

The Decorator

Volume XXIX No. 1

Vergennes, Vermont

Fall 1974



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



**HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF
EARLY AMERICAN DECORATION, INC.**

*Organized in 1946 in Memory of
Esther Stevens Brazer*

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



**Historical Society of
Early American Decoration, Inc.**

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

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH

Original Stencilled Tray — Courtesy, Marion Cooney

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EDITORIAL

It was with great sorrow that we learned of the death of Walter Wright, a Charter member and great supporter of The Historical Society of Early American Decoration. Robert Keegan knew him well and has written a tribute to a friend whom he valued greatly. We lose much in the death of such a talented and generous teacher and friend.

In this issue Virginia Wheelock has discussed in detail the interesting, if common, "Doily" Trays and hopefully it will be helpful and revealing. Margery Miller has provided us with a look at some of the fine stencilled furniture at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute. Her observations are fresh and the comparisons most meaningful. Shirley DeVoe's article on the pounce box is most interesting and as usual delightfully written. We are grateful for these manuscripts and know that you will find some new bits of information.

Avis Heatherington

A TRIBUTE TO WALTER WRIGHT

Thirty-five years ago a gracious lady in Stowe, Vermont, recognizing unique talent in a local young man, motivated him to paint boxes, chests and the like. Fortunately in the early nineteen forties, Esther Stevens Brazer journeyed to Montpelier, Vermont and taught one of her famous one week classes— he attended. With time out for the war years this lovable, controversial itinerant traveled the east, researching, teaching, painting and recording the best of ornamentation he could find in homes, shops and museums.

As a Society member he served well as a judge, a Trustee and as President. It came as a shock to all his friends when he "hung up his brush." He later donated his outstanding pattern collection to The Historical Society of Early American Decoration. All those who knew him were truly inspired by his great talent and warmed by his generosity of spirit in sharing his gift. The standards of craftsmanship and other accomplishments of this Society are in part due to his many years of devotion and service. Walter Wright was buried in Stowe, Vermont on September 10, 1974.

Robert Keegan



Fig. 1 — Detail of Cover Photograph, Courtesy, Marion Cooney. Size: $24\frac{1}{2} \times 17\frac{1}{2}$. Excellent piece exemplifying all the qualities under discussion. Carefully painted color wash on the inner edge of the petals of the small round flowers. Typical stylized gold leaf flower, outlined in black. Fine web of delicate yellow curlicues which tie the entire design together. Small yellow flowers of 3, 4, and 5 petals interspersed among the painted green leaves. Basket formed by yellow strokes painted over massed floral sprays.

THE "DOILY" TRAYS

by Virginia M. Wheelock

The assortment of trays included in this article are very familiar and perhaps because of this fact, their attractive qualities have not been fully appreciated. The trays have a great many interesting features in common — almost "family resemblances" — which include design, stencil cutting, color washes, and painted decorations. These characteristics will be observed, in general, and any variations or unusual treatments will be commented upon in the captions accompanying each photograph.

Although the designs are conventional and stylized, they are well-balanced and, for the most part, in proportion. The total effect is of a restrained, harmonious, and symmetrical arrangement. Green leaves and yellow strokes surrounding the composition contribute grace to these rather rigid decorative plans. This painted decoration has been likened to a lovely "doily" placed around the design. Examination of the accompanying photographs will make evident the great similarity of the component parts used on these trays, both those with floor decoration and those with double borders. These stencil units recur frequently in different combinations, and show diversity both in the treatment and in the organization of the pattern. Flexibility in placement and also adaptability to the proportions of the article no doubt increased their popularity.



Fig. 2 — Original Stencilled Tray, Courtesy, Marion Cooney. Size: $22\frac{1}{4}$ x $16\frac{1}{4}$. Center floral motif is tucked behind and almost hidden by the four larger flowers which surround it. Painted wash on inner edge of petals on small round flowers. Painted vertical yellow strokes which suggest the form of a container.



Fig. 3 — Original Stencilled Tray, Courtesy, Avis Heatherington. Size: $20\frac{1}{2} \times 15$. Pleasing treatment of an oval composition on a rectangular tray. Crisply stencilled basket under which is typical bronze dusting over massed floral sprays. Color wash is applied with broad sweep of the brush and does not attempt to give form or shape to the motifs.

