The Decorator

Volume XLIX No. 1 Farmington, CT Fall/Winter 1994/1995

Journal of the
Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc.

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

A society with affiliated chapters 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; 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, 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.

MISSION STATEMENT

Vision: HSEAD will be, and will become recognized, as a preeminent national authority on Early American Decoration.

Mission: HSEAD will maintain a core membership of practicing guild artists supported by active programs of education, research, and exhibitions to perpetuate and expand the unique skills and knowledge of Early American Decoration.

If you are interested in joining our Guild, or would like further information, such as the address of local Chapters, please contact the Administrative Assistant noted on the Table of Contents page.

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THE DECORATOR

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CAFE·DUBARRY

EDITORIAL

"Where's the beef?!" Remember the Wendy's™ television ad? We don't wish to become embroiled in the great metaphysical controversy concerning the relative merits of hamburgers. However, we will lay claim to providing you with a lot more beef in this issue of *THE DECORATOR*. Between the covers, at the same production cost, you will find five articles vice the usual two. This legerdemain was accomplished without shifting to tiny eye-straining print. Rather, we have reduced the amount of "boiler plate" which formerly filled each issue. Specifically we have eliminated the page-filling lists of Trustees, Committee Chairmen, Chapters, Officers and Standards changes. All this information is now contained in your HSEAD Membership Directory of September 1994 which will be updated annually.

We will continue to list all Master Teachers, Master Craftsmen, Certified Teachers and Specialists. These talented members form the beating heart of our Guild.

Two of the additional articles are ones which your editors would like to develop into regular columns. One, *The Treasures Around Us*, is dedicated to highlighting examples of Early American decorative arts which are known to a limited audience. Not every town has a Winterthur, but many do contain excellent examples of the products of our craft. We can admire them, learn from them, and expand our sensitivity to the geographic spread of those early craftsmen. We can do so that is, only if we know about them. Short articles, similar to the *The New Bedford Chair*, are welcome.

Another treasure we enjoy is the extraordinary talent uniquely gathered together in our Society. We believe that we can all learn from their experiences and insights. Such

Label from Bates and Allen Chair, see page 22

THE NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM PHOTO

background should be particularly interesting to our newer members just getting underway on their voyage to higher skills. The prudent mariner will carefully observe an experienced pilot. Hence the piece *On The Road to Master Teacher.* We encourage the Chapters to nominate to the Board of Trustees, via their Chapter Representatives, other candidates for similar articles.

Your editors always welcome your comments, questions and observations. Several changes have been made in your *DECORATOR* during the past eighteen months. Let us know your thoughts. Call us or write us at the address in the Membership Directory if you have something hot, or run us down at the next meeting of the HSEAD in Charleston. Either way we encourage your feedback. This is your journal.

—Mike and Peggy Rodgers

TROMPE L'OEIL

by Dorothy Fillmore

In the course of researching information for a presentation on trompe l'oeil painting, I was delighted to find the following excerpt chronicled by Natalie Ramsey in *THE DECORATOR* following the Fall 1952 meeting in Sturbridge, Massachusetts:

> ***Deception Painting in Early New England Houses***
>
> On Saturday afternoon of the Fall Meeting at Old Sturbridge Village, Nina Fletcher Little offered the Guild members a most instructive and interesting talk on *Deception Painting in Early New England Houses*. Her lecture, accompanied by beautiful colored slides, was given in the Sturbridge Village "Meeting House," thus providing a delightful background and atmosphere appropriate to a mental trip back into the 17th and 18th Centuries, when the *Art of Imitation or Deception Painting* flourished.

As explained by Mrs. Little, this kind of painting was not done for pure ornamentation in the usual sense, but to achieve by means of paint architectural effects which otherwise would have been unobtainable in their particular surroundings.

Interesting to Guild members who attended this lecture was the fact that many of the principles of craftsmanship and technique that were used to achieve some of the artistic and beautiful deceptions that enhanced walls, fireplaces, mantel and window frames, are those we are today learning to use successfully in our Early American Decorative Art Work.

Of course Nina Little was referring to the flourishing of deception painting in the 17th and 18th Centuries as it related to our young nation and not to the fact that this art of imitation called *trompe l'oeil* has existed and flourished elsewhere since time immemorial.

Every still life painting rendered in a realistic fashion does not qualify to be characterized as "*trompe l'oeil*" work. It must also fool the viewer, if only for an instant, into believing the painted object is real. For example, a framed painting of a book lying on a table, no matter how realistic, is not a "trompe l'oeil" representation. Because it is framed and hanging on the wall, the viewer expects to be seeing a painting. However, if the book

is painted directly on a table top, a deception occurs wherein the viewer is convinced momentarily that he actually is seeing a real book lying on the table surface. This bit of deceitful whimsy is what sets the two books apart thus, "fooling the eye"–ergo, "*trompe l'oeil.*"

> The hand touched a plane surface; and the eye, still allured, saw a relief; that one might have asked the philosopher which of the two senses whose testimonies contradicted each other was mendacious.
>
> —Diderot, Salon of 1761
> (Milman, *Trompe-l'oeil Painting.* p. 6)

The eye becomes aware more rapidly than the mind can explain what the eye is seeing. Therefore,

> The pleasure lies not in the moment of deception but in the discovery of the fraud; the momentary jolt to our perceptions of an accomplished visual trick is robbed of its threat as we smilingly acknowledge how cleverly we have been fooled. (Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home.* p. 9)

> A deception created with light, shade and perspective on a flat surface should, if it is to be successful, trick the eye of the beholder into believing it has all the volume and form of a third dimension.
>
> (Davidson, *Interior Affairs.* p. 105)

> Technically, any painting or drawing which contains an illusion of depth—for example, a view down a street—could be called "trompe-l'oeil," because it literally tricks the eye into seeing a thing in depth instead of halting on the flat surface. But this is not what is generally

Figure 1—Balconies and Architectural Details, "La Granja" Palace, Segovia, Spain

Figure 2—Frescoed Ceiling, Pitti Palace, Florence, Italy.

