

A Paris Porcelain Dinner Service for the American Market

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IN 1994, THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART acquired sixteen pieces from a larger porcelain dinner service made in Paris between 1800 and 1815. The service, which joins a small but choice group of Paris porcelains with American interest,¹ has been a feature of the Baltimore Dining Room in the American Wing since it opened in 1980, when the service was first lent to the Museum.²

The Museum's holdings include six dinner plates, six soup plates, a pair of sauceboats and stands, and a covered tureen and oval platter (Figure 1). The service originally consisted of more than fifty-seven dinner plates, forty-one soup plates, an additional sauceboat with stand, an additional covered tureen, fifteen oval platters in four sizes ranging from 13¾ inches (34.9 cm) to 20¾ inches (52.4 cm) long, seven graduated circular serving dishes in three sizes, from 10 inches (25.4 cm) to 14¾ inches (37.8 cm) in diameter, two covered butter dishes on stands, and one serving bowl. Each piece features a border of a pale peach-colored ground embellished with painted decoration in black enamel highlighted in gold. The border designs on the plates consist of three seated classical figures equally spaced, all on a groundline of rockwork and grass. Between the figures are pairs of Neoclassical trophies of musical instruments, weaponry, and agricultural implements. Gold bands frame each border, and around the well is a gilt scallop-and-dot surround. The larger borders of the platters are similarly decorated, but with additional classical figures alternating with pairs of trophies. In the center of each plate and platter is an American flag with thirteen stars crossed with a laurel branch with berries.

The sauceboats are ovoid in shape with a high loop handle at one end; they rest on fitted ovoid molded stands, ovoids that taper slightly at one end, with molded shell decoration at the swelled end (Figure 2). Classical figures and trophies, similar to those on the

plates and platters, grace each form. The Neoclassical shapes and decoration are consistent with porcelains fabricated from the 1790s through the 1820s.

The tureen, the most impressive of all the pieces in the service, is ovoid and raised on a foot, with everted scroll handles and a pagoda-type finial that are fully gilded (Figure 3). It is also the most finely painted and features not the generalized classical figures but specific allegorical subjects. At one end of the cover, Diana, the moon goddess, stands holding a bow and arrows, a dog at her feet, the crescent moon over her brow (Figure 4). At the other end of the cover is a seated female figure holding a celestial sphere in her left hand, representing Fame or Fortune. The figures of a Native American princess and Liberty are at the center of the borders on both the tureen and its cover. The eight symbolic trophies that appear on the tureen and the cover are also carefully detailed with a specificity not found on the plates and other forms. They include three trophies of war: a shield ornamented with a heart pierced by an arrow, a quiver of arrows and a bow, a musket and an olive branch; another shield with a quiver of arrows and an olive branch; and a flag, drum, and sword. Two trophies are of musical instruments: one depicts a horn and a lyre variant; the other, a lute, a drum, and a wind instrument. One trophy consists of a celestial sphere and a scientific instrument (a barometer?). The most unusual trophy, positioned to the left of Liberty, is a bundle, tied with cord, over an anchor and a caduceus.

The combined motifs of the American flag, the figure of Liberty holding the flag with an eagle at her feet, and the Native American princess attest to an American ownership of this service. During the American War of Independence, when trade between England and America was severely disrupted and when France cast its lot with America's struggle for freedom, Americans began to adopt French manners and tastes. Even after the final peace settlement had been signed in 1783, many Americans continued to reject English products in favor of those from France. Wealthy Americans seeking to decorate their homes

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Figure 1. Sixteen pieces from a dinner service. Attributed to Dihl et Guérhard (1781–1824?), Paris, France, 1800–15. Hard-paste porcelain. Tureen H. 10¼ in. (26 cm), L. 15½ in. (39.5 cm); platter L. 20½ in. (52.4 cm), W. 13¾ in. (35.2 cm); sauceboats with stand H. 6⅞ in. (15.6 cm), L. 7¼ in. (19.7 cm); soup plates diam. 9⅞ in. (23.2 cm); dinner plates diam. 9¼ in. (23.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Solomon Grossman Gift, in memory of Berry B. Tracy, and The Vincent Astor Foundation Gift, 1994 (1994.480.1–16)

and tables in the most fashionable styles imported luxury goods in the classical mode from France. During the four decades that straddled the turn of the century, French porcelains were the vogue among America's political, social, and economic elite. Notable Americans to whom French porcelains can be documented include statesmen and diplomats such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Gouverneur Morris, and John Adams.³