Varying from the very simple to the very complex, the stencil cutting is of good quality and exhibits excellent craftsmanship. As Janet Waring states, “. . . unless the units were well-designed and sharply cut, the completed decoration was awkward”. Execution of the stencilling itself is brilliant, well-burnished, and with very little shading, except where one unit meets another, and then one unit is “tightly” stencilled against the next unit. This is particularly noticeable in the leaves and flower sprays. When stencilled scrolls appear, they are applied with a deeper gold powder accompanied by a skillfully executed brighter gold blooming at the base.

Baskets which contained the flower and/or fruit grouping, when stencilled, were solidly polished. In other instances, the container was merely suggested by the use of vertical and horizontal yellow strokes. (Rarely do we see a basket large enough to adequately support the entire



Fig. 4 — Original Stencilled Tray, Courtesy, Cornelia Keegan. Size: 8×6 . Painted basket and gold leaf unit in center. See *The Ornamented Tray*, p. 183, Fig. #38, for larger version of design.

composition.) Under the container, it is customary to find a dusting of powder over the background of closely stencilled massed floral sprays.

In many cases, the color washes are applied with a broad sweep of the brush but, in others, the wash is used to delineate and form the flower or the fruit. For example, the realistic treatment of the tulips on these trays is beautiful and done with great artistry. The strokes are not painted as a definite brushstroke, but feather down into the center of the flower, giving the appearance of having been “dragged” or pulled over a tacky surface. Graceful and delicate white overstrokes complete the shaping and modeling of the tulip, producing a three-dimensional feeling to the flower.

When a gold leaf unit appears in the floor ornamentation of these trays, it was most often outlined with black paint. It is more typical for the details, within the unit, to be painted with a brush, although pen and ink or an etching tool were sometimes employed. In any case, these details are not as numerous or as finely drawn as those found on the more ornately decorated gold leaf articles.

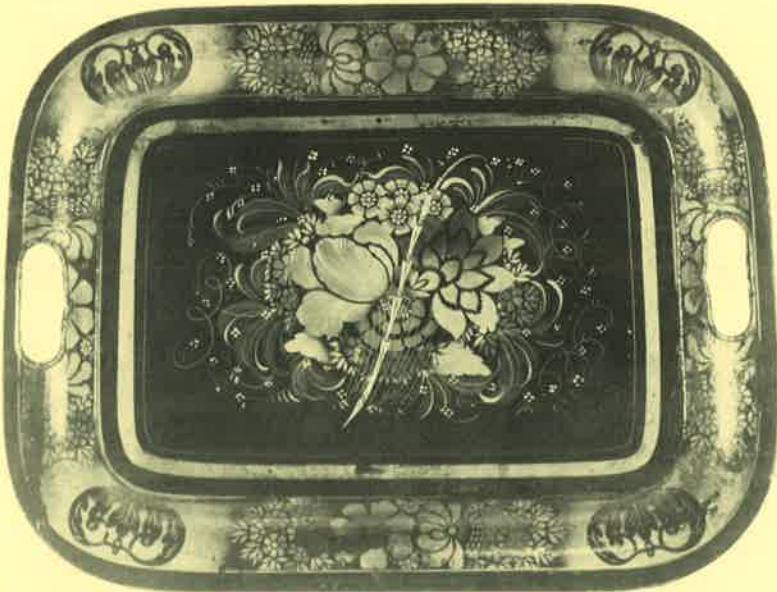


Fig. 5 — Original Stencilled Tray, Courtesy, Cornelia Keegan. Size: 12½ x 16½. Floor design similar to Figure #2, but with addition of tulip. Center motif tucked behind large flowers. Vertical yellow strokes perhaps representing container. Graceful and unusual “bamboo-like” motif painted through center of design. Small painted yellow 4-petaled flowers among the leaves and scrolls.



Fig. 6 — Original Stencilled Tray, Courtesy, Virginia Wheelock. Size: $26\frac{1}{4} \times 18\frac{1}{2}$. Flange border very precise with color washes only on the inner circle of flowers. Floor border has fluency of "vining" border. Delicate black veining on scrolls. Alternating red and mauve tulips.



