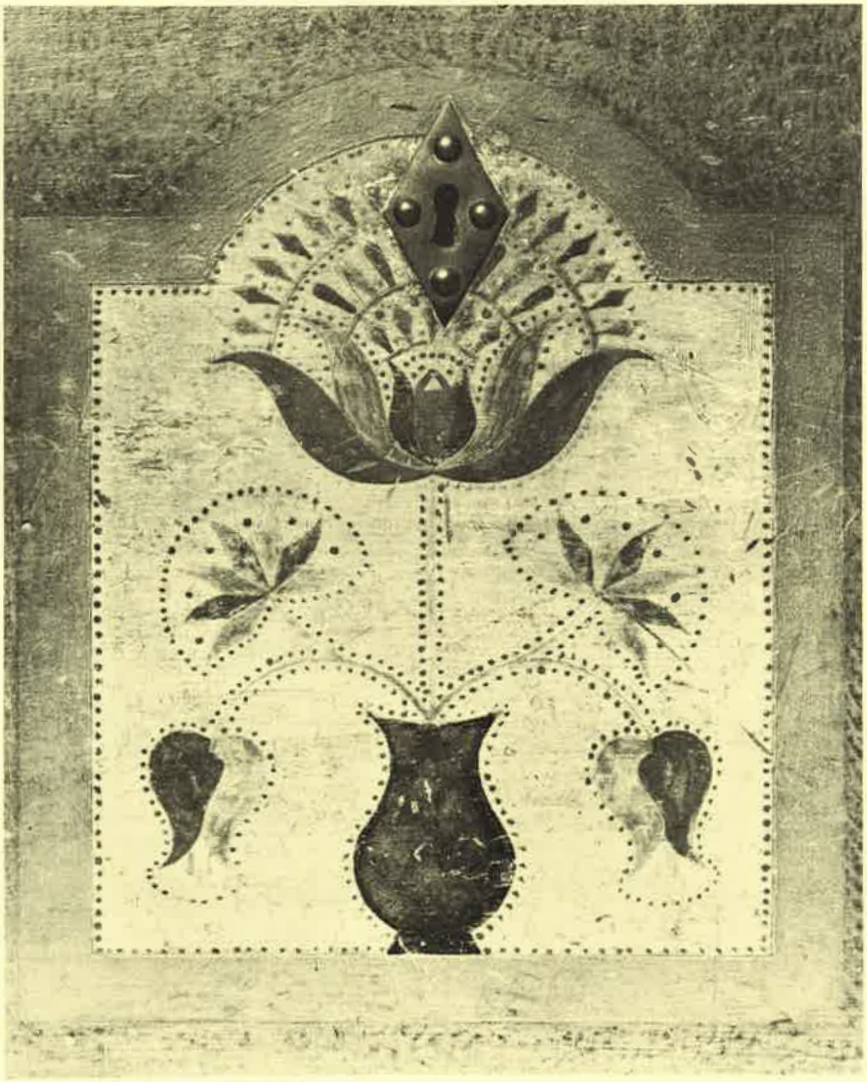
The Decorator

Volume XXXIX No. 1 Rochester, New York Fall 1984



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

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF EARLY AMERICAN DECORATION, INC.

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Journal of the
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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.

Volume XXXIX No. 1

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Detail from "dahlia" type chest, Wythe County, Virginia

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EDITORIAL

Greetings — another DECORATOR is on your doorstep. May it bring you information and pleasure. It is our pleasure (Marjorie Clarke's, Peg Rodgers', Martha Wilbur's, Dr. "Roddy" Moore's, Grace Bremer's, Ken Royal's and mine) to prepare it for you. Enjoy!

A note — especially for Jean Wylie:

Dear Jean:

> You've been loyal and helpful to our Society for a long time. None of us can guess how much time and effort you have spent for us. You have always done your job quietly and efficiently, without fanfare. Now is the time to blast the trumpets and wave the flags in your honor. Thank you, Jean.

Most members of our Society are busy people: some of us work full or part-time; others have heavy family responsibilities; most of us have many interests and are doers — we like to be active.

It seems to me that as HSEAD members we have a responsibility to do several things: (1) to record early decorative patterns so that they will not be lost; (2) to document information we can find about buildings and artifacts with early decoration; (3) to sift through records before they are lost or "buried" to find out what we can about the "ornamental painters" in our localities. I have suggestions about the last-mentioned chore for those of you who find a spare afternoon and have the inclination to visit your library or the county courthouse.

In searching out the local "ornamental painters" there are several logical places to look: (1) in advertisements in old newspapers; (2) in directories and censuses which list occupations; (3) in county or town histories, the fat all-inclusive ones or little chatty booklets prepared for special occasions such as centennials. (You might like to start with Rita Gottesman's *The Arts and Crafts in New York* or George F. Dow's *The Arts and Crafts in Early New England.)*

When you have names to use, wills and inventories may give you additional insights. Ask questions of librarians, historians, and members of antiquarian or preservation societies. Sometimes they can help.

Do you live in or near your state capitol where a state library offers wide resources? Is a university library available to you?

Think what we could accomplish if each chapter undertook a research project concerned with the decorative arts in its own locale. Won't you give this some serious thought? Of course THE DECORATOR will be interested in the research you do.

Margaret Coffin

PAINTED WALLS IN OSSIPEE

by Marjorie B. Clarke

This house has the feeling of having been loved by the people who have lived here. I try not to speak of it as "my" house because I am one of many residents to look through the wavy glass of the small-paned windows at mountains that do not change and seasons that do. I run my hand over the handrail on the steep "ship's stairs" in the front hall as earlier residents did; I think of children who ran up and down these stairs and of older folk who moved slowly, needing the railing to assist them.

I have watched my girls grow up here and my grandchildren share the feeling of home and refuge, "belonging," not just in the present, but in the company of all those men and women who worked the land, kept the house, and added the decorative touches so rare today. Their good taste makes it possible for me to write this article, and my contentment in living here makes me wish I had known them.

I have touched fingers with one — a young girl or woman — who shared my interest in craft work. In the attic, somehow preserved from former occupants, I found a cardboard holder like half a bandbox, its flat back higher than the curved front, with a nail hole top center of the back showing how it had been hung against the wall. The cardboard sides and bottom are stitched together with the common string used by storekeepers. Covering the cardboard is wallpaper that matches the paper four layers down on the walls of an upstairs chamber. Perhaps this was the bedroom of the young woman who made the holder which decorates my desk as I sit conjuring up earlier residents of this house and the artists who painted its walls.

The earliest record I have of the sale of land, which includes the portion on which I live, is in 1793, when an owner in Bath, England (loyal to the King, perhaps?) sold 400 acres to a gentleman in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The early deeds distinguished owners as "gentleman" or "yeoman" in the records concerning this property, and the land was listed by Lot numbers — not yet named by county or town.

