

The
Decorator

*Journal of The Historical Society
of Early American Decoration*



Fall 2018 Vol. 74



The Historical Society of Early American Decoration

A Society with affiliated chapters was 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; promote continued research in that field; record and preserve examples of early American decoration; maintain exhibits and publish works on the subject of early American decoration and its history to further the appreciation of this art and the elevation of the standards of its reproduction and utilization; assist in public and private efforts in locating and preserving material pertinent to the Society's work and to cooperate with other societies in the accomplishment of purposes of mutual concern.

Vision: The Historical Society of Early American Decoration (HSEAD) perpetuates and expands the unique skills and knowledge of early American decoration.

Mission: HSEAD will develop new ways of growing and sharing its art and expertise, of expanding its membership and collaborative relationships and of awakening appreciation of early American decoration among new audiences.

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Fall 2018

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Editor's Letter

Colonial Williamsburg, a timely venue for the Society's Annual Membership Meeting in the Spring, perfectly echoed the symbolism and beauty embedded in the story of America's roots as well as in her arts and crafts.

At every turn, members were face to face with original decorated surfaces on walls, furniture and artifacts. Hundreds of primitive portrait paintings were windows into 18th and 19th century lives; rooms and their painted furnishings and other traditional embellishments reflected the authentic reproductions that members of the Society replicate. Seeing decorative arts in the context of our history, we were reminded of the times and ingenuity of America's settlers and the rich cultures of its European immigrants as well as a variety of exquisite exports from the Asian trade routes. The Historical Society of Early American Decoration's mission, preserving the diverse decorative arts that were found in the homes of our country's early immigrant settlers, is important because it is a meaningful and relevant profile of America's aesthetically diverse culture and history.

The Decorator's annual issue reflects the Society's ongoing mission of research, education and reproduction, and we are pleased to include in this issue an article by artist, teacher and author, Betsy Krieg Salm. Her thoroughly researched book, *Women's Painted Furniture 1790-1830: American Schoolgirl Art*, uniquely explores and documents study in this genre and provides an historical background as well as "how-to" instructions to reproduce these furnishings. Her research, teaching and reproductions have resulted in a new category for judging called Women's Painted Furniture, and pieces in this category will be judged for the first time at Annual Membership Meeting in the Spring 2019.

Historically, decorative painted furniture was ubiquitous, and some of the most charming pieces were made by Pennsylvania German craftsmen and found in the river valleys near the Schwaben Creek area. Jeanmarie Andrews, Editor of *Early American Life Magazine*, shares her interest, research and enthusiasm about Mahantongo Valley furniture and its vibrantly painted natural and geometric motifs.

The art of ornamentation isn't limited to objects, and as Valerie Oliver, the Society's Historian has discovered and researched, any blank surface is a potential canvas. Her article on Tailpieces will resonate with us who

love books and who have noticed the subtle ornamentation adorning spaces above and below texts, perhaps embellishing an introductory letter and/or phrase or a miniature drawing referencing a textual theme. These little enhancements are meant to grace the page, and they provide an aesthetic array of printers' ornaments on a leaf of text that cannot be ignored.

Dennis Lambert, our Brazer Guild Member in England, takes us on a virtual tour of the American Museum in Britain, the only Museum outside the United States that tells the story of America from our Founding Fathers through the 20th century. The Museum's Period Rooms display authentic antique furnishings, decorative arts and costuming, all historically appropriate to their time. Dennis, with the help of some of the Museum's Curators, highlights pieces from its remarkable collection of furniture and decorative and folk art. Perhaps it's time for an HSEAD field trip to our continental cousins across the pond!

Meanwhile, we are grateful to have our Museums, particularly those that recreate our historical legacies like Colonial Williamsburg. John D. and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller were among its major founders and benefactors, and they donated their handsome Collections including Abby's stunning array of Theorem paintings whose simplicity she admired. While viewing her pieces, I was pleasantly surprised to discover a lovely Theorem by Eliza Ann Parker, who (to my surprise) was born in my town of Southborough, Mass. Between my town's Historical Society's records and those of Colonial Williamsburg, we have a very brief, but touching profile of Eliza's talented but short life as well as her lovely Theorem painting.

Thankfully, the book culture is alive and well, and it was my pleasure to review a new book by Noel Riley, author of *Penwork, A Decorative Phenomenon*; Riley has now given us another treatise celebrating the decorative and fine arts. *The Accomplished Lady: A History of Genteel Pursuits c. 1660-1860* focuses on 'society' ladies in the British Isles and their remarkable contributions to the arts. You will definitely be enriched by her meticulously researched, annotated and generously illustrated work that offers hours of fascinating reading.

Regarding our advertising for this issue, we welcome a new craftsman, Alistair Jones, a furniture and box maker and new member of the Society whose reproduction boxes will facilitate members' painted decoration for the new Women's Painted Furniture category. *The Decorator's* articles on research have always been a reliable reference for our members. The techniques, materials and recipes that our artists use to authentically reproduce

early American decorative works require quality products, supplies and materials that are sometimes difficult to find. All of us appreciate our advertisers' years of support and sponsorship of *The Decorator*, and we especially thank each of you.

As always, *The Decorator* celebrates our Brazer Guild Members' talents and achievements here highlighted in the showcase of Awards. The list of Members' Awards is prefaced with a brief overview of the criteria and standards which guide the judging process.

All of us on the staff of *The Decorator*, and all at the helm who serve on behalf of the Society, wish you a Happy and Healthy Holiday Season.

Enjoy and be inspired.

Sandra Cohen



Women's Painted Furniture

New Category Debut

by Betsy Krieg Salm



Painters Box

Tiger maple with floral designs and leaf border
from *The Ladies' Amusement* by Robert Sayer

All of those girls and women who painted their boxes, tables and face screens (objects historically referred to as women's painted furniture) 200 years ago would be very proud to know their work has reached college level. During the Federal Period (1790-1820), depending on the girl's school, a public "School Exhibition," to celebrate the students' artistry, would take place.

Parents, friends, and the entire community were invited to enjoy and watch the Academy pupils perform and present their accomplishments. The young women read aloud, sang, and danced accompanied by their sister students' music. Their exquisite needlework, paintings, ornamented furni-



"School Exhibition"
similar to the scene in the painting,
May Queen by Jacob Marling

ture and accessories were displayed at the academy or village green where the event was held. Painted Satinwood Box shows motifs from *The Ladies' Amusement*, a common design source for academy students.



Painted Satinwood Box
Motif is from *The Ladies' Amusement*,
a common design source for academy students.

How ironic that exactly two hundred years later, members of HSEAD will be hosting their “Exhibition” on the campus at Amherst, Massachusetts, the very area where Orra White was born (1796-1863). An exceptionally bright girl, Orra excelled while a student at a Roxbury school for girls, surmised to be Mrs. Susanna Haswell Rowsons’ Academy, known for its high academic standing and quality instruction in useful accomplishments.

After leaving school at the age of 17, Orra White was made Assistant Principal at Deerfield Academy and taught mathematics, botany, astronomy, drawing and painting to young girls. Suzanne Flynt wrote in her book, *Ornamental and Useful Accomplishments: Schoolgirl Education and Deerfield Academy 1800-1838*, “Painting wooden boxes with landscapes, flowers, shells and other motifs was a popular ornamental accomplishment of female pupils attending Deerfield Academy with Orra White’s tenure.



Reproduction, Ladies’ Sewing Table
Author’s inscription, “May all things done with
your hands show your heart.” is on drawer top.

Students, Rhoda Wells, Rebecca Jackson, and Adeline Hoyt, all decorated their boxes and painted under Orra White’s tutelage.”

In 1818, Miss White became the Preceptress at Amherst Academy. Her first published work accompanied Edward



Antique Fan-Cornered Box 1800-1810 and reproduction (right)

Birds-eye Maple Workboxes with floral motif of roses and blue flowers, a delicate border of morning glories, roses and rose buds; an ink border with fan-corner motifs

Hitchcock's article on Turner Falls in Philadelphia's magazine, *Portfolio*. One of the earliest pictures published by a woman in America, it was the first of 232 illustrations that Orra provided for Edward Hitchcock's articles. Mr. Hitchcock claimed that she published another 1,134 scientific



Reproduction of Oval Tiger-Maple Work Box with basket and floral motifs

Floral motif on front of box is from apron of Antique New Amsterdam Sewing Table (right).

drawings for him.

In 1821 after marrying Edward Hitchcock, an educator, scientist and minister, Orra devoted herself to her family and continued to illustrate her husband's scientific and botanical articles well as supporting him in his role as President of Amherst College. President Hitchcock described their work together as a collaboration where he described scientific facts in text that Orra would portray more vividly with pencil drawings and paintings.



Orra White Hitchcock, c. 1860

The Society's Annual Membership Meeting in 2019, "The Artistic Woman" will introduce the first judging of the Womens' Painted Furniture category. For the first time, a collaboration of judges for both Penwork and Womens' Painted Furniture will award Brazer Guild Members entering their

reproductions for the new category. Painted boxes will be highlighted at this meeting since those approved patterns for judging were presented to the membership at the Fall Working Seminar 2017. If possible and available, the antique originals will be on exhibit in a side-by-side format with the various pieces that have been judged. Viewers will experience a visual lesson on interpretation when “reading” an original sitting near its replication.



Oval Birds-eye Maple Work Box with plate of fruit and strawberry motifs
Design is from the apron of an antique New Amsterdam table.

