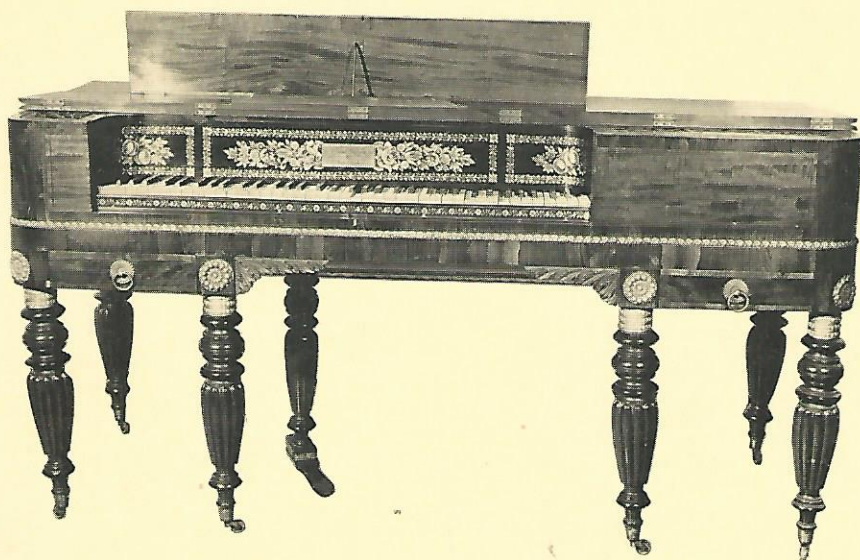


The Decorator

Volume XXVII No. 2

Baltimore, Maryland

Spring 1973



Journal of the
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF
EARLY AMERICAN DECORATION, INC.



HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF EARLY AMERICAN DECORATION, INC.

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Table of Contents

| | | |
|--|---------------------------|----|
| Editorial | <i>Avis Heatherington</i> | 2 |
| The American Piano 1800-1840 | | |
| A Reflection of Taste and Style | <i>Avis Heatherington</i> | 3 |
| President's Report | <i>Virginia Wheelock</i> | 25 |
| Applicants Accepted as New Members | | 27 |
| Members "A" Awards | | 28 |
| Notices from the Trustees | | 41 |
| Certified Teachers | | 43 |
| Master Craftsmen | | 44 |
| Advertisements | | 45 |
| List of Chapters and Officers | | 48 |
| Committee Chairmen | <i>Inside Back Cover</i> | |

COVER PHOTOGRAPH

A piano by Samuel Neilson c.1828-1833 New York
Courtesy, D.A.R. Museum, Washington. (See Detail Fig. 15.)

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EDITORIAL

Often a train of thought starts in strange ways and already accepted facts take on a new dimension. Some time ago, during a conversation with a knowledgeable student of American culture, the subject of the interesting stencil decoration on New York pianos came up. Never having seen or read about a piano with this type of decoration with other than a New York address on the nameboard, I had always assumed this to be a New York characteristic. I sensed my statement to this effect was questioned and this only whetted my curiosity. Researches strengthened my feelings so when recently the same kind of discussion brought forth another questioning air I decided to continue my earlier investigations. The following article on the American piano is the result of my searches to date. Hopefully this will stimulate still more researches into the field of piano decoration and into New York stencilling in particular. A careful examination of the rose in Fig. 15 and Fig. 17 will reveal that the highlight of one petal is on the turn-over and on the opposite petal the highlight is on the petal with the turn-over in shadow. This work is that of master craftsmen and we shall continue to search for their identity. Perhaps it is such men as William Mott listed in Longworth's Directory of 1810 as "fancy chair painter at 51, 56 Broad Street. He certainly was in good company for James Meeks, Cabinetmaker was at 49, 59 Broad Street, Charles Honore Lannuier at 60 and others at 72 and 94 Broad Street. It will take many more readings of the microfilms of the old directories, old newspapers and other sources before one can be sure there are no clues to be found.

AVIS HEATHERINGTON

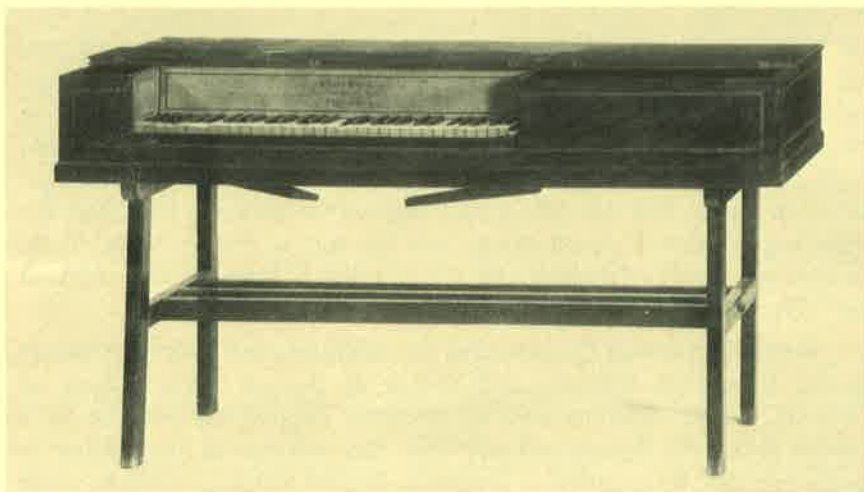


Fig. 1 — Piano by Charles Tawse, Philadelphia c. 1792-93. Courtesy The Hugo Worch Collection of Musical Instruments, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.

THE AMERICAN PIANO 1800-1840

A Reflection of Taste and Style

Avis Heatherington

"What we build is important, but why we built it — and why we liked it when we built it — is even more interesting, and can be understood only as we trace — changing tastes."¹

Ada Louise Huxtable

"The piano did represent an aspiration but almost instantly it became a pretense."²

Arthur Loesser

The story of the American piano during the first forty years of the nineteenth century is probably one of the most revealing of that period. Whatever one's personal vision of the piano may be, it is a fascinating tale. In the musician's view of the period, the delicate harpsichord and clavichord evolve into the powerful pianoforte capable of much greater expression and gradations of volume. To the manufacturers it is a mechanical challenge and to the cabinetmakers it is an opportunity to express their creative genius. The householder sees this new, socially necessary instrument as a piece of fine furniture for his drawing room.

Russell Lynes in *The Tastemakers*³ writes: "Since our story is one of democratic taste in America, I should like to start in the last years of

the 1820's when, it seems from this perspective, the long period of control over taste by a landed and intellectual aristocracy came to an end. For a long time the gentlemanly classes had set the standards of society and from their comfortable mansions they handed down the precepts of taste in art and architecture and fashion. But when Andrew Jackson was elected to the presidency in 1828 on a wave of cocksure Americanism there came with him not only a new 'age of the common man' but the beginning of what I would like to call the Age of Public Taste. Taste became everybody's business and not just the business of the cultured few." The period that we are discussing spans both eras.

Musically this was the period of the great creative masters, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven Schubert and Weber in Europe. Such pianists as Clementi, Dussek, Hummel and Stiebert were popular abroad. The great London firm, John Broadwood and Sons, had sent one of their pianos to Beethoven and he guarded it jealously. Earlier musical concepts were being changed.

