The Decorator

Vol. 52 No. 1 Williamsburg, Virginia Fall 1997

Journal of the

Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc.

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Front cover photograph: Papier mâché hand screen beautifully decorated with freehand bronze, gold leaf, and Victorian flower painting. Owned by Martha Wilbur.

Back cover photograph: A pair of papier mâché hand screens with cutouts. Very unusual shape with Victorian flower painting. Possibly from Litchfield, CT. Owned by Martha Wilbur.

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Contents

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Lois Tucker
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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.

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Editor's Notes

Featured at the Williamsburg meeting was part of Martha Wilbur's collection of hand screens. Along with an article by Martha, some of those hand screens are being shown in this issue. We are grateful to Martha for sharing her collection and knowledge with us.

At an earlier meeting in Providence (fall of 1996), a highlight was one of Yvonne Jones' lectures, "Like a Tea Tray in the Sky." In response to many requests for notes from that lecture, Yvonne has kindly incorporated those notes into an article.

Jessica Bond, a Charter Member, former trustee, judge, and chairman of the Judging & Standards Committee has researched wall stencils for more than forty years. She has written a book on the subject (not yet published) and has generously given us permission to publish her work in *The Decorator.* Beginning with this issue, on page 27, we will print her manuscript and many of her photographs in installments.

Finally, for those of you who may not have purchased the Gina Martin/Lois Tucker book on country tin, be sure to read Peg Rodger's review to see what you're missing.

Shirley S. Baer

Future Meetings

Spring 1998
Nashua, NH
April 24-26, 1998 (Friday-Sunday)

Fall 1998
Syracuse, NY
September 18-20, 1998 (Friday-Sunday)

Schedule of HSEAD, Inc.
Membership Dues
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Guild Members	$35.00
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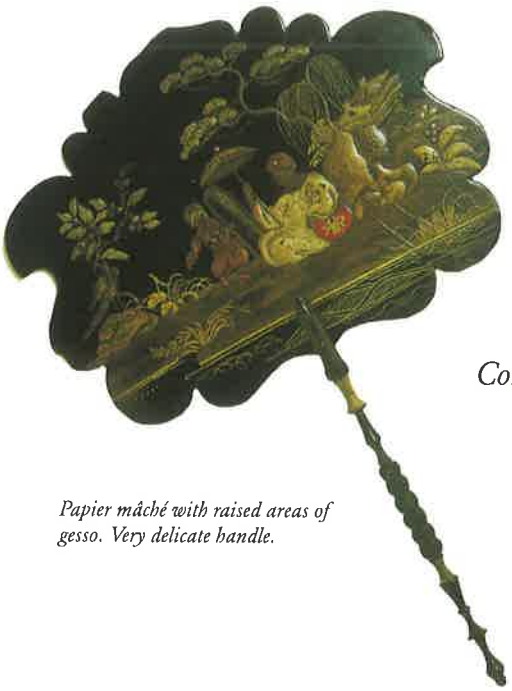

Papier mâché with raised areas of gesso. Very delicate handle.

Hand Screens

Georgian and Victorian Conceits "intended to becomingly shade the face from the heat of the fire."

by Martha M. Wilbur

In fine 19th century homes, a pair of beautifully decorated hand screens was a symbol of wealth and status, or if made by the lady herself, a demonstration of her artistic abilities. Sometimes called face screens or face fans, but more properly called hand screens, these useful and decorative items were kept in pairs on the mantle so as to be handy for a twosome sitting by the fire.

As women of the day used wax-based make up to cover the scars of smallpox and other ills, the face screens were used to protect the face from the heat and prevent the wax from melting. Screens might also be placed on stands to shield a lady's eyes from candle glare while leaving her hands free for needlepoint or reading.

Most of the screens on exhibit at Williamsburg were of papier mâché, but hand screens were also made of wood, tin, velvet, paper, needlework and beadwork. The materials – sometimes in kits – could be purchased in art stores such as "Fancy Repository and Brompton Emporium of Fine Arts" in London.

Face screens were generally round, square, Gothic or helmet-shaped with scalloped, scrolled or saw-toothed edges. Some of the most beautiful are those made by the Litchfield Manufacturing Company with cut-

outs between the painted flowers. One author says these were never found in England.

The handles, as varied as the materials, were about 9-10" long. Most were turned wood, ebony or ivory, and were fastened to the screen with rivets or a winged bolt.

Papier mâché with mother of pearl on black background

A fascination with all things oriental made Chinoiserie a popular theme for screens.

Painted on wood. Purchased in Marshfield, England.

Water color theorem on Bristol board. Handle wrapped with red silk thread. Purchased in London.

Bristol board provides a suitable foundation for decorations – both theorem and freehand.

Hand screen unusual because of material (paper), shape, and theorem decoration on Bristol board.

The variety of shapes and piercings made the form as varied as the painted decoration. Note the different handles.

Papier mâché with freehand bronze painting. "Chapel of Baliol College, Oxford" noted on the hand screen.

Very unusual shape. One of a pair shown on back cover

One of a pair of papier mâché hand screens, beautifully executed with Victorian flower painting. Note the unusual saw tooth edge.

Note "brush stroke-like" cut-outs around edge. Mate to hand screen on cover.

A pair of freehand bronze, papier mâché hand screens. Screen on right is a painting of the Shrine of Henry V, Westminster Abbey; right screen is believed to be a scene of Westminster Abbey also.

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Like a Tea Tray in the Sky!

