

The Decorator

Fall 2010 Vol. 64 No. 2



Journal of

The Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc.

The Decorator

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Front and back covers: Details of theorems from the Seward House, Auburn, New York. See related article on page 12.

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The Historical Society of Early American Decoration

A society with affiliated chapters organized to carry on the work and honor the memory of Esther Stevens Brazer, pioneer in the perpetuation of Early American Decoration as an art; to promote continued research in that field; to record and preserve examples of early American decoration; to maintain such exhibits and publish such works on the subject of early American decoration and the history thereof as will further the appreciation of such art, the elevation of the standards of its reproduction and utilization; to assist in efforts public and private, in locating and preserving material pertinent to our work, and to cooperate with other societies in the accomplishment of purposes of mutual concern.

Vision: HSEAD will be, and will become recognized as, a preeminent national authority on early American decoration.

Mission: HSEAD will maintain a core membership of practicing guild artists supported by active programs of education, research, and exhibitions to perpetuate and expand the unique skills and knowledge of early American decoration.

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Letter from the Editor

Our first article is about a church in Sharon, New York near Cobleskill, which has some lovely decoration. The parishioners supplied us with this article because of the unusual decoration found at this church. The written article shows how the desire for religious freedom in Germany and other areas made so many people come to America to try to set up their own freedom to worship as they pleased. We also see that even after they did so there was still strife amongst them. The artist for these beautiful drawings is unknown (as so many are) but the intent is unmistakable – to try and make this into as beautiful and important a church as possible. This decoration was found under numerous layers of wallpaper. The present worshippers are divided as to what to do with this - some want to put wallboard over it and some would like to restore it. Presently, the deterioration is continuing and with no funds to restore it, its future is questionable.

Our second article shows how our members can make a difference to save and record early pieces of history. The Central New York Chapter held a national meeting in Auburn in the spring of 2010 and this article shows how they recorded and reproduced an early theorem that had been done by Mrs. Seward.

The Fall issue is always the issue with the Award photos and this issue has some beautiful pieces that our members submitted at the Spring meeting. We also welcome our new members who joined at that Spring meeting.

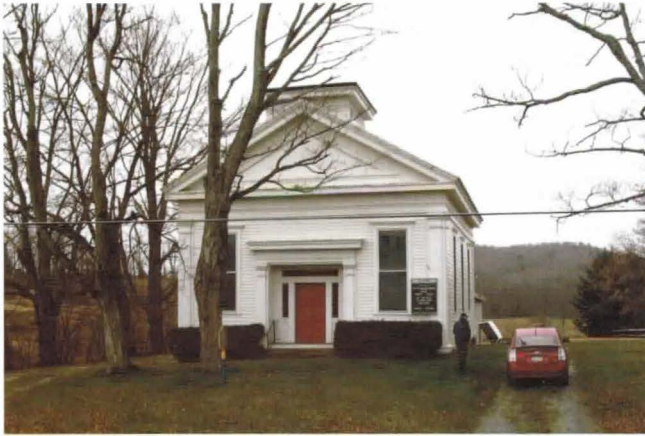
In this issue we also had to correct Valerie Burnham Oliver's name and article. We inadvertently left out the sizes for the miniature furniture and we transposed her correct name. We have corrected both.

Sandra Cohen has reviewed Betsy Salm's book for this issue. Betsy brought her originals to the Auburn meeting for all of us to enjoy. She is truly a very talented person and we are fortunate to have her in our organization with her knowledge and expertise in delving into the history of school girl art.

Yvonne Jones has again contributed to our Journal by writing about a mystery solved. So many times we don't have all the facts and in this case we finally have some answers to our past.

After the last issue, when Joseph Rice showed us an intriguing document box with very different stenciling on it, Mary Perry came up with an equally interesting stenciled chair attributed to a man in New Hampshire by the name of Whetherbee. Although we have no other information on this man, it would be interesting to try and duplicate this beautiful chair. Is there anyone out there who would like to try it?

*Lynne Richards,
Decorator Editor*



History of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sharon NY

by Lynne Richards

In order to understand the origin of St. John's Church, one has to go back into the past of more than two centuries, when in May 1743, the Rev. Peter Nicolas Sommers came over from Germany and established the first Lutheran Church in Schoharie. It was from this church that Rev. Sommers, traveling on horseback over dangerous Indian trails, organized Lutheran Societies.

Several settlements were made by pioneer families who came from Rhinebeck on the Hudson and located in areas now known as Lawyersville (northern part of Cobleskill) and part of Carlisle. This section was named New Rhinebeck. There were also German pioneers who settled around Seward, Dorloo, Hyndsville and parts of Sharon who named their section "Dorlach" after "Durlack" of their fatherland.

It was in the year 1754 that Rev. Sommers organized the society named "The Lutheran Congregation of Cobleskill and New Dorlack". By 1785, because of an increase in the number of Lutheran and Dutch Reform parishioners, 150 acres of land were bought by the two groups for a Church Farm to support the churches. The first church built there was called St. Peter's. In 1787, those of the Lutherary faith built another church, which was the first St. John's. It is safe to assume that the church was built in detail similar to St. Peter's and others of that period: a frame structure, without belfry or steeple, wholly devoid of any ornamentation. The roof was high pitched and covered with hand shaved pine shingles and the sides were of plank.