> accepted as 'trompe-l'oeil,' because we expect to see depth and perspective in a normal painting or drawing. "Trompe-l'oeil" is the use of images painted in perspective in places and situations where we might not expect to find them. (Plant, *Painted Illusions*. p. 20)

> The senses are more readily convinced that a painted landscape is real if it is also viewed through a window or door which itself has been painted directly on a wall. In this way it actually becomes part of the existing architecture as well as providing a frame for the view. Unlike an ordinary wall mural, however, the trompe l'oeil rendering blurs the edges between reality and illusion by suggesting that the window or door is actually there. (Plant, *Painted Illusions*. p. 20)

Images painted on walls of prehistoric caves in France may well be our first looks at man's attempt to recreate "reality." The artistic remains of other ancient civilizations in Egypt, Greece and Rome also reflect the wide use of decorative and architectural illusion in homes of those periods. Popular elements of painted illusion were garden vistas, colonnades, balconies, (fig. 1) staircases, and skies. These illusionary elements of design added another dimension because they appeared to extend beyond the actual structure of the dwelling place.

Countless old masters were intrigued by the charms of trompe l'oeil. Their artist's canvasses were the spacious castles, villas and cathedrals of Europe which contained vast open rooms and high vaulted ceilings which lent themselves perfectly to the illusionary images of trompe l'oeil. They painted scores of angelic figures taking flight up, up and away through great painted openings in the ceilings toward billowy cloud-filled skies overhead(fig. 2). The great walls were painted with decorative

columns, balconies or people (fig. 3), niches of statuary and marble vases of flowers. Sometimes these illusionary deceptions took on a more mischievous quality, such as a fly painted on the nose of a figure or a scrap of food painted as if it were tossed on the floor. It is this "...wit and waggishness...which have made the genre so endearing and popular throughout its astonishingly long history..." for "...trompe l'oeil has a lineage almost as long as the use of paint itself."

(Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home*. p. 10)

Flemish masters of the 15th Century were the first to achieve the quality of absolute reality. It was also at this time that certain details appeared in paintings which comprised more reality than the rest of the picture. For example, "Feet slipping over the edge of the earliest miniatures and the hands protruding from the frame of portraits are trompe-l'oeil details which painters have resorted to throughout the centuries for the purpose of linking up their pictures with the reality of the spectator." (Milman, *Trompe-l'oeil Painting*. p.12) False niches, usually populated with statues painted to imitate marble, were also an important element in the mural decoration of palaces and churches.

Illusionism as a concept can be defined thusly.

Figure 3—Fresco painted over exterior door of Building Murnau, Bavaria, Germany.

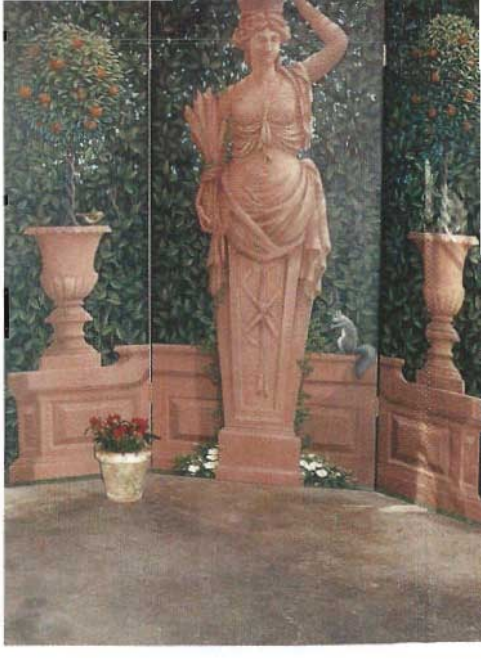

Figure 4—Terra Cotta Statuary painted in grisaille technique, Christian Thee, Connecticut.

> It... is an instance of what you see is not what you get. Yet what you get may be both more and/or less than what you bargained for, which is why it is so intriguing an element in home design. For example, at the estate Chatsworth in England a trompe-l'oeil painting of a violin hanging on a door is installed on a locked door to a music room. What we get is a perfect reproduction of the musical instrument, plausibly located, and the pleasure in realizing, after a moment, that it is all an illusion. What we do not get, of course, is a real violin on a real door.
>
> (Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home*. p. 13)

A primary condition for the success of illusionism is proportionate scale "...or the willingness of viewers to adapt themselves to the scale of an object." (Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home*. p. 16) A precisely painted flower by artist Georgia O'Keeffe would not qualify as illusionism because it is larger than life-size and does not contain realistic coloring. This is in direct contrast to the accurately scaled and colored paintings of flowers by artist Severin Roesen.

Illusionary painting has been employed throughout history for reasons of "...economy, practicality and entertainment." (Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home* p. 20) "Imitations, reproductions and re-creations usually are less expensive and can often function better than the genuine article." (Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home* p. 91) For reasons of economy perhaps, but certainly for illusionistic reasons too, painters have transformed the common space into simulated architecture, tapestries, statues and bas-reliefs. (fig. 4) Luigi Barzini in the book *The Italians* says that "Half the marble one sees in churches or patrician palazzi is, in fact, but smooth plaster deceptively painted." The highly stylized manner of painting wainscotting to resemble pastel marble at the late medieval *Palazzo Vecchio* and *Santa Croce* in Florence confirms Barzini's observation. "An American example of such techniques applied to the home is the 1725 'William and Mary Parlour' from a Massachusetts house and now in the *Winterthur Museum*, Delaware. The woodwork is painted in hyperkinetic swirls of

Figure 5—Balconies and architectural details, Concert Hall, Oberammergau,Bavaria, Germany.

faux pink marble and wood that are exuberantly false." (Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home.* p. 31)

> Due to its excessive weight, the exclusive use of marble in all parts of Saint Peter's in Rome was not feasible: the foundations could not support it. Real marble was used for twenty feet and the remainder of the wall was merely painted to match. Faux marble was a clearly practical choice but the church fathers must have found the economy to their liking as well. (fig. 6) At Versailles the same strategy was also used to avoid excess weight, and Louis XIV found that it amused his court.
>
> (Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home.* p. 92)

> It is human nature to want to adorn one's surroundings and it is also equally desirable to do so in the most economical manner possible. With the use of paint and trompe l'oeil methods, most everything in nature can be imitated. There are paint decorating techniques for successfully reproducing precious and semi-precious stones, marbles, woods, metals, fabrics, furs, and plant and animal life. For example, the flowing quality of fabric might not seem to lend itself well to the techniques of tromp l'oeil, yet it has been very effectively imitated. One example is the Paris Opera's curtain designed by Jean Louis Garnier in 1874. "The two-dimensional surface of the flat curtain was painted to resemble an elaborately draped and tasseled curtain."
>
> (Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home.* p . 38)