Fig. 6a — Detail

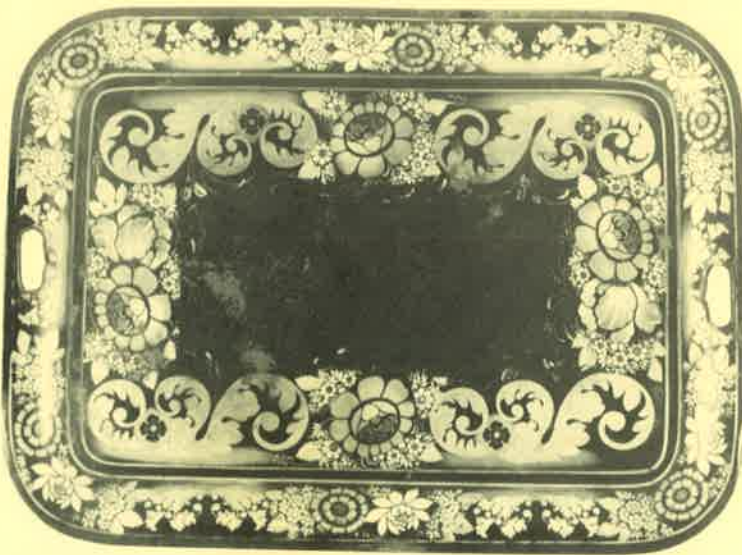


Fig. 7 — Original Stencilled Tray, Courtesy, Martha Wilbur. Large center flower on flange reminiscent of center motifs in Figure 2 and 5. Painted green leaves and yellow strokes flow into center of tray.



Fig. 7a — Detail

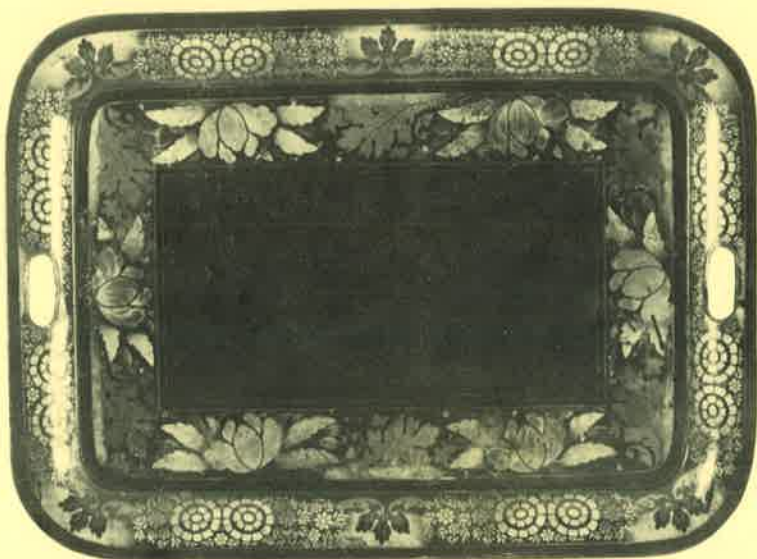


Fig. 8 — Original Stencilled Tray, Courtesy, Muriel Nado. Versatility in the adaptation of stencilled units. Stencilled floor border units appear identical to those of Figure 6, but with scroll reversed. Large flower on flange reminiscent of center motifs in Figure 2 and 5.

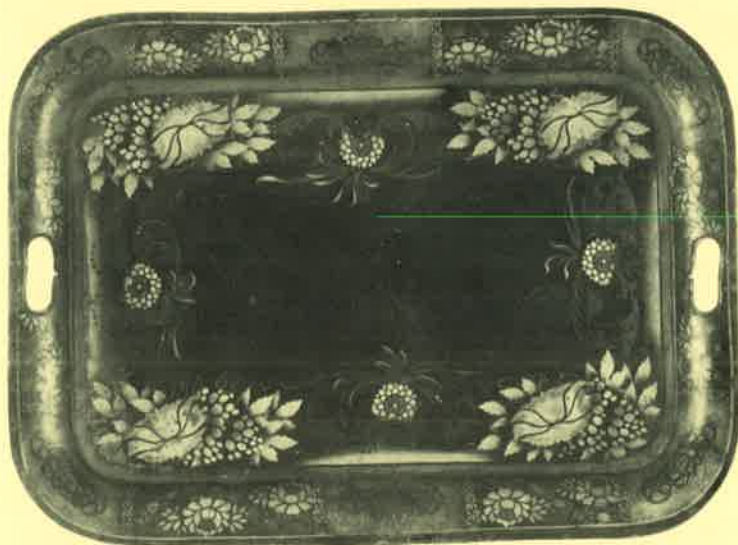


Fig. 9 — Original Stencilled Tray, Courtesy, Ruth Gallup. Size: 24 x 17½. Floor design embellished with elongated green leaves flowing into center of tray, accented with yellow strokes and delicate scrolls unifying design.



