



 Benjamin Trees Julep Cup




Coin Silver Julep cup by
John Kitts,
Louisville, Ca. 1857

COLLECTIBLES WORTH A MINT

In Kentucky, the coming of spring brings the opening of Keeneland and various celebrations culminating with the Kentucky Derby. During this exciting time, many Kentuckians, as well as our out-of-town guests, will be sampling a mint julep. This legendary Kentucky cocktail is thought to have originated in the 18th century and few American cocktails have spawned so much lore and legend. For example, it is rumored, that during his stay in Washington, D.C. as a U.S. Senator, Henry Clay introduced his counterparts to the drink in the Round Robin Bar of the Willard Hotel. It is also said that mint was planted outside of Churchill Downs in 1875 so that mint juleps could be served there on Derby Day. Thus began a tradition that has lasted well into current times with the Mint Julep clearly recognized as the official drink of the Kentucky Derby. Equally as fascinating and rich in history is the vessel that was developed to hold this drink, the Kentucky Julep Cup. Originally, the cups we now refer to as julep cups might have been called "beakers" and some of these were actually manufactured as agricultural "premiums," which were coin silver cups awarded as trophies at county fairs. As early as 1816, the Kentucky Gazette mentioned julep cups being awarded as prizes in horse races.

Following are some notable makers and/or vendors of Kentucky Julep Cups:

Asa Blanchard: As the most sought after of all Kentucky silversmiths, Blanchard's work commands higher prices in the market than others. Blanchard was a prolific producer of silver products, and was very active in Lexington from around 1808 until his death in 1838. His shop was at the corner of Mill and Short, where the Cheapside Bar is located today.

John Kitts: A popular Louisville silversmith, Kitts operated from a shop on Main Street between Fourth and Fifth. He was active in Louisville from around 1836 until at least 1859 and was involved in various partnerships, including a short pairing with David Stoy. As a result, examples of Kitts' mark exists on cups as "Kitts and Stoy" or simply "Kitts."

Mark Searce: Much more recently, Mark Searce of the venerable Wakefield Searce

Galleries in Shelbyville began producing "Presidential" julep cups. Beginning with the Truman presidency in 1947, Wakefield Searce has issued a julep cup during each presidency, marked on the bottom with an American eagle and the initials of the current president, such as BHO for Barack Obama. When a president advances to his second term, a new cup is issued,





Kentucky Julep Cup bearing
the mark of Asa Blanchard

such as the GWB II cup that was issued to commemorate George W. Bush's second term in office. These cups are highly sought after by current collectors. The Truman cup is the oldest and rarest, and therefore commands the

highest price. Interestingly, prices on some of the other Presidential cups seem to follow the popularity of the particular president to which they are associated.



 Mark J. Searce
"Presidential" Julep Cup

Benjamin Trees: A silversmith, collector, and lecturer on silver and its history, Trees came to Lexington in 1934 and worked out of his residence on Versailles Road. He was active until his death in March 1965 however, Trees did not manufacture his own julep cups. In fact, most cups bearing the "Trees" mark were actually manufactured by International Silver Company. Nonetheless, Trees julep cups remain highly sought after by Kentucky collectors who seek the mark of this well known and respected silversmith.

Mollie Moore: A native of Leicester, England who came to Lexington around 1947, Mollie Moore was a self-taught silversmith who was rather an unlikely entrant into Kentucky's julep cup history. Saying she began working in silver, "because it was the hardest thing she could think of to do," Moore spent hours at the library researching old techniques and was a great admirer of Asa Blanchard. Together with two friends, both local physicians, she learned to make julep cups, with her first cup being made around 1959. Moore's cups were initially stamped M. Woolfolk, her name by her first husband, and later with the initials MWM in block letters. Since her technique was similar

to those of early silversmiths, they are easily mistaken for those made during the time of Blanchard or Kitts. Today her cups are extremely rare and command a premium price. In an April 30, 1979 article for The Lexington Herald, Moore commented "it would make me awful proud if my name was with theirs (silversmiths such as Blanchard). I don't know if it ever would be. But a lady said to me one time that she wanted another (Moore julep cup) because one day they would be valuable." Today, although she is certainly not as sought after as



 Julep Cup
produced by
silversmith
Mollie Moore



 Kentucky Julep Cup bearing
the mark of Mark Searce

Blanchard, Moore's work stands up well and her legacy is clearly established as one of Kentucky's most revered silversmiths.

Jerry Shrout is the proprietor of the Thoroughbred Antique Gallery, located at 637 East main St. in Lexington.

Celebrating 90 years in Lexington



Visit ppgporterpaints.com
to see all 35
Lexington area locations.

Create a refined
mood with the
ATMOSPHERIC
collection