The feather-edge Leeds Ware Plate was made at the same time in England.

Sources

Flynt, Suzanne L. *Ornamental and Useful Accomplishments, Schoolgirl Education and Deerfield Academy 1800-1838*. Deerfield, Mass.: Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Deerfield Academy, 1988.

Hitchcock, Edward. “A View of the Falls in Connecticut River.” *The Portfolio* 6 (July-December) 1818.

Sayer, Robert. *The Ladies' Amusement; or Whole Art of Japanning Made Easy*. London: The Golden Buck, 1762. Facsimile of 2d ed. Newport, England: The Ceramic Book Co., 1966.

Photographs of Jacob Marling painting and portrait of Orra White were taken from Google website.

Originals in this article are in a Private Collection.



Betsy Krieg Salm is an artist and author of *Women's Painted Furniture: 1790-1830*.

Discovering Mahantongo Valley Furniture

by Jeanmarie Andrews

As a newspaper reporter in 1984, I received a call from an auctioneer in Pillow in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, which bordered on the small townships in my coverage area of Northumberland County. “You have to do a story about this chest,” Lee Dockey told me. That call drew me into the story of an exuberantly decorated body of furniture made in an isolated rural area in the south-central part of the state more than a century and a half earlier.

Dockey explained that he believed the blanket chest, found in a homeowner’s attic after her death, might be the last decorated piece to come out of the valley. He had grown up watching his father sell similar pieces to collectors including Henry Francis du Pont, whose home and furnishings became the basis of Winterthur Museum.

Made from the late 1700s into the 1840s by local carpenters, Mahantongo Valley Furniture included blanket chests, chests of drawers, slant-top desks, step-back cupboards and tall clocks, all with distinctive painted motifs that identified them as coming from the same group of makers and decorators.



Johannes Mayer Chest

Second known chest attributed to Johannes Mayer, cabinetmaker and Isaac Stiffly, decorator

Living in Northumberland County, where much of the furniture was made, greatly aided my research; the local library held the annual volumes of the Pennsylvania German Society, in which I found the seminal research on the furniture, conducted by Pastor Frederick Weiser, a scholar of his Pennsylvania German ancestry and Mary Hammond Sullivan of Winterthur Museum, published in 1980.¹



Unusual Mahantongo Chest

Decorated chest featured on the front cover of Henry Reed's, "definitive history", *Decorated Furniture of the Mahantongo Valley*, was published in 1987. Reed calls it a "truly spectacular and unusual chest," with its deep red color and numerous recessed panels. Bottom drawer is decorated with pair of angels similar to those found on printed Fraktur. dated c.1835-40. Courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art

I followed the story of Dockey's discovery to its conclusion at auction several months later. The circa 1840 blue-painted chest decorated with stamped red-and-yellow rosettes and the figures of two praying children sold for \$20,000 to an insurance salesman from New Jersey named Henry Reed. To a young reporter new to the antiques world, the sum seemed astronomical, particularly when the chest bore obvious damage to its all-important decoration.

A few years later, Reed put together an exhibition of Mahantongo Valley Furniture at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. His accompanying catalogue expanded on the research begun by Weiser and Sullivan.²

The area called the Mahantongo Valley comes from the Delaware Indian word meaning "where we had plenty of venison to eat" and stretches about 17 miles east to west and 4 miles north to south between two mountaintops. It straddles Northumberland and Schuylkill Counties about 25 miles north of the state capital, Harrisburg, in Dauphin County.

Pennsylvania German immigrants moving from earlier settlements in southern and eastern Pennsylvania between the end of the French and Indian War and the American Revolution settled in this valley, which held no named villages until the 19th Century. Even today the valley has no incorporated municipalities, only townships. The social life of these communities centered on its Lutheran and Reformed churches, primarily Himmel's Church (Church of Heaven) on Schwaben Creek. Many of these local families intermarried.

Soon after the Revolution, the valley's farmers, many of whom did their own carpentry work, began making furniture to meet their own needs and those of their neighbors. To brighten these furnishings as well as their homes, makers added their own interpretation of designs found

in their native culture. Rosettes, which do not appear on any other body of Pennsylvania German-made furniture, are a traditional German motif found on pottery still being made in Munich. They appeared on this furniture before they were printed on *fraktur* birth and baptismal certificates. Innovative decorators combined traditional motifs with aspects of the emerging neoclassical style, rendered in paint rather than inlay.



Unique Adam and Eve Motif

This Adam and Eve Motif is unknown on other furniture from the Valley. It appears on Penn. German *Fraktur*.

Stamped red and yellow rosettes tie chest to other Mahantongo Valley pieces. Courtesy of Winterthur Museum

In their research, Weiser and Sullivan postulated that two distinct groups of furniture came out of the valley. At that time, fewer than fifty pieces were known, some housed in museums, others in private collections. Many privately owned pieces have since come to light at auction, increasing the number of known examples.

The first group Weiser and Sullivan identified comprised ten dower chests, made for young men and women for storing household goods for adulthood. They date from 1798 to 1828, and all bear the name of the owner and the date each chest was received. Aside from a single grained chest with a unique hunting scene, all of the chests were embellished with local flowers (tulips, bleeding hearts, pinks, daisies) or flowers like those found on *fraktur*. The researchers believed all ten chests were decorated by the same hand and possibly built by the same cabinetmaker. Reed later identified the maker as Michael Braun and the chests' owners as his children and other relatives.

The second group, as of the late 1970s, numbered thirty-two chests of drawers, blanket chests, slant-top desks, kitchen cupboards and a hanging cupboard bearing the characteristic motifs of Mahantongo Valley Furniture (flowers/rosettes, cartouches outlining drawers, corner fans and geometric stars on side panels) along with pairs of birds, flowers, praying children, angels and horses.

Weiser and Sullivan identified nearly fifty cabinetmakers/joiners from local tax rolls, and they charted the motifs of twelve distinct decorators based on the number of petals in the rosettes, the style of the corner fans, the concave corners of the cartouches and the styles and use of stars and butterflies. They called the furniture “Schwabens Creek” because all of the owners and potential makers lived along the creek.

In 1987, three years after Henry Reed bought the blanket chest sold by Lee Dockey, he put together an exhibition at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, one county north of Northumberland and published a catalogue that built on Weiser and Sullivan’s research. He cited several new discoveries, some made beyond the Schwabens Creek.

One new find was the 1828 chest made for Daniel Ganser, part of the earlier group of dower chests. The owner was a private collector living in Lewisburg. This chest is identical to one Weiser and Sullivan showed in their study, which was made for Anderres Ganser, Daniel’s cousin, in the same year. Reed noted that the drawers for the two Ganser chests, displayed at Bucknell, were interchangeable. Reed displayed another early chest, dated 1813, made for Christina Rebuck. He concluded that John Adam Rebuck Jr. (1763-1835) made all of these early chests. Two bear the names of his nieces, and two more were made for the girls his two sons married. Both sons followed him in the cabinetmaking business.

Collectors first “discovered” Mahantongo Valley Furniture in 1926, when Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, antiques dealer A. H. Rice ran a two-page ad in *The Magazine Antiques* for eleven pieces of decorated furniture “collected by me personally in the remote sections of Pennsylvania.” The first page of the ad showed perhaps the most famous piece, a slant-top desk bearing the name of Jacob Maser and the date 1834, which has long been in Winterthur’s collection. For a time scholars attributed all of the sim-



John Mayer Chest

This chest of drawers, a non-Germanic style that had begun to replace dower chests by the early 1899’s, is adorned with many of the motifs found on the later body of Mahantongo Valley Furniture. It is signed on drawer rail by cabinetmaker “John Mayer,” with decoration attributed to Rev. Isaac Stiehly, dated 1829. Courtesy of Olde Hope Antiques

ilarly decorated furniture to Maser, who might have made this piece. Weiser and Sullivan noted, however, that Maser would have been too young to make the earliest pieces.

Although Reed wrote that Maser family history identifies Jacob Maser (also spelled Masser) as a cabinetmaker, later scholars questioned that attribution because Maser owned no lathe for making Sheraton-style turned feet for desks and chests of drawers. Reed explained the discrepancy by quoting this 1948 reminiscence by Carrie Haas Troutman, the granddaughter of Johannes Haas, another confirmed furniture maker: “Most of the rare



Jacob Maser Slant-top Desk
A 1926 Advertisement by Bethlehem Antiques Dealer, A.H.Rice in *The Magazine Antiques* displays this slant-top desk bearing the name, “Jacob Maser,” a cabinetmaker once thought to have made all known Valley pieces. Courtesy of Henry Reed



Front, Side and Interior Views of Maser Desk

Part of the Winterthur Museum’s Collection, the Maser Desk, side and decorated inside views are shown. This is the only piece Weiser and Sullivan attributed to Decorator D, perhaps Maser himself. Note the distinct difference in color - blue-green on the case body, green on the drawers and lid of the Maser Desk. Early scholars believed that on all of the Mahantongo Valley pieces painted blue, varnish turned the blue to green, but analysis by Winterthur conservators confirmed two distinct paint colors.

antique furniture made in this part of the valley was made by a Mr. Masser. The bureaux were stained with a homemade stain green, red, black, or yellow, with designs copied from the old homemade birth certificates with angels, birds, and flowers [rosettes]. The flowers were put on with a cork that was cut to resemble a flower, then dipped in the stain and put on alternately, red then yellow. Mr. Masser had no lathe, so John Haas, and later David, his son, did all the turning on a homemade lathe, such as curly maple table legs, bureau legs, bed-posts, etc., all those things that had to be turned on a lathe.”³



Dower Chest for Peter Braun

The dower chest made for Peter Braun has the only known hunting scene ever found on a piece of decorated Penn. German furniture. Made by his father, Michael Braun, the chest is one of three made for his sons, all with similar graining. Courtesy of Henry Reed

Reed further noted that the three chests all have the same reeding outlining the insides of the lids, which match reeding on doors of the Braun house. He attributed any pieces having this same detail to the Braun family of cabinetmakers.