Since the new pianoforte strings were struck with hammers greater expression could be produced by variations in the finger touch on the keys. This had not been possible on the harpsichord since its strings were plucked by a quill. Even though the early pianos available to Mozart, Beethoven and Haydn could not produce the fine tonal changes or have the wide range of present day keyboard instruments, they did provide a means for greater musical expression than the popular harpsichord. These frail wooden pianos with their fine wire strings and slight tension could not produce the sonority or range of today but they were the beginnings of the piano as we know it now. An example of these early pianos is seen in Fig. 1. by Charles Tawse (Taws or Tawes) of Philadelphia made between 1792 and 1793 and closely resembles the European and English instruments of the period. It is of mahogany with satinwood inlay as the only decoration. The nameboard is inscribed—Charles Tawes, Musical Instrument Maker, Philadelphia. The trestle base is separate. The nameboard shown in Fig. 2 is from a piano made by Charles Albrecht, another famous early pianoforte maker in Philadelphia. The painted floral decoration is typical of that found on late eighteenth and early nineteenth century painted furniture. It suits these early delicate instruments admirably. The harpsichord and clavichord ancestry of Fig. 1 is evident in the design and decoration and obviously belonged to elegant drawing-rooms where musical evenings were held. Both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were known to have owned such instruments. In 1762 Josiah Quincy of Boston writes of his visit to Charleston, South Carolina: "The music was good — the two bass viols and French horns were grand. One Abercrombie, a Frenchman just arrived, played



Fig. 2 — Nameboard from a piano by Charles Albrecht, c. 1798 Philadelphia
Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution

the first violin and a solo incomparably better than any that I have ever heard. He cannot speak a word of English, and has a salary of 500 guineas a year from the St. Cecelia Society. There were upward of two hundred ladies present and it was called no great number.”⁴ This society was formed in 1762 as a club for lovers of serious music. Other early musical societies include one in Stoughton, Mass., in 1774 followed by Harvard’s Musical Society, Yale’s Singing Club as well as the ones in Salem, Newport, Hartford and Providence. The Boston Phil-harmonic Society formed in 1810 and the Handel and Haydn Choral Society in 1815 were early Boston efforts toward “cultivating and improving a correct taste in the performance of sacred music and also to introduce into more general practice the works of Handel, Haydn and other eminent composers.”⁵

Philadelphia had early support for local musical activities. In 1792 the New Theatre was built on Chestnut Street and such native composers as Alexander Reinagle and Francis Hopkinson were active in the Quaker City along with other musicians of Scottish, English and German ancestry. Baltimore had a music society before 1799 and was the home of many excellent pianoforte makers a few years later. Early interest in serious music in New York was possibly limited. Theaters for ballad opera and musicals had opened as early as 1750. Various musical societies had started but none lasted until the Choral Society was formed in 1824 for the enjoyment of serious music.

However much we might wish to believe that the piano served a large musically sophisticated public by 1790 such is not the case. Enormous quantities of one and two page song sheets were either imported or printed here. The popular taste was for these gay melodies taken from music heard at the musicals and at the popular pleasure gardens built to imitate Vauxhall Park in London. Such titles as *Sweet is the Balmy Breath of Spring*, *Sweet Nan of Hampton Green*, *Lovely Spring* and thousands more were purchased and sung to the accompaniment of the piano by sweet young ladies. Dance tunes and Scottish airs as well as

stirring marches were also popular. Instruction in the piano was a must for any young lady whose family could afford a piano and music teachers, talented and otherwise were busy. For most of these pupils it was more a social accomplishment than any desire to become a serious musician. Previously, young ladies sat at the harpsichord or clavichord but by 1800 the piano was becoming a standard piece of drawing-room furniture and every family yearned for this luxury. The Broadwood, Clementi and Astor firms in London were the foremost pianoforte makers there and their expensive pianos lent great prestige in any American home. They were imported in great numbers until the War of 1812 and after the Treaty of Ghent in 1814 enormous quantities were dumped on the American market, causing serious problems in the small American piano making businesses. The Astor piano (Fig. 3) is typical of the instruments being imported from London at this time. By 1820 the number of piano makers had grown tremendously as had the population. Westward expansion was opening a new market and aside from the Panic of 1819 everyone was in an expansive mood. In the New York Directories, many listings change from cabinetmaker to pianoforte maker during the early 1820ies and by the end of the decade there were dozens of makers of pianos, some large firms, others small. Many of the larger firms had both a warehouse and a store where both pianos of their own manufacture as well as imported ones were sold. Here too they sold sheet music and all kinds of other musical merchandise. The small makers

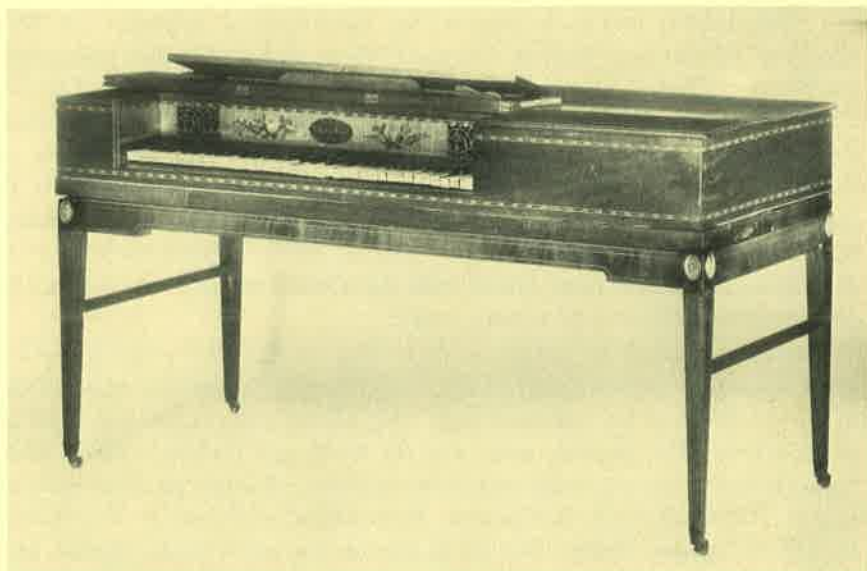


Fig. 3 — Piano by Astor and Company c. 1799-1815 London
Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution

seem to have made pianos for a few brief years and then returned to their original business of cabinetmaking. Among this group are such well known names as Jonas Chickering who had begun as a cabinetmaker in 1818 and went to Boston as an apprentice to a pianomaker. In New York, John Tallman continued to list himself as a cabinetmaker from 1816 through 1825 then as a pianoforte maker until 1839-40. A Henry Meeks, whose identity with the family of Joseph Meeks who established the fashionable cabinetmaking shop at 43-45 Broad Street, has not been established. He does however list himself as a cabinetmaker in 1825, then a musical instrument maker until 1830 when the first listing of piano forte maker is seen. This listing continues until 1835. The concentration of pianoforte makers on Broadway in New York during the 1830ies is revealing. Here we find the firms of Jason Neilson, Dubois and Stodart, Bridgland and Jardine, Henry Meeks, Thomas Loud, Samuel Neilson, Robert and William Nunns, William Geib and others while Maiden Lane has the Geib music store, and on Pearl is Firth and Hall music store. Fashionable Barclay Street boasts John Tallman at #15, Morgan Davis at #63, Thomas Gibson at #61. Early in the century #19 had first been occupied by Whaites and Chartes, followed by Samuel Neilson in 1810 listed as a musical instrument maker, and Joseph Walker, a pianoforte maker. The Walker name was never used on the pianos as far as can be determined so it is assumed that he was a journeyman pianoforte maker. Other adjoining streets displayed equally distinguished signs. No doubt some of the products of these firms were shipped outside the city as the use of metal in piano construction made it possible to safely ship these instruments great distances. The opening of canal systems such as the Erie in 1825 helped in this transportation.

Some of the earliest pianos were probably produced in Philadelphia by John Behrent (or Brent), who in 1775 advertises the completion of "an extraordinary instrument, by the name of pianoforte, in mahogany in the nature of a harpsichord". This was to be followed ten years later by another advertisement for a piano made by James Julian also of Philadelphia. The piano in Fig. 4 also has Philadelphia origins. John Sellers was a pianoforte maker of that city before he moved to Alexandria, Virginia in 1796. This lovely mahogany piano with satinwood inlay has painted scrolls on the nameboard and the name plate reads, John Sellers-Musical Instrument Maker, Alexandria. (Fig. 5). The case and the decoration closely resemble the imported Astor piano in Fig. 3. The case of all these early Philadelphia pianos rests on a separate base.

Probably the earliest pianos made in the Boston area were by Benjamin Crehore of Milton, a well known maker of violins, cellos, guitars, drums and flutes. It is believed that he was helped by a musician



Fig. 4 — Piano by John Sellers c. 1810 Alexandria
Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution



Fig. 5 — Detail of Fig. 4

by the name of Peter A. Van Hagen who had come to Boston after a brief stay in New York. He was the new musical conductor of the Federal Street Theater and advertised that he "was prepared to teach harpsichord and pianoforte according to the best London methods" and "repairing and tuning of these instruments attended with skill". The two men knew each other since Crehore also worked at the theater and it is believed that Crehore would have needed help with the piano which was new to him. Van Hagen would have understood the stringing. Crehore was able to make ten or twelve pianos a year and after van Hagen set up his music store in Boston most of the pianos were sold from this shop. Being a music teacher, van Hagen would have known many potential customers. Crehore was important in another way in the early piano world for among apprentices trained in his shop, two would have great influence in American piano making. These men are John Osborn and Alpheus Babcock. They both proved to be personally restless souls but their technical influence was enormous. Osborn later leaves Boston for New York via Albany. Babcock goes to Philadelphia.

