The Decorator

Vol. 52 No. 2 Nashua, New Hampshire Spring 1998

Journal of the

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Front cover: Detail of a papier mâché desk box (lap desk) decorated with mother-of-pearl and Victorian flower painting. The box appears on the back cover. Owned by Phyllis Sidorsky.

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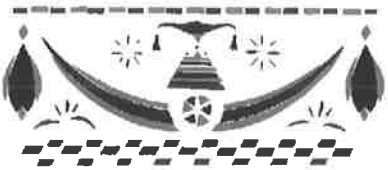
Contents



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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.

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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

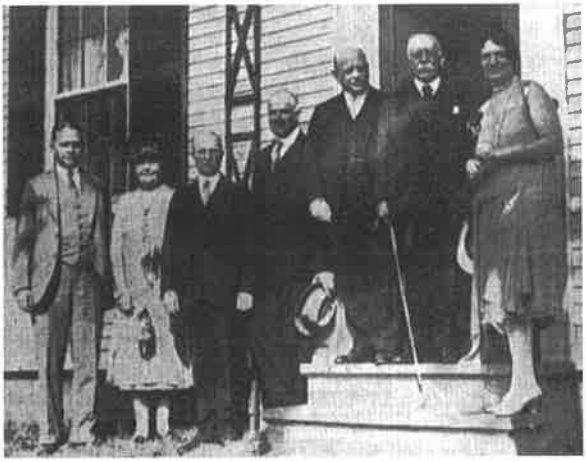
April 7th was the 100th anniversary of Esther Stevens Brazer's birth.

On that day, her daughter, Diana Seamans, wrote a letter to me, part of which follows: "Today would be my mother's 100th birthday and on this special occasion I want to thank you ... for all you have done to promote and continue her interest in early American decoration. Without the steadfast dedication of people like you, much of what my mother researched and envisioned would be forgotten. I marvel at the exquisite work ... the members do. I appreciate how painstaking it is and magnificently executed."

Esther Stevens' other daughter, Connie Fraser, had earlier sent me a photocopy of a 1929 newspaper clipping showing her mother and father with members of the Cambridge Historical Society. Below is a copy. How fortunate we are to have met Diana and Connie and to have established a priceless and personal link to Esther Stevens!

In this issue, we continue with Jess Bond's article on wall stenciling and begin to examine the stencils found in various N.E. states. Unfortunately, we are unable to show all of her photographs. The ones that I have used are very much like the quality of photographs we all took of our children with the little box cameras. They might not be picture-perfect, but they are all we have and in some cases the only ones available. They are precious to those who cherish wall stencils.

From across the Atlantic, we have another excellent article from Yvonne Jones. This one is about Henry Clay and his influence on papier mâché.



Left to right: ***Professor Cecil Eaton Fraser*** *of Harvard University; Miss Carolyn H. Saunders, Director of Cambridge Historical Society and Descendant of John Hicks; F. G. Cook, Director; Judge Robert Walcott, President; Professor Joseph H. Beale of Harvard, Professor E.Emerton of Harvard, Past President, and* ***Mrs. C. E. Fraser,*** *Hostess.* *(Boston Evening Transcript, June 22, 1929)*

A Treasury of Old Stenciled Walls 1810-1840 (Part 2)

by Jessica Hill Bond

"Austin" Stencils

Another pack of old stencils was found a few years ago in the attic of a farmhouse in upper New York, close to the Vermont border. These, too, were brought to my attention. They were hidden, probably for safe keeping, inside a large butter churn, and the ninety-year-old lady who lived in the house had no idea how they came to be in the churn that had not been in use in her memory, nor had she ever seen the stencils. There were twenty-eight stencils of a high-grade paper, some fragile from much use and all having layers of paint still bright with many colors, some with six colors on one stencil. The cutting of the patterns was done with the precision of an expert craftsman, and scored lines to keep the edges straight can be seen. On some of the stencils is large Spencerian writing designating a color to be used, and on one stencil in different writing is the name "Austin," with the first name worn off. Because of the difference

(continued on page 8)

Figure 181: A delightful frieze of yellow pseudo pineapples with red markings found in So. Sandisfield (also among the Austin stencils).

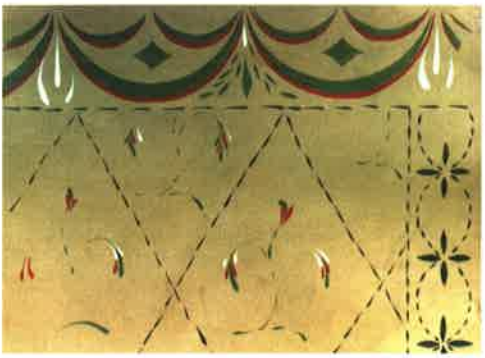
Left, Fig. 131, Atrim, N.H. An upstairs chamber with typical Moses Eaton stenciling in good condition.

Below, Fig. 132. Detail of one of Eatons' popular frieze borders in green with red hearts.

Fig. 133, left, Peterboro, N.H. Downstairs in a farmhouse a wall in the style of Moses Eaton, but not all the patterns match his known stencils.

