

The Earliest Known Example of Historical Blue Staffordshire

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Credits

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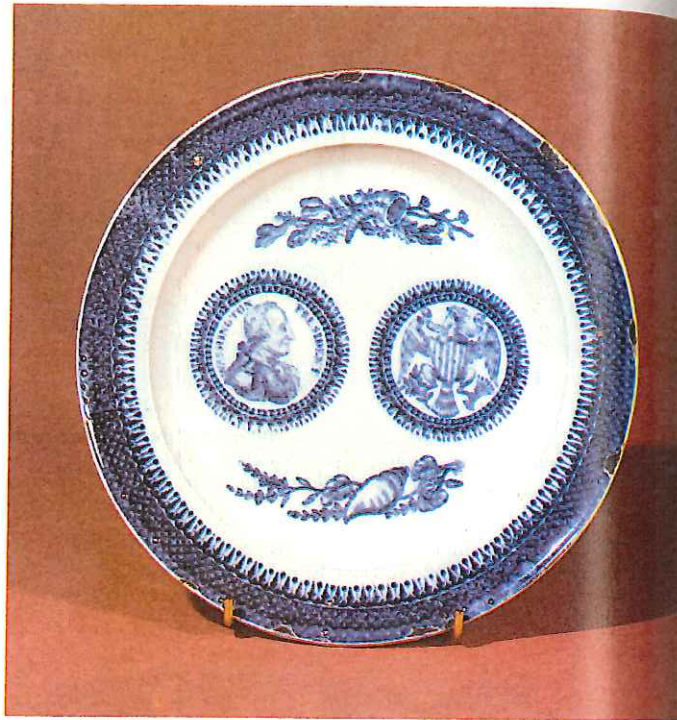
BY HAYDEN GOLDBERG

IT IS NOW just over a hundred years since William C. Prime predicted that ceramics collectors would one day prize highly "the blue-printed crockeries of [James and Ralph] Clews and [Enoch] Wood and [John and William] Ridgway . . . showing [America's] first steamboats, our first railways, the portraits of our distinguished statesmen, soldiers, and sailors, the openings of our canals, the various events of our wars. . . ."¹

By the 1890's Alice Morse Earle and other collectors were paying as much as \$25 a piece for some examples of historical blue Staffordshire. In 1899 two classics in the field were published: Edwin Atlee Barber's *Anglo-American Pottery* and R. T. Haines Halsey's *Pictures of Early New York on Dark Blue Staffordshire Pottery*, which together recorded the makers and patterns then known. Halsey chronicled 220 American scenes and portraits in dark blue. Barber identified eleven Staffordshire makers who produced these views: William Adams, the Clewses, Thomas Mayer, Edward and George Phillips, the Ridgways, John Rogers and Son, Andrew Stevenson, Ralph Stevenson, Joseph Stubbs, John Tams, and Enoch Wood and Sons.

Only sixteen additional American subjects have been discovered since that time and Barber's list of the companies that courted the American market with dark-blue wares remains nearly undisturbed to this day. Equally little challenged has been Barber's and Halsey's account of the history of the manufacture of blue Staffordshire bearing American views. They both wrote that about 1819 or 1820 a dozen or so Staffordshire potters began producing pottery designed to appeal to American patriotism in an attempt to overcome the resentment against all British goods generated by the War of 1812.

Heretofore, no Staffordshire with dark-blue transfer-printed American subjects dating earlier than about 1820 has been verified,² and no other of the more than three hundred potters in the Staffordshire district at the time has been identified as a producer of these wares. It is in this context that the discovery of the plate shown in Plate I must be considered. The plate at once adds another unquestioned American subject to the list of established views; it raises a relatively obscure potter to the very select group of producers of historical blue Staffordshire; and, most significantly, it sets back by some thirty years the first production of dark-blue Staffordshire with an American subject.



