

***The Van Dorn Silver Bowl Fashioned in 1699 by Jesse Kip of New York:
A Racing Trophy from Monmouth County, New Jersey, or a Dutch Brandywine Bowl?***

By Joseph W. Hammond

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In the study of early silver owned by Monmouth County families, one piece stands out. It is a silver bowl with two handles and six panels that is monogrammed “VD / I M” for Jacob and Maritje Van Dorn and dated 1699. Of a form made in New York City between 1690 and 1720, a legend, first recorded in the early 20th century, accompanies the bowl. Descendants believed that it was a racing trophy awarded for winning a horse race held on King’s Highway in Middletown Village. This article discusses the bowl, its form and function, descent in the Van Dorn and Conover families, early horse racing in America, an antiques dealer named Edna M. Netter who once handled it, acquisition by the Henry Ford Museum, and finally, the legend itself.



Silver bowl, monogrammed for Jacob and Maritje Van Dorn of Monmouth County, New Jersey, dated 1699, and made by silversmith Jesse Kip of New York City. Courtesy Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan, museum purchase, 1955.

The Van Dorn silver bowl, owned since 1955 by the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, measures 3 1/2 inches in height, 8 1/2 inches in length, and 6 inches in diameter. It features six lobed and chased panels that contain abstract fleurs-de-lis, two cast handles with caryatids, a very shallow foot, and an engraved stylized flower on the base. The engraved monogram, “VD / I M,” is located in a centered panel between the handles. It stands for Jacob and Maritje (Mary) Van Dorn. The D appears to have been added at a later time, given its asymmetrical position over the M and smaller size. The date 1699 was engraved on the opposite side of the bowl. The maker, Jesse Kip of New York City, struck his mark, “IK” in a rectangle, above the monogram close to the lip of the bowl.¹



Detail of the Van Dorn monogram and the Jesse Kip maker's mark. Courtesy Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.

¹ Jesse Kip, *Two Handled Cup*, 1699, 3 1/2 x 8 1/2 x 6 in., Henry Ford Museum, <https://www.thehenryford.org/collections-and-research/digital-collections/artifact/275148>.



Detail of the engraved date on the Van Dorn silver bowl. Courtesy Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.



Detail of the stylized flower engraved on the base of the bowl. Photograph taken in 1942 by Dorn's Photo, Red Bank, New Jersey. From the Edna M. Netter Collection. Courtesy Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Jacob Van Dorn was baptized at the Reformed Dutch church in Brooklyn, New York, on October 21, 1668, a son of Christian Pieterszen Van Dorn (1635–1686) and Tryntje Cornelis Shubber (1638–1686). In 1687, Jacob married Maritje Bennett, daughter of Adriaen Bennett (1637–1704) and Angenietje Van Dyke (1644–1710). They became the parents of 10 children, 9

of whom lived to adulthood.² Jacob bought his first tract of land in Monmouth County, New Jersey, on February 14, 1697. It was described as bounded by “Hop Brook, Penns land, and a deep gully.” In 1698 he acquired additional land “on the east branch of Hop River.” Two years later he purchased 200 acres more.³ By 1701, Van Dorn had become the sole owner in fee of 675 acres of land located in what is now Holmdel and Marlboro Townships.⁴ The large home tract ran from the junction of Routes 34 and 520 or Newman Springs Road west up a slight valley to the area known as Hillsdale. Van Dorn had built a dam and grist mill on Willow Brook by 1714, and his house was situated on a knoll above the mill pond. When the first minister, the Rev. Joseph Morgan, was installed as pastor of the Reformed Dutch church of Freehold and Middletown on October 19, 1709, Jacob Van Dorn became a deacon and served on the consistory.⁵ He died before March 21, 1720, when his will that had been written on April 24, 1719, was proved. An inventory of Van Dorn’s personal estate taken the following May 23 appraised his possessions, excluding real estate, at £139:6:0. One entry valued a lot of “plate” at £4.⁶ The term plate at the time referred to solid silver items, presumably including the silver bowl.

The Van Dorn silver bowl with two handles was a form that became popular among families of Dutch descent in the New York and northern New Jersey area and the Hudson Valley. Called a *brandewijnkom*, or brandywine bowl, it was typically associated with the *kindermaal*, a social gathering of women neighbors at the home of a newborn child. The bowl would be passed from person to person (hence the two handles), who would each dip out a mixture of brandy and

² Family history has been compiled from Ann Pette Miles, *Monmouth Families*, vol. I (King William, Virginia: Privately Printed, 1980), 198–204; George C. Beekman, *Early Dutch Settlers of Monmouth County, New Jersey*, 2nd ed. (Freehold: Moreau Brothers, 1915), 43–46; and from information on Ancestry.com.

³ Ann Pette Miles, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 198.

⁴ Beekman, *op. cit.*, 43.

⁵ Franklin Ellis, *History of Monmouth County, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: R. T. Peck & Co., 1885), 730.

⁶ Jacob Van Dorn, estate inventory, May 23, 1720, docket 123-125M, New Jersey State Archives, Trenton, New Jersey (hereafter cited as NJSA).

raisins with a special spoon. Such a bowl also served the same function at weddings and funerals.⁷ To cite one example, a year before her death in 1711, Margareta Schuyler of Albany instructed her children to “Put up into a trunk . . . 1 large silver cup with two handles.” The next year a memorandum mentioned things removed from the trunk “for ye use of ye funeral . . . 1 Large silver Cup with 2 ears.”⁸

Roughly 30 or fewer of these brandywine bowls made in New York are known today. They are a form of silver that originated primarily in the Netherlands, although they can also be found in Scandinavia. They were made from the mid-17th century into the 19th in most Dutch provinces. Brandywine bowls were especially popular in Friesland and Groningen in the northeast. An eight-paneled bowl was the most common form in the Netherlands. Those from Groningen and elsewhere featured a pedestal base and oval shape. Others from the Netherlands are round and seated on a short rim foot. Bowls made in New York are also round, although divided into six lobed panels instead of eight, still chased with a shape like those from the Netherlands, and placed on a short foot, all very similar to the Haarlem example shown. The major difference was the substitution of cast vertical handles in New York, like those on many other Dutch brandywine bowls, instead of cast horizontal handles.

Notable examples of *brandewijnkommen* made in New York can be found today in such institutions as the Metropolitan Museum of Art,⁹ the New-York Historical Society,¹⁰ the

⁷ Celia Betsky, “The Dutch and Their Domestic Silver in America, 1686–1750” (master’s thesis, Yale University, 1975), 28.

⁸ Roderick H. Blackburn and Ruth Piwonka, *Remembrance of Patria: Dutch Arts and Culture in Colonial America, 1609–1776* (Albany: Albany Institute of History and Art, 1988), 278.

⁹ Jesse Kip, *Two-Handled Bowl*, 1690–1710, 4 15/16 x 11 15/16 in., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/803>.

¹⁰ Benjamin Wynkoop, *Brandywine Bowl*, 1700, 8 3/4 x 5 3/4 x 12 3/8 in., New-York Historical Society, <https://emuseum.nyhistory.org/objects/34957/brandywine-bowl-brandewijnkom?ctx=3234ac7a41b92dcef0c26db2251a4db2b39e839e&idx=2>.