Contemporary sidelights on japanned trays

by Yvonne Jones

Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!
How I wonder what you're at!
Up above the world you fly!
Like a tea tray in the sky.

Alice 's Adventures m Wonderland
(Lewis Carroll, 1865)

I had long been puzzled as to why a bat should be likened to a tea-tray and not until I saw the now ubiquitous and stylized promotional silhouette of *Batman* did I find a possible explanation for the analogy - the outline of a flying bat is like an elongated "Gothic" tray shape (as shown above). It seems a reasonable conjecture since although in 1865 when *Alice* was written, the heyday of the Gothic tray had passed, such trays would still have been a familiar sight in many middle-class homes.

Trays were made throughout the history of the japanning industry and were one of its mainstays from its beginnings in about 1740 until its demise in the 1920s. They may be seen therefore, to illustrate technical developments in manufacture and to indicate contemporary taste and social mores. In this short paper, it is possible to draw on only a few contemporary references to demonstrate my point, but nevertheless, they give the trays a context by providing interesting sidelights on their manufacture and design, and their sale and use.

The development of large organized factories in the 18th century engendered widespread curiosity among the rich, educated classes, and prompted a vogue for factory visits. Birmingham, in the vanguard of industrial development, and subsequently to be known as "the toyshop* of the world," hand screen attracted many visitors mainly to Matthew Boulton's Soho Works, but also to smaller concerns like that of the japanner Henry Clay. Many japanned goods were thus purchased directly

*The term "toy" was used until the 19th century to describe small objects such as snuff-boxes, scent bottles, etuis etc..

from the manufacturer, either from stock (fig. 2) or decorated to order. Mrs. Thrale for example, who in 1774 was returning from a visit to Wales with Dr. Johnson, recorded in her journal that "We breakfasted with Mr. Hector, who took us to Clay's new paper manufactory where we saw many curiosities and purchased some."[1] Japanned ware could also be bought from the London warehouses or showrooms which were soon established in the 1770s by the more astute and entrepreneurial japanners. Smaller retailers could not compete with the large stocks carried by the japanners and this would have been a matter of some concern, particularly for those within close proximity of the factories and warehouses. Mr. Brasbridge, a silversmith of 89 Fleet Street, London, for example, who "admiring the ingenuity and taste" of Henry Clay's trays, perhaps spoke for many when he lamented that in endeavouring "to promote their sale to the utmost of my power ...I did myself as much injury as I rendered him service; for, encouraged by his success, he opened a warehouse in King-Street, Covent Garden, which operated as a net to intercept my customers."[2] There were besides, other less obvious but nevertheless rival suppliers. Like the Birmingham factories, the prestigious Worcester porcelain works were on the 18th century tour circuit of British manufactories, and they too sold japanned trays and tea-boards to their visitors. To judge from the account ledgers of Chamberlain's factory,* there was clearly a fashion for matching patterns on trays and china. In 1802 for example, Chamberlain's ordered "One paper tray from Clays exactly to match" the chocolate cups etc. which Lady Eley had bought of them, and "One paper tray with blue ground and gold work to match the china" purchased by another customer. An entry made between 1804-6 is perhaps the most interesting in relation to trays. Firstly in noting that four basic tray designs with "single gold border, double gold border, single bronze border, double bronze border," were available from the japanner Charles Docker of Birmingham, it suggests that

Figure 2 . An early 19th century engraving of a japanner's showroom from Scenes of British Wealth

*In the collection of the Dyson Perrins Museum, Worcester

Chamberlain's carried a general stock to complement their china, and by implication, endorses the quality and suitability of japanned trays in this affluent context. And secondly, it is a sobering reminder that Henry Clay did not enjoy a monopoly.

Today, we use the term "tray" more loosely than was the case in Georgian and Victorian times when a distinction was made between trays, waiters and tea-boards. Trays of varying size were used to carry china, cutlery and food to the table, much as today; waiters* "on which glasses & c. are presented" were much smaller, while teaboards were usually about thirty inches across and therefore much too large to carry when laden. Given how greatly these teaboards are admired by collectors today, it is curious to reflect that their original purpose was to protect drawing room tables from heat and spills when tea was served. This is not to suggest however, that they were not esteemed by their original owners who had after all, paid quite handsomely for them.** They took great care of them and when not in use, teaboards were "usually placed upright on the side tables of middle-class families and ... made an object of art and a room decoration by being ornamented with a well executed painting."[3] But it was not only those painted with pictures which were treated in this way; for example, a small painting of an unidentified Yorkshire interior, painted by the amateur water colourist Mary Ellen Best in the 1830s (*Private Collection),* shows a large red tea-board with a fine gilt border, stored in this way. In fact the painted trays and teaboards were so highly regarded that they fell victim to what now seems little short of vandalism. "I have seen at Wolverhampton" wrote Cuthbert Bede, "some of Bird's tea trays.... which were so highly prized by their possessors who in some cases, had cut out the painting and had framed it, like a picture."[4] One wonders whether one of two oval tin trays at Bantock House Museum in Wolverhampton which had each been mounted in elaborate gilt frames in a similar fashion, and signed (questionably) by Edward Bird is perhaps the one to which he referred.***

Not all trays of course, were made for the fashionable domestic market. Then as now, some trays were made to mark specific events or to promote causes, but whether they were made for general sale, or specially commissioned for "official" use we cannot now be certain. Take for example a rectangular tin tray painted for the Glasgow Cotton Spinners in c1820 (*The People's Palace Museum, Glasgow)* or a similar tray painted and stenciled with *Gathering of the Unions on New Hall Hill, Birmingham, May 1832 (Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery),* which both indicate the political climate of the times. Others, like the huge "tray" made by Sankey and Co. for the Great Exhibition held in London in 1851, were of course,

* Unlike silversmiths, japanners seldom used the term "salver" to describe these small trays

** eg. £5.8s.9d (approx. $16) for a tray

***see *The Decorator,* vol. L1, no. 2, Spring 1997, pg. 13, fig. 3

made as exhibition pieces four feet in diameter and made of iron. It was obviously never intended for use, but rather to demonstrate the consummate skills of the metal-workers in rolling such a large piece of iron so smoothly and evenly.

