

**THE PTARMIGAN VASE: A MONUMENTAL COPPER, SILVER AND GOLD
MOKUME VASE, CIRCA 1900-05** to be sold at Sotheby's New York, 21Jan 2011

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Summary justification

In the art world is not uncommon to see sales pitches describing a work as unique or even masterful. It is, however, very uncommon for such descriptions to be true. The Ptarmigan Vase is truly unique, and truly a masterpiece.

During the 'gilded age' of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the finest craftsmen in the world were lured to New York by design firms who could easily outbid the competition. At the top of these firms stood Tiffany & Co., which established its reputation as a world leader through the display of over-the-top *objets de luxe* at grand exhibitions. Paulding Farnham, head jewelry designer at Tiffany's, won gold medals at the Paris Exposition of 1889, the Chicago World's Colombian Exposition of 1893, the Paris Exposition of 1900, and the Buffalo Pan-American Exposition of 1901. Despite all these successes—or perhaps because of them—Farnham was ultimately squeezed out by the firm's largest shareholder, Louis Comfort Tiffany, who named himself head jeweller in 1907.

In June 1908 Farnham left to devote all of his energies to mining ventures in the Kootenay region of southeastern British Columbia. Although those investments did not pan out in the long run, Farnham's speculations were sufficiently successful to have a magnificent mountain named after him, and to have his passion for BC commemorated in the form of this splendid vase. It depicts a silver Ptarmigan perched atop a bowl with a rocklike surface formed of artfully-blended copper and silver—two of the metals being mined at the location specified by the cross on the front of the vase, along with the gold forming the provincial seal above.

It is amazing to find a work that is so truly international—a masterpiece of the Japanese *mokume-gane* ("wood grain") technique of blending metals, made in New York by craftsmen trained in the best European tradition, and replete with imagery from British Columbia!



In the 2009 Sotheby's Americana sale the highlight of the American silver portion of the sale was lot 105, a copper and jewel-set Aztec bowl, made by Tiffany & Co. to the design of Paulding Farnham in 1905. Described as the last and probably the largest of the six vases by this artist that were inspired by Native American basketry and pottery, that work sold for \$302,500. This sale no doubt led the family to come forth with the contemporaneous Ptarmigan Vase, which dwarfs the 24 cm high Aztec bowl with its height of 63.5 cm. Though unusual and highly ornate, the 'Aztec bowl' is nowhere near as rare or technically sophisticated as the vase that Farnham had made for himself.

← Paulding Farnham for Tiffany's, 'Aztec' bowl, finished 1905.

The estimate for the Ptarmigan vase is surprisingly low (\$80-120,000) but as always the estimate is merely an enticement for potential buyers. Based on coverage in the Canadian press and excitement in the American collecting community, it would not be surprising if the vase were to fetch a much higher price. We would therefore like to bid up to \$USD 660, allowing us to bid up to a hammer price of \$USD 550,000 plus 20% dealer's commission.

Sotheby's

Important Americana Including American Stoneware Assembled by Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Hochberg

New York | 21 Jan 2011, 10:00 AM, 22 Jan 2011, 2:00 PM | N08710

LOT 114

DESCENDED IN THE FAMILY OF PAULDING FARNHAM

THE PTARMIGAN VASE: A MONUMENTAL COPPER, SILVER AND GOLD MOKUME VASE, THE DESIGN ATTRIBUTED TO PAULDING FARNHAM, CIRCA 1900-05

of inverted pear form one side mounted with a gold medallion of the seal of the Province of British Columbia above applied silver and copper diagram of the exact geographical position of the Ptarmigan Mines, the sides also engraved with figures including an eagle, large stylized mask, Native American symbols and a small crescent moon. the shoulders applied with stylized bird's feet below a neck incorporating a band of eyes and a projecting bird's beak, perched on the rim is a 10 1/2 in ptarmigan with copper beak, talons and gold eyes the base rim applied with stylized pine trees all derived from Northwest Coast Indian lore. the finished base with concave recess and central silver and copper baluster finial

the base engraved with five signatures HANNWEBER SWAMBY, THOMA. BARKER and SPENGLER

height 25in.