A silver *brandewijnkom* made in Haarlem, the Netherlands. It is dated 1682, features a round form, eight lobed panels chased with a design similar in shape to those on New York bowls, cast horizontal handles, and a simple rim foot. 2 1/4 inches high x 8 5/8 inches wide. Ex-collection E. Alfred Jones. Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York, Rogers Fund, 1913.

Museum of the City of New York,¹¹ the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston,¹² the Yale University Art Gallery,¹³ the Winterthur Museum and Garden,¹⁴ the Albany Institute of History and Art,¹⁵ and Colonial Williamsburg,¹⁶ in addition to the Van Dorn bowl at the Henry Ford Museum. Five of these bowls were made and monogrammed for early members of the Brockholst, De Peyster, Ten

¹¹ Gerrit Onckelbag, *Brandywine Bowl*, 1691–1732, 5 3/8 x 12 3/4 x 9 3/8 in., Museum of the City of New York, https://collections.mcny.org/CS.aspx?VP3=DamView&VBID=24UP1GQ1OFKG8&SMLS=1&RW=1536&RH=745&FR_=1&W=1536&H=746 (one of two brandywine bowls owned by MCNY).

¹² Jacob Boelen I, *Two-Handled Bowl*, 1690–1710, 1 13/16 x 6 5/8 x 4 13/16 in., Museum of Fine Art Boston, <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/42506>.

¹³ Bartholomew Le Roux, *Brandywine Bowl*, 1690–1700, 5 1/2 x 12 1/8 x 8 15/16 in., Yale University Art Gallery, <https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/35789>.

¹⁴ Jacob Ten Eyck, *Bowl (Brandywine Bowl)*, 1730–1736, 4.646 x 11.063 x 7.441 in., Winterthur Museum, http://museumcollection.winterthur.org/single-record.php?resultsperpage=20&view=catalog&srctype=advanced&hasImage=&ObjObjectName=&CreOrigin=&Earliest=&Latest=&CreCreatorLocal_tab=&materialsearch=&ObjObjectID=&ObjCategory=Metals&DesMaterial_tab=&DesTechnique_tab=&AccCreditLineLocal=&CreMarkSignature=&recid=1955.0127&srchfld=&srchtxt=brandywine+bowl&id=38a4&rownum=1&version=100&src=results-imagelink-only

¹⁵ Jacob Ten Eyck, *Paneled Bowl*, 1730–1750, 4 7/8 x 7 3/4 in., Albany Institute of History and Art, <https://www.albanyinstitute.org/collection/details/paneled-bowl>.

¹⁶ Benjamin Wynkoop, *Two-handled Bowl*, 1696, 5 5/8 in. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, <https://emuseum.history.org/objects/100763/twohandled-bowl;jsessionid=EFC163316C555B7DDC6EED453F6A7F0B>.

Broeck, Van Iveren, and Van Schaick families, all of Dutch descent.¹⁷ A sixth, the example at the Yale University Art Gallery, was monogrammed “W / I S” for Joseph Wardell (1660–1735) and Sarah Bonnell (1660–1750), early English Quakers from New Hampshire who resettled in Shrewsbury, Monmouth County, New Jersey. They were married in 1696, the suggested date of the bowl. It could also have been acquired to celebrate the birth of their son, Eliakim, in 1697, or any of their subsequent children. Later engraved inscriptions record its descent through the female line of the Wardell family into the early 20th century. The bowl was donated to the Mabel Brady Garvan Collection at Yale in 1930 by Francis P. Garvan.¹⁸ This particular *brandewijnkom* may well be very early evidence of cross-cultural custom exchange between the Dutch and English residents of the greater New York area. Although larger and on a more elaborate stepped foot, it is strikingly similar in form to the Van Dorn bowl, featuring the same shape of the six panels as well as cast caryatid handles. This resemblance is notable, in spite of it being fashioned by another New York City silversmith named Bartholomew Le Roux (1663–1713), a Huguenot craftsman born in Amsterdam who immigrated to America before 1687 after spending time in London.¹⁹

Jesse Kip, the silversmith who made the Van Dorn bowl, was born in New York City on December 16, 1660, a son of Jacob Kip (1631–1690) and Maria de la Montagne (1637–1711). Of Dutch and Huguenot descent, he was of the third generation of his family to reside in New York. In 1695, Jesse married Maria Stevens (or Stevenson). They became the parents of 10 children.

¹⁷ The family histories of the brandywine bowls at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and at the Winterthur Museum are apparently not known.

¹⁸ Bartholomew Le Roux, *Brandywine Bowl*, 1690–1700. 5 1/2 x 12 1/8 x 8 15/16 in., Yale University Art Gallery, <https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/35789>.

¹⁹ “Bartholomew Le Roux,” Wikipedia, accessed March 21, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartholomew_Le_Roux.



Silver brandywine bowl made circa 1696 by silversmith Bartholomew Le Roux of New York City and monogrammed “W / I S” for Joseph and Sarah Wardell of Shrewsbury, New Jersey, who were married in that year. 5 1/2 inches high x 12 1/8 inches wide x 8 15/16 inches in diameter. From the Mabel Brady Garvan Collection. Courtesy Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

The Kips removed from New York City to Newtown on Long Island about 1710 when Jesse presumably gave up silversmithing. He owned a grist mill and house there bequeathed to him and his siblings by his brother, Jacobus. The following year, Kip purchased a fulling mill near his grist mill. He died at Newtown in the spring of 1722, his will being proved on April 30 of that year.²⁰

During the years from 1675 to 1750, about 70 silversmiths are known to have worked in New York City and Albany. Of these, about 45, or 64 percent, were of Dutch descent, about 14 Huguenot, about 10 English, and the rest of undetermined continental origin. After 1750, the popular English rococo style replaced the distinctive features and Dutch traits of earlier New York

²⁰ Frederick Ellsworth Kip, *History of the Kip Family in America* (Boston: Hudson Printing, 1928), 385–386; and John Marshall Phillips, “Identifying the Mysterious I K: Jesse Kip, New York Goldsmith,” *The Magazine Antiques* (July 1943): 19–21.

silver.²¹ Jesse Kip was related to four other early New York City silversmiths. He was a cousin to Peter Van Imburgh (1689–1740), related by marriage to Benjamin Wynkoop (1675–1751), and probably apprenticed his younger brother, Benjamin Kip (1678–1702), and possibly also Cornelius Kierstede (1674–1757), a nephew of his sister Rachel’s husband.²²

A second brandywine bowl fashioned by Jesse Kip is the example owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City that is monogrammed “S / T A.” It was believed by the donors in 1923 that the initials represented members of the Van Schaick family. The bowl features the same shaped panels, stylized fleurs-de-lis at the base of the panels, and caryatid handles as does the Van Dorn bowl. It sits, however, on a more elaborate stepped foot and is larger in size. Beautifully engraved feathered mantling surrounds the monogram.



Silver brandywine bowl made by Jesse Kip, presumably for the Van Schaick family, circa 1690–1710. 4 15/16 inches high x 11 15/16 inches long. Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York, gift of Mr. and Mrs. William A. Moore, 1923.

²¹ Blackburn and Piwonka, *op. cit.*, 276.

²² Kip, *op. cit.*, plus Caroline Scoon, “Cornelia Duyckinck’s Birthday Spoon Inscribed and Dated: August 25, 1686, Made by Jesse Kip,” *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* (October 1950): 315–317.