From 1793 to 1804 smaller acreage was sold frequently, and then in 1809 the deed first lists the owner of acreage "with the buildings thereon" as Daniel Abbott, who had been buying parcels of land in 1804, and who sold his property to John Brewster. In those five years the barns and house must have been built.

The front, or main, part of the house is two storey with attic, five windows across the front on the second floor, two windows on each side of the centered door on the first floor. The sides have one centered window on each floor, and this portion of the house originally had four large rooms;

one room on each side of the central front hall upstairs and down. Attached at the rear is a one-storey ell with attic, which includes the back stairs, and is, perhaps, older than the front of the house. In the two front rooms downstairs, to cover the nine-over-six pane windows are wooden Indian shutters that slide into the wall.

The Brewsters continued as owners for nearly one hundred years. One of the sons left behind two skillfully lettered tin signs found under the eaves in the attic, proclaiming "A. G. Brewster, Surgeon-Dentist." His tombstone in the small family graveyard in the backyard, enclosed by waist-high granite slabs where arbutus covers the ground, gives the information that he died in 1853 at the age of thirty. In 1862, just two months apart, two younger brothers, aged eighteen and twenty died far from home in North Carolina and in Louisiana, members of a full regiment that set off from Ossipee, New Hampshire, to fight in the Civil War.

It may have been when these boys were young that the artists arrived to paint trees on the walls of the narrow front entrance hall and the large upstairs room. The colors are bright and clear, the background plaster, never papered over, still white and clean. The only damage is from the long cracks in the south wall caused by the settling of the house after the huge supporting original chimneys and fireplaces were torn out to be replaced by small chimneys with openings for stovepipes. The lower part of the painting on the stair wall that backed against the chimney was lost and the wall replastered and repaired. Still visible, though, are great majestic trees that grow from the bottom steps of the entry up the wall to the ceiling on the second floor; well proportioned for the space, one tree trunk covers a turn in the wall so that the corner is not noticeable at first.

The steps are steep and narrow, the bottom step angling off to a point so that the large front door can clear it and swing open. The steps are only 21 inches wide and all are 7½ inches deep. How did the full-skirted ladies of the past negotiate these narrow steps safely? Did they instead use the wider, more shallow back stairs that lead directly to the long room where a huge fireplace was the center of family life?

On the second floor, across from the painted room, the large room was divided into three small rooms, each with a window and low door frame. On the partition separating two of these small bedrooms, pasted over the wide boards, is a thin paper painted light blue with stencilled sprays of flowers and leaves and yellow clusters. This is not a stencil design I recognize and I have exposed a large enough patch to be certain it is a painted stencil and not printed wallpaper.

Unfortunately the owner who removed the fireplaces also had the old wallpapers removed before applying the then stylish "oatmeal" paper so there are no traces of any other stencilled decoration except for a small

fragment of paper found behind a door that has a white background with blue pattern — not enough to reconstruct the design, but enough to suggest the colors the lady of the house liked. (Different blue and white china patterns also are represented by broken pieces of china I have found while digging the garden beds.)

The painted room on the second floor is large:14′ 6″ wide and 17′ 4″ long, an impressive setting for the painting that decorates the walls. The colors are attractive — light and darker greens for the foliage, grey tree trunks and branches, fields in an orangy-yellow reminiscent of haying season, mountains suggested in an outline of Prussian blue. The woodwork is a soft grey and the wideboard pine floor is pumpkin yellow.

Unlike most painted walls, these have no figures or buildings, no water or boats. There are several kinds of trees, mountains that look as if the painter had copied the view from the windows when Mt. Chocorua, Mt. Washington and the Ossipee Mountains could be seen. (Now the cleared fields and pastures have filled with pines, maples, oaks and the "weed trees" that grow so quickly.) The painting goes from the ceiling only to the chair rail; below is plain white plaster. Just above the chair rail is a wavy horizontal area of dark grey the width of a large paint brush in which the trunks of the larger trees are planted. Above that, for a little less than a quarter of the way up the wall, is the cheerful orange field. On some walls there are horizontal lines of green for accent; others are plain. Above, the outlines of mountains are blue, some hills sponged with blue and green, others with long brush lines of light green and blue. There are no clouds, just plain white plaster above background painting.

Large trees in the foreground reach almost to the ceiling. Trunks and branches are grey with multiple fine lines in black that appear to have been done with a feather to indicate bark. On one side of each trunk is a white stripe; on the shaded side, a black stripe. The large trees are light and graceful, the foliage painted by sponge, the white of the plaster wall showing through. The fireplace wall has trees resembling willows with gracefully drooping branches. Foliage is painted the light yellow of willows in early spring. The south and north walls use a darker green on what may be maples, elms and pines.

There are eight cone-shaped trees — the shape first filled in with grey. Then green stripes angle up in V's with a narrow sponged outline in green surrounding the grey shape. On two of these cone-shaped trees one half remains green while black stripes on the shaded side divide the tree. Only two trees were completed, a third has five black stripes starting from the bottom but stops abruptly, and the other trees never had the black shading added over the green.

Someone with a steady sure hand painted in the background quickly. Then tree trunks and branches were added in grey. There are smaller trees to indicate distance and then very small bush-like trees scattered on the fields and mountains — shaped like open fans, they are shaded with narrow, wavy, close-set black lines on one side, green on the other half over the grey, half-circle, brushstroke undercolor. The trunks of these little trees are made with one narrow white curved stroke and one black stroke, rather like stems instead of tree trunks, funny little splotches heavily concentrated on one portion of the wall followed by a clear area, as if the apprentice had been told he was painting too many little trees.

The tops of trees are sponged over door frames downstairs in the entrance hall and in the large room upstairs, but the painter did not apply them above the doors in the upstairs hall.

I have spoken of artists doing this work because there seem to have been two different persons doing the same type of painting but with differences. The greater area of the large room and parts of the hall appear to have been the work of one artist, then suddenly the style changes and the west wall has the grey undercoat used on some of the hall trees before the green foliage is sponged on. In the hall the grey is done in curved brush strokes to show the shape by a confident, practiced hand, and then the green is sponged over the grey with some orange and rust-colored curved lines in the center of the clumps of leaves. The grey undercoat on the west wall of the large room is not as carefully done. There is a feeling of urgency in the scribbled grey strokes; the black bark on the tree trunks is drawn in heavier lines.

Rufus Porter states that such a room as this could be painted in five hours. Did the allotted time expire before the work was done? Were other houses waiting to be decorated? What happened to prevent the completion of the painting? Who were the painters? Early work by Porter has similar trees: the stripe of white paint on one side of the tree trunk, black on the other is typical. (His work became more sophisticated later on.) I have seen some of the work of the local Wolfeboro artist, John Avery, who did much of the wall decorating in this area. His trees are quite different from these graceful trees and I do not feel he did this work.