Weiser and Sullivan identified Johannes Mayer as furniture maker and also a decorator. His house and workshop were still standing when Reed visited the area before his Exhibition in 1987. He found a plane in Mayer’s workshop used to make moldings in his house. The profile matched the moldings around the lids of blanket chests with praying children motifs.

The second page of the Rice ad showed the Peter Braun chest and noted that it had been displayed at the Sesquicentennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1925. Another blanket chest, made for Michael Braun,



“Concordia” Kitchen Cupboard

One of two kitchen cupboards listed in Weiser and Sullivan’s research, this example has pairs of angels on the doors and the word “Concordia” above. Early researchers speculated that Concordia was the name of a guild of craftsmen in the Valley. Weiser and Sullivan showed that the name and motif were taken from a poem titled *Concordia*, published locally.



Dower Chest for Michael Braun

A dower chest made for Michael Braun by his father has the same type of paint graining as Peter Braun's chest as well as motifs seen on local Fraktur.

has the same graining as well as similar construction on its two drawers and bracket feet. A third brother in the family owned a similar chest. Reed identified the boys' father, Michael, as the likely maker of all three chests as well as one of two known kitchen cupboards, dated 1828, with his daughter Rebecca Braun's name on it.

Mayer had a close friendship with Isaac Stiehly, pastor of Salem United Church of Christ, located just south of the Northumberland/Schuylkill County line. Stiehly, who served as pastor there for forty-five years, also carved tombstones for his parishioners, with some of the same motifs as those found on Mahantongo Valley Furniture, and he made scherenschnitte (paper cuttings) and fraktur. Stiehly's son married Mayer's daughter. In 1844, Stiehly made an eagle scherenschnitte for Mayer, which helped researchers identify the pastor as a likely decorator of several of Mayer's case pieces based on one example decorated with eagles.

The eagle, from the U.S. coat of arms, started appearing on printed fraktur after 1800. The use of eagles on Mahantongo Valley Furniture, at least the one chest of drawers attributed to Stiehly, introduces a distinctly American theme to the traditional Pennsylvania German motifs. The Mayer/Stiehly eagle chest also has the same molding profile as those on two matching chests of drawers Mayer made for sisters Julien and Pali Drion. They came out of the estate of attorney William Koch of Milton, in northern Northumberland County. At an auction preview before the third auction from the estate,



Isaac Stiehly Paper Cutting

Isaac Stiehly made this Paper Cutting featuring an eagle for his friend, Johannes Mayer, in 1844.



Johannes Mayer Chests

The same moldings on other furniture by Johannes Mayer appear on a pair of chests made for sisters Julien and Pali Drion. Note cases appear to be blue and drawers, green. Decoration attributed by Henry Reed to Isaac Stiehly.

I saw and photographed these chests of drawers, which sold for nearly \$200,000 each in 1999.

A small number of pieces have an additional decoration, a barber pole or rope twist design, often painted red and yellow like the stamped rosettes. Weiser and Sullivan identified two different decorators who used this motif, attributing five pieces to Decorator C and two pieces to Decorator K, including a lone hanging cupboard.

A unique piece came to light after the Bucknell Exhibition, a miniature blanket chest that Reed identified as coming from a stone house owned by a Lancaster County couple. The chest's size, its playful arrangement of rosettes, and a pair of prancing horses suggest it might have been made for a child. It stands on turned Sheraton-style legs rather than the bracket feet found on earlier blanket chests.

The anonymous owners of the miniature chest, whose home appeared in a 2011 article, owned at least two other pieces of Mahantongo Valley Furniture at the time: a blanket chest with praying children attributed to Johannes Mayer, likely decorated by Isaac Stiehly and a chest dated 1835 with two pairs of angels. The article failed to note the scherenschnitte



1834 Chest

An 1834 chest in Winterthur's collection has additional barber pole or rope twist decoration down the stiles of the case frame, an extra embellishment used by Decorators D

(including this piece) and K.

Courtesy of Winterthur Museum



1835-1840 Chest

The fuller rope twist employed by Decorator K appears on this c. 1835-40 chest which also bears a pair of angels on the bottom drawer. The chest, once owned by Henry Reed, is now in a Private Collection in Texas.

hanging on the wall above the blanket chest, which certainly looks like the one the Pastor Stiehly made for his friend Johannes Mayer in 1844.

Two other significant pieces of Mahantongo Valley Furniture appear in *American Radiance*, the catalogue of the promised gift to the American Folk Art Museum from Ralph Esmerian, the former Chairman of the Museum Board, a slant-top desk and a chest of drawers, both decorated by the same hand, identified by Weiser and Sullivan as Decorator A. The desk, circa 1830, is the only known Mahantongo Valley case piece that has no base color; the decorations were scribed and painted on bare wood. The lid has an unusual pair of facing female figures, and the third drawer has a pair of leaping stags. The

decoration, considered among the finest on any example from the Valley, uses motifs found on *fraktur* printed in Allentown and Ephrata.

Although prices for furniture have been steadily declining in recent years, examples of Mahantongo Furniture have brought consistently high prices when they come up for auction, perhaps because of their rarity, the unique decoration of their provenance. When antiques dealer A. H. Rice advertised his eleven pieces of Mahantongo Valley Furniture in 1924, he priced them at \$7,300, a princely sum for the time, hoping to sell them as a group. (They were sold separately.)

When Henry Reed purchased his damaged blanket chest with praying children in 1984, he paid \$20,000. Fifteen years later, the pair of matching chests of drawers made for the Drion sisters sold for nearly \$200,000 each. In January 2014, Sotheby's offered at auction the slant-top desk once owned by Ralph Esmerian, estimating its value at between \$300,000 and \$500,000. It failed to sell then, but when Pook & Pook auctioned it that October, it sold for \$66,000.



Unique Miniature Blanket Chest

Diminutive chest, identified by Henry Reed as coming from a stone house owned by a Lancaster County couple, is the only known miniature version of a Mahantongo Valley Blanket Chest, perhaps for a child.

Although the final price for what researchers called the finest decorated piece of Valley Furniture is considerably lower than in past decades, it well exceeds other auction prices realized by what antiques dealers call “brown furniture.” So why do pieces from the Mahantongo Valley pull such eyebrow-raising prices?

The significance that Weiser, whose special interest was Pennsylvania German fraktur, placed on this furniture is that the decorators drew many of their motifs from hand-drawn and printed fraktur and incorporated them on furniture. Reed suggested that itinerant schoolmasters or preachers who boarded with families in the Valley made fraktur for

children and then adapted designs for furniture decoration.

In addition to its distinctive decoration, a rural substitute for expensive inlaid furniture, the importance of Mahantongo Valley Furniture is that no other body of furniture can so firmly be identified to a singular region in which the makers, decorators and owners are known.

Lee Dockey believed that the blanket chest he auctioned off thirty-five years ago might have been the last piece of decorated furniture to emerge from the Valley, yet the occasional piece still appears at auction or changes hands among private collectors.



Decorative Furnishings

A blanket chest with praying children is attributed to Johannes Mayer (likely decorated by Stiehly) and a chest of drawers dated 1835, decorated with two pairs of angels. The scherenschnitte hanging above the blanket chest at left pictured above is likely Stiehly’s gift to his friend, Johannes Mayer in 1844. Courtesy Lancaster couple (noted with diminutive chest above)

A chest of drawers similar to the former Esmerian example appeared in a recent article about the collection of a couple in Texas. It is decorated with urns, birds, and geometric stars like those painted by Decorator A in the Weiser/Sullivan chart. At first glance it might seem that this piece is the same chest advertised by Rice.

But if you look closely at the tulips beneath the escutcheons on the two bottom drawers in comparison to those on the Rice/Esmerian chest, you'll see that



Slant-Top Desk, c. 1830
Mahantongo Valley



Chest of Drawers, c. 1830

The c. 1830 chest of drawers related to the desk has a red ground which also differs from the usual blue-green. It has stamped brass hardware and knobs typical of patterns and designs made in Birmingham, England, imported, sold and in use in Phil. in the early 19th century. Rural cabinetmakers could have purchased them through dry-goods merchants. Among the eleven pieces of Valley Furniture advertised by A.H.Rice in 1926

Courtesy of the American Folk Art Museum



Chest of Drawers

Chest of drawers from a private home has urns, birds and geometric stars on a red ground consistent with the work of Decorator A.

those on the known chest have black petals, while the other has white petals. Does this mean that examples of Mahantongo Valley furniture previously unrecorded have yet to come to light? It's a tantalizing prospect for collectors still hoping to own a piece of this intriguing body of Pennsylvania German material culture.



“Black Petals” and “White Petals” Chests of Drawers

Chest might be confused for the chest once owned by Ralph Esmerian except that the tulips on the two bottom drawers of the Esmerian chest (left) have black petals while those on this previously unpublished chest have white petals.