Mention of the Van Dorn brandywine bowl first appeared in print in 1906.²³ It was then in possession of J. Dey Conover of Middletown, Monmouth County, who was not a Van Dorn descendant. Outlined below is a presumed provenance for the bowl through six generations from Jacob and Maritje Van Dorn to Conover.

When Jacob Van Dorn died in the spring of 1720, by his will he divided the home plantation, mostly in what is now Marlboro Township, between two sons. His namesake son Jacob (1703–1779) received the western 317 acres of the tract, on which he built an imposing English Georgian-style residence about 1753.²⁴ The remainder of this suggested provenance for the bowl presumes that it passed to this second Jacob.²⁵ Next in line is Jacob's son Isaac Van Dorn (1752–1831). He married in 1785 to Anne Covenhoven (1754–1843) and removed to Middletown. They were both interred in the yard of Christ Episcopal Church in the village. Their son, Garret Van Dorn (1789–1856), became owner of the large historic Conover farm, which was located on the south side of the railroad tracks and station in Middletown Village. He married in 1821 to Williampe Covenhoven (1793–1874) who simplified her name to Conover and was a niece of Anne Covenhoven Van Dorn. They had no children and were also buried in the yard of nearby Christ Church. At this point, in 1856, the farm returned to Conover family ownership, namely to Williampe Conover Van Dorn's nephew, Azariah Conover (1821–1885).

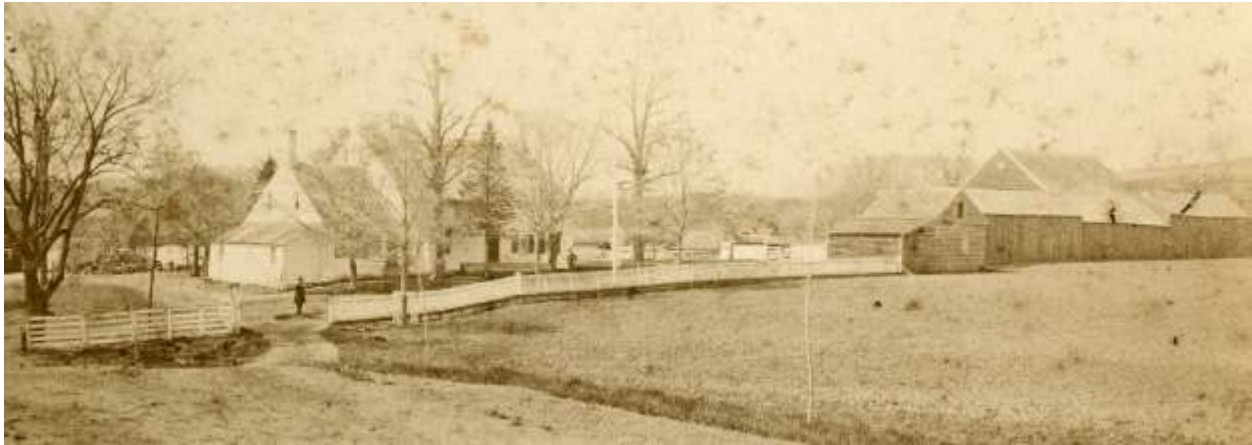
Azariah was born on the 14th of February, 1821, in Marlboro, then Freehold township, then in infancy became an inmate of the household of his uncle, Garret Van Dorn, of Middletown township, then residing on the property now owned by Mr. Conover. After a period of instruction at home, he became a pupil of the Lenox Academy, at Lenox, Mass., and later gave his attention to the cultivation of the farm, for several years superintending

²³ John E. Stillwell, *Historic and Genealogical Miscellany*, vol. II (New York: Privately Printed, 1906), 355.

²⁴ Beekman, *op. cit.*, 44.

²⁵ This line of succession is largely compiled from Ann Pette Miles, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 198–203, and vol. 2, 62 and 72; as well as from published Van Dorn-Conover bible transcriptions in Stillwell, *op. cit.*

its varied interests. On the death of his uncle he purchased the land of the estate, and has since that time been actively engaged in farming of a general character, ranking among the most successful agriculturists of the township.²⁶



A panoramic photograph of the Conover farm in Middletown Village, taken before 1893. The large 18th-century Dutch barn on the right burned in 1949. From the Hartshorne Family Papers. Courtesy Monmouth County Historical Association, Freehold, New Jersey.

Another quotation from an 1885 newspaper obituary provides more insight into the character that Azariah Conover displayed in adulthood.

On the death of his uncle, Garret Van-Dorn, he purchased his farm, where he resided during the remainder of his life, devoting himself to agricultural pursuits. He was proud of his pure, honest, Dutch blood, and liked the old-fashioned, kindly ways. He refused to change the old sweep well for the more modern pump, and allowed his low-eaved farm-house to remain as it was when New Jersey was one of the colonies of England.²⁷

The Conover farmhouse was built in a style that was popular among the Dutch in Monmouth County from about 1740 to 1760. It featured wide, flaring, overhanging eaves on the main elevation and was accompanied by a very large Dutch barn. Surely, Azariah Conover would have treasured an heirloom such as the Van Dorn silver brandywine bowl dated 1699, an object so symbolic of his Dutch ancestry. In 1846, he married Emily P. Sherman (1824–1893). It was their

²⁶ Ellis, op. cit., 552–553.

²⁷ *Red Bank Register*, July 8, 1885, 1.

son, J. Dey Conover (1860–1926), who possessed the Van Dorn bowl in 1906. He also succeeded to ownership of the Conover farm. So presumably, the bowl, and perhaps other furnishings,



The Conover farmhouse, located near the Middletown Village train station and taken before alterations in 1893. An Anglo-Dutch house form popular in Monmouth County between 1740 and 1760, notable for its wide flaring eaves, which by this time were supported by rustic columns. Having been sold out of the Conover family in 1944, the house burned in 1961. Courtesy Randall Gabrielan, Middletown, New Jersey.

remained in the farmhouse when his father, Azariah, purchased the property from the estate of Garret Van Dorn.

Van Dorn family estate documents provide corroboration for this suggested provenance of the silver brandywine bowl. The first Jacob and his son Jacob both wrote wills in 1719 and 1778 respectively. Neither testament mentions the bowl. The next three generations died intestate. But personal property inventories for four generations of the family support the line of descent outlined above. When Jacob died in the spring of 1720, the appraisal of his estate included the lot of “plate” or solid silver valued at £4:0:0 that has already been discussed. His son Jacob’s inventory was more specific. Taken on April 9, 1779, it listed “one Siler [sic] Bowl and pare [sic] of Clasps” at

£3:10:0.²⁸ The clasps may have been attached to one of two bibles in the next inventory entry. When Jacob's son, Isaac, died in 1831, he was possessed of "Silver Ware" valued at \$100.²⁹ His son Garret's appraisal of August 26, 1856, cited "1 old teapot, milk cup & bowl (silver)" at \$15.00.³⁰ The estate assessment of Azariah Conover, who assumed ownership of his uncle Garret's farm, does not describe most household contents in detail, but rather batches things at a high level by room, listing only larger pieces of furniture individually. Conover's inventory was taken on July 18, 1885.³¹



Detail from the estate inventory of Jacob Van Dorn taken on April 9, 1779, which itemizes a silver bowl in a lot with a pair of clasps. Courtesy New Jersey State Archives, Trenton, New Jersey.