Fig. 134, above, same house. Over mantel in upstairs chamber with Eaton baskets of flowers, upright border with variations in the frieze.

Above, Fig. 135, W. Keene, N.H. An unusual combination of freehand painting and stenciling. Fig. 137, right, is a facsimile of the upper wall.



1 handwriting, it is unlikely that this is the name of the stenciler, but by ray of identification in this book, I refer to these stencils as "Austin."

The best designs are the frieze borders and the vertical borders which are very imaginative. Walls decorated with these stencils are found in the Berkshire area of Massachusetts and along the eastern border of upper New York, not far from where the stencils were found. The designs turn up again on walls in the middle of New York State and still farther west on the New York border of Lake Erie. Perhaps there were many other walls along the way that have not come to light or have disintegrated.

Moses Eaton, Jr. & Sr.

It was Janet Waring who came into possession of the old stencil kit and stencils belonging to Moses Eaton, Jr. (1796-1886) when she was doing research for her book *Early American Stencils on Walls and Furniture*, published first in 1937. The kit was found under the eaves in Eaton's former home in Dublin, New Hampshire, by some of his descendants who presented it to Miss Waring. It was later given to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA). Moses Eaton, Sr. (1753-1835) was also a stenciler, but according to the descendants, he did very little and was beyond middle age when wall stenciling was at its height of popularity.

Photograph of Moses Eaton, Jr. given to the author by his great grandson, Robert Richardson of Peterboro, NH.

The young Eaton had twenty or more years to stencil, and he did not settle down to marriage until 1835. His travels took him into all the New England states with the possible exception of Rhode Island. One of the charms of his walls is in the layout of his patterns, as though he gave much thought to their placement, and his choice of single motifs and borders used together are uncrowded and have an appealing simplicity. Some of his designs can be called realistic, such as an oak leaf, willow tree, pineapple or basket of flowers

(continued on page 12)

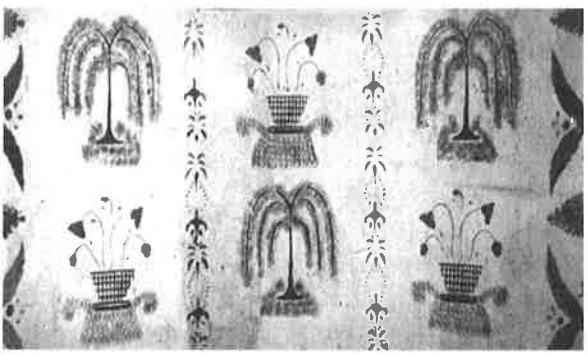


Fig. 160, Sebec, Maine.. Attributed to Moses Eaton,

The "Austin" Stencils

Fig. 259

Fig. 260

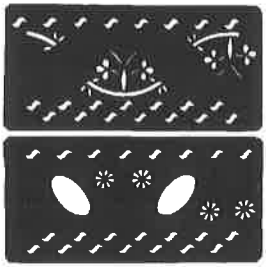


Fig. 261

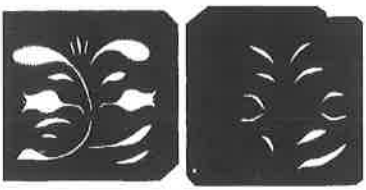


Fig. 262

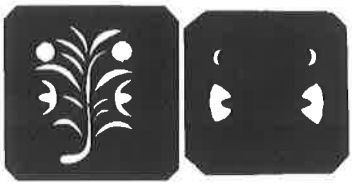


Fig. 263

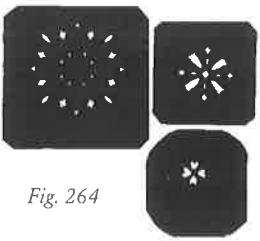


Fig. 264

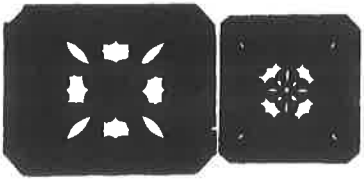


Fig. 265

Fig. 266

Fig. 267

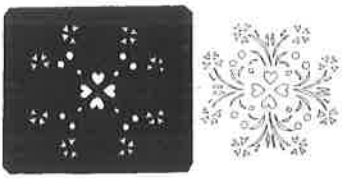


Fig. 268

Fig. 138, below, Lebanon, NH. A facsimile of classical designs found downstairs under wallpaper. Original too faint to photograph.

Fig. 139, above, same house. In a closet upstairs, original stenciling in black and red on a deep rose background.

Fig. 140, below, same house. Also found in the same closet, a border over baseboard which was the same as one used downstairs.

Left, Henniker, NH. At "Mink Hill Farms" is an unusually handsome frieze in clear blue and coral red, outlined on edge in red striping.

Below, fig. 141, is a close-up of the frieze.

On the same wall is a colorful medallion, fig. 142, left, which was saved. The fine cutting of the blue stencil is worth studying.

Fig. 143, left, Canaan, NH. The upper wall with black and red stenciling by "Borderman". Seen also in Vermont.