In 1819 we find John Osborne on Orange Street in Boston with Jonas Chickering, Lemuel and Timothy Gilbert and others as apprentices. Already his superior instruments were well known in New York and Philadelphia. In 1820 he took James Stewart as a partner. Stewart had come to Baltimore from London in 1812 and made superb pianos there until 1819 when he left for Philadelphia staying there only briefly and arriving in Boston in 1820. This partnership was of short duration for in 1823 we find that Stewart has left Osborn and is a partner with Chickering on Tremont Street. The piano (Fig. 6) made by Stewart and Chickering between 1823 and 1826 is of banded mahogany with little ornamentation. The nameplate is inscribed; Patent, Stewart and Chickering, Makers — Tremont Street, Boston. In 1826 Stewart returned to London as foreman of the shop for the great Collard and Collard firm. Soon after this, in 1829, Osborn too leaves Boston and his difficult and restless nature take him to Albany, but in 1830 we find him at 184 Chambers Street in New York. The directory lists this as the address of the famous firm of William Nunns at this time. Apparently he had only a brief stay as he soon opened a large shop on 14th Street but died shortly thereafter under strange circumstances. He contributed much to the development of the piano both in Boston and New York. He felt that others did not appreciate his superior ability and that some stole his improvements and used them as their own. His pupil, Jonas Chickering was to improve the cast iron plate invented by Alpheus Babcock with whom Osborne had studied under Benjamin Crehore. This invention was to later make American pianos world famous.



Fig. 6 — Piano by Stewart and Chickering c. 1823-26 Boston
Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution

Crehore's other apt pupils, Alpheus and Lewis Babcock were in business at 44½ Newberry Street, Boston in 1810 as Babcock Brothers. In 1813 they took in Thomas Appleton to build pipe organs and the firm became Appleton and Babcock Brothers. (This same year Crehore, whose business had failed showed up at this shop as a journeyman pianomaker.) For the next few years various partners came and went until the death in 1817 of Lewis Babcock. This left Alpheus alone. In 1822 he joined with John Mackay a ship captain who seems to have provided the capital and business knowhow. They continued together until 1829 at the Cambridge Street address. On December 17, 1825 Babcock was granted a patent for a complete iron frame, cast in one piece, for a square piano. The piano in Fig. 7, showing French Empire styling, has inscribed on the nameboard; By A. Babcock for R. Mackay, Boston. It was made between the time they went in partnership in 1822 and 1829 when Babcock left for Philadelphia where he first worked for J. G. Klemm and later William Swift. The Piano in Fig. 8 is also of the 1822-29 period, possibly earlier than that in Fig. 7. The plain banded mahogany case with a nameboard decorated only by stringing of a lighter wood has decorative fretwork. Both these cases appear to have brass inlay along the lines of construction. The nameboard seen in Fig. 9 is inscribed; A. Babcock at William Swift's Pianoforte Manufactory, Philadelphia. The beautifully executed classical decoration done in etched goldleaf is typical of that found on pianos of the period from 1815 to 1835 in Boston, New York and Philadelphia. The New York work may be more elaborate.

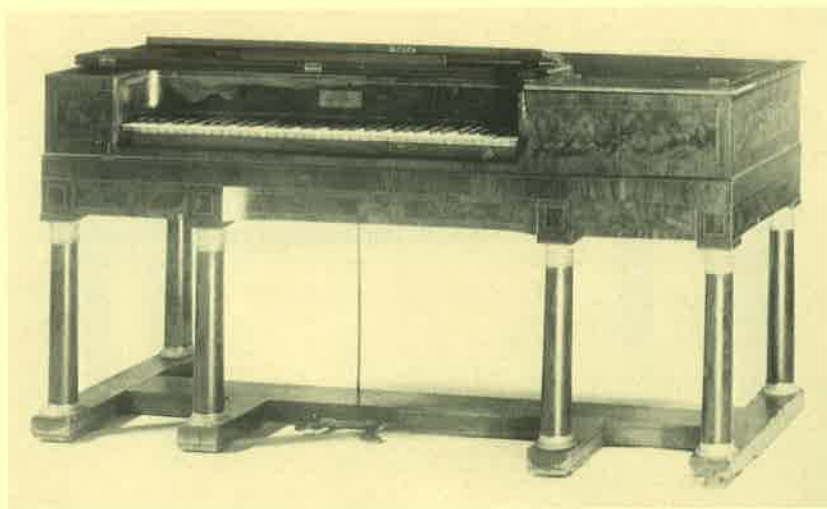


Fig. 7 — Piano by A. Babcock for R. Mackay c. 1822-29 Boston
Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution



Fig. 8 — Piano by A. Babcock for R. Mackay c. 1822-29 Boston
Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution



Fig. 9 — Nameboard from a piano by A. Babcock for William Swift c. 1830
Philadelphia
Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution

In New York, probably the earliest pianofortes were made soon after 1785 as a George Ulshoefer, musician, harpsichord and pianoforte tuner exhibited a pianoforte of his own make in the coffee room of the City Tavern in 1785 where it was used at a concert given in aid of a musician, Philip Harrison. It was called George Ulshoefer's "patent high-strung pianoforte." A Thomas Dobbs is listed as a musical instrument maker and mahogany merchant in 1789 at 66 Queen Street and in 1791-1792 the listing shows a Dodds and Claus at 66 Queen Street and their announcement in 1792 reads "the pianoforte is become so exceedingly fashionable in Europe that few polite families are without it. This much esteemed instrument forms an agreeable accompaniment to the female

voice, takes up little room, may be moved with ease, and consequently kept in tune with little attention, so it is on that account superior to the harpsichord". The following year we find the listing of Arch Whaites at 89 Queen Street, as musical instrument maker, and in 1794 he is at 382 Pearl Street, at Wine and Bowery in 1795-1796. In 1797 the listing is Whaites and Chartres and shows them at 19 Barclay Street. They continue in business until 1816 and a piano made by this firm about 1798 is now at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. It closely resembles that by John Sellers in Fig. 4.

Another early pianoforte maker was John Geib who had left his native Germany with eleven fellow countrymen and gone to London in 1760. There he established himself as a maker of pianofortes and in 1786 he received a patent possibly for the "grasshopper action" or the "buff stop". In 1798 he came to New York with his sons, John Jr. and Adam and is listed as organ builder at First Street and in 1800-1802, Bowery. In 1805 the listing is John and Adam Geib pianoforte makers at 40 Barclay Street. This same year he is also listed as John Geib and Son, Organ builders, Bowery. There seems to have been many different listings for this family over a period of many years. It is known that Adam was a music teacher and is listed as such, as well as professor of music, and from 1825 to 1843 the Adam Geib Music Store was at 23 Maiden Lane. Here he sold not only the Geib pianos but imported ones as well.