63.5 cm

ESTIMATE 80,000 -120,000 USD

PROVENANCE

Paulding Farnham, to *his wife*
Sally James Farnham, to *their*
son James Farnham, *thence*
by *descent*

CATALOGUE NOTE

This exceptional vase has descended in the family of Paulding Farnham, through his wife, sculptor Sally James Farnham. Before her death in 1943, Sally compiled a detailed list of artworks with their maker's that she wished to be distributed among her family members upon her passing. The present lot, described as "Ptarmigan Vase (Paul Farnham)" was to be given to her first-born child, James.

George Paulding Farnham was born on 6 November 1859, and it was through family connections that Farnham was hired by Tiffany & Co. His aunt, Julia, was married to Charles T. Cook, president of Tiffany & Co, from 1902-07. It was Cook who recommended his nephew as an apprentice in the "Tiffany School" under head designer, Edward C. Moore. In November 1885 he graduated from his apprenticeship and was made a "general assistant" to Moore. Farnham's rise during his early years at Tiffany & Co. seemed unstoppable and just four years into his career he won the gold medal at the Paris Exposition of 1889 for his jewelry designs. Following this success, Farnham was promoted to head jewelry designer in 1891, and during his tenure he won additional gold medals at the Chicago World's Colombian Exposition of 1893, the Paris Exposition of 1900 and the Buffalo Pan-American Exposition of 1901 Loring, John. *Paulding Farnham Tiffany's Lost Genius*, 200, pp. 7-8).



Two monumental vases in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, both designed by Paulding Farnham and manufactured by Tiffany & Company. At left, *The Viking Punchbowl*, ca. 1893. Iron, silver, gold, wood. (42.4 x 51.4 cm, 499.948 troy ounces).. Purchase 1969 (69.4). At right, *The Adam's Vase*, (Gold, amethysts, quartzes, spessartites, tourmalines, freshwater pearls, enamel, 1893-1895).

In 1902, Charles Lewis Tiffany gave control of Tiffany & Co. to his son, Lewis Comfort Tiffany. Tiffany and Farnham were both celebrated and talented designers in their respective styles, but there was not room enough at Tiffany & Co. for both. Although highly respected, Farnham's power and influence in the company was no match for the firm's largest shareholder. By 1907 Louis Comfort had named himself to be the new head jewelry designer, and on 2 June 1908 Farnham officially resigned from Tiffany & Co.

On 31 December 1896, Farnham married Sarah (Sally) Welles James, daughter of Col. Edward C. James, a prominent New York attorney, in her hometown of Ogdensburg, NY. Two years later the couple welcomed their first child, James, born in January 1898. A daughter, Julia Paulding Farnham, was born in November 1900, and a second son, John Paulding Farnham in July 1907. For a short he time shared studio space with his wife, an up-and-coming sculptor, on West 57th Street in New York, but he seems to have abandoned the art world entirely in 1909.

Farnham's first association with the Ptarmigan Mines in British Columbia, Canada began about 1898. Also called the "Red Line", the mountain was rich with copper, gold and silver the same minerals from which the Ptarmigan Vase is constructed. Farnham had initially believed the mines to be an exciting financial opportunity for his family and poured extensive personal resources into the venture (G.P.V. and Akrigg, Helen B., *British Columbia Places and Names*, 1997 p. 78). In 1901 the Farnham family purchased a ranch at the base of the mountains in the town Windermere, BC. The following year it was announced in *The British Colonist* that a prominent peak in the Selkirk mountain range "is now to be known as Mount Farnham, in honor of Paulding Farnham of New York, promoter of the Ptarmigan mines of the Selkirks. Mount Farnham is sentinel of the range, rising 12,000 feet, first to 10,000 feet, then by a perpendicular castle-like rock 2,000 feet higher. Mr. Farnham's property lies at the base of this mountain, and it is indeed well named, for Mr. Farnham has greatly contributed to the development of the mines in this district" (*The British Colonist*, 30 October 1902, p. 2).

Around 1904-05 it became apparent that the Ptarmigan mines were not the successful financial endeavor that Farnham had hoped they would be. Despite the venture's bleak prospects, Farnham continued to sink money into the project. He began to spend considerable amounts of time in British Columbia, especially after his departure from Tiffany & Co. in 1908 (Hassrick, Peter H. *The Art of Being an Artist Sally James Farnham, American Sculptor*, 2005, p. 31). It was written of him: "Mr. Farnham stands out like his mountain among mining men in this- he has lost a fortune like a man and paid every cent he owed (an unusual thing with defunct mining companies)" (G.P.V and Akrigg: 1997, p. 80).