Distinguished historian and genealogist, Dr. John E. Stillwell (1853–1930), met with J. Dey Conover when compiling his second volume of *Historical and Genealogical Miscellany*, published in 1906. He laboriously transcribed the birth, marriage, and death records from the Van Dorn-Conover family bible then in Conover's possession and described portraits owned by him, plus "a silver cup, dated 1699, and marked with the initials of Jacob and Mary Van Dorn, which was won, by one of their slaves, who trained a colt and ran it successfully, in a race, on King's Highway, in Middletown."³² King's Highway, laid out in 1667, extended from its original beginning on what is now Red Hill Road near the intersection of Holland Road, east to the site of

²⁸ Jacob Van Dorn, estate inventory, April 9, 1779, docket 4721-4728M, NJSA.

²⁹ Isaac Van Dorn, estate inventory, May 27, 1831, docket 9971, NJSA.

³⁰ Garret Van Dorn, estate inventory, August 26, 1856, docket 11670M, NJSA.

³¹ Azariah Conover, estate inventory, July 18, 1885, docket 14344M, NJSA.

³² Stillwell, op. cit.

Middletown's new town hall. It is exactly 1.0 mile in length.³³ In the 17th century, any two people who met while riding horses could challenge each other to a race.

Until the 1720s, a typical race was a quarter-mile sprint between two horses, usually resulting from an argument between wealthy country gentlemen convinced they owned the faster horse. The men frequently rode their own horses, often grabbing and punching each other as they hurtled down narrow racing lanes surrounded by fans hurling bets back and forth. These bawdy affairs known as path races took place in front of taverns, on city squares or at country fairs.³⁴

What is considered the first formal horse racing meet in North America took place in 1665.

An oval course was laid out in a section of Long Island that is now known as the Hempstead Plains in Nassau County. It was supervised by New York's newly appointed English colonial governor, Richard Nicolls (1624–1672). England had seized New York from the Netherlands the previous year. The course was named Newmarket after its English forerunner.³⁵ Horseracing spread quickly as a popular pastime throughout the greater New York area. Writing to the Church of England's bishop of London in 1700 on the state of religion in New Jersey, future governor of the province, Lewis Morris (1671–1746), summarized conditions town by town. Here is what he reported about Middletown:

Middletown was settled from New York and New England; it is a large Township; there is no such thing as Church or Religion amongst them; they are p'haps the most ignorant and wicked People in the world; their Meetings on Sundays is [sic] at the Publick house, where they get their fill of Rum, and go to fighting and running of races which are Practices much in use that day all the Province over.³⁶

Morris owned a large plantation and iron works in Tinton Falls, where he was often in residence. He would easily have had firsthand knowledge about the state of affairs in nearby

³³ The western end of King's Highway became isolated in 1919 from the rest of the roadway during a railroad bridge replacement and road realignment program.

³⁴ John Eisenberg, "Off to the Races," *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 2004, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/off-to-the-races-2266179/>.

³⁵ "Horse Racing in Colonial America and the Early Republic," Norfolk Town Assembly, August 1, 2020, <https://www.norfolktownassembly.org/post/horse-racing-in-colonial-america-and-the-early-republic>.

³⁶ *The Papers of Lewis Morris, Governor of the Province of New Jersey from 1738 to 1746: Published by the New Jersey Historical Society* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1852), 7–10.

Middletown. But Morris neglected to mention the presence of a Baptist meetinghouse on King's Highway in Middletown. He had become an ardent champion in America for the Church of England and encouraged the sending of its missionaries to New Jersey and elsewhere, hence his lengthy letter to the bishop of London. As flat racing became popular with colonists in New Jersey and elsewhere, courses a quarter-mile long were favored over the longer racecourses of England and that at Newmarket on Long Island. These courses were often no more than a straight stretch of road or flat piece of open land. Shorter sprints led to the development of the American Quarter Horse, named for the length of the races. King's Highway in Middletown would have provided a perfect location for such matches, it being straight, wide, a mile long, and flat from one end of the village to the other.³⁷

In May of 1922, the Van Dorn brandywine bowl went on exhibition in Freehold, the county seat of Monmouth County. It was part of a display of prizes and trophies to be awarded at the Freehold Driving Association racetrack for Decoration or Memorial Day races and competitions. A Freehold newspaper carried the story.

Together with the prizes for the Work Horse Show on Decoration Day on display at R. de la Reussille's window, are several other interesting exhibits, one being America's oldest racing cup. Racing authorities and men familiar with the subject agreed that this trophy is the oldest racing cup in America. It was won in 1699, in the village of Middletown, N. J., by a horse belonging to a Mr. Van Kovenhoven and has been in the possession of his family since that time. The colt which won this race was raised on the family farm and the race was run in the village street of Middletown. It was loaned by J. Dey Conover.³⁸

Raoul de la Reussille ran a jewelry store in Freehold. Even by 1922, the tradition about the bowl, recorded by John E. Stillwell before 1906, was becoming muddled. In this case, it was attributed to a horse race run by a member of the Covenhoven family. Following the death of J.

³⁷ "American Quarter Horse," Wikipedia, accessed March 23, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Quarter_Horse.

³⁸ *The Freehold Transcript*, May 26, 1922, 1.

Dey Conover in 1926, ownership of the Conover farm and Van Dorn silver brandywine bowl passed jointly to his two children, namely Lillian Van Dorn Conover Schad (1891–1970) and Geret H. Conover (1895–1982). They lent the bowl in 1936 to a celebration at Christ Episcopal Church that commemorated the one hundredth anniversary of the construction of their church building. The event, held on December 10, featured an historical address by the rector, Rev. William B. Spofford Sr. (1892–1972). His narrative paraphrased the Lewis Morris statement about Middletown, then pointed out that the residents of Middletown in the early years “were much given to horse racing and cock fighting on Sunday and to drinking applejack.” He claimed that his statement was based on old records. Mr. Spofford continued,

The horse racing took place on King’s Highway, and among the objects which Mr. Spofford used to illustrate his talk was a silver bowl with two handles, which was given as a prize at one of these races. It is owned by Geret H. Conover and his sister, Mrs. Lillian Conover Schadd [sic], wife of F. Marklie Schadd. Inscribed on the bowl are the date 1699, the name of Isaac VanDooran, and the initial M. The initial is taken to mean Middletown. There is also a hallmark, but it is not sufficiently legible to show where the bowl was made. Isaac VanDooren, or Van Dorn, as the name later became, married a Van Couwenhoven, or Conover, and the present owners are descendants of his wife. The ancient bowl has been kept as an heirloom by members of the Conover family all these years.³⁹

There are a number of problems with this recounting of the Van Dorn brandywine bowl history. Unfortunately, the Rev. Mr. Spofford did not understand that the character “I” was used interchangeably for both the letters “I” and “J” at the time, and that Isaac Van Dorn, who was buried in his churchyard under a perfectly legible headstone, wasn’t born until 1752. Also, the owners of the bowl were not descended from Isaac Van Dorn’s wife, Anne Covenhoven, but from her sister, Gashe. In the rector’s defense, the “IK” maker’s mark in a rectangle was not correctly ascribed to silversmith Jesse Kip of New York City until published by John Marshall Phillips in

³⁹ *Red Bank Register*, December 10, 1936, 13.

