



Johannis Nys Crescent Moon Pendant

Report by:

Steve Cox

4200 Sun Valley Estates

Van Buren, Arkansas 72956

Phone (479) 474-4442 email stevepacs@aol.com

I have spent many hours researching all things related to this piece. There is very little provenance attached to this item. It was found at an antique store west of Boston, Massachusetts. I obtained it from the collector who bought it. There was almost no information to go with it, other than a quick search for the maker mark. To the buyer the mark appeared to be the mark of Johannis Nys. At first I was very skeptical based on the fact that most of the pieces of trade silver I run across are not authentic, and secondly, work of any type by this silversmith is very rare, and from Martha Hamilton's records he did produce trade silver, and very likely a large amount, but no Indian pieces are known to have survived, and this is common in the field of Trade Silver, and third, very few Indian presentation pieces this early are known to exist. A good amount of tableware from early silversmiths can be found, but like some other silversmiths, pieces by Nys are very rare. I have recorded only a few pieces of tableware that are documented, and some of which have since become lost. A quick search generally will only produce about 6 or 7 pieces. Known examples I located include spoons, tankards, and

porringers. And to date I have found no examples of his Indian trade silver.

Documentation on this silversmith is scarce owing to a number of reasons. There have been at least 4 different spellings of his name found in period documents. It is thought he was a French Huguenot that went to Holland, and then to the New World. I found between 1700 and 1723 he is identified as Johannis Nys, John 'Neys, John Be Nys, and in William Penn's cash book for 1704, as Johan Nys. There are others found in documents from late 1700's to present. I put the most faith in two wills he witnessed, and signed as Johannis Nys. There are also two other craftsman he was confused with, one being a silversmith, and the other a lady weaver, both of the same period. His birth was 1671, and after serving apprenticeship in New York he served in the Albany Militia from 1689 to 1690. Johannis Nys, was then found again as one of the earliest Philadelphia silversmiths. In 1715 his shop was listed on Front Street, at the corner of

Carpenter's Alley.



Early engraving of a silversmith's workshop

There are some accounts that he had 2 shops, and that would be typical of successful silversmiths during this period. What became of him is said by most to be unknown, but I have found he was in Philadelphia as late as 1723, and died in Kent County, Delaware, in 1734. Another interesting thing I found is that he had a good number of punch marks. I have documented almost as many variants as pieces I have record of. This was also not uncommon for the more successful silversmiths.

They needed stamps for each shop, and different sizes for different size pieces, as well as extra stamps for their apprentices. Often they would change stamps when they relocated or partnered. I have found numerous silversmiths to have had 30 or more stamps. As with those, I find most of the variants to be close to the same, but still vary somewhat in appearance, and can vary even more based on a lot of other variables. Below are most of the photographed marks I have found, and judging from what I can see, and what they were found on, all appear to be authentic.

I can say for sure there were variations of the Johannis Nys mark that appear with pellets, and those that appear with just one pellet, and still others that appear without any pellets. Stated in more than one account, it could not be determined exactly what the feature under the initials was. After a close examination of all the marks pictured below, and a very close microscopic examination of the mark on the Crescent Moon pendant, I have come to the following conclusion. I think the Moon is one of his later pieces, and shows a mark made with a punch once having the pellet cross, and the pellets, for

some reason have been intentionally obliterated, or altered. This is not just a theory, it has been seen numerous times, and several various reasons have been documented for this occurrence. This practice was more common after the French and Indian War.