Fig. 10 — Original Stencilled Tray, Courtesy, Lunamae Flint. Size $10\frac{1}{2}$ x $12\frac{1}{2}$. Same design as Fig.11, arranged on a smaller tray.

The most unique and unifying trait of these trays is the painted decoration which connects and envelops the stencilled design, and provides a most decorative edging. There is great freedom and a sense of motion in the balance and shapeliness of the painted green leaves and the yellow veins, accents, and lacy scroll-work. The green leaves vary in size and shape and are applied with semi-transparent paint, as evidenced by the fact that the stencil unit clearly shows underneath the strokes. The yellow overstrokes are masterfully applied and the delicate scrolls give a flowing motion to the entire design.

Often a floor design was surrounded only by a series of very fine stripes and broad bands on the floor and on the flange of the tray. Trays of this sort were known to have been exported from the Midlands, England, to the United States. Many times the floor design alone was given a protective coating, upon completion of the ornamentation.



Fig. 11 — Original Stencilled Tray, Courtesy, Lewis Cook.¹ Size $22\frac{1}{2}$ x $16\frac{1}{2}$. By the use of different colored bronze powders and the attractive groupings of stencilled leaves, an extremely effective and pleasing design is achieved. Oval green leaves with yellow accents, veins, and tendrils twining throughout.

A LOOK AT STENCILLED FURNITURE AT THE MUNSON-WILLIAMS-PROCTOR INSTITUTE

by Margery Miller

The study of early stencilled furniture, especially that originating in a sophisticated metropolitan center often brings to light techniques unsuspected by modern-day craftsmen. The apron design on the two-part dining table in Fountain Elms, a restored Victorian mansion in Utica, New York, is a case in point. (Fig. 1)

The table, thought to have been manufactured in New York City, 1820-1830, originally belonged to the Green family of Syracuse. Its stencils exhibit several aspects which raise them artistically far above the usual.

First, there is the use of freehand bronze and stumping along with multiple stencils. The two peaches, for example, (Fig. 2) seem to be composed of only one stencil each. The division of the cheeks of the fruit shows no evidence of a mechanical separation. Each section has been modeled freehand. The second fruit (apple? quince?) has been treated in the same way, with the addition of fine stumping to help mold the forms.

The petals of the small flowers at the top have been built up from a single, repeated unit with stumped highlights and stamens while the



Fig. 1 — Two-part Empire mahogany dining table; aprons stencilled with fruit; gold leaf at corners; claw feet. New York State 1820-1830. Originally belonged to the Green Family of Syracuse. Courtesy, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.

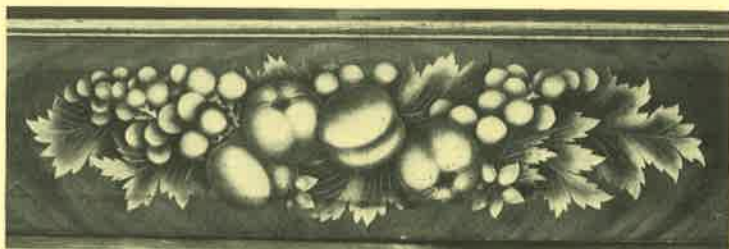


Fig. 2 — Empire dining table. Detail of stencil. Courtesy, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.

stems of the grape clusters seem to be entirely stumped in with no evidence of a stencil at all.

The leaves enclosing the pattern offer further example of a master touch. There is no duplication: each has been fashioned from a separately cut theorem, and their veining delicately defined with a curved edge.

The entire design adds up to an expertly worked grouping, obviously done by one of the more highly skilled craftsmen of his day. Perhaps further research will reveal his name, or at least the furniture maker for whom he decorated.