Fig. 144, right. The lower part of the same wall in a panel effect between windows.

Canaan photographs courtesy of Polly Forcier.

Above, fig. 145. Fitzwilliam. At the Fitzwilliam Inn this wall was reproduced by a person or persons now unknown. The stenciling and colors are superb.

Right, fig. 146, Kennebunk, Maine. The David Thompson House originally from Alewive, Maine. Courtesy of Brick Store Museum. Close-ups on page 14.

that he combined well with geometric or stylized designs. The colors he preferred were green and red in different hues, and occasionally yellow, yellow ochre, black or red used as overlay accents. The backgrounds were about the same other stencilers used. I will refer to this stenciler as Moses Eaton or Eaton. Photographs of his stencils were published in Waring's *Early American Stencils on Walls and Furniture.*

Rufus Porter

Rufus Porter (1792-1884), founder of the *Scientific American* magazine, was an itinerant muralist, and is not classified as a stenciler. Some of his landscape murals include a few houses, fences, cows, sailboats and riders on horseback that were stenciled and gave interesting accents to his scenic walls. Whether he ever decorated a wall with just stencils is not known, but he knew how to stencil, as is evident by his book *A Select Collection of Valuable and Curious Arts*, in which he has directions for making a stencil to use in painting a floor cloth.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Antrim. Two upstairs chambers, stairway and one downstairs chamber were stenciled with some of Moses Eaton's most popular patterns. Fig. 131 is in excellent original condition in green and red on a pale yellow ochre background, and Fig. 132 is the detail of the handsome frieze with its red hearts.

A house near **Peterboro** has another Eaton wall and it, too, is in good condition (Fig. 133). The candle glow in the top border is a cheerful one with baskets of flowers separated by an upright border nicknamed "overturned buds" (Fig. 134).

West Keene (Figs. 135, 137). A refreshing combination of free-hand painting and stenciling that was probably done by a very talented craftsman. The colors are unique, too. On a tan background the stenciled frieze had dark olive green and bright red swags with white brush strokes as accents. The main part of the wall is well arranged and divided into diagonals with black brush strokes, and in the center of each diamond is a delicate spray in green, red and white. The stenciled trim against the door is in black and resembles the trim on some of Borderman's walls. The house was built c. 1801 by John Grimes, and according to a former owner, it was Jotham Stearns (1791-1832) who decorated the wall between 1815 and 1818, and he learned his trade from his uncle, Jedutham of Keene. Unfortunately nothing was found about either man in the Keene town offices.

Lebanon. On a rose color background is the work of Borderman downstairs and in an upstairs closet. Partial removal of wallpaper revealed the top border almost gone, but a tracing of one of Borderman's

stencils showed it to be the same, and a facsimile in Fig. 138 shows the design on a white band. The wide red stripes add a lot to this wall. The over-baseboard and the trim borders are also on white bands. Upstairs in a closet the rose color background was quite dark and there were no white bands. The top border over the coat hooks (Fig. 139) is a graceful design in red and black with the same border over the baseboard as downstairs (Fig. 140).

Henniker. In a house built in 1765 is a front room downstairs with part of what was once a very fine wall in Borderman's style. It had been partially cleaned of a top layer of paint and showed clear blue, thin white and coral red stenciling (Figs. 141-2). The single motif on the main wall is similar to one in the Salmon Wood House, Hancock, N. H. shown in Waring's "Early American Stencils" (Fig. 50).

Canaan. Whether Borderman made his way from New Hampshire to Vermont or vice versa is not known, but it is always helpful to find a duplication of his designs. In Fig. 143 the frieze and trim are like Fig. 78 in Jericho, Vt. and the frieze Fig. 94 in Castleton, Vt. The panel with a pair of his urns of stylized flowers gives an additional elegance to the room. Fig. 144 shows black and red designs on a yellow ochre wall.

Fitzwilliam. The owner of the Fitzwilliam Inn found a classical wall downstairs many years ago and had it reproduced about 1925 by someone unknown now to the Inn. Compare this photograph (Fig. 145) to Fig. 219 in Woodstock, Ct. to comprehend the distances the itinerants went in those early days.

MAINE

Kennebunk. Brick Store Museum. Figs.146-149. A stenciled wall originally in the David Thompson House built in 1750 in Alewive, Maine and moved here. The wall is attributed to Moses Eaton, Jr., and he may have introduced some new designs not found in his old kit. The spacing of designs is unlike Eaton's usual way, but perhaps this is his "Maine phase." Another wall from the David Thompson House with an excellent combination of designs, Figs. 151-153. The colors in both rooms are a dull dark green, a pale bricky vermillion, an obscure dark red. These two walls were saved from demolition by the late William E. Barry.

Northwest of **Lewiston** is a wall with some of the same characteristics as the David Thompson House and in the same colors (Fig. 155). The focal point in the room is the over mantel which shows imagination with its perky red birds and baskets of flowers. The yellow pineapple is decorated with little green "eyebrows," green foliage and a red fleur-de-lis. Again are the upright diagonals divided in the center and typical of Maine.