During the early years of the industry when hand labor was intensive and the cost of trays very high, they were available only to a privileged few. Increased mechanization and production brought japanned tin trays within the reach of a wider working population; in 1880, "such painted tea trays are still hawked about country villages and I frequently see them in cottages, reared up against the wall on a side table. Battle scenes are favorites, and are painted cheaply."[5] Evidence of the popularity of these "cheap tin trays" may be found in many Victorian genre paintings which, although offering rosy views of modest cottage interiors, show small waiters and trays in use, or sometimes propped on the mantle shelf amid pottery figures and such-like. James Collinson's painting *Answering the Emigrant's Letter (l850), (Manchester City Art Galleries), is* one of many good examples.

At its best, there is little to choose between the decoration of tin and paper trays, yet with the exception of trays made in Pontypool, those made of tin are often regarded as inferior. This misjudgment is of long-standing. Anne Cobbett for example, writing in 1851, advised young women setting up home that "Paper trays are the best considering the small difference in appearance, it would be better to save in many other things than to hear tea-things, glasses or snuffers, jingle on japan." By which of course, she meant tin trays since the term "japan" was frequently used by manufacturers to distinguish tin from paper goods. She further advised that "Paper trays are very durable if taken care of" and in line with earlier thinking, recommended that "To prevent their being scratched, keep teaboards under the dresser of the pantry, or, if convenient hung against the wall, to be out of the way when not in use."[6]

As production methods improved, output increased and tray forms became very much more varied. Amongst the most innovative was the celebrated Redgrave Wine Tray, (fig. 3) originally made by Jennens & Bettridge in 1847 and named after its designer, Richard Redgrave. It was said of this tray that "Mr. Redgrave has transferred to trays the convenience of horseshoe tables. Instead of the

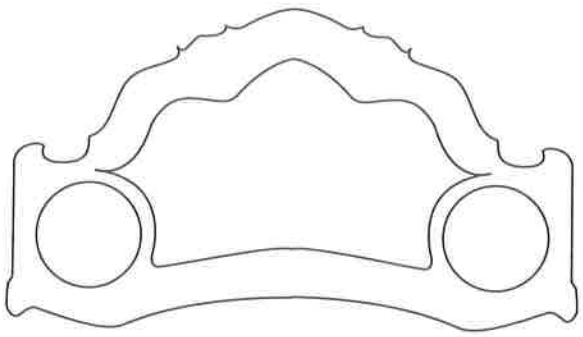

Figure 3. The Redgrave wine tray

painful sight of waiters holding trays of wine and cake at a long stretch, supporting the inner edge against their bodies, we shall now see them in a state of ease, if not an attitude of grace. The inner rim of the wine and fruit tray is now cut out so that the whole tray presents the arc of a circle projecting towards the guest, and relieving the waiter from his strained attitude."[7] Parlour maid's trays (Fig. 4) which appear to have developed from this design, were made by several manufacturers in a range of sizes and sometimes in graduated sets. Jennens & Bettridge patented a tray of this shape in 1849, and soon after, unsuccessfully tried to sue a rival firm for infringement of their copyright.

Trays like so many other japanned wares were not always marked by the manufacturer, and since they were often the combined work of the painter, pearler, gilder and japanner, rarely signed by the artists. Moreover, shapes and styles of decoration were generally common to all manufacturers. It is futile then, without strong evidence, to attempt to attribute trays to any one maker - a fact highlighted by the following account of the Wolverhampton japanning industry, written in 1874. "The average factory produces 600 sets trays (3 per set) and 400 gross waiters each month. It may seem, incredible but it is nonetheless true that one maker alone has not less than 1700 distinct patterns of trays and waiters"[8] In addition, the decoration of so-called "all-over picture trays" were often copied from popular paintings of the day, and their subjects were thus common to all factories. As George Wallis noted "An artist's works were no sooner engraved than the tray painters seized upon them, for it must be remembered no copyright existed to restrain this kind of publication even down to the time when Landseer's subjects became popular, and the revival of tray painting about 1837-8, made his engraved pictures common property on papier mâché."[9] *The Queen's Pets*, painted by Landseer was a particularly popular subject and Jennens & Bettridge for example, are known to have used it on several products besides trays.