1943.⁴⁰ In spite of all this misinformation, the Christ Church anniversary is a second known instance when the Van Dorn bowl was exhibited locally to the public.



An early 20th century postcard view of King's Highway in Middletown, New Jersey, looking east with Christ Episcopal Church on the right. The image shows the ideal conditions of the road for holding horse-racing sprints. Author's image.

To perpetuate the racing trophy story on a much broader, highly visible level, on April 25, 1939, F. Marklie Shad contacted Christy Walsh (1891–1955), a prominent sports writer, celebrity manager, and director of sports for the New York World's Fair, to offer the Van Dorn silver bowl for display. Walsh promptly responded to his wife, Lillian Conover Shad:

Mr. Shad telephoned today regarding interesting silver cup dated 1699 and now in possession of your family.

From my conversation with Mr. Shad, this is apparently an unusual sport trophy of a very old vintage and we would be glad to place same on display in our Academy of Sport, along with many other similar trophies.

Needless to say, all trophies loaned in this connection are covered by the Fair by insurance against fire and theft.

⁴⁰ Phillips, *op. cit.*, and Caroline Scoon, *op. cit.*

We would like to have such historical data as you may have in connection with the trophy.

Will you kindly advise if you care to have us reserve space for your cup.⁴¹

The answer was apparently yes, as the Van Dorn bowl went on exhibit at the New York World's Fair when the Academy of Sport pavilion opened to the public on June 14, 1939. It was seen along with a wide array of popular sporting memorabilia, including Babe Ruth's 1921 home run crown, a walking cane used by James J. Corbett (known as boxer Gentleman Jim), and a pair of baseball shoes with sharpened spikes worn by Ty Cobb.⁴² When the fair closed for the season in October, Walsh informed the Shads that "Yesterday, by Railway Express we returned your racing trophy. For our insurance records here, will kindly advise us when you have received the cup."⁴³ More than 25 million paying visitors attended the World's Fair, held in Flushing Meadows, during the 1939 season.⁴⁴

News of the Van Dorn brandywine bowl's existence became common knowledge among the antiques community in Monmouth County, and it retained its tradition as a racing trophy, even as its provenance became garbled. In 1949, Charles Vanderveer (1905–1983), then owner of the House with the Brick Wall antique shop in Freehold, was interviewed about important aspects of Monmouth County history. He highlighted the Battle of Monmouth in 1778 and the presumed role Molly Pitcher played in it. Then Vanderveer commented that there were less publicized events which were also important. "The early sports for instance. The first silver cup was awarded for a horse race at Middletown in 1699."⁴⁵

⁴¹ Letter, Christy Walsh to Mrs. F. M. Shad, April 25, 1939, Edna M. Netter Collection, Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives, New Brunswick, New Jersey (hereafter cited as Netter Collection).

⁴² *New York Times*, June 14, 1939, 34; and *Times-Union* (Albany, New York), June 16, 1939, 20.

⁴³ Letter, Christy Walsh to Mrs. F. M. Shad, October 26, 1939, Netter Collection.

⁴⁴ "New York World's Fair 1939 and 1940 Incorporated Records," the New York Library Archives and Manuscripts, accessed May 7, 2023, <https://archives.nypl.org/mss/2233>.

⁴⁵ *The Freehold Transcript*, October 14, 1949, 1.

So how did the Van Dorn brandywine bowl end up at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan? A Monmouth County antiques dealer named Edna M. Netter (1890–1980) played a key role in this part of the story. Netter grew up in the Bronx section of New York City. After she obtained an education in bookkeeping, the Netters moved to Kingston, New York, and later to Passaic, New Jersey. In 1921, Edna, her mother Fannie (1850–1922), sister Minnie (1882–1930), and brother George (1900–1949) relocated again, this time to Monmouth County. They had purchased a small 18-acre farm on Dutch Lane Road in Marlboro, four miles from Freehold. Eventually, Edna found employment there with Louis Richmond (1880–1944), a prominent antiques dealer. But after about 18 months on the job, she decided in 1926 to set out on her own. Netter became quite successful as an antiques dealer in her own right. Her clientele included Mrs. J. Amory Haskell (her principal patron), Henry Francis du Pont, Mrs. Bertha Benkard, Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, and a host of other leading collectors of Americana. Items handled by Netter can be found today in such institutions as the National Gallery of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the New-York Historical Society, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Albany Institute of History and Art, the Monmouth County Historical Association, and the libraries at Princeton University, Rutgers University, and the Monmouth County Historical Association, to name just a few. Some items were sold directly to museums, historical societies, and libraries. Others were donated by her clients. Netter styled herself an antiquarian, not an antiques dealer. Her Americana stock in trade included antiques of every sort and also rare books and manuscripts. After the 1949 death of her brother, George, who was a licensed real estate broker, Edna took over his business and became

increasingly engaged as a real estate agent. But she kept her hand in with antiques as opportunities arose for the remainder of her life, although with diminishing involvement.⁴⁶



Edna M. Netter (1890–1980) of Marlboro, New Jersey, an antiquarian dealer in antiques, rare books, and manuscripts. Photograph taken in 1962. From the Edna M. Netter Collection. Courtesy Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

From her earliest days as a dealer, Edna Netter developed a particular interest in early American silver. For example, beginning in 1929, she enjoyed a long and active friendship for more than 25 years with Phoebe Phillips Prime (Mrs. Alfred Coxe Prime) of Paoli, Pennsylvania, a noted silver specialist. The two corresponded regularly, visited each other from time to time, and also met at antique shows, exhibits, and lectures. Mrs. Prime (1883–1964) was a major organizer of the landmark 1937 exhibition of American silver sponsored by the Pennsylvania Society of

⁴⁶ This brief sketch of Edna Netter's life is based on her extensive correspondence files and business papers that are part of the Edna M. Netter Collection at Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives, New Brunswick, New Jersey. See also *Asbury Park Press*, November 20, 1980, A19.

Colonial Dames in America. She also chaired the committee that in 1938 produced the book and catalog that resulted from the exhibit titled *Three Centuries of Historic Silver*. On the title page, Mrs. Prime was credited with being the compiler and editor of the work. In the preface, a great debt of gratitude was acknowledged “to Mrs. Alfred Coxe Prime who has given so unstintingly of her care and time in the compilation of this book.”⁴⁷ It was through Phoebe Prime that Netter was engaged in 1939 to appraise the important collection of Logan family silver from Philadelphia, some of which she later sold.

Edna Netter first captured the attention of early American silver dealers, collectors, and museum curators in 1931. On August 20 of that year, she paid a very substantial sum for an early silver bowl with two handles at the estate sale of Mary Holmes Taylor III (1851–1930) in Middletown. One newspaper report of the auction contained the following comments:

The sale was one of the largest of its kind held in Monmouth County in recent years and it was notable for the great quantity of antique furniture disposed of. The most valuable of these articles was a hammered silver bowl made by Benjamin Wynkoop in 1711. The bowl is said to be the only one of its kind in the world. It was struck off to Miss E. M. Netter of Freehold for \$1,735. The buyer is a dealer in antiques. A number of other persons engaged in the same line of business, including some New York dealers, were at the sale, and the bidding was spirited.⁴⁸

The bowl was made by silversmith Benjamin Wynkoop (1675–1751) of New York City, as the article points out. Engraved with the initials “T / G H” and dated “MDCCXI,” or 1711, the original owners were George Taylor (1684–1758) and Helena Johnstone (1686–1758) of Middletown who were married in 1708. It was further engraved on the opposite side in Gothic letters “M. H. T” and the date “1846.” The bowl was apparently presented as a wedding gift to Mary Holmes Taylor II (1814–1897), who on May 20 in that year married her first cousin, Joseph

⁴⁷ Mrs. Alfred Coxe Prime, ed., *Three Centuries of American Silver* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Pennsylvania Society of Colonial Dames in America, 1938), 5.

