The Decorator

Vol. 55 No. 1

Woodcliff, NJ

Fall 2000



Journal of the

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Front and back covers: Papier mâché portfolio with Victorian flower painting. Courtesy of Astrid Donnellan. See Astrid's article on page 4 and "MJ'S Notebook" on page 34.

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Business Address:

The Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc. c/o Beverly McCarthy, Administrative Assistant
555 W 57th Street
New York, New York 10019-2925
212-977-7170
212-977-8134 (fax)

http://members.aol.com/HSEADBG

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The Flower Painting Connection

by Astrid Donnellan

Victorian flower painting is a term used to describe a painting technique practiced by members of the Historical Society of Early American Decoration. Previously called "Chippendale painting", it refers to a style of painting flowers so that they appear real.

The best Victorian flower painting is distinguished by the skillful use of both underpainting and overpainting to simulate depth and dimension, and to achieve a translucent, natural appearance in the depiction of the flower.



Tulip from a papier mâché Gothic tray owned by Ed Stannard.

Although this decorative painting style reached its heights

during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837 to 1901), it uses techniques developed in much earlier times. Looking back to the 14th century, egg tempera was the medium of choice for artists such as Cennini (1365-1440) and the Dutch master artist Jan VanEyck (1380-1440). At that time, the recipe consisted of egg yolk, water and ground pigment. In some cases, gypsum was added as well.

Jan VanEyck, as a young artist trained in the intricacies of stained glass work and tempera painting, began his artistic career using tempera in much the same as Cennini. Although tempera was at that time the accepted vehicle for painting, he became dissatisfied with the flat appearance of his work and the limited flexibility for the application of colors. Tempera not only dried too quickly to allow blending and shading, but also lacked softness and sparkle (much like our modern-day acrylic paint). He discovered that mixing ground pigments with walnut oil or linseed oil afforded him the flexibility of fusing (blending) his colors for a soft appearance. The ease with which oil paint could be blended was of extreme importance to him. The oil paints were also durable, and possessed the gloss he was looking for. Thus, VanEyck is credited with the link between tempera and oil painting as we know it today.

VanEyck is also credited with developing the technique of "underpainting" or what he called "dead color" which increased luminosity of transparent color glazes. He used tempera for his underpainting because it would set up quickly.

VanEyck's technique was not developed overnight, but was most likely a gradual development. He experimented with resins and pigments to produce glazes. Glazes of this type produced clear beautiful colors with a pleasing softness when used over an underpainting of dead color. VanEyck's techniques were soon mastered by the artists who followed him. They were now able to explore many artistic possibilities that they had not experienced before VanEyck's discoveries. Subtle modeling became easy for them, as colors could now be blended into one another without losing any of their strength. Natural shadow made its appearance on canvas for the first time and the representation of object by chiaroscuro (see page 6) had at last become possible.

There is a system, a schematic procedure, that must be used intelligently to develop this form to the highest perfection with the greatest clarity and luminosity. An underpainting properly executed should serve to simplify light values and will project the final luminous clarity of colored glazes (what we call floating color). Shadows must be kept warmer and lights kept cooler. Should the artist "miss" this contrast, deeper shadows or stronger "lights" can be added at a second application. One should avoid the extremes: too dark shadows and too strong a modeling. Soft modeling is achieved by applying a thin coat of ethereal medium into which the medium white form is built up. In this coat the white modeling coat seems to float softly. The better and more definite the modeling in the underpainting, the more clear and luminous the overpainting color glazes will be. Overpainting, or the transparent color glaze (floating color), should be applied more "liquidly" (at least for the first application).

In researching documented information for this article I found that VanEcyk's method was used by the famous Victorian flower painter George Neville (1810-1887) as well as Severin Roesen (1815-1872?). This method was also taught by the late artist Helen VanWyck, in her 1990s PBS television program, "Welcome to My Studio."

Bibliography

The Materials of the Artists by Max Doerner 1949
The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques by Ralph Mayer 1968
Severin Roesen by Judith Hansen O'Toole 1992
Dutch Flower Painting 1600-1720 by Paul Taylor 1995
From Botany to Bouquets, Flowers in Northern Art by Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr.