Numerous French services survive with a history of ownership in America, but with the exception of presidential ones, few are known that are decorated with such recognizable American symbols or were made for a specific American patron, as was this one.⁴ The most popular pattern found on Paris porcelain of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries owned by American families was that decorated with scattered sprays of blue cornflowers. One of the earliest with an American connection descended in the Verplanck family of New York.⁵ It dates to sometime



Figure 2. Sauceboat and stand. Attributed to Dihl et Guérhard (1781–1824?), Paris, France, 1800–15. Hard-paste porcelain. H. 6⅞ in. (15.6 cm), L. 7¼ in. (19.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Solomon Grossman Gift, in memory of Berry B. Tracy, and The Vincent Astor Foundation Gift, 1994 (1994.480.3a,b)



Figure 3. Covered tureen with platter. Attributed to Dihl et Guérhard (1781–1824?), Paris, France, 1800–15. Hard-paste porcelain. Tureen H. 10¼ in. (26 cm), L. 15⅝ in. (39.5 cm); platter L. 20⅝ in. (52.4 cm), W. 13⅞ in. (35.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Solomon Grossman Gift, in memory of Berry B. Tracy, and The Vincent Astor Foundation Gift, 1994 (1994.480.1–2)

shortly after 1778, when it was sent as a gift to Mrs. Samuel Verplanck from Sir William Lord Howe. Services with similar decoration were owned by Franklin and Jefferson; William Bayard and Rufus King of New York; Harrison Gray Otis of Boston; and the Middleton family of Charleston, to name a few. Several more elaborately decorated Paris porcelain services with American histories are known, but with floral or other generalized decoration rather than specifically American motifs.⁶ Most services specially made for American clients are far simpler, featuring initials in gold, or family coats of arms, like two services known with Livingston family histories.⁷

The iconography of the motifs depicted on the Museum's service indicates that it was a specific commission for the American market. It is emblematic of the period from 1783 to 1815, with its conscious



Figure 4. Representation of Diana on cover of tureen in Figure 3

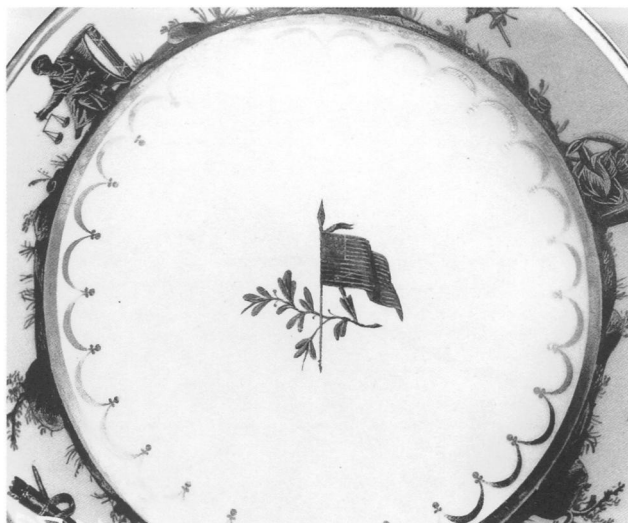


Figure 5. Flag on dinner plate in Figure 1

development of a distinctively American nationality. The most obvious patriotic symbol is the flag, which is prominently displayed on all the plates and platters. The flag is consistent in its rendering throughout the entire service, with twelve stripes and thirteen stars arranged horizontally on a canton in a four-five-four design (Figure 5). By the time the service was made, the United States had adopted an official flag with a canton depicting a greater number of stars (fifteen in 1795, and twenty in 1817), but the flag with thirteen stars remained a symbol of the colonies' hard-won freedom and continued in use as a flag of the seas.