Until five years ago there was a house three miles from here that I thought of as the last remaining mansion in Ossipee. A large upstairs room had stencilling patterns that exactly match known patterns done by Moses Eaton in Kennebunk. I had the good fortune to trace those patterns the summer before the house burned to the ground on a bitter January night. Ossipee is close to the Maine border and Fryeburg, Parsonfield, Westbrook and Portland where Rufus Porter decorated houses. I would like to think that the young Porter and Moses Eaton, traveling together, arrived in the Ossipee area and decorated a number of houses including the one in which I live. Did Rufus Porter sleep here?

FROM OUR MUSEUM

by William Jenney, Director

A recreation of an early 19th century tinshop can now be seen at the museum of HSEAD. It is part of a new exhibition that will be on view until May 1985.

Occupying the entire second floor gallery, "True Tale of a Tinsmith" examines the early tinsmith's trade in America. Tools, processes, plain and ornamented tinware are included. Many of the artifacts are originally from two New York State tinshops: the Daniel Lamp tinshop of Saugerties and the David Jeremiah Young shop of Sag Harbor.

The visitor is immediately impressed by the variety of tools that were needed to produce the tinwares found in early American homes. Some are familiar: hammers, shears and punches, for example. Others, such as the rolling machines, swedges and stakes are less known to the layman, but their uses are clearly explained with labels, diagrams and pieces of unfinished tinware.

Accuracy of presentation has been a priority. The tools are placed on and around a bench as a tinsmith would have used them; bits of scrap tin are scattered on the floor.

This period setting is only part of the exhibition, however. A step-by-step analysis of the construction of a tin basin (c. 1845) is also featured. A selection of canisters is examined chronologically, and a display of swedging marks or beading will facilitate the dating of certain tin forms.

"True Tale of a Tinsmith" was prepared in cooperation with Eastfield Village of East Nassau, New York. The Village, a 19th century teaching restoration, has assembled a definitive collection of tinsmith's tools. Eastfield has generously loaned many of the late-18th and early-19th century hand tools and machines for the show. Tinsmiths Don Carpentier of Eastfield and Charles Hartwell of Hancock Shaker Village have acted as consultants.

Those interested in history and technology will have much to see. A few of the tools are unique, such as the ring former that was used to make the wire handles on trunk lids. Some tools are signed by well-known Connecticut manufacturers such as J. and E. North of Berlin (1824-1854) and Seth Peck and Company of Southington (1833-1843).

Collectors and connoisseurs will enjoy studying the tinware placed liberally throughout the exhibition. An extensive collection of miniatures, gadgets and "make-do's" helps to illustrate the diversity of items that were once fashioned from tinplate. Objects are from several private sources and, of course, from the museum's collection of country-painted tin.

WYTHE COUNTY CHESTS

by J. Roderick Moore

Until recently it was felt that most paint-decorated blanket chests were from Pennsylvania. However, in 1973 the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection presented a show on "Virginia Decorated Furniture" containing fifteen pieces. It appeared even then that there were at least two Virginia schools of decoration, one from Shenandoah County (now Page County) and the other from Wythe County. This article will discuss the Wythe County school of paint-decorated chests.

As early as the 1750's many Scots-Irish and German-Swiss people settled in what was then Augusta County, Virginia, but in 1790 became Wythe County, Virginia. They came south from Pennsylvania and Maryland through the Shenandoah Valley in search of inexpensive land. They were mostly farmers and craftsmen who had been encouraged to come by land companies. A few of them had settled first in the lower Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and in North Carolina but they eventually settled in Wythe County, the German-Swiss concentrating in the western part of the county where the best farm land was located and the Scots-Irish settling in the eastern part. This migration continued and by the 19th century Wythe County had more German-Swiss settlers than any other county south of Augusta County, Virginia.

The majority of these German-Swiss people were members of the Lutheran or Reformed faiths, and before 1800 they had established four churches in Western Wythe County, all within a radius of 10 miles. This is important because of the compact and strongly German neighborhoods which were established around the churches and continued to grow. More than 90 percent of these people still spoke and wrote in German at this time, and this created a language barrier that continued into the 1850's. This contributed to their cultural isolation from the English-speaking Scots-Irish settlers in the eastern half of the county.

Although time and technology have now changed the customs and belief systems of these people of German-Swiss descent, there is still evidence of their cultural heritage in artifacts such as the bank barns and the gravestones in some church cemeteries. In addition, there are fraktur and decorated furniture from the region, but unfortunately these are more easily dislocated, destroyed or lost. All of these art forms are distinctive, and their decoration is endemic to this small region in western Wythe County.

Two unique forms of decorated furniture from the county are in existence, the earliest form being decorated chests and the later form being punched-tin pie safes (Fig. 1). This article will concentrate on the paint-decorated chests.

Fig. 1. Elaborate design in punched tinplate, a type of ornamentation indigenous to Wythe County, Virginia

The twenty-four chests discussed in this article comprise the Wythe County school of decoration. They all have certain common characteristics of decoration and construction which link them together. They are all painted with similar designs composed of an urn and multiple tulips within two or three panels on the front of the chests. The identifying characteristic of this school is the "arc" or "halo" appearing above the large central tulip in one or more panels on each chest. There are variations in the shapes and arrangement of the tulips and "arcs", but these design elements are used consistently on all the chests.

The decorator used templates and a compass in the design, layout and decoration of the panels. He scratched the design on the chest and applied

thick paint carefully, creating bold, well-defined designs. There is extensive use of polka-dotting as an accent. The majority have decoration on the lids, either two large circles with white backgrounds decorated with sponging, or two neoclassic panels with a star in each.

The background colors of the chests range from shades of brown to dark red, with one exception which is dark blue. Many have sponging or mottling over this background. Borders of all panels contrast with the background color, either because of the absence of sponging or the use of contrasting color for the border. There is also a similar contrasting vertical stripe on the front corners of most of the chests. All applied moldings, and the feet, are painted either the base color, a contrasting color, or a combination of both. The front panels all have white backgrounds, and the decoration is painted in four or five colors such as red, green, black, orange, blue and yellow. The urns are always black.

All twenty-four chests discussed have similar construction characteristics, and the dimensions vary only slightly. All are made of poplar with dovetailed cases and bracket feet. The feet and lower base moldings are made from one piece of wood and are pegged to the cases as are the upper moldings and the bottoms of the chests. Three of the chests have two drawers, and five of them have three drawers. They all have a simple till on the left, and five of these tills have drawers.