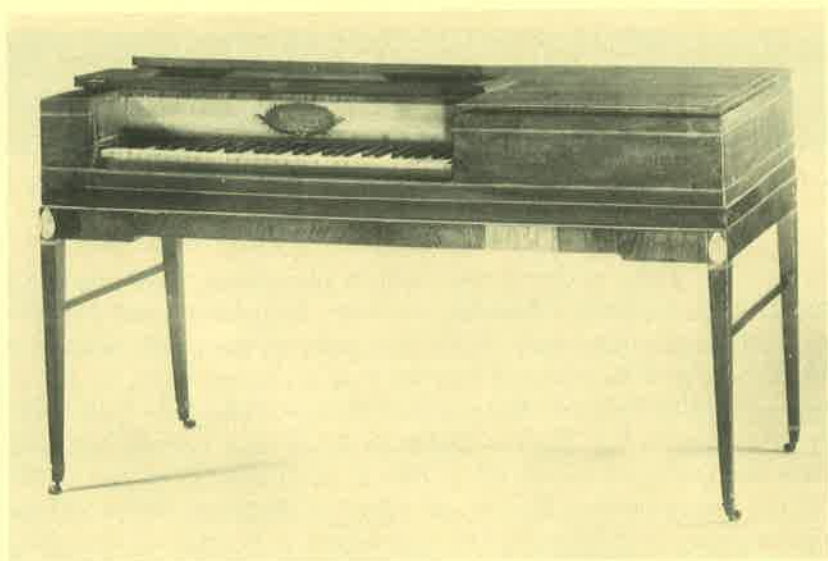


Fig. 10 — Piano by John Geib and Son c. 1800-1805 New York
Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution

The piano in Fig. 10 is of mahogany with satinwood stringing inlay and name board which bears the inscription; John Geib and Son, Bowery Road, New York. This early New York piano with a separate base resembles other American and English instruments of the period. Many pianos bearing this label still exist and one having much patterned stringing, wide bands of satinwood, handsome calligraphy on the name plate as well as dainty fretwork and beautifully painted flowers on the name-board is at Winterthur Museum. The name John Geib ceases to be found after 1814 and one assumes that he may have died at this time. John Geib, Jr. is listed as a pianoforte maker until 1819. A newspaper advertisement of 1815 says that he may be found at a Duncan Phyfe's Shop. In a Geib advertisement of May 18, 1816 we are told — "Piano Warehouse and Wholesale & Retail Store. John and Adam Geib and Company have removed their store from number 9 to number 23 Maiden Lane where they offer for sale upon the most reasonable terms a large assortment of grand and small Pianofortes made by Geib of New York, and Broadwood, Astor and Clementi and others of London, also Organs, Harps, Violins, Flutes, Clarinets, Flageolets Bassoons, Drums and Fifes and all that appertains to the Music Business. Music Foreign and of their own publication and the best Roman Violin Strings. They solicit the custom of their friends in this city and the Southern and Western merchants and engage to give perfect satisfaction. They have just received per ship "Ocean" from London a handsome assortment of Clementi's best Pianofortes and some choice Songs, Airs and instruction books. The most fashionable Songs and Airs will be published from time to time. Second hand pianofortes for hire and all kinds of musical instruments repaired and tuned." Possibly no other words can better describe the cultural climate of New York at the time.

In 1822 we find William Geib, a nephew of John Geib, also listed at 23 Maiden Lane, in 1828 he is at 3rd Ave. & 11th Street, then at various addresses on Broadway and the last listing Ave. 3rd & 12th Street in 1838. He apparently had left the firm in 1828 for in 1829 it became Geib and Walker. A lovely piano by W. Geib is at the Museum of Art, Science and Industry in Bridgeport, Conn. and appears to be of mahogany with large areas of satinwood. It was made in 1828 at the 3rd Ave. and 11th Street address. Jenny Lind played upon this piano soon after she was brought to America by P. T. Barnum. It shows examples of stencilling. The piano in Fig. 11 is by W. (William) Geib and was probably made about the same time as the Samuel Neilson piano on the cover (c. 1828-33). After 1828 William Geib was in business for himself for the next ten years, so this would be within that period. The classical decorative motifs of scrolls, anthemion and harps are in gold



Fig. 11 — Piano by William Geib c. 1828-1833 New York
Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution

leaf, etched to model the forms. The wave-like border of scrolls and cornucopia are stencilled with no etching. The nameboard design is exactly the same as that on the piano described above as being used by Jenny Lind, but the treatment of the decoration is quite different. The custom of including the address of the maker after the name on the piano nameplate makes the task of dating a piano relatively easy since a look at the city directory will tell the year that the maker was at that address. This is seldom the case in trying to date other pieces of furniture.

Another New York firm that covered a long span of time was that of Morgan Davis and Thomas Gibson which was known as Gibson and Davis. This partnership started in 1802 at 58 Warren Street and in 1805 moved to 61-63 Barclay Street where they are listed together until 1816. Hereafter Gibson is listed at 61 Barclay Street until his last listing in 1835. Davis is listed M. Davis at 63 Barclay Street until 1826, then Morgan Davis until he moves to 201 Chambers Street in 1834. His last listing is 64 Church Street in 1835. Fig. 12 and Fig. 13 show a piano by Davis while at the Barclay Street address. The beautifully stencilled decoration on the case, nameboard and cover are typical of that done in New York between 1825 and 1835. The heavy, deeply carved trestle



Fig. 12 — Piano by Morgan Davis c. 1826-1833 New York (case closed)
 Courtesy, Historical Society of American Decoration



Fig. 13 — Same as Fig. 12 with case open

base will carry the new cast iron plates but is far less attractive than the trestle bases attributed to Duncan Phyfe before 1820. The piano as furniture has bowed to the piano as a musical instrument. (One cannot use this excuse however when looking at other heavy forms of empire furniture.) Fine examples of these earlier instruments may be found at The Museum of The City of New York, at Winterthur and I am sure many other places. The decoration of these instruments is either of painted floral designs until about 1815 and then simple classical motifs in etched gold leaf.

Samuel Neilson is first listed at 21 Barclay Street in 1805 as an instrument maker, at 71 Chambers Street in 1807 and in 1808 he moves to 19 Barclay when the Whaites and Chartres firm move out. He stays at this address until 1815 or until he moves to 96 Chambers Street in 1817. From 1819 until 1825 he is listed as pianoforte maker at 94 Chambers Street, then two years at 140 Chambers again moving in 1828 to 154 Chambers Street where he stays until his last listing in 1834-35 at 453 Broadway. An early Neilson piano, Fig. 14 is of banded mahogany with satinwood panels on the name board. The only decoration is the lovely fretwork and a handsome nameplate at the center. The slender reeded legs resemble those shown in *Sheraton's Drawing Book* and the general squareness of the instrument is repeated in the nameboard, which is inscribed; Patent'— Sam. Neilson 19 Barclay Street New York. It was made between 1807 and 1817. In comparison with the later pianos one



Fig. 14 — Piano by Samuel Neilson c. 1807-1817 New York
Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution

can see why William Harris wrote an article many years ago about "The Unfortunate Story of Piano Legs." The Cover photograph and detail Fig. 15 show another piano by Samuel Neilson, 154 Chambers Street, New York. This instrument of the 1828-33 period is of banded mahogany with brass trim and beautiful stencilling on the nameboard. The intricate built-up stencilled roses and tulips deserve careful study. Without doing a tracing it appears some twelve stencils were used in the rose alone. The veining is most intricate and helps to shape the flowers and leaves. The well done tulip with stump work is most appealing and how well the simple border stencil frames it all. Another stencil border runs along in front of the keys. What a wonderful surprise when this piano is opened. The nameboard decoration closely resembles that of the Morgan Davis piano in Fig. 12.

The nameboard from a piano made by L. Whiting, New York (Fig. 16 and detail Fig. 17) shows exactly the same border design and the same built-up stencilled rose as Fig. 15. A lily replaces the tulip in the Neilson composition and is beautifully stencilled and the designs at the curve of the board are nearly identical in composition and execution. It would be hard to believe that they were not done by the same hand. Longworth's Directory for New York lists a Luther Whiting, pianoforte maker at 123 Elm Street in 1823-24; 133 Elm Street in 1824-25; 199 Mulberry, 1825-26; 192 Mulberry, 1826-30; 234 North, 1830-31; Bowery corner 9th, 1831-32; 9th near Broadway, 1832-34. Judging from the decoration, this piano belongs to the same general time period as the Neilson piano (Fig. 15) and poses the questions; was decoration done by journeymen decorators, were the cases built in one shop and decorated there and then sent to the pianoforte maker for the mechanical installation or did the decorator simply work at one shop until he found more satisfactory employment and then take himself, stencils and stencilling equipment with him to his new place of employment? Since many pianoforte makers were journeymen and seemed to have been a restless lot perhaps too the decorators were of the same temperament. Emily Underhill, in her article on "Early Decorated American Pianos",⁶ asks the question "by whom were these beautiful pieces of furniture decorated?" We still do not know.

