

# The Decorator

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Volume XXXVIII No. 1

Danvers, Massachusetts

Fall 1983

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



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



**Historical Society of  
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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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# THE DECORATOR

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## COVER PHOTOGRAPH

Empire bureau found at Rumford Point, Maine. ca. 1825-1845.  
Courtesy Kenneth and Pauline Tuttle.

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## EDITORIAL

“What a really fine meeting at Danvers”; “excellent exhibition, best examples of reverse painting on glass we’ve ever had”; “marvelous talks and demonstrations.”

I was sorry not to get to Danvers, especially sorry to miss Mona’s “Our Roots.” We need reminders of Esther Brazier who precipitated this whole investigation into the decorative arts which have become an integral part in the lives of so many of us. Her accomplishments should make us feel humble; we have encouragement and assistance from other members of HSEAD, a resource ESB could not call upon. Mrs. Brazier, though, had a fascinating family history of interest in the decorative arts from tinsmith-decorator great-great-grandfather Zachariah Stevens to Great-aunt Cordelia who taught painting at Westbrook Seminary to Grandmother Jane Tyler Stevens who “Painted charming Victorian flower arrangements with hummingbirds and floating ribbons.” Persistent in her search into the almost forgotten “arts and mysteries” of our trade, aggressive in her digging into its history, generous in sharing knowledge with pupils in widespread classes and with the reading public, Esther Brazier may serve well as our role model.

As your new Editor, I would like to:

1. Congratulate Jinny Wheelock on the fine journals her stewardship has produced: a dozen scholarly issues we are proud to place in our libraries.
2. Thank the Trustees who have placed their confidence in me and renewed an old challenge, that of gathering material of high interest to you, a specialized and discriminating audience.
3. Entreat HSEAD member-readers: write to me about your own research. Suggest topics THE DECORATOR should cover and people who know about them, along with information about talks that appeal to you and the lecturers who might write articles for us. Regional decoration helps fill in the larger pattern. Research goes on outside the area where I live; please be my eyes and ears in your communities.

This issue of THE DECORATOR is devoted largely to decorated furniture. Enjoy!

Margaret Coffin

**PATTERNS IN PAINT:  
MAINE DECORATED FURNITURE, 1800-1850**

*by Edwin A. Churchill*

American painted furniture has never enjoyed greater popularity than at present (except perhaps when it was being made). Brightly decorated pieces show up at most auctions, in numerous shops and, ultimately, in the homes of enthusiastic collectors. Still, for all of the interest that has been generated over these colorful objects, there is much yet unknown regarding the regional patterns, local peculiarities, and cultural implications of the many painted boxes, bureaus, tables, chairs, and stands.

Eventually such a vacuum will be filled, and due to a number of circumstances, the process has started for the State of Maine. The most recent findings evolved in the development of a recently-opened exhibition at the Maine State Museum with an accompanying catalog on Maine painted furniture, 1800-1850.

At this point, the information in hand has been largely gathered for the lower half of the State, roughly from Bangor south. The northern and northeastern areas are still to be investigated. Thus far there are only a few patterns distinctive to the southern half of Maine. The most pervasive is the use of green, especially olive green, as decorative elements on painted furniture. The color appears in bands, borders, cartouches, foliage, and, at times, over the full object. A rocker constructed by Joseph Hockey of Freedom, Maine is wholly typical (Fig 1). In the chairmaking business for about a decade, Hockey apparently hired his decorators. On this piece, the painter outlined the panels on the crest rail and banded the seat perimeter in olive green. While the use of green seems logical on the Hockey rocker, it appears to be almost capricious on a small domed box given to fifteen-year-old Esther Leighton of Augusta in December 1847 (Fig. 2). Featuring finely executed graining, it has a painted olive-green cartouche right in the center of the top. Time and again, these small green elements appear on Maine decorated furniture.

A second pattern found in the area is red-and-black graining in wide, horizontal striations. A matched dressing table and wash stand (Fig. 3) represent this pattern at its best. From the Raymond W. Tobey estate of Fairfield, the pair were almost certainly decorated by the same individual, probably the person who also put red and black graining on over a half-dozen other pieces from the same house.

Besides these more generalized patterns there are several which seem to emanate largely from central and west-central Maine, including multi-colored striping, red and green brush strokes, and exotic, dramatic decorative motifs.

Bold multicolored striping was often used in the region, with red/green and red/yellow the most frequently encountered — many times in





Fig. 1 — Salem Rocker. Made by Joseph Hockey of Freedom, Maine,  
ca. 1825-1835;  
H. 45", W. 22", D. 27½"; seat — probably basswood.  
Collection of Arlie Porath.

juxtaposition with black banding. These combinations were often applied to pieces with monochromatic ground colors, usually yellow, but also salmon and blue-green. Those objects so striped nearly always carried other elaborate decoration. A red/green striped early Empire bureau from Rumford Point is representative, including as well smoke-grained drawer fronts and slim, well-turned black painted feet (Fig. 4). More exotic is a small blue-green box found in an Augusta attic (Fig. 5). Besides red and black striping with yellow banding, it contains a set of handpainted motifs without peer in the State. In fact, they seem quite foreign to the area. Nonetheless, the interior of the box is lined with local broadsides and newspapers dating 1834 and 1835, and a cryptic painted inscription on the

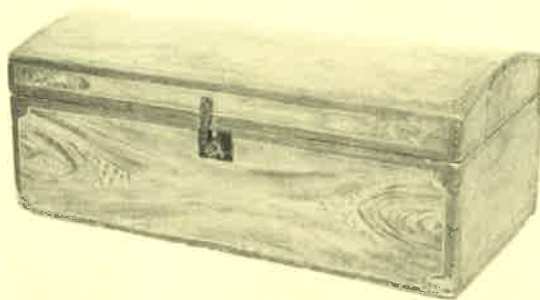


Fig. 2 — Box. Made for Esther Leighton of Augusta, Maine, ca. 1847;  
H. 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", W. 26 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", D. 13"; basswood.  
Collection of Maine State Museum, 82.17.2.

back reads "Jn x C.y x 1835." These, plus location of discovery, strongly suggest that this brightly painted and striped box was right at home in Maine's State Capital.

Another striping combination — yellow and green — appears in the mid-Maine region; however, unlike the other pairings, it is used almost solely on red-and-black grained objects. Found throughout the area (and in the case of two labeled Biddeford boxes, beyond), the largest number of examples appear in Kennebec and Oxford counties. The rocking settee illustrated here (Fig. 6) is representative. Also from the Tobey estate in Fairfield, it has green/yellow striping outlining the crest rail and the gate. The combination of red/black graining and green/yellow striping was used on nearly all forms of furniture, appearing on chairs, tables, beds, boxes, and bureaus, but only — as far as presently known — in Maine.