All have simple wrought iron strap hinges. Nine have box locks as is usually expected on Southern chests, but eleven have grab locks with diamond-shaped iron keyhole plates. four have no locks at all. Four of the grab locks have the engraved initials "J.D.", and one hinge has the punched initials "J.H.". These probably are the initials of the makers of the hardware.

The construction, hardware technique and basic decoration described are common to all the chests in this school, but there are some variations in the decoration. There are two styles of panels used; sixteen of the chests have astragal panels on the front and seven have neoclassic panels both on the front and the lids. The sixteen chests with astragal panels show four distinct types of decoration, and the chests with neoclassic panels show a fifth. The most intricately decorated of all are the eight chests of the "dahlia" type (Fig. 2), so named because of the dahlia-like flower (see cover) on at least one panel of every chest. This is not seen in any other type. All the "dahlia" chests have three astragal panels, with identical decoration on two of the panels, the middle one being slightly different. The detail involved in the decoration between the petals of the large central tulips is much greater than in other variations, and the "arcs" or "halos" are very complex — double or even triple arcs of diamonds and single petal shapes painted in alternating colors. The variations of design

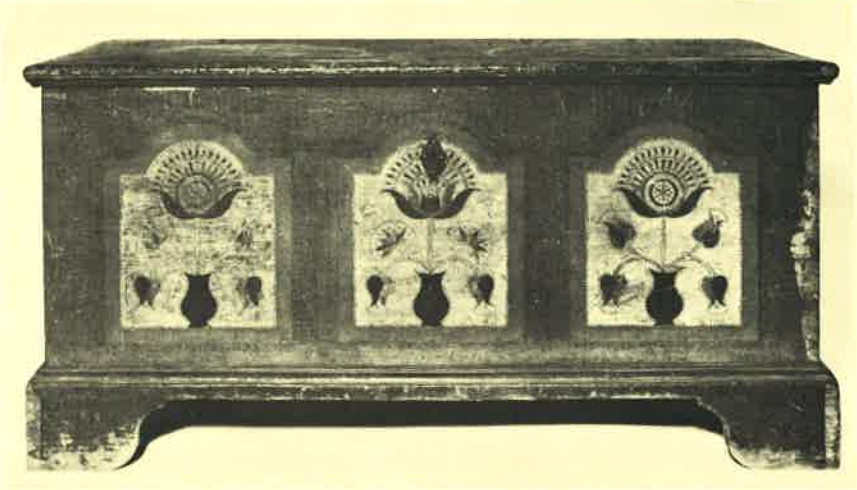

Fig. 2. Dahlia-like flower lends its name to identify this kind of decoration

and decoration in this type are very minor, and it appears that they were all decorated by the same person.

The second type is called the "hollow-tulip" because of the lack of decoration between the two outside petals of the small tulips (Fig.3): The four chests in this type have three astragal panels with the same arrangement of two identical panels and a different middle panel as seen on the "dahlia" chests.

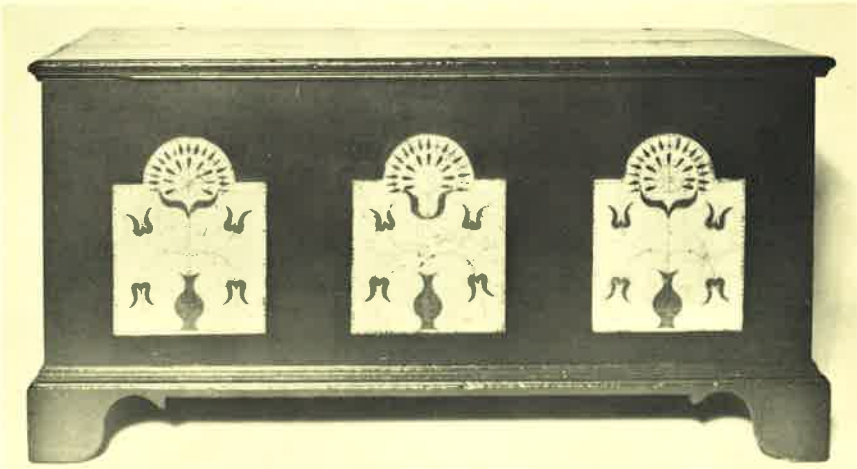

Fig. 3. Astragal panels serve as background for urns and flowers outlined in dots

Two of these chests are painted with a traditional treatment of the urn and tulip motif while the other two show a creative and unconventional approach. The decorator used geometric forms and color to create patterns and designs not found on other Wythe County chests. The use of the hollow tulips and the bulbous urns seen only on these three chests indicates that they were probably decorated by the same person.

The third group, consisting of three chests, is called the "three-tulip" type (see Fig. 4), because of the use of three tulips only in each panel. Features that vary within this group include: the shape of the urns, the presence of leaves on the stems, the treatment of the large tulips and the number of panels. This group is the least uniform, and because of these differences it seems possible that they were decorated by two or more people.

The fourth type with astragal panels has only one example. It is called the "transition" chest because it has decorative details from both styles. It has three astragal panels on the front and two neoclassic panels on the lid. The decoration in the front panels has the same small tulips seen on other astragal panel chests, but the large central tulips are like those seen on the "neoclassic style" chests.

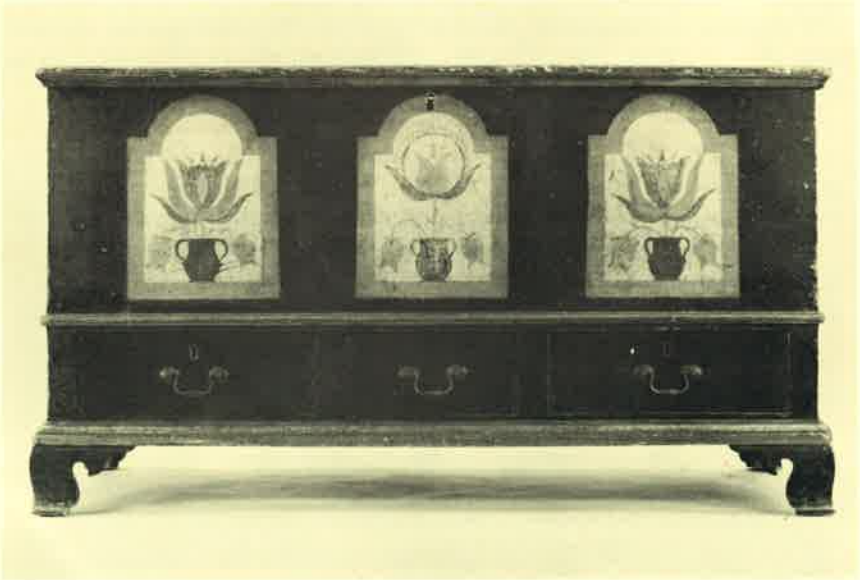

Fig. 4. This chest descended in the Umberger family of Wythe County with the birth certificate of Catherine Umberger, dated 1805 inside the lid.
Photograph — Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg

Fig. 5. Like the chest in Fig. 2, background paint is putty grained.
Photograph — Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg.