⁴⁸ *Keyport Enterprise*, August 27, 1931, 8.

Dorset Taylor (1802–1864). She was a great-granddaughter of George and Helena Taylor, and Mary Holmes Taylor III was her daughter. Measuring 8 inches over the handles and 2 5/16 inches high, the bowl features S-scroll handles and a rim foot. Otherwise, it is a very plain piece of silver, and in its form may be a simplified version of the Dutch-style *brandewijnkom*. It probably served much the same purpose as a communal drinking vessel for use at weddings, births, and funerals.

Within weeks of acquiring the Taylor bowl, Netter was able to obtain a second similar bowl in October of 1931 from another Taylor descendant.⁴⁹ Larger in size than the Wynkoop bowl at 3 7/16 inches high by 9 1/16 inches wide at the handles, it was fashioned by Adrian Bancker (1703–1772), another New York City silversmith. In its form, it follows the model of the earlier bowl with S-scroll handles and a rim foot. It also bears the same engraved initials for George and Helena Taylor on its base, plus the date “MDCCXI.” But Adrian Bancker did not enter the silversmithing trade until about 1731. So, the second Taylor bowl is actually a near copy of the first one that was made decades later. By that time, the customary use of a brandywine bowl had more or less passed out of fashion. The Bancker bowl had been engraved at a later time with the words “Mary Lyell Micheau,” on its body. Mary Micheau (1838–1908), also a great-granddaughter of George and Helena Taylor, married John M. West (1824–1916). Netter is believed to have obtained the bowl from their son, John M. West (1876–1962) of Middletown.

Edna Netter chose not to sell these Taylor silver bowls for many years. In fact, she lent them for the inaugural exhibits of the Museum of the City of New York when its new building first opened to the public in January of 1932.⁵⁰ Netter then allowed them to be included in a major exhibit of New York silver held from December 7, 1937, to January 17, 1938, again at the Museum of the City of New York. They were listed in the catalog of the exhibit, titled *Silver by New York*

⁴⁹ Letter, Edna M. Netter to Mrs. Breckinridge Long, August 30, 1932, Netter Collection.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Makers: Late 17th Century to 1900 by V. Isabelle Miller, as items 8 and 377. Strangely, Edna Netter was not included in the lengthy list of lenders, perhaps desiring anonymity.⁵¹



The Taylor family silver bowls from Middletown, New Jersey. On the left is by Benjamin Wynkoop of New York, engraved 1711, and on the right is by Adrian Bancker, also of New York, made several decades later but copying the form, engraved initials, and engraved date of the earlier bowl. Photographed about the time of the New York silver exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York held in 1937–1938. From the Edna M. Netter Collection. Courtesy Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Finally, on March 1, 1954, Netter wrote to a close friend and colleague, “As soon as the excise tax on silver is repealed, you can expect two silver bowls (two-handled ones) by Wynkoop and Bancker, respectively, to come on the market.”⁵² Congress did in fact repeal the Federal excise tax, imposed during World War II on silver, jewelry, and other items, by passing the Excise Tax Reduction Act of 1954, which went into effect on April 1. The Wynkoop bowl was then acquired by Mr. and Mrs. Walter M. Jeffords Jr., of Media, Pennsylvania, who were occasional Netter clients. It was subsequently sold as part of the important Jeffords Americana collection on October

⁵¹ V. Isabelle Miller, *Silver by New York Makers: Late 17th Century to 1900* (New York, Museum of the City of New York, 1937), 1 and 38. The Bancker bowl was illustrated on page 43.

⁵² Letter, Edna M. Netter to Donald A. Shelley, March 1, 1954, Netter Collection.

29, 2004, at Sotheby's in New York.⁵³ The Bancker bowl ended up in the large and impressive silver collection of Philip H. Hammerslough (1894–1978), a preeminent collector from West Hartford, Connecticut, who was also a Netter client. It is now part of the Hammerslough Collection at the Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum of Art in Hartford.⁵⁴

The Van Dorn silver brandywine bowl may have been brought to the attention of Edna Netter within days of her landmark purchase for \$1,735 of the Benjamin Wynkoop bowl at the estate auction of Mary Holmes Taylor III in August 1931. In responding to Netter on October 8 of that year, her friend and colleague, Phoebe Phillips Prime, wrote, “Did you not say that you are looking for the letters ‘I. K.’, as an early New York silversmith?”⁵⁵ Prime had no relevant suggestion to make, and the mark was not announced publicly as that of Jesse Kip until 1943, as already mentioned. Nonetheless, Netter reached out to Robert Ensko Inc., prominent New York dealers in old silver and publishers of several books on early American silversmiths’ marks, to see if they had a client who would be interested in the Van Dorn bowl. Stephen G. C. Ensko wrote back on November 16, 1931, saying, “Please excuse this delayed answer but have just received word that our client is not interested in racing trophy.”⁵⁶

Edna Netter was especially adept at seeking out items owned by descendants of early Monmouth County families. Such heirlooms became a major part of her stock in trade.⁵⁷ If a family did not wish to sell a particular object when Netter first learned of it, she would keep in touch with its owner for years in the never-ending quest for important acquisitions. Such was the case with

⁵³ Benjamin Wynkoop, *An American silver two-handled bowl*, 1711, length over handles 8 in., <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2004/the-collection-of-mr-and-mrs-walter-m-jeffords-n08016/lot.738.html>.

⁵⁴ “Bancker Collection,” Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, accessed March 27, 2023, https://5058.sydneyplus.com/argus/final/Portal/Public.aspx?lang=en-US&g_AABJ=bancker&d=d.

⁵⁵ Letter, Phoebe Phillips Prime to Edna M. Netter, October 8, 1931, Netter Collection.

⁵⁶ Letter, Stephen G. C. Ensko to Edna M. Netter, November 16, 1931, Netter Collection.

⁵⁷ Many such objects were sold by Netter to her principal patron, Mrs. J. Amory Haskell, who in turn donated them to the Monmouth County Historical Association in Freehold, New Jersey.

the Van Dorn bowl. Her interest in it peaked in 1942 when research by John Marshall Phillips (1905–1953), director of the Yale University Art Gallery and a silver specialist, finally identified the “IK” maker’s mark as that of Jesse Kip. On January 24 of that year, Netter wrote to her principal client, the legendary Americana collector, Mrs. J. Amory Haskell:

Mr. Phillips has asked me to get him a photograph of the two-handled silver bowl made in 1699 by the mysterious “IK” whose identity has been discovered, for an article which he hopes to do for the magazine *Antiques*. This bowl, you will remember, is a Monmouth County Racing Trophy. The owners’ ideas of value have always been outrageous – now that we ask for a photograph, there’ll probably be no ceiling.⁵⁸

Photographs of the bowl were accordingly taken by Dorn’s Photo, a professional studio located in Red Bank, New Jersey. The following month, Netter wrote again to Haskell:

You may be interested to know that I saw Mr. [Geret] Conover’s sister, and, unless my impression is very wrong, I would not be surprised to learn that a fair price will take the two-handled bowl. A family conference was scheduled for this weekend. Before I write Mr. P., you shall hear any interesting news. And, by the way, I’ve had no word from him since I sent (at his request) the bill for the photographs.⁵⁹

Mrs. Haskell responded on March 4, “Of course, I would not be able to buy the Conover bowl as my Income Tax this year is much worse than last year so I will not have much left to put into antiques.”⁶⁰ But Netter continued to pursue the Van Dorn bowl with her typical determination.