The red-and-green brush stroke patterns combine as a second feature which is found on items from mid-Maine. They appear as fernlike motifs on the crest rail and vining foliage on the front spindle of a handsome step-down Windsor sidechair. These and other elements clearly derived from contemporary painted tin were applied by Daniel Stewart of Farmington, the chair's maker. Stewart was only eight when he moved there with his family from Martha's Vineyard in 1794. Receiving his training from his father Hugh, a housewright and chairmaker, Daniel became one of Maine's preeminent Windsor chairmakers, only to die in 1827 at the age of forty-one (Fig. 7).

The use of brushstroke leaves also appears on a dressing table made and decorated by John Williams of Mount Vernon in 1832 (Fig. 8). The alternating red-and-green leafed vines ascending the front legs closely parallel those on the Stewart chair. However, the brushstroke elements on



the backboard seem freer and more spontaneous in both conceptualization and application. John Williams was a native Maine maker and decorator, born in Chesterville, Maine on January 6, 1801. He was the son of Captain Thomas and Lydia Williams. A joiner by trade and a locally prominent individual, Thomas became a victim of alcohol, was put under town guardianship by 1808 and died two years later. John, with two brothers and two sisters, helped his mother run the family farm until he reached his mid-twenties when he turned to cabinetmaking. In 1827, he moved to Mount Vernon, where he continued until shortly before his death in 1888. Interestingly, when John's mother was put under bond regarding her husband's estate in the early 1800s, two of her underwriters were joiners, including David Morrill of Farmington. He may well have had a role in training young John as a cabinetmaker and, if so, it is highly probable that



Fig. 3 — (left)

Country Sheraton Washstand. From Fairfield, Maine,  
ca. 1825-1840;

H. 39 $\frac{3}{4}$ " , W. 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ " , D. 15" ; front, drawer front and backboard: white  
pine; top, legs, and drawer interior: basswood; pull: brass.

Collection of Maine State Museum, 81.121.1.

Fig. 3 — (right)

Country Sheraton Dressing Table. From Fairfield, Maine,  
ca. 1825-1840;

H. 34 $\frac{3}{4}$ " , W. 31" , D. 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ " ; frame and drawer front: white pine; top,  
drawer and drawer interior: basswood; pull: brass.

Collection of Maine State Museum, 81.95.2.

John saw and copied patterns used by Daniel Stewart, including the red-and-green brush stroke motif. Williams also included red-and-green striping along with black banding on his table, a combination thoroughly typical of the mid-Maine area.



Fig. 4 — Empire Bureau. Found at Rumford Point, Maine, ca. 1825-1845; H. 49 $\frac{1}{2}$ "", W. 43 $\frac{1}{2}$ "", D. 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ ""; case and drawer fronts — white pine; drawer interiors — basswood; pulls — brass. Collection of Kenneth and Paulette Tuttle.

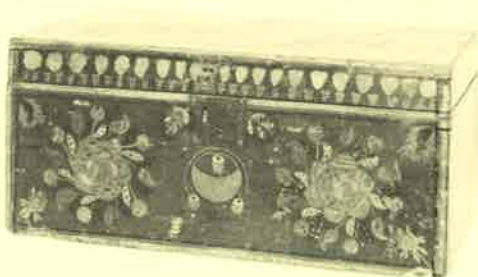


Fig. 5 — Box. Found in Augusta, Maine, ca. 1835; H. 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ "", W. 24", D. 12"; probably pine. Collection of Kenneth and Paulette Tuttle.



Fig. 6 — Rocking Settee. From Fairfield, Maine, ca. 1830-1845;  
H. 33", W. 56", D. 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ "; seat — basswood; back posts — birch; gate  
posts — maple; crest rail and gate — probably pine or basswood.  
Collection of Maine State Museum, 81.102.1.

Another element, less easy to categorize but nonetheless present in the central and west central regions of the State, is a proclivity for dramatic, exotically decorated objects. The small Augusta box noted above (Fig. 5) is one example. Another is a box attributed to the upper Kennebec area (Fig. 9). The red-black graining curls in whirling scrolls across the box, seemingly ready to leap from the pine surfaces if not held in place by a set of elaborate stencils unlike those by any other decorator. The box front features a wolf and a fox in frozen pursuit of a pair of startled rabbits, themselves in mid-leap toward a schematic bush (briar patch?). Supplementing these images are several other stencils that all but defy description.

The exuberance is also reflected in the elaborate shaping that frequently appears on top or bottom terminal units, including backboards, fretworks, and skirts. The phenomenon is evident on the backboard of the Williams dressing table (Fig. 8). The deeply curving, multiple scrolled backboard creates a striking silhouette further enhanced by red-and-green striping and bronze stenciled rosettes. This and similarly shaped items from the region reveal a delight in the bold and dramatic, nowhere else matched throughout the State of Maine.



Fig. 7 — Step-down Windsor Side Chair. Made and decorated by Daniel Stewart of Farmington, Maine, ca. 1812-1827; H. 35 $\frac{1}{2}$ "", SW. 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ "", SD. 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ "", seat — probably basswood. Collection of Burton and Helaine Fendleman.

Unfortunately, the patterns prevalent in southwestern Maine are yet not so well known, and where they are understood are far more derivative than those from the central region. There are vividly painted examples from the southwest, yet the heritage of the region was more restrained and stylistically up-to-date. A relatively well-to-do, politically conservative, and fashion-conscious population looked southward to Boston and eastern Massachusetts for inspiration and, conversely, for delineation of approved decorative patterns.

The predominant spirit is evident in the yellow painted arrow-back Windsor chair made and decorated by William Capen of Portland, ca. 1823-1827 (Fig. 10). Capen, who was to have a very successful career as a sign and fancy painter before dying of "painter's colic" (lead poisoning), was aware of what was in style. The chair is up-to-date in its squarish verticality and late Empire lines; the decoration, although bright, is elegantly simple and in carefully coordinated colors.

The same conservatism can be seen in the side chairs built by the firms of Walter Corey and Todd and Beckett of Portland (Fig. 11). Corey set up



Fig. 8 — Country Sheraton Dressing Table. Made and decorated by John Williams of Mount Vernon, Maine, 1832;  
H. 38 $\frac{3}{4}$ " , W. 36" , D. 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ " ; frame, top and drawer fronts — white pine; upper case and case drawers, main drawer interior, and legs — basswood; glass pulls patented by Deming Jarves of Boston and Sandwich Glass companies.  
Former collection of Mr. and Mrs. W.M. Schwind, Jr.

a "cabinet warehouse" in 1836 and developed his factory to the point that at mid-century he was employing nearly a hundred workers and was producing 20,000 chairs per year, as well as a full line of other furniture. James Todd, who had begun a looking-glass manufactory in 1823, joined with Samuel Beckett in 1834; in 1844 the partners expanded into chairs and other furniture construction as well, staying together until 1848, after which Todd was joined by his sons in running the business.

Both the Corey and Todd firms were destroyed in the great Portland fire of 1866. As with the Capen chair, the products from these two firms were conservative and up-to-date. The Corey chair exhibits the klismos form, which was introduced years earlier and continued strong to about mid-century in middle-quality furniture, as did the vase splats used on both of these chairs. The Todd and Beckett piece is even more interesting in that the rolled crest rail with the pronounced ears appears to be startlingly similar to formal women's hairstyles of the period, a similarity which seems too strong to be accidental. The properly restrained mood is continued in the imitative rosewood graining and the simple yellow striping. They were, in a word, "tasteful."



