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Coffee Pot

Tawny Chamberlain

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COLONIALISM AND THE AMERICAS
OBJECT ANALYSIS
IDES 521/651
TAWNY CHAMBERLAIN
DECEMBER 8, 2021



Artist: T. Chamberlain, 2021

INTRO

PLACE

TIME

PEOPLE + CULTURE

TOOLS + MATERIALS

DESIGN PROCESS + CHARACTERISTICS

ROLE WITHIN THE INTERIOR

EFFECTS OF COLONIALISM

ANALYSIS

REFERENCES

colonizer

BRITAIN

location

BOSTON, MA

date produced

1772

item type

COFFEE POT

maker

PAUL REVERE, JR

collection

MFA BOSTON

dimensions

12" x 9.25"

materials

SILVER, WOOD



Source: MFA Boston

Coffee and tea pots from this period were on pedestals. Why is this one standing on three feet?

Why did the colonies choose coffee over tea and what role, if any, did coffee play in American resistance to colonialism?

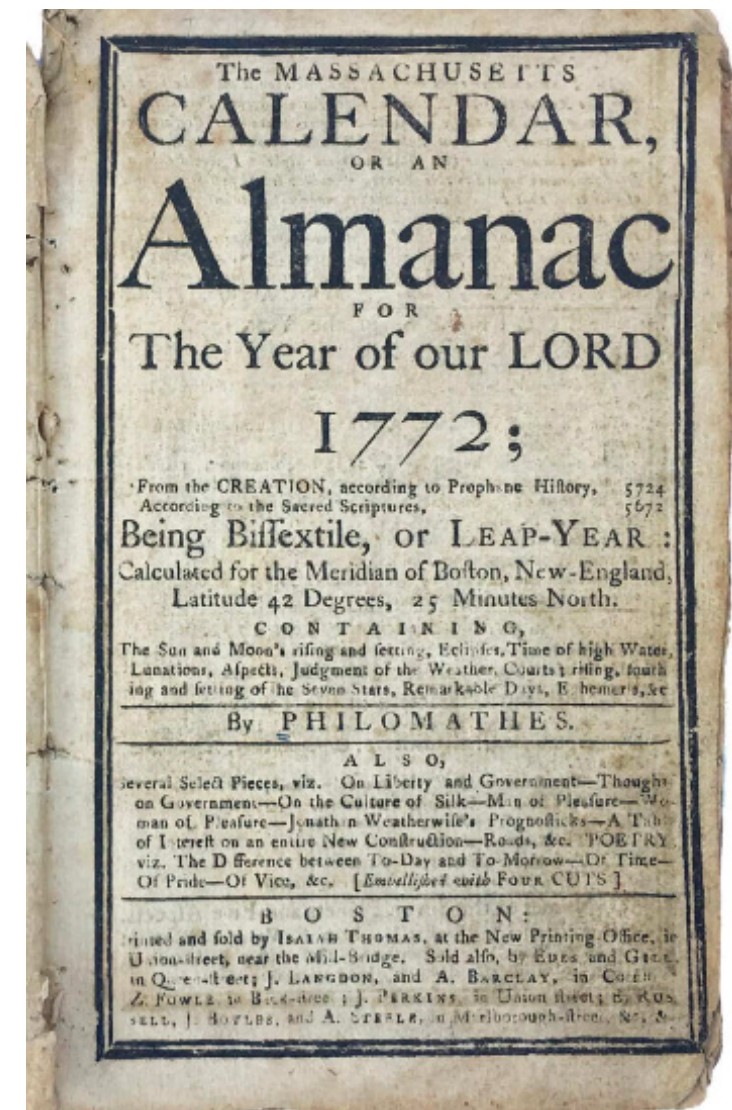
Colonial America - 1772



George III, 1762
Artist: Allan Ramsay

- Under the reign of George III (*pictured at left*), King of Great Britain
- Consisted of 13 colonies, all on the eastern seaboard:
 - New England: CT, MA, NH, RI
 - Middle: DE, NJ, NY, PA
 - Southern: GA, MD, NC, SC, VA
- Population ~2 million
- English Parliament controlling trade, taxing imports/exports

