

## Who Engraved Homan and Other Pewter in Cincinnati?

By

Gary D. Wiggins

Conjectures about who did the engraving on Cincinnati pewter pieces have been made for many years. A major collector of American pewter once suggested to me that Henry Homan might have contracted with nuns in Cincinnati to do the engraving work for Homan & Co. (1) Another possibility is that one or more of the Cincinnati pewter makers perfected the skill of engraving and worked for the Britannia manufacturers. A third plausible explanation is that some of the woodblock engravers in Cincinnati who were displaced by technological advances in lithography transferred their skills to the decoration of Britannia ware items. Clues about the identity of the engravers who enhanced the many fine pewter pieces in Cincinnati can be found in genealogical research. I will trace the family links of some Cincinnati pewter makers and engravers and speculate about who likely did the pewter engraving work there.

John H. Stalkamp (1822-1876?) made engraved Britannia wares in Cincinnati from 1853-1860. (2) An ad placed in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* touts Stalkamp & Co.'s engraved products as early as October 7, 1854 and lists his partner as F. Wendeln. (3) Stalkamp & Co. made engraved Britannia ware several years before Homan introduced the option in his product line. His partner, John Frederick Wendeln (1818-1900) has his name engraved on a Stalkamp & Co. teapot as depicted in Figure 1. Stalkamp was married to Wendeln's sister, Maria Elizabeth, but the close relationship did not guarantee that the partnership of the brothers-in-law would last. It was officially dissolved by January 12, 1856. (4) Stalkamp then got a new partner, William C. Pomeroy, but that partnership also lasted only a couple of years.



Fig. 1. J.H. Stalkamp & Co. Britannia ware coffeepot engraved *F. Wendeln*.

Stalkamp's shop was located at 247 Fifth Street, south side, five doors west of Plum. Henry Homan's business address at the time was 211 E. Fifth St., between Elm and Plum at the corner of Home Street. Sellw & Co.'s address was 214 Main Street, between Fifth and Sixth. Since all three of the establishments were quite close to one another, Stalkamp's competitors surely became aware of his innovation very soon after he started offering engraved products, but none of them added engraved Britannia wares to their product lines right away.

Studebaker wrote that “One of the so-called disadvantages of pewter versus silver was that since it is such a soft metal, it did not lend itself well to engraved decoration, and fine detailing.” (5) She includes a picture of an engraved no. 8 Stalkamp teapot on p. 43 of her booklet. It was likely engraved by the same person who did the unmarked no. 8 teapot pictured in Figure 2.



Fig. 2. Unmarked engraved teapot no. 8, attributed to Stalkamp.

The 1860 U.S. Census lists John H. Stohlkamp’s occupation as “Brittania (*sic*) ware maker”. (6) However, in the 1860 *Williams Cincinnati Directory*, p. 77, Stalkamp’s place of employment is shown as 11 E. 7<sup>th</sup> Street. That is the address to which the expanded Homan & Company moved in 1857. Apparently after his business folded, Stalkamp worked for a while for Henry

Homan, but what was he doing there? Perhaps he was hired to introduce pewter engraving techniques to Homan employees. Since we don't know for certain who did the engraving on Stalkamp's and then Homan's products, we can only speculate that Stalkamp had a role in introducing engraving at Homan & Co. He might have brought with him other engravers, possibly even his brother-in-law, John Fred Wendeln (if in fact it was Wendeln who did the engraving at Stalkamp's establishment). Shortly after Stalkamp started to work at Homan & Co., many engraved Homan products began to appear in the 1860s.

If not Stalkamp and Wendeln, then what other Cincinnati residents might have been the engravers for Homan's products? Brown noted that the 1840 *Cincinnati Directory* has an advertisement for Sellew & Co. that included a tiny reference to Doolittle and Munson. (7) It is under the "P" in the word "Pewter," as shown in Figure 3.



Fig. 3. 1840 Sellew & Co. ad. Note the names below the "P" in Pewter.