(continued on page 16)

Close-ups from the David Thompson House
Kennebunk, Maine

Fig. 147, left. Detail of frieze in reddish brown and apricot.
Courtesy of Gina Martin.

Fig. 148, right. Single unit in all green.
Courtesy of Gina Martin.

Fig. 151, left. Frieze detail in interesting color combinations.
Courtesy of Gina Martin.

Figures 152, above, and 153, left, show detail of the pineapple and oak leaf. The divided "commas" at the bottom of the oak leaf are typical of Maine.
Courtesy of Gina Martin.

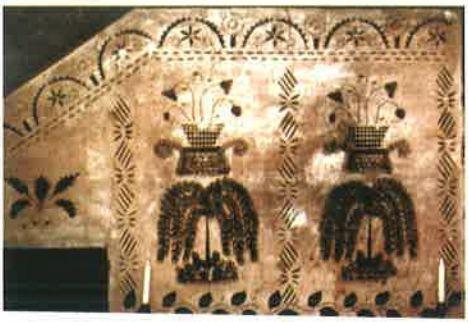
Fig. 155 .An overmantel found northwest of Lewiston, Maine. Courtesy of Gina Martin.

Fig. 157, right, South Berwick, Maine. A facsimile of a wall in the Gen. Icabod Goodwin House, now called "Old Fields." Same design as in the Barry House, fig. 156.

Above, fig. 156, Kennebunk, Maine. On display at the Brick Store Museum is the front hall of the Barry House. Border design in black and coral red on white bands. Soft rose background. Courtesy of Brick Store Museum.

Fig. 161, below, Sebec, Maine. Over the mantel in the same house as fig. 160 (pg. 8) Sponge work a little heavier than in the other room. Some of the designs are like Eaton's.

Fig. 159, above. On the Nezinscot River is stenciling of a different type and in excellent condition. (Name and town withheld by request). A close-up of the wall shows very dark green and brick red designs on a yellow ochre background. Courtesy of Gail Lane.



Also at the Brick Store Museum in **Kennebunk** is a wall from a house built in 1800 and known as the Barry House (Fig. 156). Quite different from the other two walls there, the front hall has border stenciling in black and coral red on white bands against a background of pale apricot. This classical design complements the very fine woodwork.

South Berwick. Just over the New Hampshire line from Dover is the Ichabod Goodwin House called "Old Fields." Built in 1790, it is a full two story plus attic Colonial with tall center chimney and a commanding doorway of exceptional design. Ichabod Goodwin was a general in the Revolutionary War and many generations of Goodwins have lived in the house. The stenciled room is in a chamber on the second floor and the walls are being protected by shirred fabric to keep light and air from the old walls. Fig. 157 is a facsimile from a tracing made many years ago. The background of the wall is a soft rose, and the black and coral frieze border on a gray band with quarter fan accents in black and reddish brown make an appealingly simple decoration in the classical style almost exactly like the Barry House in Fig. 156. This same decoration was also found in the Gov. Pierce House, Hillsboro, N. H. and variations of the frieze in Vermont and Connecticut.

Near **Lewiston** on the Nezinscot River is a very simple wall of a different type (Figs. 158,159). At first glance, the single motifs on the main wall look alike, but there are two in dark green and red on a buff background. The frieze in red and green flows along gracefully and ends with a complementary trim border in the corners.

Sebec. Fig. 160 is overmantel stenciling attributed to Moses Eaton and four of the designs are like those in his kit at SPNEA. Part of the room has a landscape mural attributed to Rufus Porter and it is probable they may have worked together on a few walls which bear both stenciled work and mural painting. The sponge work on the willows and baskets in Fig. 161 fits in very well with sponge work on trees and shrubs that Porter excelled in. Another wall in the same house has an abundance of spongework and is not in Eaton's usual style.

(To be continued)

Stencils and brushes used by Moses Eaton of Hancock and Dublin, NH. (Janet Waring's "Early American Stencils on Walls & Furniture.")

The Bookshelf

"American Painted Furniture"

by Cynthia V.A. Schaffner & Susan Klein

Reviewed by Margaret K. Rodgers

Clarkson N. Potter, Inc. Publishers, 201 East 50th Street, New York, NY 10022. 1997. Many photographs – all in color; 223 pp, three appendices, glossary, notes, selected bibliography, and index. ISBN: 0-517-70083-2, $65.00.

In the course of writing book reviews for *The Decorator*, many works have come under my scrutiny, ranging from the pedestrian to all-night page-turners. *American Painted Furniture* is one of those rare treasures which, from the first moment I opened its pages, I knew I must have in my permanent library. As is so often the case, the book I am reviewing is on loan and I must return it (big sigh). I am sorely tempted to hang onto it until the copy I immediately ordered for myself arrives. This is a "MUST-HAVE" volume for any of us who enjoy the painting and study of American furniture.

This book is written with careful attention to detail concerning both the decorative and the historical aspects of its subject. The text is divided into two main sections – "High-Style Furniture" and "Country Furniture." The two authors take the reader on a decorative furniture journey of high adventure through the years of greatest interest for us, 1790 to 1880.

