



ORNAMENTAL MEN'S JEWELRY
OF THE LIBERTY HALL PERIOD

Anthropology 377

Dr. McDaniel

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On my honor I have neither
given nor received aid on
this work.

Sam H. Campbell IV

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Men's jewelry of the early eighteenth century is a very diffuse field which perhaps hasn't received enough detailed study. After my discovery of the initialled artifact in Operation Thirty~~one~~ of the current Liberty Hall excavation efforts, several questions puzzled me, and prompted this research effort. What in the world was this artifact? Who was the person with the initials ABMcD? And how, or why, did this particular artifact show up in its present location? These questions raised several provocative alternatives and options, each demanding a full explanation. Although failing in my effort to positively identify the person whose initials appear on the lost artifact, I think I have been able to throw a different light onto the concepts of the types of jewelry the nineteenth-century men preferred, and onto the diverse cultural tastes of these stereotypically "simple" Scotch-Irish people.

To discuss the primary issue, the artifact in question has been identified by several different antique dealers as an eighteenth century watch fob. The intricate metalwork on the artifact suggests the early time period the piece dates from. There are many differing opinions concerning the origin of this term, but in multiple sources this definition surfaced as the most likely: The word "fob" was derived from the German word "fuppe", which meant small pocket.¹ With the passage of time, and as the article began to gain more popularity, "it came to mean a decorative object worn on a chain."² Also, it could have been a trinket or other object worn on a

chatelaine,³ which in itself was popular in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries among the more aristocratic of the population. A chatelaine was worn on the belt or waist band of the trousers or dress, and was used to carry various articles which normally required a purse or handbag. A typical chatelaine was incomplete unless it held at least the following: "... a fruit knife, pencil, scissors, seals, bodkin, ruler, and snuff spoon. These essential accessories were worn by both ladies and gentlemen"⁴ of the period. An illustration of this particular form of jewelry follows the text.

Many different people, including the site supervisor, thought this fob was actually a wax seal on first inspection. After extensive research, I believe I have exhausted the possibility that it is a seal in terms of the engraving and ornamentation found on the artifact. According to definition, a seal "is an object used to impress the owner's mark on some malleable substance such as wax or clay."⁵ On most, if not all, other sealing objects, such as signet rings, the impression is engraved "backwards" so the impression the stamp leaves on the soft material can be readable. The evidence provided shows that this fob is actually just an ornament probably used as an identification trinket, even though seals did take the form of fobs before the written signature became so widespread. The impression on this fob is not even deep enough to produce a significant stamp, albeit inverted. In other words, the initials when imprinted would read backwards, if they were readable at all. This artifact does not have an authentic

intaglio to merit the assumption that it is a wax seal.

By definition, an intaglio is a "...piece of metal in which the design is sunk into the material so that when it is impressed onto a softer substance it leaves an impression in relief."⁶ Upon examination, it's obvious this artifact doesn't fit the necessary description. But this serves to back up my main point: that this artifact dates from a slightly later period than the Liberty Hall occupation era. Although fobs took many different elaborate and fanciful forms during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their usefulness changed dramatically by the start of the nineteenth century. By then, "the seal fob and signet ring were objects of ornament rather than of use."⁷

Undoubtedly, this appeal for ornamental jewelry among the men of the period created a heavy market for the many metal engravers of the time. Upon close examination of the artifact, a woman's face and flowing mane of gold are the most prominent features noticed. Such intricacies of this sort suggest the enormous talent of the metalcrafters of the period.⁸ Some of the most exotically beautiful examples of this intricate craftsmanship can be found in the various accounts of the Faberge' collections around the world in public as well as private collections. In these pieces, often precious stones were incorporated into the overall design of the fobs. According to one source, some seals "were also made in the form of eggs, so that they could be suitable as Easter presents."⁹ The Faberge' style, though, had many origins and a very limited appeal to those who didn't belong to the aristocratic

segment of the population, mainly because of the expense.

For the people of less elaborate sources of income, the fobs had to be made of simpler materials because of the cost factor. And, even though the elaborate fobs were the height of fashion in the 1770's and 1780's, they ceased to be regularly worn when men's dress became sober and unadorned at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century.¹¹

So, as trinkets of ornamental value, the watch fobs like the one we're examining are definitely works of art, and "in so far as they have been made of precious materials, and worn on the person, they form a significant class of jewelry for the period."¹²