An Overview of Victorian Flower Painting Technique

Although materials have changed over the years, the basic techniques for Victorian flower painting remain the same. This overview of the technique shows the steps used to create realistically modeled flowers.





Underpainting is used to create a foundation, establishing shape and form for the individual blossom.





Thin and opaque areas of paint may be used to create dimension and shadow (modeling). The treatment of light and shade in underpainting is called "chiaroscuro".

(Illustrations by Astrid Donnellan)





Transparent glazes are applied over the dried underpainting (adding layers of colorless glaze between color applications allows subtle blending effects.)





The complement of a color is used to create the proper tones for shade. Highlights and fine detail applied over the final transparent layer.

A Treasury of Old Stenciled Walls 1810-1840 (Part 7)

by Jessica Hill Bond

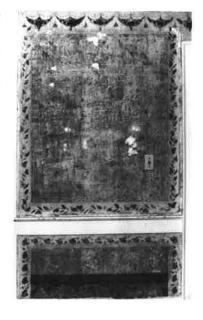
Vermont (Part 3)



Above: Figure 92. Frieze detail showing black festoons with red "roses" just barely visible on festoons.

Just outside of Shoreham is a hip roof house built in 1790 by Job Lane How for Elijah Wright, an early settler. An upstairs chamber has border stenciling in black and burnt sienna on bands of thin white, light and dark gray in panel effects. The fringed festoons of the top border appear to be solid black, but a closer look shows red "roses" on top of the black following the curve of the festoons. The panels on the walls above the dado are bordered with burnt sienna vines to make a distinctive and unusual wall. Figs. 91-93.

The wide main street of **Castleton** has a serene look with dignified houses on each side of the street. At the eastern end is a brick house built in 1811 and





Above: Figure 91. Shoreham, VT. An upstairs chamber with walls divided into panels with the stencilling in black and reddish burnt orange.

Left: Figure 93. Detail of the reddish leaves on a light gray or dirty white band.

Figure 94: Castleton. The Higley House built in 1811 has several rooms and a hall stenciled by Borderman.

known as the Higley House. After a heavy rain or thaw one year, an attempt was made to glue back a piece of wallpaper which had come loose at the top of the wall in a downstairs room. A ladder was necessary to do this and a close



look at the plaster showed a stenciled border. This was in 1965 when the house was occupied by teachers from Castleton College and I heard about it from one of the teachers. With the aid of three teachers with buckets of warm water and vinegar, we stripped the wall in short order. Figures 94 and 95 are Borderman's classical borders. The background was a pale blue with upright borders in black across the wall, and the buff color band at the top was stenciled with one of his favored patterns in black and red. The ceiling is vaulted, and the stenciling followed the curve. Unfortunately this room was painted over by mistake. Many years later another wall was uncovered in the wide entrance hall; a charming pattern of alternating uprights in burnt sienna and black on a buff back-



ground. The white bands add a lot as does the bow-knot frieze in red and black. These walls were too far gone to save and were carefully reproduced by Sara Tiffany (Figure 95).

"Stage Coach Farm" is in Ira on the road from Middletown Springs to West Rutland. Very faint Borderman stenciling was found in an upstairs chamber. The stenciling was done in a cadet blue on a soft rose background, and the only other color was in the white overlay stencil on the urns. To fill up space on the dado a stylized floral design was

Figure 95. The front hall stenciling reproduced by Sara Tiffany from the original.

used over the urns to make a very graceful border. The wall was too dim to photograph and is now protected by wallpaper, awaiting a more propitious day to restore it to its former beauty. Figure 97 is a facsimile of what was traced. Some of the same designs, also in blue, were found in Dorset, at the Dorset Inn (Figure 102).

