

COHEN & COHEN

CHINESE EXPORT PORCELAIN AND ORIENTAL ART



Massive Chinese export punchbowl for the American market with a view of New York

Jiaqing period, circa 1804

American Market

Diameter: 22¼ inches; 56cm

Priced in US dollars

\$40,000

This item is located in the USA in the state of New Jersey. Shipping from there is at the buyer's expense.

A massive Chinese export punch bowl with sepia panels of landscapes, one European and one apparently depicting the Farmer's Free Bridge, New York, built 1758, with unusual neo-classical borders to the interior.

This extraordinary bowl is an important discovery, as it appears to depict a scene in eighteenth century New York. Bowls of this size are often called christening bowls and the decorative style of this one suggests that it was made for the American market around 1800 and would have been a special commission. A small number of other topographical bowls of this size and date are known, mostly for the American market.

The two scenes at first appear unrelated but it has been suggested that they represent the 'Old World' and the 'New World'. The scene with the ships and fortified town on a cliff top has typical Dutch or South German architecture (for example the high pointed square spires) and the men have tricorn hats, the ships being standard Dutch merchant ships.

In contrast to this, the other panel has a very simple rural landscape, the people with round-brimmed hats (a later style more popular in the New World) and a wooden bridge on three stone piers, with simple plantation style buildings in the background. This bridge is very similar in style to the Farmer's Free Bridge built in 1758 over Spuyten Dyvil Creek, in what is now the Bronx area of New York City.

The few early surviving images of this area show similar buildings and a later print from about 1860 shows the bridge still in existence and looking quite like this. A photograph of the bridge in the late nineteenth century, before it was demolished in 1911, also shows three stone piers. The mountains are an exaggeration by the Chinese artists of the high ground to the east of the bridge.

The Farmer's Free bridge, also known as Dyckman's Bridge, was built by John Palmer to avoid the King's Bridge, an expensive toll bridge built by the Philipse family of Westchester and until then the only access to the livestock markets in Manhattan for farmers to the north in Westchester county.

It was a rudimentary bridge over the shallow creek, at what is now 225th Street and Broadway, and was rebuilt a number of times in its history but its construction served as a pre-revolutionary snub to the English King. The New York Gazette wrote that it was "the first step towards Freedom in this state." It was destroyed after the rout of Washington by the British in the Autumn of 1776 but rebuilt after the Revolution, surviving until 1911.

It is possible therefore that this bowl was made for a family of Dutch settlers in New York who wished to acknowledge their origins while also celebrating their new home, now an independent republic.

One good candidate for this is the Dyckman family who owned land in Harlem and married into a number of other families. They are descended from Jan Dyckman who came to New York in the mid 17th century and married Rebecca Nagel, a widow. His son Jacob married Jannetje Kierson and had two surviving sons, William (1725-1787) who inherited land on which was built Dyckman House, which still exists and Jacob, Jr (1720-1774) who was an enterprising though ultimately unsuccessful innkeeper.

Jacob, Jr (who owned land to the west of the bridge) and his brother-in-law John Vermillje (who owned land to the East in Fordham Manor) were the principal backers for the Farmer's Free bridge and because of him it was also known as Dyckman's Bridge. The opening of the bridge, January 2 1759 was celebrated with "a stately ox roasted whole" at Dyckman's new tavern, strategically built at the junction where traffic went east to the Freebridge from the main road to the Kingsbridge.

Jacob Dyckman and Benjamin Palmer had hoped to recoup their expense from subscribers but when they failed to honour their obligations they turned to the British government in New York for recompense but were repeatedly denied. Jacob petitioned the authorities every year from 1760 until he died in 1774 having had to sell his tavern in 1772. At every attempt he was thwarted by Colonel Frederick Philipse who controlled the authorities and whose family had built, and gained financially, from the use of the toll at the King's Bridge. This Colonel Philipse was a notoriously unsympathetic character who was described as domineering and arbitrary with a fondness for the recreational administration of capital

punishment.

The family continued the petitions until the bridge was destroyed during the war in 1776 - though accounts differ as to who destroyed it, the English or the retreating Rebels. It remained in ruins until the British rule in New York ceased in 1783 after which it was soon mended. Jacob's son Samson continued to seek funds from the authorities for repairs, with more success until Jacob's grandson Jacobus was ultimately successful in 1824.

This bridge was therefore a significant affair in the family life of Jacob Dyckman and his family. His youngest son Staats Morris Dyckman (1755-1806) is the most interesting member of this family - and very likely the man to have ordered this remarkable bowl.

Staats was born in 1755 and was named after Staats Long Morris, younger brother of Lewis Morris who signed the Declaration of Independence. Staats Morris was a friend of Jacob Dyckman and it has been suggested that his youngest son may have been partly educated by the Morris family. The great opening ceremony for the Free bridge with its roasting ox and the throng with his father at the centre would have left a strong impression on the young boy. So too would the struggle for finances and the gradual decline that led to his father selling up in 1772 when Staats was twenty.