The following incidents are given us in the "Reunion Volume" by the Rev.

M.W. Empie of his boyhood recollections of the church in 1831. "I sat with my good Mother (the sexes occupied different sides of the house). I wore a stove pipe hat - white beaver - with a silver cord and tassel which I thought quite nice and very becoming. Another thing that attracted my attention was the way the church collections were lifted. On either side of the pulpit, there was hung on a nail two long poles with a black bag on the end, in the bottom of which there was suspended a bell. These the deacons took down and passed around from seat to seat among the congregation. The bell serving to arouse the sleepers and notify all to be in readiness with their contributions so that there might be no delay when the bag passed before them. I think the method a convenient one and not improved upon to this day."

According to an act of legislature passed March 27, 1801, a Lutheran Society was reorganized and recorded in Schoharie in the Book of Deeds that the church shall be named "St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Dorlack" in the Town of Sharon.

Despite the usual shortages of funds, St. John's managed to survive. An item of interest was that the pastor was to receive \$130.00 in cash, 50 bushels of wheat, 80 loads of firewood and the use of 50 acres of land, free house and a barn to be built. The congregation was to fence and clear five acres of the church farm each year for eight years and to be allowed to clear ten acres extra if they desired to do so.

The doctrines of St. John's were very severe. Members were suspended from membership because of disorderly conduct, drunkenness, or starting false rumors concerning members. If a member should be absent from Communion



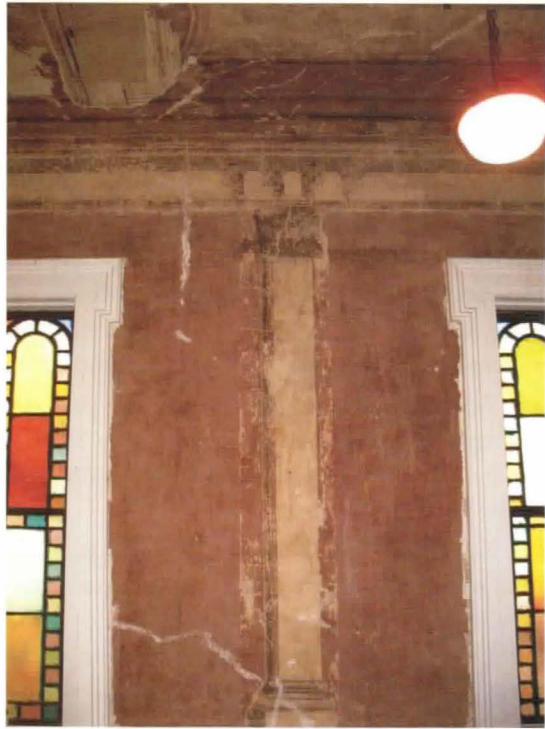
The front wall consists of trompe l'oeil elements, including a convincing half-round recess behind the altar.

for three successive times without good reason, they were investigated.

For many years, services were preached in German, and even the old baptismal records were in German. The children were baptized at a very early age and were sponsored by people other than relatives. There were also records of baptisms and marriages of “bonded Negro servants.” According to dates, the first St. John’s Church was in use for approximately thirty years.

In 1828, through the efforts of John Empie, a humble unassuming man but a devoted member of St. John’s, Rev. Philip Weiting was called to the pastorate. He was to receive a salary of \$300.00 and to live in the parsonage on the Church farm. In the year 1828 when Rev. Weiting started, there were only forty Communicant members at St. John’s and thirty at St. Peter’s. In 1864 the total was 1250. the largest number to be received in one year was 192.

It was during Rev. Weiting’s pastorate in 1830 that Hartwick Synod (a synod is an ecclesiastical council) was organized at a



The wall painting simulates architectural elements in trompe l'oeil, including pilasters and panels with molded edges on the walls and similar treatment on the ceiling.





The outer edge of the ceiling is painted to simulate a border of panels and moldings.

convention held in St. Paul's Church in Schoharie with the Rev. G.A. Lintner, D.D. as President, Adam Crouse, Secretary, and Rev. Wieting as Treasurer. A committee of six men was appointed to frame a constitution and report at the next annual convention. The synod was formed marking out its own territorial limits without conferring with the New York Ministerium. This was a big mistake but it is difficult to know all the reasons that led to the forming of the Hartwick Synod. Some of them were that the New York Ministerium had made no recognition whatsoever of the Augsburg Confession and that some of the leading men were by no means Christians in their views and doctrines. Some of the measures the synod adopted were: total temperance; to engage in home and foreign missions; more religious education; to encourage revivals; the publication of the monthly Lutheran magazine, and a position on the slavery question.

Everything was fine for seven years until in 1837, four members of the synod, including Rev. Wieting, withdrew and organized the Frankean Synod. This action of the four men was very irregular as they had all attended the last Hartwick session and had not asked for letters of dismissal or had they any cause for this procedure. One possible reason stands out: L. Swackhamer introduced a resolution at the last Hartwick Synod strongly condemning American slavery and the Hartwick synod refused to adopt it. Also, ministers were in great demand and the qualifications of ministers were lowered - much to the detriment of the churches because an illiterate minister seldom commands much consideration or influence from his congregation.