Fig. 9 — Box. Probably from the upper Kennebec Valley, ca. 1825-1840;  
H. 11¼", W. 25¾", D. 13½"; basswood, except for white pine bottom.  
Collection of Maine State Museum, 81.121.2.



Fig. 10 — Arrow-back Windsor Side Chair. Made and decorated by William  
Capen of Portland, ca. 1823-1827; seat — pine; other elements —  
probably maple.  
Collection of Lowell Innes.





Fig. 11 — (left)  
 Klismos-type Vase-back Side Chair. Made and decorated by the  
 Walter Corey factory of Portland, ca. 1840-1850;  
 H. 34 $\frac{1}{2}$ " , W. 18" , D. 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ " ; seat frame — maple; legs and back upright  
 — beech.  
 Collection of Earle G. Shettleworth.

Fig. 11 — (right)  
 Vase-back Side Chair. Made and decorated by the Todd and  
 Beckett firm, Portland, ca. 1844-1848;  
 H. 34" , W. 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ " , D. 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ " ; seat frame and legs — birch.  
 Collection of Maine State Museum, 75.61.3.

In conclusion, we are beginning to understand some of the decorated patterns that evolved in Maine during the first half of the nineteenth century. There are regional differences as well as a number of more widely utilized combinations and motifs, and at least some of these were related to various social and economic factors. Nonetheless, there is much that is not yet known and large areas not yet investigated. The opportunity to learn more about the painted furniture of this most northeasterly state is still very real for anyone who would wish to take up the pursuit.

**FEATURED AT OUR MUSEUM**  
**"THE FLOWERING OF TIN — FROM THE CONNECTICUT**  
**VALLEY TO THE HUDSON VALLEY"**

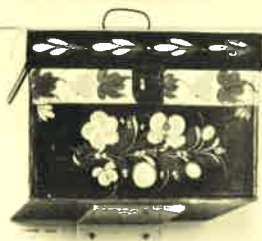
*by Doris Fry, Director*

From the center of the tin industry in Connecticut, two families moved to the Hudson Valley to open new territories. Although both families were trained in the same area, their tinshops and decoration were entirely different.

The Filley family business originated in Bloomfield, Connecticut, in about 1806. A shop was opened in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, in 1810, and in 1815, Augustus Filley, cousin of Bloomfield's Oliver Filley, started a business in Lansingburg, New York. Harvey Filley, Oliver's brother, set up shop in Philadelphia about 1816, and Dwight, Oliver's son, followed suit in St. Louis, Missouri, in the 1830's. Because of the many shops, most of the work was done by hired hands who traveled from shop to shop, and very few pieces are signed. Many changes in transportation and industry after 1850 made tinsmithing a less profitable business and many tinshop owners turned to the cast iron stove business (for which they supplied tin stove pipes.) Among them were members of the Filley family who later expanded their fields of interest and became, among other things, lawyers and scholars. Filley descendants still live in the Troy-Albany district but, unfortunately, do not own any Filley-painted tinware.



Introductory display "The Flowering of Tin"



Filley pieces and charts of typical motifs



Pieces thought to be Lansingburg Filley work



Another display at our museum.

Abel Butler moved his family from Berlin, Connecticut, in 1799, to eastern New York State, and sent his son Aaron back to Connecticut as an apprentice in the tin trade. Aaron eventually set up a tinshop, along with other enterprises, in East Greenville, in the Catskills. Aaron and his wife, Sarah Cornell Butler, had eleven children, of whom Ann was the oldest. She "flowered" the Butler tinware, and taught the younger siblings. Other than Ann, Minerva was best known for her painting; both signed pieces that they painted.

There are many Butler descendants in the Albany-Catskill area and many of them own Butler-decorated tinware. Some twenty pieces, most never exhibited before, are in the present Museum exhibition. On loan are also a pieced quilt signed by Ann Butler, several Butler account books showing the day-to-day transactions of the Butler businesses, and a beaded bag with "Minerva Butler 1838" worked into the beadwork design. HSEAD members have been most generous in lending their Butler and Filley-Lansingburg tinware. The exhibition also includes photographs, family trees, and charts showing units typical of the Filley and Butler shops. The exhibition will remain until April 1984.



Butler bun basket and mementoes



Butler pieces and charts of typical motifs.



## WILDER CHAIRS

*by Charles S. Parsons*

Very little has been written about the small chairmakers that were scattered about the State of New Hampshire in the 18th and 19th centuries. Although some are mentioned briefly in local histories, the makers of most chairs cannot be identified today, as there are no records remaining of their work. The account books, personal histories, and branded and labeled chairs of the Wilder Family are, therefore, unique.

The Wilder Family dates back to 1638 when Widow Martha Wilder with her four children emigrated to Massachusetts Bay for religious purposes. Her son, Thomas, at thirty-six years of age, moved to a 500 acre farm in Lancaster, Massachusetts, in 1654. His son, Thomas, carried on the farm and his son, Joseph, became a judge. Then followed Andrew, who was the father of two chairmakers.

In the next generation, it is interesting to note that Abijah (1750-1831) moved to Keene, New Hampshire, where he worked as a cabinet, sleigh, and spinning wheel maker. Peter (1761-1841), from Lancaster and Boston, moved to New Ipswich, New Hampshire, in 1805. He purchased land soon after the Third New Hampshire Turnpike which ran from Townsend,



"Pillowback" Windsor side chair made by Minot Carter, ca. 1840.  
Courtesy The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum.



Wilder stepdown Windsor side chair.  
Courtesy the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center.

Massachusetts, to Walpole, New Hampshire, was opened. In 1810 he settled in an area known as "Trophet Swamp," now "Wilder Village," which probably never had more than ten buildings. There was an ample supply of wood in that area and a brook which later supplied power for the circular saw and wood turning. A pair of side chairs, though not marked, have been attributed to Peter. He also made chairs with his son-in-law, Abijah Wetherbee (1781-1835).

Peter had five sons who also made chairs. Joseph (1787-1825) probably made those few chairs marked "J. Wilder" and a few with his paper labels. Thomas (1791-1862) kept the store in Wilder Village and is known to have made a set of six side chairs stamped "T. Wilder." He later moved to Worcester, Massachusetts, where he worked as a portrait artist. Captain Josiah Prescott Wilder (1801-1873), known as "J.P.," was undoubtedly the most prolific of the chairmaking sons of Peter. John B. Wilder (1804-1852) worked with his brother J.P. at times and at the store. However, no chairs carry his identification. Calvin R. (1806-1852) went to New York City and in 1837 J.P. invoiced him for "rocking chair stuff for 100 chairs." Later he took on a partner, and his firm known as Wilder & Stewart, only lasted

from 1840 to 1842 during which time more chair parts were supplied by J.P. It is not known what he did in the next few years, but in 1849 he sailed around Cape Horn for California. No chairs with his name are known. Minot Carter (1813-1873), a brother-in-law of J.P., also worked at the factory. He used two different labels which read "Warrented Chairs, Made by Minot Carter, at Wilder's Chair Factory, New Ipswich, N.H. Price \$\_\_\_\_\_." A few of his chairs are known today.

