

The Decorator

Vol. 55 No. 2

Winston-Salem, NC

Spring 2001



Journal of the

Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc.

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Front and back covers: Examples of graining by Esther Stevens Brazer at Cogswell's Grant, Essex, MA. Photographs by David Bohl. Courtesy of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

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Graining by Esther Stevens Brazer at Cogswell's Grant

by Shirley S. Baer



Cogswell's Grant grounds and outbuildings. The house itself, painted a pumpkin color, is partially hidden behind trees on the right. Photo by Shirley S. Baer

Cogswell's Grant was the summer home of Nina Fletcher Little and her husband, Bertram. The Littles purchased the 165-acre Massachusetts farm in 1937. Since the farm was part of the original land granted to John Cogswell in 1636, it is called Cogswell's Grant.

From across a harbor on the Essex River, one can just make out a pumpkin-colored house partially hidden behind the trees. It sits on a knoll surrounded by fields, with a view of the river. One can imagine what a beautiful and peaceful place this was for the Littles to spend their summers in the early and mid 1900s.

A few years ago, Peg and Mike Rodgers and I were privileged to be given a tour of Cogswell's Grant by Richard Nylander, curator of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA). He told us that when the Littles purchased the property, everything inside the house – walls, woodwork, etc. – was painted white. The Littles did not strip the paint. They wanted to leave things as undisturbed as possible.

In *Cogswell's Grant Master Plan, Vol. 1, Historic Property Report*, it is noted that Nina Little's attitude differed from the conventions of the day: "By late in the 30s, we were still in the refinishing the woodwork period. A great many people were still refinishing all the woodwork in a house and the idea that houses of the period were originally painted was still a pretty new one ... We had progressed far enough to realize that original paint was suitable to that period." The Littles engaged Esther Stevens Brazer, a paint specialist who ran the *Studio of Old-Time Decoration* in Flushing, NY, "to investigate evidence of early paint and restore the original paint scheme." Brazer and her husband visited Cogswell's Grant in 1938 to examine the woodwork. The following year, she returned to do the work.

Richard Nylander kindly shared the transcript of his 1976 interview with the Littles, in which the Littles recalled the two weeks Brazer spent with them while graining.



A corner cupboard grained by Esther Stevens Brazer. Photo by David Bohl. Courtesy of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

The following excerpts are from these interviews.

We found all these variegated paints in this part of the house. We had never seen much of this. Now Esther got onto it, but we really hadn't. We said, "There's something here we can't make out and what do you think it is?" She came down and looked and said "Well, what you have is marbling or graining or variegated paints ... this is something that you really can't just get the local painter to redo." So we left on the white paint for another year, until she was able to come down in 1939 and scrape properly herself.

When Esther Stevens Brazer came here to live with us about two weeks or more in June of 1939, one of the first things we did was to scrape samples of the then very "James Riverish" white paint. And she found here something that sort of puzzled her until she finally decided that it must have been a grained, marbled or pounced paint finish of a dark green nature. She said it would be impossible and very expensive to try to remove the white paint, but that she thought she could match it. She did the hall and the chamber and then, I think, the green sitting room. Everything had gone along very well, up to a point where along came a Saturday and she found that she had run out of the green paint for this



*Peg Rodgers and Richard Nylander in front of the grained panel in need of restoration.
Photo by Shirley S. Baer*



*Richard Nylander unrolls a miniature pattern of graining done by Esther Stevens Brazer for the Littles.
Photo by Shirley S. Baer*



*In the sitting room, Esther grained the fireplace panel and the woodwork.
Photo by David Bohl. Courtesy of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.*

wall. So we went to Gloucester and Rockport to see if they had any suitable paint, and they didn't. So even though it was a Saturday, I went to Boston, and went to two of the three places she said I might find still open on a Saturday (even in a summer of June). I got green paint which turned out to be a little bluer green, unfortunately, than she had been using, so that you get a really very hand-painted effect in this room if you look around.

Referring to the guest sitting room chamber:

We scraped here, and indeed Mrs. Brazer did a great job of work here. We found, to our surprise, a three-color combination. We found the cedar graining over the panels, and on the summer beam we found the plain rose color, which of course is the base coat for the graining left untouched on the big moldings of the ceiling.

Mrs. Brazer said that she felt very strongly she would like to try carefully to clean down the two panels over the fireplace. She cleaned these with denatured alcohol, and it took a little chipping. It took her a long time. She used to work an hour or so every evening, just washing these down, because she said the result would be much better than if she used paint remover. It may be slow, but it would be better. And the base coat was hard as a rock when she came to it. She said "You don't have to worry about going through the graining! The first coat is always so hard." So what you see over the mantle is the original, and the rest of it she simply painted back, from samples we scraped on all the various moldings.



