

THE SUBJECT WAS PEWTER

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The Norwalk Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution had a rather full schedule of events slated for the November 1, 1898 meeting according to the account that appeared in *American Monthly Magazine* (January 1899). While Katherine Sturgis' "*The Wedding of a Norwalk Belle a Century Ago*" dealt with a romance from the past, the remaining events dealt with the romance of the past in the rather prosaic form of pewter. Offerings included opportunities for viewing a display of pewter, mostly belonging to Dr. J. Milton Coburn, and listening to Mrs. George B. St. John's "*Old Pewter in America*." But the big draw and attraction was a presentation on pewter from Alice Morse Earle, who, by 1898, was the author or editor of a dozen books and innumerable articles.(1) As Angeline Scott, the chapter historian, notes Earle was "*the well-known author of 'The China-Hunter in New England' and other books about colonial topics of interest to collectors of antiquities.*"(2) What were some of these books? At the time of Earle's visit titles included *The Sabbath in Puritan New England* (1891), *China Collecting in America* (1892), and *Customs and Fashions in Old New England* (1893), amongst others.(3)

Not surprisingly, Alice Morse Earle's presentation received the lion's share of the coverage provided by Angeline Scott who emphasized Earle's undoubted expertise: "*Mrs. Earle said that pewter was not sufficiently appreciated by the people in general, yet a shining collection of pewterware might be very attractive; and, while many mistakes are made regarding the period to which china pieces belong, we may be certain that pewter pieces are really old.*" (4) Scott also conveyed Earle's advice for locating pewter: "*She said the place to search for was not in the china closets and kitchen of country houses, but in the wood sheds, barn lofts and under the attic eaves.*" (5) Scott concluded with more insights from Earle on the significance of pewter: "*Careful inventories used to be made of all household articles, and old wills contain as explicit bequests of pewter as of plate, showing its high esteem in early days.*"(6) By highlighting Earle's expertise and pearls of wisdom in locating pewter perhaps Mrs. Earle's lecture should have been called the pewter-hunter in New England.

Did Mrs. Earle have an underlying motive in visiting Norwalk to lecture on pewter? Although there is no mention in this Norwalk Chapter account did Mrs. Earle tout her newest book *Home Life in Colonial Days*? Perhaps the purely social activities that concluded the chapter meeting may have provided the perfect opportunity for mentioning her newest book. Although these questions may never be answered what cannot be denied is that by securing Alice Morse Earle as a speaker the Norwalk Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution created its own bit of history.

1 "Chronological Bibliography of Alice Morse Earle's Works" in *Alice Morse Earle and the Domestic History of Early America* by Susan Reynolds Williams. (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013): 295-299.

2 "Norwalk Chapter." *American Monthly Magazine* (January 1899): 40.

3 "Chronological Bibliography of Alice Morse Earle's Works" in *Alice Morse Earle and the Domestic History of Early America* by Susan Reynolds Williams. (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013): 295-299.

4 "Norwalk Chapter." *American Monthly Magazine* (January 1899): 40-41.

5 "Norwalk Chapter." *American Monthly Magazine* (January 1899): 41.

6 "Norwalk Chapter." *American Monthly Magazine* (January 1899): 41.

Additional Reading

[China Hunter in New England](#) by Alice Morse Earle from *Scribner's Magazine* (September 1891)

[Ad for Alice Morse Earle's Books](#)

(an advertisement for books by Alice Morse Earle that appeared in *The Literary World* (January 9, 1897)

[Trencher Treen and Pewter Bright](#) (a chapter from Alice Morse Earle's *China Collecting in America* (1892)

Reviews of *Home Life in Colonial Days*: [Review in Literature Jan 10, 1899](#) & [Review in Education Jan, 1899](#)

[Links to online books & Articles by Alice Morse Earle](#)