Reference: www.loc.gov



Source: bostonraremaps.com
Publisher: Isaiah Thomas

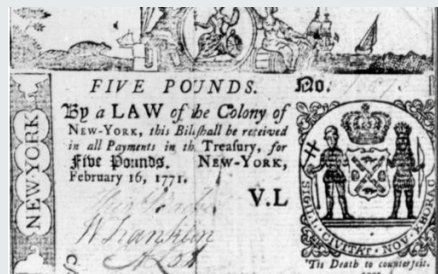
Boston - 1772

- In Providence of Massachusetts Bay
- Large merchant fleet, Boston Harbor = center of trade & commerce
- Site of Boston Massacre (1770) - Old South Meeting House held large, annual gatherings to commemorate the anniversary
- Home of local politician James Otis, who famously quipped, "taxation without representation is tyranny"
- Considered the "birthplace of the American Revolution"

Reference: historyofmassachusetts.org



Source: www.loc.gov



Source: www.ushistory.org

-Beginnings of Colonial Oppression
-Sugar Act
-Currency Act

-Nonimportation: Colonies Discourage British Imports
-Townshend Acts



Source: www.history.com

-Richard Derby Commissions His Coffee Pot
-Attack on the "Gaspee"



Source: RI Historical Society
Charles Brownell 1892

1764

1765

1767

1770

1772

1773 - 1776

-Boston Massacre



Source: MET Museum
Printer/Engraver: Paul Revere, Jr.

-Boston Tea Party (1773)
-Numerous Acts, Protests, & Battles, Revolutionary War
-America Declares Independence in 1776



Source: MET Museum
Waterman Lilly Ormsby, 1876

-Britain Further Angers Colonies & Organized Protest Begins
-Quartering Act
-Stamp Act



TIME



Paul Revere, Jr.
Source: Worcester Art Museum
Artist: Fevret de Saint-Mémin

General Silver Clientele

Although Paul Revere's shop made items for a wide variety of customers, coffee pots such as ours would have been affordable only to the wealthy. According to the Paul Revere House, a coffee pot would have sold for ~17 pounds in the 1760s (the equivalent of \$4,200 today). At that same time, a laborer averaged £30 annual salary and Paul Revere himself (*pictured above*) paid £16 for an entire year's rent on his home.

Coffee, tea, and chocolate were a revolution both abroad and in the colonies, giving rise to social mainstays such as afternoon tea and the coffeehouse. Coffeehouses in particular were powerful catalysts for the exchange of news and ideas (see "Effects on Colonialism" for further discussion). All three beverages were also consumed in the home, and fashionable society found it essential to serve their guests from the finest silver vessels they could buy (Wees, 2003).

Affluent patrons often did not want to wait a year to import their silver from Europe, nor did they wish to pay taxes to the Crown. As a result, they requested local silversmiths to emulate the latest designs, often from London.

Silver, long associated with wealth, served as a sort of savings account that could be liquidated promptly due to the value of the metal. This helps to explain the role of engraving, which served to identify pieces in the event of theft. A family coat of arms or initials was traditionally used, making silver objects safer than cash (Heckscher & Bowman, 1992).



Source: MFA Boston



Sarah Hersey Derby
Source: Hingham Heritage Museum



Artist: Frances B. Townsend
Source: Tremont Auctions



Source: MFA Boston

Captain Richard & Sarah Derby

Captain Richard Derby, the original owner of our object, was born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1712 and died there in 1783. He owned and sailed several vessels, retiring from the sea in 1757. His sons, John and Richard, took control of the fleet and their father became a merchant. The Captain and his sons were also involved in politics, with Richard, Sr. serving on the general court and governor's council from 1769-1777. Due to their knowledge in commerce, the family engaged extensively in trade and were apt shipbuilders and wharf builders. In fact, they strongly supported the colonies' cause, providing ships and supplies to the army and even engaged in privateering against British commerce (Wilson & Fiske, 1887).

Due to his support for the colonies, Derby would only have considered having his silver made by a local silversmith, so he naturally selected Revere, the best in the area. According to MFA Boston, he most likely commissioned this coffee pot upon his 1771 marriage to Sarah Langlee Hersey (*pictured at left*), who was widowed from Dr. Ezekiel Hersey, a prominent physician. Sarah has a remarkable "rags to riches" story. Born the daughter of a tavern keeper, Madame Derby married well twice, amassing a large amount of land and fortune. She gave generously, especially to Harvard College, laying the foundation for what would become Harvard Medical School (Bagger, 2014).

