

Recent Additions at Middleton Place

BY MARY EDNA SULLIVAN



Middleton Place (Fig. 1), home of Arthur Middleton (1742–1787), a signer of the Declaration of Independence, is a National Historic Landmark in Charleston, South Carolina. Now owned by the Middleton Place Foundation, the plantation has had continuous family stewardship for approximately 320 years. Burned to the ground in February 1865 by the 56th New York Regiment, Middleton Place, a rising phoenix, is renowned for America's oldest landscaped garden, a rejuvenated plantation stableyard interpretive complex, conservation easements along the Ashley River that shield the landscape from modern incursions, and a house museum in the restored (ca. 1870) South Flanker. Thanks to the generosity of Middleton descendants, the museum contains a family archives and a collection of Middleton paintings, silver, furniture, jewelry and clothing of extraordinary quality and with impeccable Middleton provenance. For four decades, developing these collections has been a rewarding process of scholarship and discovery.

Among many other loaned and contributed objects, the Middleton Place Foundation collection has recently been enriched by an

eighteenth-century silver pap boat, a pair of eighteenth-century silver candlesticks (part of a set of eight), a nineteenth-century silver coffee and tea pot set by Ball & Black of New York (not discussed here), and (in a separate gift) their original receipt. Each silver acquisition is a superlative example of artistic and technical skill, and has impressive Middleton provenance.

In 2006, "Two Silver Pap Boats, London, 1773," (Fig. 2) were listed in a Sotheby's auction catalog for a Middleton-related English estate sale. One of the pair was English-made and engraved with the family crest. The description for the other noted that it had a maker's mark "... A. P. struck three times in the center. . ." and that it was "initialed on the underside S. M. in George II style."¹ Knowledge of Charleston silver and Middleton history, made it apparent that the mark was that of Alexander Petrie (active 1745–1765), and the engraved "S. M." was not a silversmith but probably one of three Sarah Middletons. The pap boat was brought to England when its owners, William and Sarah Middleton, left South Carolina with their children in 1754 to claim an inherited family property in Suffolk. It remained within

Fig. 1: Western View of Middleton Place, built in 1755. Original pencil sketch by Countess Paolina Bentivoglio Middleton (Mrs. Arthur Middleton) (d. 1883), ca. 1842. Image shown here is a colorized Glicée done in the 21st century by a family artist. Courtesy, Middleton Place Foundation, Charleston, South Carolina. The sketch shows the original main house, ca. 1705, with its north and south flankers, ca. 1755, stables, and other outbuildings.

the family in England until acquired by the Middleton Place Foundation at the Sotheby's sale, coming full circle to return to its origins.

Arthur and Mary IZARD Middleton acquired a magnificent suite of eighteenth-century English silver during their grand tour of Europe from 1768 to 1771. Distinctive pieces include a silver epergne (see pages 272–279), a large, lushly ornamented double-handled covered loving cup, and eight matched silver candlesticks (Fig. 3) by John Carter (active 1765–1780). Candlesticks in the form of columns have come to symbolize the neoclassical movement, but candlesticks such as these aspiring toward architectural correctness had been in vogue since the late 1750s when taste for Palladian classicism was a stylistic force.² This pair of sticks is ornamented

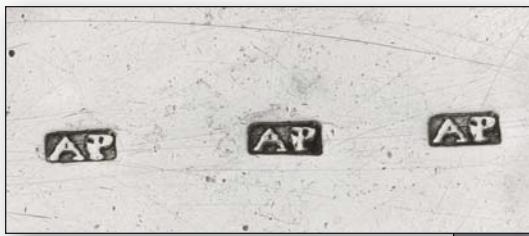


Fig. 2: Pap boat, Alexander Petrie (ca. 1707-1768; active 1745-1765), Charlestown, S.C., ca. 1754. Silver. L. 4½, W. 2¾, H 1⅛ in. Hallmark “AP” stamped three times. Courtesy, Middleton Place Foundation, Charleston, South Carolina.

with neoclassical bellflower swags framing applied oval cartouches: one engraved with the Middleton coat of arms and the other monogrammed “A.M.,” the initials of the original owner. Today, 240 years later, all eight candlesticks have been reunited to illuminate the dining room at Middleton Place, courtesy of several Middleton descendants. Paired with the epergne, the candlesticks illustrate for visitors how dinners at Middleton Place epitomized the gracious style of hospitality for which wealthy and powerful Carolinians were renowned. In 2009, the Middleton Place Foundation was delighted to receive two of the candlesticks as donations.