Notes

1. *“Decorated Furniture of the Schwaben Creek Valley,”* by Frederick S. Weiser and Mary Hammond Sullivan, in *Ebbes fer Alle-Ebber – Ebbes fer Dich (Something for Everyone – Something for You)*, Publications of the Pennsylvania German Society, Volume 14, 1980.

2. *Decorated Furniture of the Mahantongo Valley.* Henry Reed, Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University, 1987.

3. Ibid



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The Tailpiece

A Decorative Conclusion

by Valerie Burnham Oliver

The Tailpiece, a printer's ornament, was used especially during the first several hundred years of book printing in the United States. It was employed by printers to occupy the empty space at the end of a book chapter or at the end of a poem and was one of many designs called printers' ornaments. These ornaments were decorative designs intended to embellish the pages of early books and other types of publications. They originated from the printing houses who were often the publishers during this time. According to Elizabeth Reilly in her publication on ornaments other types of ornaments were: headbands, rectangular designs located at the beginning of a chapter; initial and mortised initial blocks that decorated individual letters; border ornaments and printer and bookseller signs or devices. More formal royal coats of arms, emblems and seals were also used. Other less decorative markings used to divide text can be noted such as rules, simple lines, and swelled rules where the line is widened or slightly embellished in parts to create more notice and design. (Glaister p. 467).



Roses and Holly, a Gift-Book for All the Year. Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1867.
(tailpiece p.25 "School-Boy Days" by Thackeray)

In Colonial times American printers had to purchase their ornaments from Europe especially England, Holland and Germany as it was too costly for them to create their own; this reliance on imports lasted until the American Revolution (Reilly p. xvii). These types of printed decoration evolved after the invention of printing presses and movable type and evoked, in a very different way, hand painted manuscripts of the past (Reilly p. xv). As printers gained more experience and success, they could acquire a variety of ornaments, and over time these designs became more graceful enhancing the text on the page. (Reilly p. xviii).

According to Glaister in *Encyclopedia of the Book* (p.177) flowers, fleurons, florets, printers' flowers and roslein were terms used to indicate a

printer's collection of ornaments as flowers and other plants were often featured. Printers could combine elements of flowers to create new designs as needed. For example, a factotum or mortised initial block was designed with empty space so that any letter could be added (Reilly p.xv). Ornaments could be sold and shared as they usually had no connection with the subject matter of the publication.



The Poetical Works by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (selected) with prefatory notice, biographical, and critical by Eva Hope. London: Walter Scott, [1888]. (tailpiece p.153 poem "Daylight and Moonlight")

The Works Progress Administration of the 1930s allowed the organization and completion of the filming of all the publications included in what was then the Charles Evans' *Early American Imprints* and several other major bibliographies listing publications printed in the United States from 1639-1800. Libraries from around the country cooperated in this endeavor thus creating the Readex Microprint set that research libraries could purchase, making the collection available to scholars and the public around the country. The American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts carried out a project to index all the printers' ornaments and illustrations contained in these early publications of books (pamphlets and broadsides). Years later the material was made available in digital form so that it can be searched in full text. This later Readex *Early American Imprints, Series I, II and Supplements* expands to 1819 the inclusion of books, pamphlets, broadsides and other publications, searchable online. Although searching online provides many advantages, having a volume to consult showing the ornaments together arranged by type and style has many advantages for research and analysis.

The original work on ornaments resulted in the publication by Elizabeth Carroll Reilly of *A Dictionary of Colonial American Printers' Ornaments and Illustrations: a Tribute to Alden Porter Johnson* in 1975. The work had been envisioned by Alden Johnson back in the early 1950s, but it was not until the early 1970s that he asked Elizabeth Reilly to take on the project while she was a student at Mt. Holyoke College (Reilly p. ix). In this volume images of the printers' ornaments are arranged by type. For example, the section for tailpieces is further arranged by style or subject for example: urns and baskets, birds with flowers, birds, flowers, angels, rococo designs, allegorical cuts, sunbursts, ships, biblical and genre scenes, music, crowns, trees and hearts.

For each image there is notation indicating printer, date(s) of publication using that ornament, source of the ornament, so that one could consult the

original publication and its bibliographic data, as well as a code indicating the location where the photograph was taken. Some ornaments appeared in multiple editions of the same work, but one can learn much more as there are indexes for printers and for dates, 1640-1775. The first publication with a tailpiece appeared in 1717 from the Boston printer, Bartholomew Green. Only three different tailpieces appeared in 1720 growing to 33 by 1765.

According to the *Dictionary*, the ornaments including tailpieces featured various designs that reflected the religion, culture and politics of the 17-18th centuries (Reilly p. xiv). Puritan religious beliefs influenced not only religious publications but also poetry and other literary writing. Use of angels, skulls and skeletons can be seen along with the simply decorative flowers. Reilly also notes that regional distinctions can be determined with New England being influenced by the British with angels, urns and flowers while the middle colonies especially Pennsylvania and New York were influenced by the German's bold use of line, rococo style and allegory. The southern areas came later in the colonial period to printing, and some were influenced by the French delicate and finely crafted designs.



Famous Stories and Verse. The Home University Bookshelf. v. 5. NY: The University Press, 1938.
(tailpieces p. 137 "The Tempest" by C. & M. Lamb



and p. 302 "The Story of Cuchulain,
an Irish Legend")



Evangeline and Other Poems by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. NY: F.M. Publishing Co, [188?]
(contains 7 circular tailpieces)

Although printers' ornaments usually did not reflect the subject of the publication, some publishers did include tailpieces to compliment the general focus of their books. Take for example two 20th century publications by Charles T. Tuttle of Rutland, VT., *The Ornamented Chair* (1960) and *The Ornamented Tray* (1971), both, the work of the Historical Society of Early American Decoration, contained specially designed and placed tailpieces as well as initial block letter designs. The same style initial blocks were used in each book, but the tailpieces, six in *The Ornamented Chair* and eight in *The Ornamented Tray*, were elements of designs discussed within the text. Although the publications do not state how these ornaments were decided upon, the following information is given. In the former, "Book design and typography by J.Y. Kilpatrick" is noted, and in the latter "Book plan by Roland A. Mulhauser." However, five of the tailpieces were seen prior to 1960 in the Society's journal, *The Decorator*. So it is evident that the editor for both volumes, Zilla Lea, appreciated their use in the earlier publications (see p.66, 87, 118, 146 in *Ornamented Chair* and see table of contents in *Ornamented Tray*).



The Ornamented Tray. Ed. by Zilla R. Lea. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1971.
(tailpiece p.33)



The Ornamented Chair. Ed. by Zilla R. Lea. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1960.
(tailpiece p.118)

Tailpieces feature many designs that have been and continue to be reflected in decorative work today. Members of HSEAD continue to reproduce, with paint and pen, decorative themes expressed especially in the 1800s such as baskets and urns of flowers and fruit, musical instruments, ships, birds and hearts. Flourishes are sometimes used to also decorate the edges of boxes, trays or other decorative work.



The Fatal Consequences of the Unscripted Doctrine of Predestination and Reprobation; with a caution against. it. Written in High-Dutch by M.K. and translated an [sic] desire. Germantown [Pa], Printed and sold by Christopher Sowr [sic], 1753. p.14.

Photo from book publ. in 1753 provided by Am. Antiq. Soc.

and

Reproduction of 19th c. Theorem

The fashion of using printers' ornaments in book decoration may have faded, but examples can still be found, perhaps in private or specialized publications. Although the use of color in printing books made a major impact on their decoration the small, often unnoticed, ornaments of the past represent a very interesting object of study.



*Golden Stories. Home University Bookshelf. v. 2. NY: The University Press, 1938.
(tailpiece p.378 poem "The Best Tree")*

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(tailpiece p. 25 poem "Cheerfulness" by Lawrence Labbee)



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Eliza Ann Parker Her Painting and Prose

by Sandra Cohen



Eliza Ann Parker Theorem

Courtesy of Folk Art Museum Collection, Colonial Williamsburg

The year was 1804, a leap year. On the national scene, Thomas Jefferson followed John Adams and became the country's third President. The Industrial Revolution was making its way from England to the United States, and in addition to farming, manufacturing began to flourish, especially in Massachusetts. If family circumstances allowed, children, boys and girls, were given opportunities to attend school, and Massachusetts, especially the Southborough area, has an impressive history of supporting the value of education, particularly for children.

According to the Historical Society of Southborough, Mass., on March 10, 1804, Eliza Ann Parker was born in this little town 25 miles west of Boston to Swain and Caroline Parker. A third generation resident, she later married Dr. Adolphus Brigham of Shrewsbury, a neighboring community, where they lived after their marriage on November 10, 1828. As recorded by Eliza Ann, this was also the year that she completed her Theorem. Prior to Adolphus becoming a physician, he taught school in Southborough, where Eliza had been one of his former students. Sadly, Eliza died three years after their marriage on March 21, 1831 just eleven days after her 27th birthday.

The Southborough Historical Society's documentation states that there is a burial marker on the Parker family plot in the town's cemetery inscribed with the names of Swain and Caroline's three daughters, Nancy Mariah, Eliza Ann and Wealthy. According to the town's records, she and

her sisters, all between the ages of 18 and 27, died of consumption (TB). The Swain's youngest and only surviving child, Hiram Parker (b.1815), survived and later fathered six sons.

