

## **George Samuel Rankin (1794-1876)**

Rankin was born in St. George's. He was the son of a sea captain who came here from Birkenhead, about 1775. The Rev. C. B. Sinden who married Mr. Rankin's great grand daughter, Miss Boyle, has given me this information. He thinks Captain Rankin's mother was also English. Mr. Rankin married Janet Clements, one of the three daughters of Joseph Clements who was a schoolmaster in Warwick. Miss A.M. Outerbridge once told me that the Misses Clements were remarkably handsome, tall young women. Young George was sent to England, - perhaps to school, - and was apprenticed to a silversmith there, whom he served for the required seven years. His "masterpiece" i.e. the piece of work done by an apprentice at the end of his service to show what he could do, - is a handsome tankard, afterwards in the possession of his youngest son, Mr. John Cox Rankin.

Mrs. A. T. Tucker, many years ago, when I admired some lovely teaspoons she was using, told me they were made in 1859 by Mr. Rankin for her father on his marriage. He told Mr. Hayward that is he would get some old silver from his grandmother and bring it to him, he would make him half dozen spoons from the pattern taught to him by David Glegg Ming, Mr. Hayward's grandfather. These are still in daily use. Mrs. Tucker also said that Rankin was an apprentice of John Cox, and named his son for him. Mr. Sinden does not know of that connection but it is quite likely that Rankin was his apprentice, but it may be so for Rankin was said to have gone to work at the trade when he was twelve years old.

To be quite candid, I think that Rankin's work has a finish and style to it that other Bermudian silversmiths lack, which may be accounted for by his service under an English silversmith. I have a set of teaspoons and sugar tongs (mark GR) which are so very well shaped, the tongs being a different pattern to any other I have seen.

I have been shown a large soup ladle and a table spoon, both marked GR, the spoon has the owner's monogram which looks like HGFAC, intertwined, but it is very worn.

Mr. Rankin was also a jeweler. Mrs. Sinden has a very beautiful large brooch which he made for one of his daughters. It is gold set with amethyst and she has the ear-rings to match. She also has several pieces of his silver. I can well remember being taken by my mother, when I was a young girl, to see Miss Henrietta Rankin, who lived in the Bridge House in St. George's - so called because it was built where the bridge crossed a creek now filled in. Miss Rankin showed my mother a silver bodkin which her father made and this, strange to say, was the only piece of his silver she then had. She said a niece of his in England had a very pretty brooch, and she herself had a scarf pin made from a ring, it had hair set in a medallion mounted on a gold setting. Miss Rankin was a charming old lady; she died May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1921, aged 98 years and 3 weeks.

Rankin and Canton are the last of the Bermudian silversmiths. I do not know that the former had a son who followed his track. The son of the latter may have been trained to do it, but he was a watch and jewellery repairer, for the fashion for hand made silver had unfortunately then passed.

I have one piece of silver which I have given to the Historical Society, and which I wish to note. I found it many years ago in my garden, quite black, and only by careful cleaning could I read the inscription. It is a medal, larger than a halfcrown, but thinner, and very likely it was made of an old silver Mexican dollar, which used to be quite common here. It is obviously hand-made, the lettering and engraving being very crude; on one side is "Pagets December 31<sup>st</sup> 1831," on the other is "Reward of Mrit, IST." Its origin was unknown until recently I found in the *Bermuda Gazette* Dec. 31<sup>st</sup> 1831, an account of an examination held by Archdeacon Spencer at the Free School in Paget. The Archdeacon presented two medals to Tatem and Stone "who distinguished themselves by their good conduct and their proficiency in the knowledge of the Scripture." Who made the medals is not known, but about that time "A Society for Promoting Industry" was established so it may have been fashioned by one of the Industrious, for it is clearly the work of an amateur. The *Gazette* of April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1820, mentions a piece of silver of a very different caliber; this was when "the Parish of St. George presented Mr. George Brown, Parish Clerk, with a handsome silver goblet as a tribute of respect and consideration for his distinguished services and humane exertions during the time the fever raged in the months of August and September 1819. We understand the Etruscan Vase, presented to Mr. Brown is a piece of plate of exquisite workmanship which reflects great credit upon the *native artist* who wrought it." Who was that artist? In all good probability it was George Samuel Rankin and I hope that possibly some-one has some record of it. Mrs. Tucker, told my mother that she could get no further information about the Etruscan Vase, but from what Mr. John Rankin told her she supposed that it had been taken to the United States. In 1858, Mr. Rankin said, he went to New York in the brig "Lark" Captain Jeremiah Peniston, and a fellow passenger was Mrs. Joanna Brown, widow of George Brown, who with a grandchild was going to Utica, N.Y., to end her days with her daughter, Sallie, wife of Mr. Thos Richardson. There is an old story about Mrs. Brown on this voyage; when she landed in N.Y. and saw the large, overflowing markets near the docks, she wondered where the people could come from to eat all that food, but when she got to Broadway and saw the people, she wondered where the food came from to feed so many!

If Mrs. Brown valued the vase she would have taken it with her but perhaps she sold it as old silver, and it was melted down. People who were hard up used to sell their silver to a silversmith, who would give them 3/- per oz. for it. The profit was not great; the silversmith, would make spoons and other things from it which he would sell at 8/- per ounce, thus retaining 5/- for his labour.

*Source: "Bermuda Silversmiths and Their Silver". Bermuda Historical Quarterly, Winter 1965-6*

*Vol. XXII, No.4. Card covers. 4to. 85-115pp long. Includes many biographies on Bermudian silversmiths mostly from the 18th. and 19th. centuries based upon the research and memory of Mrs. Allan F. Smith in 1920 whose work often integrated notes made in turn by her mother Mrs. Henry A. Smith. This is a nice example of local and oral history at work at the same time.*