Josiah P. Wilder, mentioned above, was born in Boston, Massachusetts. He attended New Ipswich Academy. Fifteen of his essays, correspondence, and account books for 1837 to 1858 have been preserved. Quite a few of his chairs stamped "J.P. Wilder/Waranted" are known and have been photographed. An 1839-1851 journal documents his partnership with George P. Gardner from 1839 to 1841 and refers to "Chairs sold on pedling excursion, 1838." He was a Captain in the N.H. Militia. He depended on the work of his family for the most part and had three sons who, when young, helped their father and neighbors with the farming. Charles Wetherbee Wilder (1827-1913) worked in the chair factory in 1847 according to the account book entries and later moved to Fitchburg, Massachusetts. Oliver D. Wilder (1830-1910) who is reported to have worked for a neighbor for six months in 1843 and earned \$25.00, lived in Lowell, Massachusetts, at



Wilder stepdown Windsor side chair with typical decoration, ca. 1820.  
Courtesy the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center.

one time and later became a chairmaker in Ashburnham, Massachusetts. Josiah P. Wilder, Jr. (1832-1863) left home after reaching the age of twenty one. Letters show that he went to Ashburnham and later worked his way West making chairs in various places. In 1860 he was in Washington Territory logging and in 1863 was killed by a falling tree.

The later type Windsor chairs were probably the first form of furniture produced in large volume in New Hampshire. Although there were turners who specialized in chairs a hundred years previously, they did not produce in quantity. The Wilder chairs were primarily turned chairs except for seats and back tops. They were well made and much stronger than the later types that did not have leg stretchers.

Very few chairs have survived with the original decoration in whole or in part. It is believed that most were sold unfinished although a few accounts indicate painting. The pigment boxes which remain are labeled for sixteen colors. J.P.'s account book has entries for about forty different types of chairs which include "arm, banister, barbour's, bar room, child, common, desk, double back, fancy top, night, nurse, office, parlour, rocking, school, scroll seat, and wagon." Settees, cradles, stools, and tables are also mentioned. The descriptions, however, are so brief that some cannot be identified today. In addition, there are variations in the number of spindles, decorative turnings, and shapes of tops.

J.P.'s accounts show that he made more than 25,000 chairs from 1837 to 1859, with the peak years of production starting about 1845. In 1844 he sold 100 chairs in Lowell, Massachusetts which increased the total sold in that town to three different dealers to 22,000. In his 1847 forecast of sales, he anticipated making 2750 chairs for Lowell which would take 24 one-horse loads. In 1846 he had carted 18 loads of chairs averaging 127 chairs (approximately 2286) each at a cost per chair of 2.2 cents or ten percent of the price obtained per chair. In 1849 he made 2846 chairs of which only ten percent were sold locally. In that year shipment was made by railroad at a cost of 1.67 cents per chair. According to the records he only sold one lot of chairs in Boston which was in 1850 for 138 pieces. The chair parts he shipped to his brother in New York City went by freight to Boston and then by schooner to New York. He also had small customers in neighboring towns.

At times J.P. paid his brother for piece work such as "getting out 100 rocking chair tops, \$1.50," "By getting out 200 rockers, \$3.00," and at other times the allotted amount was not recorded. In 1847, he paid his son Charles "By making 1650 common chairs \$99.00" or six cents each for the chairs which he sold at Lowell for 22 and 23 cents. At this time labor was paid about one dollar a day. By 1850 he sometimes purchased parts from other factories as in 1856 when he bought "1600 chair backs for \$8.00."

Apparently, the Wilder Chair Factory did not advertise, but it is interesting to note some of the newspaper advertisements of the time in New Hampshire. In Portsmouth, 1829, Dockum & Brown "Just received 1000 chairs of various kinds...painted and gilded in town...call and see the difference between these chairs and those that come from Boston ready painted." Benjamin Damon of Concord, 1825 to 1834, advertised chairs "of my own manufacturing" and also "did chair decorating, sign, and house painting." In 1843 Tuttle & Wheeler from Amherst: "500 chairs just received." In the same year Coggin, Fisher & Company of Nashua: "Chairs, 5759 custom-made chairs consisting of sixty different patterns...." In this advertisement there could have been a chair for every resident of the town but, of course, the ad covered the surrounding area as well.

The factory continued in business until 1869 when a freshet ruined the dam and factory. Only portions of the stone foundation remain. It is, indeed, fortunate that the Wilder account books and interesting letters from family members who left home have survived to give us a very complete story of an important chairmaking family and an industrious, intelligent, and independent craftsman.

Note: Our thanks to Mona Rowell for securing this article for THE DECORATOR.





## THE PALATINES AND A SURVEY OF DECORATION ON MOHAWK AND SCHHARIE VALLEY CHESTS

*by Mary de Julio*

In the summer of 1710 approximately 2400 people from the German Palatinate and neighboring territories arrived in New York. These homeless, almost destitute people and their heirs, would become one of the most important factors in the extension of the New York frontier and would leave a legacy of material culture which exists today.

These Palatines, as they were called, had begun a journey in 1709 when they and hundreds of others left their homes along the Rhine River Valley. Devastated by war, severe weather, and heavy taxes, they wanted to live where they could own land and farm in peace. They had heard that this could be done in the American British colonies, so they had travelled down the Rhine, through Rotterdam, to London.

Originally the British government encouraged the emigration of the Palatines. Soon over 13,000 Germans were camped in and around London, supported by Great Britain. Under pressure, the Board of Trade considered and implemented several plans. One plan was to send some of the Palatines to the royal province of New York. Here the Germans would produce tar and pitch for the British navy to give Great Britain a return on the money spent in the Palatines' behalf. (1)

A small group of Germans had been sent to New York in 1709. Under the leadership of the Rev. Joshua Kockerthal, they had settled fifty-five

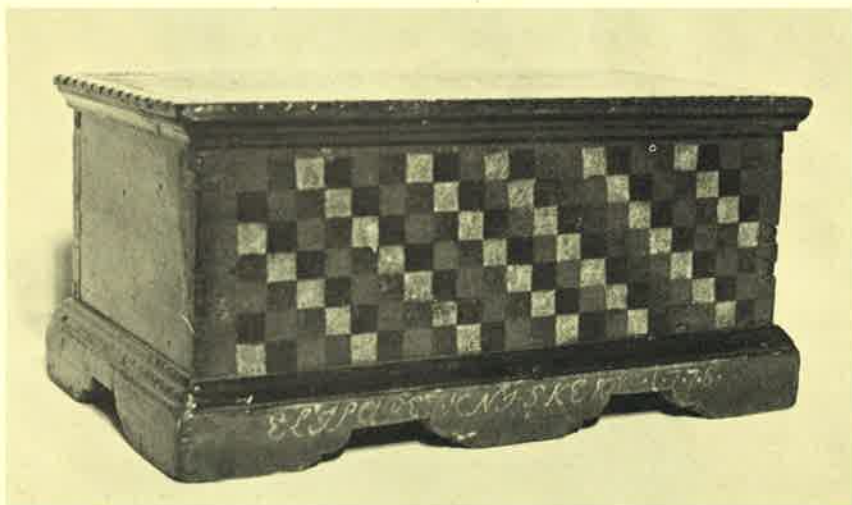


Fig. 1 — Chest, painted softwood.