*Graining in the hallway by Esther Stevens Brazer.
Photo by David Bohl. Courtesy of the Society for the
Preservation of New England Antiquities.*

Asked what techniques Brazer used to give the mottled green effect, the Littles explained:

Well, she mixed her own paint. She used a brush and, as I remember, a pounce (cloth) to get the effect. One thing that was very interesting: This work was done after the wood was up, so she had the same problems I think the old grainers did. The thing is you have to have the oil soft enough to make your pattern, but not too runny. I remember well that during dinner at night, when we would all sort of drop exhausted down at the dinner table, she would often leave and come up once or twice because what she had put on in a nice pattern an hour before would be beginning to run. And she would bring a brush up and rework it back so that as the oil dried it would dry itself into the pattern that she wanted to have. Now, I've seen other woodwork of this sort in a few other houses where it's kind of run a little, and people don't understand this, but I do because I saw her actually do it. I know if you go away and leave it, and your oil is too thin, it will run. The pattern will run. She called it 'weeping.'

On the following page is a copy of Brazer's bill for her work. For graining the two rooms and the hall at Cogswell's Grant, she billed the Littles for 102 hours at \$2 an hour or a total of \$204.

The Littles enjoyed their summer home until their deaths, at which time Cogswell's Grant was left to SPNEA. The Littles had both been active members of this preservation group. A 1996 SPNEA newsletter says of the Littles:

For over fifty years in the mid 20th century, Bertram K. and Nina Fletcher Little were among the country's most celebrated and widely respected collectors of Americana. Nina Little was a dedicated researcher who contributed significantly to the field of American decorative arts. Through zealous scholarship she reclaimed artists from obscurity and inspired a more considered appreciation of the work of anonymous artisans. She published numerous books and exhibition catalogues and wrote more articles for *The Magazine Antiques* than anyone else in its history. Her husband,

¹ SPNEA, Series 64, Fall 1996

Bill for framing 2 rooms
 + hall
 esset
 1939 -

Studio of Old-Time Decoration

Esther Stevens Brazer

"INNERWYCK"

31-07 Union Street Flushing, N. Y.

Telephone Flushing 9-2526

Sunday.	June 18 th - 1939	6 hrs.
Monday.		8 "
Tues.		8 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
Wed.		7 $\frac{1}{2}$ hrs.
Thurs.		7 hrs.
Friday		9 $\frac{1}{2}$
Saturday.		8 $\frac{1}{2}$
Sunday		3
Monday		9
Tuesday		10
Wednesday		9
Thurs.		9
Friday		7
		<hr/>
		102 hrs.
	at \$2. an hour.	\$204. ⁰⁰

A photocopy of Brazer's bill for her work at Cogswell's Grant. Courtesy of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

Bert, director of SPNEA from 1947 to 1970, shared her passion for collecting, and together they filled two houses with treasures of American folk art.

Bert and Nina Little were among the first to collect the works of painters and artisans who supplied art and furnishings for the people of rural New England – what is most commonly referred to as “folk art.” “Country arts” was the term the Littles preferred, pointing out that “folk” implies an ingrained peasant tradition, something this young country never had. Mostly they bought objects with a New England heritage, particularly those whose history they could trace.

The Littles decided to give their country house, Cogswell’s Grant, an early 18th century farmhouse overlooking the Essex River in Essex, MA, together with its collection of art and furnishings, to SPNEA upon their deaths.

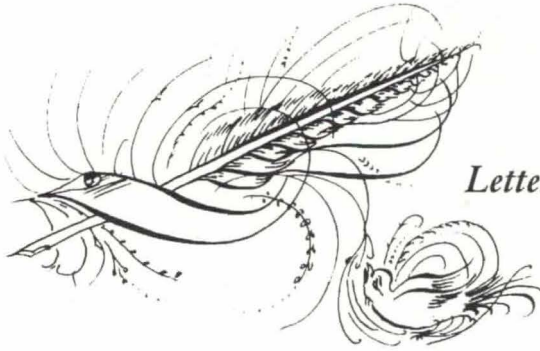
Cogswell’s Grant was officially opened to the public as a museum in 1998. Brazer’s graining had started to deteriorate, and was conserved by a team led by Mary Lou Davis. The photographs in this article are of Brazer’s original work.

Nina Fletcher Little, a friend and admirer of Brazer, dedicated her book, *American Decorative Wall Painting 1700-1850*, “In affectionate memory of Esther Stevens Brazer whose knowledge and enthusiasm encouraged my first interest in the architectural use of paint.”



