



# The Gardner News

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## City's history with silver a 'love story'

**Gardner Museum hosts demonstration**

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News Staff Writer

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GARDNER — Visitors packed into the replica silver shop located in the basement of The Gardner Museum on Thursday to watch local silversmith Peter Erickson fashion a handwrought spoon.

"All of the tools I have are from my grandfather," said Mr. Erickson, currently the city's only full-time silversmith, who works out of his home studio on Green Street and offers evening classes.

While earning a degree in economics from Clark University in the early 1970s, Mr. Erickson spent his free time apprenticing alongside his grandfather George Erickson, a member of the Arts and Crafts Society of Boston who was well known on the East Coast throughout the 1930s and 1950s for producing high-quality flatware.

According to local historian and former antique dealer Dorothy Tracy, George Erickson's craftsmanship "graced the table of United States presidents, governors, senators and other notables" of the time. Prior to training his grandson, the late Mr. Erickson had emigrated from Sweden and apprenticed in Gardner under Arthur J. Stone.

"Handwrought silver had become popular again after the turn of the century. There was a movement away from manufactured goods. The manufacturers had, in a way, gone wild with design. They almost overdid it," Ms. Tracy said. "President (Franklin D.) Roosevelt had George Erickson's sterling at one point, and so did President (John F.) Kennedy at one time."

As a co-author of the book "A Century of Gardner Sterling Silver," Ms. Tracy noted that the Chair City's silver history makes for a "romantic" read.

"You might ask yourself how we ended up with a rich silver history in a town known for furniture," she said. "Well, it was all about love. In fact, it is all a big love story."

According to Ms. Tracy, the "big beautiful building with stained-glass windows" still standing at 222 Chestnut St. was a wedding gift bestowed to former residents Frank W. Smith and Frances S. Heywood in 1888.

"The Frank W. Smith company made a lot of silver for the U.S. Navy," she said. "They used it on ships. It was a time when officers dined separately from the other sailors. It was not quite as equal back then. We have come a long way."

During this year's museum demonstration, an "Erickson Silver" ring was auctioned off to the highest bidder, Gardner resident Jane Huntoon.

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News staff photo by MELISSA SANDFORD

Local silversmith Peter Erickson crafts a sterling silver spoon at The Gardner Museum, Thursday.

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