 1838. Her husband, on the

4. Wilhelmus Bogart Bryan: *A History of the National Capital From Its Foundation Through the Period of the Adoption of the Organic Act, 1790-1878*; New York, Macmillan, 1916

5. John F. Marszalek: *The Petticoat Affair, Manners, Mutiny, and Sex in Andrew Jackson's White House*, The Free Press, New York, 1997, page 28

other hand, enjoyed a long life, dying in 1887 at age 86. He served many years as a Methodist minister in Baltimore (where he married several more times) and Washington DC. He was politically active in the tumultuous 1860s, giving speeches in which he described himself as “son of Virginia slave-holders and a political friend of Lincoln”.⁷ He also acted as guardian for Margaret Timberlake, the daughter of Georgiana Clinton O’Neale’s elder sister, Margaret (Peggy) O’Neale.⁸

Peggy O’Neale was a lively girl, blessed with extraordinary good looks and a “vivacious” temperament; she spoke French, had a fine singing voice and was known for her piano-playing. “She grew up amidst post-prandial political clashes and discussions of history, international battles, and arcane legislative tactics. Margaret observed the nation’s lawmakers at their best and at their worst, and the experience taught her that politicians were as flawed and fallible as anybody else. Far from home and family, these gents were easily charmed by the precocious and beautiful girl and did their best to spoil her rotten.

⁶ William O'Neale (b.1751, d.: Oct. 24, 1837) and his wife Rhoda (b.1771, d.: April 5, 1860) had six children:

1. Margret O'Neale, b. Dec. 3, 1799, d.: Aug.11, 1879 + John Timberlake (the purser)
+John Henry Eaton (the senator/ secretary of war) +Antonio Buchignani (the dancer)

2. William O'Neale, b.: 1803, d.: about 1828

3. Robert O'Neale, b.: 1803, d.: Sept.17, 1818

4. Mary B. O'Neale, b.: 1805 + Dr. Phillip Grymes Randolph

6. John H. R. O'Neale, b.: Dec. 25, 1812, d. Aug. 15, 1847 + Louisa Maria Virran

The O'Neales had been married in Trenton, NJ, May 12, 1799. Will O'Neale was originally a cooper. The couple arrived in Washington soon after their marriage and opened their first boarding house at what was then 20th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. After the war of 1812, O'Neale took several lots at 21st Street and built a new hotel and tavern. About 1823, the new Franklin House passed from Mr. O'Neale into the hands of Mr. John Gadsby, who ran it for seven years and then converted the building into spacious private dwellings, since known as Gadsby's Row. Mr. O'Neale, on vacating the Franklin House, went back to his original tavern on 20th Street, which he conducted to the day of his death in 1837. His widow continued the business until she died in 1860 at the age of ninety years.⁷ We are grateful to Kay O. Freeman for this info and other research she did in connection with this article.

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⁸Supreme Court abstract, Mr. Chief Justice Waite, dated October Term, 1881

9. J. Kingston Pierce: Andrew Jackson: The Petticoat Affair – Scandal in Jackson's White House, page 3 – www.historynet.com/magazines/american_history/3032691.html

'I was always a pet,' she later remarked."⁹ Even though she was married, she had an affair with rich, recently widowed and nine years her senior Senator John Henry Eaton. It was rumored that Peggy's husband, John Timberlake, – upon hearing of this affair – committed suicide, however the official cause of Timberlake's death is given as "pulmonary disease". The subsequent marriage of Peggy to Senator Eaton infuriated the "respectable women" of the capital. Second Lady Florinde Calhoun, the wife of Vice President John C. Calhoun led the anti-Peggy coalition. The only unmarried member of the Cabinet, Martin Van Buren, having been recently widowed, sided with the Eatons, and President Jackson was also sympathetic to Peggy and the Senator. The scandal – known as the Petticoat Affair - grew so vicious that several Cabinet members resigned, a fate finally also shared by Senator Eaton.¹⁰



Finding all these data left us a little breathless, but one enigma still remained. It seemed odd that the pap



boat was engraved on either side. (Fig. 2 and 3) The thought, that there had been maybe two Maria/Mariah's as donors and two Georgiana's as recipients, had to quickly be abandoned, as nothing

surfaced in the records. Studying the inscriptions, we found enough divergences to suppose that the engraving was done by two persons¹¹. The different f's are interesting – the version in "of" is the terminal form, the looped form in "Gift" is the medial and

⁹ J. Kingston Pierce: Andrew Jackson: The Petticoat Affair – Scandal in Jackson's White House, page 3 –www.historynet.com/magazines/american_history/3032691.html

¹⁰ John F. Marszalek: The Petticoat Affair, Manners, Sex and Mutiny in Andrew Jackson's White House, Free Press, 1997, page 160ff. Peggy Eaton died penniless, after marrying a young dance teacher, Antonio Buchignani, who relieved her of her money and left. (Page 232)

¹¹ Our thanks to Stuart Warter (swarter) on the SMPub forum for his observations of the engraving discrepancies.

correctly used as such in the second inscription. While the first inscription is much more consistent, the second inscription features lettering which bounces above and below the line and letters, which are somewhat erratically formed, spaced and sized. This would indicate another hand, or haste in getting the piece done again. Did the scribe read/hear the text as “George Ann Clinton Oneale” and proceeded, only to have Maria Clinton show up and cry: “No, no, no! Again and right this time; the post awaits!”? Or did it arrive in Washington and old Will O’Neale wondered aloud: “Did she think we had a boy? Let us set this right.”? I guess, we will never know.

In closing, let us say, that we wrote this article to show how a modest item can be brought “to life” with research and hope that our research journey will be an inspiration for other silver collectors. It may also serve as a warning for all those who continuously remove monograms and inscriptions to better the “resale value” of a piece of silver. So many erasures, so many – maybe interesting - stories lost!

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