With the organization of the Frankean Synod, six churches and 1,000 members left the Hartwick Synod to join the Frankean Synod and from this time on, it was a house divided against itself. Bitter controversies ensued between ministers and congregations. Families were divided and in some congregations, there were rival organizations which led to expensive lawsuits. In one lawsuit, members of St. John's who belonged to the Hartwick Synod sued the Frankean Synod. In the end, the lawsuit granted all the property which was jointly owned consisting of two churches, a parsonage and the "glebe" or farm to the Hartwick Synod. Such discord checked the development of the spiritual life in the churches and retarded the growth of the Lutheran Church in New York State. After that, many members withdrew and joined other churches where they felt they would be free of contention and bitter strife.

Rev. Wieting sorely felt the loss of the farm as it was by his own toil and care that the land had been transformed from a forest into a productive farm. It also left Rev. Wieting and his followers without a church in which to worship. It was these events that caused Rev. Wieting and his followers to build the first Gardnersville church in 1849 but it was burned within a year, thought to have been set fire by an incendiary because of the hard feelings. Another church was soon built on the same site. This structure still stands and is now the "Seward Valley Grange Hall".

By 1858, a new pastor, Rev. H. Wheeler, had come and it was decided to build a new St. John's Church to accommodate the congregation.

In 1860 a resolution was made to build the new church, if the funds could be raised and a suitable site found. A three-member committee was appointed - Peter Borst, Abraham Sternberg and John Van Slyke, to obtain the site and money needed. Most of the work was done by volunteer help and much of the material needed was donated by members. The "Little Church" as it has

always been called, was erected and still stands by the side of the road ready for the regular Sunday Services.

In the year 1888, the Ladies of St. John's held a "Crazy Supper." This consisted of the use of different kinds of plates, china, tin, wood, porcelain, pie plates, saucers, etc. Butter was served in salt cellars, cheese in clam shells, milk in gravy boats, pickles in milk pitchers, baked beans on dust pans, and "smoked squeal" (ham) on wooden plates. This supper was well attended.

The information in this article is derived from a compilation of several years of effort and people updating the history of the church, now in the church's files.



*Original theorem showing much staining and discoloration.
The eglomise border is titled "L. C. Seward".*

William H. Seward House Paintings on Velvet Recorded 2009

by Joanne Balfour and Diane Thompson

*The Study and reproduction of theorem paintings attributed to Lucinda
Cornelia Seward, sister of William H. Seward, circa 1820*

When the Central New York Chapter decided to have their meeting in Auburn in order to highlight the Seward House, they found to their delight two theorems attributed to Lucinda Cornelia Seward. This led them to a challenging but rewarding task of reproducing these theorems. The following is their story and how they were able to replicate them.

Due to the deteriorated and damaged condition of these paintings the Central New York Chapter of the Historical Society of Early American Decoration offered to do an evaluation and interpretation of these paintings as a tool for educational purposes for the William H. Seward Museum, Auburn, NY.

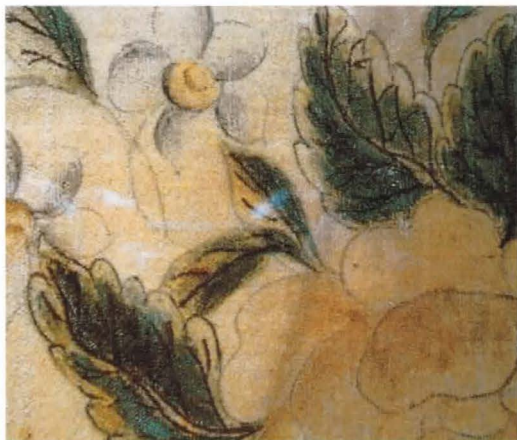
It is believed that the paintings were in their original frames. Upon ex-



amination it was found that the back of them showed evidence of a white fine velvet fabric stretched and nailed (tacked) onto a wooden framework. This was inserted into a gold-leafed frame behind a fillet and under glass. The painting of a floral bouquet did have an eglomise glass with the black lettered name “L. C. Seward” in the gold leaf. The painting of the basket of flowers may have had the same type of glass as evidenced by the shadow outline surrounding the painting itself. The original glass may have broken and have been replaced



Top: Original “flower basket” theorem and frame. Below: Detail of original showing linework and lack of stencil definition indicating more painting freehand. Also note the heavy linework on leaves.



Details of linework and highlighting from the original theorems.

by the present piece of undecorated glass.

Because the paintings were in such fragile condition and not stable in the frames, all work and examination was done without their removal from the frames. This meant measurements and photographs were done with the glass and pictures remaining intact in the frames.

Measurements of the paintings and frames were recorded in order to duplicate the size. Numerous photographs were taken using the available light in the workroom at the museum from window, overhead room lights and camera flash. The resulting photographs showed painting and linework in much greater detail that was not apparent through examination by the eye alone.

The following oil colors were used to replicate the paintings: Alizarin Crimson, Cerulean Blue, Payne's Gray, Chrome Oxide Green, Yellow Ochre, Prussian Blue, White, Indian Yellow, Raw Sienna, Burnt Sienna, Alizarin Crimson Golden and Oxide of Chromium.



Seward theorem reproductions: "Flower Basket" painted by Joanne Balfour, and "Floral Bouquet" painted by Diane Thompson.

Completed copies of the two paintings on velvet were presented to the William H. Seward House framed in a style similar to the originals.