Pl. I. Transfer-printed earthenware plate depicting George Washington and the arms of the United States, made by Joshua Heath (w. c. 1770-1800), Staffordshire, England, c. 1791. The impressed marks on the bottom are shown in Fig. 1. Diameter 9½ inches. Private collection; except as noted, photographs are by Helga Photo Studio.



Fig. 1. Marks on the bottom of the plate illustrated in Pl. I.



The principal decorative elements are two medallions: that on the left contains a profile portrait of our first president and the words *Washington President*, while that on the right contains the great seal of the United States. Each medallion is enclosed by a double border. The outer border consists of daggers alternating with tiny hanging-ball ornaments; and the inner border is a chain of round links. Above and below the medallions are compositions of shells,

Fig. 2. Transfer-printed plate made by Heath, c. 1790. The Buffalo pattern was designed and probably engraved for Heath by Thomas Minton (1765–1836). The photograph is reproduced from W. L. Little, *Staffordshire Blue* (New York, 1969), No. 31. Helga photograph, by courtesy of Mrs. W. L. Little.

Pl. II. Transfer-printed wares bearing portraits of George Washington, Staffordshire, 1820–1830. *Left to right:* Coffeepot made by Enoch Wood and Sons; height 11¼ inches. The vignette is derived from a likeness of Washington executed by Charles Buxton that was engraved by Cornelius Tiebout in 1798. Mug; height 2¾ inches. The portrait of Washington is derived from one by Gilbert Stuart; the arms of the United States appear on the sides (see Pl. III). This mug and one from the same series bearing a portrait of James Monroe and now in the collection of the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum are among the few pieces to bear American subjects that were not catalogued by R. T. Haines Halsey in *Pictures of Early New York on Dark Blue Staffordshire*, first published in 1899, or by Ellouise Baker Larsen in *American Historical Views on Staffordshire China*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, New York, 1950). Pitcher made by Richard Hall and Son; height 5¾ inches. The portrait of Washington is derived from Stuart's Athenaeum portrait. The arms of the United States appear under the spout (see Pl. III). Plate from the acorn-and-oak-leaf series made by Ralph Stevenson and Williams, with portraits of Washington and Lafayette at the top; diameter 8½ inches. The central vignette depicts the City Hotel in New York City. Small plate from the wild rose series by Andrew Stevenson with portraits of Washington and DeWitt Clinton; diameter 6½ inches. The central vignette pictures Halstead, Essex, England. Discovered by David Arman in 1978, this is another of the few designs made for the American market now known that were not catalogued by Halsey or Larsen. This is the only example of the design that I know of. *Private collection.*

leaves, and flowers. The outer border of the plate is typical of that found on eighteenth-century Staffordshire plates with Oriental designs. The inner border is composed of the same daggers and hanging balls that surround the medallions. On the back of the plate are an indecipherable impressed mark—possibly the number 3—and IH (Fig. 1).

The initials are those of Joshua Heath, who operated in Hanley and Shelton between at least 1770 and 1800³ and was one of the first makers of both creamware and blue transfer-printed wares. Among the rare examples of the latter that are assigned to him, in addition to the plate shown in Plate I, are the



Figs. 3, 3a. Obverse and reverse of a copper essay for an American coin designed by Obediah Westwood and John G. Hancock (w. 1775–1815), English, 1791. On another of their three essays Westwood and Hancock showed the eagle with its wings raised. It was that essay that Peter Getz copied (see Figs. 4, 4a). Photographs by courtesy of Stack's Numismatists.