It is interesting to contrast this work with that on another piece of furniture in the same museum: the stunning stencilled settee or day bed of Albany origin. (Fig. 3) Here, the principal design, while skillfully exe-

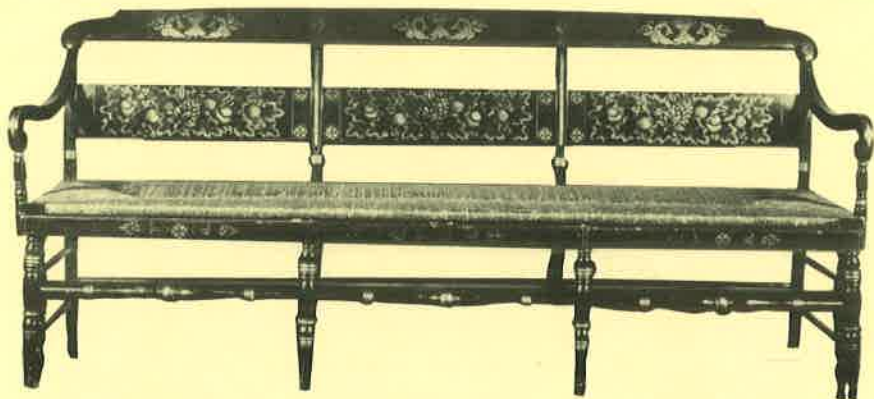


Fig. 3 — Decorated Sheraton bench. Trundle, now bolted to main section, pulled out to form a wider bed. Signed on right stile under arm: C. Johnson. Patent. Rush seat, rosewood graining. Albany, New York, after 1827. Courtesy, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.



Fig. 4 — Decorated Sheraton bench. Stencil detail of Fig. 3. Courtesy, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.

cuted, reflects the effort of a less inspired artist working in a prosperous but provincial upstate environment at about the same time or a very few years later.

While we wish to take nothing away from this striking piece, we find on it far less freehand detail. The center pineapple is composed of a repeated single stencil as are the leaves at its top and base, the latter veined with stencilling. The seeds of the strawberries are also stencilled, as well as the blossom end of the fruit to the left. (Fig. 4) Compare these with the stump modeling of the fruit on the table apron.

On the bench, the peaches are the familiar two piece pattern, the melons, one piece and the leaves with their veinings, each a repeated stencil. As on the table, there is an alizarin wash shading the fruit. In this unit, however, one finds only three small stump-workings: the receptable

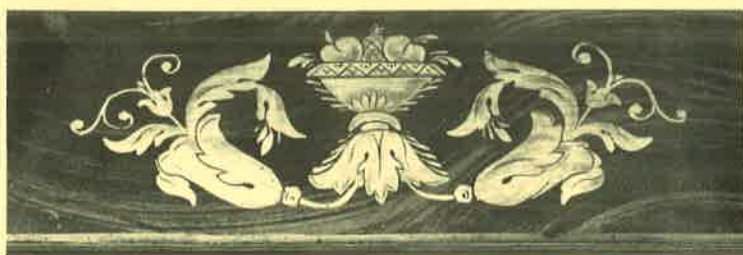


Fig. 5 — Decorated Sheraton bench. Gold leaf detail of Fig. 3. Courtesy, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.

of the pineapple, the highlights on its head, and the dot at the center of the blossom end of the lower fruit.

Just as the stencilling on the bench is executed in a more cursory manner than that on the table, so are the gold leaf forms. The three classical designs on the top slat (Fig. 5) are picked out with black brush strokes. The etching, done with a three-needle tool, is sketchy and formless, resulting in a somewhat flat appearance.

In comparison, the shading of the gold leaf on the table apron is a masterpiece of plasticity — a realistic and superb translation of the scarce and more expensive ormolu mounts. (Fig 6).

In conclusion, we would point out the utter suitability of the design to the piece in each case. The settee, a country manor piece, is embellished with striking but less accomplished work, in keeping with its charming, countryfied ambience. The decoration on the high styled, urbane dining-room table is the ultimate in artistic perfection.

For additional details on Sheraton bench, see: Fales, Dean A. Jr., *American Painted Furniture 1660-1880* E. P. Dutton and Company, New York 1972.