Eliza's Theorem, painted on cotton velvet (14 5/8" x 18 1/4"), depicts a generous variety of fruits with a melon snugly nestled in a woven yellow handled basket on a fringed base. According to Laura Barry, Juli Grainger Curator of Paintings, Drawing and Sculpture at the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, "we know from analytical testing that theorem artists used watercolor based paints. What gives them the oil-like appearance is the gum Arabic that binds the watercolor pigment and water. That supports period descriptions/recipes as well." One can see from the picture of the original that time has compromised the arrangement's original colors. However, Eliza has charmingly captured the beauty of nature's bounty. She has also shared two inscriptions written in ink on paper edged with gilt and attached to the lower left and right corners of the painting. On the left side, she observes,

"Each pleasing art lends softness to the mind.
And by our studies are our lives refined."

On the right side, we are grateful to find, "Executed by Eliza Ann Parker Southboro A.D. 1828."



Another photo of the original clearly shows the green color.

The following is an interesting reference that seemingly supports the provenance of Eliza Ann's theorem. In *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller: The Woman in the Family* by Bernice Kert, we learn about Abby's friendships in the art world. Holger Cahill, a prominent writer and scholar in the arts organized an exhibit, *American Folk Art: Art of the Common Man in America 1750-1900* in 1932 at the Museum of Modern Art in NYC. Cahill convinced Edith Halpert (who ran the Downtown Gallery in NYC) and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, two ardent collectors of Modern Art, that folk art played an inherent role in America's art tradition and that these early

paintings and sculptures were the forerunners of modern art. Together with Cahill, Halpert opened the American Folk Art Gallery in NYC in 1931, and with Halpert's guidance, Abby began to seriously collect early American folk art. Abby's Theorem Collection, part of the The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection at Colonial Williamsburg, has one of the largest and loveliest collection of Theorem paintings. Holger Cahill said that "...Women[s].... knowledge of textiles and dyes explains the quality of the velvet paintings which they made and which are a distinct contribution to the tradition of still-life painting in this country." Colonial Williamsburg's attribution number, 1931.403.5, Museum Purchase and Vendor listing for the Eliza Ann Parker Theorem, entitled *Full Basket*, indicates that this Theorem was purchased from Mrs. Edith Gregor Halpert.

Nina Fletcher Little notes in her book, *The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection* that Eliza's theorem "is one of a group of six similar compositions formed by using the same individual Theorems." She suggests that they were composed "from one model, probably a lithograph." Other resources on Theorem painting suggest that a single vendor produced the stencils which were then sold through stores or ladies' magazines and were often accompanied by an instruction book, allowing many women to forgo formal instruction. It's believed that such easy access led to the popularity and spread of Theorem painting beyond that of a school girl activity. For many of us who admire the art of Theorem painting, Eliza Ann Parker's work is special for its appealing composition and its thoughtful sentiment. Her talent and words share such a personal insight about this lovely young woman. In addition, her signature, place and date (rarely found on Theorems) are enormously helpful in documenting the art of Theorem Painting.

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The American Museum in Britain

by Dennis Lambert



American Museum in Britain

The American Museum in Britain opened in July 1961 in a 19th century three-story Manor House, set on 125 acres of woods and gardens, on the outskirts of Bath. Dallas Pratt, an American Psychiatrist and collector, and John Judkyn, a British antiques dealer, wanted to establish a museum in England to show the people of Europe, America's history and culture including the skills and crafts of its early settlers. Pratt and Judkyn hoped to recreate the domestic lifestyle of colonists with an outstanding collection of antiques from the early Colonial Period to the 19th century. The Manor House offered a number of suites to accommodate a variety of Period Rooms, and its outstanding collection of artifacts, dating back to the 17th century, would enable all rooms to be furnished and fashioned authentically. Some of the rooms themselves have paneled walls and floors made from vintage wood from the era depicted and brought here from America. The following photographs, supplied by the Museum, demonstrate its attention to creating each authentic detail.



Signed Lintel

Conkey's Tavern

The tavern was created to show the main room of the Wayside Tavern, situated on a crossroads outside of Pelham, Massachusetts. Conkey's Tavern, built by William Conkey

in 1758, owes its celebrity to Daniel Shay who met there with fellow patriots to plan Shay's Rebellion, an armed uprising in 1786, against the government of Massachusetts. When William Conkey died in 1788, his son took over the Tavern until his death in 1841 when it closed. The Museum has faithfully reproduced the main room. The massive stone lintel over the fire place has the inscription, "William Conkey, June ye 21st 1776."

17th Century Massachusetts Keeping Room

The Keeping Room, the main room of the house, essentially combined the kitchen, dining and living areas. This furnished space would indicate that the Puritan family was well established and prosperous. The Puritans came to America to escape religious persecution and to practice their



Keeping Room

beliefs freely and without fear. Here, a huge bible sits on the table, an English clock and an iron breast plate adorn the wall. The term, "How are you keeping?" is a derivation of, where are you keeping, meaning where are you living.

Shaker Sisters' Room

In the early 1920s, Edward Deming Andrews and his wife, Faith Young Andrews, realizing that the quickly dwindling Shaker communities would soon be a thing of the past, began to research, write and collect everything reminiscent of the Shaker Community. Over the years their collection grew immensely and became of great importance to preserving the legacy of the Shakers for future generations. Their attempts succeeded in housing the collection in three ideal places: Winterthur Museum, Hancock Shaker Village and The American Museum in Britain.

The center piece of the Shaker Sisters' Room is a mannequin dressed in full Shaker Sisters' costume, a long flowing brown cotton dress from the mid-1800's, a shawl, white linen collar and blue silk collar band.

The particular Shaker Community for these items is unknown. Next to the mannequin is a small ribbon making loom, designed and built by the Shakers. The unusual looking wood burning stove is also a Shaker design. The patterns would have been made by the Shakers in preparation for the casting



Shaker Room

Shaker dress, wood stove and Shaker pegs on walls for hanging clothes and accessories

of the stove parts. The actual process of casting the iron was done in non-Shaker foundries by the ‘world’s people,’ as the Shakers called the outside world.

Pennsylvania German Room

Many Swiss and German settlers emigrated to Pennsylvania in the 1700s. The fusion of the ‘old world’ with the ‘new world’ produced very distinctive, colorful designs attributed to the culture in the region. The settlers’ German and Swiss origins are echoed in the ornamented furniture and the many Fraktur Paintings that adorn this room.

This room has a very fine collection of American Painted Tinware that includes trunks, bread pans, waiters, coffee pots, tea canisters, syrup cups and mugs, all displayed on an open kitchen dresser. The tinware shops of Edward Pattison, Oliver and Harvey Filley, Frederick Zeitz, and



Open Kitchen Dresser

American painted tinware in open kitchen dresser (hutch)

Oliver Buckley are handsomely represented. Some of the tinware is pictured in the Historical Society of Early American Decoration’s publication, *American Painted Tinware: A Guide to Its Identification*, Vols. 1, 2, and 4, by Gina Martin and Lois Tucker.

Also on display are many Fraktur Paintings; one in particular, described by Curator Laura Beresford in her book, *Folk Art From The American Museum in Britain*, is a Taufschein, an illuminated certificate to celebrate the birth of Maria Klotz in 1810. The Fraktur was done on paper with pen and ink and a limited palette of red, yellow and umber water color paints. Although simple in design, the overall effect is very pleasing.



Painted Fraktur (Taufschein)

Two tulips rise from the lower two corners to meet two flying angels in the top two corners. The inscription, which is very neatly written, is enclosed in a painted circular design. These flying angels have been found in other Frakturs. The artist's name has remained elusive, but researchers have dubbed him or her, the flying angel or 'blowsy' angel artist.

Stenciled Bedroom

An early 1700's home from Wyndham, Connecticut offers an example of stenciled wall painting done after 1835. The unidentified oak leaf pattern was probably executed by an itinerant decorative painter, and unfortunately, the artists who decorated many of these floors, walls and furnishings remain anonymous. A stenciled basket of red roses with leaves and stems is the central design on the bed coverlet. The same rose design continues around the edge creating an attractive border. Two corners of the coverlet



Bedroom, Stenciled Walls, Furnishings and Bed Coverlet

of the coverlet have been cut away to accommodate the bed posts.

Two mirrors, partially obscured by the bed netting, hang on the far walls. An Empire Looking Glass from c.1830 hangs on the right. The columns would have been turned on a lathe, gilded and finished,

then split down the middle to make half-round sections. Square corner blocks, usually decorated in some manner, attach to the four corners of the wooden base frame. A Reverse Glass Painting is featured at the top. A Courting Mirror or Looking Glass in a Box is on the left. These mirrors originally came from Northern Europe and were a customary courting gift. The box in which they came, considered part of the mirror, was usually hung on the wall to enclose the mirror. This mirror still has it's box.



"Little Girl in a Pink Dress"

Folk Art Gallery

On one wall are portraits by Ammi Phillips, Sturtevant J. Hamblin, John Brewster Jr., William Matthew Prior and others. When the portrait, "The Little Girl in a Pink Dress," was acquired, it was thought to be painted by William Matthew Prior. Conservation work in 2009, in preparation for an Exhibition of American Folk Art, revealed much more detail. After careful research by Laura Beresford, Curator at the time, the painting's artist was identified as Sturtevant J. Hamblin, Prior's brother-in-law. Backboard removal at the same time also revealed the little girls name as Emma Thompson.