Buffalo pattern plate shown in Figure 2, a sauceboat decorated with the Buffalo pattern, and a plate decorated with a portrait of King George III and the legend *God Save the King* enclosed in the same border as that around the rim of the Washington plate.⁴

The Washington plate can be dated to the eighteenth century with confidence because Heath is not known to have worked after 1800 and because of the quality of the printing and the source of the design. The transfer process was first applied to earthenware, as opposed to porcelain, by Thomas Minton in 1780 at Caughley, but it was not successfully used in Staffordshire until the mid-1780's. During the first years that the process was used on earthenware the design was transferred from the copperplate to the pottery on very thick paper, with the result that designs were limited to rather heavy line drawings. Graduated shading and fine lines were not made possible until 1803, the year England began to produce the fine Fourdrinier tissue paper that revolutionized transfer printing. The plate illustrated in Plate I displays the heaviness of line and detail typical of early transfer-printed earthenwares, in obvious contrast to the transfer-printed objects shown in Plates II and III, all of which were made in the 1820's, during the heyday of American historical blue.

The pattern of the outer border design on the plate is also of the eighteenth century. The brocaded crosshatching, copied from Chinese and Japanese porcelain, is found on virtually all Staffordshire made at the end of the eighteenth century, where it

complemented central motifs that remained steadfastly Oriental until the end of the century. The flower and foliage borders typically found on historical blue Staffordshire (see Pls. II, III) did not begin to be used until "about 1802 [when] Mr. Wm. Brookes, engraver, then of Tunstall, now [1829] of Burslem, suggested to Mr. J[ohn] Clive, a new method of ornament by Blue Printing. The border of the plate was engraved from a beautiful strip of Border for Paper Hangings of Rooms [*i.e.*, wallpaper]."⁵

It is impossible to date the Washington plate precisely, although it cannot have been made earlier than 1789, the year Washington was first elected president. Indeed, it is attractive to suppose that the plate was created to commemorate Washington's election or his inauguration on April 30, 1789, and there is some evidence to support this. For one thing, if the plate was designed to celebrate America's first presidential election, then the curious word order of the inscription could be explained as a proclamation. Furthermore, since the design of the border is less sophisticated and the engraving of the decoration is cruder than on the Buffalo plate (Fig. 2), which was designed for Heath by Thomas Minton about 1790, it seems likely that the Washington plate predates Heath's association with Minton.

Despite the temptation to conclude that the plate dates from Washington's inauguration, there is stronger evidence that it was made slightly later and that it is related to the establishment of the United States Mint in 1791 and the beginning of Federal coinage about that time.



Figs. 4, 4a. Obverse and reverse of a copper essay of an American coin probably engraved by Peter Getz (1764–1809), Philadelphia, 1792. Stack's Numismatists photographs.





As early as 1776 Congress planned a national mint, but the insolvency of the Confederation and the unavailability of bullion prevented the execution of the plan until 1791, when Congress passed the bill establishing the mint. Robert Morris, the financial genius who had kept the young country afloat throughout the Revolution, and who in 1791 was a senator from Pennsylvania, began a campaign in Congress to adopt coins portraying President Washington on the obverse and an eagle with the inscription *United States of America* on the reverse. The English coiner Obediah Westwood, working with the English die-maker and designer John Hancock, created three essays, or models, of coins fitting this description (see Figs. 3, 3a), but it is not known if Westwood and Hancock were working under Morris' aegis or on speculation. Specimens in various metals of Westwood-Hancock cents and half dollars, dated 1791 and 1792, respectively, were presented by Morris to President Washington and other government officials. When Morris introduced the bill to authorize the Washington coins on April 2, 1792, he presented each senator with a silver essay of his proposed half dollar and each representative with a copper one. These essays are believed to have been engraved by twenty-three-year-old Peter Getz of Pennsylvania, who aspired to a post in the Federal mint. These essays were almost exact copies of one of the Westwood-Hancock essays.

Despite Morris' enthusiastic and dramatic efforts, Washington called the coin "monarchical,"⁶ and the bill was emended to provide for the allegorical head of Liberty on United States coins. Not until 1932 did Washington appear on an American coin.