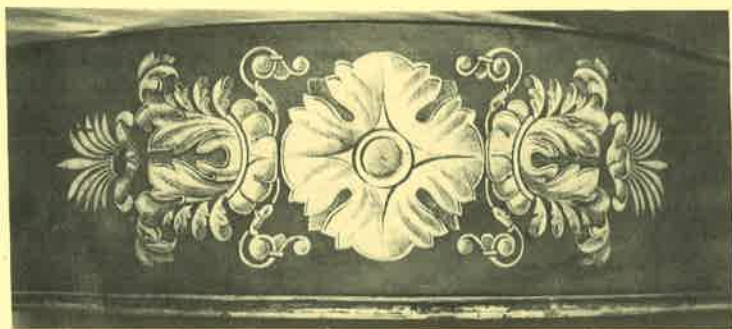


Fig. 6 — Empire dining table. Gold leaf detail of Fig. 1. Courtesy, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.



Original Red Japanned Sand Pourer
Courtesy, The Connecticut Historical Society

THE POUNCE BOX OR INK SANDER

by Shirley Spaulding DeVoe

The pounce box, pot, dredger or ink sander, to mention all the names, was a necessary article for the writing table or desk. It was used from medieval times until the mid-nineteenth century. Pounce boxes have been made of wood, porcelain, pottery, glass, enamel on copper, pewter, silver, tinplate and brass.

In the eighteenth century, a matching pounce box was often incorporated with an ink stand and they proved to be a considerable nuisance to writers who were apt to find themselves throwing ink instead of pounce on their paper and clothing.

Originally, pounce was used to scour or smooth and degrease vellum or parchment in order to prepare a suitable surface for writing with a quill pen. Even so, it was still necessary to use an iron-gall ink mixed with gum to obtain adherence.

A piece of cuttlefish can sometimes be found in an old writing box because it was used in powdered form as a pounce. Other materials used for this purpose were powdered pumice mixed with sandarac which gave the parchment a good scoured surface.

After paper replaced parchment, scouring its surface was not necessary as early writing paper was unglazed, so a preparation was then needed to prevent the ink from blurring.

The pounce box then became cylindrical with a saucer-shaped top in which there was a single hole like a salt pot. This saucer-shaped top allowed the paper to be cupped and the valuable pounce tipped back into the box for re-use. At this time the pounce used was pure sandarac, thus the name "sand" dredger. To dry the ink, the powder was sprinkled on the paper and rubbed with the finger or a special pad to prevent the ink

from spreading. Sometimes the sandarac was tied up in lawn or cambric to be used on the wide margins of old books on which early scholars sometimes made notes.

Paper was improved at the end of the eighteenth century and it seemed that the pounce box was no longer needed as a drying agent. A new pounce that was then in use for this purpose was either powdered chalk or biotite, (powdered magnesia mica). The latter adhered to and coagulated the ink and gave it a sparkling, frosted effect. Finally, blotting paper which was produced in England from about 1840, banished pounce from the writer's desk.

In this country, Connecticut tin shops produced "sand pourers," as they were called by the tinsmiths, from the first decade of the nineteenth century. They too, had a perforated saucer-shaped top and were japanned black or red. Some had hand painted designs or were merely striped while others had no ornament. No doubt these ink sanders, when filled, were useful for a long time, especially as the sand could be returned to the container as suggested earlier. Once emptied though the top would have to be pried off and after refilling, be soldered on again, but there is no suggestion in the Filley papers that this was ever done. However, it is noted in those papers that Asahel Goodrich, in October 1810, made five dozen sand pourers for Oliver Filley.

For most of the material in this article I am indebted to Edward Pinto whose article on this subject appeared in the *Times, Saturday Review*, London, on September 13, 1969.