Inscribed: ELISABET • KNI • SKERN • 1 • 7 • 7 • 8 •

H: 7½", W: 15¾", D: 9½"

Schoharie County Historical Society, Schohorie, New York.



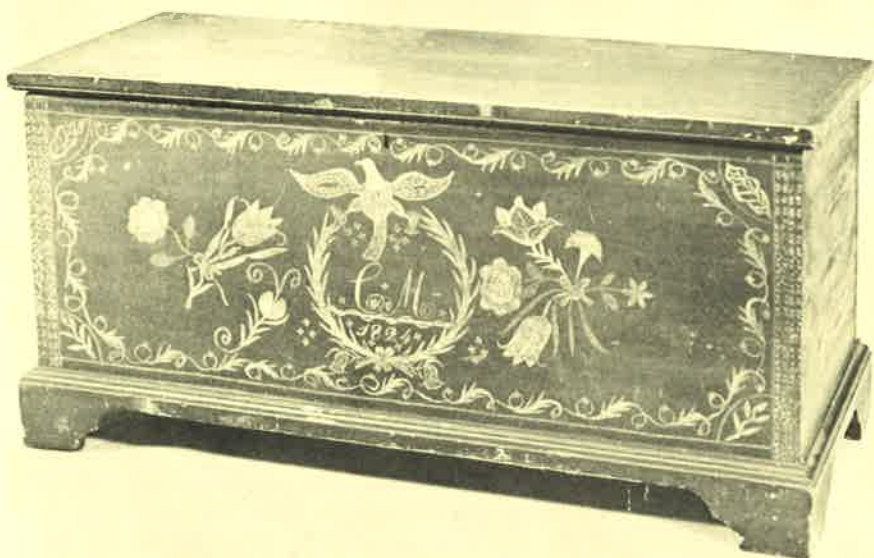


Fig. 2 — Chest, painted softwood.

Inscribed: C M/1824

H: 20½", W: 43¾", D: 18¾"

The Graeter-Hammon Collection.

Photograph courtesy Richard A. Bourne Co., Inc.

miles north of New York City at what was to become Newburgh. The Board of Trade had settled these Germans "where they might be useful to this Kingdom, particularly in the production of naval stores..." (2)

Under a poorly organized scheme, a group of Palatines was again sent to New York in 1710. They arrived in July with the new governor of the province, Robert Hunter. Seeking lands with good pitch pine trees close to a navigable river, Hunter secured three tracts of land. One was on the east side of the Hudson River in a patent granted to Robert Livingston. The other two were on the west side of the Hudson, across from Livingston's land. Here towns were laid out and in October, 1710, the Palatine Germans were settled upon them. Totally dependant upon Hunter and Livingston, the Palatines virtually were indentured servants.

Within two years the project failed. In September, 1712, the Palatines were told that they would have to support themselves, but they were not to travel out of the provinces of New York and New Jersey. Taken by surprise, the majority of the Palatines remained in the area of their settlement or moved down the Hudson. The more restless remembered the

Schoharie Valley (3) which had been one of the early areas considered<sup>1</sup> as a place of settlement. After sending deputies to secure permission from the Indians to occupy the Schoharie, about 150 families moved into the Valley in March 1713. They established seven villages, or dorfs, named for their deputies. (4)

Though acquiring the Schoharie land from the Indians, the Palatines did not petition the government for a patent and in 1714 Governor Hunter awarded the Schoharie lands to men from Albany. (5) The Schoharie Palatines would now have to purchase, lease, or vacate the land upon which they were living. This situation led to another migration of Germans.

The new Governor of New York, William Burnet, set about to settle the problem of the Palatines. In 1722 he purchased land specifically for the Germans and in 1725 this became the Burnetsfield Patent. (In 1723 the Stone Arabia Patent had been given to 27 men.) Both patents were located in the Mohawk Valley and the Palatines from the Schoharie soon occupied these acres. (6) Other Germans in the Schoharie purchased the land upon which they were living from the Seven Partners. Eighty-three families had had enough and left New York, moving to the Tulpehocken in Pennsylvania.

The Germans who had come to New York in 1710 were now scattered throughout the Hudson, Mohawk, and Schoharie Valleys. They were joined by another migration of Palatines in 1722, who located in the Mohawk Valley. There would be some more migration of these people within the province, but the emigration of Germans to New York had ended. Other Germans coming to America would go to Pennsylvania.

The Palatine Germans who settled in New York and their descendants, though living among Dutch- and English-speaking people, retained much of their German culture. They built houses and produced furniture, textiles, and objects that were decidedly their own. Because of their association with other cultures, these objects are different from the decorative arts made by Germans in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and Ohio. The six-board chests made by and for the Palatines in the Mohawk and Schoharie Valleys are good examples of New York State German cultures.

The chest was a very important piece of furniture in the daily lives of the Palatine Germans. They brought chests filled with clothes when they came to New York. (7) Once in New York, more chests were made. Chests can be found in estate inventories of men of German descent from the 18th to the mid-19th century. Most men had two, three, or more listed as part of their personal effects.

Examples of Palatine German chests from the Mohawk and Schoharie Valleys still exist. They belonged to people who lived in the regions settled by the Palatines in the first third of the 18th century. For those whose family history is known, the original owner was a direct descendant of

those Palatine Germans. The chests were always painted. Many of them were solid colors: reds, greens and blues are predominant. These were made and used to the mid-19th century. Other chests that were made in the 18th and 19th centuries were decorated.

The decorated chests which have been found come from an area in the Mohawk Valley from Canajoharie-Palatine Bridge to what was the German Flatts around Little Falls. In the Schoharie Valley, the chests originated in settlements in the Town of Schoharie south to Middleburgh and east to the Altamont area. No chest was found dating earlier than 1773 and the latest is dated 1836. Decoration differs from 18th to 19th century. Almost all chests have a name or initials of the owner painted on one surface, and many have dates. The chests were made for both males and females of marriageable age.

Each 18th century chest is decorated uniquely, and most have motifs long associated with the Germans. Some pieces were painted with just a name and date, often within a rectangle having notched- or quarter-circle clipped corners. This motif will appear with regularity as part of the decoration of 19th century chests. On others plump hearts and tulips around a name and date were used as embellishments. Two chests were



Fig. 3 — Chest, painted softwood

Inscribed: C K

H: 19½", W: 48½", D: 18¾"

The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center,  
Williamsburg, Virginia.

decorated with figures. On a chest made for Rachel Petrie by her betrothed, the man and woman facing each other are holding carnations. Above them are oversized flowers. It is doubtful that the figures on a 1798 chest represent such a happy occasion. While a man and woman are toasting each other, another man approaches with a drawn sword. A distelfink and a fox are watching.