American Silversmiths and their Marks



Attributed to John Noyes, but in fact is a Nys mark as well



Marks found in Hamiltons book "Silver in the Fur Trade"
These replicate 3 of the marks in the above book



Three marks, one clearly shows 3 pellets below the Initials

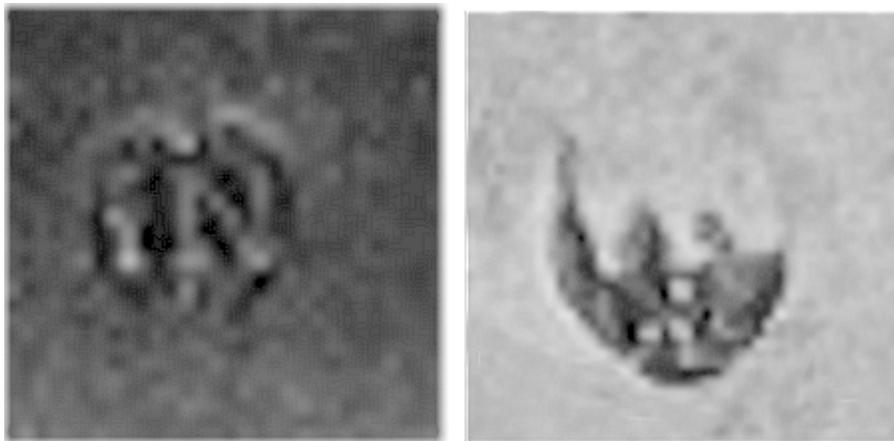


Spoon and Porringer Same Punch Mark



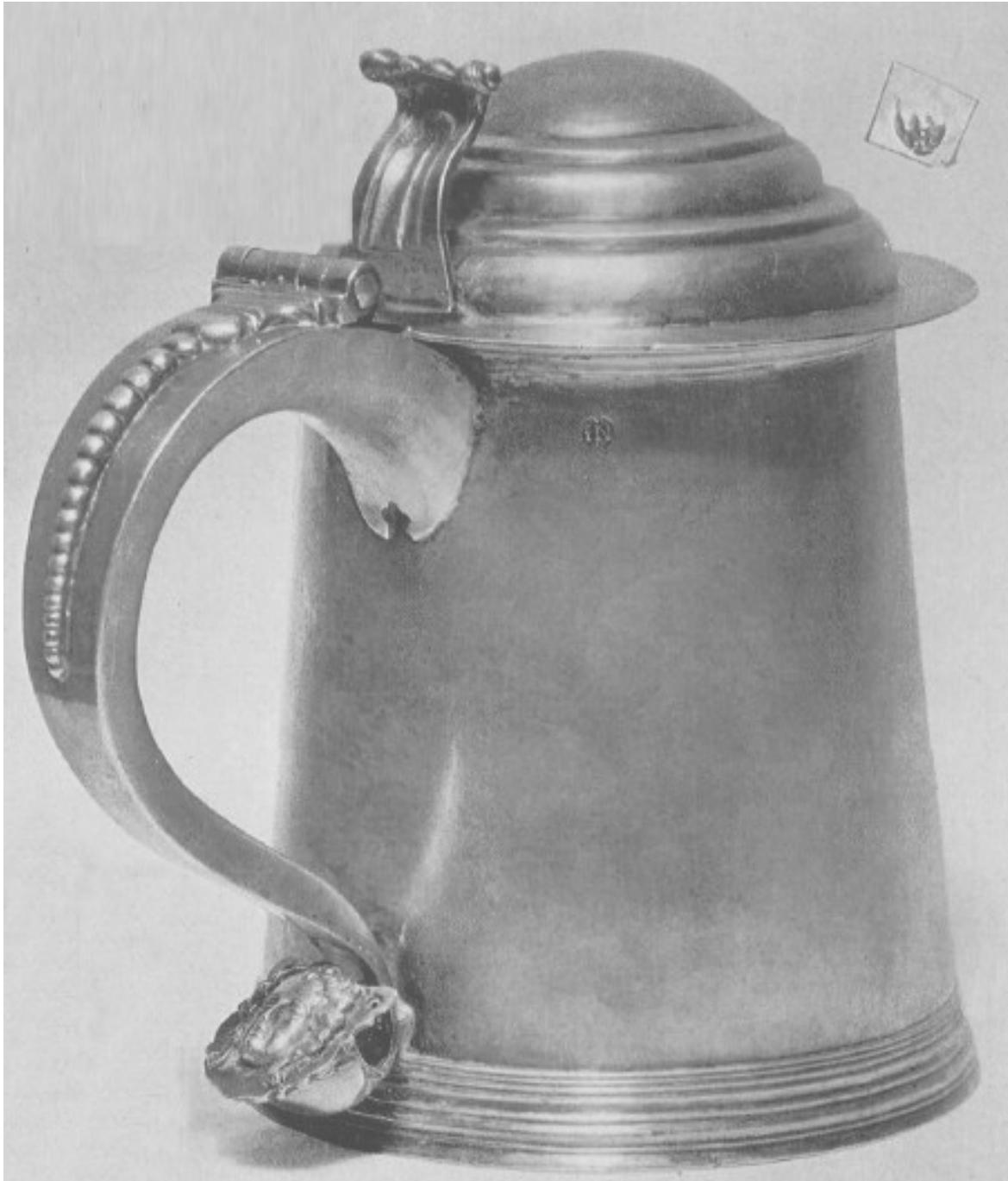
4 Punch marks, all to be with the same punch