A popular trend in illusionary painting is what is known as *Street Art.* This refers to painted architectural details and ornamentation on the exterior facade of an otherwise plain building. ***Figure 5*** is a splendid example of this

style of deception painting. Two other contemporary works also come to mind. The first example is painted on a large side wall of a building on the corner of Greene and Prince Streets in the Soho district of New York City. The painted wall duplicates the original facade of the building but in a newly refurbished condition. The second example is known as *The Newbury Street Mural* located on Newbury Street at Dartmouth Street in downtown Boston. This fanciful mural is painted on the side of the building and is decorated with many windows and balconies filled with over sixty famous historical figures important to the history of Boston. Also included are some great works of art including portraits, paintings and sculpture by Picasso, Ingres, Michelangelo and others.

"More real than reality is often the effect to be aimed at and hard outlines, dark shadows and cut-away shapes all form part of the vocabulary of trompe l'oeil." (Millman, *Tromp-l'oeil Painting*. p. 33) Some rules for the effective painting of trompe l'oeil suggest that the rendering of live figures is to be avoided. "Their frozen appearance commands little belief in their reality, and they become objects. Moreover, unlike objects, they date very quickly." (Millman, *Tromp-l'oeil Painting*. p. 36) However, the numerous examples of dummyboards in existence in museums and private collections attest to the fact that this rule is often ignored. Two fine examples of these *"Silent Companions"* are to be found in the *Victoria and Albert Museum* in London. (See page 6 of *THE DECORATOR*, Volume XLVIII No.1, Fall/Winter 1993/1994 for photographs.)

> These human silhouettes undoubtedly originated in the Renaissance theater, where they replaced the extras. They also had their place in the fun-loving tradition of the Seventeenth Century Dutch painters. Well placed and cunningly lighted, such cut-outs could produce the desired effect. Today, however, the spectator may experience some difficulty in accepting the painted cut-out as a serious device. For with it we reach those shifting, ill defined limits where tromp-l'oeil passes over from the domain of art to that of the practical joke.
>
> (Milman, *Trompe-l'oeil Painting*. p. 92)

Because the feeling of reality was weakened when executing the perspective of height and depth in a painted niche, it was often "...replaced by representation of a recess in the wall fitted with shelves laden with objects, ...a pile of books, objects penetrating the spectator's space, and half-open manuscripts with ruffled pages..." which suggest "...the touch of human hands absent from the picture." (Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home*. p. 44) Also, cupboard and *"curio cabinet"* pictures became immensely pop-

Figure 6—Painted book cupboard, oil on Masonite™ panel—Dorothy Filmore, Connecticut.

ular in the 17th and 18th centuries. Showing a door ajar in the rendering of wall cupboards gives it greater credibility. From a technical viewpoint the half opened doors "...immediately give depth to a painting without creating problems of perspective. At the same time they throw into shadow the difficult background zone of the space depicted." (fig. 6) (Milman, *Trompe-l'oeil Painting*. p. 50)

When beginning a trompe l'oeil work, prime consideration must be given to the position of the viewer and the logical light source. The appearance of your work from the main viewing point is crucial and trompe l'oeil painting at times only works if you are standing at one position in the area of the painting. Always take into account the natural light source in the area and study the highlights and shadows carefully. Great care must also be devoted to getting the perspective correct. "The most successful trompe l'oeil subjects have very little depth; the flatter the object, the more likely it is to fool the viewer. The deeper the subject, the quicker the viewer will realize the hoax or not be fooled at all." (Decker, *Trompe L'Oeil*. p. 2)

"The queen of illusionistic devices—trompe l'oeil painting—has amazed and entertained viewers for centuries." (Chambers, Trompe L'Oeil at Home. p. 123) There is a famous story by Pliny the Elder, a Roman scholar, of the competition between the Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius around 400 BC. "Zeuxis produced a painting of grapes so realistic that the birds came down to peck at them. However, he ceded victory to his rival when he realized that the curtain he asked to have drawn in order to see Parrhasius's work was in fact the painting itself." (Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home*. p. 123) "But that is not the whole story. When Zeuxis

painted a boy carrying some grapes and the birds came again to peck at the fruit, he considered that he had failed; the grapes had drawn the birds, but the boy had not been painted convincingly enough to frighten the birds away." (Milman, *Trompe-l'oeil Painting*. p. 6)

By using trompe l'oeil techniques in our homes we can fashion and design our surroundings to suit any mode we desire. Incorporating trompe l'oeil and faux finishes allows us a greater freedom to obtain the interiors we dream about. "Our surroundings are an extension of our personalities—real and imagined." (Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home*. p. 145) A very desirable effect of illusion painting is its permanence—flowers are always in bloom, fruits and vegetables ripe for picking, and "...perpetually sunny skies or starry nights". (Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home*. p. 168) "Sky ceilings are just one way for us to introduce nature indoors. Sometimes it is even more subtle. Mrs. Paul Mellon has her floors painted with shadows, so that on a dreary day the sunlight still seems to be streaming in." (Chambers, *Trompe L'Oeil at Home*. p. 170)

Simply stated, *IMITATION is the sincerest form of flattery* and trompe l'oeil can make us smile in the process. (Fig. 6) Enjoy it. Practice it. Fool someone's eye with your next project.

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PHOTOS: Dorothy Fillmore

Figure 7—Stencil and scissor motif painted on a table top, Christian Thee, Connecticut.

Editor's Note. In the last issue of THE DECORATOR, the reader may have noticed that Astrid Donnellan's name was added to the short prestigious list of Master Teachers. This is a major accomplishment for any member of our society. Your editors believe that it would be appropriate to include some of Astrid's memories of her successful career in painting to accompany her article on Teacher Certification. Hence the following. Occasionally we shall publish personal vignettes of other members of our society highlighting the road they took to their personal achievements and how they got there. We trust that you will find their various voyages to our common goals as interesting as we do.