Farnham's prolonged absences began to take their toll on his marriage and family life, and on 27 July 1914 Sally filed a petition for divorce on the grounds of abandonment. The couple officially divorced the following year, and Farnham took up residence in California a few years later (Hassrick: 2005, p. 35). By the time the divorce was granted Farnham had exhausted nearly all of his personal resources. He took very few possessions with him into his post-divorce life and Sally appears to have retained the property in their home and studio in New York, including the Ptarmigan Vase. The Ptarmigan Vase is among the artworks listed in a 1936 inventory of the contents of Sally's studio.

Given Farnham's enthusiasm for the Ptarmigan mines, the Ptarmigan Vase was probably made towards the beginning of the venture. This time period also corresponds with Farnham's burgeoning interest in Native American and Aztec design. Although Tiffany & Co. had been producing Native American-inspired silver wares since the mid-1870's, Farnham revived the firm's design vocabulary in the late 1880's to include bolder motifs, pictograms, and forms directly based on Native American basketwork and pottery. Examples of Farnham's Native American designs include the four "Pueblo" bowls exhibited in the 1893 Chicago Exposition, the "Navajo" vase and "Zuni" and "Hupa" bowls designed for the 1900 Paris Exposition, as well as the "Aztec" bowl finished in 1905 and sold in these rooms on 23 January 2009, lot 105 (Loring, John. *Paulding Farnham Tiffany's Lost Genius*, 2000, pp. 60-67).

Although the Ptarmigan Vase does not bear a Tiffany mark, the complexity of its manufacture would have required it to have been made in the Tiffany factory in New Jersey. Tiffany certainly

had the capabilities to produce mokume of this scale the only other known work of large-scale mokume is the 32 inch tall vase designed by Edward C. Moore for the 1889 Paris Exposition, now in the collection of the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum, New York. A period drawing of this vase as published in *The Jewelers' Weekly*, is reproduced by John Loring in *Magnificent Tiffany Silver*, 2001, p. 52.



Most importantly, however, the five signatures on the base provide a direct connection with Tiffany & Co. All five signatures, HANNWEBER, SWAMBY, THOMA BARKER, and SPENGLER can be traced to master craftsmen who worked for Tiffany during the period. Additionally, four of these men - Hannweber, Spengler, Swamby and Thomaare recorded as contributors to the "Silversmiths' and Goldsmiths' Ware" category of 1900 the Paris Exposition and were important enough in their craft to be listed independently of Tiffany & Co. (Paulding Farnham was also listed independently of Tiffany in the "Jewelry" category). Moreover, they comprise four of the seven individuals named in this category, and were the only individually-listed makers representing the New York area. The 1900 Paris Exposition records also denote the various specializations of the craftsmen's contributions to the fairHannweber was a chaser, Spengler a silversmith,

Swamby an enameler and Thoma a designer (*Catalogue of Exhibitors in the United States Sections of the International Universale Exposition Paris, 1900*, 1900, pp 435-36). Since it is documented that these craftsmen created the Native American-inspired wares for 1900 Exposition, they most certainly would have had the technical skills to create the Ptarmigan Vase. Likely their experience with large-scale mixed-metal is the very reason why Farnham chose these specific craftsmen for this personal project.

As Tiffany & Co. did not normally permit their master craftsmen to sign their wares, tracing the signatures on the bottom of the vase provides us with a rare insight into the lives of the men who created some of the most spectacular pieces of turn-of-the century American silver.

According to public records **Louis Hannweber (chaser)** was born in Brooklyn on 5 July 1867. His father was a German immigrant and his mother a native New Yorker. He married his wife Rose in 1887, and the couple appears to have had only one son, George, born around 1890. Hannweber spent most of his life in Brooklyn and is listed in the 1897 Brooklyn directory as living at 744 Bushwick Avenue, The 1900 census also lists his residence as Brooklyn as does the obituary of his son printed in the New York Times on 21 February 1914. By 1928 he was living at 7102 Manse Street in the Forrest Hills neighborhood. It is unclear when Hannweber and his wife died, but he is recorded as traveling alone to Bermuda in 1928 and to Cuba the following year.