Marks found on a spoon

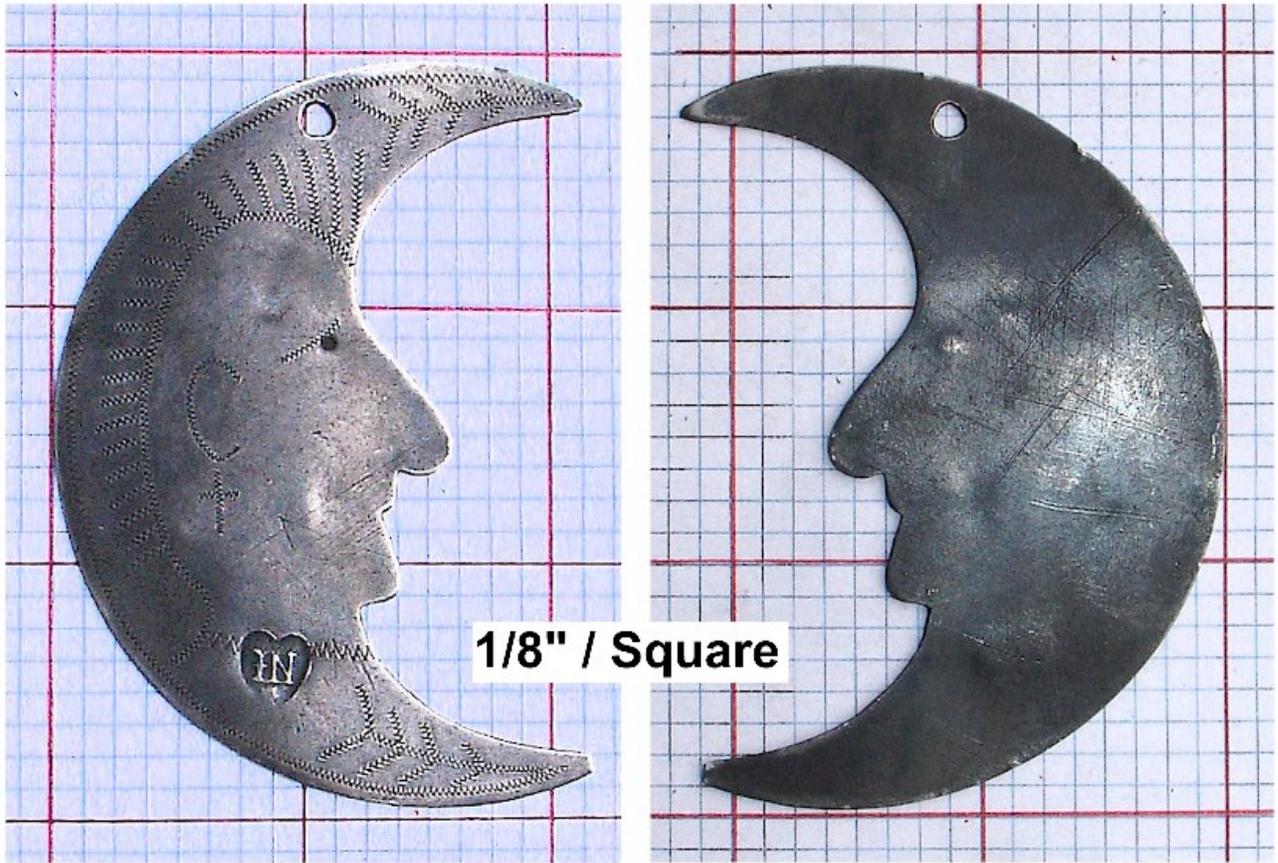


These 2 marks are found on a Tankard, and the lower one said to be the clearest representation of the 5 pellet cross under the initials

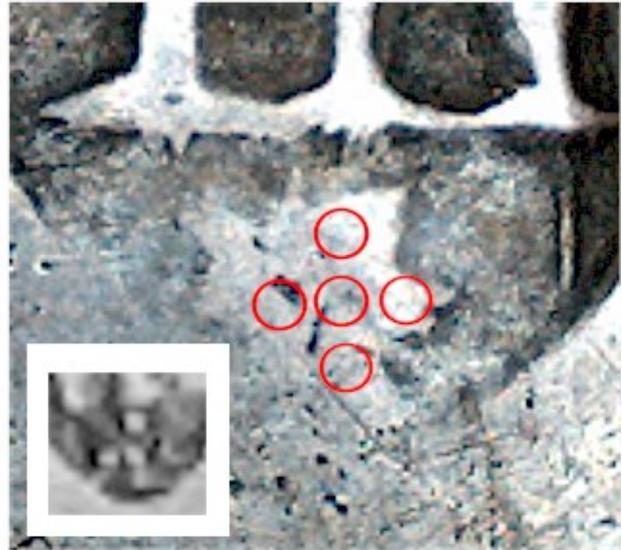
The above marks are found on a Tankard made by Johannis Nys in 1717. My belief is that the mark on the Moon pendant will post date this tankard.



Below are views of the Moon pendant showing some of the different characteristics referred to within this paper.



Below: Close-up of the mark and a duplicate view showing where I think the pellets appear to have been chiseled off of the original punch.



I found the characteristics of this piece to closely follow those of known pieces from this time and location. The type of silver used tested to be about 70% silver and 30% copper. This content can indicate use of coins of the period, or in some cases an alloy. The density would be