Our thanks to Richard Nylander and SPNEA who were generous, gracious and helpful in sharing their information.





Letter from Birmingham

by Yvonne Jones

25 BC

Twenty-five Years before Clay

Henry Clay's important patent of 1772 certainly heralded the commercial success of japanned papier mâché in Birmingham, but contrary to popular opinion, it did not mark the start of the trade. We know that the japanning of metals began in Birmingham in about 1740, and that the introduction of papier mâché followed on the heels of its success but, in the absence of any hard evidence, precisely how soon after, has hitherto remained a mystery. Now, in the light of new evidence, we can date its start to within a period of 11 years or less.

I recently came across the following report, written by R. Campbell in *The London Tradesman* in 1747, which, besides shedding interesting light on early French papier mâché and its manufacture, shows that the trade had not yet begun in England:

“I must inform the Reader of a late French invention of Snuff-Boxes, which, however absurd it may seem at first sight, ... are made of the same Materials as Paper; are to be had at Paris of any Colour, but are most commonly Black, as Ebony, and are actually as hard and durable as any made of Wood, Horn, or Tortoiseshell. They are made of Linen-Rags, beat to

a Pulp, as if intended for Paper. A large Quantity of Pulp is put into a Vessel, and the Water allowed to drain off; the Pulp is dried and coheres together in a hard uniform Lump, out of which they turn upon the Leath (sic), Boxes or any other kind of Toys, which for their Novelty fetch a large price.”

There is little doubt that Campbell was describing the earliest of the papier mâché snuffboxes made by Guillaume Martin of Paris. A few years later, in 1753, Chambers Cyclopaedia observed that papier mâché had developed into a ‘regular manufacture’ in England, although the author was unspecific about where. But by 1758, Robert Dossie, in his influential book *The Handmaid to the Arts*, acknowledged Birmingham as the leading centre of the English papier mâché trade. Furthermore, by way of endorsement, a letter from Stephen Bedford to the Royal Society in 1759, is particularly telling. In that year, Bedford, a Birmingham japanner, responded to the Society’s request for a varnished wooden coach panel stating that as he had made several similar sets in paper, “Exact the same as Martins in Paris ... I should like Better to do it on that because it is the Height of the french (sic) which in this affair we are endeavouring to rival.” This is clear evidence that Bedford, at least, had begun working with papier mâché some time between 1755, the year in which he was first listed as a japanner, and 1759.

Thus it appears that the manufacture of papier mâché began in Birmingham between 1747 and 1758, and mindful of the date of *Chambers Cyclopaedia*, and of Bedford’s obvious skill in handling the material, it most likely began in the early 1750s.



A papier mâché Gothic shaped bread tray. Courtesy of Joyce Holzer. Photo from Shirley S. DeVoe's book, Decorative Arts: 18th & 19th Century, Research and Writings of Shirley Spaulding DeVoe. HSEAD, 1999



Robinson's branded signature

Signatures on Chairs

by M. Jeanne Gearin

Speculation about the age and origin of decorated chairs we own or observe becomes more interesting and important to members of HSEAD than to casual observers. Many people have a piece for a long time and have never looked to see whether it was marked or signed in any way.

Signatures on chairs may be:

- Written in pencil or chalk
- Painted or stenciled on part of the decoration, as William Page Eaton and Leander Houghton did¹ (Houghton's signature was found upside down on the top rail of a yellow chair)
- Stenciled in printer's ink on the underside of seat
- Applied on paper labels (Paper labels were not used in the South because they would detach in the humidity)
- Branded or incised on the underside of seat (According to Nancy Goyne Evans in *American Windsor Chairs*, a brand was "a hand tool consisting of a rodlike shaft with a rectangular block or head at one end, and a hanging ring at the opposite end. The broad bottom face of the head is cut or cast with a name, place name, initials, or word. Brands are usually made of wrought iron, sometimes of brass or copper. The tool was used on wet (green) wood in a cold or heated, although not charring, state to transfer an impression of the letter on the head to the wood.")

1. Maine Antique Digest, July 1966.

An Identification Checklist

Since most chairs were not signed, the following checklist may be used to determine the type and age of a decorated chair.

- First look it over carefully, examining the front, back and underneath.
- Look at the structure – what kind of arms, legs, stiles, rails, posts, stretchers are there?
- Does it have a rush, plank or cane seat? Do not try to *date* your chair by the kind of seat. Plank seats on Windsor Chairs date to the mid 18th century in America. Rush seats are not earlier than cane, but are country products. Rush was used to save the manufacturer the cost of imported cane. Rush seats were less expensive than the labor intensive Windsor seats. Cane came from the Orient and was used on English chairs as early as 1649. Cane was used in America by cabinetmakers who could afford the cane.
- Do you know the period or the provenance of the piece?
- What kind of wood is used? Although most craftsmen used local woods, it is not necessarily a definitive way of knowing where a piece was made. For example, Chinese craftsmen made furniture for the Western trade with mahogany imported from America.
- Is there a signature?