This research was undertaken with the permission of the William H. Seward House, Auburn, New York.

Members "A" Awards

Carol Heinz
Gold Leaf



Linda Mason
Stenciling on Tin





Dortia Davis
Country Painting

Carol Buonato
Clock Dials



Linda Mason
Country Painting





Linda Mason
Country Painting



Linda Mason
Country Painting

Diane Thompson
Theorem



Mary Avery
Theorem

Mary Avery
Theorem



Members “B” Awards

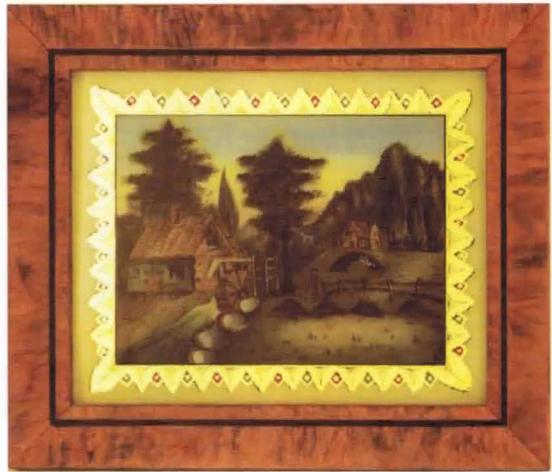
Anne Dimock
Pontypool (3)



Debra Fitts
Country Painting



Diane Thompson
Glass with Border



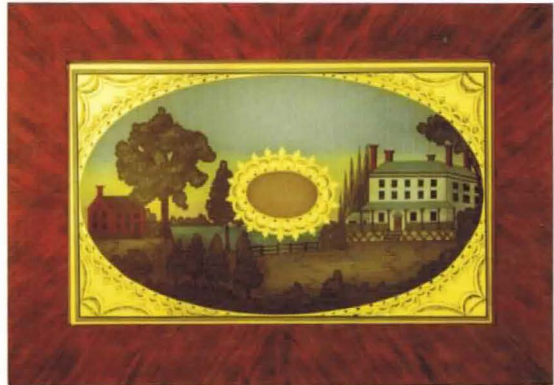
Debra Fitts
Country Painting





Diane Thompson
Glass with Border

Anne Dimock
Gold Leaf on Glass



Anne Dimock
Glass with Border

Joanne Balfour
Theorem



Joanne Balfour
Theorem

Betty Nans
Theorem



Anne Dimock
Gold Leaf on Glass (3)



Joan McGrath
Theorem



Donna Hartz
Theorem



Applicants Accepted as New Members

Joyce McMurray (2025)

Judith Short (2026)

Ursula Smith (2027)

Annabelle Turley (2028)

Book Review



Women's Painted Furniture 1790-1830: American Schoolgirl Art by Betsy Kreig Salm.

Published by University Press of New England, Hanover and London, 2010. Hard cover, 200 + color pictures and many black and white illustrations, several appendices, glossary, bibliography and index, 223 pgs.

Review by Sandra Cohen

Women's Painted Furniture 1790-1830: American Schoolgirl Art, a detailed, unique treatise, introduces us to early American schoolgirl art and focuses on "women's painted furniture, treat[ing] it as a subgenre of American academic schoolgirl art."

The nature of this genre is rooted in the educational experience of young girls in the 18th and 19th centuries that provided both the context and the opportunity for producing these decorative works. After years of documenting the history of these charming works, Salm uncovers a series of fascinating stories of these individual adolescent girls and young pioneering school-mistresses who paved the way and broadened the curriculum for female students.

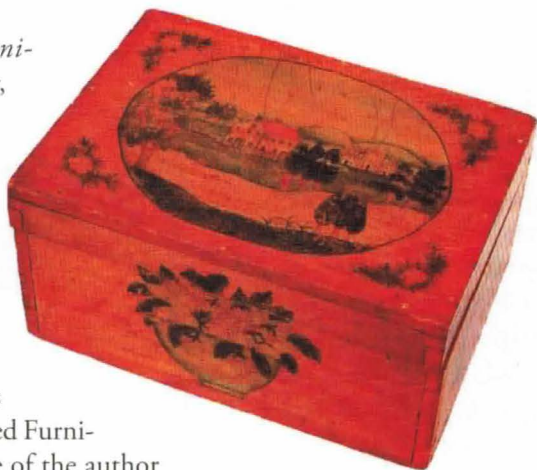
For too long, the primary reason for educating a young girl was to prepare her for her lifelong role, i.e., a good companion to her husband, modestly entertaining, and a nurturing homemaker and mother. A young girl's ornamental projects were proudly displayed in her home and became a handsome reference for suitors. However, history has shown that women have always demonstrated that there was more to them than met the eye.

In 1792, Sarah Pierce, founder of Litchfield Academy, emphasized the "value of practical studies" in addition to the decorative arts and offered the "solid" subjects of arithmetic, history, grammar, sacred history and French," progressing to the study of "logic, chemistry, botany and geography." Salm's research is replete with excerpts and illustrations of newspaper notices and advertisements of schools for young girls. The text reads like an historical review of women's educational opportunities in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It's amply punctuated with quotes and brief biographies and portraits of prominent figures and their work that define her book; the numerous annotated color images are the visual celebration of these ladies' lives and works, creating an intimate and endearing legacy.