The figure of the Native American princess, depicted as a bare-chested woman with a feather

headdress and skirt and holding a bow and arrow (Figure 6) derives from symbolic references to America as the New World that date at least to the 1500s.⁸ In the earliest examples—in which it was represented as the Western Hemisphere or as the fourth continent, after Asia, Africa, and Europe—America was portrayed as an Indian queen, conjuring an image of a land inhabited by barbarous people. After about 1763, the image shifted from Indian queen to Indian princess, a daughter of Britannia representing the American colonies; in this version, she was depicted as a younger woman holding not a club but a bow and arrows. The Indian princess was often paired with bales of merchandise and an anchor, seen here as separate emblems on the opposite side of the tureen cover.

Although the personification of America as Indian princess persisted throughout the early nineteenth century, she was paired more and more frequently, especially after 1783, with the female allegorical figures of Minerva, Hercules, Columbia, and, most often, Liberty.⁹ The tureen underscores the relationship of America and her pursuit of liberty by depicting Liberty exactly opposite the Indian princess. This rendering incorporates many of Liberty's traditional emblems, including the Phrygian cap that she wears, the protective eagle at her feet, a quiver of arrows, and the American flag with thirteen stars held aloft on a tall, slender staff (Figure 7).

In addition to the specific references to America, the porcelain artist depicted attributes on the covered tureen that provide clues as to the original owner. These, too, were executed with great care. The presence of the astrological globe and scientific instrument (Figure 8) suggests that the owner was an educated



Figure 6. Representation of Native American princess on cover of tureen in Figure 3



Figure 7. Representation of Liberty on cover of tureen in Figure 3

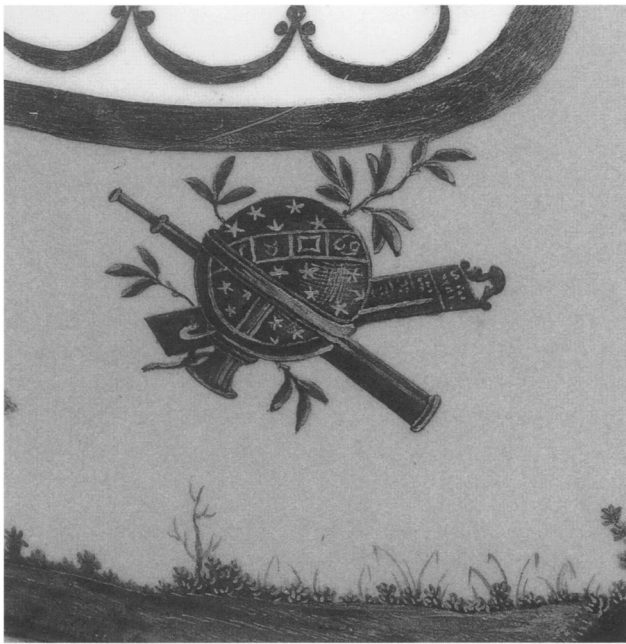


Figure 8. Astrological globe and scientific instruments on cover of tureen in Figure 3



Figure 9. Tied bundle with initials JAB on cover of tureen in Figure 3

man with an interest in science; the trophy of various musical instruments gives rise to the speculation that he was also a man of culture. The pairing of the weapons and olive branch might imply a peacetime resolution to conflict.

The most tantalizing of all the attributes, however, is the bundle tied with cord (Figure 9) positioned to the left of the figure of Liberty on the tureen's cover. The bundle is depicted with other recognizable emblems of trade: an anchor, suggesting ships and shipping, and a caduceus, or staff of Mercury, signifying the protection of travelers. Tied bundles such as this one were the common cargo of merchants in the early nineteenth century. It appears to be a soft bundle, indicating that it contained fabric, probably linen or cotton; wooden crates and hogshead barrels were also popular packing materials, but for shipping fragile articles like ceramics, glass, and metalwork. The initials JAB, inscribed in gold on one quadrant of the bundle, have given rise to much speculation. They probably are those of either the tureen's decorator or its original owner.¹⁰ It might seem surprising that the individual who ordered such a prestigious service would have his initials so inconspicuously placed, visible in tiny letters on only one side of one of the pieces. And yet, although French porcelain painters are known to have signed scenic panels on vases and other pieces, there are no known examples of one signing the front of a decorative service such as this, or signing in this almost trompe l'oeil fashion. Therefore, it is worth

looking into the possibility that they are the initials of the owner. Such bundles frequently bore the initials or monogram of the company or merchant who had placed the order. In fact, one early-nineteenth-century typographical ornament, a generalized emblem of a merchant of that period, pictures a well-dressed gentleman sitting on just such a tied bundle, with initials prominently displayed in one corner, and gesturing to the ship that carried his imported goods.¹¹ Therefore, the service likely was made for a patriotic American merchant in the shipping trade, probably dealing in textiles, whose initials are JAB.