The new additions to the silver collection join treasured portraits by Benjamin West and Thomas Sully, miniatures by Charles Fraser and J. B. Guérin, a Thomas Elfe breakfast table, two Charleston “rice beds,” eighteenth-century silk brocade clothing of Henry and Arthur Middleton, a two-volume first edition of Mark Catesby’s *Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands* (1731, 1743), and an early facsimile on silk of the Declaration of Independence. [AFA](#)

The collections will be part of the lecture “Phoenix Rising: The Extraordinary Collection in the Middleton Place House Museum,” presented by Charles H. P. Duell, president and CEO of Middleton Place Foundation, at the Winter Antiques Show in New York City on January 21. For information on the lecture visit www.winterantiquesshow.com, and for information on Middleton Place, visit www.middletonplace.org or call 843.556.6020.

Mary Edna Sullivan is curator at Middleton Place Foundation, Charleston, South Carolina.

1. *Sotheby’s Shrubland Park*, (Suffolk, England 19, 20 & 21 September 2006), 338.
2. John D. Davis, *English Silver at Williamsburg* (Williamsburg: Colonia Williamsburg foundation, 1976), 32.

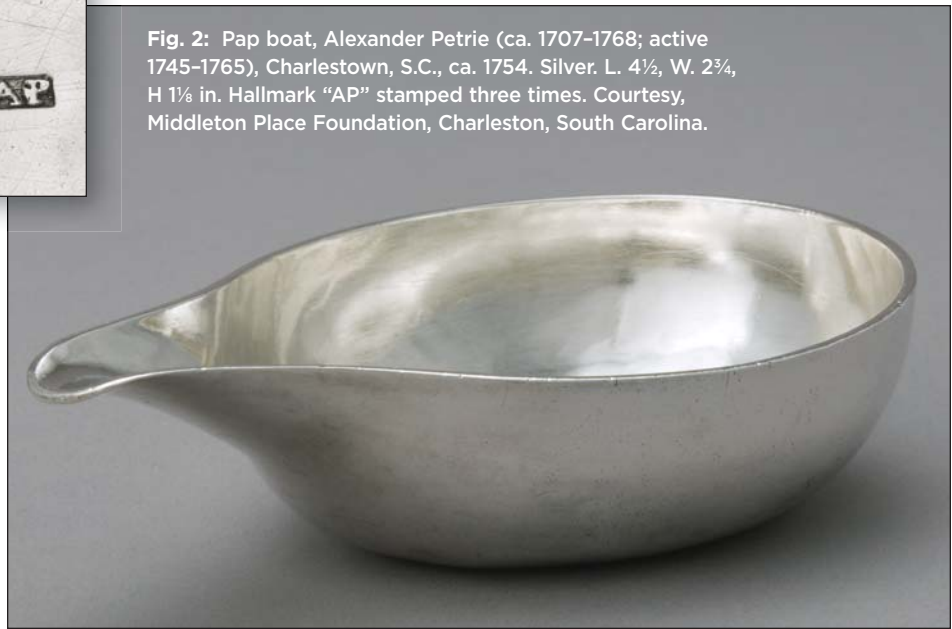


Fig. 3: Candlesticks (two of a set of eight), John Carter (active 1765-1780), London, England, 1771-1772. Silver, 14½ x 4¾ x 4¾ in. Courtesy Middleton Place Foundation, Charleston, South Carolina. Photography by Rick Rhodes. Purchased in London by Arthur Middleton, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and his wife Mary Iazard Middleton.