"Boy with a Pull Toy" and "Girl with Flowers and a Book"



"The Vicksburg Campaign"
signed, C.C. Churchill

Born in Portland, Maine in 1817, Sturtevant J. Hamblin, known to be active as a portrait painter between 1837-1856, was 11 years old when William Matthew Prior married Hamblin's sister, Rosamond, in 1828. Quite possibly, his style of painting was influenced by Prior who was painting at that time. The similar-

ities between them are very close. Both painted to suit the finances of the customer, and both could produce finer quality work when the occasion demanded. Hamblin retired from professional painting around 1856 to join his brother in the tailoring business.

Sturtevant's brother-in-law, Prior, born in Bath, Maine in 1806, had a successful painting career spanning 50 years. He also advertised his skill for bronzing, oil gilding, decorative and sign painting as well as Reverse Glass Painting. Although an accomplished artist, Prior, as many other artists, would also paint to the customers' budget. He advertised that "persons wishing for a flat picture, can have a likeness without shade or shadow, for a quarterprice." The portraits, "*Boy with a Pull Toy*" and "*Girl with Flowers and a Book*" are examples of his flat pictures. On the opposite gallery wall are scenic paintings and one in particular, "*The Vicksburg Campaign*," signed C.C. Churchill, depicts an historical battle from the American Civil War where Union Soldiers, while laying siege to Vicksburg, are constructing an assault tunnel across a field towards the Confederate Army. The tunnel sides are being made from earth filled wooden cylinders. The roof is made from tightly packed bundles of wooden sticks. The artist, who was there at the time and may have been a soldier, has inscribed in the lower right hand corner, "Vicksburg from memory."

Theorem Painting, often considered one of the "early school girl arts," enjoyed popularity in the first half of the 1800s. It was taught in young ladies' academies, along with other art forms, such as decorative needle work, appropriate and practical for young women at that time.

Theorem Painting, the process of using multiple stencil sheets to build the composition step-by-step, enabled the students to achieve a modicum of success fairly quickly. The oil on velvet Theorem displayed here is quite large (44 1/4 inches wide by 26 inches high). Many Theorem Paintings suffer the same anonymity as other works in the area of decorative art. However, the complexity and scale of the Theorem convey that this person was knowledgeable and skilled. Unfortunately, the colors have greatly degraded and in some areas are gone altogether. Reds turn brown over time, and possibly, the parrot would have had some reds and yellows on his body.

The American Museum in Britain is the only Museum outside of America that is devoted solely to American history and culture and well worth visiting if you ever travel to England. I have focused on the few Period Rooms that reflect the early American decorative arts. However, the Museum also exhibits authentic artifacts in the Greek Revival Room, Lee Room and the Textiles Room, displaying its important collection of quilts that have been added since the Museum opened. The surrounding grounds also offer reproductions of a Mount Vernon Garden, a Colonial Vegetable Patch and Herb Garden, a Parkland Walk and Arboretum.



Parrot Theorem

I extend my gratitude to the Staff at the American Museum in Britain for making my visit enjoyable and for its assistance and courteously sharing the resources and photographs for this article.

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Bookshelf

The Accomplished Lady: A History of Genteel Pursuits c. 1660 - 1860

by
Noel Riley

Published by Oblong Press and printed in the United Kingdom by Latimer Trend
2017. Hardcover, 460 pages, 415 illustrations. \$65.00

An Overview by Sandra Cohen

In Europe in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, many women, particularly those with social status, successfully ignored and/or overcame social impediments to lead productive and creatively fulfilling lives. Not all women accepted their socially designated roles as accessories and homemakers for their husbands and families. Riley's treatise presents us with a litany of women who developed their own legacies; it is an illustrated anthology of countless innovative ladies who exercised their personal initiative, despite obstacles, and pushed the envelope to assert and pursue their ambitions. Each woman's story could probably begin with an "in spite of..." or "even though..." or "as long as she..." However, all manage to finesse the ways and means necessary to accomplish their goals. Their stories of persistence, ingenuity, acquired knowledge and skills, as well as their creativity are admirable. Many of the names will be familiar to you; books have been written about many of them individually. However, Riley's book not only offers us three centuries of these accomplished ladies and their genteel pursuits, it also presents them in the context of their time, families and social conventions and their "noncreative activities — reading, writing, card playing, sports, dancing and music," utilizing all this "connective tissue" to create a better understanding of these women's lives and pursuits.

"A Women's Lot," "Educating a Lady" and "Reading and Literary Pursuits," chapters 1,2 and 3 respectively, introduce the odyssey of *The Accomplished Lady: A History of Genteel Pursuits c. 1660-1860*. It lays a well researched foundation for the roles of women of leisure from the mid 17th to mid 19th centuries. In general, women, particularly those "who came





Temple of the Muses

Robert Ackermann's "Temple of the Muses" in Finsbury, from *Ackermann's Repository*, April 1809

from that portion of the population, from royalty to gentry, known in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as 'society,'..... were barred from positions in government, the professions, the universities and the church.....[To] work for money would be to defy the moral and financial

protection of her menfolk..... a double threat to male power and female independence." History has demonstrated that some of these young ladies from socially prominent families were deployed as political pawns, as property and bearers of a dowry, but, for the most part, with no legal right to retain personal property; working toward her own personal aggrandizement was surely unacceptable.

By nature, women as well as men, (basically, any repressed people), will find a way to express themselves, and art has almost always been the most accessible and psychologically healthy medium for self expression. Laws and convention aside, women of leisure, whose lives were defined by legal and social mores, used their ingenuity and voices and developed ways for their voices to be heard. Subtlety and wit become a clever feminine wile for the wives of men of power with positions in society as well as for courtesans.

Riley's book is replete with examples of English women who defied convention by using their innate as well as acquired skills through the educational opportunities afforded to ladies in the areas of refinement and housewifery. Satisfying intellectual curiosities and demonstrating an interest or wit in topics would be discouraged in girls. Said Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, "There



Japanned Tin Tray

Japanned Tin Tray with a fishing scene after a George Morland painting, *A Party Angling*, c. 1790
 Courtesy of Peter Francis

is no part of the world where our sex is treated with so much contempt as in England.... We are educated in the grossest ignorance, and no art omitted to stifle our natural reason...our knowledge must rest concealed, and be as useless to the world as gold in the mine.”

During the 18th and 19th centuries there was a burst of growth in the book trade giving rise to

personal and public libraries which created an available source of education and pleasure for many, especially women. Some women would no longer be content with just the Bible and other spiritual reading material, and as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu said, “No entertainment is so cheap as reading, nor any pleasure so lasting.” Others of a more traditional, moral



Horse-chestnut
(*Aesculus Hippocastanum*),
cut paper collage by Mary Delany
Courtesy of the Trustees
of the British Museum



Cut Paper 'Gallant' Figures
A sheet of cut paper grotesque or comic 'gallant' figures,
early 19 Century Private Collection

temperament like Hester Chapone, (author of *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, addressed to a Young Lady*) understood the attraction of popular novels, but also stated that “the greatest care should be taken in the choice of these fictitious stories that so enchant the mind— most of which tend to inflame the passions of youth, whilst the chief purpose of education should be to moderate and restrain them.”

I am reminded of a poster, entitled *Pursuing Refinement*, available from Historic Deerfield depicting a portrait by Ralph Earl (American 1751-1801) of Sally Buel. Young Sally, the daughter of a prominent Connecticut family, is seated in her fine attire



Pin-Pricked Picture

A pin-pricked picture or 'Amelia'
by America Blackburn, 1830's

Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

with a book on her lap. The byline, "Useful Improvements, Innumerable Temptations: Pursuing Refinement in Rural New England, 1750-1850," conveys this universal message regarding the act of reading by young ladies. Riley's book also invokes an interesting comparison between ladies in England and in New England.

Printing presses and publishing houses made literature, newsletters, diaries, social, religious

and political treatises abundantly available, and this proliferation of information and ideas fostered a more enlightened society. A plethora of books, accessible for men and women, opened minds and opportunities; women became writers as well as avid readers. There was a surge of ladies' magazines; history is rich with women diarists and more women emerged as poets and novelists; Jane Austen, the Brontes, Mary Wollstonecraft and so many others. Women had also found their own voice. Mary Astell, an early English feminist and author of *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest*, (all of her books were published anonymously), advocated for women's equality in educational opportunities.

Riley reminds us that it is, therefore, not surprising that women discovered a variety of personally fulfilling outlets. Her chapters on "The Sporting Lady" and "Dancing and Public Entertainment" are filled with Diana Sperling's charming watercolor drawings whimsically depicting women enjoying a number of activities including horseback riding, dancing, fighting for the shuttlecock (a form of badminton), chess and swim-



Unidentified Young Lady Painting,
by Paul Sandy c. 1770

Note the specially equipped painting table.

Royal Collection Trust

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2015



Theorum on Velvet

A flower garland painted on white velvet
Author's Collection

ming and fishing. In the arts and crafts, Mary Delany, 1700-1788, (*Mrs. Delany: Her Life and Her Flowers* by Ruth Hayden) was an accomplished artist, designer, musician, naturalist, collector, writer and more. As Riley states, "Mary Delany is the yardstick by which we can assess the creative success of others; there was hardly anything she did not do." Women recorded their recipes and home remedies associated with housewifery as well as writing poetry and diary accounts (Lady Grisell Baillie, 1665-1746, records in

more than 1000 pages, the accounts of her household). Mary, Duchess of Beaufort (1630-1715), Margaret, Duchess of Portland (1715-1785) and her contemporary, Lady Anne Monson (1727-1776) were avid gardeners at the very least and acknowledged horticulturists of the very best. In all, they designed gardens, carefully collected and meticulously recorded hundreds of plant varieties. Gardening was accepted as an indulgence for ladies, and yet their efforts and noteworthy results were recognized by distinguished botanists.