It is seldom then, that one can reliably attribute an unmarked tray to any one manufacturer, let alone identify an artist. An impressive provenance, and the knowledge that the tray made for presentation to Queen Victoria in 1852, was decorated by Edward Haselar, Walton's leading painter, makes it doubly important in the history of the japanning industry.*

Although the artists were denied the opportunity of signing their work, they at least enjoyed positions of considerable prestige and privilege within the factory. It is sad that the same cannot be said of the hand-polishers whose skills in adding the final polish, which contributed so much to the success of the industry, were so often overlooked. This high polish on trays and other articles, was done by rubbing the

* For detail, and an illustration, see *The Decorator*, vol. Ll, no. 2, Spring 1997, p 20, Fig. 10 .

surface with the heel of the hand and a little fine rotten-stone for upwards of half an hour until a mirror-like surface was achieved. It was pompously said "that those females employed in this art, who are gifted by nature with the much coveted charm of a soft and delicate hand, find it commercially advantageous to preserve this softness and delicacy by a degree of gloved carefulness not usual in their rank in life."[9] The same methods prevailed into the 1920s when one of the last women to be employed as a "hander", as they were known by Henry Loveridge & Co., in Wolverhampton, would never wash the dishes at home for fear that her hands would become roughened and chapped and cause her to lose her job.

As I address an audience of skilled craftspeople all too aware of the problems associated with final polishes, I am sure you will agree there can be no more fitting an end to this paper than this tribute written in the 1870s: "It is pleasant to know that it is to the fair sex, who have made the graces of the tea-table so peculiarly their own, that we should be indebted for the lustre of its most indispensable accompaniments."[10]

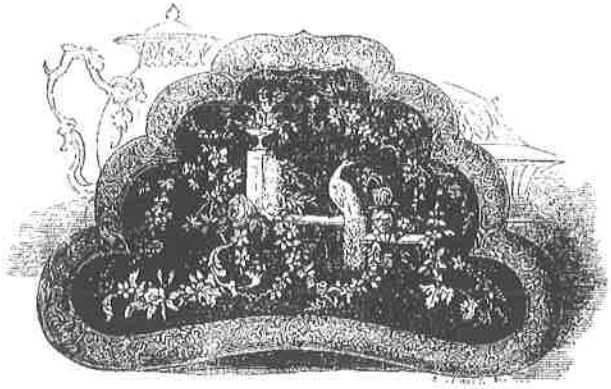

Figure 4. Parlour maid's tray by McCallum & Hodson, c 1850 (*sometimes McCullum)*

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[7] Dickens, Charles. (ed.) *Household Words*, no. 82 vol. IV, 18th Oct. 1851
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The Bookshelf

"American Painted Tinware, A Guide to Its Identification." Volume One.

by Gina Martin and Lois Tucker

Reviewed by Margaret K. Rodgers

Publication of The Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc. Index, bibliography, 156 pp, color, black and white photos/plates, line drawings. $42.50.

The long-awaited first volume of this comprehensive tin book series is now in the hands of those who had the perspicacity to order it early. Those lucky owners now know it was well worth the wait. The extensive amount of carefully selected examples, coupled with a detailed examination of hundreds of country painted pieces, make this book an absolute must for anyone who has ever painted a comma stroke.

The first chapter is an excellent historical overview of the early tinsmiths, their genesis, their shops, and their families. Many names appear that might be unfamiliar to us. Consequently we can appreciate the many hours spent delving into family records in various townships, piecing together the geography of the early towns and getting the feel for what the life, times, inspirations, and challenges were for those who developed our craft. This chapter expands on and corrects much of the information contained in many of the books written in the past. The authors provide us with the professional background that serves as the basis for a proper appreciation for our decorative art.

The book continues with four chapters which are divided into sections containing carefully selected photographs representative of known decorative tinware from Connecticut and New York. Chapter 1 examines the area around Berlin, Connecticut. The reader is led on a trail

from an easily identified piece to the next one which exhibits a few of the characteristics of the known one. From there the text branches out by examining the "new" strokes, which in turn leads to the next example. The authors' technique is an adventure much like a treasure hunt with numerous clues examined here and there. The many superb photographs of whole examples are followed by a series of detailed line drawings expanding on the decorative features of each tin-producing center. The author's painstaking research is reflected in the scholarly text and in the notes that accompany each piece.

Chapter 2 similarly treats the products of the Upson Shop in Marion (Southington) Connecticut; chapter 3, the North Shop in Fly Creek, New York; and chapter 4, the Butler Shop in East Greenville, New York. Again we follow the carefully selected trail of photos and the exquisitely line-drawn tinware designs which typify the specific shop or artist. This book contains the definitive background and indicators for the informed appreciation of anyone who has ever admired the design on a country painted item.

The authors are friendly professors, providing a superb guided of the origin and growth of tinware through a fascinating period of American history. To my knowledge, the manner selected is unique. To read and savor this book is to further enhance our great admiration for the two authors who have demonstratively devoted many years to accumulating the information they share with us. This was obviously a labor of love.

Three more volumes are planned for this series: Volume II will address "The Tinshops of Stevens Plains, Maine," Volume III "Filley Tinshops of Connecticut, New York, and Pennsylvania," and Volume IV "Miscellaneous and Unknown Tinshops." Once you have enjoyed the pleasure of learning from Volume I, you will eagerly await the books to follow.

"*An Introduction to 'Victorian Genre' Painting from Wilkie to Firth*"

By Lionel Lambourne. Stemmer House, Publishers, Inc., 2627 Caves Road, Owings Mills, Maryland 21117. 1982. ISBN O-88045-009-6. $8.95. 48 pages, color and black and white photos.