Through extensive research in Rockbridge County files, Augusta County files, and Virginia state files from the Bureau of Vital Statistics, I have found no absolute proof that a person with the initials ABMcD had any connection with the University during the Liberty Hall period. The Bureau of Vital Statistics provided me with the names of two persons, Adam Borden McDonald and Alexander Barnes McDonald, who were inhabitants of Augusta County at the turn of the eighteenth century.¹³ Lexington at that time was part of Augusta County, as Rockbridge County wasn't established until later in the century. There is no other more specific evidence that these men lived at the Liberty Hall site, or for that matter even visited it. An Alexander McDonald, without a middle initial, appears in a study of the Scotch-Irish settlers of the Shenandoah

Valley. In February 1763, he was contracted to work on a road from Christian's Creek to Rockfeil Gap. He was also listed as being involved with a lawsuit against Lieutenant John Sallard, although the reasons were not elaborated upon.¹⁴ Sallard is tracable to the area during the Revolutionary era. Although it's certainly possible that one or more of these men had ties with the Liberty Hall academy during the turn of the century, there's no tangible evidence that backs this up. For one thing, middle names didn't come into vogue until after the establishment of the Federal Government in 1789. The practice of giving two names to offspring then grew with such rapidity that within fifty years a single name had become an exception to the rule.¹⁵ It has also been hypothesized that naming practices changed after the Revolutionary War, when people began to name their children after war heroes or other people in the national limelight.¹⁶ (i.e. George Washington Smith is , even today, not an uncommon name-type; this was the beginning of the trend.) But no records in the University files of the period before 1900 show an ABMcD, even though several AMcD's show up.¹⁷ The most logical trail to pursue, then, is the one most trodden upon. That is to say, the McDowell Family members should be suspected as the most likely contributors of the watch fob in question simply because there were so many of them, and because many of them were involved with the University in its earliest stages.

The McDowells, in the most comprehensive study of the

early Rockbridge area, are reported to have emigrated from Scotland in 1729,¹⁸ and were the first family to settle in the Borden Grant, which includes today's Lexington. They were very probably the first family in the county, and furnished from the extensive family a governor of Virginia and a number of other more or less eminent names of county, state, and national importance.¹⁹ The University Alumni records list Colonel Sam McDowell and Colonel James McDowell as trustees during the Liberty Hall period, and the Honorable James McDowell was listed as a trustee one generation later. Other prominent members of this family mentioned in Alumni directories, the Card index archives of the old Trustee minutes, and other places, include William McDowell, John A. McDowell, R. M. McDowell, and A.W. McDowell.²⁰ They all fall into the general time period we're examining. It's highly probable that an undocumented relative of these men was in fact ABMcD, and left his watch fob at the Liberty Hall site to prove he had been there. I find it puzzling, however, that there's no mention of anyone with these initials anywhere in Rockbridge or Augusta County files. Also, there's nobody interred in the Stonewall Jackson Cemetery with those initials,²¹ so the identity remains a mystery.

Another possibility exists that the artifact predates the main Liberty Hall structure. There is record of a person named Reverend Alexander McDowell who held deed to some property north and west of the mouth of the Maury River.²² This is recorded in 1752, though, so the chances are slim that he was a resident of the area around or near Mulberry Hill.

One point which I considered a paradox was the absence of the Reverend Alexander McDonald's name from the Augusta County records: he's not listed in either the birth or the death records.²³ Apparently he was a transient who only stopped by just long enough to make a land transaction in Augusta County, and then left after a relatively short period of time. Archive files in McCormick Library make no mention of the Reverend Alexander McDonald, which shows that he made no official contact with the Trustees or administration of the school. So, after all else is considered, the McDowell family seems to be the contributor of the mysterious artifact, if only by default.

There is one fact which must be considered above all others. A watch fob is not something one loses all the time. Most pieces of jewelry of this type are carefully cherished for use by future generations, and are treasured by many more people than just the original owners. Whoever the watch fob belonged to, he probably didn't mean to leave it in trench 65 of Operation Thirty. This artifact should serve to help identify the date of the structure in this Operation, but the hard names seem to have eluded me. So I can't make an accurate prediction as to the age or origin of the artifact. But the type of trinket like this had virtually no use beyond Civil War times. Watch Fobs left the men's fashion scene when it became fashionable to wear a watch key on the chain, and the written signature all but

eliminated the need for a seal.²⁴ After this period during the middle of the nineteenth century, the men's jewelry market began to gradually be phased out, as only the people of great means were wearing such ornamental jewelry. Much simpler pocket watches were being employed by the working class, and such ornaments as fobs had little appeal.

The chatelaine all but faded from view in the 1840's, to be relegated to museums and antique stores. Apparently, as men felt they had to assert their masculinity, they began to wear less jewelry.²⁵ Only recently the appreciation for fine men's jewelry has increased to the extent it enjoyed during the early years of the country. Craftsmanship like that found in the artifact will never be matched, though, so we must realize that artisans responsible for the metalwork of the period cause our appreciation for antique goods. Appreciation of our ancestors' tastes is an integral part of the study of their values and standards. For most people, it's a very enjoyable experience.