The first section recalls the years just after our Revolution, in Boston and Salem. The neoclassical look was popular on painted furniture. Emphasis is placed on the world of clocks as might well be expected. From Boston we travel to Philadelphia, then Baltimore and finally to

New York. In each city the reader learns of the historical influences on the world of paint decoration. Chairs, tables, clocks, settees, beds, cabinets, looking glasses, chests, and cupboards are all pictured in superbly reproduced color on fine glossy paper. The principal photographer, Schecter M. Lee, deserves great credit for his outstanding work.

The second section takes us through the major regional areas of our country from "New England" to "The Middle Atlantic States," and on to "The South." Our decorative arts journey ends (as it did for many), in "The Western Frontier."

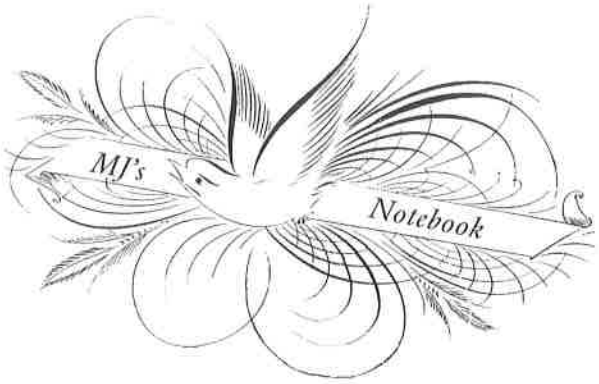
This second half of the book provides a broader overview of the geographical differences in the style and type of decoration found in each local area detailed in the first section. Even to the unpracticed eye, these subtleties are made obvious through a careful selection of examples. The reader will definitely experience a different "feel" for the illustration of a New England painted dressing table compared to a Midwestern cupboard. Even the nuances which differentiate a Southern from a Pennsylvania blanket chest become apparent after just a few hours of fascinating study which enables the reader to detect the several subtle differences and similarities.

From their regional studies the authors continue on to expand on several specific subjects in three very interesting appendices. *Paint* is the subject of *Appendix A*. The history of paint plus a thorough discussion of the manuals written in the time frame under discussion are well documented. *Gilding* is treated in *Appendix B*. The various types of gilding, including water size and oil size, are examined for the reader. This is done without superfluous intricate detail, rather just enough historical and factual information to whet the appetite of the reader for further study in books dedicated to this craft. *Appendix C* is titled *Directory of Painted and Gilded Furniture*. Sources, supplies, and restoration services are listed in the first section with names, addresses and telephone numbers. Museums and historic houses are similarly listed in the second section.

The *Glossary* and *Notes* are very inclusive and they are developed to the same high standard which is typical of the professional dedication consistently exhibited by the authors.

The *Selected Bibliography* contains an excellent list of literature on *American Painted Furniture,* sorted by author. It should come as no surprise that *Early American Decoration* by Esther Stevens Brazer is cited. Among periodicals, *The Magazine Antiques* is often a source, as are several editions of the very journal you hold in your hands. So save your copies!

I have reviewed many books for *The Decorator*. This one is among the very best. You should have it in your library, in a place where you can easily take it down for reference, study, and enjoyment.



While looking through my notebook on stenciling, I found this article which seems to tie in with Jess Bond's material:

> The pale, washed-out shades one often associates with early American decoration is the way these items look after 150 years. The original colors the wall stenciler used were very daring. Blacks, greens, reds, and rusts on light backgrounds such as yellow, white, or pink were the most popular color schemes.
>
> Moses Eaton's daughter remembered a room in their house with soft raspberry walls and deep red and green decoration; the same color scheme found in an 1812 house in Amherst, New Hampshire.
>
> One must remember that this intense color and overall design was used in rooms with simple furniture, plain fabric (if any), and few decorated objects. Today's home would have to be as simple as the original 1800 home to contain so much color and pattern on the walls. A border, a frieze, or a design from chair rail to ceiling can be charmingly included in most of today's rooms to give an authentic and colorful effect.

About Wall Stenciling by Alice Bancroft Fjelstul & Patricia Brown Schad, 1978.

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Mae Fisher

Country Painting

Jane Beach

Glass Gold Leaf Panel

Japanner to His Majesty

By Yvonne Jones

Henry Clay is one of the most highly regarded figures in the history of English papier mâché and japanning. His foresight and entrepreneurial flair place him ahead of his rivals, winning him the respect of the designer Robert Adam, and the admiration of fashionable society. He was to papier mâché what Josiah Wedgwood was to ceramics. His success brought great wealth and election as High Sheriff of Warwickshire in 1790 (Fig. 4), and paved the way for the exuberant papier mâché and tin-ware industries of the Victorian period. Today, any good example of 18th/early19th century papier mâché, is popularly, but often erroneously, attributed to Henry Clay, and yet surprisingly little has been written about this enterprising man.

Japanning, in this context, was a varnishing process allied to the papier mâché and tin-ware industries which centred on Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Bilston. It took its name from the tar-based, or "japan" varnish used in the separate craft of varnishing "in the style of Japan" which developed in the west in about 1660, in imitation of eastern lacquer.