Several theories have been advanced regarding the identity of the service's original owner. It had been owned by Mrs. Miles White Jr. (d. 1955) of Baltimore, Maryland, and reputed to have previously been the property of Robert Bowie (1750–1818), plantation owner and governor of Maryland from 1803 to 1806.¹² The Bowie family genealogy, however, yields no family member of the proper date with the initials JAB. Recently published research on an extensively decorated Chamberlain's Worcester porcelain dessert service (Figure 10) in the collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art provides new clues to the possible ownership of the Paris one under discussion.¹³ Like the Metropolitan's, the Baltimore service once belonged to Mrs. Miles White. The Chamberlain factory order book shows that the elaborate dessert service was ordered by William Brown of Liverpool on October 30, 1816, with the stipulation that it was to



Figure 10. Square dish from dessert service. Chamberlain's Worcester (English), 1816. Soft-paste porcelain, diam. 8 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (20.7 cm). The Baltimore Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Francis White, from the Collection of Mrs. Miles White Jr. (1973.76.168.1)

"be in L'pool before Christmas." An entry two years later shows that a set of two dozen plates was to be ready for shipment on January 10, 1819. Both orders presumably were timed to coincide with the sailing of one of Brown's ships bound for America and his family there.¹⁴

The coincident history of Mrs. Miles White's ownership and initials ending with B inspires a search for a member of the Brown family with the initials JAB. The Browns were prominent and highly successful merchants in Baltimore. The patriarch, Alexander Brown (1764–1834), in 1800 emigrated from Ireland, where his family had been in the linen business. He began his career in Baltimore by importing linen from Ireland and soon began exporting cotton from America to England. What started as an import-export textile firm evolved into a thriving Anglo-American trade and foreign exchange. Brown's sons became active in the business, called Alexander Brown & Sons, and expanded the company beyond its Baltimore headquarters. William, the eldest (who ordered the fancy porcelain dessert service from Chamberlain's), opened the Liverpool branch. John opened a branch in Philadelphia in 1818, and James, the youngest, opened one in New York City in 1825. Such was their success that by 1820 Alexander Brown was one of America's earliest millionaires. The firm he founded

would eventually become the banking institution Brown Brothers, Harriman and Company.¹⁵

Alexander's third son, John A. Brown (1788–1872), ran the Philadelphia branch, called John A. Brown and Company, was a partner in his brother William's Liverpool venture, and, like his father, was a successful merchant. He married Isabella Patrick in 1813; the dinner service may have been ordered at the time of their wedding.¹⁶ Emblematic of his success, Brown, a handsome man, had his portrait painted in the fashionable attire of the day and made his home in a grand townhouse on the corner of Chestnut and Twelfth Streets in Philadelphia.¹⁷ It seems fitting that a porcelain service such as the Museum's would have graced the dining room where he served as host. It is not known for which member of the Brown family in America William ordered the Chamberlain's dessert service. Dating to approximately the same time as the Paris one, it is equally elaborate, with gilded decoration and finely painted landscape scenes, and helps to establish the Brown family taste for sumptuous porcelains. The ground color is nearly identical to that on the Paris porcelain. Assuming the Brown ownership of the Museum's service can now be recognized, the fact that an American merchant trading with Great Britain would commission such a service from France illustrates the strength of the taste in America for French porcelains.

The service was undoubtedly somewhat larger than what is known to survive today. A careful examination of the individual pieces reveals the hands of several decorators. The tureen, as has been noted, is the most sensitively painted of all the pieces. The plates seem to have been done by two painters, one of which used a much tighter style, with smaller individual elements, and less care in the placement of the trophies around the border. Most noticeable is the almost linear groundline, with little of the articulation of grasses and rocks seen in the other pieces. The service contained another variant, with identical designs painted on a border with a gray, rather than a peach, ground (Figure 11). Only plates are known in the gray ground, and the two are aesthetically pleasing complements.