ON THE ROAD TO MASTER TEACHER

by Astrid Donnellan

I was introduced to the art of ornamental painting (in the Esther Brazer tradition), quite by accident. While welcoming a new neighbor, Jane Stevens, to our environs in July 1966, I was fascinated by the beautiful articles she had in her home. I just had to try my hand at this painting even though I had no formal art training of any kind. She suggested I try to get into the Fall class at Maryjane Clark's studio in Norwell, Massachusetts. Mrs. Clark agreed to find a place for me in her class and I arrived at my first class empty handed. I didn't know what a square tipped quill was or Prussian blue or what a brush stroke was for that matter. I soon learned. The first pattern I "painted" was full of, what seemed to me like, hundreds of brush strokes. I did the best I could. The other students in the class said it was good. But what did I know? I was glad to take their word for it.

I worked hard season after season doing my country tin patterns, scared to death to move on to something more exotic. Sooner or later, I had to try to stencil a tray. Once I had a simple tray stenciled, Maryjane said, "Okay, put these two pieces aside, they can be your applicant's pieces for entry into the Guild." I became a member in 1971. In September of 1971 I received my first "A" award, my applicant's country tin. I was delighted.

With much encouragement from Maryjane, I began teaching in the Fall of 1975. It's hard to believe that twenty years have passed since 1975. From 1971-1995, I have had one goal in mind...to be like my teacher. Be a Master Teacher! Learn all I possibly could about this delightful art.

Ascutney Resort, Spring Meeting, 1987

There was so much to learn. I wanted to pass on to my students everything I had learned. I wanted to share everything that was exciting about painting. It has given me so much pleasure in personal accomplishment over the years.

I studied hard and drove myself to excel. I wanted those "A" Awards! They were the road to my goal of MASTER CRAFTSMAN. Not every piece I submitted was an "A". There were "B"'s too. Finally, the day arrived—MASTER CRAFTSMAN in 1981.

While achieving that, I worked to be certified in all categories. My certification record is as follows:

Country Painting—1978	Reverse Glass Painting—1988
Stenciling—1979	Freehand Bronze & Metal Leaf—1993
Pontypool—1987	Victorian Flower Painting—1994

Master Teacher—April 1994

During those years I have written the following articles for *THE DECORATOR*, something I used to think that I could never ever do. But: *Boston's Custom House Tower, A Landmark Restored*—Spring 1990, *English and American Japanned Ware, An Exhibition*—Spring 1983, *Painted Decoration on English Japanned Clock Dials*—Spring 1989, *Gold...Its History and The Nearly Forgotten Art of Gold Beating*—Spring 1993, *HSEAD's*

Teaching Tool: The Teacher Certification Program—Fall/Winter 1994–1995.

I teach two weekly classes in my studio "In The Barn," a February Workshop and most years some special workshop in April or May.

I am most grateful for the existence of the HSEAD, its members and teachers. I often wonder what I would be doing today if I didn't have my constant association with Early American Decorating. It has opened a whole world for me which never ceases to be a delightful challenge.

Incidentally, that very first country painted pattern that I painted in 1966 has a place of honor on a wall in my studio. It is there to remind me how I began and it serves to be an encouragement to my students. They can do it too.

HSEAD's Teaching Tool: THE TEACHER CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

by Astrid C. Donnellan

The Teacher Certification Program is one of the primary teaching tools offered by the *Historical Society of Early American Decoration (HSEAD)* to all members of our Society wishing to further their knowledge in the craft of ornamental painting. This program was first chaired by Gina Martin in 1952. Because our art requires authentic technique for precise reproduction, it is essential that the teacher be aware of techniques that will result in an end product or art piece in keeping with our teaching and the mission of our Society.

Each art procedure carries with it a fascinating history of manufacture and methodology along with the record of individual artists and countries of origin that makes it unique from all others. Our long line of Society historians have provided us with much research which makes our journeys back in time one of the more interesting aspects of our efforts. This research is available to us all in our Society's books, lectures, meetings and publications—including the one you are holding now. A caring teacher wants to ensure that his or her students will be equipped with a comprehensive background on our art. Such grounding can only help to further the teachings and goals of our society.

By preparing for certification, the teacher and applicant team research deeply into every shred of history pertaining to the chosen category. No stone is left unturned, when preparing for certification. The student's portfolio will contain a comprehensive collection of patterns that encom-

pass all techniques for the chosen category. The applicant is well prepared, thorough, precise and creative in all endeavors. This expertise will be demonstrated in the presentation of the portfolio.

Certification announces that the teacher has successfully researched all there is to know about our art and is prepared to pass that knowledge on to others. The continuing growth and strength of the HSEAD is assured through the Teacher Certification Program.

A good teacher is an accomplished demonstrator. They show by doing. It is vital that demonstrations be accurate and that they be accompanied by verbal instructions made easily comprehensible and as repetitive as necessary. This method of demonstration permits the teacher to know if the student is absorbing the information and also creates good communication between teacher and student.

A good teacher exhibits motivation and infectious enthusiasm. Keep a student's interest high and communicate the excitement of creativity. Enthusiasm is contagious. Be imaginative with ideas to retain a student's excitement in motion. Accomplish these two key factors and return to class is guaranteed.

A good teacher is a skilled technician. He or she is aware that problems may arise for the student and is experienced enough to show how corrections can be made so as not to frustrate the student.

A good teacher is a conscientious supervisor, constantly checking a student's progress. Frustrating mistakes can be kept to a minimum under the watchful eye of the teacher. Confidence comes from repeated instructions, practice and, when warranted, praise.

A good teacher is a good critic. They have to be. However, the manner in which they deliver criticism is important. Be aware of the student's feelings. Criticism must be constructive, not destructive. A little kindness goes a long way as does praise to help build self-esteem. A teacher must be aware that all students are not capable of perfection and may not wish to achieve it. Each student is an individual and must be treated as such. The good teacher accurately gauges the potential of each student and guides him or her accordingly.

A good teacher is always patient and always understanding!

A good teacher is also a good student. It is essential that he or she refresh interests, techniques and concepts constantly. To do otherwise is to become stagnant and to turn a delightful occupation into a chore.

Official teacher certification is available in the categories of country

painting, stenciling, metal leaf and freehand bronze, glass painting, Pontypool, and Victorian flower painting.

The mechanics of certification include:

1. Applicant applies to the Teacher Certification Committee (TCC) Chairman (currently the author). The TCC meets whenever there is an applicant, at the next occurring HSEAD meeting.