a little less than coin silver standards of the late 18th century. It appears to be rolled to a fairly uniform gage of .03 inches, rolling compared to hammering on pieces like this was common with the better equipped silversmiths, and gage was not a standard at all. Under the microscope the indications of cutting, stamping, and rocker engraving are all typical of the day. Also, as would be typical of the better silversmiths, is this crescent moon

example exhibiting the use of 3 different size chisels to do the rocker engraving?

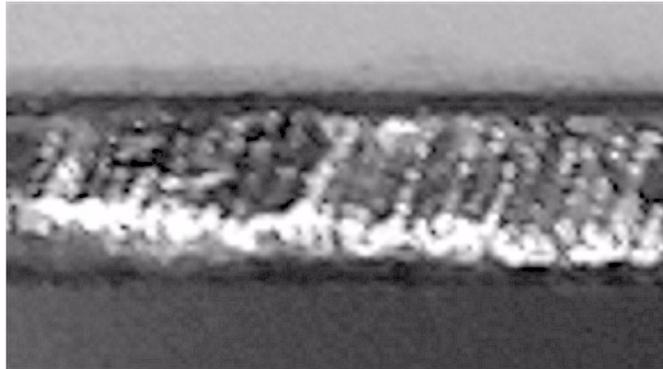


I could find no observable sign of modern technology being used in any part of the manufacture of this piece. I also observed slight indications of charcoal annealing of the period, being used to soften the metal for engraving and stamping. The faint signs of this early technique are seen as bluish grey color copper oxide, then called “fire skin”.