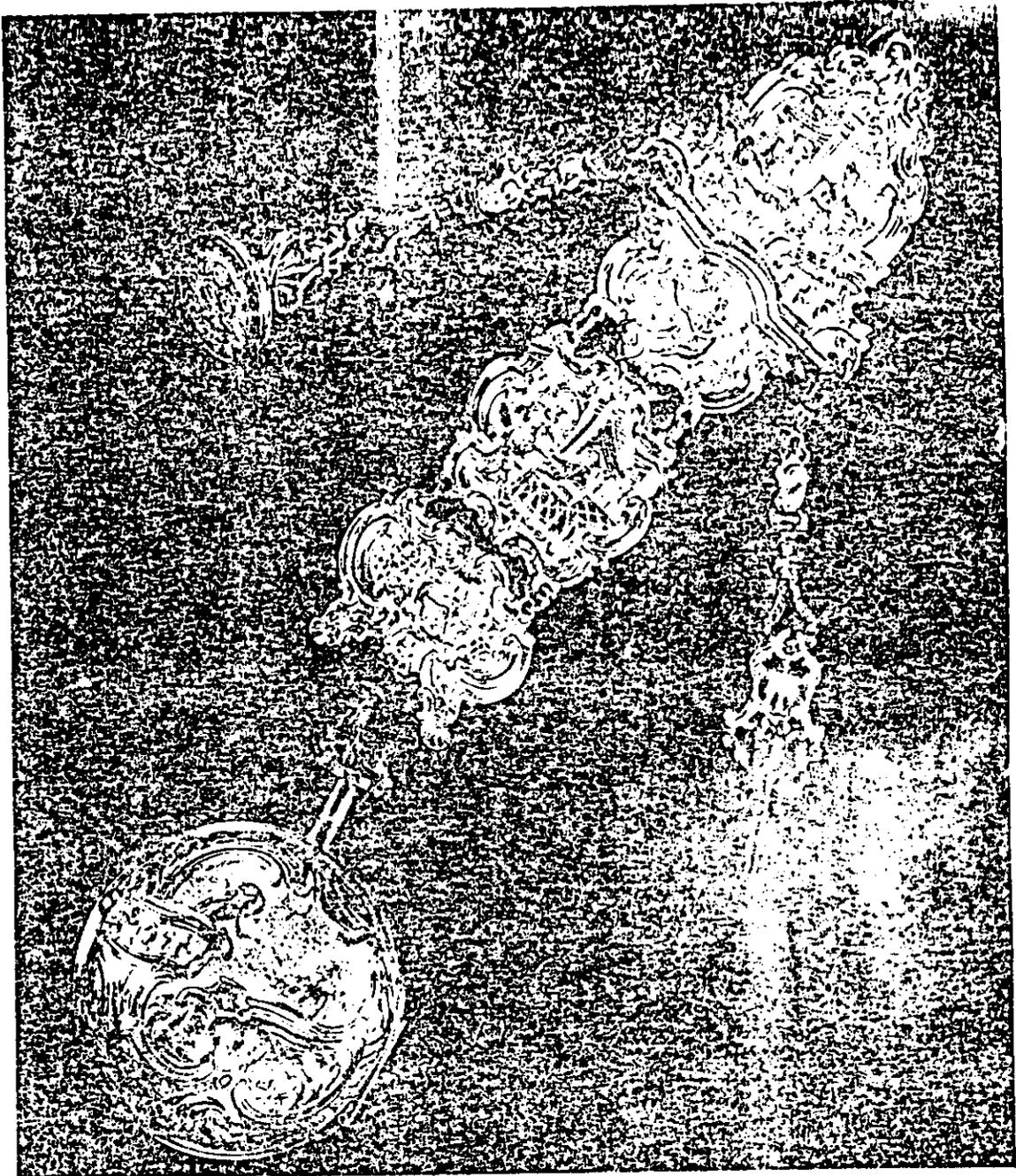
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- 2 Anita Mason, An Illustrated Dictionary of Jewelry, (Harper & Row), New York, 1974, p.151.
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- 4 Rupert Gentle and Rachel Feild, English Domestic Brass, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1975), p 186.
- 5 Mason, p. 327.
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- 8 Fred W. Burgess, Antique Jewelry and Trinkets, (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1937), p. 322.
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- 15 Oren F. Morton, A History of Rockbridge County, Virginia, (Staunton, Va.: The McClure Co., 1920), p. 340.
- 16 Personal Conversation with Dr. I. T. Sanders, II.
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- 22 Chalkley, Vol. 3, p. 528.
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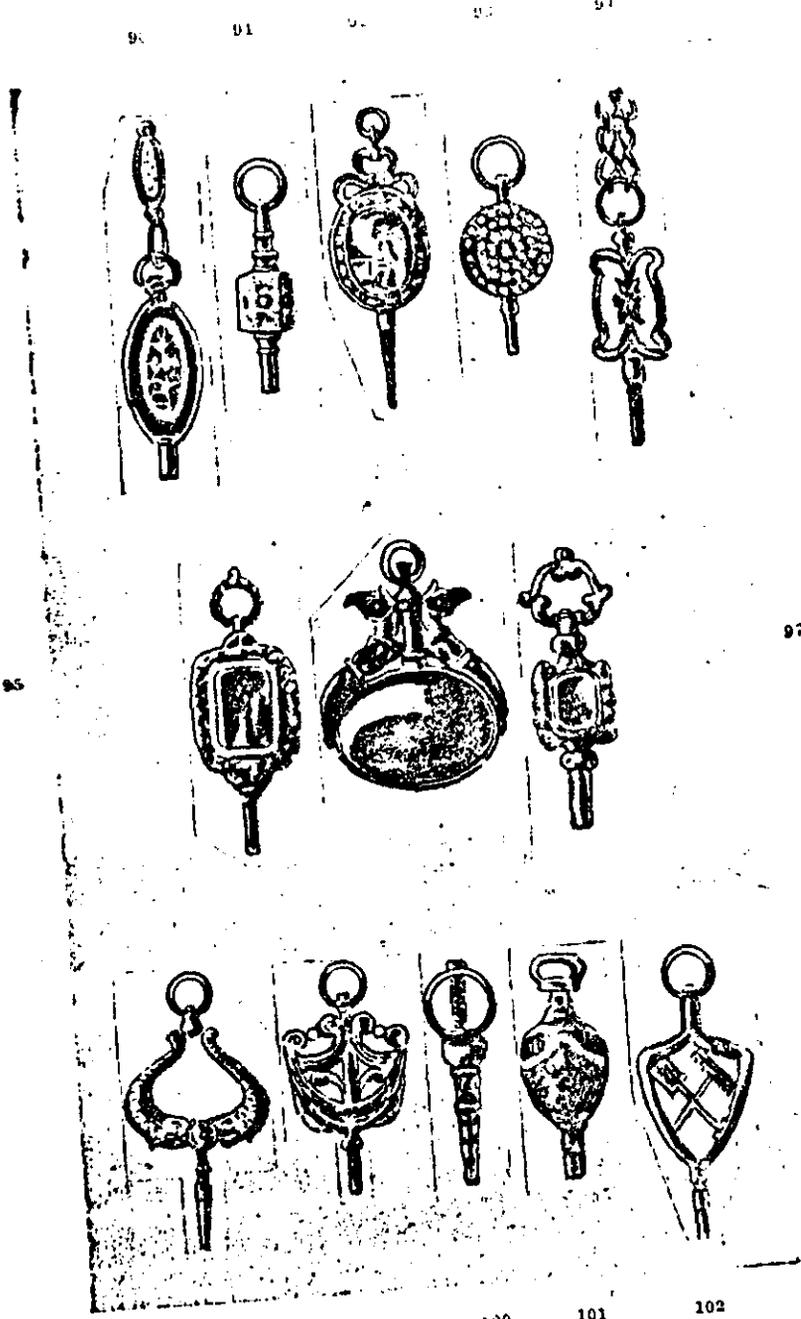
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Silberne getriebene Reisuhr mit 5 Szenen
 dem Leben Wilhelm Tells.
 Ø 5 cm. Dicke 7 cm. Signiert: Nicolas Colin a Tortone 1791.

39. Goldgetriebene Chatelaine-Uhr mit Petschaft des Grafen
 Adam Heinrich von Steinau-Steinrück.
 Ø 5 cm, Gesamtlänge 21 cm. Signiert: Wilson, London.

This is an example of a particularly ornamental chatelaine and the trinkets attached to it. This single artifact dates back to the early eighteenth century. From the University of Virginia private archives-- "The Faberge' collection!"



FIGS. 90 TO 94.—CHATELAIN KEYS.
 FIGS. 95, 96, 97.—FOB KEYS WITH STONES.
 FIGS. 98 TO 102.—RATCHET AND EMBLEM KEYS.
In the Author's Collection.

This is an assortment of various watch-chain implements which enjoyed popularity during the eighteenth century. From English Domestic Brass, by Rupert Gentle and Rachel Field, 1975.