2. Applicant presents to the TCC a portfolio of his or her work in the category (which must contain sufficient patterns to illustrate the scope of technique within the category), a history of the subject, and several optional factors such as receipt of "A"s in category, performing a teacher/student demonstration, bringing new members into our Guild, etc.

3. Complete guidelines for submitting are contained in *"The Standards Manual of The Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc. with requirements for Craftsmanship Awards, Teacher Certification, and Applicants."* The latest version is 1989.

4. If the applicant is certified his or her portfolio may be displayed in the Exhibition room of the current HSEAD meeting.

The growth and very life of our Society is totally dependent on a continuing infusion of new members. This in turn demands high quality classes, workshops and lectures on our art. It is important that teachers exhibit their work as an example of achievable goals. Teachers, at times, suffer some disappointments, as do their students, but a good teacher is not afraid of criticism. It is in learning to accept criticism that we continue to experiment and to further our professional growth. Never forget that we were all beginners once. Encourage others to join our unique team as students of our past and its relationship to our future.

HSEAD
EXHIBITIONS AND DEMONSTRATIONS–1994

Chapters and members are encouraged to sponsor, co-sponsor or participate in exhibitions and/or demonstrations to heighten public knowledge of and interest in early American decoration and the HSEAD. The use of the HSEAD name and seal at such functions is approved. The Chapter's Trustee must be aware of the function, including its purpose, timing and location, if the HSEAD name and/or seal is to be displayed, announced, or used in advertising the event. Copies of publicity generated by each event must be forwarded to the Society Treasurer and Historian, if HSEAD, Inc. is mentioned in the publicity.

DISCUSSION

1. It is anticipated that such exhibitions and demonstrations will often be held in cooperation with historical societies, museums, historical buildings or sites, early American decoration magazines, historic celebrations or festivals, libraries, etc.

2. If The HSEAD name is used, the function should be in good taste, with respect for authenticity and quality of HSEAD, although not necessarily confined to HSEAD's 10 areas of work. Wall and floor stenciling, penwork, faux painting, quilting, early furniture making, etc. might be quite appropriate.

3. If originals and members' work are to be displayed unlabeled or unattended (by HSEAD members), the use of "A" and "B" Award items is recommended. Partially completed items might also be ideal if they illustrate a progression of work, perhaps accompanied by the tools and materials involved in their creation.

4. Sales of members' work is acceptable as long as this is not the primary purpose of the Chapter's participation in the function.

THE TREASURES AROUND US

A NEW BEDFORD CHAIR

by Margaret K. Rodgers

Editor's note. This is the first of some projected columns which will take us to various museums and historical societies where we will examine ornamented items which might not be known to the general membership of the Society. Our concept is that many of us have fine local examples of the crafts addressed by our society. Many of these Treasures Around Us are worthy of inclusion in this journal in the interest of filling in the geographic gaps in our knowledge. There was much excellent work produced by small local shops, every bit as good as the more famous products. It is our hope that you will write similar pieces on items from your areas for inclusion in future issues of THE DECORATOR.

For this issue I would like to highlight a New Bedford, Massachusetts yellow arm chair. It is in the possession of *The Old Dartmouth Historical Society*, which iincludes *The New Bedford Whaling Museum*, located at the top of Johnny Cake Hill, in the old whaling port area of New Bedford. The firm of Bates and Allen made this chair on April 4, 1822 as shown by the label on the bottom. *William Bates* and *Thomas Allen* were chair makers who also did painting and glazing in their store on Water Street from 1822-1824. According to their advertisements they had fancy and Windsor chairs, paints, glass and oil for sale as well. This is one of only two New Bedford chairs known to retain their original labels.

Label from Bates and Allen Chair

THE NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM PHOTOS

The chair itself is in remarkably good condition. It has a soft yellow background with two morning glory type flowers executed in tones of burnt sienna with off white interiors. Black dots and

fine lines constitute the accents. Surrounding the central flowers are several green leaves with a large central yellow vein. There is a green brush stroke grouping on the middle splat and green striping on the points of construction. Four other green brush stroke clusters are found on the front legs of the chair. The paint is worn away from the top of the arms and from the seat of the chair. The whole chair is very graceful in appearance and very tight in its present condition.

This chair is not on view in the regular collection at the museum, but one can easily gain permission to see it, to photograph it (as long as the photos are not to be published), and to admire it, by calling the museum at (508) 997-0046 and asking for *Judy Lund*, the Curator. Information concerning this chair and other pieces of New Bedford furniture is available in the booklet *New Bedford Furniture*, by Elton W. Hall (1978) which is sold in the museum gift shop. While you are there take the opportunity to go aboard the largest ship model in the world, the whaling bark LAGODA, itself a mighty example of early American craftsmanship on a grand scale. The museum contains many other representations of our arts such as several tall case clocks.

Okay, now it is your turn to be a published author.

THE BOOKSHELF

The Art of Theorem Painting:
A History and Complete Instruction Manual
by Linda Carter Lefko and Barbara Knickerbocker

Viking Studio Books –Penguin Books USA Inc.
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014. 1994.
Quality soft cover, 127 pp, color photos and line drawings, Bib. $21.95.

This is the definitive work on theorem painting. The title says it all. There is no need to read any further—just add it to your professional library now. However, if you feel you must have additional information, the following is offered.

The Art of Theorem Painting is by two of our members, Linda Lefko and Barbara Knickerbocker. Displayed within its pages are the most complete, careful and explicit directions for executing a theorem available anywhere. Combine that with the excellent line drawings of patterns and beautiful full-color photos of original theorems and you have a book to treasure and, above all, use. Many classic original patterns are included with helpful "cut-by-the-numbers" annotations ready for the stencil maker.

The text, liberally illustrated with superb photos of very special theorems done on a multitude of objects, from pin cushions to bell pulls, and from the standard framed picture of a bowl of fruit to wonderful landscapes, leads you intelligently through the world of theorems. The history and conservation of them is examined in great detail. A complete list of necessary supplies is included, keyed to the type of material to be painted, with commercial sources identified. The accompanying text provides detailed instruction of not only what to do, but what not to do with the tools and mediums. I especially enjoyed reading about the production of black-walnut water and the great emphasis placed on the use of rubber gloves. You just know that the authors must have had real life experience with trying to rid their hands of "impossible-to-remove" stains.

