



THE PIERCE BRIGADE MONTHLY NEWS



September 2009

Volume 5, No. 8

From Happy Accident to Royal Tradition

By Virginia Gerseny

It all began in China, according to legend, when an Emperor accustomed to a cup of hot water each afternoon one day found a leaf from the ti tree floating in his cup. Aghast, his servants tried to take it from him, but he had noticed the lovely fragrance of the brew and insisted on drinking it. And so was born the practice of brewing tea.

The intrepid Portuguese explorers were the first to import the leaves of tea. Finding it so invigorating, they considered it a medicine. Tea's popularity soon spread to Spain, where it became a beverage. When the Infanta of Spain married Charles I of England, she brought with her quantities of tea, and His Majesty quickly became enamored of this delicious drink. (It is said that he regularly drank up to ten cups a day!)

The British, so often associated with tea, originally embraced coffee that seamen brought from South America. Before the introduction of tea, coffee houses could be found all over the British Isles. A century later however, tea



Teacup from the Pierce's White House China

had taken hold and tea gardens were en vogue. Here, patrons could not only have their beloved tea, but they could walk in the gardens, hear concerts, gamble and see and be seen by the upper class.

There were many developments spawned from the Brits love of tea. Chinese exporters originally packed each packet of tea within red clay bowls and teapots that were then used to brew and serve tea. Tableware in England at that time was quite crude. Pottery was thick, not particularly

(Continued on page 2)

Brigade Lecture Series
2009 Event Calendar

**COMING THIS
MONTH**

**Thursday, September
24th, 7:00 pm @**

The Manse

**"Music and Dance of the
Early 19th Century"**

*A performance by
R.P. Hale*

~

Please join us for
refreshments after the
performance.

~

**CALLING ALL
MEMBERS!**

**Special Members
Meeting**

September 17th

@ 7:00 pm

This is an evening to
socialize with your fellow
Brigade members and to
share your ideas for
strengthening our preserva-
tion efforts at the Manse.

Refreshments will be
served.

In Review: 19th Century Formal Tea

On August 6th, the Pierce Brigade hosted a 19th Century formal tea as a benefit for the Pierce Manse. Virginia Gerseny portraying Jane Pierce, described the origins of tea parties and her entertaining at the White House. Afterwards, guests then were treated to piano music, delicious tea beverages and delectable pastries in the solarium at Pleasant View. A special thanks to all of the Brigade members who loaned over one hundred china tea cups and saucers, prepared finger sandwiches and sweets, and who provided event support. A raffle of Political Library and Pierce books and tea-related items, as well as sales of the Brigade cookbook brought in additional revenue. The event raised more than \$800 to preserve the home and legacy of President Pierce. Thanks to all who supported this event!

Tea Customs continued...

graceful, and spoons were carved out of wood. As time went on silver and goldsmiths learned to design spoons, but the bowls they made were too hot to hold when filled with tea. So the search began for a finer porcelain. The Chinese made almost transparent pure white porcelain, and try as they might, the English could not find the formula.

The earliest (circa 1720) English porcelain factory was Wedgwood. However, it was Josiah Spode who ultimately succeeded in reproducing the fine white porcelain of China. He ground up bones and added that to the clay mixture, and called the result "bone china".

Sometime in the 18th century the English added handles to the tea bowls, and they became cups. They also added saucers, which were quite deep and shaped like a bowl. The English often poured the brewed tea into the saucer to make it cool enough to drink.

It was not until the early 1800's that Americans were drinking tea out of tea-cups. Delicate teaspoons were invented for use in the delicate tea cups. Tea trays were produced to come from the kitchen and be placed on the new "tea table," a small round table in the living room. Tea cozys were produced by needle workers, as a way to keep the teapot warm, and locked tea caskets stored the

precious tea leaves from thieving fingers!

The originator of the tea party was probably the Duchess of Bedford. The dear Duchess became very hungry, and perhaps a little faint around four o'clock when she retired to her boudoir to dress for an 8:00 p.m. dinner. She secretly ordered her servants to bring sandwiches and tea to sustain her. When her lady friends discovered this they clamored to be invited to her secret party, and she happily obliged. Soon tea was moved to the dining room and tea at four o'clock became the custom of the day.

Near the end of the 19th century, progressive women were designing tea gowns to wear to bedroom tea parties. These were the ultimate in comfort, since they were constructed with no waistline, and the wearer did not have to wear confining corsets to the tea party.

The working classes yearned for their own invigorating cup of tea at tea time; however they did not typically end their day until six o'clock. So they began preparing the evening meal, complete with meat potatoes, side dishes and tea, which they named "high tea." The working man ate with relish his "tea party."

When Jane Pierce had tea parties at the White House, her beautiful bone china trimmed with gold and deep blue was used and white gardenias were set on the tables. She enjoyed entertaining, as she was invigorated by the fresh brewed tea.



**New Faces at the
Pierce Manse**

This fall be on the look out for two fresh new faces around the Manse. John Miller and Allana Sullivan, who are both students at New England College, will be spending four hours a week at President Pierce's historic home.

Working under the Director of Programs' supervision and with the help of the Pierce Brigade volunteer guides, they will be learning to guide school groups through the house and deliver the political library's other onsite educational programs. Please extend a warm welcome to the newest members of the Pierce family!

Did You Know?

**In all of 2008,
1,720 visitors
toured the Manse.**

**In just the first 8
months of 2009,
1,675 people have
toured the historic
house!**

Get Involved

The Pierce Manse will continue to be open to the public through Columbus Day weekend on Friday and Saturdays from 12:00 to 3:00 p.m. We will also be hosting a fall open house on Saturday, October 3rd from 11:00-2:00 pm. Admission is free and we hope to see

all Brigade members at some point during the day. If you would like to help during the event, we always need greeters and general event help.

If you plan to attend and would like to volunteer to help, please contact Joan Davis at (603) 224-2939.