John Kearsing came to New York from London before 1810 and is listed in 1811 at 279 Bowery; 1818, 117 Broome and the last listing 6th near 3rd Ave. The piano in Fig. 18 and detail Fig. 19 is by this maker but he fails to inscribe his address on the nameboard, but from the general



Fig. 15 — Detail of Cover photograph. Piano by Samuel Neilson c. 1828-1833
New York. Courtesy, D. A. R. Museum, Washington, D. C.



Fig. 16 — Nameboard from a piano by L. Whiting c. 1828-1833 New York
 Courtesy, Historical Society of Early American Decoration



Fig. 17 — Detail of Fig. 16



Fig. 18 — Piano by John Kearsing c. 1825, New York
 Courtesy, D. A. R. Museum, Washington, D. C.



Fig. 19 — Detail of Fig. 18

shape, the straight nameboard with the etched gold leaf classical decoration and the motifs also in gold leaf on the corner blocks it would appear to be about 1825. The beautiful fretwork on the nameboard and the lovely running border which frames it are very pleasing. There is also a typical running stencilled border in front of the key board.

John Tallman, like many other pianoforte makers, is first listed as a cabinetmaker at 80 Liberty Street in 1816-17; 77 Chapel Street, 1821-26; pianoforte maker 15 Barclay, 1826-1839 or 40 — his last listing. Possibly the best known Tallman piano is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It very much resembles the Morgan Davis piano in Fig. 12. A large etched gold compote filled with stencilled fruit is used at each end on the front of the dark mahogany case whereas the compote on the Morgan Davis is a built-up stencilled design filled with flowers. The piano in Fig. 20 and 21 are also by John Tallman and probably of a slightly later date possibly 1830-35. The gold anthemion placed to simulate fretwork is an interesting decorative device on the nameboard. It appears to be stencilled as does the running border in front of the keys. The urns and scrolls in etched gold on either side of the name plate are beautifully done and the plate itself is inscribed; John Tallman — No. 15 Barclay Street, New York. The entire nameboard design is the same as that on the Tallman piano at The Metropolitan Museum, the case of course is quite different with its satinwood inlay. Tallman made many undecorated pianos as did all other makers.

Many important makers have been omitted in this discussion but an effort has been made to select those which reveal American attitudes in furniture style and how these styles were decorated. As we have indicated before, some of the heaviness of the pianos in the 20ies and 30ies may have been to support the increasingly heavy cast iron frames being developed to prevent warping of the piano as the strings became larger and the tension increased. The Mechanics Institute established in 1830 in New York was most interested in the interior of the pianos and annually awarded gold medals for the best pianos in a variety of classes. It was a much coveted award. It is apparent from their official papers of 1836 that they were annoyed by what was done to the exterior of the piano case. "We have a suggestion to make to all our manufacturers of musical instruments. Let them expend in addition one half as much on the interior of pianos — upon that part which gives the instrument its character — as they throw away on unnecessary ornamentation on the exterior, ornamentation causing positive injury to tone and durability. The best pianos we have seen, though made of the finest wood and well finished were invariably plain. A much better piano could be made for \$250.00 under these conditions than many that sell for \$500.00 as handsome



Fig. 20 — Piano by John Tallman c. 1826-1839 New York
Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution



Detail of Fig. 20

pieces of furniture.” A later authority on American pianos apparently disagrees “a piano we must remember has an aesthetic and artistic value as a resident of the drawing-room independent of it’s musical qualities.”⁷ After examination of many pianos and several hundred photos of pianos I would feel that the total number of ornamented pianos was so small in relation to the total output that the aforementioned warning was scarcely needed.

A few salient characteristics might be mentioned in summary. The use of etched gold leaf classical motifs as the usual type of ornamentation from 1815 to 1835 was seen in all three cities studied. (Due to space the Baltimore pianos were not included.) In Boston, there seems to have been less decorated pianos made and of those the simple gold decora-

tion was confined to the nameboard. In Philadelphia, the classical motifs, with less etching to model the forms, is found discretely placed on the case as well as on the nameboard. New York uses etched gold leaf lavishly at times both on the nameboard and on the case after 1825. Only here between 1825 and 1835 do we find the beautiful stencilling, which is so masterfully done, used as piano decoration. A relatively small amount of fine furniture was also made and decorated in the same way in New York during this decade. The use of stumpwork over a base stencil gives a soft, beautifully modelled feeling and seems more like the earlier freehand bronze work than the other stencilling on wood that we know so well. The only stenciller that we do have a record of is Thomas Jefferson Gildersleeve, who at age 22 had a chair shop 237-239 Delancy Street in 1827. He later moved to 197 Chatham Street. He had served his apprenticeship under a chairmaker, Richard Tweed, and whether or not he learned stencilling there is not known. His stencils do not resemble those which must have been used to decorate the pianos. This would seem the work of another more experienced hand. We shall continue the search for those anonymous craftsmen.

I would like to say thank you to many people who have been most helpful and kind, Mrs. Helen Hollis, Division of Musical Instruments, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. for allowing me to examine, and photograph instruments in the Hugo Worch Collection of Keyboard Instruments, for making available to me her files as well as the files of the Hugo Worch Photographic Collection; Miss Betsy Donoghy, Director-Curator, D.A.R. Museum, Washington, D.C. for the photographs that were taken at that museum, for allowing me to examine and photograph whatever I wished from that exciting collection and for being so helpful; Mr. Jeffry S. Childs, Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts at the Museum of the City of New York, and Mr. Emanuel Winternitz, Curator of Musical Instruments, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Mrs. George Watt and Mrs. Robert Wilbur for research material which they provided. The librarians at the New York Public Library, both the Main Branch and the Library of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, at the Library of Congress and the New York Historical Society were generous with their suggestions.

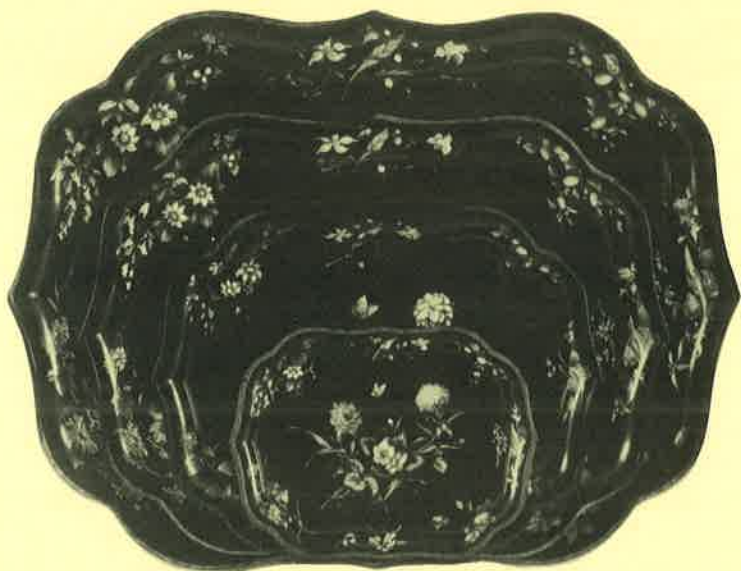
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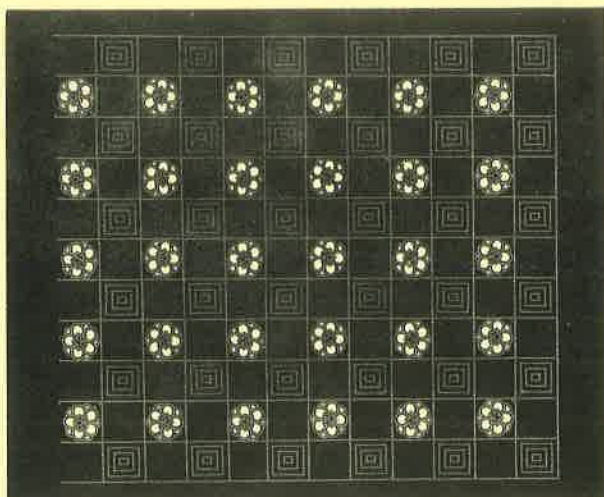
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Original Nest of Chippendale Trays
 Courtesy, Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc.