Original Black Japanned Sand Pourers
Left Sand Pourer — Border of painted buds
Courtesy, Shirley S. DeVoe

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TO THE H.S.E.A.D., INC.**



Document Box, Country Painting — Donor, Flora Mears

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MEMBERS' "A" AWARDS
Vergennes, Vermont — September, 1974

Country Painting



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Eleanor Scott



Estelle Lyon

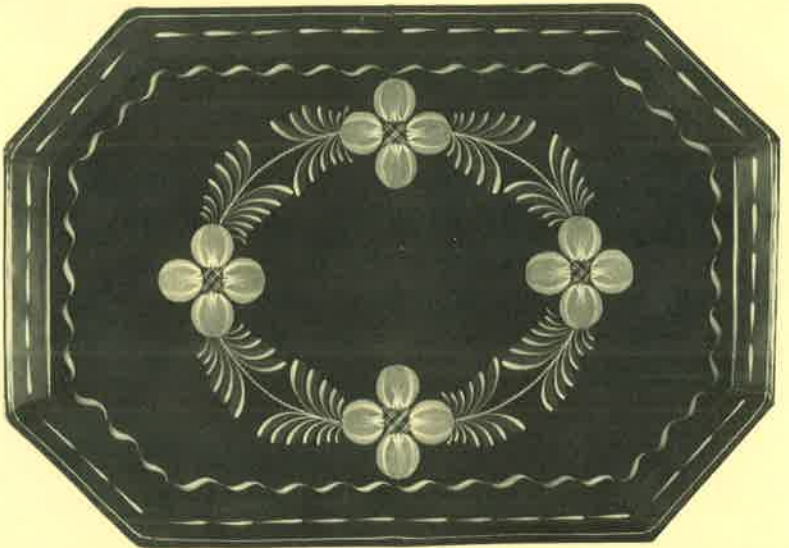
Country Painting



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Stencilling on Tin



Estelle Lyon

Stencilling on Wood



Laura Thompson

Metal Leaf Painting



Astrid Thomas

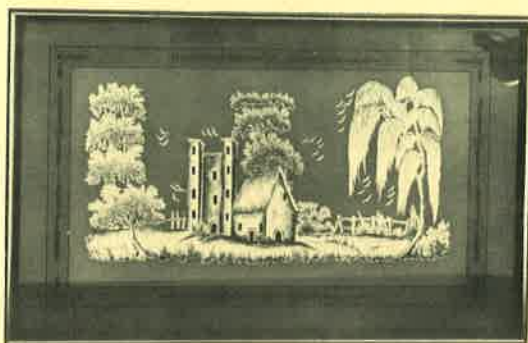
Lace Edge Painting



Dorothy Harrington



Jean Walter



Jane Bolster



Emily Underhill

Glass Panel — Metal Leaf Border



Jane Bolster

Special Class



Margaret Watts



THE BOOKSHELF

By Martha M. Wilbur

Antiques of American Childhood

by Katharine McClinton

Bramhill House, N.Y.

1970

An interestingly written book covering many phases of early childhood life, clothes, education, toys, and pastimes. There are many illustrations and throughout examples of early American Decoration. The chapter dealing with childrens' furniture pictures stenciled as well as painted cradles, chairs, both highchairs and minatures, for the child. One chapter deals with toys of tin, showing stenciled banks and pull toys. There is a chapter by chapter bibliography for anyone who wishes to study the subject in more detail . . . Informative as well as nostalgic reading.

Discovering Antiques — The Story of World Antiques

21 volumes — Graystone Press, N.Y., London and Toronto

1972

These volumes, originally a British publication, explores arts, crafts, styles and fashion from the Renaissance to the present. There are many short articles and a profusion of colored plates. Each volume is made up of several parts, short articles dealing with furniture, glass, pottery or other subjects; interspersed between these articles is a page of "Collectors' Items," discussing smaller antiques that are relatively inexpensive and available. At the end of each article is a box listing "Museums and Collections," world wide, and a listing of "Further Reading."

At the end of each volume is a section printed on blue paper titled "Collector's Corner." This section deals with the antiques market trends (these could become out of date relatively soon), the practical aspects of collecting, a how-to-do-it and instructions on care and repair. Throughout the volumes are separate articles pertaining to our field of interest. The papier mache chapter by Shirley DeVoe is very interesting and well illustrated . . . an interesting encyclopedia to browse through if it is in your public library.

Palekh Village of Artists

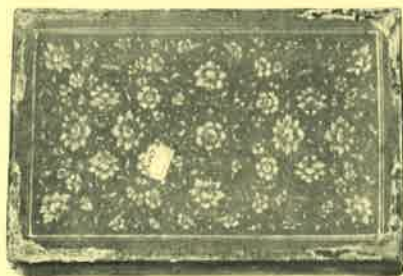
Progress Publications, Moscow

(Obtainable from Four Continents Bookstore, 5th Ave. at 21st St., N.Y.C.)