When I was first handed this slim volume, I immediately looked for an index so that I could go right to George Morland. However, there was no index. This set me on a course whereby I leafed through the book looking for some of his more familiar works. I came across them right away as Morland and his genre paintings are discussed on page nine and displayed in plates five and six. For those who have past "Decorators," you might recall the excellent articles written by Maryjane Clark (Spring 1982), and Roberta Edrington (Spring 1992) on this artist. Certainly no

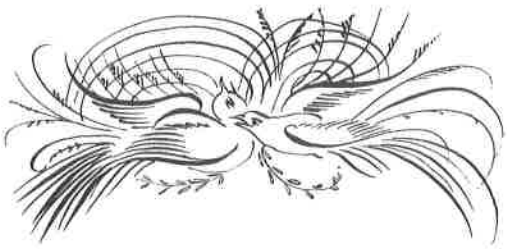
one can forget Roberta Edrington's Specialist's Award display at the spring '97 meeting in Ogunquit, Maine of those incomparable scenic freehand bronze trays inspired by Morland paintings and prints. With those examples in mind, your appetite may be whetted for further information concerning other artists working in that type of painting.

The author examines many of the other English Genre painters working with the same techniques. When one looks into the terminology of "genre," images of cute kittens, puppies, sentimental farming scenes. etc., come to mind. The truth of the matter is that these painters working in the Victorian era were in fact depicting what was commonly understood in their times. Often hidden meaning can be attached to a painting such as that by William Collins of a boy touching his forehead and hair. At first glance this is a charming picture of two children standing by a gate. What is not so obvious is that this boy is meeting his superiors and is respectfully "tugging his forelock" to them and to the viewer. One must examine each painting in the context of the times to determine the full range of the artist's intent.

If you have the opportunity to find this little book, you will be rewarded with a refreshing new insight into a style of painting which can be found on trays employing bronzing powders to "draw" the characters, animals, and background. Victorian genre painting typically contains scenes depicting social issues, mighty victorious empire-expanding battles, as well as domestic household scenes, cuddly animals, and the delights of the poetic country way of life. All tell a tale to the viewer. These paintings are the precursors of photography - freezing a moment for all time.

Judging and Standards

by Dolores Furnari



If you wish to submit a theorem for judging that was recorded from an original, write to the Standards Chairman and include a photograph of the original. If approved and submitted for judging, please attach a clear photograph of the original to the back of the theorem.

Awards

President's Award Box

Shirley Berman Lynn Glover

Beth Martin Marti Tetler Robert Wilbur

Members' "B" Awards

Stenciling on Tin

Trudy Valentine

Metal Leaf Painting

Elaine Dalzell

Theorems

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Dolores Furnari

Theorem

Beth Martin

Glass with Border

(Photo by Beth Martin)

Judy Neumeyer

Stenciling on Wood

Alice Smith

Theorem

Roberta Edrington
Victorian Flower Painting

Martha Springett
Theorem

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Theorem

Linda Brubaker

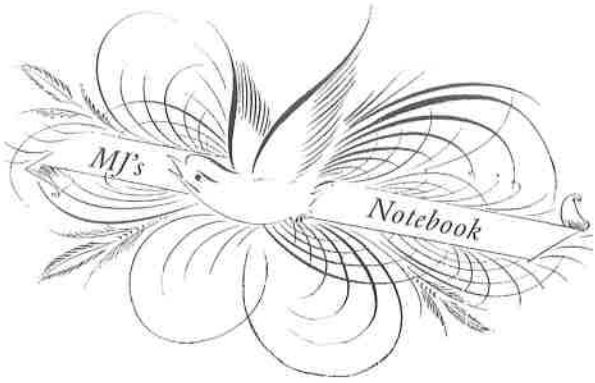
Country Painting

Amy Finley

Theorem

Dorothy Fillmore

Stenciling on Wood



One rarely finds the same subject on two different materials. For example, the Morland print below is found on a tin tray (22" x 30") owned by Maryjane Clark and a papier mâché tray (24.5" x 18.5") owned by Astrid Donnellan. This is the first time Maryjane has seen the same freehand bronze pattern on both papier mâché and steel.

"Smugglers at Work," a print after a painting of Morland.*

Closeups of horses from Donnellan's papier mâché tray (left) and Clark's tin tray (right).

*The Decorator, Volume 36, No. 2, Spring 1982, p. 6.

A Treasury of Old Stenciled Walls 1810-1840

by Jessica Hill Bond

Part of an original overmantel design found in South Woodstock, VT.

Having spent more than thirty years with the absorbing interest of finding, recording and photographing old stenciled walls, I have come to the conclusion they were more prevalent than at first assumed.

In traveling about the countryside here in Vermont I have noticed that old houses of early architecture are being rescued and put back into a semblance of what they once were. Fortunately the new owners have a desire and a knowledge to restore authentically. Old bricks are being used where needed, small pane windows put in, verandas of a later day removed, woodwork scraped to find original paint colors, layers of wallpaper removed from walls and often unsuspected stenciled decoration found underneath on the plaster. Others have found stenciling when a roof has leaked and made the wallpaper fall away. It is exciting and gratifying to historians that these old decorations are being appreciated.

The stenciled walls that brought joy to our ancestors during the first three decades of the 19th century were done by itinerant decorators who had a natural feeling for good design. The walls were cheerful and skillfully done with an interesting variation in the placement of their patterns and in how to solve different wall problems to make the room come alive. As in all fashions, stenciled walls ceased to be a novelty and were finally covered up by wallpaper when it became accessible to the outlying districts of the northeastern United States in the 1840's. The

"Borderman" stencils on a wall in Jericho, VT.

machine age was not far off and the speed of making things took away some of the incentive to do things by hand. As the Victorian period gained ground, wall stenciling made its appearance again, an ornate type with fancy scrolls and furbelows done by trained professionals, suitable for the elaborate mansions of that era. Churches are found with formal designs stenciled on domed ceilings to give a dignified appearance. By the turn of the 20th century wallpaper trade journals were advertising stencil designs for walls, and a touch of the Art Nouveau influence began to show. Now, many years have gone by and the interest of people into doing old time crafts of all kinds has made a remarkable comeback.