The "neoclassic style" is represented by eight chests, each featuring two neoclassic panels on the front and two on the lid. Each panel on the front contains four small solid-colored tulips and a large multi-colored central tulip. The layout and design of the panels on all these chests are identical, the only variation being in the arrangement of the colors used (Fig. 5 & 6).

All eight of these chests in the neoclassic style are either dated or dated and signed. The dates are either scratched into the urns or painted on the backs of the chests. They range from 1812 to 1829. Besides these dated neoclassic chests there is only one other with a date, and that is the transition chest which has the date 1809 painted on the bottom.

Both signatures have been interpreted as "Johannes Hudel" (see Fig. 7), and since they appear on two of the eight neoclassic chests, it is probable that he was the decorator, and possibly the maker of all those chests. "Johannes Hudel" is the German spelling of the name "John Huddle" as it appears today. John Huddle was the son of Elizabeth Pfeiffer Huddle who was a widow with three young sons when she married Peter Spangler, Jr. in about 1774, in Shenandoah County, Virginia. The Huddle/Spangler family then moved to Wythe County before 1781, when Peter Spangler, Jr.'s name appeared on the militia records. Seven children were

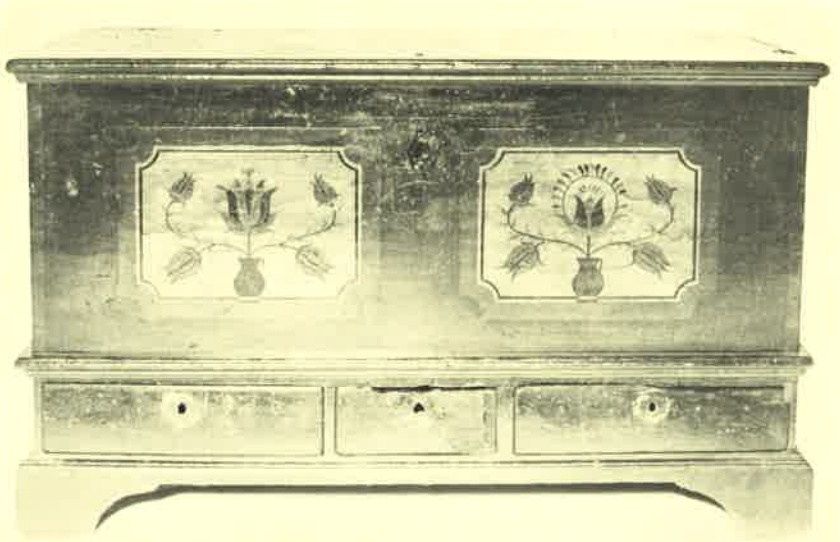

Fig. 6. Neoclassic panels have replaced astragal panels and the urn has changed to a pitcher. Five tulips ornament each panel

later born to Elizabeth and Peter Spangler. Family oral history claims that the Huddle brothers spent their youth with their step-uncle Jacob Spangler in the community of Ceres (now in Bland County, Virginia). A search of wills, inventories and other county records produced nothing proving that John or his brothers were painters or cabinetmakers, but the inventories of Jacob Spangler, John's step-uncle and all of John's full and half-brothers showed a greater number of woodworking tools and materials than were found in most farm inventories in Wythe County at this time. This indicates that possibly John and his brothers were involved with some aspect of woodworking, but there is no indication of where they may have acquired their skills.

The ideas for the decoration of these chests must have come from the Jonestown, Pennsylvania school of decorated chests because of the similarities of layout, design and technique. The cultural communication between the two regions is obvious although the method is unclear.

In conclusion, while it appears that John Huddle decorated the neoclassic style chests because of the signatures, it cannot be proved who made them or who made and decorated the other variations of the Wythe County chests.

However, oral history or genealogy link the Huddle family with many of the chests in this article; three chests came directly from the families of John's brothers and sisters, and sixteen others came from families related

Fig. 7. Detail of chest in Fig. 6 showing easily read date "1812"

by marriage to the Huddles or Spanglers. It therefore seems possible that all of these chests could have been made and deorated by one or more members of the Huddle/Spangler family in the early 19th century.

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I would like to thank the owners of all the chests for their cooperation, and Wallace Gusler, Sally Moore, Mary Kegley and Elizabeth Eaton for their help with this article.

PEARL PICTURES ON PAPIER MÂCHÉ

by Martha M. Wilbur

"He approached, and perceived the kind of rude lawn overshadowed by high and spreading trees, which seemed coeval with the building and diffused a romantic gloom around. The greater part of the pile appeared to be sinking into ruins and that which had withstood the ravages of time showed the remaining features of the fabric more awful in decay. The lofty battlements thickly enwreathed with ivy were half demolished and became the residence of birds of prey." Thus wrote Mrs. Radcliffe in a 1791 book titled *The Romance of the Forest.* As roads improved and travel became easier the British public ventured out into the country, sketchbook in hand. Fascinated by the awesome beauty of the ruins, visitors demanded pictures of popular sites. This lead to the publication of many books on the antiquities of Great Britain illustrated with engraved plates of castles, houses, cathedrals, and abbeys. Interesting titles were used such as *Seat of the Nobility* and *Old England a Pictorial Museum.* The same ruins were illustrated over and over again in these books. Not only were these romantic buildings engraved, but they were painted on canvas, ceramics, tin, and papier mâché.

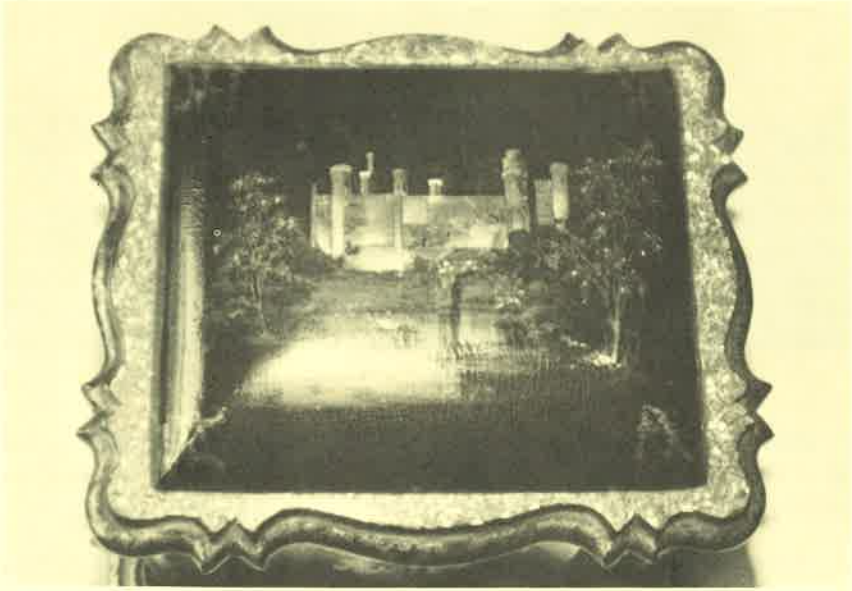

Fig. 1. Warwick Castle on a lady's casket, a small box with a hinged lid. Courtesy the author