Captain Derby and his wife never engraved the pot, but his son, Richard IV, and his wife, Elizabeth placed "D" over "IE" on the bottom (*pictured top left*). The pot was passed down three additional times to family members when a second engraving was added: "H. P. to F.B.T. 1863" (Hannah Pickman to Frances Barnard Townsend) (*pictured bottom left*). Frances Townsend was an accomplished painter (*see sample at left*), studying under Jules Dupré in Paris. According to MFA Boston records, the coffee pot remained in the Townsend family until 2019 when it was donated to the museum by Thomas H. Townsend, a real estate agent currently living in Boston.

MELTING

Sterling silver is melted at 2,000 degrees in a crucible. The molten metal is poured into a cast iron mold to form bars.

FORGING



The bars are flattened and shaped with an anvil & hammer. As the silver is forged, it hardens and must be heated (annealed) to remain malleable.

CASTING

To create the spout, handle pieces, finial, and feet, molten silver would have been poured into molds of sand. Silversmiths had many patterns for their patrons to choose from, however, a new pattern would have been made for the feet of our pot and perhaps other features as well.

CHASING



Chasing, which involves manipulating the silver into sculpturing designs, required advanced training and skills that most American silversmiths did not have. Revere successfully honed his craft and was able to make ornate, graceful details characteristic of the Rococo style.

ENGRAVING

Thin lines are cut into the metal, often to place initials or other identifying marks. Silversmiths often engraved or stamped their name, marking their work.

POLISHING

The process of firing tarnishes the metal, so objects were hand-polished to bring out the luster of the silver. Assembly would have also occurred at this stage. For our pot, this included the lid and wooden handle, which was most likely carved by a local artisan. The wood species is not recorded, but similar objects list "fruit wood" as the material.



Source: Paul Revere House



Source: Paul Revere House



Artist: T. Chamberlain, 2021



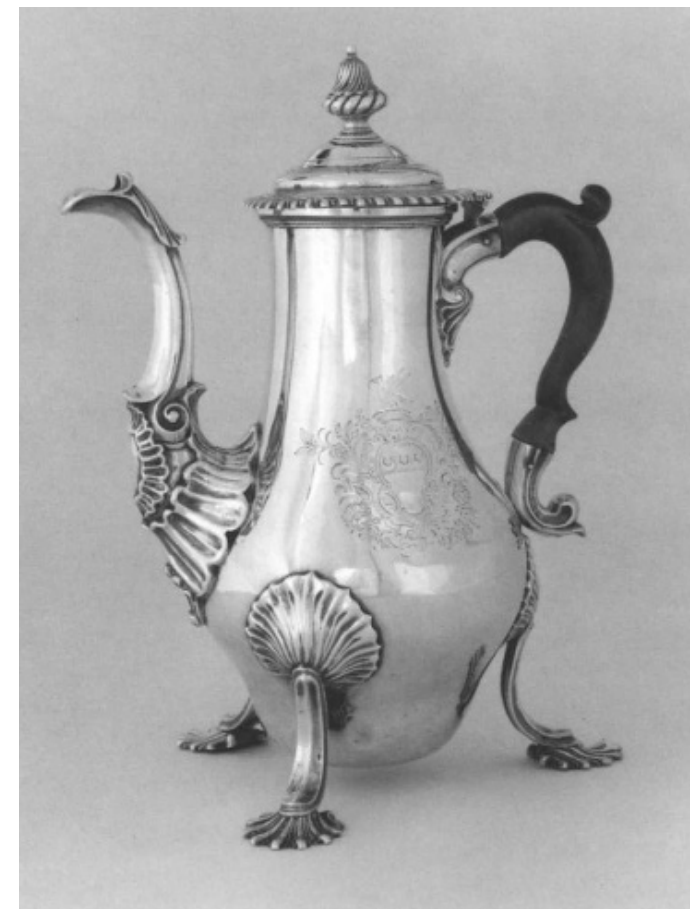
Source: MFA Boston

Beginning in the 1740s, American silver began to reflect the Rococo style. Silversmiths, influenced by imported goods from London, did their best to imitate the graceful, organic style, but often struggled. Specialized training was required to create the highly ornate patterns, vigorous C-scrolls, acanthus leaves, and asymmetrical engravings characteristic of prized pieces from England. Due to this fact, wealthy merchants often ordered their silver pieces from London and waited a mere 10-12 months for them to arrive. Other people (who were perhaps more impatient) sought out shops that employed immigrant journeymen or outworkers who were trained abroad and familiar with the unique style (Heckscher & Bowman, 1992).