Hannweber was first documented as a silversmith in the 1897 Brooklyn directory, which records his occupation as "chaser". Likewise the *Catalogue of Exhibitors in the United States Sections of the International Universal Exposition Paris 1900* lists his contribution to the exposition as "Chased work" under the category "Silversmiths and Goldsmith's Ware." (p. 435). An amusing account of Hannweber while working at Tiffany is recorded in the notes of master craftsman Howard Tucker Bailey (1889-1950) transcribed by his wife after his death. Bailey, who worked at the Tiffany factory from 1905-1950 describes a conversation between Hannweber and Frank Malsch, foreman of the 2nd floor chasing room:

One day into the chasing room stalked Mr. Han Weber, in a towering rage. "Mr. Malsch", he almost shouted, "Look here at this cup that some fool of a chaser spoiled. When they tried to put a monogram on it they discovered it has been chased with an odd number of divisions. It was chased some time ago but I want you to look up your records & see what fool chased it. I'll certainly give him a good piece of my mind." (and how he could do that). Later on Mr. Han Weber entered the Chaser's Room again and said, "Well! Mr. Malsch did you look up that record for me?" "Yes" Mr. Malsch replied, very uneasily. "Well, who is the man who did such a fool thing?" "I don't like to tell you Mr. Han Weber" replied Malsch very unsteadily. "Come, come I insist upon knowing" said Mr. Han Weber. From the very body of his soul Malsch dragged the answer, "It was you, Mr. Han Weber". Mr. Han Weber gave one shocked Oh! And turned on his heel and left the department, not did he ever broach the subject again." (The Woodley-Bailey Family: <http://auntiem6.ranchoweb.com>)

Godfrey Swamby (engraver/enameller) was born in Brooklyn in 1856/57 to Norwegian immigrant parents. On 16 June 1887 he married Lizzie Cottrell of New York in Manhattan. The couple, who had at least two daughters, Kary and Edna, lived in Newark, NJ, close to the Tiffany factory for many years. Swamby died in November 1930.

Swamby appears to have had multiple roles at the Tiffany factory during his career. The 1880 census and the 1920 census both list his occupation as "silver engraver". Additionally, he is recorded as having been responsible for "Enameling" silver wares for the 1900 Paris Exposition (p. 435), and is described as "enameller silverware" in the 1910 census. Howard Tucker Bailey's notes also suggest that he was worked in Finishing on the 2nd floor of the factory.

Jacob Thoma (designer) was born in New York in 1862 to German immigrant parents - John (a cooper by trade) and Margaret Thoma. In 1887 he married his wife, Johanna (1865-1909), and the couple had three children, Abbie, Margurite and John Jacob.

The 1880 census records that Jacob Thoma, was still living with his parents in New York City as a "looking glass maker". Twenty years later, records indicate that he and his family were living at 6 Clinton St. in Belleville, NJ, near the Tiffany factory, and that he was occupied as a "silver smith". Looking at the census records from this time it is apparent that quite a few of the Tiffany silversmiths were neighbors in the Belleville area. For example, the 1900 census shows that Eugene Dulgie, a spoon maker at Tiffany, and his son, listed as "silversmith" lived at 7 Clinton Street, and that Daniel Rioden, an "apprentice silversmith", lived at 39 Clinton Street. Furthermore, the 1910 census shows that Thoma, **then** living at 10 New Bridge Street, lived down the block from Frank Noonan, a "silver polisher, silver shop" and Jamie Donohue, a "silver finisher, silver shop". The 1900 census, also lists Abbie Thoma's occupation as "stationary, silver shop" suggesting that Jacob Thoma was facilitating jobs at the Tiffany workshop for not only his own daughter, but his neighbor's children as well.

Thoma's experience as a designer for Tiffany is recorded not only in the accounts of Howard Tucker Bailey, but also in the list of exhibitors of the 1900 Paris Exposition where his contribution is recorded as "Design of silverware" (p. 435).