This is a very small hardback book printed in Russian, German, Spanish, French and English. It describes the making of small lacquer boxes and plaques. The full color illustrations show step-by-step the method used by the artisans today just as they have for a hundred years or more. The pictures of the finished boxes are beautiful and in detail. However, there are no pictures of the modern boxes with flowers, birds, and gold leaf that are so like lace edge and Chippendale designs. Both types of boxes are for sale in shops in the United States.



Original Persian Box — Courtesy, Dolores Samsell



Bottom — Persian Box



Inside Lid — Persian Box

NOTICES FROM TRUSTEES

SPRING MEETING

April 16, 17, 18, 1975

Sea Crest Hotel, North Falmouth, Massachusetts

Meeting Chairmen: Theresa Corey, Virginia Cochran

Program Chairman: Dorothy Hallett

FALL MEETING

Jug End, South Egremont, Massachusetts

September 24, 25, 26, 1975

NEW COOPERSTOWN PROCEDURES:

Members wishing to use pattern collections or do research work, write to the Director, Mr. Peter C. Welsh, N.Y. State Historical Association, Cooperstown, N.Y. 13326, stating the dates you wish to work in our rooms at Bump Tavern. You will be notified by mail if it is convenient. Present your membership card at the Registrar's Office, Fenimore House to obtain a pass for admission.

Members traveling through the area who wish to visit the rooms, present your membership card at the Registrar's Office, Fenimore House, to obtain a pass for admission.

No HSEAD photograph may be used for publication unless first cleared through the Photography Chairman and the owner.

Applications to sponsor an Exhibition using the Name of the Society may be obtained from the Treasurer, Mrs. George C. Watt.

Individuals desiring membership in more than one Chapter shall be governed by each Chapter's membership policies.

Send Endowment Fund Contributions to Mrs. Floyd Frost, Pleasant Cove Road, Boothbay, Maine 04537, our new Assistant Treasurer and Endowment Fund Treasurer.

The official seal of the Society shall be used for official Society business only. Any exceptions to this policy must have the written consent of the Board of Trustees.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

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.

STANDARDS AND JUDGING

CHANGE IN STANDARDS AND JUDGING BOOKLET

Page 10 under category "Freehand Bronze", caption "Design", add "Be certain that design contains adequate well bronzed and modeled large forms (as fruit, flowers, shells, people or animals.)"

ENDOWMENT FUND

THE HONOR ROLL OF DONORS, listing the names of all donors to the Endowment Fund will be prepared for display at the Newport Meeting. All names will be included for gifts received through March 31, 1975. Please remember that all personal and appreciated property gifts are tax deductible at fair market value and receipts for these gifts as well as cash gifts are sent to the donor for income tax purposes, by Mrs. Floyd Frost, Endowment Fund Treasurer. The HONOR ROLL OF DONORS will be included in the Annual Report. Another way to remember and serve the organization is by bequest.

NOTICE:—

The By-Laws of the Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc., as revised July 19, 1961, provide in ARTICLE VI — Section 5, as follows:

Any member having voting privileges may vote in person or by absentee ballot filed with the secretary before the opening of such meeting but such absentee ballot shall only be allowable upon the election of trustees. The nominating committee shall file with the secretary at least 60 days before the annual meeting its report on nominations for trustees, which report shall be open to examination by any member prior to such annual meeting. Additional nominations for elections of trustees may be made in writing by the petition of any member with voting privileges signed by 20 or more other members with similar privileges and filed with the secretary at least 35 days before such annual meeting. No person shall be eligible for election as a trustee unless so nominated by said committee or by petition as above set forth. The secretary shall provide absentee ballots to any members applying for the same.

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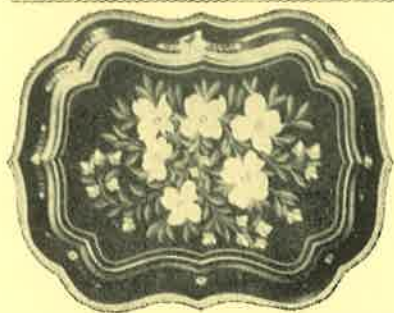
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