

## HISTORY FROM OHA

*Polished Off!***History of the Silverware Industry in Syracuse**

■ BY KAREN Y. COONEY

Locally, most residents associate the silverware industry with Oneida International. However, Onondaga County, and specifically Syracuse, was a major supplier of formal silverware during the last half of the 19th century.

Syracuse was able to manufacture what was termed "spoonwork" due to the influx of capital and skilled labor during that time. "Spoonwork" was a term used to describe flatware such as knives, forks, spoons, ladles, and servers for the table. "Hollowware," on the other hand, described items like bowls, teapots, and larger serving pieces, and these items were made elsewhere in the U.S. It has been suggested that the silverware industry in Syracuse at one time rivaled that of Boston — well-known for its exquisite silver.

The first report of silverware manufacturing in Syracuse was made around 1841. William Ward Willard, assisted by J. Dean Hawley, had a small jewelry trade. Willard

expanded into the spoonware business and hired Joseph Seymour, a silversmith who had been trained at the Rogers Bros. factory located in Hartford, Conn. When Seymour left in 1857 to form his own business, Willard & Hawley employed Lemuel D. Beebe to manage the factory. Willard & Hawley produced vast amounts of plain coin silver spoons and a limited number of patterned ones. It subsequently gave up the silver business in 1867, and returned to its original business as a small jewelry firm.

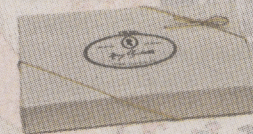
Joseph Seymour's company started with one assistant in a small building located near the Park Central Church. When he outgrew the inadequate space, he relocated to Montgomery Street, near the present YMCA location. He employed 20 men to fill ever-increasing work orders. At his zenith, Seymour used \$40,000 worth of silver per



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**Seymour**



# SILVERWARE: *The process of silver manufacturing was simple*

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year to manufacture items such as forks, spoons, ladles, dessert and butter knives, servers, napkin rings, and crumb scrapers. Additionally, he designed Masonic, Odd-Fellow, and other Society silver and gold pieces, such as badges and ornate medals. One of the manufacturer's most famous orders was for 1 million commemorative spoons honoring the 1901 Pan-American

Exposition in Buffalo. Four patterns were designed and used for the bowl of each spoon. These were a view of Niagara Falls, the Fair's electric tower, machinery and transportation building, and the electrical building. The handle was imprinted with both a buffalo head and an Indian head and the lettering "Pan-American Exposition 1901." Despite the death of Joseph Seymour in 1887, the firm stayed in business until 1905.

The process of silver manufacturing was

simple. The silver was subjected to high temperatures and the resulting liquid poured into moulds, producing bars of a pre-determined weight. These bars were then hammered and passed through a rolling mill that was set to roll out the silver in a variety of thicknesses based on the article being produced. The silver was then hammered again by hand, fed into die-rollers where it received the shape and pattern required, filed, polished, burnished, and finally engraved.

The silver industry in the Syracuse area declined at the end of the 19th century, primarily due to economic reasons and changing consumer tastes. After more than 50 years and much acclaim, the industry disappeared from the area. □

*Karen Y. Cooney is support services administrator at the Onondaga Historical Association (OHA) Museum ([www.cnyhistory.org](http://www.cnyhistory.org)) at 321 Montgomery St. in Syracuse.*