Chair number 1

This chair was purchased in Sandwich, MA because of the interesting putty-grained seat. The paint shows no signs of overpainting or of being a later addition.

First impression of the chair shows a plank-seat, half-spindle chair with some inpainting on the decorated top slat. The fruit and the brush strokes show evidence of repair by inpainting. The yellow paint shows no evidence of repair or overpainting.

Originally I assumed the chair was c.1845. When I turned it over, I found a branded signature of S. Stuart, Warranted.



- Stenciled on part of the chair as on the Hitchcock and the Robinson chairs

Most of us are familiar with the signed Hitchcock chairs and the progression of signatures over time:

L. Hitchcock, Hitchcockville, Conn. Warranted (1825-1832)

Hitchcock, Alfred and Co, Hitchcockville, Conn. Warranted (1832-1843)

Lambert Hitchcock, Unionville, Conn (1844-1852)

Sometimes the “N”s in Connecticut were backwards.

Twentieth-century Hitchcocks are signed: L. Hitchcock, Hitchcocks-ville, Conn. Warranted, but with an “R” at the end of the signature. There is also a stamp “HCCO” under the seat on the right front seat block on the reproduction chairs. This is important to remember when trying to authenticate period chairs.

Signed chairs can be extremely valuable. A pair of signed chairs by Daniel Stewart of Farmington, ME c.1812-1827 from the Marna Anderson Collection sold at Skinner’s Auction House in Bolton, MA in May 1998 for \$21,850!

Some signed chairs can be very informative. Others raise questions and awaken our interest in knowing what the signatures mean. A signature does not necessarily mean that it was the maker’s. Some signatures may be attributed to the owner or a jobber. In addition, signatures do not mean that the maker did all of the turnings or carvings on the chair. There were turners, joiners and carvers as well as factories that produced chair parts.

With the many chairmakers in America in the 19th century, a signature can be a valuable beginning in attempting to attribute the chair to a certain maker or locality. However, with the rapid industrial growth, many one-man shops were replaced by small factories. These factories specialized in chair parts and left the finishing and assembly to others. It was not only Hitchcock but Benjamin Heywood and others who erected waterpowered saw mills fitted with the newly-invented machinery. Chair-making was an early part of the Industrial Revolution.



Top of common yellow chair (#3)



Signed common yellow stenciled chair (# 1), owned by author.

After some study, I found the signature to be identical to that on a chair at Old Sturbridge Village attributed to Samuel Stuart of Sterling, MA, who died in 1829. There are many signed examples of chairs by Sterling makers.

It was interesting to examine this chair and its details and realize that these “common yellow chairs” were in production at the same time as the Hitchcock chairs. I had always been led to believe that they were much later.

Stuart was one of many chairmakers in the Worcester County area. In 1832, there were 52 chairmakers listed in North Worcester county.



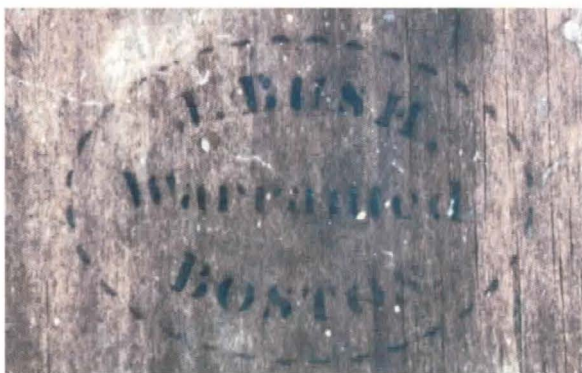
*A rubbing of branded signature:
“S. Stuart, Warranted.”*

Chair number 2

This common yellow chair was purchased in Mashpee, MA. It has original decoration and banding. It is signed with a stencil in printer’s ink “J. BUSH Warranted Boston” on the bottom of the plank seat. There was a Jotham Bush & Co. working in Boston from 1821 to 1835. Jotham Bush was born in 1810.



Common yellow chair owned by Dorcas Layport (#2)



*Stenciled on bottom of chair #2:
"J. Bush, Warranted, Boston"*

Chair number 3

This too is a common yellow-type chair. Its simple decoration, perhaps a flower with two leaves, is well worn. It has not been restored. "T. Atwood" is branded on the bottom of the seat .