Original Chinese Stencil
Courtesy, Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc.
Gift of Mrs. Ida White

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The Spring Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, at the Downtown Holiday Inn, was skillfully managed by the Meeting and Program Co-Chairmen, Mildred Ayers and Mildred Lenderking, assisted by the Hospitality Chairman, Lillian Boland. Baltimore chairs were attractively stencilled on tags identifying members and guests, charming theorems were made for the hostesses at the dinner tables, and, presented to those at the head tables, reverse paintings on glass and beautifully scaled-down and decorated Baltimore chairs. Although its membership is small in number, the Maryland Chapter arranged and executed a meeting that would do credit to a much larger chapter.

From reports given at the Chapters' meeting on Wednesday afternoon, it is evident that the Chapters are actively and enthusiastically supporting the goals and aims of the Society. Following this meeting Shirley DeVoe and Avis Heatherington shared their knowledge of many of the outstanding articles in our exhibition. After dinner, Mr. William Voss Elder, Curator of the Decorative Arts, the Baltimore Museum of Art, spoke on "The Baltimore Furniture and Eglomisé Insets". The slides shown by Mr. Elder illustrated the typical style of Baltimore furniture and its decoration, and prepared us extremely well for Thursday's museum tour.

At the Business Meeting on Thursday morning, the following Trustees were elected, by ballot, for a three-year term: Mrs. Russell Annabal,

Mrs. Ernest Greenhill, Mrs. H. S. Topping, and Mrs. George Watt. Reports were heard from committee chairmen and 21 new members were welcomed into the Society. Mr. Thomas J. Foster, Executive Director, Baltimore Forward Thrust, showed slides of "Old and New Baltimore" and described points of interest that could be seen in the city. At 11 o'clock, members and guests were privileged to tour five museums: The Baltimore Museum of Art, The Peale Museum, The Walters Art Gallery, The Maryland Historical Society, and Hampton House. We were especially appreciative of the fact that a number of these fine museums had arranged special displays of their decorated pieces.

Following the banquet Thursday evening, Mrs. Romaine Somerville, Curator of the Maryland Historical Society, spoke on "Early Baltimore Living and Architecture". Various styles of architecture in the city were exhibited and, particularly emphasized, was the development of the "row house", so peculiar to Baltimore.

Two demonstrations on Friday morning were most interesting: "Various Techniques of Freehand Bronze", ably described by Mona Rowell, and "Art to See Through", the unusual scenic painting on window screens, by Mr. Richard Oktavec.

The Exhibition, always one of our greatest attractions, contained 121 original pieces, 38 "A" Awards, 16 "B" Awards, and 2 Reproduction Awards. The Endowment Fund Table, the Decorator Sales Table, and the Curatorial Sales also enjoyed a large attendance.

The Trustees met and elected the following officers:

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| President | Mrs. Edwin Rowell |
| 1st Vice-President | Mrs. George Watt |
| 2nd Vice-President | Mrs. Donald Heatherington |
| Recording Secretary | Mrs. John Miller |
| Corresponding Secretary | Mrs. E. A. Nibbelink |
| Treasurer | Mrs. H. J. Parlman |

It was a pleasure to meet in Baltimore and to be entertained by members and friends of the Society. On behalf of the Trustees, I wish to thank all chairmen and members of committees for the exceptional meeting that we all enjoyed.

I wish also to express my personal thanks to all members of the Society who made my work so stimulating and rewarding these past four years.

Virginia M. Wheelock

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APPLICANT ACCEPTED AS MEMBER AT BEDFORD, N. H. MEETING — FALL, 1972

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MEMBERS' "A" AWARDS
Baltimore, Maryland, May, 1973

