

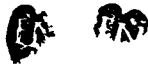
## A PHILADELPHIA SILVER PORRINGER

(made by John Nys)

By HARROLD E. GILLINGHAM

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania has recently received as a gift from Miss Ann Paschall a silver porringer bearing the mark of John Nys who was working as a silversmith in Philadelphia in 1700. This piece was made for Francis Knowles of this city and bears on the top of the handle, crudely engraved in block letters,  $\text{F}^{\text{K}} \text{S}$  the initials of Francis and Sarah Knowles. It has remained in the possession of the family until recently when Miss Paschall presented it to the Society for future preservation.

The porringer is five inches in diameter and measures seven and three-eighths inches across to the end of its geometrical handle; the centre of which is shield shaped and engraved as above mentioned. On the bottom of the porringer is stamped three times the mark of John Nys, I N, of irregular crude capitals over a cross of pellets in a heart shaped cartouche.



But little is known of JOHN NYS, one of the first silversmiths mentioned in the annals of Philadelphia. He is believed to have been one of the French Huguenots who went to Holland; and as William Penn, in his *Further Account of the Province of Pennsylvania, 1685*, said that French and Dutch people had come to this colony, Nys may have been one of the arrivals from the Netherlands. We know he was here at the beginning of the eighteenth century, by the entry in Penn's Cash Book of *2nd. mo. 22nd., 1700*:



Porringer made by John Nys for Francis & Sarah Knowles, married 1714  
Presented to The Historical Society of Pennsylvania  
by Miss Ann Paschall



*[By Johan. Nys Goldsmith for his Note - £002 | 10 | 0*

In the Isaac Norris, Sr., Journal, 1709-1716, owned by The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, this entry is found under date of 3 mo. 16, 1712:

John DeNoys Silver smith Dr. To Cash. pd him for a Tankard to make for James Parrock. for 29 oz. 18 dwt. Choyce Plate at ... pr. oz.

As no sum has been carried out we are unable to know the price. Two months later, under date of 5 mo. 1, 1712, appears this enlightening entry:

James Parrock Dr. To John Denoys	
£11-15-4½ for Sundries (viz <sup>t</sup> )	
for a Silver Tankard wt 30 oz 4 dwt at 10½ p oz	£10- 7-7½
for making the Tankard at 15 d p oz.	1-17-9
	<hr/>
	£12- 5-4½

In the same Norris Journal, under date of July 12, 1716, this craftsman's name is spelled *John Nys*, showing the uncertainty of the correct spelling of foreign names. James Parrock, for whom Nys appears to have made a tankard, as shown above, together with Johannes Nys, were the appraisers for the Estate of James Spencer hereafter mentioned.

His residence and shop were on Front street at the corner of Carpenter's alley, in a house owned by Arthur Holton, a *baker*, who, in his will, bequeathed to his daughter the house *now in the tenure and occupation of Johan Nys, Silversmith*.

On April 6, 1713, *Johannis Nys* was one of the witnesses to the will of James Spencer, mariner; and ten years later he witnessed the will of John Goadby. In each case the signature is plainly written *Johannis Nys*.<sup>1</sup>

Some writers on American silversmiths and their

<sup>1</sup> See *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LIV. 32.

marks<sup>2</sup> call him Neuss, de Nys, Nice and Dennis; but there seems another authority for any variation of the spelling of his name; that in James Logan's Account Book, 1712-1719, where the following entries appear:

156... Household Goods Dr. In De Nys for making 6 Kettles... £. 6.

and John De Nys is Dr. to Accot. of Kettles . . . . £3-5-0. He may have come from Holland and been called De Nys, but apparently soon Anglicised his name, as shown by his signatures to the two wills above mentioned. No other citizens of that period have been found with a similar name, living within the old city proper.

*Johannis Nys*

*Johannis Nys*

Thirteen pieces of silverware fashioned by John Nys are known at the present time and The Historical Society of Pennsylvania is fortunate in having two; a tankard and the porringer presented by Miss Paschall.

FRANCIS KNOWLES of Philadelphia, *book-binder*<sup>3</sup>, and Sarah Lee of the same city, *spinster*, were married at the Philadelphia Meeting House on 1st mo., 10th., 1714/15. Francis seems to have been a shop-keeper as well as a bookbinder, as one frequently sees

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Brix, *List of Philadelphia Silversmiths and Allied Artificers, 1682-1850* (Philadelphia, 1920); Stephen G. C. Ensko, *American Silversmiths and their Marks* (New York, 1927); and C. Louise Avery, *Early American Silver* (New York, 1930).

<sup>3</sup> In William Penn's Cash Book is this entry: 1701, 3rd. mo. 15th. *pd a Bookbinder for 3 books £0-4-7*; but as no name is mentioned one cannot definitely connect Francis Knowles with the transaction.

his name in James Logan's Account Book, from 1715 to 1719, where all kinds of merchandise were charged to him; the purchases, varying from £3 to over £25; and payment seems generally to have been made within three months. He owned a house and lot on Walnut street near Second, bought from his brother-in-law, Thomas Gilpin; and another on High Street at the corner of Second street.

The Meeting records show that Francis Knowles died 10 mo. (December) 20, 1739, and his will was filed seven days later, having been signed July 6, 1739. As no mention is made therein of his wife she must have pre-deceased him. One minor child, Sarah, was mentioned; but as is shown by her uncle John Knowles' will, proved February 23, 1743, she too had died soon after her father. The estate of Francis Knowles amounted to over £1000, and was mostly bequeathed to his brother John Knowles, a carpenter, of Oxford Township, Philadelphia, and his (John's) children. The inventory of Francis' estate discloses that he owned at the time of his death, *214 oz. 8 dwt.* of silver plate, including 4 tankards, 2 servers, 5 porringer, 1 teapot, 3 cups, 16 spoons of various sizes, and other silver articles, valued at £91-2-4.

Miss Ann Paschall, who has so generously given the porringer to this Society, is descended from one of John Knowles' children, who inherited it from her uncle Francis, the early Philadelphia bookbinder and shopkeeper. In the Pennsylvania Museum of Art is another of Francis Knowles' porringers, also made by John Nys. In addition to the original owner's initials of  $\text{F} \begin{smallmatrix} \text{K} \\ * \\ \text{S} \end{smallmatrix}$  on the centre of the shield of the geometrical handle, there is engraved A G (Ann Garrett, daughter of John Knowles and wife of Nathan Garrett of Darby), and A O, presumably for her niece, Ann Oborn, the daughter of Elizabeth (*née* Knowles) Oborn.