As long as a ladies' interests and pursuits didn't stray into areas "that led them too far from dutiful devotion to their menfolk or led them into seriously challenging pursuits tended to be frowned upon as lacking propriety, female virtues rested in the domestic sphere, and at home women were allowed to shine." Generations of inculcating women with a submissive nature isn't eradicated quickly, and moderation seemed a more tenable tact.

Riley's chapters on "Embroidery" and "Threads and Ribbons" handsomely explore the variety of textile arts. For most women, the ability to sew was required, but for 'genteel ladies,' forms of less practical sewing, such as needlework, were more attuned to her leisure and lifestyle. The history of textiles goes back to ancient times; now take a quantum leap from its inception to the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and notice its evolution in function and form, from necessity to fashion and accessory. Artifacts and paintings, windows into past cultures, customs, lifestyles and aesthetics, give us a vivid array of the styles in dress, in furnishings and in the decorative arts. Artists, George Romney and Thomas Gainsborough portrayed



A Spinning Baskets for Pictures, Kiosks, Ranges & Stoves



Designs for Painted Decoration

*A page of designs from Stalker and Parker's
Treatise of Japanning and Varnishing*

their accomplished young subjects at the spinning wheel (a luxury only affordable to the wealthy) and netting (crocheting lacy loops and knots); Queen Charlotte gave Mary Delany, an artist, a lovely set of several needlework tools, an indispensable requirement for ladies practicing the serious avocation. Skill levels graduated from the simple to the sophisticated, and the sampler or ‘exempler’ became a record of the embroiderers’ progressing techniques with continual additions as her skills advanced. Artistically embroidered embellishments such as upholstery, picturesque wall panels, fashionable needlework

details for clothing from head to toe, bobbinlace work, patchwork quilts and feltwork collages were all admired for their level of skill and beauty.

Time was an asset for the English ‘genteel lady,’ and her creativity manifested itself in a variety of arts and crafts. Chapters on “Beadwork,” “Shellwork” and “Nature into Art” illustrate the delicacy of beautiful materials such as Italian glass beads, tiny naturally shaped organic sea shells, feathers, sand and seaweed, pressed flowers and more that lend themselves to elegant, ornamental expressions.

Riley’s Chapter on “Paperwork” illustrates Mary Delany’s delicately cut and painted flowers, and her collages included newly discovered worldwide, botanical specimens which she annotated in the recently introduced Linnaean system for naming plants. Over 900 of Delaney’s collages are in the Prints and Drawing Department of the British Museum. Painting, particularly flower painting, was quite acceptable for women, and Riley identifies and illustrates a number of women and their painted art that truly invites us to discover more about their lives and works. Mary Beale (*Mary Beale* by Tabitha Barber) is one such artist. Fortunate to have the support of her husband, Beale was a prolific portraitist, in spite of the fact that portrait painting was frowned upon for women because



Design Motifs on Table Cabinet

A table cabinet shows a multitude of border designs on the drawer fronts and other motifs on the doors. Courtesy of Christie's, South Kensington

“their calling might involve them in the indelicacy of staring in men’s faces.” Mary Delany also emerges as a talented artist in oils who copied the masters, and I was prompted to read her biography, *Mrs. Delany, Her Life and Her Flowers* by Ruth Hayden, which is an inspiring testament to her independence, resourcefulness and creativity.

A hallmark of Riley’s book is that she highlights a variety of women and samples of their works allowing us to pursue and discover more on our own. There is a color drawing from *Illustrations from Specimens of the Flora from South Africa* by a Lady (Lady Arabella Roupell, a botanical artist). Interior color artwork by Ellen Best, Charlotte Bosenquet and Caroline Vernon are meticulously detailed from floor to ceiling with fashionable furnishings. View a page from an illuminated manuscript by Sarah Steurart Fripp and painted porcelain by China painters, Mary Moggridge and Lady Amelia Murray as well as more work from women for whom their talent and work was more than a frivolous avocation.

Chapters on “Japanning” and “Penwork” will resonate with members of the Historical Society of Early American Decoration. The informative description of lacquering and a detailed overview with excerpts of Stalker and Parker’s *Treatise of Japanning and Varnishing* are credible references. Enter Mary Delany, again, sharing her new skill of Japanning in a letter to her sister in 1731: “I am going to do boxes for a toilette,” and a few months later, she mentioned a “Japan book which tells you how to polish your work.” Delany is among those few Japanners credited with keeping



Decorated Workbox

A workbox of exceptional quality has a classical battle scene on the lid and fine watercolor paintings on the lids of the compartments inside; it is dated 1816, an early date for Penwork. Private Collection

this technique alive until the mid 1800's when professional interest was renewed. Chinoiserie patterns were seen in both Japanning and Penwork. Riley also offers examples of neoclassical designs from several editions of Ackermann's monthly magazine, *The Repository of Arts*. "With the black background and varnish finish," the overall effect gave the appearance of Indian ivory inlaid work. In her treatise, *The Young Ladies Book*, Mrs. Henry Mackarness suggests that whenever possible, ladies reproduce their patterns directly from Indian and Chinese ivory cabinets. The most stunning illustrated work is one of a pair of cabinets by Augusta M. Alderson that combines Indian style floral festoons and swags in

penwork on the exterior. On the inside of the doors, a border of continued penwork surrounds authentically painted botanical bouquets of flowers, while the front of the drawers showcase additional beautifully painted floral specimens. The piece is inscribed, "Commenced painting this Cabinet Sept 24 1842...Finished May 23 1845. Augusta M. Alderson." A detailed picture of this cabinet may be viewed in Riley's previous book entitled, *Penwork: A Decorative Phenomenon* published in 2008.

Not surprisingly, we again meet our multi-talented Mrs. Delany in the chapter on "Silhouettes," where we learn that the daughters of George III, Princesses Elizabeth and Charlotte, enjoyed cutting paper profiles and apparently were quite accomplished. Also, their mother's friend, "Mrs. Delany, was a keen silhouettist; examples of her creations are at Longleat." Mary Wray, a distinguished profiler, liked to depict her sitters engaged in parlor activities such as needlework or spending time with their children, while other sitters are portrayed indulging in afternoon tea. Some of Wray's

formal portraits would include the dramatic effect of a drape pulled to the side for her more distinguished sitters such as scientist/ composer, Sir William Herschel; philosopher, David Hume and artists, Benjamin West and Mary Delany! It's no wonder that the multi-talented Delany would write *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mrs. Delany*, 1879.

Riley's comprehensive tome includes chapters on photography, carving, turning, metalwork, toys and trifles where women with time, interest and talent were also able to excel. The reader is introduced to sculptors and artists, Anne Seymour Damor, Emma Crewe and Lady Diana Beauclerk whose designs were used by Josiah Wedgwood. Hand screens, fans, glove boxes, purses and more begged for ornamental embellishments; these handmade 'trifles' were fashioned to please the eye. Women and their male counterparts involved in the arts recognized opportunity and were at times able to find compatibility and mutual respect for their contributions; although, real equality was yet to be realized. By 1860 the Arts and Crafts Movement begins in Great Britain, and during this time, the stage had been set for many more women to become artistic innovators.



"Family Conversation Piece" by Mary Wray
Courtesy of Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum

Noel Riley's survey of the English genteel lady is a thoroughly enlightening and enjoyable resource of individual society ladies and their handiwork in the arts and crafts between 1660 and 1860. Her footnotes attest to her fastidious research, and her textual references and bibliography are a generous gift of further delightful and valuable reading for all of us.



Sandra Cohen is Editor of *The Decorator* and a Docent at the Worcester Art Museum.



Standards for Excellence

“The Historical Society of Early American Decoration grants “A” and “B” and Reproduction Awards for those entries that show excellence in craftsmanship and meet the Society’s Standards” as outlined in more specific detail in *The Standards’ Manual*. The tradition of research and encouraging excellence through evaluation of members’ work began at the Fall Meeting at the Wellesley Hills Country Club, Wellesley, Mass. in 1947 (recorded in Vol. 1, No.2 of *The Decorator*).

The following excerpted overview offers a perspective of the guidelines (reviewed and revised with respect to ongoing research over the years) for recreating historically authentic reproductions submitted for Judging.

“The design of the article submitted must be authentic and appropriate for the piece in size, period and type of decoration. The work must demonstrate techniques that meet the requirements of the category.

The design must include adequate work to demonstrate the craftsman’s ability and to afford the judges enough painting to enable them to make their assessment.

The design and work must meet all General Requirements as well as the Category Requirements. If the design includes other techniques in addition to those of the category, each technique will be judged according to the requirements of that specific category.”

Congratulations and appreciation to all who choose to undergo this process.