Two services are most closely related to the Metropolitan's. One, by the Locré factory, features crossed flags, each with fifteen stars, and a laurel branch. The saucers have a border design of three panels of trophies of war and music alternating with three green-wreathed white paterae, all on a claret ground.¹⁸ This service bears no markings as to its original owner, nor is it accompanied by any history of ownership. The other is a dessert service made for President James Monroe (1758–1831). Ordered from the firm of



Figure 11. Two dinner plates, one with peach border, the other gray. Attributed to Dihl et Guérhard (1781–1824?), Paris, France, 1800–15. Hard-paste porcelain, diam. 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (23.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Ronald S. Kane, 1995 (1995.202.1,.2).

Russell and La Farge at Le Havre in 1817 and made at the Paris factory of Pierre-Louis Dagoty and Édouard D. Honoré,¹⁹ it was described as a service for thirty, “Bordure Amaranthe avec Cinq Vignettes, représentant la Force, l’Agriculture, le Commerce, les Arts & les Sciences.”²⁰ A version of the Great Seal of the United States occupies the center. The symbolic trophies of the border design recall the various classical vignettes on the pieces that constitute what we may now call the Brown service. The Metropolitan’s service slightly predates the Monroe service, evidenced by the latter’s amaranth, or deep claret, border and the round, not ovoid, shapes of the serving pieces.

None of the Metropolitan’s pieces bears a mark that would help determine the factory that made them. A factory attribution is especially difficult for Paris porcelain because, to fulfill a special commission, one firm might use forms made at another, and they often employed numerous decorators, few of whom ever signed their work. Many Parisian firms are known to have provided porcelains for an American clientele, including Dagoty & Honoré, Schoelcher, Nast, duc d’Angoulême, Darte Frères, Rihouet, and Dihl et Guérhard.²¹ Of all the possibilities, it seems most likely that Dihl et Guérhard produced the service for Brown. The service relates stylistically to documented examples from Dihl et Guérhard, which is known to have produced porcelains for foreign export. For example, Grand Duke Ferdinand III of Tuscany purchased a number of examples of Paris porcelain, among them a teacup and saucer marked by Dihl et

Guérhard, that are in the collection of the Palazzo Pitti.²² Stylistically, they relate closely to the Metropolitan service, with decoration of related classical trophies and figures on a border of white displayed in a similar arrangement on a grassy groundline. A marked plate by the same factory and with similar decoration is in the collection of the Musée National de Céramique at Sèvres.²³ In America Benjamin Franklin purchased sprig-decorated porcelains from Dihl et Guérhard in 1784.²⁴ In 1790 Gouverneur Morris visited the Dihl et Guérhard factory, from which he ordered a table service for George Washington and later purchased “Dishes and Ornamental China to a too large Amount.”²⁵ Dihl et Guérhard also made the French porcelain harlequin tea service owned by Philadelphia merchant and banker Stephen Girard (1750–1831).²⁶ Each piece displays a differently colored marbled ground and gilded ornament in the classical style. Given that Brown and Girard worked in similar fields in the same city, they may have known each other, and Girard may even have influenced Brown in his decision to order a French porcelain service.

This service, therefore, attests to the taste in America for high-style French luxury goods at the turn of the nineteenth century. It is also a testament to the mercantile acumen of a new class of entrepreneurs who capitalized on the burgeoning economic opportunities in the United States. As their wealth increased, they acquired such emblems of prosperity as Paris porcelains, of which this elaborately and appropriately decorated service is an example.