This is the first comprehensive study of this genre, and Salm shares hundreds of images that will be viewed for the first time describing in detail the materials, techniques and design.

Anonymous was a Woman by Mirra Bank pays tribute to the majority of early American women whose lives were preoccupied with maintaining a household and raising children. Their self-image was one of caretaker, wife and mother, not artist, and it never occurred to most of them to sign their work. "Anonymous" is abundantly represented, but there are a number of painted pieces that are attributed to the manufacturer and bear a signature. Her research invites us into the lives of these identified ladies, their families, husbands and in some cases their careers as a Head Mistress, i.e., Sara Pierce, founder of Litchfield Academy; Orra White, a teacher at Deerfield Academy and later its Assistant Principal; Emma Hart Willard, (16th of 17 children) Director of Middlebury Female Academy and author of "A Plan for Improving Female Education" "which she published at her expense and sent to Presidents James Monroe, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams." A strong advocate of equality for women, Emma Hart Willard wrote "reason and religion teach that we, too, are primary existences....the companions, not the satellites of men..."

Women's Painted Furniture is itself, cover to cover, an ornamental treasure that will complement your library with its beautiful depictions of decorated works, many from private collections and some of which are in print for the first time. In her chapter, "The Process of Creating Women's Painted Furniture" the teacher/artist side of the author is revealed as she shares information about the creation and design of these works. This not only enhances our understanding and appreciation of this artform, it is instructional for those daring enough to record and reproduce these painted pieces. Each page reveals the delicate workmanship that is the hallmark of early school-girl art.



*Work box painted by Emily C. Emerson
Northfield, Vermont, 1826*

Emily Emerson skillfully depicts a lovely Vermont landscape in an oval field surrounded by floral motifs in each corner on the top of her workbox. The front of the box has a small still life bowl of fruit. Fruits, shells, garlands and

floral motifs were popular choices for boxes and tea caddies, sewing, chamber and ladies' work tables. One of the prettest pieces, an elaborate chamber table painted by Elizabeth Paine Lombard, is a potpourri of design elements meant to captivate and please the eye and soul of the observer. Its painterly landscape includes a central basket of overflowing fruits surrounded by a delicate ivy bor-



Elizabeth Paine Lombard (1798-May 1882)
Chamber Table Top with running border. Bath, Maine 1816
H 33 1/2 x L 32 1/4 x W 16 3/4

der that is repeated on each of the table's slender turned legs. Tiny clusters of flowers and shells occupy the table-top's four corners, and birds perch on the front drawers' design of extended floral branches. Elizabeth loved poetry and she incorporates a verse, entitled "Hope," scripted on each side of the centerpiece.

The "Farewell" or "Parting," common scenes in Fine Art as well as Folk art, is movingly depicted on a box top initialed L. Dames (spelling?) The young couple, grandparents and children share embraces as they prepare to depart, an experience



Made of birch, maple, and white pine, paint and ink decoration, single drawer, brass hardware. Turned legs with three turned rings at bottom are highly decorated.

that resonates with many. The landscape and homestead and a strong looming oak tree create a nostalgic setting, as the encircling scripted verse reminisces:

*“What sorrows gloomed that parting day,
That called them from their native walks away,
When the poor exiles every pleasure past
Hung round their bowers and fondly looked their last.”*

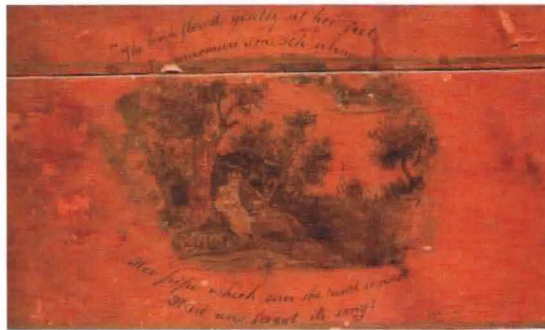
A child, sheep and dog nestle at the foot of a tree on the box's side, surrounded with more sentimental verse.

Salm's talent as an artist is evident in her last chapter, where we are treated to a gallery of her work beginning with an interpretation of the box that inspired her odyssey into the world of women's painted furniture. Salm's reproductions and their stories beautifully pose with their antique ancestors as a tribute and rediscovery of an historical artform that speaks to the heart. Appendices, A through I offer further elaboration of the comprehensive text, and are followed by several pages of Bibliography and an Index. This book is unique and deserves to be in your library of historically authentic decorative arts.

Women's Painted Furniture 1790-1830 American Schoolgirl Art is more than a treatise on this art and a celebration of its young artists. This is a testimony to the meaningful and industrious lives of exceptional young ladies whose valuable contributions advanced the social, cultural and educational opportunities for women. Reflected in each painted piece and echoed through-

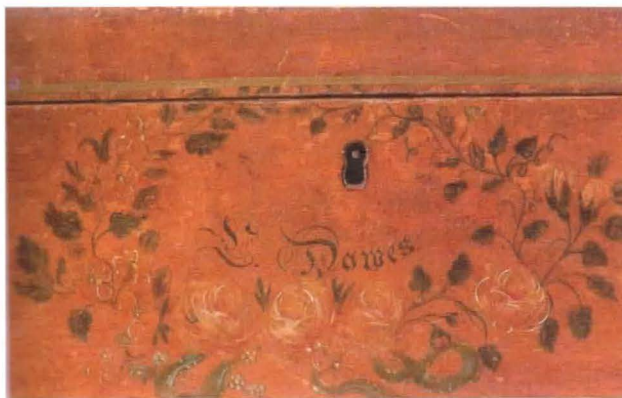


Top of "parting couple" box. L. Dames (spelling uncertain), New England, c. 1800-1820



Side of "parting couple" box. L. Dames (spelling uncertain), New England, c. 1800-1820.

out this reference is Salm's gentle refrain, "May all things made with your hands show your heart."