Country Painting



Sherry Dotter



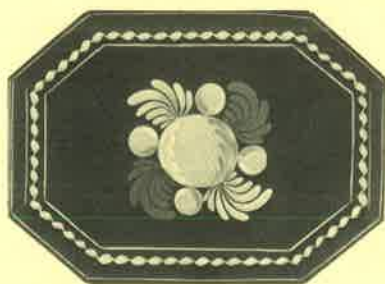
Elsie Caliri



Jean Walter



Deborah Lambeth

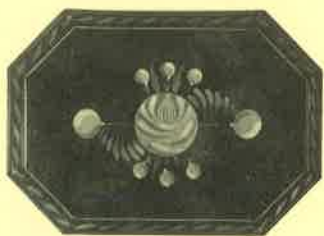


Astrid Thomas



Sherry Dotter

Country Painting



Phyllis Sherman



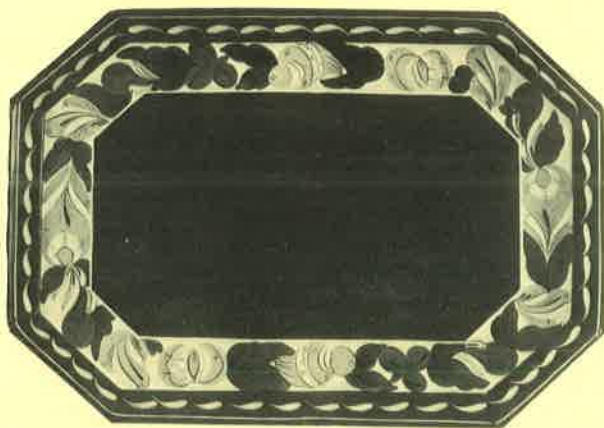
Patricia Smith



Alice Wall



Jane Newman



Alice Wall



Ramona Hoff

Stencilling on Wood



Elsie Caliri

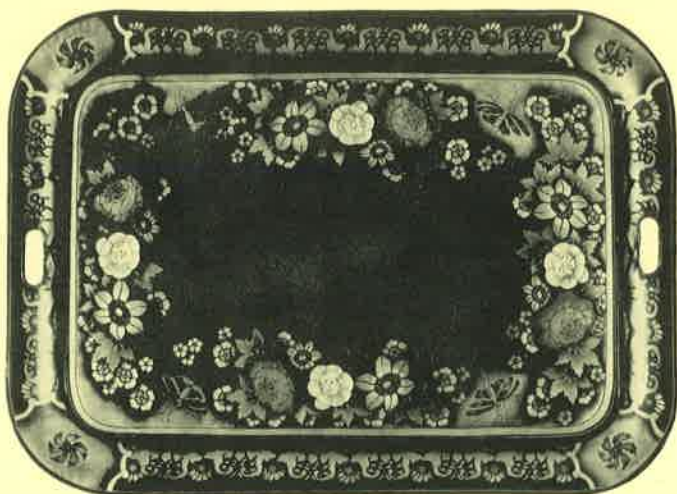


Barbara Dickinson

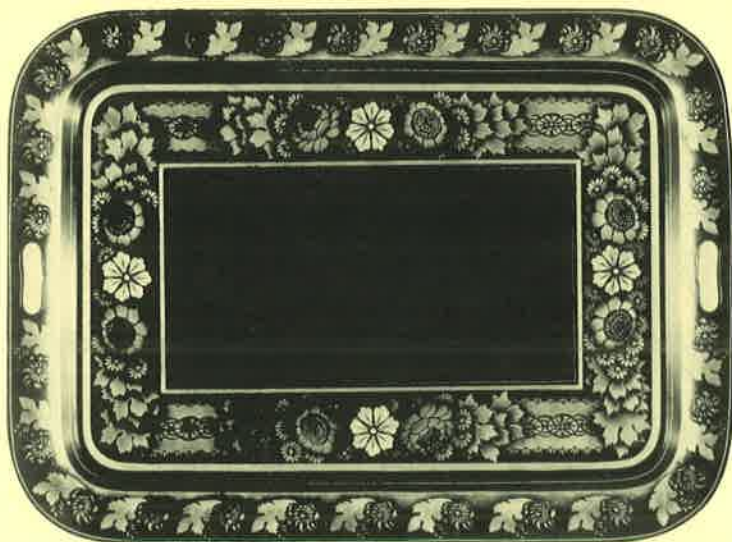


Jean Bennington

Stencilling on Tin



Charlotte Duval

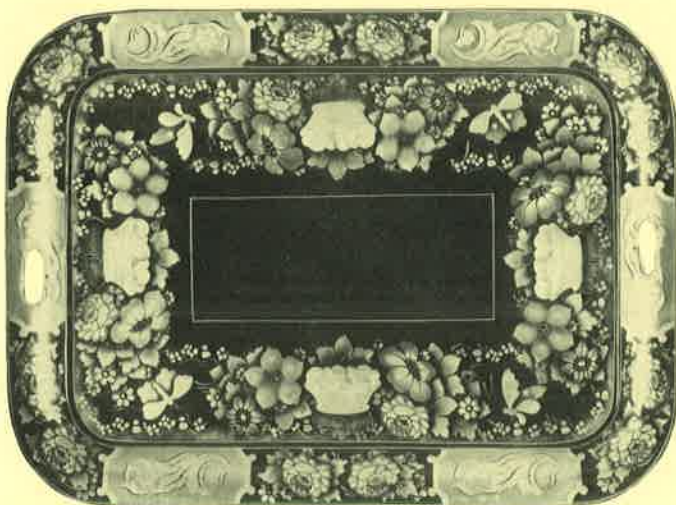


Jane Newman

Stencilling on Tin



Lynette Smith

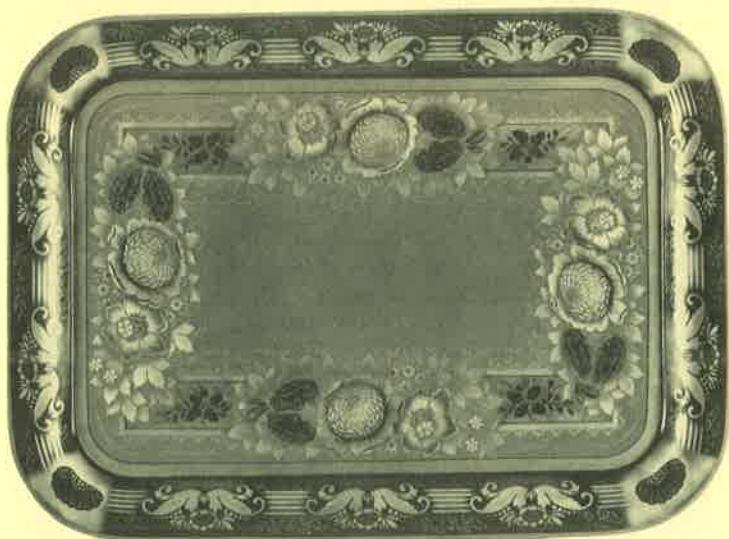


Barbara Dickinson

Stencilling on Tin



Alice Carlson



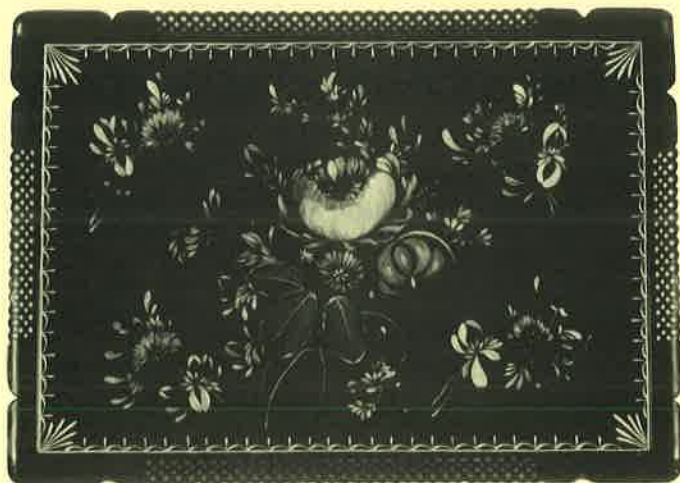
Margaret Watts



Free Hand Bronze - Helene Britt



Free Hand Bronze - Yvette Childs



Lace Edge Painting - Frances Cavanaugh



Lace Edge Painting - Virginia Cochran



Glass Panel, Gold Leaf Border - Jane Bolster



Glass Panel, Stencilled Border - Helene Britt



Glass Panel, Stencilled Border — Margaret Emery

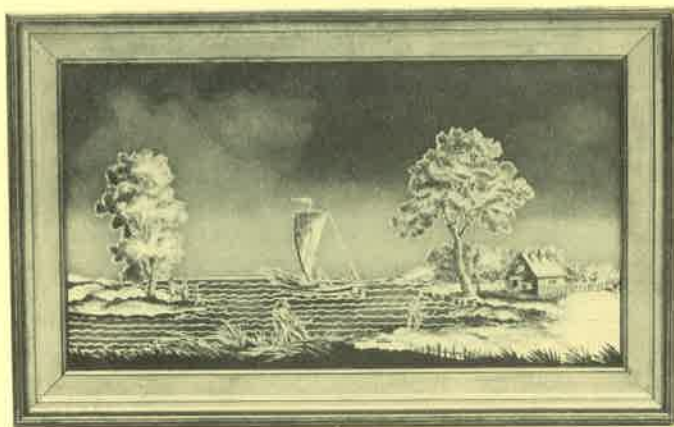


Glass Panel, Gold Leaf Border
Emilie Underhill

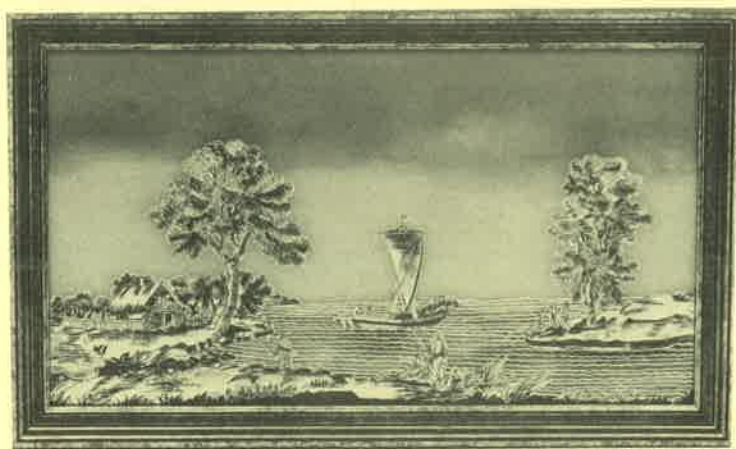


Gold Leaf Glass Panel
Ruth Morse

Gold Leaf Glass Panel

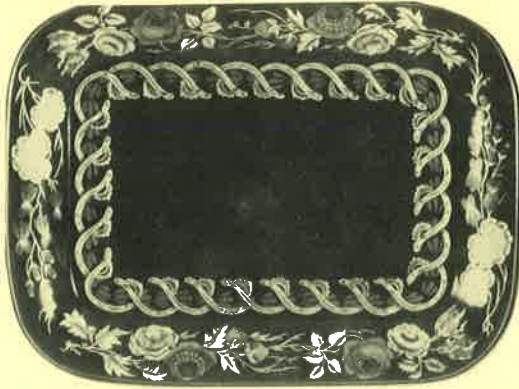


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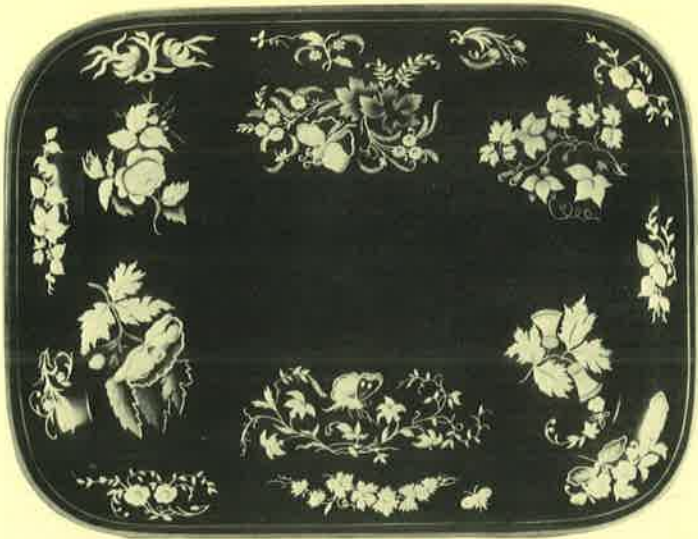