Although there is no evidence Paul Revere's shop employed men formally trained in London, it is clear that they closely studied imported pieces. This close study, combined with their excellence in engraving, led to the creation of what many would consider the finest silver pieces produced in the American Colonies. One such example is "Paine Service," (*pictured below*). According to the Worcester Art Museum, the set is "one of the highest achievements in design and craftsmanship credited to any eighteenth-century New England silversmith." The coffee pot, pictured at center, exhibits many of the same characteristics as our studied object.



Paine Service, 1773, Artist: Paul Revere
Source: Worcester Art Museum



Coffee Pot, 1760
Source: Essex Institute
Artist: Arthur Annesley



Coffee Pot, 1772
Source: MFA Boston
Artist: Paul Revere

The coffee pot pictured above left exhibits even more in common with our studied object (*above, right*), as it was quite literally the inspiration. Crafted in 1760 by Arthur Annesley in London, this pot was considered extraordinarily unique due to its departure from a traditional pedestal foot (as found on the Paine pot). Instead, Annesley placed his double-bellied, pear-shaped pot on three C-shell-and-scroll feet. This allowed the pot to gracefully "defy gravity" and appear unstable, fitting well into Rococo style. This French design was adopted by only a select group of London silversmiths. The Annesley coffee pot was owned by Mary Holyoke of Boston. Hecksher & Bowman (1992) suspect that it had strong admirers during dinner parties, which led to Richard Derby's commission. In fact, there are only two known tripod coffee pots of Rococo American silver and both were made for the Derby family of Salem.

When comparing the Annesley and Revere coffee pot, one can observe that the feet and wooden scroll handle appear nearly identical. Both share reeded banding on the domed, hinged lid, but an acorn adorns the London pot versus the pinecone finial found on Revere's. The ornate spouts share the same shape, yet feature a slightly different design, with Revere's pot featuring vigorous C-scroll "chasing." Finally, the engraving differs, which is expected as many owners chose engravings and other personalized features.

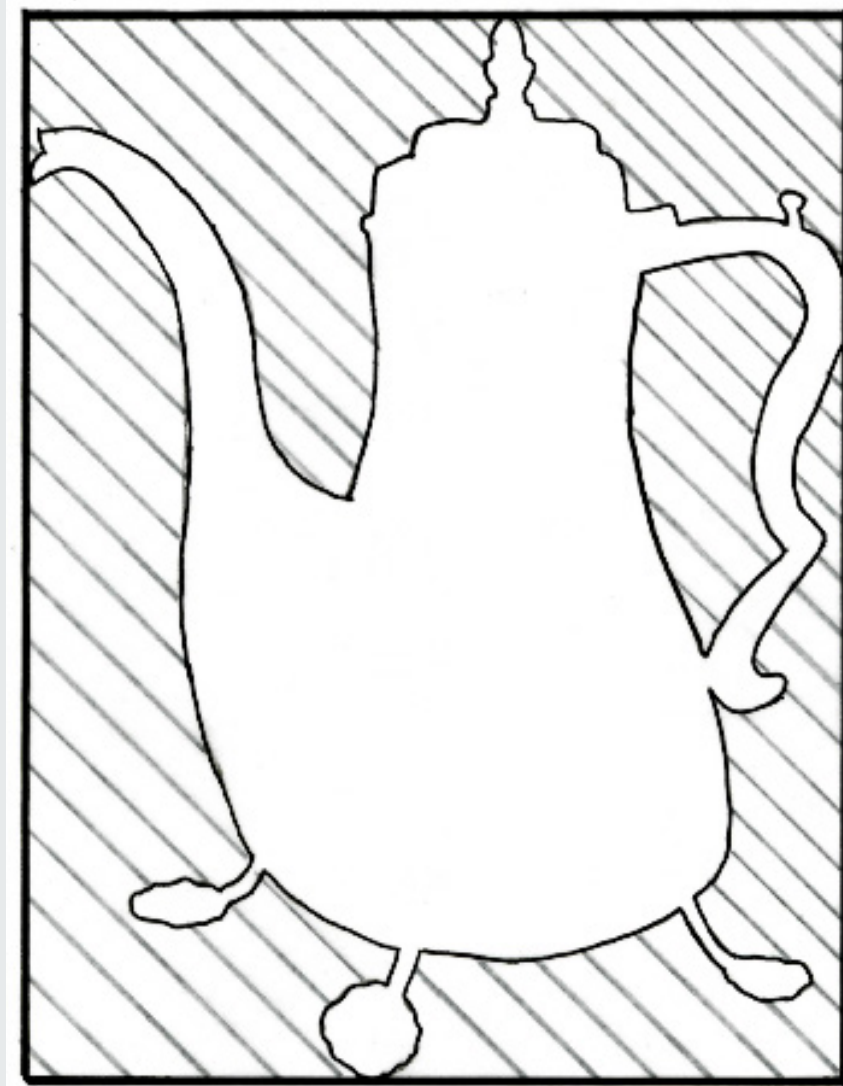
Coffee, tea, and chocolate all gained sudden, widespread popularity in Europe during the middle of the 17th century. As Jamieson (2001) explains, drinks are cultural, defining expected behaviors and giving structure to social life. Although caffeine and coffee were medicinal in other parts of the world, they came to Europe after the Renaissance and people quickly built rituals around their consumption. England's first coffeehouse opened in 1650 and began to spread around Europe. By the late 1700s, there were thousands, and, much like today, everyone had a favorite that they regularly patroned. It replaced the alehouse as a gathering place for men to discuss politics, conduct business, and share the news of the day. In fact, the London Stock Exchange and Lloyd's Insurance were both born in coffeehouses (Jamieson, 2001).