Clearly clever and educated he amassed a large library of several thousand books and fraternised with many successful men in New York. A fierce loyalist he was arrested on 4 June 1776 (George III's birthday) and charged with "drinking damnation to the Enemies of the King". He was released and became clerk to the quartermaster's department for the British in New York. He received a good salary and made many good connections. He was sharp and good at his job and, when later it all fell apart with cries of profiteering being made in London, he became an important fixer for a number of the senior quartermasters, explaining their cases. He spent almost a decade in London from 1779 to 1789 under the patronage of William Erskine and Archibald Robertson, a cousin of the architect Robert Adam. Robertson had made a number of watercolours of New York in 1779 - some of which survive but another might have been the original drawing used for this bowl - the style is not dissimilar.

While in Europe he travelled widely in Ireland, Wales and to Holland to view his ancestral origins (the "Old World") and he visited Lisbon on his return journey to America. He worked closely with the lawyer William Adam, a first cousin to the architect and he mixed with fashionable and aristocratic society, including the young William Cobbett who became a close friend. In one letter he wrote: "I dined with Dukes, Earls, Marquises, and Lords in the evening, went to the play, my head as light as frenchman's heels."

States (he had anglicised his name) returned to New York in 1790 and in 1794 married the young granddaughter of a rich New York man Peter Corne. He set up a family home in Westchester but encountered financial difficulties when the money he was due from various quartermasters, principally Sir William Erskine, was not forthcoming. He had to sell most of his books and became increasingly desperate.

Finally he returned to London in 1800. After some careful negotiation he eventually gained a substantial

sum of money and went on a major shopping spree buying glass, silver, jewellery, books, prints and porcelain. Many of the invoices survive and show his elegant taste and choice of things that were the height of contemporary fashion, particularly in neoclassical design.

He returned to New York in 1803 and set about building one of the finest houses in federalist style, Boscobel, which he filled with his purchases. Sadly he died in 1806 suddenly while staying at Dyckman House with his cousin, but Boscobel was finished and his wife and son lived there in style. Later the house fell into disrepair but in the mid twentieth century was rescued in pieces and transported to a new site near Garrison where it is now restored and open for view, a testament to Dyckman's taste.

So this bowl could well have been among the many items that he ordered during his time in London. No mention has yet been found in his personal papers but it would have taken some time for the order to reach China and for the bowl to be received and very likely it was sent on to him after he had returned to New York so the paperwork could have remained with an associate in London.

At Boscobel is a Coalport dessert service that States bought in London accompanied by the original bill of sale from Sharpus and Co. The service has a gilt greek key border and scenes of the English countryside. One item is intriguingly labelled "this is the one with the bridge", though it depicts Taymouth and does not resemble the bridge on this bowl.

The decoration on the inner and outer rim of this bowl are not typical of American market export porcelain, which was generally very simple and puritan in aesthetic (one service was deemed too outrageous because the rims were gilded) - however they match well with States Dyckman's neo-classical taste. The outer border is quite similar to the one on the Coalport dessert service that he ordered in 1803. The inner rim border is elaborate and not recorded on any other porcelain - it is very much in the 'vetruvian' style favoured by Robert Adam and others, inspired by excavations at Pompei. It is also in a similar style to decoration at Boscobel.

Whether States Dyckman ordered this bowl or not cannot yet be stated conclusively but the circumstantial evidence is strong. It was clearly an expensive special commission and the two large views would have been deliberate and significant.

The Farmer's Free bridge would have loomed symbolically over Dyckman's life, from his earliest memories of the triumphantly roasted ox at the bridge's opening to the long struggle and financial decline of his father, caused by the bridge and he was still a teenager when his father died in an accident with a horse and carriage, a broken and impoverished man. Dyckman was haunted by the threat of poverty and had been forced to sell his first library, lovingly acquired, because of financial problems. He was generous to his friends and gave money freely if he had it. His letters to his wife from his last visit to London show a tender and loving man, bereft at the news of his young daughter's death and yet living life to the full with his friend William Cobbett.

His taste was refined and favoured the neoclassical - unlike the more puritan style of the New World. A more detailed examination of his library and his papers might show sources for decoration on this bowl and even turn up a reference to its order.

References: Howard 1997, p13, large masonic bowl, dated 1813, with inner rim border similar in style to the outer rim border on this bowl; Herbert & Schiffer 1980, p37, 22 inch punchbowl with view of New York, circa 1803; p167, large punchbowl with image of Pennsylvania Hospital, circa 1805; p149, large punchbowl with image of the Surrender of Burgoyne, circa 1850, now in The White House; Flexner 1992, States Dyckman American Loyalist, Fordham Univ. Press; Stokes's Iconography of Manhattan, Index Vol, p328 for Farmer's Free bridge; Buerdeley 1962, p135, punchbowl with scene taken from certificate of members of the Cincinnati Society, 54cm diameter; Tracy, Berry B 1981 Federal Furniture and Decorative Arts at Boscobel, p128, the Coalport dessert service ordered by States Dyckman in London from Sharpus & Co., Set 24 1803; Reier, Sharon 1977, The Bridges of New York, Dover Pub. Inc.