This book will steer the student safely through the rocks and shoals of planning, engineering and duplicating a credible theorem. Great care has

been taken in developing the text so that it clearly shows the steps one should employ. The colors of the paints to be used are all but mixed on your palette. A color chart, including degrees of shading, is included and the authors instruct the student to prepare a similar one on a piece of velvet so that they will get a feel for exactly how much paint is needed for producing a particular work and how the colors will appear. Nothing is left to chance.

Credit is given to all who have helped in compiling this book and lending their treasured antiques for photographic inclusion as superb examples of the art. The list reads like a "Who's Who" of our Society. The reader will find many familiar names. This nicely demonstrates one of the major purposes and professional delights of our HSEAD. By formally associating, meeting, teaching, exhibiting, interacting with each other personally or via our literature, we become a synergistic group much greater than the sum of our individual parts. Buy this book. Try a few patterns and, based on the author's comprehensive guidance, see how well your next theorem project comes together for a most pleasing and satisfying effect. *—Margaret K. Rodgers*

Practical Gilding, Bronzing, Lacquering and Glass Embossing
by Frederick Scott-Mitchell

The Trade Papers Publishing Co., Ltd. London, 1914.
Republished by International Institute for Frame Study,
2126 O Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20037 (Tel. 202-223-3666)
185 pp, index, $15.00.

On May 7th of this year, I decided I would attend the second annual Society of Gilders' meeting in Newport, Rhode Island. I was pleasantly surprised to find a few vendors set up in the lecture room and happened across **Practical Gilding.** This reproduction is a quick photocopy of the original with two pages side-by-side on the right facing a blank page on the left. The book represents a crossroads in the world of gilding. One foot is in the nineteenth century with its products and methods and the other is in the twentieth century with the drive towards quick results. In one chapter, there is a price list for average charges for various types of gilding. Everything is measured in English pence and nothing is more expensive than 9d. which would buy you the girth of one inch of solid gilding per foot run on a molding! Ah, those were the days.

The material contained in each chapter is listed in detail in the *Table of*

Contents. Consequently it is very easy to let your eye wander down the page until you hit upon a subject which strikes your fancy. I found every chapter to have an extensive glossary of the terms employed in the ancient art of gilding. The first several chapters are devoted to the basics —tools, preparation of surfaces, materials to be used, and sizes (mordants). Then the reader is launched into methods. Both water gilding and gilding with sizes are dealt with in depth. In fact there is even instruction in how to make gold leaf powder. Bronze powders, various types of gold leaf, compo repairs, how to use the gilder's tip and gilder's knife are all in the *Methods and Materials* sections.

From there we go to gilding on leather and book edges, railway car gilding, gilding on plaster casts, furniture gilding, and lettering on glass and signs. Advice on what to do if something goes awry or you find you have defects in your finished work are found in Chapter Fourteen. Embossing on glass is found in Chapter Fifteen. Two methods are discussed; one is the acid (hydrofluoric acid) process and the other is the sand-blast method. The latter process is the "new, modern method" and works in a safer and quicker manner. I doubt that either process is in use today.

The chapter entitled *Points to Remember* is loaded with tips that even today are well worth reading. Some instructions are eternal verities. For example, it is stressed that the gilder should not use an airtight frame for gilded glass and that ventilation is necessary. Moisture will accumulate and the best of backings will break down and thus the size will as well. The same chapter also addresses the employment of mercury and the consequences of its evaporation which, of course, is downright deadly. The author recommends adequate ventilation. As such hazards are included, some highlighted more than others, one should not follow this book unquestioningly. Use it as a guide in exploring how gilding was accomplished in the early part of the century, and for useful hints which even the passage of many years cannot pale.

I found this book interesting and well worth the price. It nicely complements the two articles on gold and gold beating by Brian Cullity and Astrid Donnellan in the Spring/Summer 1993 (Volume XLVII) issue of *THE DECORATOR*. I noted at The Institute for Frame Study table that there were several reprints of other early books available. I believe some are listed in The Society of Gilders' newsletter, *The Gilders' Tip*, in their ads. Check them for additional insight into the earlier procedures employed in producing our crafts. —*Margaret K. Rodgers*

MEMBERS "A" AWARDS

Kathleen Hutcheson
COUNTRY PAINTING

Ann Baker
COUNTRY PAINTING

Cora Longobardo
STENCILING ON TIN

Judy Neumeyer
METAL LEAF PAINTING

Beth Martin

GLASS WITH BORDER

Astrid Donnellan

SPECIAL CLASS

Ann Baker
COUNTRY PAINTING

Marilyn Mitchell
THEOREM #4

Helen Spear
THEOREM #7

Marie Vandermind
THEOREM #9

AWARDS
Farmington, Connecticut–Fall 1994

PRESIDENT'S AWARD BOX
Shirley Baer • Barbara Quirk • Peggy Rodgers
Phyllis Sherman• Margaret Wehner

CAREER AWARD
Helen Thieme

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD
Frank Nelson

Dorothy Filmore received her Graduation Certificate
from the HSEAD School

APPLICANTS ACCEPTED AS NEW MEMBERS
Farmington, CT
Joan Diane Briggs • Kathryn Curtis • Laurie Gambee
Margery A. Greene • Emily L. Holmes • Patricia Lacy
Eleanor Langlois • Mary Ann Morrow • Patricia A. Olson
Ellen Swider

MEMBERS "B" AWARDS
Farmington, Connecticut–Fall 1994

COUNTRY PAINTING
Jane Giallonardo • Virginia S. O'Brien • Gladys Sowers
Helen E. Thieme • Marie Vigeant (2 pieces)

METAL LEAF
Shirley Berman

FREEHAND BRONZE
Elizabeth Landell

GLASS GOLD LEAF PANEL
Andrea Nuccio

CLOCK DIALS
Carol Buonato

THEOREMS
Pamela Benoit • Joyce Frascarella • Inez Gornall
Susan Redfield • Lois Tucker

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SPECIALIST AWARD

(Continued from past issue Volume XLVIII No. 2, page 25)

1. All "A" Awards to be used in meeting the criteria listed herein must be Awards that meet the full requirements as outlined in the Standards Manual for the general membership. Special Class "A" Awards will be disallowed. An exception may be made however in some instances. The petitioner may request the Standards and Judging Committee to review the piece in question to determine whether it does fully meet requirements as stated in the manual. A piece found to be acceptable by the committee will be allowed as one of the "A" Awards to be used in obtaining the Specialist Award.