*Cartouche with the artist's name. L Dames (spelling uncertain),
New England, c. 1800-1820.*



*Two views of painter's box
painted by Betsy Kreig Salm,
Interlaken New York, 1997*





Another Stenciling Oddity

Shown in these pictures is a stenciled chair back, seen by Mary Perry. The concentric circles create an “eye-popping” effect. We do not have the actual chair to examine, but would be interested to know if anyone has seen this type of stenciling or knows the method used to achieve it.



Detail showing concentric rings. Photo courtesy of Mary Perry.



Henry Clay, Francis Egington, and ‘Mechanical Painting’: A Mystery Solved?

by Yvonne Jones

In 1774, along with a papier mache tea chest, iron bread basket, and other japanned goods, Sir Thomas Ward of Northamptonshire, bought of Henry Clay:

1 fine square Picture of the two Misers from a painting in Windsor Castle, on canvas with Gilt Frame £3.3.0

1 Pair of fine oval Pictures, the Senses of hearing and Smelling, on paper high Varnishd with Gilt Earthen Frames a[t] £3.3.0 each

12 fine square Pictures with Gilt Frames at £2.12.6 ea. Of the following subjects, Viz.

Shylock & the Venetian Merchants, a Turkish Lady reading by Candlelight, a Lovely Lass & Fryer, Portia, Shylock, Leonora & Diego, Leonora & Leander, Iachimo, a Philosopher [sic], an Indian Family, Venus, Dænea & Jupiter

Should we deduce from the above list, that alongside the manufacture of japanned ware, Henry Clay acted also as a dealer in fine art? Probably not, for

Above: Oval papier mache tea caddy which, although not marked, shows a style of decoration consistent with known specimens stamped for Henry Clay, c1780/90s. Courtesy of Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury

in the same consignment were pictures of a 'cat', at 1 guinea and 'a Squirrel', at fifteen shillings, which, if compared with a panel, entitled An Owl, which currently hangs in Soho House¹, in Birmingham, leads to a wholly different, and plausible, interpretation of Sir Thomas Ward's pictures. Were the cat, squirrel and owl paintings, perhaps, of a type with the other pictures which Sir Thomas purchased? Before attempting to answer this question, it will be helpful to set the scene.

The owl picture was painted by Moses Haughton (1734-1804) on a japanned papier mache panel measuring 16 ½ x 13¼ inches, the reverse of which is multiply-stamped 'CLAY'. In addition to working for Henry Clay, Haughton is known to have painted japanned ware for John Baskerville (1706-1775), and possibly, and more significantly here, for Boulton & Fothergill, at the Soho Works, in Birmingham. His work is specifically mentioned, for example, in an inventory of the japan workshop at this prestigious firm, drawn up in 1779: '2 Turkish Heads done by Haughton', and again in a later inventory of 1782: 'A large Square of Dead Game on Iron by Orton' (this was almost certainly a misspelling for Haughton whose name was sometimes given as 'Horton'). And while not specifically named as the artist, Haughton's type of work is reflected in the titles of many other works listed in both inventories.

Matthew Boulton (1728-1809) a flamboyant and dynamic innovator, was one of the leading figures of the Industrial Revolution. In partnership with John Fothergill (1730-1782), he enjoyed international renown as a manufacturer of coins and medals, buttons, buckles, high quality silver, Sheffield plate, and ormolu, and his partnership with James Watt (1736-1819) resulted in the development of the steam-engine. Boulton, with his entrepreneurial flair was never one to miss a business opportunity and, much to Clay's chagrin, introduced japanning at the Soho Works in 1765. It was a relatively short-lived venture which ended in 1779 – hence the need for an inventory of the department - but nevertheless, a highly significant one which supplied fine quality japanned trays, knife caddies, and other luxury goods, to fashionable society across Europe and beyond.

The person appointed to develop and oversee Boulton & Fothergill's japanning venture was Francis Egington² (1737-1805), a talented and versatile decorative artist. Born in Bilston, only 15 or so miles from Birmingham, Egington would have been familiar with, if not trained



*Shuttle, papier mache: stamped 'CLAY PATENT', c1780/90s
L: 12.2 cms. Private collection.*

in one, or both, of the decorative trades of his home town: enamelling and japanning. He would have known how the introduction of transfer-printing in 1751, had transformed the decoration of the small snuff-boxes, scent-bottles, plaques, and other fashionable trinkets which were the mainstays of the enamel trade in Bilston, Birmingham, and Battersea, in London. He would have been aware, too, of its impact on ceramic artists in nearby Stoke-on-Trent.