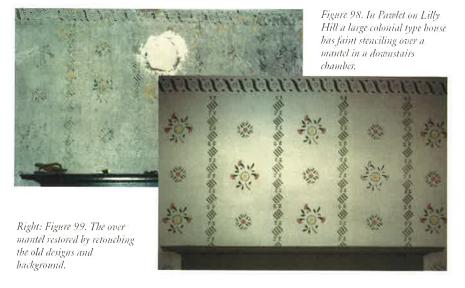
In Pawlet, high on a hill with distant views of the mountains is a large colonial house built in 1817. It must have been a heyday for the itinerant who stopped here because he stenciled nearly every room and the upstairs hallway with the same designs in different color combinations. There was enough for me to trace, cut stencils and retouch two rooms without overpainting the designs. Figures 98-100 show a room as found, and then as re-



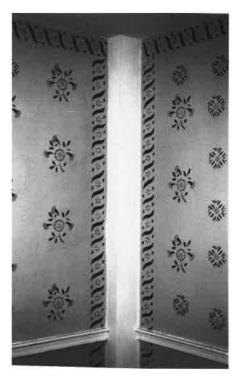
Figure 97. Ira. A facsimile of a wall in an old stagecoach inn. Wall was too dim to photograph and is now covered.

touched in the original colors of soft red, olive green and yellow on an off white ground. There are two abandoned houses near Salem and Stephentown, New York with these identical designs.

The Dorset Inn in Dorset was built during the last decade of the eighteenth century, and has been in continuous use as an inn ever since. Many changes have been made over the years: a third floor was added, a few ceilings lowered, partitions moved, and modern improvements in-

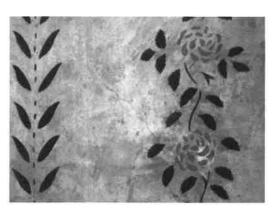






Above right: Figure 100. Pawlet. An upstairs chamber with some of the same designs used differently. Above left: Figure 102. Dorset. Wall repaired and retouched to its original state and color.

stalled. About fourteen years ago it was decided to paper a small front room on the first floor. Wallpaper was removed, and on two inner walls very dim stenciling was revealed. The owners saw only the condition of the plaster–cracked, stained, and unsightly to them. They planned to tear it down. When it came to my attention I disregarded the condition of the plaster, and saw what was an early wall by Borderman. With some persuasion I was allowed to repair the wall and retouch the designs Figures 102-103).



Also in Dorset is a house built in 1804 for the Rev. William Jackson who came to Dorset in 1796 to become the town's minister. In 1900 Experience and Theresa Barrows lived there and ran an inn (it is still an inn today called Barrows House). In 1965 another owner decided

Figure 103. Dorset. Detail of two upright designs after retouching.



Figure 105. Dorset. Border stenciling was discovered in the Barrows House built in 1804. In the front hall this frieze over a door was covered by a coat of paint.

Figure 106. Reproducing the stenciling was necessary, The old hell was used to summon guests to the dining room.

to re-paper the front hall and I was given permission to look for stenciling there. After removing much wallpaper nothing was found until I came to an area over a door where an old bell attached to a coil spring was fastened to summon guests into the dining room. This place had been spared many layers of paper because of the bell, but to my dismay

it was painted instead, However, with determination and scrubbing, a design began to show and I recognized it as being in Borderman's style and retouched it slightly to let the owner see what it looked like. With these two borders, the hallway stenciling was reproduced in the original colors of medium blue and coral red on a soft yellow background and makes an inviting entrance (Figures 105-107). About sixteen years ago a room next to the hall was found to have stenciling all in dark blue on a yellowpeach background, a pleasing com-

Figure 108. In the parlor next to hall this graceful stenciling in dark blue was found; two of the uprights were used in the Dorset Inn.



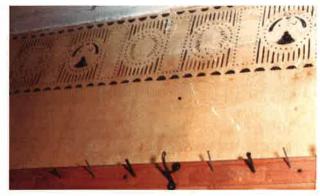


Figure 110. Manchester Village. An upstairs hall closet in the Lathrop House, built c.1786.



Figure 111. The urn and swag border matches
Borderman's except for the white and red trim on the urn

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bination. Two of the upright borders were used in the Dorset Inn and the frieze border has been found on several Borderman walls. Except for one small panel, this room was re-papered (Figure 108).