"Barker", the only signature on the vase not recorded as an exhibitor at the 1900 Paris Exposition is that of **George Barker (stamper)**. Unfortunately, very little published information can be found on this maker. Although his dates are not known, he is listed in the 1880-90 Brooklyn directory as living at 104 Newell Street with the occupation. "5 silversmith". Additionally, Howard Tucker Bailey recalls that Barker worked for Tiffany as foreman of stamping in the plaster molding room on the first floor, and that he spoke with a "deep bellowing voice."

"Spengler" (silversmith?) is the only signature that can not firmly be identified at this time. Although the 1900 Paris Exposition lists a "Spengler, F., New York" or "Silversmith's work", it is possible that this corresponds with Peter Spengler, who was born in Germany in 1871. Peter Spengler, who was extensively physically described on his 1908 passport application as 5 feet 7 inches with a "forehead: high", "Nose: straight", "Mouth: small", "Chin: low", "Complexion: ruddy" and "Face: full, with small moustache" was known to be a "jeweler" and "jewelry dealer" in Manhattan and Boston. This seems to be the only male of appropriate age in the New York/New Jersey area working in metalwork in the late 19th/early 20th century.

NOTES ON THE PTARMIGAN VASE

by Graham Larkin, Curator of International Art, National Gallery of Canada

Dating of the Seal

NB: This research supports the dating by Sotheby's scholars of ca. 1900-1905.



The gold seal at the centre of the Ptarmigan Vase depicts the provincial Coat of Arms designed by Canon Arthur Beanlands of Victoria and adopted by Order-in-Council on July 19th 1895.



That design lasted until March 31st 1906, when the Province received a revised coat of arms by Royal Warrant of Edward VII. In the redesign the relative positions of these devices was reversed, and a crown was added to the centre of the Union Jack.



Subsequent changes include the addition of a wreath of dogwood flowers along the bottom, and the addition of a golden helmet of sovereignty between the shield and the crest, indicating BC's co-sovereign status in Confederation.



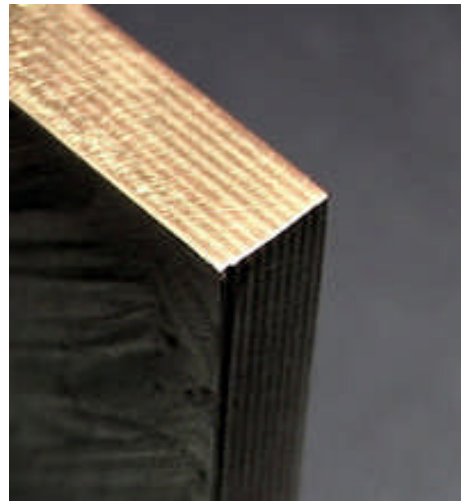
Metalworking Technique

The distinctive mottled pattern of the Ptarmigan Vase indicates the Japanese *mokume* technique of metalwork.



Details of front and underside of the Ptarmigan Vase showing mokume surface.

Mokume-gane (木目金) is a mixed-metal laminate with distinctive layered patterns. Translating as *wood-grain metal*, the name was borrowed from one type of pattern created in the forging of swords and other edged weapons.

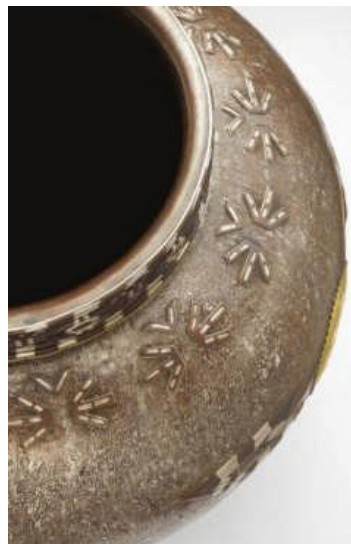


Mokume-gane patterns in gold and silver alloys

Mokume-gane brass/copper billet

In Western art the technique seems to have been reserved for rings and other fine jewellery. I have not been able to find evidence of other mokume vases before the contemporary period.

The Bird



The ptarmigan is common name of a type of grouse of the genus *Lagopus*. It may refer to any of three species. As indicated by the distribution maps accompanying the photos below, the rock ptarmigan prefers high altitudes and is not distinctive to the region. The vase itself has a very rocky surface.