Three chests, all belonging to Kniskerns and dated 1778, are most interesting. One chest, made for Jacob Kniskern, is the only chest found that was decorated with architectural details. On the front, two painted panels are surrounded by moldings, and applied pilasters are at each end. Sechsterns were painted on the top and sides of the chest. Two chests for Elisabet Kniskern and Margreda Kniskern are miniatures. (Fig. 1) All three chests are red with decoration of small squares in a checkerboard pattern painted red, gray (green), white, and black. Jacob, Elisabet and Margreda were the children of Johannes Kniskern, and the Elisabet chest is said to have been made by him.

In the 19th century definite designs and forms became popular, some of which seem to be unique to the New York Germans. They are used and reused with subtle changes depending upon who decorated the chest and the area from which the piece originated. Some chests retain the tulip, heart and distelfink. Other chests combine these motifs with new 19th century ones. In this century there is evidence of professional decorators.

One of the 19th century decorative designs is a wreath. The wreath, often painted with a bow at the bottom, is found on chests dating from 1808 to 1825. In most cases, the initials of the person for whom the chest was made are enclosed in the wreath along with the date. The letters and numerals were executed in a fine calligraphic script. The wreath may stand unto itself, be flanked by an oversized flower, flowers, or spirals of flowers. These flowers are usually stylized tulips or dahlias.

There is a group of chests painted by the same person with wreaths and two tulips at the bottom. Judging by the details and quality of the work, the decorator was a professional. The chests date 1823, 1824, or 1825. On the front board of each chest is a red-and-yellow wreath, with initials and date inside, separated by interwoven straight and wavy lines. The purchaser could decide how much decoration he or she wanted. Some chests have only the wreath with date and initials. Other chests were painted with an eagle perched atop the wreath, flanked by a bouquet of flowers, with a border of vines and leaves. (Fig. 2) One chest has a seamaid instead of the bouquet painted next to the wreath. These chests come from a small region in Schoharie County.

Another group of chests was decorated with swags of bellflowers and classical paterae or stars encircled by fine wreaths. Here the initials are large. All is enclosed in a rectangle with notched corners. Black and salmon



Fig. 4 — Chest, painted softwood  
Inscribed: MARIA NELLIS / 1811  
H: 20", W: 49", D: 19"

Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.

were used to paint these chests. (Fig. 3) Again, close examination indicates the chests were executed by the same decorator. A compass was used to plot the pattern, and the bellflowers are drawn and spaced in good proportion.

There was another decorator working in the Mohawk Valley at about the same time. The chests this person painted were very personalized. The name of the owner was placed in large block capital letters across the entire front of the piece. A date was below, and long tendrils border the name. This decorator used an interesting pattern to outline the keyhole. He had difficulty, though, in spacing the letters for the name. (Fig. 4)

An urn or basket of flowers was used as the main motif on the front of many chests. One group was painted with a classical urn filled with a riotous bouquet of flowers. Every color in the palette was used: red, rose, plum, orange, yellow, green, and white, with black touches in the stems and leaves. The initials of the owner were placed on each side of the urn in a tight script. The border of leaves and flowers is highlighted with a large flower at each corner. (Fig. 5)

Another decorator used an urn or pot of flowers for decoration, but he used fewer flowers. These seem to be escaping loosely on long thin stems. Only three colors were used: red, yellow, and black. While these urns have



roses and carnations seen on other chests, there is a five-petal flower that is unique and helps identify other work by the same hand. The script initials are large and flowing; all is enclosed in a rectangle with notched corners.

Urns of flowers, very similar to those found on the New York chests, are found on European pieces. In 1717 Ulrich Simmendinger returned to his home from the tar camps of New York. He wrote of his experiences in a booklet. The tailpiece ornaments in this publication are an urn and a basket, both filled to overflowing with flowers. (8) The tendril design was also familiar to Palatine Germans. In 1772, when the construction of the Schoharie Reformed Church was completed, some of the men involved with its fabrication had their names chiseled on the stone. Under the name of Johannes Werth are tendrils found thirty to forty years later on these chests.

All of the decoration described so far was painted free-hand, with a compass or scribe used sometimes to plot the border. One group of chests was decorated with the use of stencils. The basket of flowers is the central design. While the flowers are freely painted, the details of the basket and



Fig. 5 — Chest, painted softwood

Inscribed: E P

H: 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", W: 43 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", D: 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

Privately owned.

Photograph courtesy of Sotheby's.



the border of C-scroll leaves are stencilled. The same colors of yellow, green, and salmon were used identically, and designs are repetitive.

While professionals were involved in the decoration of many of the 19th century pieces, none were signed, and no records have been found indicating who made or painted these chests.

By the 1830's the practice of decorating chests began to disappear in the Mohawk and Schoharie Valleys. The last effort — a few chests from the Schoharie were decorated totally with the use of stencils. While the borders were well-done, the basket once filled with gay animated flowers has shrunk to a composite of a few flowers or pieces of fruit. The effect is flat and lacking the life of the earlier painting.

For over a century these decorated chests have sat in a backroom or barn, overshadowed by their Pennsylvania counterparts. They are beginning to emerge and be appreciated as fine examples of the New York German culture.

#### Footnotes.

1. Walter Allen Knittle, **Early Eighteenth Century Palatine Emigration**, (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company, 1937). Knittle presents a very good history of the Palatines' emigration, conditions in London, and the dispersal of Palatines.
2. E.B. O'Callaghan, M.D., **The Documentary History of the State of New York**, (Albany: The State of New York, 1850), Vol. III, pp. 327-328.
3. Paul A.W. Wallace, **Conrad Weiser Friend of Colonist and Mohawk**, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1945), pp. 15-16.
4. Knittle, **Early Eighteenth Century Palatine Emigration**, p. 195
5. Jeptha R. Simms, **History of Schoharie County and Border Wars**, (Albany: Munsell & Tanner, 1845), p. 62.
6. Nelson Greene, ed., **The History of the Mohawk Valley Gateway to the West 1614-1925**, (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1925), Vol. I, pp. 498-499, 502-506.
7. O'Callaghan, **The Documentary History of the State of New York**, Vol III, p. 428.
8. Ulrich Simmendinger, **Warhafte und Claugwirdige Berzeichnuss ...** (Reuttlingen, circa 1717).

## CORNER OF FACTS

**CRYSTALLIZED TINWARE:** It was patented in 1816 by Edward Thomason of Birmingham, and marketed as *moire metal*. The patent took advantage of the fact that when tinned iron plate is held obliquely to the light it reveals figured patterns. After processing it was silvery in appearance and covered with stars and other well-composed geometrical figures; it was varnished at once to preserve its brilliancy. In the 1830s *Ryton and Walton* discovered that splendid effects could be obtained by staining the tin green, lake, yellow and other colours. This was coated several times with japanner's *varnish*. Pictures were painted over this ground with outstanding effect by flower painters from the potteries. Under the name of crystallized ware many a japanner issued a variety of domestic goods such as *trays* and *waiters*, tea chests, work boxes, tobacco boxes and lamps.