South of Manchester and just off the main thoroughfare is a gracious colonial house built c.1786 by the Brevoort family, but known locally as the Lathrop House. The wide upstairs hallway



Figure 112. Marlboro. Known as the Bundy House, the unusual designs were on just one wall in a downstairs chamber.



Figure 115, Marlboro. In the Whetstone Inn is a tryout of original old stencil designs in a cubbyhole.

was at one time stenciled, but all that is left now is in a closet where the upper and lower part of the wall are very clear Borderman stenciling. Both of these borders have been seen elsewhere in Vermont and only the trim on the urns is different (Figures 109, 111). In scraping away some of the patching below the urn border, a black painted band edged with scalloping appeared. The stencil for this border is among Borderman's stencils (Figure 121) and solves the mystery of how the scalloping was used.

Shaftsbury has a house built in 1806 by Lavius Fillmore (1767-1850), an architect and master builder of fine churches and houses in the Bennington and Middlebury area. Only one room shows faint border stenciling and that is very modest but suits a bed chamber very well. The designs are faded black on a pale pink wall.

In **Pownal** on the western side of southern Vermont stands an impressive house off by itself in the country. On the large chimney is written "B & B June 16, 1799". The house is called Paddock Place. On the stairway to the attic is one small fragment of stenciling that is being preserved. In red and black it matches Borderman's "candle frieze" stencils.

On the fringe of **Marlboro** there used to be a small story-and-a-half house known at one time as the Bundy House. In a downstairs chamber was unusual stenciling in dark green, pale red and black; a very simple and naive decoration that befits the house (Figures 112-113). It was sad to hear from the owners in 1970 that the house had burned to the ground.

In the village of Marlboro is the Whetstone Inn, a handsome colonial built c. 1786 and little is known about its history. Evidence that Borderman stopped here is in a small pantry or bar where he stenciled a row of different borders for the family to see (Figures 114-115). A former owner said one of the bedrooms had had stenciling but that it was covered up a long time ago. These tryout borders and variations of them have been found on other walls as is indicated in the text.

This concludes the research portion of Jess Bond's manuscript "A Treasury of Old Stenciled Walls." All of her text was used, as well as a selection of her photographs. Included in her manuscript are sections on how to stencil walls, how to prepare walls for stenciling, how to restore old stenciled walls, a list of stencilers, some patterns, etc. These may be published at a later date. Our thanks to Jess for letting us publish this valuable research.

Specialist Award in Victorian Flower Painting

Roberta Edrington











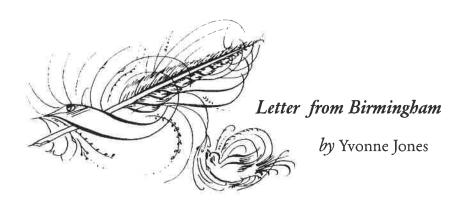






Roberta Edrington graduated from Douglass College with a degree in art. After college she attended the Parsons School of Design.

She is a Master Craftsman, the former Chairman of Standards and Judging for HSEAD, and our first member to become a specialist in Victorian flower painting.



An alternative use for papier mâché:

"During a recent visit to the manufactory of Jennens & Bettridge, enquiries as to the content of a number of large boxes which were being sent off to Piedmont in Italy, elicited a fact which might be made good use of by those who are agitating for a repeal of the duty on paper. These boxes contained panelling for railway carriages - one of the most novel of the many purposes to which papier mâché is being adapted by the firm referred to Their appearance, a mere compact slab of brown paper, contrasts most strangely with the chef d'oeuvres of the japanners art and omamentists; but ... the material is superior to wood in many respects - in non-liability to contract, warp or split (... splinters are the most disagreeable accompaniment of railway collisions) and the durability...."