Fig. 2. Warwick Castle
Photograph, 1982, by the author

The author became fascinated as she encountered a variety of pieces of papier mâché with pearl used in rendering famous buildings. Curious to discover more of the history of the ruins, the author consulted Mrs. Yvonne Jones, Keeper at Bantock House Museum, Wolverhampton, England, who was interested in the present research into the engraved examples used as models and the comparison between them, the pearl pictures, and the ruins as they are today. Through Mrs. Jones, Mr. Henderson, a collector of ceramics with landscape views who has traveled through England photographing those ruins today, sent the author a catalog of an exhibit of his collection titled *China Postcards*. Exhibited were many items with the same subjects as those found on papier mâché.

The process of using pearl on papier mâché was a tedious one. At its peak of popularity from 1830 to 1850 the pearl was imported into England in great quantities. The shell had to be smoothed to a very thin sheet, from 1/40th to 1/100th of an inch. The job was at first done by young girls and boys who rubbed the shell by hand with file and pumice. (Later the hand work was replaced by a grinding wheel or a press.) In this whole process

Fig. 3. Netley Abbey on writing box or lap desk. — Courtesy the author

Fig. 4. Print of Netley Abbey from 19th century book

much was broken, and so was the health of the young people, as they developed silicosis. Several kinds of shells were used. The rainbow colors were much desired, and wrinkled aurora shell was used in special places. In the making of the buildings the green and blue of the ear shell made an interesting contrast.

The thin pieces of nacre were soaked in warm water, and then the shape could be cut with a knife or scissors. A better technique was developed when the design was painted on the pearl with varnish or asphaltum. Sulphuric or nitric acid was brushed over the design and the acid ate away the unprotected pearl. Later on, in a more efficient process, the pieces were glued together in a stack and were cut with a press tool. The pearl was then affixed to a sized blank tray, table, or other article. The piece was blacked in the blacking room. Many coats were required, pumiced in between to make the pearl level with the background. The polishing revealed the pearl, and then the details of gold and paint were applied.

There were cathedrals, castles and great houses as well as abbeys depicted in pearl on chairs, trays, writing slopes, caskets, tables, face screens, and many other small items. One of the earliest identifiable landscapes to appear on pottery was printed in Leeds: Fountains Abbey, founded in 1132 by Cistercian monks from the city of York. The Victoria and Albert Museum has three papier mâché chairs, and one of them has Fountains Abbey in pearl. Fountains was built in the Norman cruciform plan with eleven bays and a handsome tower at the end of the north transcept. The ground plan has remained intact, and the positions of the various quarters are plainly visible.

The second chair at the Victoria and Albert pictures Warwick Castle. Fig. 1, the lady's casket, shows a view from the river and is marked on the lower right corner "Warwick Castle." The walls are made of squares of green and pink pearl set in such a way that the right towers appear green while the wall connecting them is pink. The courses between the stories are depicted by fine gold lines as are the crenelations of the towers. Most of the overpaint on the pearl has worn off but some of the windows are still visible. The river is freehand bronze with willow trees on either side composed of bits of pearl among dots of gold and fine gold branches. There is a pearl boat in the river and the bridge is made of chips of pearl laid hit or miss.

Warwick is considered one of the finest medieval castles in England, Fig. 2. It stands 100 feet above the river Avon, and extends 400 feet along the cliff. Recognized early as a good defensive position, the first fortress was built on the cliff by Ethefleda in 914. Occupied continuously since then it has passed through many changes. The four corners are fortified by towers. The living quarters are on the river side, and the state apartments

Fig. 5. Tintern Abbey on papier mâché table ex-collection Mrs. Emily Heath
Photograph — Courtesy Mrs. George DeVoe

rival those of Windsor. Tourists flock to Warwick to go through the rooms, to admire the carvings, paintings, armour, and furnishings. The grounds are meticulously kept.

The third chair at the Victoria and Albert Museum pictures Melrose Abbey. The abbey ruin is situated on a small bend in the River Tweed in Scotland, twenty miles north of the English border. Sir Walter Scott made it famous in his *Lay of the Last Minstrel.* The abbey was built by King David I of Scotland for the Cistercian Order in 1136. Attacked many times in border warfare, the remains include part of the nave and the transcepts, chancel, and choir. In his book on papier mâché George Dickinson illustrates a tilt-top table with Melrose in pearl on the top. (Mr. Dickinson dates his table 1830-40). The view is identical to one on a jewelry box. However, on the box the artist has taken the liberty to paint a beautiful stained glass in the large window. An engraving of 1845 gives the same view.

Mr. Dickinson also illustrates a trinket box with Windsor Castle on the cover and Tintern and Netley Abbeys on the sides. Netley is not as well known as the others discussed so far. It is located in a suburb of Southhampton, but when built the Abbey was in the country, established by Henry III in 1232 as a home for Cistercian monks. Netley was never a wealthy or prosperous abbey; however, it was known for its collection of rare books and manuscripts. Its destruction was decreed by an act of Parliament in 1535. King Henry VIII was always in need of money after his break with Rome, and the Catholic properties were thought to be a good source. Workmen tore off the roof and the gutters and melted down the

Fig. 6. Print of Tintern Abbey from 19th century book

lead. The bells were smashed with sledge hammers and also melted. Much of the interior woodwork was used to keep the fires going for this melting job, and the books, also, were added to the flames. The ruins eventually changed hands, and in the early 18th century, part of the north transcept was moved to the estate of Lady Holland to make an interesting vista on her landscape. The writing box shows a pearl picture of the east window, the surrounding yard full of grass and bushes with a couple standing before the window which the artist has beautified with a stained glass scene of people worshipping, made of gold leaf overlaid with reds and blues. (Fig. 3). An engraving from an 1845 book, *Old England, A Pictorial Museum of Regal, Ecclesiastical, Baronial, Municipal and Popular Antiquities* shows a view from inside looking out through the same window. (Fig. 4). Today Netley Abbey is set in an immaculate park.