This book is a study of the early style of wall stenciling in the northeastern United States: when and why it started, names of some of the itinerants, what the designs look like, my opinions about them, and when and why this fashion came to an end. It is hoped that the ones left will be cherished and protected for they are of historic importance in the art of our ancestors and when these walls do finally crumble they will not surface again.

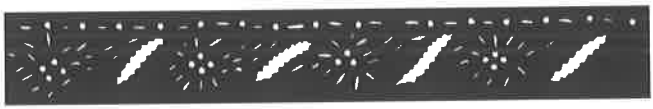
Part One: The Background of Wall Stenciling

In the study of design and decoration in early America, the stenciled wall plays an important part toward revealing the tastes of our ancestors. Even in pastoral Vermont, which was almost a wilderness until quite late

in the 18th century, the fashions of the day made themselves known. After the Revolutionary War had ended and freedom had at last been won, people everywhere rolled up their sleeves to continue where they had left off. A very welcome prosperity came to the northeastern part of the country and was evident not only in the cities but in the rural areas where my study takes place. Farms grew larger, mills along the many streams were thriving and this prosperity is reflected in the fine houses built during the late 18th and early part of the 19th centuries. The country builders had access to builders' manuals and they also had an uncanny sense of symmetry in roof lines, doorways and window placement. Interiors, too, show this simple good taste of our early craftsmen with their well designed mantels, cornices, and staircases. Except for paneling or boarding on some of the fireplace walls or dadoes, many walls were white-washed plaster.

By the early 1800's the villagers in these rural sections were ready for a change in their rather plain surroundings and craved some color, some decoration. They were aware that in urban areas painted decoration had been in vogue and that "ornamental painters" were advertising in newspapers. Painted floor cloths had been advertised since mid 18th century. These canvas floor cloths were not only functional but decorative in entries, hallways and important rooms in mansions and in modest homes, too. There was also demand for decorated signs for inns, shops, fire buckets or whatever the individual painter-craftsman could supply. Wallpaper, both domestic and imported, was popular among the wealthy. Some wallpaper from England and France had designs stenciled on it. There is an interesting advertisement in the "Federal Gazette" of Baltimore, Maryland in 1796 that William Priest does ".... painting in imitation of Paperhangings, by a Mechanical process, which from its facility, enables the artist to paint a room, staircase &c. upon lower terms than it is possible to hang with paper of equal beauty." There is little doubt that he was describing stenciling done directly on the walls of a room. But this idea of Mr. Priest's made little headway in Baltimore if the scarcity of these walls there is any criterion.

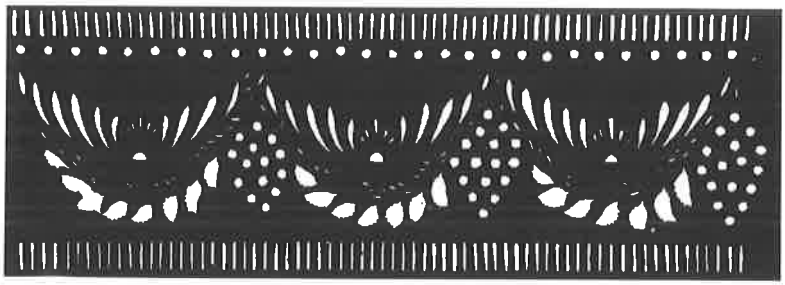
But in outlying districts of the New England states this new and cheaper way of adorning walls with the aid of stencils appealed to some of the young talented craftsmen who were eager to get away from their normal trades for awhile and see if they could interest the rural people in this new way of decorating their rooms quickly and cheaply. Little did they know what they were starting. The years of popularity for decorating rooms this way fall within the three decades 1810-1840 in New England and New York, a few in other states, and in Canada before it died



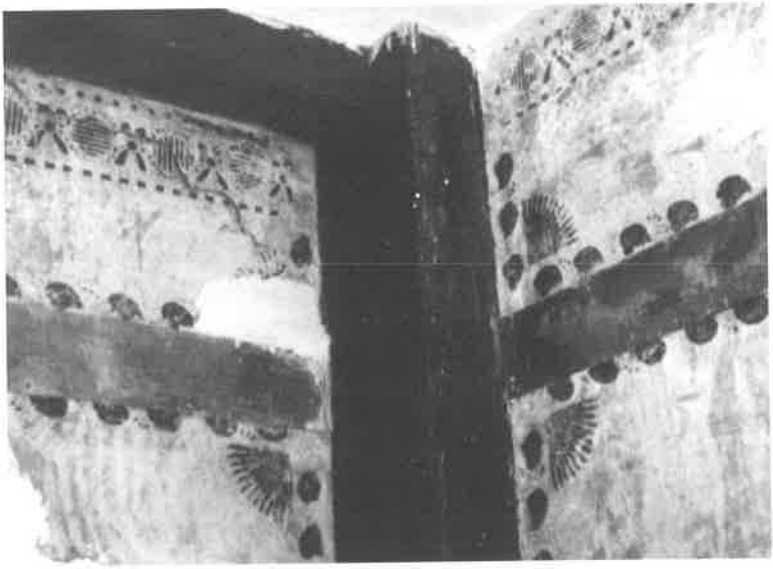
out and succumbed to wallpaper which finally became obtainable and covered up these old walls for another century.