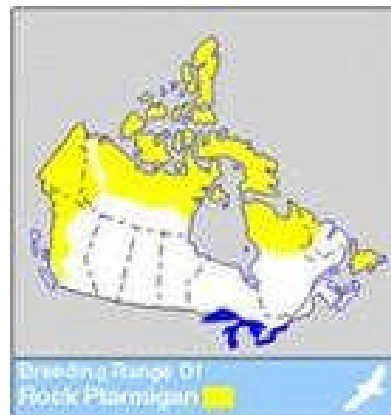
(1) Rock Ptarmigan, *Lagopus muta*, known as Ptarmigan in Europe;



(2) Willow Ptarmigan, *Lagopus lagopus*, or Willow Grouse;



(3) White-tailed Ptarmigan *Lagopus leucura*, restricted to United States, Canada and Alaska.



The Canadian Encyclopedia notes that "Ptarmigan are distinguished from other members of the grouse subfamily by their all-white wings. [...] Willow ptarmigan (*Lagopus lagopus*) and rock ptarmigan (*L. mutus*) are the only grouse native to both Old and New Worlds. Willow ptarmigan has circumpolar distribution. In Canada, it occupies higher western mountain elevations and tundra habitats as far north as Melville Island. Rock ptarmigan, the most northern grouse, prefer habitats higher and drier than those of willow ptarmigan. Both are strong fliers but rock ptarmigan are more migratory, moving from high latitudes to escape the dark arctic winter."

Stylistic details

Although they are not clearly visible in the photograph, the sales catalogue notes the presence of all manner of aboriginal imagery. It notes that the sides are “engraved with figures including an eagle, large stylized mask, Native American symbols, and a small crescent moon, the shoulders applied with stylized bird's feet below a neck incorporating a band of eyes and a projecting bird's beak.” The striking silver and black motifs bear comparison with indigenous basket designs from the Pueblo to the Pacific Northwest. Although I have not found any exact matches I would note the comparison between the nesting triangles at the bottom of the vase and this design for a Cahuilla bowl.



“Colored Basket Bowl of the Coahuila Apaches” in Otis T. Mason, “Basket-work of the North American Aborigines” in *Report of the National Museum*, Washington, D.C., 1884.

In the sales catalogue that motif is described as comprising “stylized pine trees derived from Northwest Coast Indian lore” but we should probably cast a wider net when considering the range of reference for this fantastical object. Closer to home, the wings on Kwakwaka'wakw totem poles may have inspired the motifs on either side of the provincial seal, and the ovals along the upper band.



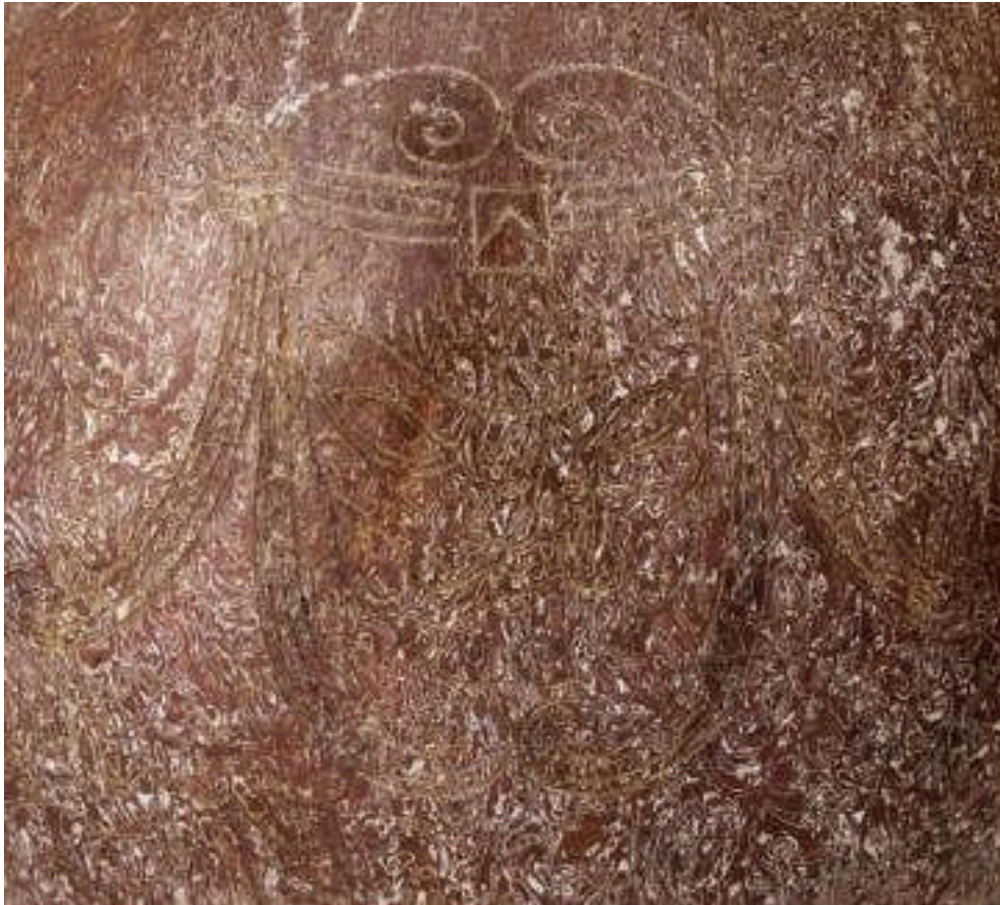
Detail from photo by Edward S. Curtis showing carved Kwakwaka'wakw totem poles at Alert Bay in *The North American Indian*, Volume X.