Royal Society of Arts, Vol. 2, 8th September, 1854

A sobering comment on the Great Exhibition of 1851:

"...Where all the locks and keys, nails and screws, hinges and bolts, coal-scoops, teatrays, and the thousand other articles produced in Wolverhampton go to, is a perfect mystery. The stock of one of the great factories there would seem sufficient, to the uninitiated, to supply all Europe with tin and papier mâché ware for a twelve month."

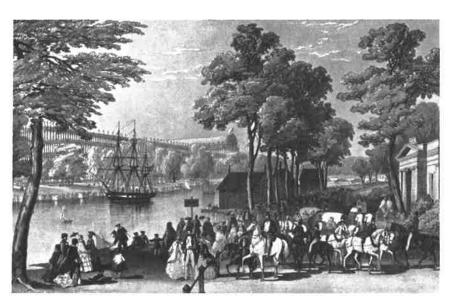
Journal of Design and Manufactures

To Ironmongers, Japanners, Tin Plate Workers and the Public in General

by Mr Stewart

"on Tuesday 2d of September next, and four following days [at] 132, St John Street, Clerkenwell, by Order of the Proprietors, The whole of the superb and interesting STOCK IN TRADE of the oldest JAPAN TIN, and PAPER TRAY MANUFACTORY in London, Many Years established, and carried on under the Firm of DYSON and BENSON, afterwards Joseph BENSON & Co., and recently by Mr. Henry SWINBURN. The Stock comprises highly finished painted Salvers, Trays, and Waiters, in Sizes; Bread Baskets, Knife and Spoon Trays, Plate Warmers, Lamps, Candlesticks, Decanter Stands, Snuffer Trays, & c.; a superbly painted Iron Table Top, 4 Feet 6 Inches Diameter; a large Assortment of black japanned Paper Panels, Skreens, Quadrille Pools, Match Boxes, &c."

Wolverhampton Chronicle, 27th August, 1823



A view of the Crystal Palace from the north bank of the Serpentine as seen by the visitors to the Great Exhibition of 1851. Photograph from "The Great Exhibition of 1851, a Commemorative Album."



The Bookshelf

"Women of Flowers: A Tribute to Victorian Women Illustrators"

by Jack Kramer

Stewart, Tabori & Chang Pub., NY, 1966. Hard Cover, 223 gold leaf pages, heavily illustrated on every page in color.

Reviewed by Sandra Cohen

Women of Flowers introduces us to thirty Victorian ladies who have contributed enormously to the science and art of botanical prints. Ninety percent of the material in this book comes from Kramer's personal collection and library compiled over thirty years.

The format begins with a lengthy introduction about women in the Victorian Age, and the interest in botany and flower painting. Following, in alphabetical order, are cameo sketches of thirty outstanding women artists.

In their own time many of these identified artists received little or no recognition, a practice not exclusive to the Victorian Age. There were also many women artists who did not sign their work, echoes of Mirra Bank's *Anonymous Was A Woman*.

In the early 1700s, Linnaeus classified and named plants, and pioneered the way for further scientific investigation. However, according to Mrs. Sarah Lee, we would benefit from "A book on botany which might read like any other....At present the loveliest works of God are obscured by the wearying details." Flowers were a sign of a benevolent God, symbols of love, health and fortune. Out of necessity and dedication, women illustrators captured their beauty for botanical books to books on poetry, and for magazines and periodicals. Today, their work has escaped anonymity and ultimately earned them overdue recognition and praise.

This litany of Victorian flower painters begins with Clarissa Munger Badger. Her *Floral Belles* was considered a major contribution in the field of Botany. A lovely insert of her camellias, her parrot tulips and her bouquet of mixed flowers beg to be framed.