Historical Society of Early American Decoration Master Teachers, Master Craftsmen and Specialists

HSEAD Master Teachers

Clark, Maryjane 1962	Gross, Helen 1972
Watts, Margaret 1965	Donnellan, Astrid 1994
Martin, Gina 1968	Grossman, Helen 1997
Hutchings, Dorothy 1969	

HSEAD Master Craftsmen

Bond, Jessica H. 1952	Hutchings, Dorothy 1967
Martin, Virginia (Gina) 1952	Keegan, Cornelia (Phil) 1969
Underhill, Emilie 1952	Wallace, Louise 1970
Watts, Margaret 1952	Edrington, Roberta 1983
Clark, Maryjane 1957	Donnellan, Astrid 1983
Hague, Helen 1957	Lambeth, Deborah 1983
Drury, Bernice 1960	Sherman, Phyllis 1983
Murray, Maria 1960	Hedge, Carolyn 1989/90
Gross, Helen 1962	Heinz, Carol 2010
Cruze, Annetta 1964	Davis, Dortia 2012
Burns, Florence 1967	Brubaker, Linda 2017

HSEAD Specialists

Tucker, Lois / Country Painting 1993
Baker, Ann / Country Painting 1995-96
Edrington, Roberta / Free Hand Bronze 1997 / Victorian Flower Painting 2000
Buonato, Carol / Clock Dials 2004
Dimock, Anne / Reverse Glass 2012
Jewett, Parma/ Country Painting 2016

Sources: *The Decorator*
Chair, The Standards and Judging Committee
Chair, Specialist Awards

**Colonial Williamsburg Spring Exhibition 2018
Members' "A" Awards**

Country Painting
Linda Mason



Victorian Flower Painting
Honors Class
Roberta Edrington



Pontypool
Pauline Bartow



Country Painting
Susan Naddeo

Members' "A" Awards

Theorem
Oil on Velvet
Alexandra Perrot



Country Painting
Linda Sheldon

Theorem
Watercolor on Paper
Linda Brubaker



Penwork
Lois Tucker

Members' "A" Awards



Stenciling on Wood
Linda Brubaker

Country Painting
Linda Mason



Theorem
Watercolor on Paper
Patricia Oxenford

Country Painting
Eve Marschark



Members' "A" Awards



Theorem
Oil on Velvet
Linda Sheldon

Country Painting
Honors Class
Linda Brubaker



Theorem
Watercolor on Paper
Dennis Lambert

Members' "A" Awards



Theorem
Oil on Velvet
Dennis Lambert

Theorem
Oil on Velvet
Dennis Lambert



Pontypool
Linda Mason

Stenciling on Wood
Linda Brubaker



Members' "A" Awards



Free Hand Bronze
Honors Class
Roberta Edrington

Theorem
Oil on Velvet
Dennis Lambert



Pontypool
Linda Mason

Theorem
Watercolor on Paper
Alexandra Perrot



Members' "A" Awards

Country Painting
Linda Brubaker



Theorem
Watercolor on Paper
Dennis Lambert

Country Painting
Patricia Kimber



**Colonial Williamsburg Spring Exhibition 2018
Members' "B" Awards**

Country Painting
Debra Fitts



Pontypool
Dennis Lambert



Country Painting
Nancy Toombs



Reverse Painting on Glass
with Border
Kat Britt

Members' "B" Awards



Country Painting
Nancy Toombs

Country Painting
Kat Britt



Country Painting
Dianne Freiner

Country Painting
Expanded Class
Linda Brubaker



Members' "B" Awards

Country Painting
Debra Fitts



Country Painting
Nancy Toombs

Stenciling on Wood
Linda Brubaker



Country Painting
Expanded Class
Pauline Bartow

Members' "B" Awards



Penwork
Robert Flachbarth

Country Painting
Expanded Class
Linda Brubaker



Country Painting
Nancy Toombs

Theorem
Oil on Velvet
Glenda Barcklow



Members' "B" Awards

Country Painting
Expanded Class
Linda Brubaker



Theorem
Oil on Velvet
Patricia Oxenford

Country Painting
Linda Sheldon



Members' "B" Awards



Country Painting
Dennis Lambert

Pontypool
Alexandra Perrot



Pontypool
Dennis Lambert

Country Painting
Expanded Class
Linda Brubaker



Members' "B" Awards

Country Painting
Nancy Toombs



Country Painting
Dennis Lambert



Stenciling on Tin
Eve Marschark



Stenciling on Wood
Linda Brubaker

Members' "B" Awards



Country Painting
Dennis Lambert

Country Painting
Nancy Toombs



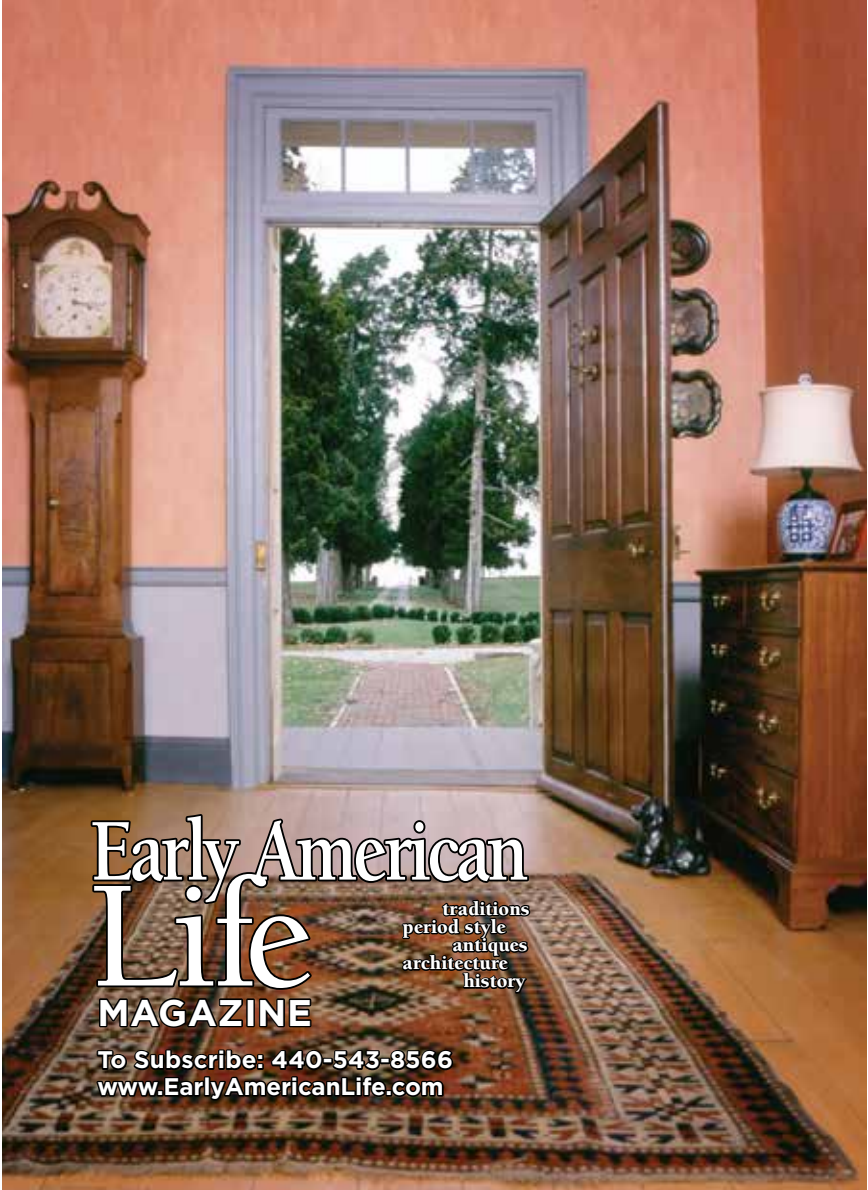
Country Painting
Dennis Lambert

Country Painting
Debra Fitts
(Addition to 2017 Awards List)



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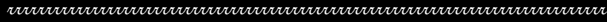


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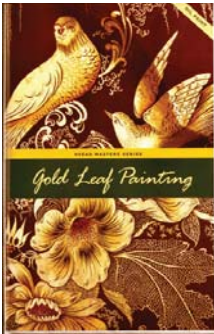
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Historical Society of Early American Decoration

Products and Publications



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Videos include pattern(s), materials/supply list, color data and instructions by “Masters” of the craft. Like having a teacher at your side, these videos allow you to learn or refresh your EAD skills.

Country Painting (VHS tape)	\$25
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Freehand Bronze (DVD)	\$40
Clock Dials (DVD)	\$40
Theorem (DVD)	\$40
Gold Leaf (DVD)	\$40
Reverse Glass Painting (DVD)	\$40

Books

American Painted Tinware:

A Guide to Its Identification (Vol. I, II, III, IV), *hard cover*

This handsome, hard cover, four volume set is the only authoritative and comprehensive source on American painted tinware. A rich historical text, along with hundreds of full color photographs of original pieces and line illustrations of motifs and patterns, will allow you to visually identify the products of these regional tin shops.

\$55 each volume (plus S&H)

A list of HSEAD publications and supplies is available on the website or from the office in Cooperstown.



607-547-5667

• info@hsead.org

• www.hsead.org



Patterns and Supplies

Six stenciling and six country painting patterns are available and are appropriate for applicants. See images on HSEAD.org.

Country Painting on Tinware	\$25
Stenciling on Tinware	\$25

Theorem Kit Includes tracing, laser cuts, color picture and instructions. Contact Office for price and information

Schnader Chair Patterns

Freehand Bronze & Painted Chair Patterns (kit includes 8" x 12" digital color photo & tracing) \$12; Color Catalog of Patterns, \$25



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*Original Octagonal Paper Covered Box c. 1820
(top and front panel)*