There are similar alternating patterns of dark copper and bright silver along the rim of the bowl, in dialogue with the “bird footprint” designs applied to the bowl itself. The motifs on these respective registers combine to form a masklike face with a sort of beak descending from the forehead in this detail at left.



Incised Mask

On the right side of the vase there is a form described in the sales catalogue as a “large stylized mask.” Only barely legible in the Sotheby’s photograph (below), this motif appears vaguely neoclassical, with some non-western inspiration in the mask details.



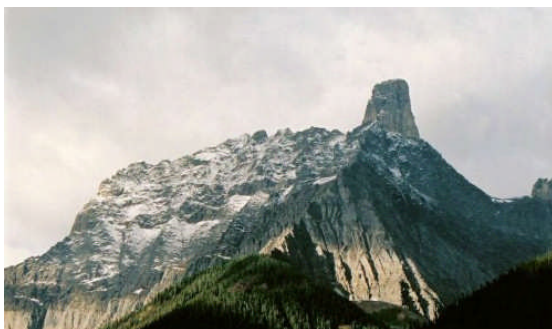
Cross motif



The cross below the seal of British Columbia should be read most literally as a cartographic sign or surveyor's mark. It comprises a schematized arrow pointing up, intersecting a horizontal line terminating in angular forms analogous to the “wings” either side of the provincial seal. The horizontal line reads “NORTH | LATUD / 50 DEG | 30 MIN” and the vertical line reads “WEST | LONG / 116 DEG. | 30 MIN”.” This corresponds to the location of the stream known as Paulding Creek.



Also in the region are Red Line Creek, home of the Ptarmigan Mines, and Mount Farnham, names after the vase's designer.



Mount Farnham

The Steamboat *Ptarmigan*

Ptarmigan was the name of a sternwheel steamboat that ran on the mighty Columbia River, between Golden and Columbia Lake, from 1903 to 1909.



Steamwheeler *Ptarmigan* before and after the fire

A chronicler of the steamboats in the region notes that she was launched in 1903, and

named ...after a mining property at Red Line Creek, about 28 miles from Wilmer, which had commenced ore shipment in 1902. Principal owner of the mine was Pauldung Farnham ... who presented the new steamer with an elaborately designed eagle.¹

In 1907 the boat hit a snag and sank . Later that year she caught fire and her upper works were destroyed, and then rebuilt, so she could return to service for another year, before being dismantled in 1909.

Place Names

Canadian places incorporating the name of this well-loved bird include Ptarmigan Island (Nunavut), Ptarmigan Cirque (Alberta), Ptarmigan Lake (Ontario), Ptarmigan and Tom gold mines (Yellowknife, NWT) and Ptarmigan Creek Provincial Park and Protected Area (BC).

¹ Norman Hacking, ““Steamboat Days on the Upper Columbia and Upper Kootenay,” *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, XVI (1952), pp. 38-39.