Elsie Katherine Dykes' specialty was cultivating and classifying tulips and irises. Dykes survived her husband who was Secretary of the

continued on page 33

Members' "A" Awards

Carol Heinz

Clock Dials





Rosemarie Booth

Glass Gold Leaf Panel



Roberta Edrington

Freehand Bronze

Members' "A" Awards



Lois Tucker

Country Painting

Laura Bullitt

Clock Dials

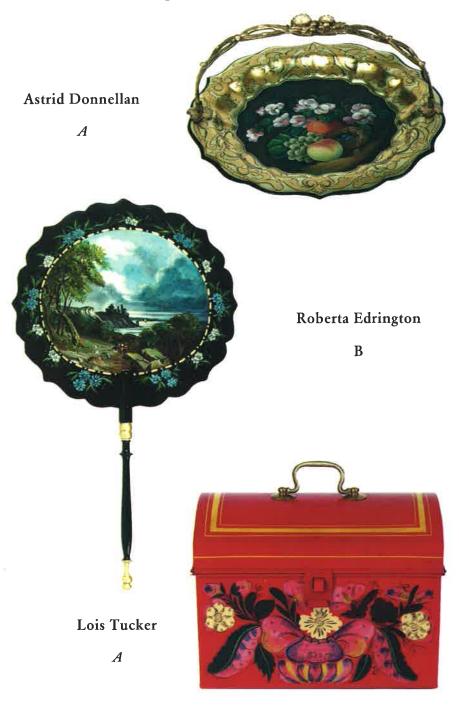




Cora Longobardo

Victorian Flower Painting

Special Class Awards



(Copies of award pieces may be ordered from the photography chairman, Martha MacFarland)

Members' "B" Awards



Danielle Lott

Gold Leaf Panel

Dorothy Fillmore

Stenciling on Wood



Maureen Morrison
Freehand Bronze Painting

Members' "B" Awards

Maureen Morrison
Freehand Bronze Painting







Lois Tucker
Freehand Bronze Painting

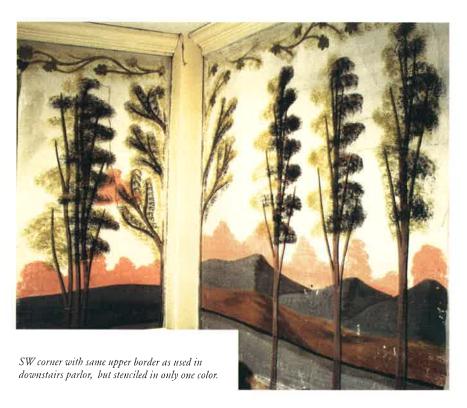
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The Joshua Eaton House (Part 2: A Second Mural, Stenciling, and Graining)

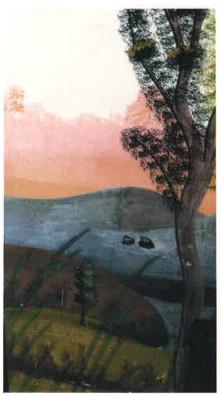
by Shirley S. Baer

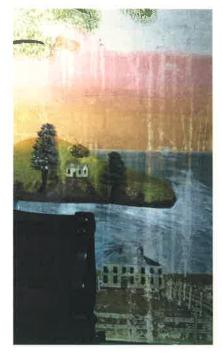
In an upstairs bedroom in the Joshua Eaton house is another mural with decorations attributed to Rufus Porter. At first glance, one is struck by the abundance of pink and salmon colors used in the mural. This decorated wall is simpler in design with much less detail than found in the parlor downstairs. However, the upstairs mural does have a house with a fenced in yard which we did not find in the parlor room.

Across the hallway is a bedroom with stenciled walls attributed to Moses Eaton. In her book *Early American Stencils on Walls and Furniture*, Janet Waring describes the room in the following manner: "...stencilled room which has canary yellow walls and patterns of green and scarlet that show the same appreciation of color. The frieze includes a heart and a starflower which are also used to center the other two motifs, while a single leaf makes an effective running border above the wainscoting and mantel. The stenciller was not discouraged when he found that his frieze









Overall and close-ups of the bedroom's east wall.

did not fit over the door; he picked a narrower border to take its place. Nor did he mind repeating a bit of swag to fill an awkward corner, for he was not hampered by careful calculations."

In addition to the stencil decoration, the house has other examples of decorative painting, including grain-painting and marbling. Grain painting is used both upstairs and down. On the second floor, both doors leading from the bedrooms to the hall have grained panels on the sides facing the hall. The back of one of the doors is painted a solid color while the other is grained. The grained panels have a unique and beautiful pattern.

