



Four profile silhouettes mounted in round pewter frames attributed to Justin Salisbury.

Justin Salisbury's Silhouettes

by FLORENCE THOMPSON HOWE



WHERE, SAVE in New England? Where, indeed, except in Vermont, would you find a valentine made of black cloth, white paper, and a circlet of pewter? The profile likenesses of Luke and Lucy, cut in Windham County, Vermont, in 1829, were just that—a pair of "Valentine silhouettes." On the back of the hollow-cut profile of Luke Sherwin, pictured here, is the inscription: "Made by Justin Salisbury, Feb. 14, 1829/Newfane Hill, Vt."

Who was Justin Salisbury? Was he one of those itinerant silhouettists who tramped the remote hills of New England in search of sitters? With a profile machine on his back, perhaps? To immortalize loved children and teenagers at twenty-five cents a head? He may have served an apprenticeship with an established silhouettist. Or he may have been a somewhat gifted Windham County farm lad who had a yen to "do his thing." (The names Salisbury and Sherwin appear frequently in the early records of Windham County.)

Thus far little information about him has come to light. Vital statistics record his marriage to Miranda Frissell (or Frizzell), daughter of Reuben, of Leyden, Massachusetts, though the date of this marriage is not given. Since Miranda was born in 1807, she was 22 years old when Justin was making his



valentine silhouettes on Newfane Hill in 1829. Quite likely he was about the same age or a little older.

Justin Salisbury's work closely resembles that of Wm. Chamberlain of New Loudon, N. H., who worked in the early 1820s, and went on a two-year tour through Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New York. Both the Boscawen Library in New Hampshire and the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Mass., show his work.

Occasionally the men who made silhouettes advertised their wares in local newspapers. *The Hampshire Federalist* of Apr. 8, 1807, carried this ad:

"J. Fuller, taker of profile likenesses, respectfully informs the ladies and gentlemen of Springfield, that he has taken a retired and convenient room at Mr. Eleazer Williams' Inn, where he will continue, if meeting with liberal encouragement, to ten or twelve days. The superiority of his machine to those in common use, and his extensive practice enable him to give correct Profiles. He has selected a few specimens that may be examined at his room. He takes a profile on beautiful wove paper, and three minutes sitting. He respectfully assures those Ladies and Gentlemen who will favor him with a call, that his whole endeavors will be to please; and that for the small sum of 25 cents they may depend on receiving two correct Profiles . . . etc. etc."

Nothing so definite has been found about Justin Salisbury's approach to his work, though it is likely his use of a "machine" and his prices were much the same.

Salisbury's profiles were the hollow-cut type; that is, the outline of the sitter's head and the profile was cut out from white paper, and the resulting aperture backed with black cloth.

Set into a previously prepared stock and collar delineated on white paper, the sitter's head and profile were his own, even if his collar and waistcoat were of the "ready-made" variety. The stock Salisbury used for his profiles can be identified by a small black triangle in the waistcoat below the collar.

A descendant of Luke Sherwin tells us that this profile of Luke, a young man of Windham County who aspired to the ministry, was one of a pair of Valentine silhouettes which had come down in her family. With it were several other profiles by Salisbury, framed, too, in the simple pewter circle. These were later acquired by an antiques dealer in Greenfield, Mass. One of them, "Lucy" (the other half of the Valentine?) subsequently turned up in the collection of Alice Van Leer Carrick and is illustrated in her book, *Collector's Luck* (1919).

Those Round Pewter Frames

Of these circular pewter frames, Alice Van Leer Carrick says: "Another characteristic American profile frame—I associate it chiefly with New England—is a circle of pewter, very simple but very becoming to a sedate hollow-cutting. The Connecticut Valley is a happy hunting ground for such

frames, and it is possible that they are the work of Richard Lee and his son who after many wanderings and a rather itinerant life, settled finally in Springfield, Vermont."

More recently, Marion and Oliver Deming, collectors, students, and active members of the Pewter Club of America, gave an authoritative account, in the Club bulletin, of the Greenfield pewterer, Samuel Pierce, whose chest of tools, the gift of Ledlie Laughlin, is presently on view in a replica of a pewterer's shop in Old Deerfield, Mass.

The Demings discovered that Samuel Pierce, Jr., the first Samuel's youngest son, carried on his father's business. Since Samuel Jr. and Justin Salisbury were contemporaries, living in neighboring areas—Justin's wife Miranda came from Leyden, next door to Greenfield—it seems reasonable to suggest that the pewter circle frames may have come from the shop of Samuel Pierce, Jr. rather than the Lees. More research is needed for positive proof.

Several of the silhouettes attributed to Justin Salisbury may be seen at the Windham County Historical Society Museum near the Green and the Courthouse in present-day Newfane. One of these is inscribed: "Pardon F. Taylor, Age 10/Newfane, April 8th, 1829." This little boy profile and two others, not identified, are in the round pewter frames which could have come from the shop of Samuel Pierce Jr. in nearby Greenfield. One silhouette by Salisbury is framed in a square wooden frame.

Although Justin Salisbury might be dubbed one of the lesser men by experts on 19th century American silhouettists, his profiles—especially those in the pewter frames—are worth collecting. The frames are of interest as an example of the Yankee ingenuity which enabled pewterers of the period to keep up production as the demand for pewter tableware tapered off.

THE OLD HOUSE

Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts 02532

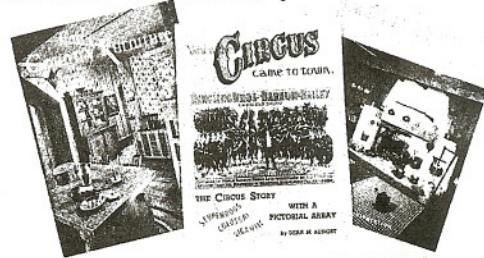
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Dewdrop Band goblet 5.75
Rosette pickle dish 6.00
Grape 6" plate 6.50
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MARCH, 1971

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