Thomas Atwood (c.1785-1865) worked in Worcester, MA from 1810-1819; in Bedford, NH from 1819-1840; in Nunda, NY from 1840-1860; and in Cana-seraga, NY from 1860-1865. His brother David Atwood also worked in Bedford, NH from 1802-1821. He was apprenticed to David McAfee in Bedford in 1795. It is interesting to note that Thomas moved from Massachusetts to New Hampshire on to New York. This supports the supposition that craftsmen moved freely carrying their designs with them and adding more as they moved from state to state.



Above: The branded signature of "T. Atwood"

Left: Chair #3, owned by Lois Tucker.

Chair number 4

This is a signed chair (right) by the well-known manufacturer Charles Robinson of Rochester, NY. It is owned by Ruth Beede.



Robinson's diagonal signature is difficult to see on the back of the chair.



Chair number 5

This chair (right) was purchased in Rochester, NY, and I thought it was a Robinson chair. However, when comparing it to the Robinson chair owned by Ruth Beede, I saw that the stenciling was cruder. (Note the roses.)

After owning the chair for many years, I found a pencil signature in old script under the back top stretcher. It appears to read "N Laenter" or "Laender". I have been unable to determine whether this is the maker of the chair, the stenciler, or the owner. Because of its location, the signature must have been there before the chair was assembled. In attempting to learn more about the chair's origin, I have found reference to "a decorator in the Buffalo area who used the stencil roses." I have





Top slat of Chair #5.



*Pencil signature of "Laender"
(?) found under the back top
stretcher.*

as yet been unable to find the name of this decorator. I would be pleased to hear if someone can offer more information.

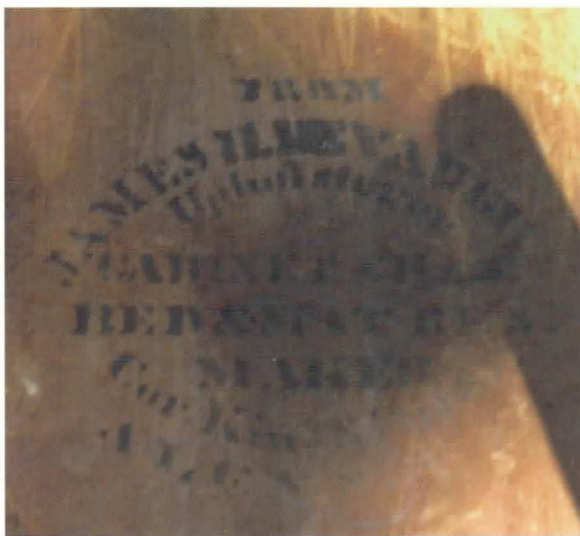
Chair number 6

This chair (right), one of a set of five, has signatures stenciled in ink on the underside of the seat. The chairs were previously owned and displayed at the Robert E. Lee boyhood home on Oronoco Street in Alexandria, VA. Now part of the Lyceum Collection in Alexandria, they were a gift from the Historic Alexandria Foundation.

These chairs were made by James H. Devaughn, whose shop was on the southwest corner of King and Pitt Streets in Alexandria. Devaughn is listed in the 1860 census as 44 years old, married, with four daughters.

The chairs have a bootjack back similar in design to that of a Pennsylvania





"James H. Devaughn" signature stenciled in ink on bottom of chair #6.

chair, although the boot jack is smaller. They have interesting grained seats and stenciled fruit with washes typical of the period. Each back has a one-piece stenciled design appropriate to the size and shape of the chair.

The most informative and inclusive research on the history of chair-making in America has been done by Nancy Goyne Evans in her book *American Windsor Chairs*, Hudson Hills Press, NY 1996 .



Close-up of the Robinson chair (#4).

All photos for this article by M. Jeanne Gearin

Members' "A" Awards



Carol Buonato

Clock Dials



Mae Fisher

Glass with Border

Members' "A" Awards



Inez Gornall

Theorem



Dolores Furnari

Theorem



Mae Fisher

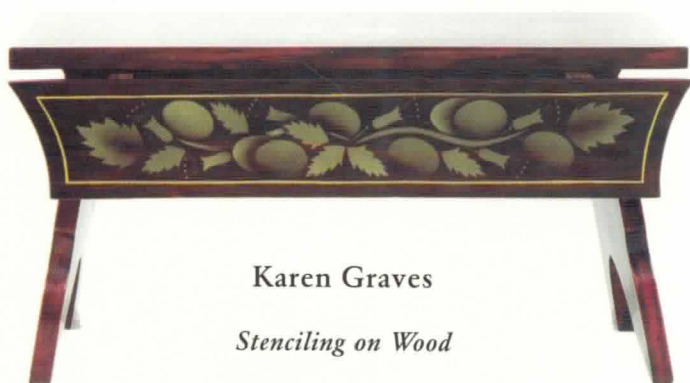
Country Painting

Members' "A" Awards



Carol Heinz

*Freehand Bronze
Painting*



Karen Graves

Stenciling on Wood

Members' "A" Awards

Alice Smith

Theorem



Parma Jewett

Country Painting

Parma Jewett

Theorem



Members' "A" Awards



Martha Kinney

Theorem

Peggy Waldman

Stenciling on Wood



(Photographs of award pieces may be ordered from the photography chairman, Martha MacFarland)

