

# When You Had To Go Spooning

That is, when silver or pewterware denoted you as being quality folks

By JULIET SHELBY

I remember childhood fascination with the spoon tray brought to the family table for ordinary breakfasts, dinners (then the midday meals), suppers. It had compartments for serving spoons, soup spoons, and smaller spoons of varied use. A handle rose from brackets screwed to middle partitions. This arrangement suggested to my younger brother's imagination a ship's masts, and mother was accustomed to finding the tray on the floor, with spoons arranged like guns on prow, port, starboard, and stern, to repel attacks by phantom pirates.

She never complained about picking up the spoons and re-washing them before father took his position as carver, server, and ex-officio dispenser of spoons as needed. Naturally, Tommy's playing with the spoon tray was not tolerated when my sister or I was a substitute for mother.

Spoons were the most used of tableware both by adults and younger folk in earlier times, when hearty meals included porridge, soup, stew, side dishes of vegetables, puddings, or desserts flowing with cream. There were no forks in common use until persons

abroad followed a fashion among effete descendants of the Romans in the 17th century (such people were dubbed "macaronis"). Elsewhere, it was common for a diner to hack for himself a piece of roast and spear it to his plate, or dip fingers into a salver for food that could be managed with a spoon or without drip on clothes.

Spoons and ladles were commonly of shell, carved wood or hollowed burl. Families "better fixed" had some of horn, tin, copper, brass, pottery, pewter. There were those, of course, who had wealth in silver spoons, and royalty whose exactions in taxes were exhibited in spoons of gold.

As late as the 18th century, a silversmith was an investment auxiliary who was given an individual's surplus silver ingots or coinage to be moulded into spoons, teapots, saltcellars, candlesticks, etc., that could be both impressive and utilitarian until the owner needed silver for commercial transactions or borrowings.

The phrase "Born with a silver spoon in his mouth," came from a proverb, "One man is born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and

another with a wooden ladle." This became progressively less apt as wealth underwent distribution under reforms in the 19th century. Silver and silver plate was a proud possession of many more families, and souvenir spoons had their inception.

At our home, on occasion - always when there were invited guests - drawer of the "sideboard" was unlocked, a velvet-lined box brought forth. The children were excited anew by mother's "Christmas spoons" and "souvenir spoons." A devoted friend of mother's adhered to a not unusual custom among families of European derivation. Each Christmas and wedding anniversary she sent mother two more silver spoons of the ornate pattern she had chosen for the purpose years ago.

Mother herself started collecting "souvenir" spoons at a world's fair; she was among an original group of hobbyist collectors of these who multiplied into thousands internationally. Father and older family members brought contributions from their travels. Thus, when dessert was served we children could choose a spoon that signified some historic person, place, or tour. The

handle of one was surmounted by Eiffel Tower, another by St. Peter's of Rome, several with festive motifs, such as weddings. Like the distinctive plates distributed each Yuletide in Scandinavia, there were annual editions of spoons inspired by Christmas motifs or by other serious religious occasions, such as Easter.

After a dinner, when her spoons were displayed, mother made count discreetly. Not that she suspected the guests of appropriating any; she was apprehensive that one might have been disposed of with the table scraps of dishwashing. She may also have had subconscious memory of a confession for many Robert W. Chapman put into an essay, Silver Spoons: "When I dine out and find my soup embellished by a notable spoon, as may happen... my manners are seldom proof against temptation." T. B. Macaulay had remarked earlier of "Ye diners out from whom we guard our spoons."

In earlier times, I was to learn, travelers were accustomed to carrying spoons and knives of their own, either because cautious city hotels, country inns, or boarding houses did not supply them, or for sanitary reasons. There was a popular assumption some of the wayfarers purposely carried spoons with extra long handles, to insure their being able to reach competitively with, or to the disadvantage of, other diners, into bowls from which all had to help themselves. It became an adage, "He must have a long spoon that must deal with the devil."

Among oldest of American historical or souvenir spoons were those sold at the Centennial Exposition, Philadelphia, 1876, (a George Washington medallion in the design), but there are commemoratives of earlier events in America, such as Columbus' voyage of discovery, the landing of the Mayflower Pilgrims, etc., just as there are of Old World events, in an assortment of coffee, dessert, or ladle sizes.

Spoons have been among the souvenirs of many coronations. The interval between an accession to a kingship or queenship and the traditional coronation rites has favored production of such items. A rarity prized by a collector is one of spoons produced in anticipation of formal enthronement of Edward VIII at London, in 1937 - an event cancelled out by Edward's abdication in 1936.



A caricature of big eater in days when traveler was accustomed to carrying implements with which to insure his helping himself from platters.

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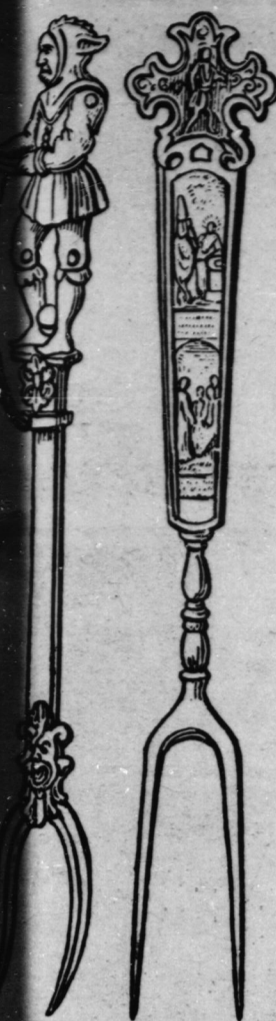
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## Spooning

Oddly, there appears to be no corresponding number of souvenir forks. A British historian asserted that forks were virtually unknown in England in 1611, when a venturesome Briton urged upon his countrymen adoption of the table implement referred to above. "An Italian cannot endure to have his dish touched with fingers, seeing that all men's fingers are not alike clean." He explained a gentleman provided himself with a miniature of the two-tined stable fork. The British historian referred to above remarked that his countrymen's reaction to the innovation was typically British. "Who would make hay of his food and pitch it into his mouth?" was one etymological question. There were contemptuous allusions to "miserable fork-bearers."