Above: Papier mâché tea-board, decorated in so-called "Old India" style; impressed mark CLAY KING ST./ COVT GARDEN, c. 1810-15. Christie's, London.

The commercial development of papier mâché began in Birmingham in about 1740, largely through the acumen of John Baskerville (1706-1775), the printer and papermaker, who "effected a complete revolution in the manufacture of japanned goods", and to whom Henry Clay was apprenticed. A visitor to his factory in 1760, wrote that "The ingenious artist carries on a great trade in the japan way, in which he showed me several useful articles, such as candlesticks, stands, salvers, waiters, bread-baskets, tea-boards, etc., elegantly designed, and highly finished. Baskerville is a great cherisher of genius, which, wherever he finds it, he loses no opportunity of cultivating." With such an auspicious start, Clay was well-placed to succeed.

In about 1767, Clay entered into partnership with John Gibbons, and made, amongst other things, iron, brass and polished steel candlesticks, which they sometimes japanned. Gibbons died in 1772, but "the Japanning Business [was] continued in all its branches by Mr Clay" who, three months later, and in the pioneering spirit of his mentor, John Baskerville, took out a patent which was to have far-reaching effects for the papier mâché industry. It was for "Making in paper, high varnished pannels or roofs for coaches, and all sorts of wheel carriages, and sedan chairs, pannels for rooms, doors, and cabbins of ships, cabinets, bookcases, screens, chimney pieces, tables, teatrays and waiters."

In principle, it was a refinement of an existing method but being more durable and heat-resistant, could be japanned and oven-dried without warping or cracking. Clay maintained it was strong enough to "en-

Fig. 2. Papier mâché tea-board with chinoiserie decoration in variously coloured metal powders. Impressed mark CLAY/KING STREET/ COVENT GARDEN c. 1810-15. Wolverhampton Art Galleries & Museums: Bantock House Museum.

dure all weathers and Climates . . ." It was not really papier mâché, and Clay never called it such, but "pasteboard". His method involved pasting together twelve to eighteen layers of special paper, which were "screwed or fastened on boards or plates, and put in a stove [and] rubbed over or dipped in oil varnish, etc. . ." It was made in large sheets and "sawed and worked in the same manner as wood, being to the full as hard as that substance". Largely used as a wood substitute, it was not until the 1830s that its full potential as a plastic material was recognized.

When Gibbons & Clay started their business, only nine japanners were listed in Birmingham, but by 1800, there were thirty-one. Clay's patent offered protection for fourteen years, but already by 1775, he considered it necessary to publicly threaten legal action against any infringement. The few surviving and marked pieces made by other firms show that in terms of quality, he had good reason to be wary.

Clay advertised in 1773, that his work "may be seen at their Majesty's Sedan Chair Maker's in Coventry Street, Piccadilly, and at Mr Wright's, Coach-maker to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, in Long-Acre, London", firms to which he presumably supplied coach panels. By 1783, he had opened a "Birmingham Warehouse" at 18 King Street, Covent Garden, where his tea-trays, snuff boxes and other small articles, attracted royal[1] and aristocratic patronage. Although not generally associated with making snuff boxes, their type was described by his friend, Mrs. Papendiek, Keeper and Reader to Queen Charlotte, who noted that Clay "had greatly improved snuff-boxes, which were now made to open with hinges, miniatures being introduced or settings of hair."

Contemporary records show that Clay made two pier tables "painted after some designs brought purposely from Rome", for Lord Bristol, and that he presented another pair, painted after Guido Reni, to Queen Charlotte. We know also that Horace Walpole, the aesthete and collector, owned a highly varnished writing table "with flap and drawer" made by Henry Clay, which was "black with blue

Fig. 3. Pembroke table, the oval top painted with a Muse and a cherub playing a lyre; attributed to Henry Clay, c 1785. It is clear from furniture of this type, why Clay was sometimes described as a "cabinet-maker". Sotheby's, London.

and white ornaments in a Gothic pattern, designed by Paul Sandby".[2] Furniture is sometimes attributed to Clay (see fig. 3), but the only known surviving piece definitely made by him, is a japanned mahogany Pembroke table in the Estruscan Dressing Room at Osterley Park House. Decorated in white and gilt on black, it picks up the Etruscan theme of Robert Adam's room and shows a "Scene in the Garden of the Hesperides, painted from D'Hancarville's engraving of William Hamilton's finest vases". Although listed in the 1782 inventory of the house, there is no evidence that Adam commissioned this table, but he is known to have employed Clay's door panels at Derby House (Fig. 5), London, (demolished in 1862), which Adam described as " . . . painted on papier mâché and so highly japanned as to appear like glass." This original effect, now dulled with age on most pieces, was achieved by applying twelve layers of japan varnish, each of which was oven-dried and polished. Similar panels, painted in the style of Angelica Kaufmann, and still to be seen in the doors of Adam's "Marble Hall" at Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire, may also have been made by Henry Clay. Clay's Birmingham factory was an important venue for fashionable travellers and it is from their writings that some of our knowledge of Clay's ware comes.