Emilie Underhill

Gold Leaf Painting

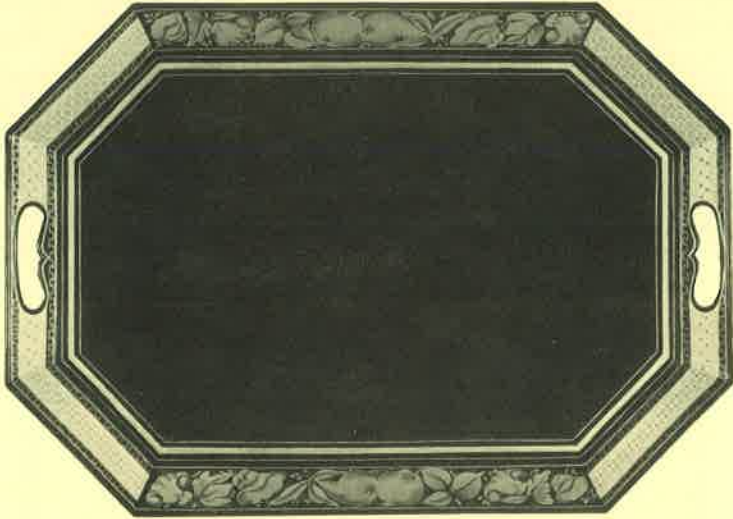


Maryjane Clark

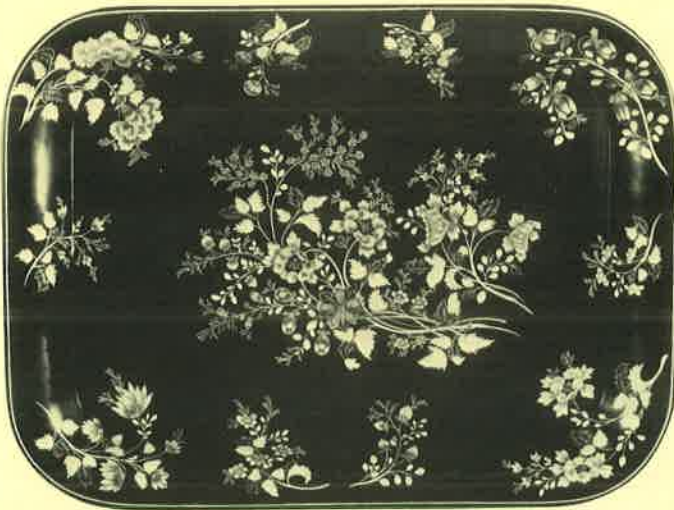


Astrid Thomas

Gold Leaf Painting



Dorothy Hallett



Dorothy Hallett

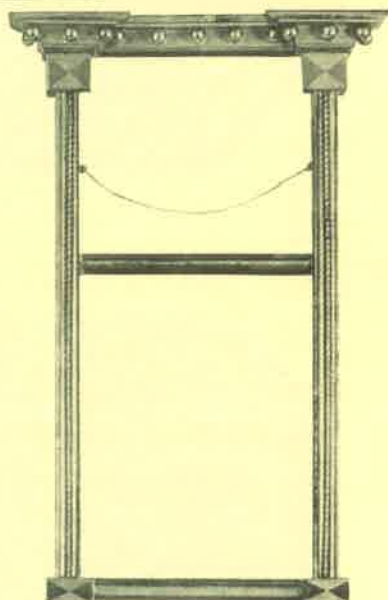
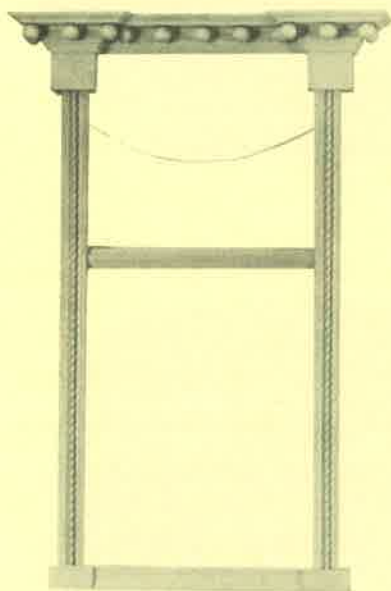
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NOTICES FROM TRUSTEES

FALL MEETING

September 19, 20, 21

Statler Hilton Hotel — Buffalo, New York

Meeting Chairman, Mrs. Gartley Weller

Program Chairman, Mrs. Kenneth R. Nado

SPRING MEETING

May 15, 16, 17, 1974

Treadway Inn, Chicopee, Mass.

POLICY

USE OF SOCIETY NAME AND SEAL From July 1969 Trustees Meeting:

- a. **ADVERTISING:** The name of the Society may be used in personal publicity and by Certified Teachers, who are required to list the categories to which they are certified, Master Teachers, and Master Craftsmen.
- b. **PERSONAL PUBLICITY:** Members who do not qualify under "a", may state their membership in and awards received by the Society in newspaper and magazine articles provided that the articles are for educational or public relations matters.
- c. **EXHIBITIONS:** Chapters may sponsor Exhibitions in the name of the Society with written permission of the Exhibition Chairman of the Society, provided that only originals, "A" and "B" awards, approved portfolios of Certified Teachers, and applicants pieces accepted within the last five years, are exhibited. Added Sept. 16, 1970, July 19, 1972.
- d. **OPINIONS OR CRITICISMS:** Members should not use the name of the Society when writing personal opinions or criticisms to newspapers and magazines. Any matter requiring action by the Society should be referred to the President.

The Official Seal

The Official Seal of the Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc. shall not be duplicated or used by individuals or chapters.

(Exception: Upon application, Chapters will be granted permission to use the seal for the cover of their yearly program. Passed by the membership at Fall Meeting, 1966.)

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Please notify Membership Chairman promptly of any change of address.

TEACHER CERTIFICATION

Teachers interested in Certification may have the new Minimum Requirements Form by writing to the Teacher Certification Chairman.

Notice: Please notify the chairman of the Teacher Certification Committee at least eight weeks before a meeting if you wish an appointment for an interview or plan to submit work to complete a category.

Teachers must now submit any incomplete work for certification within two meetings of their interviews.

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Mrs. E. A. Nibbelink, 8055 W. Canal Road, Brockport, N.Y. is Registrar of Trademarks. She requests that all applications for registration be made on black cardboard measuring 8"x5" showing the trademark either painted or stencilled, with the dates used. If more than one trademark is to be registered in one name, include dates for the period when each was used. On the reverse side of the card: Name, Society number, address, date of birth (and marriage if you wish), date you became a member, any certification and the date, teaching and dates, education—to include both formal and craft schools and teachers, business name and address, if any, and all trademarks used by you and the dates for each. Make check payable to H.S.E.A.D. \$5.00.

POLICY CHANGES

CHAPTERS 6.05 Chairman will notify Treasurer, once a year, of any educational activities of the Chapters.

CURATOR 5A.01 Upon notification from the Membership Chairman, Curator will express appreciation to donors of gifts in excess of \$50.

MEMBERSHIP 15.05 Chairman will notify the Curator of gifts in excess of \$50.

MUSEUM 16.04 (Added to Cooperstown Agreement p. 3, V. 2.)
Limited supervised access to the collection for reference purposes may be granted by the Association to qualified persons, *but recordings will be permitted only with the approval of the designated representative of the Guild, the Curator or the President.*

MEMBERSHIP 15.06 Any member may submit a written request for an appointment with the Trustees to discuss a matter of concern.

MEMBERSHIP 15.07 If it is learned that any member or members of H.S.E.A.D. has, in the opinion of the Trustees, been indulging in political and/or philosophical and/or financial activities to the detriment of the Society, this member or members will be called before the Trustees to discuss their actions.

If the above mentioned activities are not justified, the Trustees, by a vote of those present, may terminate such membership in H.S.E.A.D. from that moment forward. If the member or members fail to appear before the Board when requested, they are automatically dropped from the membership.

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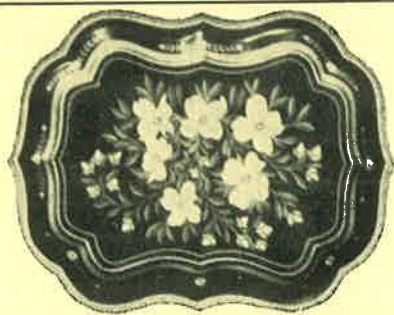
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