Equally intriquing and beautiful is the graining of the baseboard in the parlor. As Janet Waring said, "The blue, green, and buff of the marbleized baseboard are repeated in the closet at the right of the mantel-even the edges of the shelves are marbleized, for in this house details were handled with care."

Although the upstairs bedrooms have been damaged by water, it is still a thrill to see these original walls with such vibrant colors. The graining on the doors and on the baseboard in the par-



Above: A panel found between two windows showing the remains of a house at the bottom.

lor is a testament to the talent of the "two young men" who decorated these rooms around 1818. They took pride in their work and obviously enjoyed doing it. How fortunate we are to find such treasures today!



Overmantel decoration in the bedroom

Bedroom with Moses Eaton Stencils



As Janet Waring noted "when his frieze did not fit over the door; he picked up a narrower horder to take its place." Notice the narrow friezes over the doors in the photographs above and below.

Also notice the red motif at the end of the mantle. Since the mantle was in the way of a whole motif, they simply pushed it to the side. It's interesting to note how many motifs are off center...and how it only adds to the charm of the room.



Photos by Shirley S. Baer



Grained Door





Above left: One of two grained doors in the bedrooms.

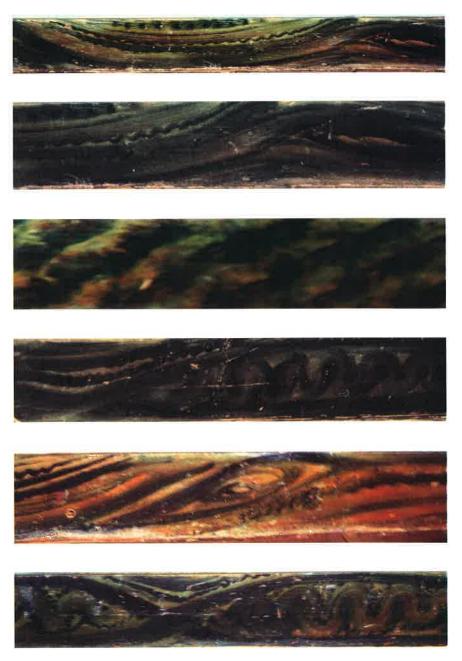
Above right: Close-up of a panel and pattern.

Right: Close-up of the unusual design.



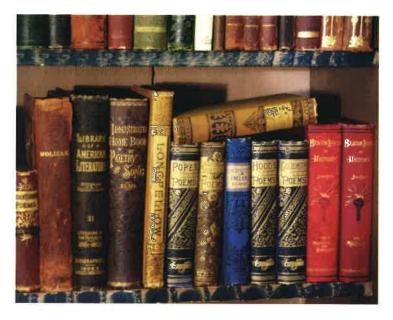
HSEAD member Jeanne Gearin is researching methods for recreating this design.

Samples of the Baseboard Graining in the Parlor



The baseboard in the parlor is striking. All of the above samples were found on that baseboard.

Grained Shelves



Even the edges of shelves in the parlor closet were grained.

Our thanks to the present owner, Hugh Keays, who so kindly let us photograph this historic home which is currently for sale. One hopes that whoever buys this home will appreciate the talent of the "two young men" whose work is still being admired nearly two hundred years later.



President's Award Box

Myrna Herniter

Norman Kenneally

There were no Guild Members accepted at the fall meeting in Woodcliff.

Future Meetings

Spring 2001 Winston Salem, NC April 20-22, 2001 (FSS)

Fall 2001 Chatham, MA September 21-24, 2001 (FSS)

Spring 2002 Danvers, MA April 19-21, 2002 (FSS)

Royal Horticultural Society in Great Britain. She continued his work raising seedlings and edited and painted the illustrations for his book, *Notes on the Tulip Species*. Kramer shares several of her fifty-four painterly plates.