*The Concise Encyclopedia of Antiques*. 1959, Vol. 4. Hawthorne Books.

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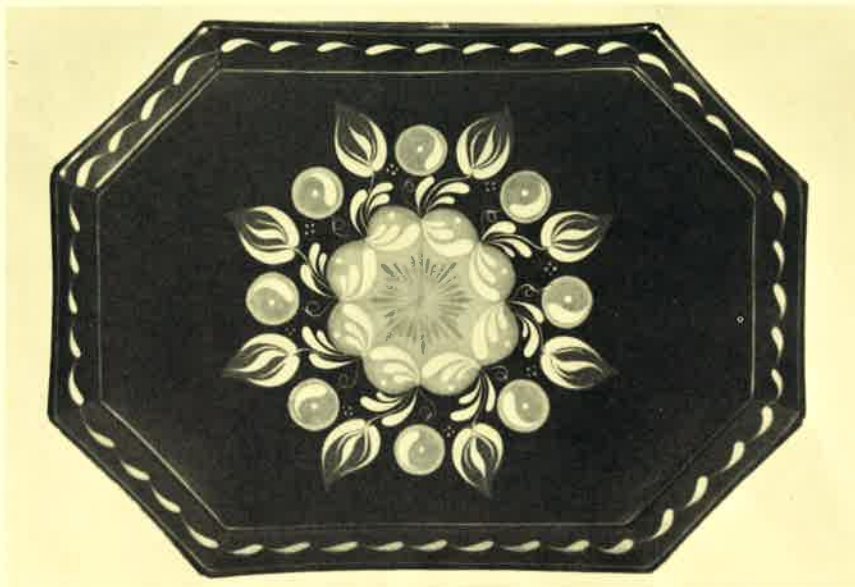
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Victorian Flower Painting — Roberta Edrington

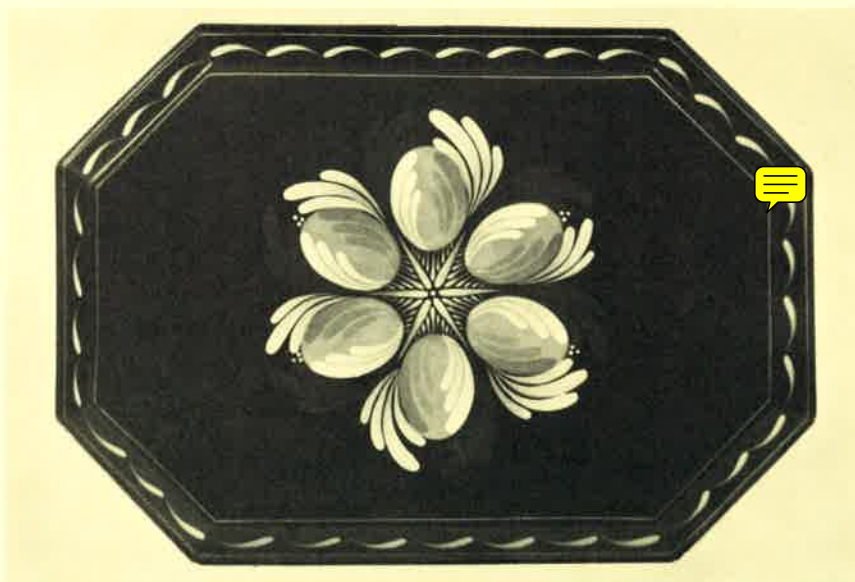


Inside Cover

**MEMBERS' "A" AWARDS**  
**Danvers, Massachusetts — October 1983**  
Country Painting



Ursula Erb



Shirley Berman



Country Painting



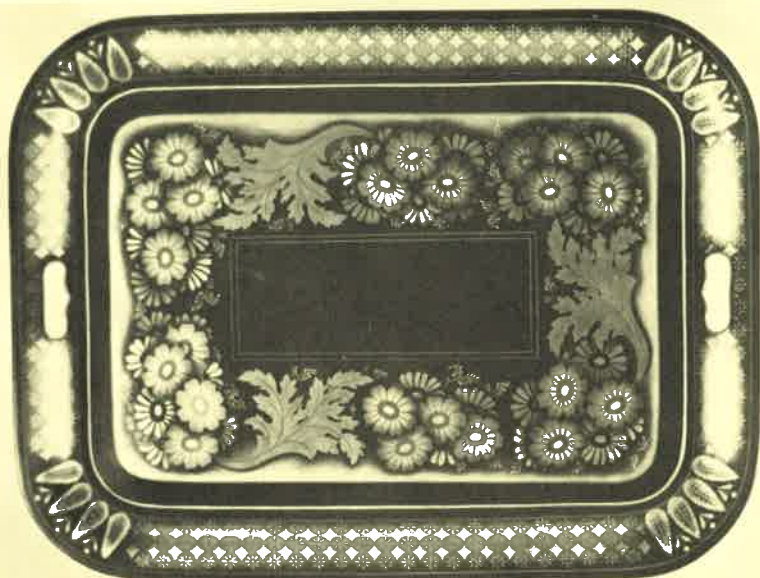
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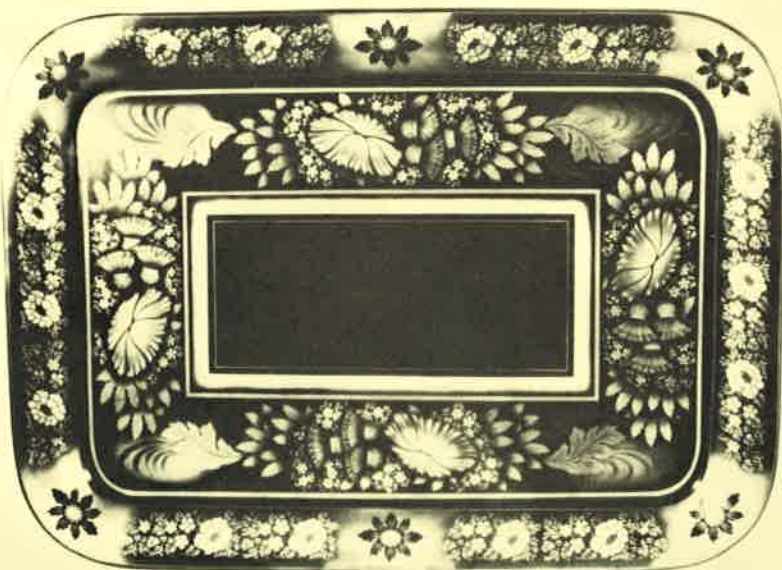
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Stencilling on Tin