The ruins of Tintern Abbey are also kept in a park-like state and are visited by busloads of tourists. Tintern, another Cistercian Abbey, is on the River Wye in Wales. Built in 1311 during the reign of Henry I, the remains that are seen today were moved as were those of Netley Abbey. Outstanding is the grandeur of the all-over design. The masonry and the beautiful

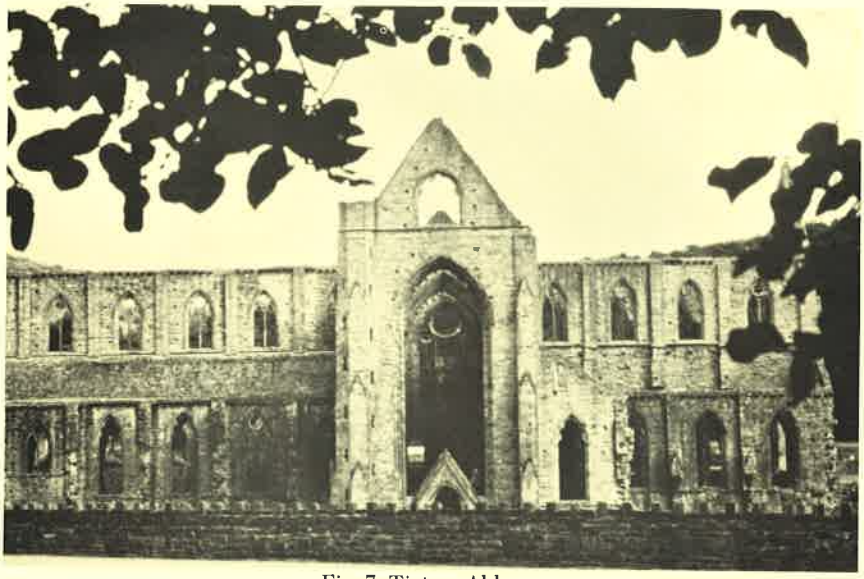

Fig. 7. Tintern Abbey
Photograph, 1982, by the author

mullions referred to as "stone lace work marvelously upheld on the paper thin walls" gave the abbey its beauty. Tintern has been painted on papier mâché hand screens, boxes, and on the top of a tip table once owned by Mrs. Emily Heath, the Society's first President. (Fig. 5). Compare this to Fig. 6, and as it is today (Fig. 7).

Windsor "... calmly from its hill top enjoys the most delightful views in the world" wrote William Camden in the reign of Elizabeth I, and so it appears to us today. The tower, begun by William the Conqueror in 1070, was of silver stone quarried in nearby Bagshot. A defensive fortess, it has been used by kings and queens of England, the only royal residence in continuous use. Through the years Windsor has been changed, repaired, and added to until it is a museum as well as the home of the monarch. Papier mâché makers have used views of Windsor on face screens, boxes, table tops and trays. Most views are of the round tower from the river and look much as we see it today.

There are many more buildings depicted on papier mâché, still fascinating and intriguing. The November 29, 1983 TIMES magazine published an article titled "Bricks Come Tumblin Down," illustrated by buildings designed for Best Products company, using "ruins" as a theme; I quote, "...such designs succeed in part by playing upon our fascination with romantic decay. We travel far to admire the remnants of past civilizations...."

CORNER OF FACTS

Editor's note: Research which, when completed, becomes fascinating reading, is often tedious and involved; researchers spend long hours at their desks in correspondence. Excerpts quoted below from letters discussing the numbers on the back of a tray illustrate this point.

From Frank G. White, Curator Mechanical Arts, Old Sturbridge Village, to Virginia Wheelock:

> It is our assumption that the "No. 56655" is the reference number for the pattern and that the double rows of numbers below are the price lists for the tray in a range of sizes. In other words, the tray in this pattern is offered in sizes ranging from twelve (12) to thirty (30) inches priced respectively from 1 shilling, 5 pence to 4 shilling.

Mr. White's question: "... what is the significance of the lower double row of figures, the last four of which duplicate sizes in the upper price list, but at different prices?"

From Shirley De Voe:

> I agree with Mr. White's assessment of the figures... The lower double row of figures probably indicates a smaller size waiter. Trays with prices, sizes and pattern or stock numbers were made for traveler's samples.

Bottom of stencilled tray — Courtesy Old Sturbridge Village
Photo by Henry E. Peach

From Yvonne Jones, Keeper of Applied Art, Bantock House Museum, Wolverhampton:

> Mr. White is quite correct in assuming the tray to be an English manufacturer's sample. With regard to the two rows of figures, it seems likely that they refer to two versions of the same tray, one having a superior finish to the other. For example, the less expensive range may not have had wired edges especially given that it seems to include the small and medium trays. Alternatively, it is possible that the medium and larger trays had pierced handles to facilitate carrying. I think either of these suggestions is more likely than there having been a difference in decorative finish for I can think of no reason why the decoration would not be the same for all sizes.

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Glass Panel

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Roberta Edrington

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Special Class

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Rochester, N.Y. Fall Meeting 1984

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Harriette W. Hoolan
Lois Tucker

Linda Lefko

Special Class

Maryjane Clark

Astrid Thomas

Margaret Watts

THE BOOKSHELF

by Margaret K. Rodgers

New York and the China Trade by David Sanctuary Howard with an essay by Conrad Edick Wright. Frenchtown, New Jersey: Columbia Publishing Co., Inc., The New York Historical Society, 1984. Illus. Bib. pp 142

New York and the China Trade is a detailed catalogue of an exhibit of many of the products carried in the China trade which would be of interest to the historian. The China Trade, conducted between Canton and America, flourished in the late 18th and early 19th centuries with New York City serving as a center for many of the merchants and their ships. Tea, silver, ivory, and opium were the most profitable items of the trade, but porcelain of all shapes and sizes, paintings, rosewood furniture, lacquer boxes, screens, reverse paintings on glass, pith paintings, and silks were also prized imports from that fabled land. The western fascination with all things Oriental increased as China was "opened up" after the First Opium War when many more ports became accessible. Clipper ships enjoyed a brief popularity in this trade before the advent of steam as a means to get commercial items to and from the United States in the fastest possible time.

Of greatest interest to the decorator should be the comparison between and genesis of many decorative motifs found in the excellent pictures of these imports. Leaves, flowers, eagles, border patterns, and geometric designs are all found on the porcelains. Reverse paintings on glass were imported as "mementoes of China", often in the form of portraits of Chinese ladies. Lacquerware and gold leaf work were also imported in quantity and were often imitated by artisans in this country. To own something Chinese was the "in thing" to have in the fashionable homes of the late 18th and early 19th century.

Although the photographs of the items on display are small, they are of good quality and this catalogue contains other valuable information. An essay by Mr. Wright helps the reader to understand the significance of this interesting period of our history and ties together many concepts found in our early designs.