Writing again to Mrs. Haskell on September 7, 1942, she stated:

I had a nice visit with the owners of the “IK” bowl – and am convinced that this is the auspicious moment to buy it. You will remember that Mr. Phillips asked me to get their price on it. It would be just too bad to allow it to go out of the County – and I impressed that on the owners. Did Mr. Phillips tell you the identity of “IK?” He wrote me that he knew it – that the information would be published in his “IK” monograph. Would you care to talk the matter over with me with a view to keeping this lovely “Racing Trophy” in the County? Surely with racing interest so high in this locality – and the owners of this bowl in their present state of mind – some way should be found to keep it here.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Letter, Edna M. Netter to Mrs. J. Amory Haskell, January 24, 1942, Netter Collection.

⁵⁹ Letter, Edna M. Netter to Mrs. J. Amory Haskell, February 26, 1942, Netter Collection.

⁶⁰ Letter, Mrs. J. Amory Haskell to Edna M. Netter, March 4, 1942, Netter Collection.

⁶¹ Letter, Edna M. Netter to Mrs. J. Amory Haskell, September 7, 1942, Netter Collection. John Marshall Phillips finally published his Jesse Kip research in the July 1943 issue of *The Magazine Antiques*, as cited above. The Van Dorn bowl is discussed in the text, and its engraved base is illustrated in fig. 7.

Two days later, Gwendoline Newcome, secretary to Mrs. Haskell, wrote back to Netter:

Mrs. Haskell has asked me to write you in answer to your letter received this morning. She is awfully sorry, but simply cannot buy the bowl. She said a few years ago she might have considered it, but now it is absolutely out of the question. She was wondering if you could get some of the museums interested.⁶²

Sadly for the world of Americana collecting, and for Edna Netter in particular, Margaret Riker Haskell died on September 17, 1942, at her Oak Hill Farm estate in Middletown. She was 78 years of age and had been suffering for some time from serious bouts of high blood pressure.

Early in 1943, Netter was approached about the Van Dorn silver bowl by Stephen Ensko, the widely known New York dealer in early silver. He wrote:

We have had an inquiry for racing prizes won in the Colonies, to be used in the American Racing Association book on the history of racing in this country. Four or five of the earliest items are to be illustrated. If you can arrange to get photographs of the IK bowl and permission of the owner or owners, I think it should be of interest. Also if the name of the owner can be used if published. If you know of any other prizes which could be listed the Association would be pleased to credit you with use of this information.⁶³

Netter responded:

I have delayed answering your letter, hoping to have news from the owner of the IK bowl. Unfortunately the party is away for the month. Photographs of this bowl were taken last year and I am wondering whether these could be used if the owner will permit it – or would Racing Association require their own? At this time I cannot think of any other early racing trophies that would be of interest.⁶⁴

Ensko indicated that the photographs taken of the bowl in 1942 would be acceptable, unless Netter thought that new shots would be better.⁶⁵ He also asked:

if the owners have any papers which will authenticate family tradition that the bowl was a racing trophy. And possibly the name of the horse that won the race and where it was run. All this is important to give it the necessary background to be the first early American silver racing prize.⁶⁶

⁶² Letter, Gwendoline Newcome to Edna M. Netter, September 9, 1942, Netter Collection.

⁶³ Letter, Stephen Ensko to Edna M. Netter, February 23, 1943, Netter Collection.

⁶⁴ Letter, Edna M. Netter to Stephen Ensko, March 3, 1943, Netter Collection.

⁶⁵ Letter, Stephen Ensko to Edna M. Netter, March 4, 1943, Netter Collection.

⁶⁶ Letter, Stephen Ensko to Edna M. Netter, March 8, 1943, Netter Collection.

Ensko was correct in asking for detailed documentation that supported the Conover family claim that the Van Dorn silver bowl was awarded as a racing trophy in 1699. There is no indication, though, that the American Racing Association ever went forward with their publication. Wartime conditions in 1943 may have caused them to drop the project.

About 1954 or 1955, Netter was finally able to obtain the Van Dorn bowl from Lillian Schad and her brother Geret Conover, some 23 years after first learning about it. They also gave her the World's Fair letters cited above. She then sold the bowl in 1955 to the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan.⁶⁷ Netter kept prints of the 1942 photographs of the bowl. But further documentation on the transaction seems to be lacking in Netter's extensive surviving business papers and correspondence. For whatever reason, she did not pass along the World's Fair correspondence with the bowl, but rather retained in her personal files the 1939 letters from Christy Walsh to Lillian Conover Schad.

Again, the question arises—why the Henry Ford Museum instead of a museum, historical organization, or private collector located in the greater New York and New Jersey area, as she had tried to do in 1942? The answer is Netter's personal and longstanding friendship with Dr. Donald A. Shelley (1911–2006). They had first met in 1940 when Shelley was curator of paintings at the New-York Historical Society. In that year, Netter sold that institution an important self-portrait by Charles Willson Peale that showed him holding a mastodon bone.⁶⁸ In 1952, Shelley became

⁶⁷ Personal Communication, Henry Ford Museum to Joseph W. Hammond, November 9, 2022. The Ford Museum curatorial staff was able to confirm from their records that Edna Netter was the source for this purchase.

⁶⁸ Charles Willson Peale, *Self Portrait*, 1824, oil on canvas, New-York Historical Society, <https://emuseum.nyhistory.org/objects/21638/selfportrait?ctx=7b92282e874b1b6551138ef4c1f3cb87c499e4c8.&idx=15>. For detailed documentation on this transaction, see a folder titled "Peale Portrait" in the correspondence files of the Netter Collection.

curator of fine arts at the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village. In 1954, he was promoted to executive director and from 1968 to 1976 served as president and CEO of the organization.⁶⁹



The Van Dorn brandywine bowl as photographed in 1942 for John Marshall Phillips by Dorn's Photo studio, Red Bank, New Jersey. From the Edna M. Netter Collection. Courtesy Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Donald Shelley and his wife, Esther, maintained a close and cordial relationship with Edna Netter, occasionally traveling on historic house tours together and attending conferences on antiques with other friends. On at least one occasion, they were accompanied by Alice Winchester (1907–1996) and Helen Comstock (1893–1970), legendary editors and authors long associated with *The Magazine Antiques* and *Connoisseur* magazine respectively.⁷⁰ Shelley would also try to visit Netter

⁶⁹ Tammy Miller, "Death of Donald Shelley," Humanities and Social Sciences Discussion Log, April 26, 2006, [https://lists.h-net.org/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-pennsylvania&month=0604&week=d&msg=%2B9tgmUyonrO5PdPyiU%2BMUA&user=&pw=.](https://lists.h-net.org/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-pennsylvania&month=0604&week=d&msg=%2B9tgmUyonrO5PdPyiU%2BMUA&user=&pw=)

⁷⁰ Letter, Donald A. Shelley to Edna M. Netter, June 8, 1953, Netter Collection.

whenever his travels took him east. After Netter's death on November 18, 1980, Shelley served as an advisor to her estate in preparation for a three-day auction held in May of 1981.⁷¹ It was therefore entirely appropriate for Edna to offer the Van Dorn brandywine bowl to the Henry Ford Museum in light of her warm friendship at the time with Donald Shelley.