This is generally gone from polishing or wear, and appears only in this one small location. There is still some of the original fret saw cutting that was common long before

stamps were used for cutting. Most has been sanded off, but about 5% to 10% still remains.



The hole looks typical under close examination as well, and only slight wear in the correct location.

History treats trade silver as a mid to late 18th century product. This is because that was when the fur trade became wide spread, and a covered most of the known areas of colonization and exploration in the North East, and Canada. It has been well documented by scholars that there were many silver smiths involved in the manufacture of metal trade items, and also pieces made for presents, and rewards by the 17th century. One such book written just for the purpose of documenting that is “Indian Ornaments made by Philadelphia Silversmiths’, by Gillingham and Heye. Its first references go back to the 1680’s. *In this book it is stated that newly discovered documents show that in this Quaker City of Philadelphia Indian ornaments were produced by the thousands; and while a few have been found bearing Philadelphia maker’s punch marks, the documents referred to indicate the local silversmiths did produce many such pieces.*

It is obvious on first examination this piece was almost without doubt, made to be presented to a very influential and important Indian. During the first quarter of the 18th century gifts and presents were being made

for the Indians for presentation for loyalty, land, trade, and in some cases religion. Documented treaties were well known to involve gifts of trade silver pieces and medals. Much silver was given to the Lenape when they were relocated from their native lands after William Penn was given title to the same by the King. This was not necessarily out of any binding agreement, but more out of good will.

I have spent a good amount of time studying the symbolism on the piece. The moon symbol was common to most of the tribes, and even some of the rarest glass trade beads found in the area have the “Man in the Moon” design made into them. The “Man in the Moon” symbol is one that goes very far back in history, and would be hard to single it out as having special meaning to any one tribe.



One might ask about the cross earbob on the ear of the Indian. Was it too early to see this type of adornment, no, small crosses were common by 1700, most were

made of Pewter, some of lead, copper, and a few of silver. In most cases they were not looked at by the Indians as having religious meaning, but only as a symbol popular to them. One of the more obscure traits of the piece is the headdress. This is what the headdress of the place and time should be for a more important Indian. The engraving on this piece represents a coach spreader and Porcupine quill headdress, and not the feathered headdress found to be common later on the plains, and also incorrectly used on early paintings, and even as late as 1910 on the Seal of Bergen County, NJ.

In my opinion this piece is an authentic example of Indian trade silver made by Johannis Nys. It exhibits a punch that I believe to be just one more variant of a mark that cannot be confused with any other makers mark. I further believe it was very likely made for presentation to a chief or sub-chief of one of the tribes found in the areas around New York and Philadelphia between 1690 and 1734. The Lenape, Delaware, I believe would be the most likely, and it could have been connected to the ‘Friendly Society’ That being said, I will also state that none of the Six Nations can be ruled out. I

base this statement on the documents that state by the early 1700's, Philadelphia silversmiths were supplying numerous trading stores with trade silver. Any surviving piece of trade silver from this early date is rare, but adding a great deal to the rarity of this piece is the maker, Johannis Nys, almost none of his pieces have survived the ages, and as far as I can tell, no examples of his Indian trade silver have survived. In addition to my conclusion I have consulted with 3 other long time very qualified persons involved in the collecting and study of Trade Silver. So far there have not been any opinions that would conflict with the above findings. The study of a piece like this is an ongoing thing, and I welcome any qualified opinions that may add to the history of this rare piece of early American Indian trade silver.

Best Regards, Steve Cox