Curtiss Miller Doolittle (1799-1849) and Samuel Bishop Munson (1806-1880) were very successful engravers and copper plate printers in Cincinnati from 1831-1849. (8) In April 1838, Munson married Hannah Sellew (1815-1861), the sister of William, Enos, and Osman Sellew, who operated Sellew & Co. as a Britannia manufacturer from 1831-1864. (9) The 1842 *Cincinnati Directory* shows both Doolittle and Munson as employees of Sellew & Co. Since

Henry Homan was doing his apprenticeship with Sellew & Co. at that time, he was undoubtedly acquainted with them. In 1845, they employed 24 people in their printing shop at the corner of Fifth and Main Streets in Cincinnati, close to Sellew & Co. Following Doolittle's death in 1849, Munson sold the engraving business to Elijah C. Middleton, a steel and copper plate printer, and worked for him for a time. (10)

Samuel B. Munson remained in Cincinnati for many years after Doolittle died. He was listed as a copperplate engraver in the 1855 *Cincinnati City Directory*, and we find him in the 1870 census living in the same household with his son William Sellew Munson and brother-in-law Enos Sellew. He was then an agent for American Gas Tip Manufacturing Company, later becoming secretary of the company. One would think that Munson, if he possessed the skills to engrave pewter, might have been called upon in the 1850s and 1860s to introduce engraving at Sellew & Co. after Stalkamp and later Homan began to market engraved products. However, to my knowledge, Sellew & Co. Britannia wares were never engraved with the type of elaborate artwork found on Stalkamp and Homan products. Other than Stalkamp's ads, no other manufacturer's advertisements for engraved Britannia ware appeared in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* throughout the 1850s. Given his close family ties to the Sellews, we can undoubtedly eliminate Munson from the list of potential pewter engravers who decorated Homan's products in the 1860s.

Who else might have done the work? By 1860 there were six lithographic firms in Cincinnati, employing 66 workers. (11) O'Brien says, "The engraving trade declined as lithography gained in importance." (12) Perhaps some of the wood block engravers who were displaced by lithographic printing found work as Britannia engravers at Homan & Co. J. H. Stalkamp likely played a significant role in extending the engraving of Britannia wares in Cincinnati in the 1860s, either by performing the engraving himself or by recruiting Wendeln or unemployed woodblock engravers to do the work. The Stalkamp-Wendeln family connection and Stalkamp's close association with Homan lead to a plausible conjecture for who engraved (or enabled the engraving of) pewter in Cincinnati, at least as plausible as the possibility that a group of nuns did the work.

My money is on Stalkamp and/or Wendeln as the likely artist(s) for the engraved Cincinnati pieces produced with Stalkamp's and Homan's marks. At the presumed time of John H. Stalkamp's death in July 1876, he was living at 70 Abigail Street. *Williams' Cincinnati Directory* earlier has John Fred Wendeln living at 70 Abigail from 1857-1861. During this period, 12<sup>th</sup> Street east of Main in Cincinnati was called Abigail Street. Homan & Co. was located at 11 E. 7<sup>th</sup> Street between Main and Sycamore Streets, so the Stalkamps and Wendelns lived within five blocks of Homan & Co. (13) (14)

Figure 4 displays two more unmarked items bearing the number 8 that were likely made by Stalkamp & Co.



Fig. 4. Two pieces of a no. 8 coffee set attributed to Stalkamp & Co.

In Figure 5, a sugar bowl, though marked "Homan & Co.," was likely made with Stalkamp parts, since the handles closely resemble those on the no. 8 Stalkamp sugar in Figure 4. They are not at all like other Homan & Co. handles on items with the number 8 as seen in Figure 6.



Fig. 5. No. 8 engraved Homan & Co. sugar bowl



Fig. 6. Plain Homan & Co. no. 8 set.

In the 1860s, more and more engraved items became available with the Homan & Co. mark. The author currently has 20 such items of this vintage. A typical example is the sugar bowl inscribed "Louisa" in Figure 7. Coincidentally, both Stalkamp and Wendeln had daughters named Louisa. (15)



Fig. 7. No. IX Homan & Co. sugar bowl engraved "Louisa"

#### NOTES

1. Garland Pass. "Folk Art Engraving on Pewter." *The Pewter Collectors Club of America Bulletin*, v. 13 no. 1, Summer 2004, pp. 3-34, p. 15. Pass casts doubt on the unsubstantiated story of the engraving by German nuns. The article contains a tutorial on the art of pewter engraving and the tools used to do so.
2. John F. Brown. "Vas You Effer in Zinzinnati?" *The Pewter Collectors Club of America Bulletin*, v. 7 no. 5 (74), April 1977, pp. 180-185, p. 182.
3. *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, v. XIV, no. 194, 7 October 1854, p. 1. Identical ads appear on November 4, 1854, December 13, 1854, January 10, 1855, and August 7, 1855.