During the 1700s there was a high demand for coffee pots for the home primarily because women were not permitted in European coffeehouses. The design would allow coffee consumption to be a family affair. Additionally, it would allow users to serve their guests the most fashionable beverage of the day. The bourgeoisie class was also developing, which further prompted the need to entertain in the home. England's fascination with tea also grew during this time. The social elite began to consider ceramic tea sets "common," and wished for more upscale tableware. English and French silversmiths met this need in the early 1700s and, naturally, created silver coffee pots too. One such example, pictured at top right, was made in England in 1744.

In the colonies, not only were women able to patronize coffeehouses, some even owned them (Crookshanks, 2018). Entertaining in the home was also important and high society wished to emulate silver tableware from London in particular. Only the affluent could afford silver coffee pots and their elite status would have been marked by how many pieces they used to serve their guests. Tea and coffee rituals were also associated with elite femininity, as depicted by two Boston women in the painting to the right (Jamieson, 2001). We can imagine their parlor had elegantly framed mirrors and paintings, a plaster ceiling, and comfortable furnishings typical of the Georgian Era (Pile & Gura, 2014).



Source: AC Silver
Artist: William Partis



Artist: T. Chamberlain, 2021



"Tea," 1909, William Paxton
Source: The Met

[Coffee and tea] “were an essential part of the demonstration of colonialism, a visible reminder of the possession of the foreign.”

Jamieson, 2001

“Tea must be universally renounced and I must be weaned, and the sooner the better.”

*John Adams to his Wife
(in Historic Kenmore, 2017)*

Coffee Fueled the American Revolution

London coffeehouses (*depicted below*) were unique, allowing the interaction of people from all social classes. The fashionable elite rubbed elbows with scientists, artisans, scholars, and even the poor peasantry. Coffeehouses in America followed the same blueprint, welcoming people of all social and political backgrounds.

Rightfully so, those in power in England began to see coffeehouses as a threat to the status quo. As discord grew in the colonies, ideas and actions were often discussed over a cup of Joe. The elite, often hurt most directly by British taxes, sat across from dockworkers eager to fight (Schenawolf, 2019).

The Tea Act of 1773 and Townshend Acts further enraged the colonists. The purchase of tea would amount to taxation without representation in