One of the Westwood-Hancock essays is virtually identical to the medallions on the Washington President plate except that on the latter the date has been

Pl. III. Transfer-printed wares bearing the arms of the United States, Staffordshire, 1820-1830. *Left to right:* Cream pitcher made by James and Ralph Clews; height 5½ inches. Plate made by James and Ralph Clews; diameter 10½ inches. Mug illustrated in Pl. II. Pitcher made by Richard Hall and Son illustrated in Pl. II. Bowl by an unknown maker; diameter 6¾ inches. Covered sugar bowl; height 7 inches. Pitcher made by William Adams; height 5¾ inches. There are sixteen stars above the eagle on the front of this pitcher, which led Josiah Wedgwood and Thomas H. Ormsbee to assume that it was made shortly after 1796, when Tennessee was admitted as the sixteenth state in the Union (*Staffordshire Pottery* [New York, 1947], p. 113). However, British potters were notoriously inaccurate regarding the names and numbers of the states, and it turns out that this pitcher, like almost all American historical blue Staffordshire, dates from the 1820's. *Private collection.*

eliminated. Almost certainly the essay was the immediate source of the design for the plate. The words "Washington President," it now becomes clear, are not a proclamation of Washington's election but are taken from the wording on the essay, where they were probably intended to parallel the legend *Georgius Rex* that appeared on British coins. Perhaps this was the "monarchical" pretension to which Washington objected.

At the time of the appearance of the Westwood-Hancock essays there were two profile portraits of Washington that could have served as the source for the likeness of the president on the coin and on the plate. The most likely is a drawing of General Washington made in February 1779 by the Swiss-born artist Pierre Eugène du Simitière. An engraving of it published in London in 1783 was widely copied and was probably the best-known portrait of Washington in England at the time (see Fig. 5). The Du Simitière portrait bears a strong facial resemblance to the likeness on the coin and, ultimately, the plate, although details of the uniform differ somewhat.

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Fig. 5. *His Excellency General Washington Commander in chief of the united States of North America &c.*, by B. B. Ellis after a drawing by Pierre Eugène du Simitière (c. 1736-1784). Engraving, 5 by 3½ inches. This copy of Du Simitière's portrait was published by R. Wilkinson of London on May 15, 1783. *New York Public Library, Charles W. McAlpin collection; photograph by courtesy of the library.*

The second possible source for the likeness of Washington is any of a number of prints after a sketch done in New York City in 1790 by the young American artist Joseph Wright (see Fig. 6). The details of the uniform, including a lace jabot, are like those pictured on the coin and plate, but the shape of the head, the severity of the wig, and the long angular face are very different. Moreover, since Wright's portrait was not so widely known in England as Du Simitière's, it is almost certain that the latter or one of the many engravings of it was the source for the Westwood-Hancock coin, and thus for the medallion on the Heath plate.

The whereabouts of this historically important plate during the past 190 years is not known. Stained and chipped around the rim, it came to light in the winter of 1979 in a house in the Midwest. Dating from within a dozen years of the introduction of underglaze-blue transfer-printed earthenware in 1780 and created to honor the first president, the importance of this plate to collectors of American historical blue Staffordshire cannot be overstated. It is hardly less significant to students of American numismatic history and of Staffordshire pottery. A

rare exception to the almost exclusive use of pseudo-Oriental designs on Staffordshire before 1800, Joshua Heath's Washington President plate may well be the first underglaze-blue transfer-printed portrait plate. It is certainly the earliest known example of American historical blue Staffordshire.

¹ *The China Hunters Club* (New York, 1878), p. 8.

² Rumors of the existence of such pieces have appeared from time to time. The unmarked pitcher shown at the far right in Pl. III is a case in point.

³ William Chaffers, *Marks and Monograms on European and Oriental Pottery and Porcelain*, 15th rev. ed. (London, 1965), vol. 2, p. 5, gives Heath's working dates as 1740-1780, while Geoffrey A. Godden, *The Handbook of British Pottery and Porcelain Marks* (New York, 1968), p. 76, and W. L. Little, *Staffordshire Blue* (New York, 1969), p. 71, both give Heath's working dates as 1770-1800. It is possible that there were two generations of Joshua Heaths, which would explain Chaffers' early starting date of 1740.