4. Dissolution of the Stalkamp-Wendeln partnership was announced in *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1 June 1856, p. 6.
5. *Sue Studebaker's Antiques Study Series: Pewter*. Edited by Jessica Thress. [Lebanon, OH], Warren County Historical Society, 2012, p. 43. Studebaker's comment is not supported by the many engraved items chosen by Garland Pass (See Ref. 1) and John Clayton in his articles "Some Examples of Engraved Pewter" Part 1 (*PCCA Bulletin*, v. 15 no. 4, 2015, pp. 2-21) and Part 2 (*PCCA Bulletin*, v. 15, no. 5, 2016, pp. 21-39). The Pass article includes many American examples.
6. U. S. Census. Year: 1860; Place: *Cincinnati Ward 11, Hamilton, Ohio*; Roll: M653\_974; Page: 259; Family History Library Film: 803974. The entry includes Stalkamp's one-year old daughter, Louisa, a name that is engraved on two of the Homan pieces in the author's collection. (See Fig. 7.)
7. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 184. The image of the ad is taken from the original Brown article.
8. Mary Sayre Haverstock, Jeannette Mahoney, and Brian L. Meggitt. *Artists in Ohio, 1787-1900: A Biographical Dictionary*. Ashland: The Kent State University Press, 2012, p. 235.
9. Allan W. Scheer. "Sellew & Co." The Pewter Collectors Club of America, Inc. *Bulletin*, v. 15 no. 3, Summer 2015, pp. 22-26, p. 25. After 1860, Sellew & Co. moved more and more toward the supply side for metals. In the 1872 *Cincinnati Directory*, it is listed under "House Furnishing Goods". Their ad on page 1180 describes the business at 214, 216, and 218 Main Street as "importers and dealers in tin plate, sheet iron, metals, stamped and japanned tin ware, tinmen's findings, tinner's tools and machines, railway supplies and house furnishing goods."
10. Donald C. O'Brien. *Amos Doolittle: Engraver of the New Republic*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2008, p. 102.
11. Donald C. O'Brien. *The Engraving Trade in Early Cincinnati* (with a brief account of the Beginning of the Lithographic Trade). Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2013, p. 172.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
13. The entry in the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* for 12 July 1876, p. 4 reads, "John Stahlkamp, who lives at No. 70 Abigail Street, while at work yesterday about four o'clock in the afternoon, was prostrated by sunstroke. He is thought to be fatally injured." The *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* (v. XXXIV, iss. 185, p. 8) reported that, "John Stahlkamp, an employee of the Mutual Ice Company, who lives at No. 70 Abigail Street, is lying in a critical condition at his house from the effects of a sun-stroke." His widow, Elizabeth Stallkamp (nee Wendeln) lived to be 91 years old. She died December 20, 1915 in Cincinnati. (The *Cincinnati Post*, 21 December 1915, p. 12.)
14. By 1870, the process of metal engraving was apparently becoming automated, so the need for hand engravers who were skilled in Britannia ornamentation probably declined rapidly after that date. US Patent 108408 for engraving on metal and other hard surfaces was granted in 1870 to Benjamin G. Tilghman. (<https://patents.google.com/patent/US108408A/en>) The *Cincinnati Enquirer* of 3 September 1872, p. 3 has a job ad from James L. Havens & Co. for a pattern-maker on brass and Britannia, and in 1874, the Ohio Mechanics Institute introduced a new branch

devoted to designing and ornamentation at its 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the School of Design.

15. Louisa Wendeln was 13 years old in the 1860 U.S. Census, whereas Louisa Stalkamp was only 1 year old. Louisa Wendeln is listed under "Frederick Windel" in: Year: 1850; Census Place: *Cincinnati Ward 1, Hamilton, Ohio*; Roll: M432\_687; Page: 16A; Image: 39. And under "Jno F Wendel" in: Year: 1860; Census Place: *Cincinnati Ward 9, Hamilton, Ohio*; Roll: M653\_973; Page: 422; Family History Library Film: 803973. Louisa Stalkamp is found under John H. Stohlkamp in the 1860 census. (See reference 6.)