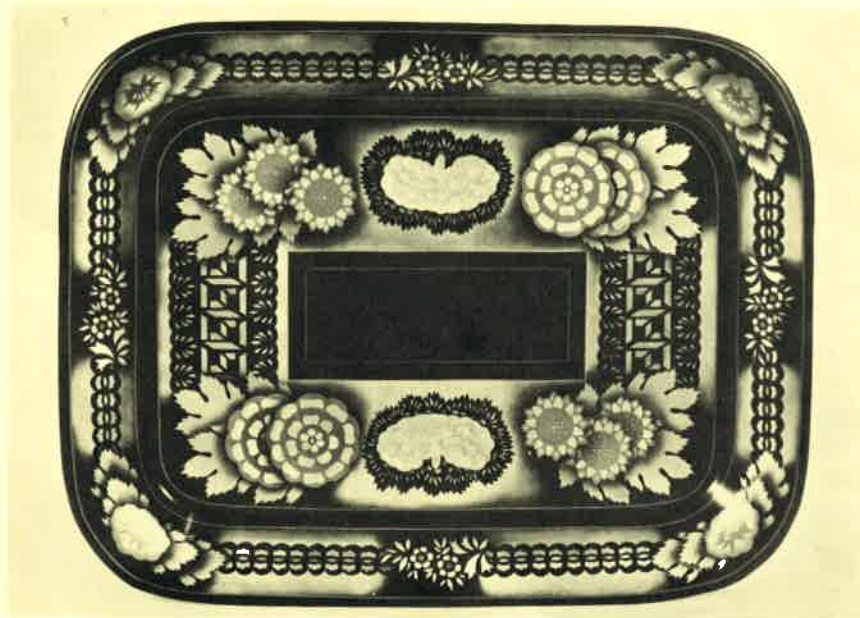


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## THE BOOKSHELF

by Carol Heinz

*The Pennsylvania Germans: A Celebration of Their Arts 1683-1850*, by Beatrice Garvin and Charles F. Hummel, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1982.

*The Pennsylvania Germans: A Celebration of Their Arts 1683-1850* by Beatrice Garvin and Charles F. Hummel is a catalogue of a traveling exhibition honoring Pennsylvania's 300th anniversary. The exhibition was jointly organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art and Winterthur Museum. It began October 1982 in Philadelphia and will conclude January 1984 at the Art Institute of Chicago.

1682 to 1982, 300 years distinguished by over 300 objects. Eighty photographs and descriptions link a diverse ancestry of settlers to a stable and productive colony. Pennsylvania German decorations, inscriptions and workmanship reveal traditions, beliefs and achievements. These are all evident in the silver, furniture, fractur, basketry and weaving of the Pennsylvania Germans.

The *Pennsylvania Germans: A Celebration of Their Arts 1683-1850*, catalogue and exhibition is a fine reminder of our German heritage.

*Simple Forms and Vivid Colors*, by Edwin A. Churchill, published by the Maine State Museum 1983.

*Simple Forms and Vivid Colors* is a catalogue of an exhibition of Maine Painted Furniture, 1800-1850, at The Maine State Museum, July 8, 1983 to February 28, 1984. Edwin A. Churchill is Curator of Decorative Arts at The Maine State Museum, Augusta.

*Simple Forms* refers to the furniture construction and local woods used for economic reasons. *Vivid Colors* are the decorations, either all-over treatments or specific ornamentation such as stencilling. Decorators, types of decoration, 32 full-page color plates and an impressive bibliography are included.

The colorful cover photo of a decorator's kit, 1850-1900, with lots of brushes, graining tools and paints urges any true early American decorator to explore the numerous treasures within. For openers, there is the classic mahogany-grained Hepplewhite bureau constructed by E. Morse Livermore in 1814. It has red on yellow graining with a painted dentil border on drawer edges. Mahogany graining was a favorite as were rosewood and maple. Then there are the painted pieces found in central Maine, completed with a painted green band and yellow stripe around the decoration. Decorated chairs, bureaus, tables, boxes, — they are all shown here with elegance and beauty.

Do not miss *Simple Forms and Vivid Colors* by Edwin A. Churchill. It has both significant historical and pictorial value.

## **NOTICE FROM THE TRUSTEES**

### **SPRING MEETING 1984**

Americana Inn, Albany, NY

April 27, 28, 29, 1984

### **FALL MEETING 1984**

Genesee Plaza Holiday Inn, Rochester, NY

October 3, 4, 5, 1984

## **NOTICE**

The By-laws of HSEAD, Inc., as revised Apr. 25, 1982, provide in Article IV — Section 2, as follows: Additional nominations for the election of Trustees may be made in writing by petition signed by 30 or more members with voting privileges and filed with the Secretary at least 21 days before such Annual Meeting.

## **POLICIES**

### **Use of Society Name and Seal**

#### **Exhibitions:**

Chapters or Members may sponsor Exhibitions using the name of the Society with written permission of the Treasurer of the Society provided that only originals, "A" or "B" awards, approved portfolios of Certified Teachers and applicant pieces submitted within the last five years, are exhibited. Any exception will be at the discretion of the Board of Trustees.

#### **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 of the Society.

#### **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.)

### **Membership List:**

Permission of the Board of Trustees must be obtained to release the Society's Membership List.

### **Meetings:**

Taping of HSEAD, Inc. functions is not permitted.

### **New Policies**

July, 1977 — There will be no refunds for meeting registrations, special, tours, and/or admission fees.

July, 1977 — An applicant may have three consecutive years in which to complete requirements for regular membership.

Sept, 1978 — Names of candidates for consideration by the Nominating Committee in the selection of nominations for the Board of Trustees must be sent to the Chairman of the Nominating Committee by September 1st.

Sept, 1980 — That the Standards and Judging Committees be separated into two committees, the Standards Committee to set the Standards of Craftsmanship and the Judging Committee to judge those articles submitted for judging according to the established standards.

Oct, 1983 — Effective January 1, 1984, H.S.E.A.D. will no longer guarantee return postage.

### **Change in Bylaws**

#### **Article II**

##### **Section 4.**

- a. Annual dues for active and associate members shall be payable as of July 1, which shall be the beginning of each fiscal year.
- b. If any member has not paid dues or other indebtedness to the Society by November 1, the membership shall be terminated. Reinstatement shall be at the discretion of the Board of Trustees.

### **CHANGE OF ADDRESS**

To avoid delay in receiving THE DECORATOR and other Society mailings and thus adding to the already heavy mailing costs, please notify the Membership Chairman promptly of any change of address.

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## SCHEDULE OF MEMBERSHIP DUES OF THE H.S.E.A.D., INC.

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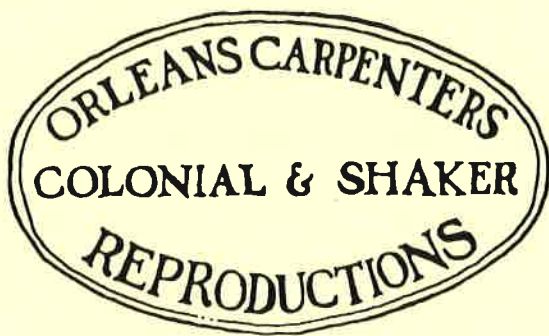
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