There is one remaining issue to be addressed in this narrative, and that is the Conover family legend that the Van Dorn bowl was a racing trophy. To recap, it was believed in the early 20th century to have been awarded to Jacob and Maritje Van Dorn in 1699 when one of their horses, trained and ridden by an enslaved farmhand, won a race on King's Highway in Middletown, a location about eight miles from the Van Dorn property in what is now Marlboro. Horse racing was certainly popular in New Jersey by that time, to judge from the Lewis Morris statement of 1700. Typical races would have involved a lot of hooting and hollering (no doubt enlivened by the consumption of alcohol at the local tavern), hat waving, and wagers placed between those in attendance. But to award an expensive silver bowl made in New York City as a prize to the winner of a small-town, rural country race seems very unlikely. It would have required a more formal race meet such as that held in 1665 on Long Island. Furthermore, a sponsor like Governor Richard Nicolls, or a group of subscribers, would have had to put up the money for such a trophy to be made in advance of the race date.

There is another significant problem with the part of the trophy legend that claims the colt was trained and ridden by someone enslaved by the Van Dorns. The will and inventory of Jacob make no mention of enslaved people, either male or female. There is, however, an anomaly with the appraisal of his personal property, which was only valued at £139:6:0. That very modest sum is out of line for an individual who owned over 650 acres of land and a grist mill. Furthermore, his

⁷¹ *Asbury Park Press*, May 19, 1981, 18.

cash bequests as specified in the will amounted to over £750.⁷² Also, the meager few furnishings itemized in the appraisal were certainly not representative of the household of a successful planter and mill owner in which 10 children had been raised. This discrepancy cannot now be explained. But, taken at face value, it appears that Jacob Van Dorn had distributed most of his assets, perhaps including enslaved individuals, before his death early in 1720.

Is there another possible story behind the Van Dorn silver bowl? The original intent among the Dutch inhabitants of New York and New Jersey was that such a two-handled bowl would be used as a communal drinking vessel at weddings, births, and funerals. A review of Van Dorn family genealogy provides an alternative interpretation to the racing trophy legend. As already pointed out, Jacob Van Dorn purchased his first property in Monmouth County in 1697. Presumably, the family removed to their new farm soon after. Two children, son Arie and daughter Engeltje, had been born to Jacob and Maritje while still resident on Long Island. But their third child, named Christian after his deceased paternal grandfather, was born on August 11, 1699. Christian Van Dorn married in 1723 and soon after relocated to Middlebush, Somerset County, where he and his wife raised a large family. He died there in 1781.⁷³ The brandywine bowl, with its engraved date of 1699, could just as easily have been acquired by Jacob and Maritje Van Dorn to celebrate the birth of their son, Christian. That would have been more consistent with Dutch custom in the New World as well as in the Old. And the engraved monogram does in fact include the initials of both father and mother, something that might not appear on a racing prize.

If this interpretation proves to be the case, then when did the racing trophy legend arise? J. Dey Conover came into possession of the bowl following the deaths of his father in 1885 and his

⁷² Jacob Van Dorn, will, April 20, 1719, docket 123-125, NJSA. Most of the cash bequests were to be paid over time by two of his sons.

⁷³ Miles, *op. cit.*, 198–200.

mother in 1893. It was he who, before 1906, related the trophy story to historian John E. Stillwell. Conover had a vested interest in the legend. As a local newspaper reported on June 28, 1893, “H. L. Pease, the contractor, is building twelve box-stalls for J. Dey Conover at the latter’s place in Middletown. The stalls will be occupied by race horses.”⁷⁴ Conover also constructed a training track and boarded racing horses owned by others. On July 11, 1894, one news article stated that “Jacob Taylor’s running horse High Header fell and broke its neck on Thursday while being exercised on J. Dey Conover’s training track at Middletown. The jockey was thrown to the ground and was stunned by the fall.”⁷⁵ Conover named his facility the Homestead Farm Boarding Stables.⁷⁶ It would have been a singular privilege for him to claim ownership of the earliest known American horse racing trophy, along with the recognition it would bring him from the racing community.

The Henry Ford Museum continues today to suggest that the Van Dorn brandywine bowl might be the earliest known American horse racing trophy in its original, unaltered form, if the story behind it is true. It is this writer’s belief that the trophy legend originated with J. Dey Conover. He projected backward in time to the 17th-century Van Dorn bowl the popular 19th-century practice, continued today, of presenting silver or silver-plated loving cups and other such awards to the winners of horse races. The Van Dorn bowl didn’t even belong to one of Conover’s own ancestors. It is much more probable that Jacob and Maritje Van Dorn followed their inherited Dutch custom of celebrating the birth of their son in 1699 by sharing with other relatives and friends the traditional mixture of brandy and raisins, served in a special two-handled silver bowl acquired to mark the occasion.

⁷⁴ *Red Bank Register*, June 28, 1893, 1.

⁷⁵ *Red Bank Register*, July 11, 1894, 1.

⁷⁶ *The Monmouth Press* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey), January 9, 1897, 5.

Author's Postscript

It is not common in the museum world for an object's history to be so fully documented, whether the legends that surround it are true or not. It is rarer yet to understand an antique dealer's role in handling such an object. The Edna M. Netter Collection at Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives in New Brunswick, New Jersey, provides in-depth insight into such dealer/client relations. Netter's business papers and correspondence files fill in the links between her sources of the art, antiques, manuscripts, and rare books that she handled over a period of 40 years or more, and where many of her treasures ended up, whether it be in the collections of public institutions or private clients. This article is just one example of the possibilities. Netter handled some of the most iconic items associated with New Jersey history, as well as exceptional materials from elsewhere in the northeastern United States. Researchers can be well rewarded by spending time with the Edna M. Netter Collection if the stories of the great artifacts and manuscripts that she bought and sold are of interest to them. It has been a special privilege for this writer to serve as a consulting archivist to Rutgers for organizing the collection and for preparing a detailed finding aid. This work is still in progress. It was also my sincere privilege to have known Edna Netter in the last two years of her life. Her recollections and stories of the antiques trade over many decades were always colorful and full of interest.

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Joseph W. Hammond writes on New Jersey history topics from his retirement home in northern New Hampshire. His interests include decorative and fine arts, architecture, and social history. A resident of Freehold for more than 40 years, he has in the past served the Monmouth County Historical Association as executive director, consulting archivist, curator of museum collections, and director of collections. Hammond holds a BA in American history and civilization from Boston University and an MA in history museum studies from the Cooperstown Graduate Program of the State University of New York, College at Oneonta. He can be reached by email at jwhammond@aol.com.