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NEW EXHIBIT AT HISTORICAL SOCIETY: TAUNTON'S METAL ARTISANS

September 16, 2011, Taunton, Massachusetts – On September 16, a new exhibit at the Old Colony Historical Society at 66 Church Green in Taunton will debut, “Lester Vaughan and Taunton’s Metal Artisans.” The exhibit is open through March 31, 2012.

Lester Vaughan, a long-time resident of Taunton, was recognized as one of the country’s most talented craftsmen in the early decades of the twentieth century. Four of his pewter tea sets even served guests of President and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. Through a gift made in 2010 by pewter collector Robert Bury, the Historical Society can now display over eighty pieces of Vaughan’s work. One of the eye-catching items on display will be a large, red salesman’s trunk that Lester Vaughan used to travel from place to place to promote his business. The trunk, also a gift of Robert Bury, was recently conserved.

The city’s reputation as “The Silver City” is a suitable one, but the Historical Society’s exhibit will display pewter and many of the other types of metalwares crafted here. The exhibit will reveal the talented people behind the metal industry, show their methods from design to production and marketing, and will tell more about the fifty-plus companies that employed Taunton’s workforce.

Generations of men and women have taken part in the metal industry, a backbone of the local economy since the 17th century. Christie Jackson, Curator of the exhibit, said, with Taunton’s “accessibility to Boston, New York, Providence, Fall River, and New Bedford, and its location on the Taunton River, this city was perfectly situated to become a metalworking capital. Taunton’s waterways allowed for the easy shipping of both raw materials and finished products, while also providing waterpower for factories.”

Some of the earliest pieces to be produced commercially in Taunton will be on display, including the very first style of teapot made by Babbitt & Crossman in 1824, the company that later became Reed & Barton Silversmiths. When the company began, they were not manufacturing silver; rather, they were making housewares out of britannia metal, an alloy similar to pewter. Curator Christie Jackson said, "Its shine rivaled silver and it was much stronger and malleable than pewter. Massachusetts became one of the leading centers for the production of britannia wares."

Many more fine examples of Taunton's metal industries can be viewed in the museum's newly-revamped Silver Room on the second floor. The variety of materials, styles, uses, makers, and owners are explored in-depth in the permanent exhibit. Just a few highlights include a large hand-operated machine for decorating metalwares, a shelf of items made just for children, and an array of table utensils that would baffle today's diners.

The history of pewter and britannia production will be presented on February 25, 2012 at 2:00 in the afternoon by Robert Bury, the donor of the Lester Vaughan collection and a noted expert in the field.

The mission of the OCHS is to collect, care for and interpret the history of the Taunton region, collaborating with the community to share meaningful connections between the past, the present and the future. To that end, the Society maintains a museum and library that are open Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 to 4:00, except for closings on holidays and Saturdays before Monday holidays, such as on September 3. Admission for non-members during normal hours of operation is \$7 for genealogy, \$4 for adults, \$2 for seniors and children 12-17, free for OCHS members and accompanied children under the age of 12. For more information, please contact the Society at 508-822-1622 or visit our website, www.oldcolonyhistoricalsociety.org.

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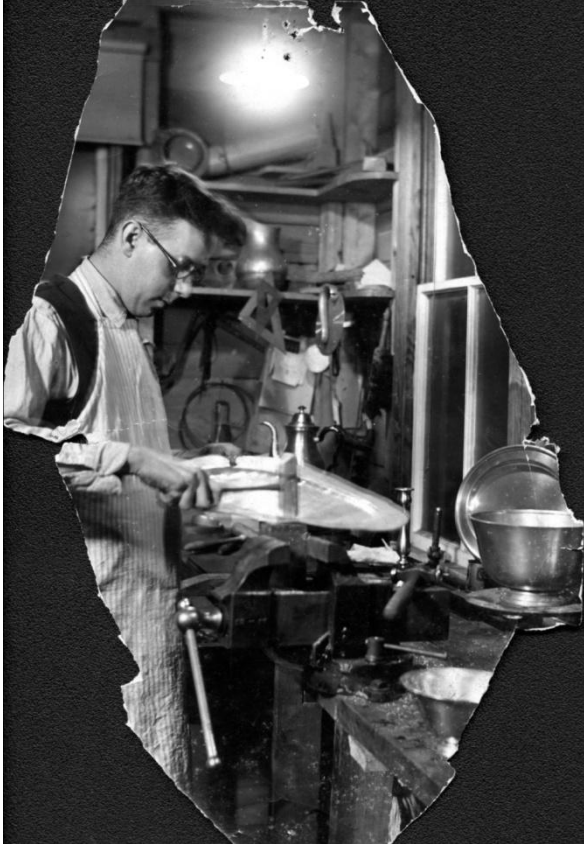
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Pewter artisan Lester Vaughan was captured doing what he did best around 1915 in this fragment of a photograph. Over eighty examples of his wares, along with those of many other metal artisans, will be on display beginning on September 16 at the Old Colony Historical Society in Taunton. Photograph courtesy of the Old Colony Historical Society.