2. "A" Awards will be retroactive to 1975.

3. Listed with each of the following categories are additional requirements that must be met as well as the minimum number of "A" Awards.

4. Petitioners for this award are encouraged to work from originals whenever possible rather from patterns that may be several times removed from the original.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

Specifications as to the type and number of pieces, as well as backgrounds and designs to be demonstrated are listed for each category. The number listed with each specification is the minimum number required with the total of "A" Awards. It is possible to incorporate several of these specifications on one award piece.

Specialist Award
Country Painting pieces by Lois Tucker

COUNTRY PAINTING REQUIREMENTS: 12 "A" Awards (minimum)

1. Types of pieces to include two (2) coffee pots and one (1) each of the following: trunk, 1-sheet waiter, 2-sheet waiter, tea caddy, and bread tray.
2. Backgrounds to include two (2) asphaltum (or suitable substitute) — one of which must be mottled; and two (2) in a color other than black or asphaltum.
3. Designs to include one (1) with a white band and one (1) with a band other than white; one (1) Pennsylvania design; one (1) Maine design demonstrating the wet technique. The designs chosen must represent at least six (6) known tin centers.

SUGGESTION: Select designs that are readily identifiable as to the tin center where they originated.

NOTICE FROM THE TRUSTEES

SPRING MEETING 1995
Sheraton Hotel, Charleston, SC
April 28—April 30, 1995 (Friday, Saturday, Sunday)

FALL MEETING 1995
Host Hotel, Lancaster, PA
September 29—October 1, 1995 (Friday, Saturday, Sunday)

SPRING MEETING 1996
Gideon Putnam Hotel, Saratoga Springs, NY
April 19—21, 1996 (Friday, Saturday, Sunday)

FALL MEETING 1996
Cape Codder Hotel, Hyannis, MA

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THE HISTORICAL USE OF SHELLS BY PAINTERS

by Ann Eckert Brown

An informative article about Charles Bullard, the early 19th Century ornamental painter from the Boston area, appeared in the *Collector's Notes* column of the January 1994 issue of the magazine *Antiques*. Included in the article was a transcript of Bullard's obituary, which was printed in a Boston newspaper in August 1871. The obituary quoted an early visitor to Bullard's studio, who recalls that "he gazed with curious delight upon the multitude of clam shells which bore his bits of paint and color."

The *Antiques* contributor interpreted this to mean that Bullard executed decorative designs on clam shells. She wrote, "The extensive tidal mud flats off Boston Neck would have yielded any number of clam shells for Bullard to decorate. Perhaps decorated shells are now a forgotten genre of early 19th century ornamental painting."[1]

A 19th Century illuminator's paint box, with mussel shells in upper front compartments. Shown in the 1987 Victorian Bibliomania exhibition at the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island. From the collection of Henry L. P. Beckwith, Wickford, Rhode Island. (Photo courtesy Rhode Island School of Design.)

This is an intriguing hypothesis, but I would like to offer what I believe to be a more plausible interpretation—namely, that Bullard used shells as *containers* for his decorative painting materials, not as objects to be decorated. Such use of shells by painters (decorative and otherwise) has been a tradition for centuries—since at least the ninth century, according to Sir Charles Eastlake. In his 1847 *Materials for a History of Oil Painting*, he writes, "The ancient artists in encaustic used shells for this purpose [as a small palette for holding paint], and the Byzantine painters continued the practice. A copy of a drawing, supposed to be of the ninth century, representing St. Luke painting the Virgin, is published in Ottley's *Italian School of Design*. The artist holds a brush in one hand and a small shell in the other. In the mss. of Alcherius colours are mixed in shells. In the Venetian manuscript caporoze (shells) are repeatedly mentioned in reference to the same purpose. They were commonly used by Spanish oil painters and were employed in miniature-painting in the seventeenth century; the practice in that is even now (1847)not altogether obsolete."[2]

An earlier reference to the use of shells is by an artist named Norgate, who wrote c. 1634, "You must have shells allsoe to put your colours in after they be ground, with tinfoil to cover them."[3]

Another traditional use of shells by artists is in the preparation and storage of a material called "shell gold"—ground or powdered gold leaf, typically stored in a mussel shell and removed from the shell by applying water. An 11th Century monk named Rugerus used "...the shell of a tortoise, or a shell which is taken out of the water" for preparing shell gold.[4] Cennino Cennini's guide to methods of painting, written in 15th Century Florence, includes directions for making shell gold."[5] Its primary use was in the illumination of books and manuscripts, but it was (and is) used by gilders and ornamental painters to execute delicate gold designs. In *The Practice of Tempera Painting*, published in 1936, Daniel Thompson writes about powdered gold leaf, "For small quantities it is convenient to buy the powder ready-mixed with gum, like a water color. It is sold as shell gold. One, two, or three drops are placed on a mussel shell, reminiscent of the shells in which the painters and illuminators of the Middle Ages used to mix and keep their colors."[6]

Shell gold is still available—with the difference that nowadays it is likely to be sold in a plastic mussel shell!

Numerous references to artists' use of shells persist into the 19th Century, when Charles Bullard worked. Richard Wilson, an early 19th

Century English oil painter and member of the *Royal Academy*, is said to have used an oyster shell to mix his "meguilp"[7] (an additive mixed into glazes and varnishes to keep them from sagging or dripping). Many artists had their own secret formulas for such additives. As noted above, Sir Charles Eastlake observed in 1847 that painters of miniatures were still using shells to hold their paint. British publications about heraldic illumination in the 1860s contained references to and advertisements for shell gold.[8] In 1987, the Museum of Art, at the *Rhode Island School of Design* in Providence, staged an exhibition of 19th Century illuminated books entitled *Victorian Bibliomania*. Included in the exhibition was a mid-19th Century paint box complete with mussel shells.

As a decorative painter and gilder with a waterfront studio overlooking Narragansett Bay, I find it both convenient and esthetically satisfying to collect my own shells and continue the tradition of using them to mix and hold materials—including shell gold. I'm sure the practice will survive as long as there are shells on the beach and artists to gather them.