The story of Jane Webb Loudon reminds us that many of these ladies sought work to pay off debts incurred by family, and to support themselves. However, women were often considered either too deficient, too delicate by nature, or too genteel for the crass commercial endeavors of promoting their work. Ms. Webb found herself in dire financial straits after the death of her father and decided to publish her science-fiction novel, *The Mummy*, using a male pen-name. Her reference in her book to a steam plough captured the attention of writer John Loudon.

After their marriage, she dutifully fulfilled her role as wife, assisting him in publishing his magnum opus, *Encyclopedia of Gardening*. However, her love of flowers was dampened by the technical jargon of this work, and she decided to write an anecdotal gardening instruction book for ladies, filled with "sensible and original ideas," as well as her beautifully sketched botanical prints. *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* was reprinted nine times and a great financial success. However, it was *The Ladies Flower Garden* in four volumes (a drawing book for young ladies to copy from, the work is unrivaled) that eventually won her recognition.

An interest in insects inspired Maria Merian's botanical prints, and she included these species in their natural habitat. Butterflies adorn her few reproductions here. Clara Maria Pope's camellias in blushes of pink, white and red are stunning. Charlotte Caroline Sowerby tempts us with her spray of dianthus and a clipping of clematis. There is an irresistible and generous serving of garden prints by Louisa Anne Meredith Twamley, a prolific poet, author and illustrator. In *Some of My Bush Friends in Tasmania*, her delicate drawing of a wreath frames its focal point, a tiny, red and black bug, balancing on a leaf. Add the mixed rainbow bouquet of Elizabeth Twining, the dancing, white wood sorrel of Lady Caroline Wilkinson and the vibrant bouquets of E. W. Wirt to the treasury. Bright, bold and beautiful are Augusta Withers lilies, orchids and portulaca.

This book is a visual feast of color and blooms. Illustrations are featured in miniature sized medallions, small, framed inserts and in dramatic, full-page spreads. The brief biographies are seasoned with poetry and excerpts from the portfolios of these talented and resourceful women. As if this weren't enough, there is a four column bibliography which will benefit any researcher and collector. There is also a list of catalogues from exhibits of these works. Wouldn't we love to see these! This book most deservedly received the 1996 Award of Excellence from the Garden Writers' Association of America. Enjoy!

Editor's Note: Our Bookshelf Editor, Sandra Cohen, owns and operates Legacy Books.



One of the joys of being a teacher is that you are always learning. Recently our editor showed me a small tray with a transfer pattern under Victorian flower painting. I had never seen a background transfer with this type of decoration over it.

In preparing this issue of the *Decorator*, the editor borrowed a portfolio from Astrid Donnellan to use with Astrid's article on Victorian flower painting. The editor was not only surprised and excited to find a transfer pattern behind the beautifully painted flowers on Astrid's papier mâché portfolio (shown on the front and back covers), but also noticed that it matched the transfer pattern on her tray. These were a first for me. I'm still learning from my students!



Small tin tray with Victorian flowers over a transfer background, 12 ³/4" x 10 ¹/2".

Courtesy of Shirley Baer.



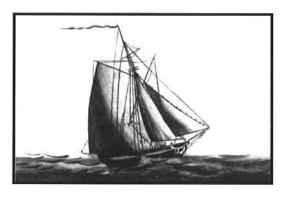


Above left: Close-up of the tin tray.

Above right: Close-up of the paper maché portfolio.



Right: Close-up of the papier mâché portfolio. Courtesy of Astrid Donnellan.



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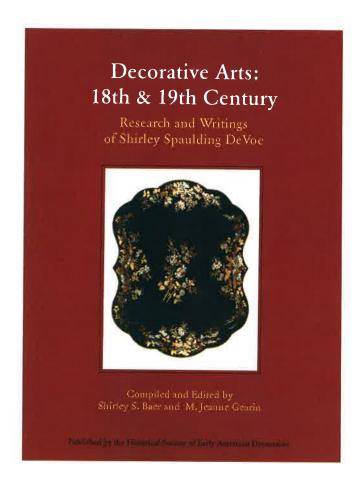
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