Fig. 4. Portrait of Henry Clay, perhaps painted to mark his election as High Sheriff of Warwickshire in 1790. Private Collection.

Dr. Johnson for example, following a visit in 1774, noted that "The paper which the[y] use is smooth whited brown; the varnish is polished with rotten stone", while George Lichtenberg, writing to a friend, shows that Clay was still japanning tin-ware in 1775: "Here most excellent lacquered tinware is made which is now imitated in Brunswick, also paper boxes, caddies, panels for coaches and sedan chairs . . . Coffee trays and all sorts of vessels are made and decorated in black with orange colour figures in the manner of Etrurian vases - they are beautiful beyond words". By 1781, it was clearly unusual for him to japan metal since in a letter to the potter Josiah Wedgwood, Clay wrote, almost apologetically, of some goods ordered from Dresden, that "the reason of those not being done on paper was they were expressly order'd on Tin or Iron."

Wedgwood's biographer, Eliza Meteyard, described Clay as "a most ingenious cabinetmaker" who she believed did "much for Wedgwood's

Fig. 7. Oval papier mâché tea-caddy with a jasperware insert, c. 1780. The average cost of Clay's tea caddies at this time, was 3 guineas. Private Collection.

fame, by inserting . . . cameos in tea-caddies, writing-desks, dressing cases and similar articles" (Fig. 7). Wedgwood confirmed such use in a letter informing his partner Bentley, that "Mr Clay was just gone to Lord Craven's, to shew Lady Craven some drawings of Cabinets. The Panels of which are to be of his painted Cartoons, perhaps inlaid with W & B's Cameos . . . " As Clay advertised that his ware could be "painted to any design" it is likely that the decoration of most furniture was, like this, a matter of consultation between himself and his client.

In 1778, Clay filed the first of his two patents for paper buttons, and from then on, factory visitors emphasized this branch of his trade. The patent was for " . . . buttons, japanned, with or without shanks or catgutt, or set in cups or sockets of various metals", which might be "ornamented with painting, gilding and so forth or inlarged with pearl, stones, mettal, and various other ornaments."[3] George III, a keen button maker in his youth, gave encouragement by requesting that Clay send "several sets of buttons, for as I am called George the button-maker, I must give a lift to our trade."

His second patent for buttons, filed in 1786, was for a type "much more useful and ornamental than any now in use", although not, apparently, japanned. They were made from pulped natural fibres and "all kinds and sorts of raggs and stuffs . . .", dyed to the required colour and formed into flat sheets from which buttons could be cut or die pressed.

Given the large number of buttons which Clay made, it is remarkable that none are known to have survived. Perhaps with their japanned decoration or rich colouring, they defy classification or identification, and are mistaken for other materials.

Henry Clay was granted a patent in 1792 for slitting slate, blue stone, and portland stone, into thin panels for japanning, painting, gilding, varnishing etc., for use on coaches and carriages, tables, cabinets or "for putting on or setting in miniature paintings, prints, drawings, cameos, or other ornaments, . . . also for picture pannels or plates for painting thereon in oil colours, water colours, crayon or otherwise." The panels could be veneered to wood, paper cloth or other strengthening material. This was probably the "new material" that Clay introduced to the royal family in

1793, as "infinitely superior to any substance hitherto used" for painting upon. Of all the stones with which he worked, Clay seemed to have favoured slate and even used it for the manufacture of buttons which were said to look "uncommonly rich" and to resemble "the finest silk."

Notwithstanding the success of his furniture and buttons, Henry Clay is best known as a maker of paper trays and "tea-boards" (figs. 1 & 2), which must have contributed greatly to his wealth - a tray which sold for £5. 8s. 9d., for example, was said to have yielded a profit of £3. 8s. 2d. Trays were available in matching sets like Clay's wedding gift to Mrs. Papendiek, which comprised a "tea-board, waiter, bread basket, snuffer-tray, and four little stands [probably bottle stands], all alike . . . " (Fig. 6), or made to match one's porcelain. Clay's teaboards and trays were generally oblong or oval in shape, and made in two pieces with a base and separately attached, slightly everted sides. Teaboards, too large for use as trays, were made to protect highly polished tables from tea-time spills; they were so decorative that when not in use, they were frequently displayed vertically on a side-table.

Some accounts suggest that Clay sold his Birmingham factory in 1801/2. Be this as it may, the firm of Henry Clay was listed in Birmingham directories until 1812, the year of his death, and in London directories until 1823. Under whose ownership is not known, but the firm reappeared in London directories in 1830 when 18 King Street (and number 17 also, from about 1840), was shared by Henry Clay and another Birmingham japanner Thomas Small; from 1851, Clay also had premises in Pall Mall. The firm continued in London until 1855 and, as Henry Clay &: Co., "designers", exhibited a range of typically Victorian papier mâché at the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Clay's inventive wit emerged in two further patents which if put into operation, would have benefitted the efficiency of his japanning interests. The first, granted in 1796, was for a wagon designed to speed-up unloading by shedding two loads simultaneously. The second, granted

Oval papier mâché bread-basket. Impressed mark CLAY, c. 1810-15. By courtesy of Halcyon Days, London.

in 1798, outlined a method of saving water at canal locks, which although ingenious, was too expensive to be put into operation.