Egington was living in Birmingham by 1759, where as early as 1752, the engraver, John Brooks,³ had already recognized the suitability of transfer-printing for japanned surfaces. His advertisement in Aris's *Birmingham Gazette* in that year, announced that:

Such Gentlemen as are desirous of having WAITERS [ie. small trays] printed, may apply to John Brooks, Engraver, in the New Church-Yard, Birmingham, who is willing not only to treat with them on reasonable Terms, but also engages to execute the work in the most elegant Manner, with Expedition...

N.B. He also recommends that his work may not be spoild by committing it into Hands of unskillful Daubers.

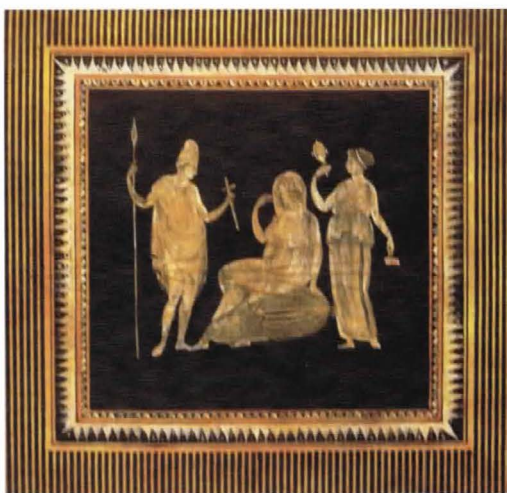


Therefore, transfer printing was not new when, in about 1778, Egington introduced 'mechanical painting' at the Soho Works. In effect, 'mechanical painting' extended the possibilities of transfer printing. It provided the means by which popular oil paintings by artists such as Angelica Kauffman, could be reproduced, full scale, on stretched canvas, or decorative panels, to bring the possession of famous pictures within reach of a wider market. The process was shrouded in mystery and intrigue - an atmosphere which Boulton probably relished, if not encouraged. - and indeed, exactly

Corner cupboard, decorated with classical motifs copied from D'Hancarville's engravings, (published 1776), of antique vases in the collection of Sir William Hamilton, against finely striped grounds. In the style of Henry Clay, though in common with most japanned furniture of this type, the cabinet is not marked, c1780/90s. Private collection

how it was done has been the subject of much debate among scholars.

What is known for sure is that the process involved one or more engraved copper plates, a rolling press, 'dead-colour', and the use of egg white as a fixative. It is generally understood that the engraved plate was rubbed with a mixture of ink and honey, and the image transferred to canvas and exposed to sunlight in order for the ink to solidify – hence their alternative name



Front detail of the cabinet shown on previous page.

‘sun prints’. Once dry, the print was hand-coloured with oil pigments, first by ‘boys’, and then by experienced artists like Joseph Barney, until it resembled an original oil painting. But an explanation of how large canvases could be prepared in this way, without any sign of an imprint from a printing press has remained obscure.

When asked at a recent seminar held at Birmingham University, whether mechanical painting was ever used in the decoration of japanned ware, there was, then, no evidence upon which to base an answer. Underlying the enquiry was the content of a letter - found by the questioner during the course of her research on Francis Egington⁴ – from John Hodges, manager of the silver and plate departments at Soho, to his employer, Matthew Boulton, in 1780: ‘It’s conjectured’, Hodges wrote, that Egington ‘does many common paintings for Mr. Clay; indeed, he told me he had orders for *Calypsos* and *Penelopes* by dozens ...’. It was one of those deceptively simple questions which clearly begged further research; but with so little known about the process of mechanical painting, where to begin?

On a subsequent, and quite serendipitous re-reading of Charles Valentine’s patent for *A New Mode of Ornamenting and Painting all Kinds of Japanned and Varnished Wares of Metal, Paper, or any other Compositions and various other Articles* (#3219), of 1809, it seemed to hold the key to both of Egington’s ‘secrets’; namely, the mechanical painting process, and how it might be applied to japanned surfaces.⁵

It may have been coincidence that Valentine lodged his patent only four years after Egington’s death but, less coincidentally, Valentine had been apprenticed to the London japanner Edward Strickland (see *The Decorator*, vol. 63 no.2). Over the space of two years, Strickland had placed three advertise-

ments in Aris's *Birmingham Gazette*, for experienced workmen. If, as this would suggest, there was sufficient take-up for it to be worth Strickland's while to repeatedly advertise in the Midlands, then it is likely that Valentine would have worked alongside those Midlands men and women who responded to the adverts, and who took with them, to London, experience of printing japanned surfaces. It is equally as probable, therefore, that Valentine's patent describes, in essence, the printing method employed by all early japanners.

Valentine's process involved four equally sized copper plates, numbered 1-4. On the first, he etched, or engraved, the lightest parts of the proposed image, building up to the darkest tones on the fourth plate. He then coated four sheets of 'fine fan, tissue, or other soft paper', of corresponding size, with a solution made from 1lb of 'gum Arabic, isinglass, or any other glutinous body' to a quart of soft water. Next, he prepared a thick mixture of black pigment and strong burnt linseed oil with which to ink the copper plate intended for the darkest tones, and added flake-white, in increasing quantities, for each of the lighter-toned plates. After laying the wet fan-paper on each of the inked plates, Valentine ran them, one at a time, 'through a printer's rolling press', though he said a letter-press would have served equally well. The paper was gently peeled from the plates, and left for one week to dry 'in the air' (*cf.* Egington leaving his papers in the sun).

