

TREASURE SEARCH

Silver piece shines with history

BY NANCY AND FRANK BOOS
SPECIAL WRITERS

Dear Readers:
Circumstances have kept us away for a while and we're happy to be back. Thank you for your patience in our answering your letters. We will try to answer all inquiries that don't appear in the column, so please include an address and phone or fax number. Also, we need good quality pictures of your items and identifying marks on the bottoms and sides. If you can't photograph the marks, please draw them for us. Thanks again and good treasure searching to you.

Dear Nancy and Frank:
Could you please help us with this item? It's about 3-1/2 inches high and 6-1/2 inches long.

Bill and Jessie,
Farmington

Dear Bill and Jessie:
Sure can. You have a piece of American silver plate. Silversmithing had its greatest flowering in England, the country that had the greatest influence on silver producers around the world. The earliest pieces of English silver were made primarily for religious use as the metal was scarce and too costly for general consumption.

As silver supplies became more avail-

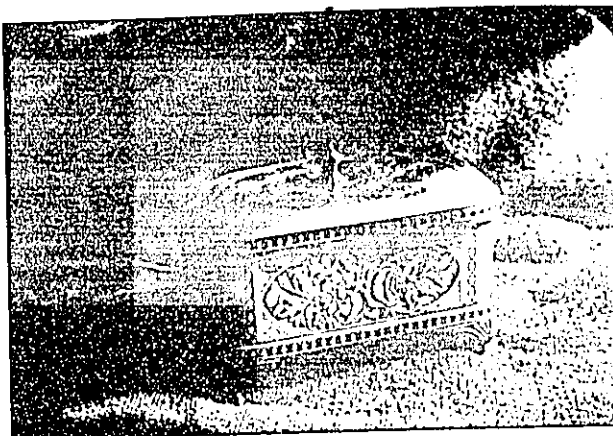
able and demand for silver items increased, commerce with foreign countries developed too. Silver guilds were established to keep records of who made silver, when, where and of what quality.

In 1335, it was decreed that each silversmith must stamp his wares with his own mark assigned by the king. In 1477, it was decreed that each piece made in London must be stamped with a leopard's head or crowned leopard's head. Other city marks soon followed. In 1479, a date letter was inaugurated to indicate the year of manufacture. All of these marks together are called "hallmarks."

American silver is more difficult to identify because no official hallmark system existed. Only through the efforts of many people have the trademarks and company names been compiled.

Your piece is a very lovely quadruple silver plated lady's dresser box. The quadruple plating would suggest the highest quality of plate and the design is intricate and charming.

Your piece is by John Tufts of Boston. He registered his trademark on Feb. 2, 1875, and started with the silver plating of soda fountain metal parts. (Soda fountains were very elaborate marble and silver plate affairs in those days.)



Shining example: This lady's dresser box bears an intricate, charming design.

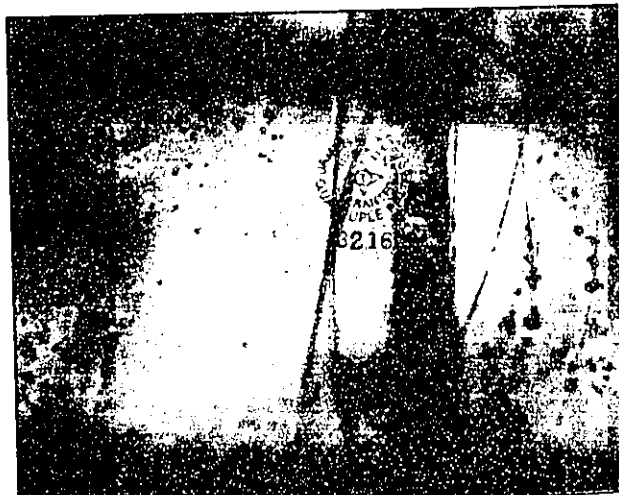
The business was incorporated in 1881 in Medford, Mass. Tufts consolidated in 1891 with other soda fountain companies and the business became known as the American Soda Fountain Company.

In 1895, Tufts retired to North Carolina, where he bought 5,000 acres in the sand hills and founded the resort town of Pinehurst. Tufts died in Pinehurst in 1902 and the company went out of business in 1915.

This would indicate that your piece was made between 1875 and 1891 when the consolidation and name change occurred. If your piece isn't worn,

repaired or damaged, we think it would be priced around \$200 in a retail store. If it were sterling, it could be priced around \$800. This is the kind of piece that makes a very nice heirloom for some young lady in the family.

Nancy and Frank Boos are with the Frank H. Boos Gallery. Do you have an item you would like to know about? Send in a good photo of it, along with its description and any known history to Treasure Search, The Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.



Special signature: The inscription on a silver piece tells a lot about the work.

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