Edward Bird 1772-1819 by Sarah Richardson
Kenmore Printing Limited, Wolverhampton, 1982, Illus. 44 pp.

This catalogue of an exhibit of Edward Bird's works displayed at the Wolverhampton Art Gallery and the Geffrys Museum in London in 1982 sheds some light on the life and times of a japanning painter who in his later years became a well-known artist. The booklet is divided into the basic time frames of Bird's life and follows his progression from the japanning trade, to early book illustrations, to genre paintings. He enjoyed royal patronage for a brief time and eventually devoted his last efforts to religious history paintings. Of particular note is the photograph number 5 of a tray which depicts a pastoral scene with donkey, children, and thatched roof cottage done by Bird. His early training in the japanning craft which supplied his bread and butter while he branched out into painting canvases is of interest. Bird's apprenticeship was typical of the period as he learned copying techniques from the engravings of Mr. Gower, a master painter. This was his only formal training. However, in the rather haughty eyes of the Royal Academy Schools, this was not considered reputable and was the least desirable of all methods of training.

The booklet is of interest to historians since it vividly describes the life of an English artist and craftsman during the late 18th and early 19th century.

Il Libro Dell'Arte (The Craftsman's Handbook) by Cennino d'Andrea Cennini translated by Daniel V. Thompson.
Dover Publications, Inc., New York 1954, Ind. Illus. 141 pp.

When you were last in the Renaissance rooms of your local art museum, perhaps you asked yourself how those painters of the 14th century achieved such fresh, vibrant colors on all sorts of materials. The Book, *Il Libro Dell'Arte (The Craftsman's Handbook)* contains many of the answers. It was written in 1437 by Cennino d'Andrea Cennini and recently translated into English by Daniel V. Thompson, Jr. from Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. From frescos to stained glass; from the recipe for yellow ochre paint to the making of a life mask; from the painting techniques used in mountains, draperies, and even wounds, to the proper procedure for boiling linseed oil, this book covers most of the techniques used during that exciting period in the history of all types of art.

There is a refreshing element of naive charm associated with the descriptions of some of the processes, which adds to the enjoyment of the book. However, some of the translations are a bit difficult to understand because the materials described are unfamiliar or have been refined to the extent that Mr. Cennini would be unable to recognize them. This is a small price to pay compared with the service he has performed in preserving the techniques of the old masters.

NOTICE FROM THE TRUSTEES

SPRING MEETING 1985
The Worcester Marriott, Worcester, MA
April 26, 27, 28 1985

FALL MEETING 1985
The Park Plaza, New Haven, CT
September 18, 19, 20 1985

NOTICES

By-Laws
Article IV
Section 2.

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.

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

Anyone desiring to become a member must write to the Applicant Chairman for the necessary forms.

BEQUESTS TO H.S.E.A.D., Inc.

The Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc. appreciates the generosity of its members as expressed through bequests. Such gifts serve as a memorial and also enable the Society to perpetuate the pursuits of the Society in the fields of education, history, preservation, publication, and research. While unrestricted gifts have more general uses, a member may designate a gift to serve a particular phase of endeavor.

Bequests should be left in proper legal form, as prepared by a lawyer, or following the general bequest form.

> I give, devise and bequeath to the Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc., an organization incorporated in the State of New York, the sum of $..... to be used at the discretion of said corporation. (Or a specific purpose may be indicated.)

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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.

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.)

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.

Meetings:

Taping of HSEAD, Inc. functions is not permitted.

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

CHANGES IN STANDARDS MANUAL

The following revisions in the REQUIREMENTS FOR PAINTING AND GILDING ON GLASS have been approved by the Board of Trustees and will become effective at the Spring Meeting of 1986. Please make these changes in your Standards Manual.

PAINTING ON GLASS WITH STENCILLED BORDER

I. DESIGN Sentence #1 — Choose a typical design **found in** looking glasses and clocks which must include a painted picture, **often** scenic.

II. OUTLINES Firm outlines of the picture elements painted with a brush **and/or fine outlines of buildings, ships, etc. drawn with pen and ink** will be judged here.

III. PAINTING AND OVERALL FEELING

The picture, whether **primitive* or sophisticated,** including the sky and background, will be judged here.

IV. BORDER Last sentence — The border must be skillfully backed with paint, **translucent or** opaque, with no bleeding through the stenciled motif.

V. STRIPING A **stripe** must separate the painted picture from the stencilled border. **The stripe may be stencilled, painted with a brush or executed in metal leaf,** and must be straight, sure, and of **uniform** width and **opacity.**

*Primitive does not mean crude.

PAINTING ON GLASS WITH GILDED BORDER

II. OUTLINES **Firm outlines of picture elements painted with a brush** or fine outlines of buildings, ships, etc. drawn with **pen and ink** will be judged here.

III. PAINTING AND OVERALL FEELING

The picture, whether **primitive* or sophisticated,** must be well placed and expertly painted.

IV. METAL LEAF BORDER

Sentence #2 — Leaf must be skillfully backed with paint **and "washed back" to the separate units and fine detail.****
Sentence #4 — The stripe, if any, must be straight, sure, and of **uniform width and opacity.**
Sentence #5 — **The border must be carefully backed with paint, either translucent or opaque.**

* Primitive does not mean crude.

** A "solid" gold leaf border, etched, but not "washed back", does not require enough skill to qualify for an award in this category.

GUILDING ON GLASS

II. METAL LEAF

Sentence #1 — The leaf must be smooth and highly burnished without ragged edges, holes, breaks, or **cloudiness.**
After sentence #2 add the following sentence:
A narrow gilded stripe would qualify here as "fine lines".

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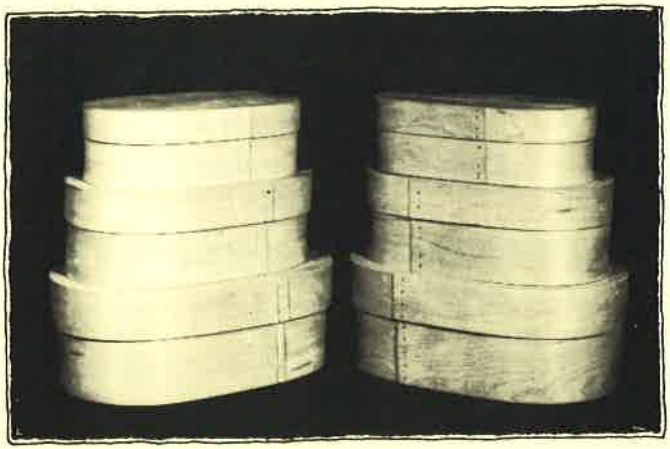

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