Henry Clay was a man of his time. With his bold spirit and enquiring mind, it is neither surprising that Matthew Boulton sought his partnership in business, nor that Clay, perhaps confident of his own commercial flair, refused. That "Clay's Ware" is as keenly sought today, as it was some two-hundred years ago, is testimony to its strength and durability; Mrs. Papendiek was of the same opinion when she observed of her wedding present from Clay, "my tea-board is only just now, some fifty years after, worn out."

It is hoped that in describing the diversity of Clay's productions, some hitherto unplaced "curiosities" of manufacture, might come to light for reassessment.

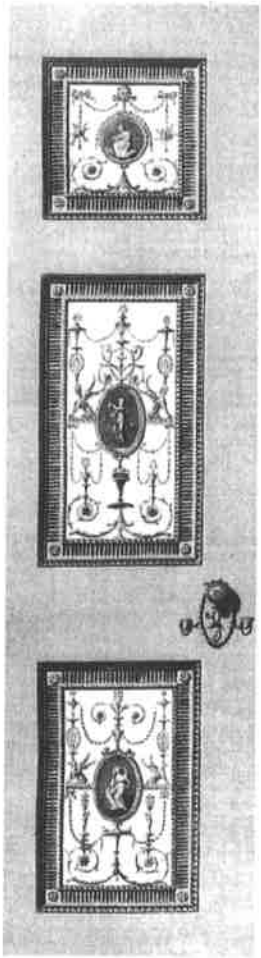

Fig. 5. Detail of one of the Folding Doors of the third Drawing Room at Derby House, London, designed by Robert Adam in 1774, and incorporating painted paper panes by Henry Clay. By courtesy of the Trustees of the Sir John Soane's Museum.

NOTES

1. Clay styled himself: *Japanner to the Queen* (from 1777); *Japanner to his Majesty* (from 1781); *Japanner to her Majesty* (from 1790); *Japanner in Ordinary to his Majesty, and his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales* (from 1800); *Manufacturer of Paper Tea Trays to their Majesties and the Royal Family* (from 1816).
2. Paul Sandby (1725-1809), water-colourist, whose studio in Bedford Street, was close to Clay's London showroom.
3. This seems to be the evidence for Clay using 'pearl decoration" as early as 1778.

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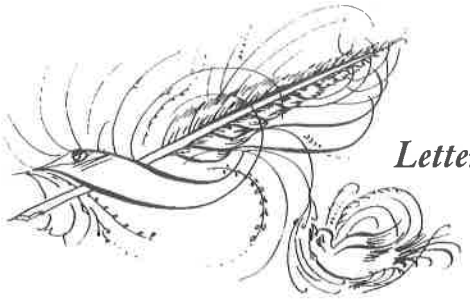

Letter from Birmingham

by Yvonne Jones

Memories of my visit to your Fall meeting in Providence in 1996, came flooding back when I found the following extract among my records It reminds me of my bemusement when hearing members despair of what looked to me quite exquisite varnishes on the trays, screens and boxes they had made. I am sure it will strike a familiar chord, but I hope a reassuring one.

On Amateur Japanning

Great nicety is required in regulating the heat of [the] stoves; if the fire be too intense the work is cracked and spoiled, or at least greatly deteriorated; if the heat be not sufficiently great, the injury is still the same The varnish will not receive so high a polish and is soon defaced This is one reason why it is so difficult for private persons to work in papier mâché. Small articles may, with great care, be dried in a good oven; but so much exactness must be used in regulating the heat, that it becomes very wearisome. In fact, beautiful as is the result, the means by which it is achieved are anything but pleasing. To stand all day rubbing the surface of a table or a chair with wet pumice-stone can scarcely be deemed either a lady-like or gentlemanly occupation, whatever the advertisements may choose to assert to the contrary; nor is the odour of varnish much more agreeable than patchouli itself. Inlaying and painting, however, may very properly be considered as affording employment suitable for persons possessing talent of a high order; and on this ground alone it is desirable to encourage the manufacture of papier mâché, did no other reason for it exist.

The Book of Papier Mâché and Japanning,
The Ladies Library, London, 1850

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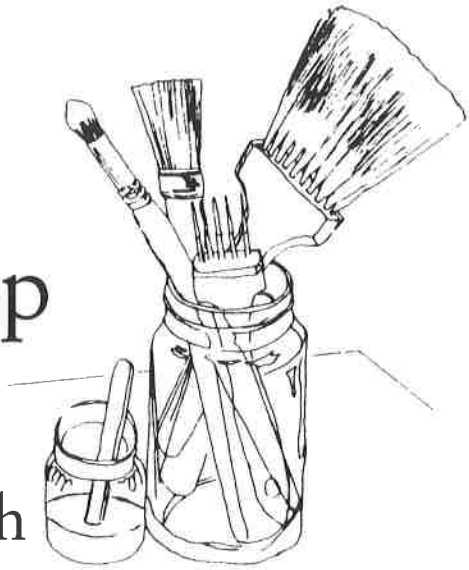

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