NOTES

1. In 1998, the Metropolitan Museum held an exhibition, "Elegant China Ware": Paris Porcelain in America," that drew primarily on the collections of the Museum.
2. The pieces of this service were originally a loan from Ronald Kane in 1980, selected by Berry B. Tracy, then curator in charge of the Department of American Decorative Arts. They were withdrawn from loan in 1993 and, with the other pieces of the service, offered for sale at Christie's. See *The Collection of Ronald S. Kane: Important American Classical Furniture and Decorative Arts*, sale cat., Christie's (January 22, 1994), lot 369. The service did not sell at auction, and the Museum negotiated the purchase of sixteen pieces.
3. See Susan Gray Detweiler, "French Porcelain on Federal Tables," *American Ceramic Circle Bulletin* 3 (1982), pp. 87–110, and idem, *George Washington's Chinaware* (New York, 1982). See also Louis Schreider, "Gouverneur Morris: Connoisseur of French Art," *Apollo* 93 (1971), pp. 470–83.
4. See Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, "Paris Porcelain in America," *The Magazine Antiques* 153 (April 1998), pp. 554–63. A number of services with documented American ownership are discussed and illustrated.
5. This partial tea service is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum (41.127.1–.3,.5,.10; 41.129.1,.3; 1950.108).
6. When Chancellor Robert R. Livingston served his residency in Paris as minister plenipotentiary, from 1801 to 1804, he purchased an elaborate dessert service decorated in a striking design in black and gold. The ice-cream cooler from the service bears marks from the Darte Frères factory at the Rue de la Roquette and Palais Royal. The service survives at Clermont, Livingston's New York country home overlooking the Hudson River.
7. John Livingston of New York owned a Paris service decorated with only a gold border and a single initial, L. See William Nathaniel Banks, "Edgewater on the Hudson River," *Antiques* 121 (June 1982), p. 1405, pl. 5. Several plates painted with the Livingston family coat of arms survive at Montgomery Place (Historic Hudson Valley), Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. They bear the mark of Baruch Weil, Rue de Bondi, Paris, and date to 1799–1828. See Frelinghuysen, "Paris Porcelain in America," p. 555, pl. 2.
8. See James H. Hyde, "L'iconographie des quatre parties du monde dans les tapisseries," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 10 (1924), pp. 253–72. See also Clare Le Corbeiller, "Miss America and Her Sisters: Personifications of the Four Parts of the World," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* n.s., 19, no. 8 (April 1961), pp. 209–23.
9. For a detailed study of the use of the personification of America, see E. McClung Fleming, "The American Image as Indian Princess, 1765–1783," *Winterthur Portfolio* 2 (1965), pp. 65–81, and idem, "From Indian Princess to Greek Goddess: The American Image, 1783–1815," *Winterthur Portfolio* 3 (1967), pp. 37–66.
10. See entry for lot no. 369, Christie's, *The Collection of Ronald S. Kane*.
11. See C. P. Hornung, *Handbook of Early Advertising Art* (New York, 1956), p. 34.
12. Charles F. Montgomery, *American Furniture: The Federal Period* (New York, 1966), p. 154 n. 25.
13. See Mavis A. Cleggett, "A Worcester Dessert Service by Chamberlain," *The Magazine Antiques* 158 (September 2000), pp. 320–27.
14. Ibid., pp. 322–24.
15. John A. Kouwenhoven, *Partners in Banking: An Historical Portrait of a Great Private Bank, Brown Brothers Harriman and Company, 1818–1968* (Garden City, N. Y., 1968), pp. 23–28.
16. Isabella Patrick Brown died in 1820; three years later, Brown married Grace Brown of Baltimore.
17. Kouwenhoven, *Partners in Banking*, pp. 28–29.
18. See New Hampshire Auction, Northeast Auctions (Portsmouth, New Hampshire), sale cat., August 7 and 8, 1999, lot 567.
19. Margaret Brown Klapthor, with additions and revisions by Betty C. Monkman, William G. Allman, and Susan Gray Detweiler, Klapthor, *Official White House China*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1999), pp. 40–47.
20. Quoted from account 37131, voucher 3, National Archives, miscellaneous treasury account in Klapthor, *Official White House China*, p. 43.
21. See Frelinghuysen, "Paris Porcelain in America."
22. This reference was brought to the attention of Jody Wilkie, Christie's, by Régine de Plinval de Guillebon in a letter dated November 1993. See *French Porcelain in the Palazzo Pitti* (Florence, 1973), no. 98. I am grateful to Ms. Wilkie for sharing this information with me.
23. See Antoinette Faÿ-Hallé and Barbara Mundt, *Porcelain of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1983), p. 36, fig. 30.
24. *Benjamin Franklin and His Circle*, exh. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 1936), nos. 315, 316.
25. Diary of Gouverneur Morris, January 15, 1790, quoted in Detweiler, *George Washington's Chinaware*, p. 212.
26. See Robert D. Schwarz, *The Stephen Girard Collection: A Selective Catalog* (Philadelphia, 1980), pl. 63.