The painter-itinerants often traveled in pairs and would go from village to village, state to state with their stencil kits of various pigments, brushes and stencils. Many came on horseback in late spring or summer, or by river. Some came in winter, possibly by stagecoach because the snow on the roads was rolled with wide rollers to make a packed surface for horses and sleighs. A likely place to stop would be the village tavern for even today some places known to have been early taverns or stagecoach inns have some remains of wall stenciling in them. Here the tavern keeper would let them decorate a room or floor in the very latest fashion for room and board. The tavern was the hub of the village in early days. Mail was dropped there; news, politics and gossip discussed there. When the villagers saw this new fashion of decorating walls with colorful designs, many were eager to have it done in their own homes and excitement was everywhere. That some itinerants braved the northeast winters is proven in an old diary that Blanche Brown Bryant saw many years ago. It had belonged to Sally Brown who wrote from Cavendish, Vermont January 24, 1832 that "two men came to paint the house in imitation of paper. They mix paint with skim milk using Spanish white for whitewashing...Thursday Mr. Livingston finished the house. He used rose pink to make lilac or peach blossom colors mixing it with Spanish white and milk....yellow and Prussian blue for green. They had between six and seven dollars for the job". Much of the writing was obliterated and the rest of the diary had no further mention of the walls nor of Mr. Livingston nor the name of the other man.

The designs created by the different itinerants depended upon the individual's background, artistic ability and imagination. Some of the designs can be called realistic such as birds, baskets of flowers, pineapples, leaves, urns and willow trees; others are fanciful and geometric. The combination of realistic and fanciful designs used together on a wall complement each other very well. Many chose completely different designs from the rest of the room to decorate over mantels or a panel between windows. This is seldom done with wallpaper and is one of the most charming features of a stenciled room. The woodwork was often grained.



Patterns for the stencils were drawn onto sturdy high grade paper and cut out with a sharp knife. Stencils of leather and thin brass are also known. Dry pigments were mixed with the medium the stenciler preferred or had access to. Some liked watercolor, others oil, tempera, or a type of casein, and applied it sparingly to the wall through the cut out stencils with quite large round soft bristle brushes. The stencil was then lifted off and moved over to form an exact repeat design. Each color required a separate stencil. Different shades of green and red were very popular; others used blue, black and red. Yellow, yellow ochre, black, red or white overlay stencils were sometimes used as accents. For the backgrounds there was easy access to skim milk in the country and milk mixed with whiting, some glue size and a little coloring made light buff, gray, yellow, pale raspberry, pale blue or left white.



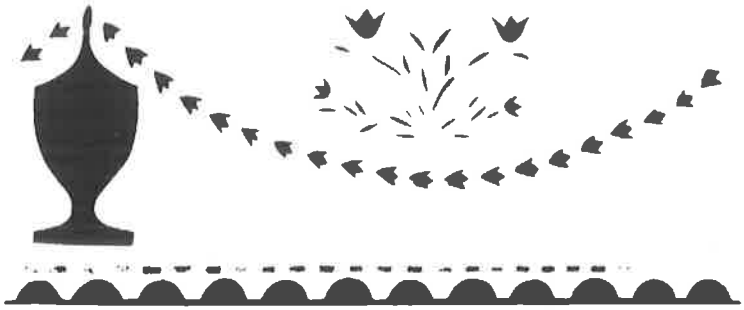
"Borderman" stencils from the same house on page 28.

Stencils as tools in art are centuries old. The word "stencil" is thought to come from the old French "estencele" meaning spangle or sparkle. In Latin it is "scintilla" from which we get "scintillate". Both of these meanings indicate something that shines. Centuries ago, gold leaf and gold powder were applied through stencils onto a painted design tacky enough to receive the gold. Some of the Japanese No dancing robes of silk were decorated this way in the 17th century, and in England early rood screens from churches have been found with gold stenciling amid the freehand decorations.