However, an English book of etiquette published in 1653 reflected a European-wide capitulation. Its author conceded it was "comely and decent to use a fork at the table."

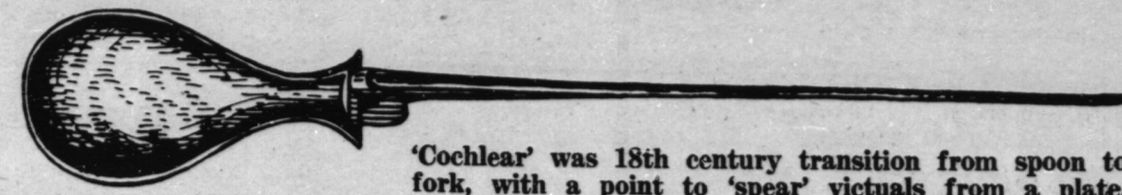
Thereafter, it was evident, pertentious persons added silver forks to the encased eating implements they carried about as badges of gentility, or "status symbols," to use a modern phrase. They were recorded among possessions even of conservative Puritans in Massachusetts before 1650.

## Agricultural Engineering Head Appointed At Ridgetown

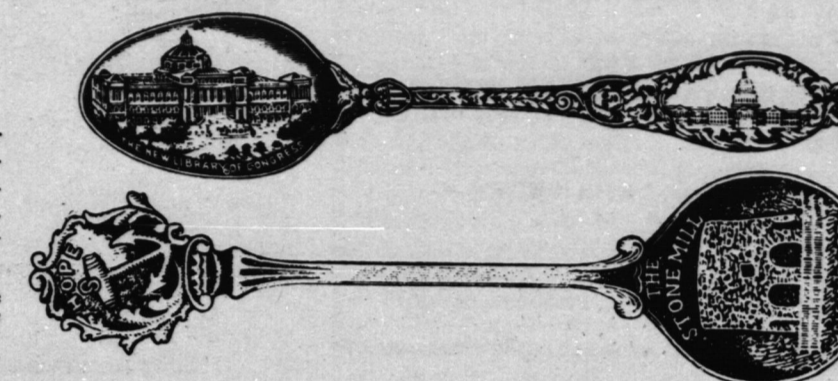
Mr. W. W. Snow, principal of the Ridgetown College of Agricultural Technology, has announced the appointment of Mr. Peter Bomford as head of the Agricultural Engineering Division at the College.

Mr. Bomford, who gained his B.Sc. (Agriculture) from Reading University, England, and his M.Sc. (Agriculture) from the University of Newcastle, England, is a specialist in

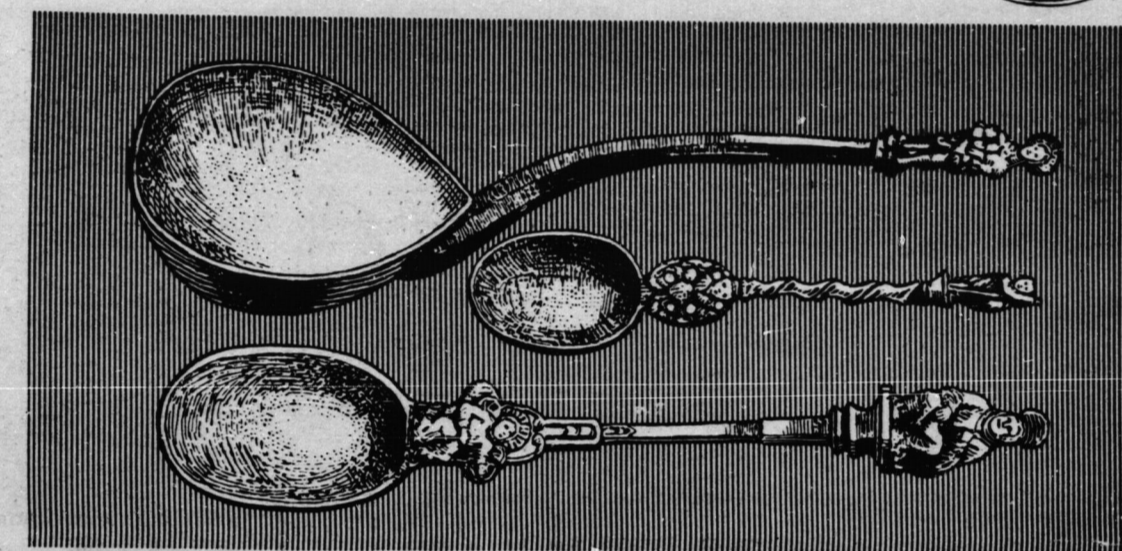
farm machinery and farm power. He taught the specialist one-year diploma program at the Essex Institute of Agriculture and agricultural engineering at Wye College, University of London.



'Cochlear' was 18th century transition from spoon to fork, with a point to 'spear' victuals from a plate.



At right: Two examples of souvenirs of national monuments sold to early tourists: Library of Congress spoon; memento of stone mill at Newport of reputed Viking age.



Among silver particularly prized by collectors: spoons ornamented with figures of Babe and Apostle, such as were christening gifts in Europe in the 17th century.

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