Members' "A" Awards



Alexandra Perrot

Theorem

Karen Graves

Theorem



Susan Laime

Theorem



Members' "B" Awards



Alice Smith

Clock Dials



Lois Milne

Pontypool Painting



Amy Finley

Theorem

Members' "B" Awards



Carol Buonato

Clock Dials



Louise Langerhans

Glass Gold Leaf Panel

Sonja Bridges

Theorem



Applicants Accepted as Guild Members

Bobbe Beauchamp
Fisher, IN

Joan Bradford
Chester Springs, PA

Olivia Cort Hill
Philadelphia, PA

Donna Ellison
No. Andover, MA

Lauren Jean Harhen
Thetford Center, VT

Joan McGrath
Sturbridge, MA

Glynne McGregor
Turramura, Australia

Gail Warren
Essex Junction, VT

Kathleen Quackenbush
Waterliet, NY



President's Award Box

Tasha Paul

Alexandra Perrot



Future Meetings

Fall 2001 Chatham, MA

September 21-24, 2001 (FSS)

Spring 2002 Danvers, MA

April 19-21, 2002 (FSS)



The Bookshelf

Still Life: A History

by Sybille Ebert-Schifferer

Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Pub. 1998. Hard cover, 420 pages, 338 illustrations, 278 in color.

Reviewed by Sandra Cohen

Still Life: A History by Sybille Ebert-Schifferer covers this genre from European antiquity through the twentieth century. First of all, its commanding size, over 11 x 13 inches, suggests the real magnitude and impact of these canvases. Before you even reach the text, you are teased with a vivid detail of peonies, morning glories, cherries and raspberries from DeHeem's *Bouquet of Flowers in a Glass Vase*. The next is a two-page spread which reveals Frans Franken the Younger's *Art and Curio Cabinet*, paintings within a painting, shells, porcelain and portraits. This is followed by yet another two-page layout of Moillon's abundant *Still Life* with ripe peaches, plums, strawberries, asparagus and artichokes. The reader is now perfectly primed for what follows. The text is not overwhelmingly scholarly, and it offers just enough information to provide us with a background for understanding this most popular painting genre. However, paintings are first and foremost a visual art, and it's these masterpieces, one after another, that create this book's value. The quality of the photographs is excellent. The realistic depictions of textures and other physical properties of these natural and material objects are almost palpable. The glittering clutter of tipped silver candlesticks, goblets and platters and delicately patterned Chinese porcelain on velvet and Oriental throws, French lace, German damask cloths and linen drapes are only a few of the exquisite embellishments that populate these opulent settings.

As your eyes travel across the canvas, they rest on succinctly captured moments that are magnified in separate "details" to satisfy the desire for a more intimate view. As if through a telescope, we view a

butterfly in mid-air over an open parrot tulip while a lady bug traverses a basket's rim; a blue Wan-li porcelain bowl with fresh raspberries and a pearl-handled knife on a damask tablecloth; golden peaches piled in an ornate silver tureen, their soft, velvety texture in contrast to the high gloss of polished sterling.

From antiquity, still-life painting was a reflection of upper-class opulence, and it was also appreciated as a work of art. It exhibited techniques of illusion, and it also developed important moral messages through an iconic language. There is the "memento mori," a reminder to be mindful of death, with its snuffed-out candle, which recalls one's transitory existence, skulls to represent mortality, and butterflies to symbolize the soul leaving the body. There is the "Christian table" where arranged food means more than a feast, where apples and cherries represent original sin and Paradise, respectively, and where bread, wine and grapes allude to the Eucharist. By learning to read these paintings, we understand, appreciate and enjoy them on every level just as the viewers did in the times in which they were painted.