The "Borderman" Stenciler

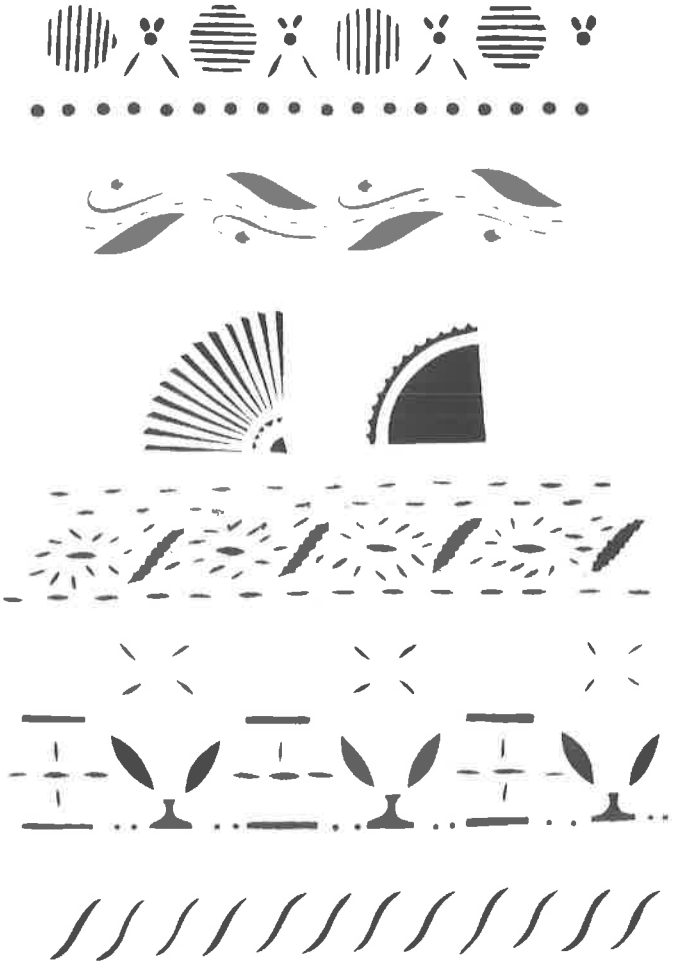
Because the itinerants were not accustomed to signing their work we must get to know them and where they went by their designs, the way they would lay out a wall, their colors, stencil cutting and workmanship. There must have been some copying done of the patterns but each itinerant had his own style of decorating which is difficult to imitate. One stenciler who went into all the New England states can be followed quite easily by his style, colors and classical designs. He is referred to among wall researchers as the "Borderman". Unlike the walls with single motifs alternating across and down the walls he liked to outline the room with borders at the top for a frieze, around doors and windows, over and under chair rails and above the baseboards, leaving the main part of the wall undecorated. Often he painted wide bands first in a different color from the background and stenciled his designs on the bands which gave the room an air of elegance and refinement. There is a delicacy to his work in his festoons, reeding, urns, beading and quarter fans as though he may have seen good woodwork in houses by master builders. Occasionally he graced the over-mantel with an urn of stylized flowers and in a few houses where further decoration was needed, the main wall was stenciled with graceful vertical borders . 'The colors he preferred for the designs were black, dark or medium blue, shades of red or deep pink and often overlay stenciling in white. The backgrounds were similar to those used by other itinerants plus a light apricot and very pale blue.

It was an exciting day several years ago when someone brought me a long box and said "open it". Inside were some of Borderman's old stencils! Some were coated with thin paint; some were cracked and broken; others drawn and not cut out, while a few were cut out but had never been used. Most of the stencils are about twenty inches long of a high grade heavy paper. On the back of one is very clear precise writing in ink "Chelsea June th 26 1814 for Value Received I promise to pay Henrey Rogers....Dollars and twenty three cent with..." and the rest obliterated. On the reverse side in different writing it says "Chelsea June th 26 A.D. 1814 For Value. ." and stops. On another stencil "Henry Rogers" appears

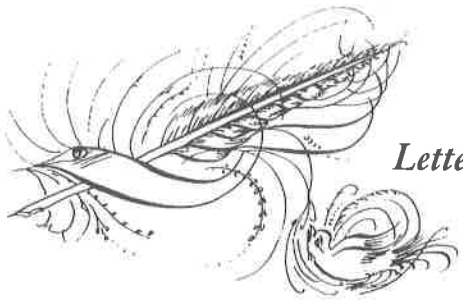


again but not spelled the same. Twenty years of research on this name have revealed nothing that a Henry Rogers was an "ornamental painter", stenciler, artist, itinerant or whatever he might have been called and out of habit I shall probably continue to call him "Borderman."

(To be continued)



(Editor's note: Individual stencils shown in the article are from photographs of "the original stencils by the Borderman." A few have had paint smudges removed to show the designs better.)



Letter from Birmingham

by Yvonne Jones

Contemporary inventories often shed light on both the market for, and the consumption of japanned goods. The following details of papier mâché and tin are from the inventory of William Hutton, a wealthy Birmingham stationer, compiled in 1792 after his house in High Street, had fallen victim to the riots of 1791:

The kitchen 1 japan'd and 1 tin candlebox
I japan'd candlestick, 4 pair of snuffers and 6 extinguishers

The pantry 1 gilt paper knife tray & 2 waiters
1 gilt paper bread basket
2 paper snuffer trays
1 paper tea caddy with some fine tea in
1 large black & gold India tea board with
I japan'd & 1 mahogany tea board
1 bronzed clutch chocolate pot
2 very large tin sugar canisters with locks

Wearing apparel trinkets etc.
1 oval paper quadrille board* & 6 dozen of ivory fish**

* a card game
** ivory gaming counters shaped like fish

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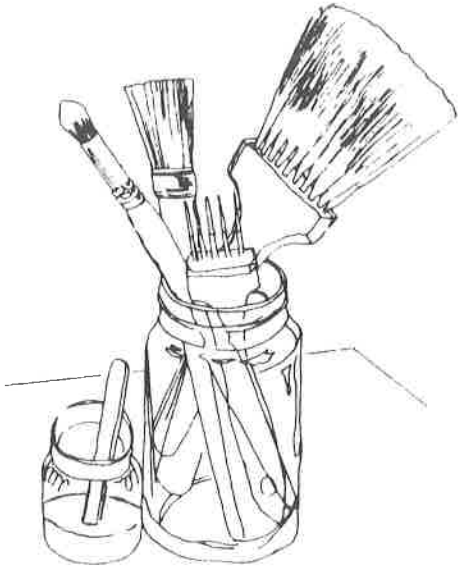

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