⁴ Both the saucboat and the God Save the King plate are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The latter was presumably created to commemorate the recovery of George III (r. 1760-1820) from one of his periods of insanity.

⁵ Simeon Shaw, *History of the Staffordshire Potteries* (Hanley, England, 1829; reprinted New York, 1970), p. 226.

⁶ Quoted in Q. David Bowers, *The History of United States Coinage As Illustrated by the Garrett Collection* (Los Angeles, 1979), p. 181.

Fig. 6. *G. Washington*, by Joseph Wright (1756-1793), c. 1790. Inscribed at bottom, *J. Wright Pinx & F.* Dry-point etching, 2½ by 1½ inches. *New York Public Library, McAlpin collection, photograph by courtesy of the library.*

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Plate 1: See article for description. This image presented as it is better quality than the image in the article reproduction. Reproduced courtesy Chet Creutzburg.



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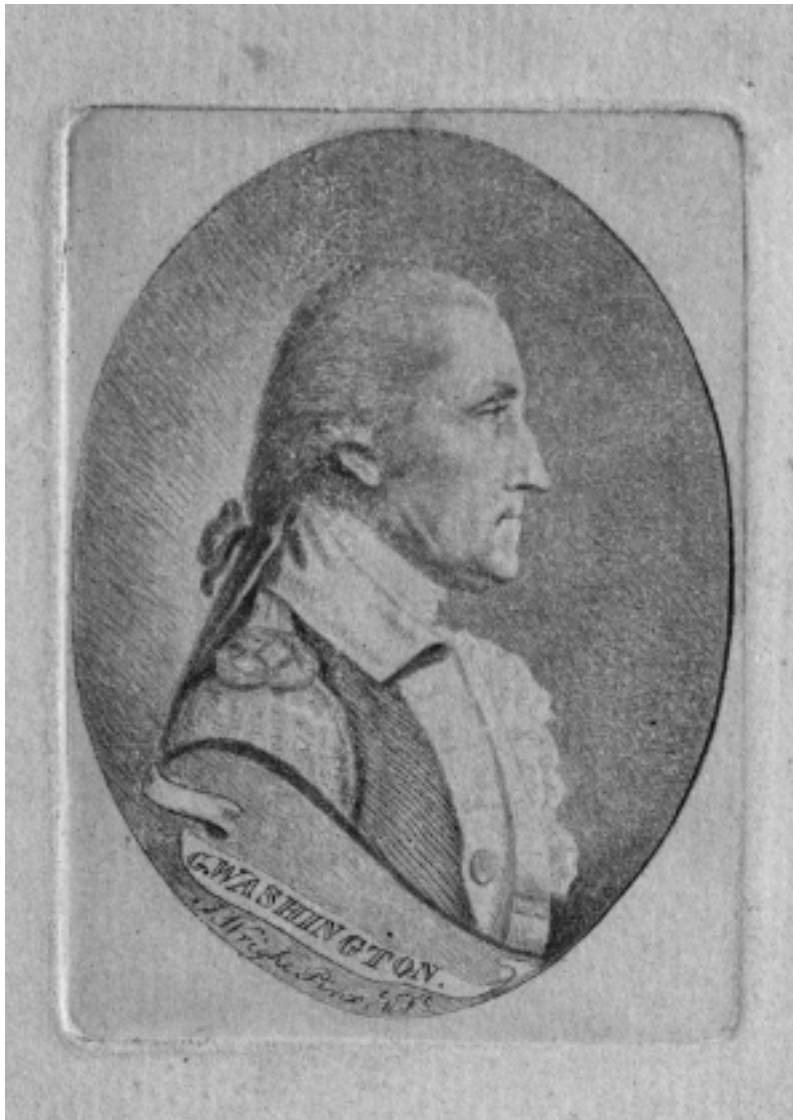


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