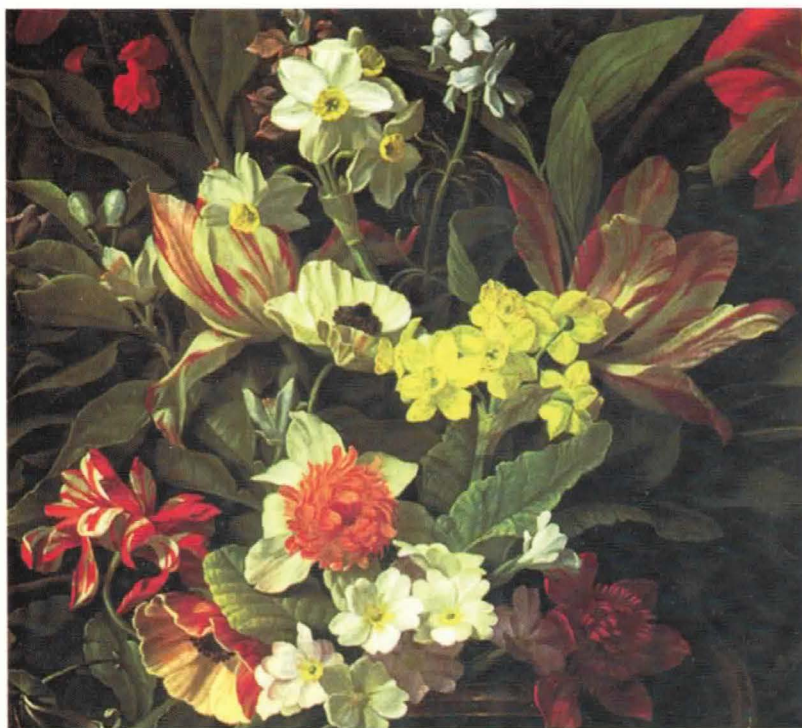
The desire and demand for still-life painting exploded around 1600, and appeared simultaneously in the Netherlands, Germany, Spain and Italy. Caravaggio's *Basket of Fruit* with its trompe l'oeil appearance is striking in its simplicity. In contrast are the elaborately set tables of Gillis and van Dijck, both from Haarlem, and Germany's Flegel with his *Cupboard Picture with Flowers, Fruit, and Goblets*. Madrid's Juan de Espinosa's *Still Life with Grapes, Apples and Plums* is beautifully realistic. These bountiful buffets and beautiful floral arrangements were enjoyed by the affluent members of society, and they carried the subtle moral message of a "need to choose between gluttony and salvation."

The flowering of still life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries focuses on kitchen and market scenes, table and vanitas still lifes, flower paintings, fruit paintings and trompe l'oeil. What follows are some of the most beautiful specimens of this genre. These paintings are accessorized with the most colorful species of butterflies, insects and other small creatures. The arrangements are curious and inclusive of everything to stimulate the senses and the imagination. For the more talented, the desire to reproduce these works will be irresistible. The imagery and references are thoroughly explained to satisfy our curiosity, but explanations are not necessary for us to appreciate the sheer beauty of these works. There is so much splendor offered on each canvas, yet nothing seems gratuitous. Foregrounds of fruits, flowers, porcelain bowls and butterflies compliment rather than compete with detailed background landscapes of ruins at sunset.

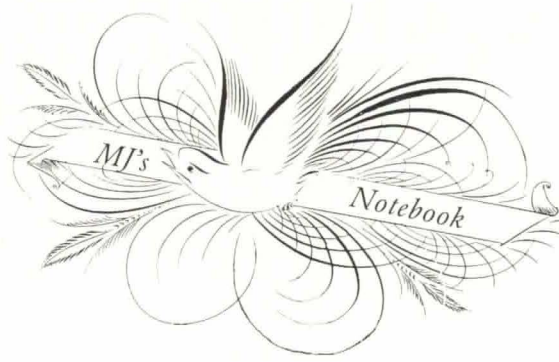
Nineteenth-century still life would not be complete without mentioning at least one member of the Peale family. Raphaelle Peale's *Still Life with Wild Strawberries* will be familiar to many of you. His father,

Charles Wilson Peale was disappointed that his son chose this genre because it was considered to be an “inferior art form” by their contemporaries. Time and the very desirable body of still-life works by R. Peale have disproved this opinion. Peale had a strong influence on Harnet, whose *Old Cupboard Door* will be a temptation to trompe l’oeil lovers. Martin Johnson Heade’s blending of still-life and landscape painting with the precision of a naturalist and botanist offers us humming birds and orchids in their tropical South American habitat. Peto’s *Job Lot Cheap* is a painterly rendition of a peek into a used book shop. Books, which are somewhat symbolic of the Old World, were an inexpensive and accessible purchase in the young American nation, but in a fast, mobile society, they were soon discarded. These masterpieces tell stories about the past, present and future. Pictures are worth a thousand words.