Joseph Highmore, 1725
Source: Yale Center for British Art



1775
Source: Library of Congress

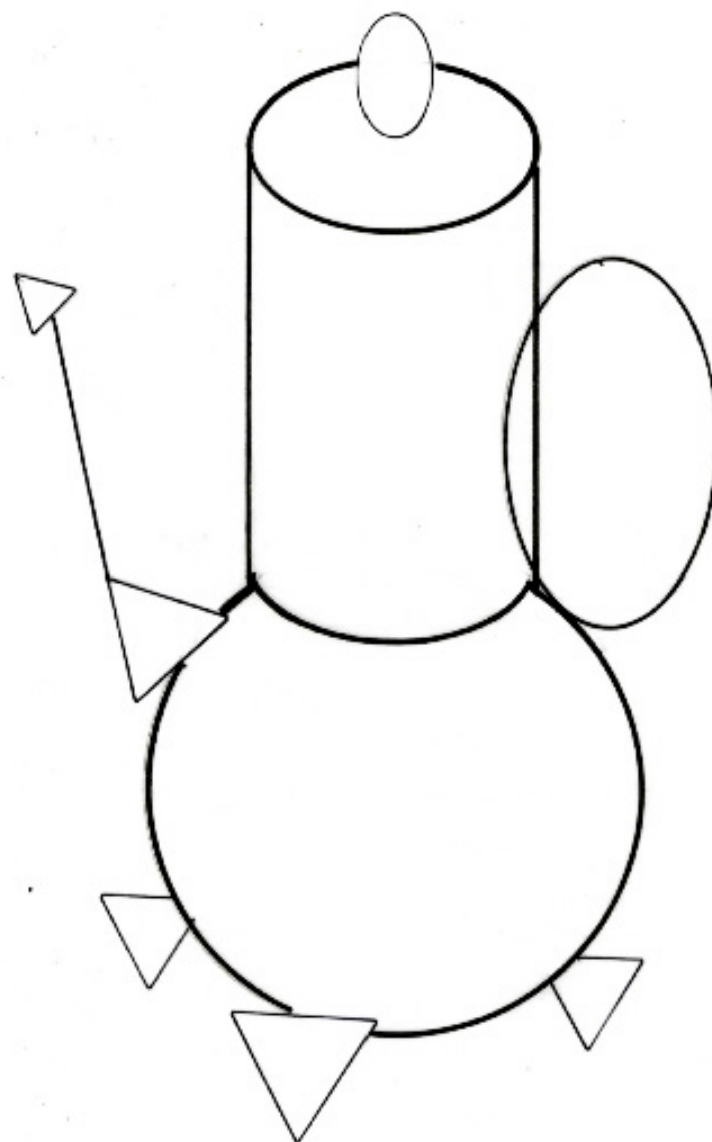
Parliament. “Tea became an emblem of British oppression and a boycott of the drink became a revolutionary act” (Historic Kenmore, 2017). Thus, the consumption of coffee equated to supporting the revolution. To further reject British culture, colonists would have “tea parties” outside of merchants who continued to sell tea (which was not the type of party they wanted to be a part of). Patriotic ladies made pledges to boycott tea, vowing to never serve it in their home (Schenawolf, 2019). The print above, entitled “A society of patriotic ladies, at Edenton in North Carolina,” is a satire of American women boycotting all British goods.

Realizations & Reflections

I first visited the MFA in Boston in 2002 when I was living in Cape Cod during graduate school. At that time in my life, Boston was a magical city full of culture and ideas that I had never before experienced. I surely saw some coffee pots that day, but this particular pot would have still been in Mr. Townsend's care - likely displayed in a cabinet or on a shelf. Of the thousands of objects I could have chosen from this museum, I find it fascinating where this one led me. Its owners built Navy ships and literally worked as pirates to help defeat the British. One of their ships, "Columbia," discovered the Columbia River. They built wharfs and businesses that are still active today. Their donations literally started Harvard Medical School and Derby Academy. They opened trade to St. Petersburg, Russia, and were responsible for bringing merino wool to America. They were a family of politicians, merchants, sailors, lawyers, authors, and artists. Yes, they all seem to have been wealthy, white, and privileged, but they were also incredibly generous. We literally may not have won the Revolutionary War without them.

The coffeepot diagram on this page echos how this object has come full circle. Drinking coffee was a revolutionary act and the family that commissioned this vessel was

very prominent in America's revolution. The colonies were supported in their efforts by all three regions, just as the pot is supported by its unique three feet. The pot heralds designs and techniques from England and France, yet was superbly made by a man who likely never stepped foot on their soil. The coffeehouses found in the 1700s bear a striking resemblance to those today and, thankfully, coffee is still in fashion. Every object tells a story and, if we are lucky, we get to hear it.



Areas of Further Study:

- Throughout history, pinecones have symbolized many ideas. Why did Captain Derby select it for the finial of his coffee pot? What other symbolism was common in silver objects?
- After the Revolutionary War, Revere began to make objects in the Neoclassical style. How was this transition for him? Was it his choice or solely client demand?
- When was it acceptable for Americans to drink tea again? Did they still have their silver tea sets?
- How did the use of silver in the home evolve over the 19th and 20th centuries?

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