The next step was to mix copal varnish with the required background colour for each of the four impressions and, with a camel-hair brush, paint it evenly, and accurately, over the parts to be shaded. This was the equivalent of Egington's 'dead colour'. After a couple of days, when the colour had hardened on the paper, the japanned surface on which it was to be laid, was thinly coated with copal varnish, and left until tacky. The first of the prints was applied, inked side down, and gently pressed in place with a sponge moistened in warm water; this dissolved the underlying gum and enabled it to absorb the ink. After about 15 minutes, the paper was washed off with a sponge. The subsequent prints were added in the same manner to produce 'a finished painting of four shades' which once dry, was varnished and stoved in the usual way. Or, if only one plate was used, its effect could be enhanced by overpainting the printed japanned panel with transparent colours prior to stoving.

It should be remembered however, that Valentine was describing a method of printing on japanned ware. As such, there were notable differences between his patent, and Egington's method of mechanical painting. Egington was making full-scale reproductions of large works. These necessitated engraving small sections of the original painting on separate copper plates, and reassembling the resulting prints on the canvas to make a whole – rather like a jig-saw. Since the images could not be transferred by means of a rolling-press – the canvases were too large, and the pressure would, anyway, have left an undesired impression – the fine papers onto which they were printed, were permanently attached to

the surface of the canvas to serve as guides for overpainting. Neither of these steps were followed when decorating japanned ware. But notwithstanding these differences, Valentine's patent seems the most plausible explanation, to date, of how Egington produced his so-called mechanical paintings.

To return to the cat, squirrel and owl pictures, it now looks possible that their outlines were produced 'mechanically', and enhanced by overpainting, first by apprentices or junior copyists, and then by experienced painters such as Moses Haughton, in Birmingham, or Joseph Barney, japanner and painter, of Wolverhampton, to whom Egington is known to have sent many 'mechanicals' to be finished. Moreover, the notion that the owl-painting may be an example of a mechanical painting was, apparently, raised some years ago.

In conclusion, it begins to look as if both transfer printing, and a form of 'mechanical painting', were fairly widely used by early japanners. It now appears likely that the small classical figures found on so many of Clay's wares of the period were transfer-printed, and not stenciled as previously thought. If this deduction is correct, it would certainly explain how Henry Clay was able to produce the fine, clean stripes that form the background to so many of his early pieces.

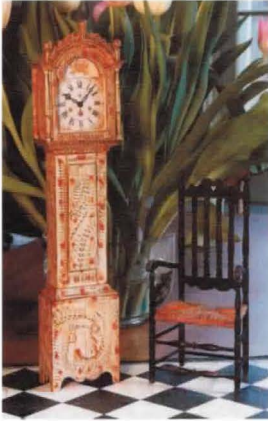
Thus, with the possible exception of the picture of two misers on his list, the paintings Sir Thomas Ward purchased in 1780, were most likely japanned panels - exactly as one would expect from the firm of Henry Clay. There remains the question of why Clay should have supplied one of Egington's mechanical paintings on canvas, but it may have been no more than a good-will gesture towards Egington, or an expedience for either party.

- 1 The former home of Matthew Boulton, now open to the public as part of Birmingham City Museums and Art Galleries.
- 2 The name Egington appears in contemporary records also as Eginton, and Egerton.
- 3 John Brooks was one of the earliest exponents of transfer printing, though he was three-times refused a patent.
- 4 The questioner was Barbara Fogarty whose thesis, *Matthew Boulton and Francis Eginton's Mechanical Paintings: Production & Consumption 1777-1781*, is currently being submitted for M.Phil, to University of Birmingham (UK), and with whom I've had the pleasure of sharing thoughts.
- 5 Prints could be directly transferred to ceramics and enamels by gently pressing the inked paper image onto their surfaces, and either floating the paper off with water, or leaving it to burn away during firing. While japan varnish was, in itself, impermeable, 'floating' the transfer off in water, was impractical, not only because of the relatively large size of some articles, but because, by virtue of their construction, the edges of objects were not always entirely covered by japan varnish. Moreover, japanned ware was stoved at too low a temperature for the tissue paper to be burnt off.

Additions to “Miniaturist in Our Midst”

by Valerie Burnham Oliver

In the Spring 2010 *Decorator* we inadvertently left out the sizes for the miniature furniture done by James Hastrich. We also turned around Valerie Burnham Oliver’s name. We regret this and have corrected Valerie’s name and added the sizes to the pictures.



(left) Page 13: Tall Case clock c. 1820-40, Height 6¾” in 1” scale
Height 13½” in 2” scale



(right) Page 14:
Rufus Porter Blanket Chest c. 1720,
Decoration 1825
Width: 3 1/8” (1” scale)
6¼” (2” Scale)

(right) Page 15: (top) Rufus Porter Lift Top Box c. 1825
Width: 3 3/8” (2” scale)



(below left) Hannah Barnard Cupboard 1710-15
Height: 5 1/8” in 1” scale 10¼” in 2” scale

(below) Page 14: School Girl work/sewing table
Tall: 2½” in 1” scale 5” in 2” scale



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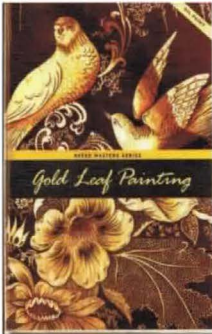
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