Shifferer has made an important contribution to the study of still-life painting with this book. She elaborates on the iconography which gives us an even greater appreciation of the paintings by examining their historical context. Religious and secular references from the past, and the influence of artists on their contemporaries and predecessors are demonstrated throughout the book. *Still Life, A History*, is truly an “embarrassment of riches.”



Close up of “Bouquet of Flowers on a Balustrade” by Jean-Michel Picart, 1653. One of the many beautiful paintings in Sybille Ebert-Schifferer’s *Still Life: A History*.



In Shirley DeVoe's article *Tea Trays Made by Coachmakers*¹, she notes that trays covered with leather are very rare. She had seen only two and felt that the leather covered trays may have been an offshoot of the sedan chairs and coach panels. However, she could find no documented evidence of this. One of the two trays is shown below.

While traveling abroad, I found this leather portfolio with beautiful Victorian flower painting. It is the only one I have ever seen. Sandwiched between the leather cover and the inside fabric is a piece of material that looks like felt.



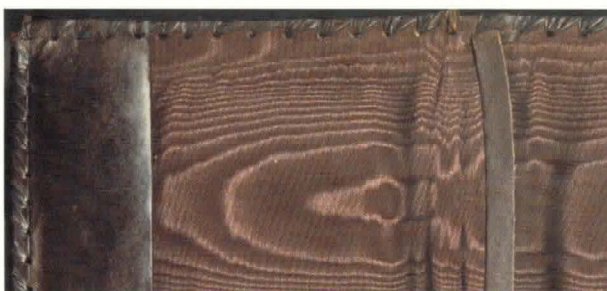
Late 18th-century tray with painting dated 1819. The leather cracked when salt water washed over it at sea.

¹Shirley S. DeVoe, *Decorative Arts: 18th & 19th Century, Research and Writings of Shirley Spaulding DeVoe*. HSEAD, 1999



Leather portfolio, 8.5" x 6.5", with Victorian flower painting. Courtesy of Maryjane Clark

Photos by Shirley S. Baer



Inside lining of leather portfolio.



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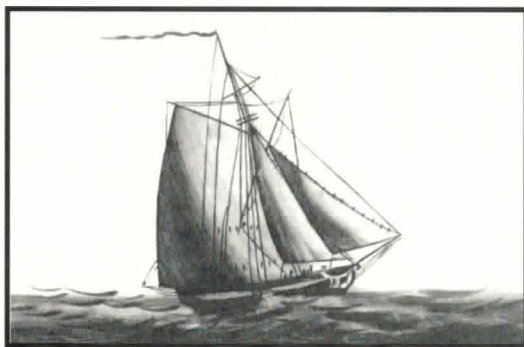
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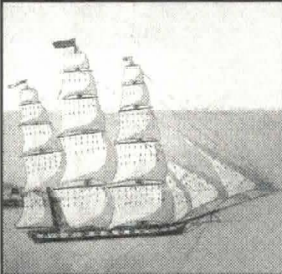
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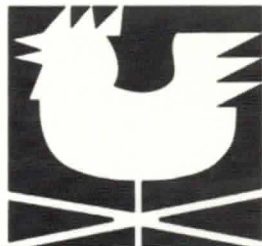
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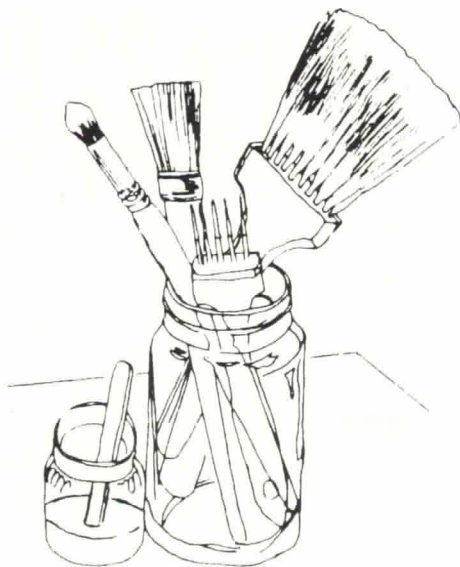
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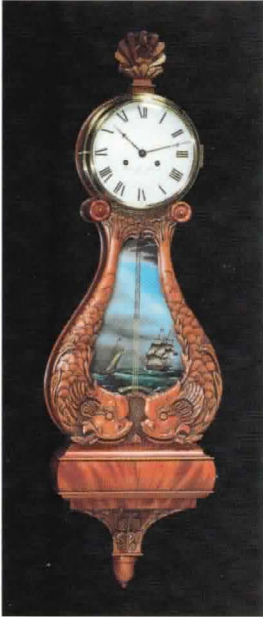


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