

THE "LOST" SILVER URN OF BENJAMIN RUSH

Funny how things that are thought to be lost and gone forever sometimes suddenly turn up again. That's what happened recently with a silver urn that once belonged to Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Dr. Rush's medical students commissioned Philadelphia silversmith Daniel Dupuy to make it and presented the 10-inch high, gracefully-shaped and handsomely-decorated piece to Dr. Rush in June 1790.

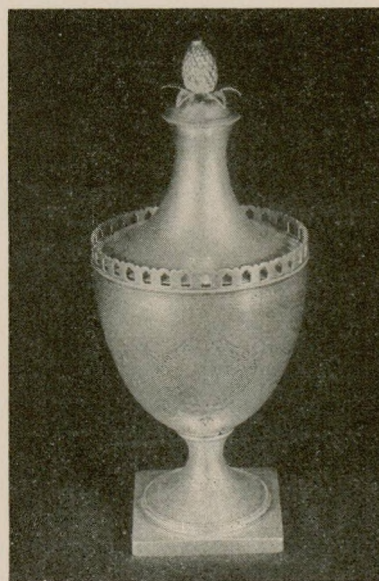
Sometime later (no one seems to remember quite when) the urn was thought to be lost in a fire and a reproduction was made. Slightly smaller and differing only in minor details, the copy was loaned by Dr. and Mrs. Alexander Rush to the College of Physicians of Philadelphia where it has been on display in the unique Mutter Museum with other possessions of Dr. Benjamin Rush, one of the College's founders.

That display was called to the attention of a Baltimore physician who had in his possession a similar urn, inscribed to Dr. Rush by his students. Curious to know the background of the two urns, the physician, Dr. Robert Abrams, brought his urn to the museum, where a comparison was made and it was immediately obvious the two were almost identical. Dr. Abrams' urn, however, bore the "DD" stamp of Colonial silversmith Daniel Dupuy (authenticated by Frank Schwartz, a Chestnut St. antique dealer and authority on Colonial silver) and it appeared that here was the original urn thought to be irretrievably lost.

Dr. Abrams' urn, the original one, was acquired by his father in a most unusual and fortuitous way about 25 years ago. His father, Dr. Michael Abrams, one day spotted a young boy carrying a blackened object down the street in Baltimore's "Antique Row." It had the outlines of a silver urn and so he stopped the lad and offered him a small amount of money for it.

The boy eagerly grabbed the money and ran, leaving the urn to its new owner. Upon removing the smudge and smoke stain which had completely discolored the urn, Dr. Abrams' father realized the importance of what he had bought so offhandedly.

The original urn and the reproduction are both on display for the Bicentennial year at the Mutter Museum, 19 South 22nd St., Philadelphia.



Other items once belonging to Dr. Rush which are also on display include his gold-headed walking stick (a status symbol of physicians of that day) and his medicine case.

The museum is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. A special slide show and guided tour of the museum and the College's collection of portraits are given Tuesday and Friday at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. The College has many outstanding examples of portrait painting from the 18th and 19th centuries by such noted artists as Thomas Sully, Charles Willson Peale and Thomas Eakins. Admission is free.