NOTES:

1. Carol Damon Andrews. Article on Charles Bullard, ***Collector's Notes*** column. The Magazine ***Antiques***, January 1994, vol. CXLV, no.1, p. 68.

2. Sir Charles Lock Eastlake. ***Materials for a History of Oil Painting*** (later retitled ***Methods and Materials of Painting of the Great Schools and Masters***) 1847. Dover reprint, 1960, p. 401.

3. Ibid., p. 402.

4. W. R. Tymms and M. D. Wyatt. ***The Art of Illuminating.*** Chartwell Books, 1987, p. 72.

5. Cennino Cennini. ***The Craftsman's Handbook.*** **Florence**, c.1450. Dover reprint, 1960, p. 102.

6. Daniel V. Thompson. ***The Practice of Tempera Painting,*** 1936. Dover reprint, 1962, p. 87.

7. Eastlake, op. cit., p. 402.

8. (a) F. J. Baigent and C. J. Russell. ***A Practical Manual of Heraldry and Heraldic Illumination.*** London, 1864, p. 45 (main text), p. 2 (back matter).

(b) Clifford. ***Heraldry and Heraldic Painting.*** *London, post 1861, p. 20.*

CHRISTMAS TREE ORNAMENTS

by Shirley Baer

For the second consecutive year, the *Historical Society of Early American Decoration (HSEAD)* has donated handmade ornaments to be hung on a Christmas tree displayed at *The Museum of American Folk Art* (MAFA). Each year, one of the seventeen chapters of the HSEAD is responsible for donating approximately 150 Christmas tree ornaments to decorate one or two of the MAFA Christmas trees. The *Pioneer Chapter* created the ornaments in 1993, and the *Old Colony Chapter* in 1994. The following addresses the most recent project.

For Christmas 1994 the theme for the handmade ornaments was butterfly and flower motifs taken from trays painted in two centers: (1) the Pontypool and Usk area of Wales, and (2) the Midlands of England, primarily Birmingham, Wolverhampton, and Bilston. Most of these trays

SHIRLEY BAER PHOTOS

were painted between 1790 and the early 1900's. Butterflies, morning glories, dahlias, and roses are examples of flower painting found on trays from the Midlands, Pontypool, and Usk.

Freehand bronze trays, made of papier-mâché and sheet iron, were decorated mostly in Birmingham. Gold leaf butterflies were first found on trays from Pontypool and were called "pilla-pilla" (Welsh for butterfly).

Included in the 1994 ornaments were examples of Pontypool painting, gold leafing, and silver leafing. The ornamental butterflies were decorated with transparent paints over silver or gold leaf backgrounds.

Maryjane Clark chaired the committee to make the decorations. Mrs. Clark is the well-known author of the *Illustrated Glossary of Decorated Antiques* and she was instrumental in starting the *Old Colony Chapter*.

The *Historical Society of Early American Decoration* is pleased to be affiliated with *The Museum of American Folk Art*. We look forward to continuing to work with the MAFA in fulfilling the mission of our Society to perpetuate the art form of Early American Decoration.

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MARYJANE CLARK, Norwell, MA
ASTRID DONNELLAN, Hingham, MA
HELEN GROSS, Vero Beach, FL
GINA MARTIN, Vernon, CT
MARGARET WATTS, Toms River, NJ

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SPECIALIST AWARD

LOIS TUCKER, North Berwick, ME
COUNTRY PAINTING

ACTIVE CERTIFIED TEACHERS

JANICE ALDRICH, Keene, NH.....country painting, stenciling.

SHIRLEY BERMAN, Carmel, NY.....Pontypool.

JANE BOLSTER, Berwyn, PA.....country painting, stenciling, glass painting, freehand bronze.

MARYJANE CLARK, Norwell, MA.....stenciling, country painting, metal leaf, freehand bronze, Pontypool, glass painting, Victorian flower painting.

DORTIA DAVIS, Perkinsville, VT.....stenciling.

ASTRID DONNELLAN, Hingham, MA.....country painting, stenciling, Pontypool, glass painting, freehand bronze, metal leaf, Victorian flower painting.

SHERRY DOTTER, Lebanon, NJ.....country painting.

MARGARET EMERY, Averill Park, NY.....country painting, glass painting.

DOLORES FURNARI, Brandon, VT.....stenciling, country painting.

DOROTHY HALLETT, Bourne, MA.....country painting.
BARBARA HOOD, Hammondsport, NY.....country painting.
HARRIETTE HOOLAN, Oyster Bay, NY.....country painting, stenciling.
HELGA JOHNSON, New City, NY.....country painting.
CORNELIA KEEGAN, Hudson, OH.....country painting, stenciling, metal leaf, freehand bronze, Pontypool, glass painting.
DORCAS LAYPORT, Mattapoisett, MA.....country painting.
BETH MARTIN, Charlotte, NC.....country painting, glass painting.
LUCINDA PERRIN, Canandaigua, NY.....country painting.
MARION POOR, Augusta, ME.....country painting, stenciling.
CAROLYN REID, Averill Park, NY.....country painting.
MONA ROWELL, Pepperell, MA.....stenciling, country painting, Pontypool.
DOLORES SAMSELL, Warren, NJ.....country painting.
NORMA STARK, Glens Falls, NY.....country painting.
SARA TIFFANY, Hilton Head, SC.....country painting.
LOIS TUCKER, North Berwick, ME.....country painting, stenciling.
ALICE WALL, Plymouth, MA.....country painting, stenciling.
MARGARET WATTS, Toms River, NJ.....stenciling, country painting, metal leaf, freehand bronze, glass painting, Pontypool, Victorian flower painting.

Retired Certified Teachers who are willing to serve as Consultants:

ELIZABETH BACH, Glens Falls, NY.....country painting, stenciling, and freehand bronze.
HELEN GROSS, Vero Beach, FL.....country painting, stenciling, Pontypool, glass painting, metal leaf, freehand bronze, Victorian flower painting.
GINA MARTIN, Vernon, CT.....stenciling, country painting, metal leaf, freehand bronze, glass painting, Pontypool, Victorian flower painting.
HARRIET SYVERSEN, Closter, NJ.....stenciling, country painting, Pontypool.

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