

The Decorator

Fall 2002

Vol. 56 No. 2



Journal of the

Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc.

The Historical Society of Early American Decoration

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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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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Front cover: Paper mâché tilt top table, decorated with mother-of-pearl, gold leaf border. Courtesy of Janice Hight. Photo by Joseph Rice.

Back cover: Papier mâché table top, c. 1840, probably Birmingham. Courtesy of Shirley Baer.

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Anniversary Tinware

The Thompson's Anniversary Tinware at the Ontario County Historical Society

by Lucinda Perrin

The custom of anniversaries seems to have first come into vogue at the beginning of the 19th century in western Europe, though there are some references in English literature during the 17th century. In church records of 1624, a mention was made of "sylver brydells." At that point in history, the silver anniversary was not widely celebrated because few lived long enough!

In 1806, the Germans referred to a "Silver Feast" when mentioning an anniversary. In 1860, a London newspaper referred to a "Golden Anniversary," as well as a "Diamond Wedding." Other symbols for specific anniversary years seem to have evolved comparatively recently, until now we have a modern as well as a traditional list of gifts to give.



Why tin came to be the gift for the tenth anniversary is uncertain, though in the 19th century tin was a valued commodity, and the 10th an important milestone. In many cultures, 10 is considered a lucky number.



Above: A miniature bank with the Thompsons' name printed on it. Thompson was in the banking business.

Left: A tin derby or top hat.

In an excellent article by Nancy and James Clokey, "Tenth Wedding Anniversary Tin"¹, the authors write:

The custom of presenting couples with gifts made of materials of increasing value through the years originated in Medieval Germany where wreaths of silver and gold were given to mark the twenty-fifth and fiftieth anniversaries, respectively. In this country, the tenth, or tin anniversary, became the most widely celebrated one along with the silver and gold; a large and hilarious party often commemorated the event. The special nature of the gifts made it an occasion of fun and gentle teasing. After ten years of marriage, many of the articles couples had been given to begin housekeeping had worn out with constant use. The guests sometimes provided a new tin "trousseau" of utilitarian gifts. More often, the presents were tin novelties which provided the evening's entertainment when opened and displayed.

The variety of these whimsies is almost endless due to the skill and unbounded imagination of the tinsmith...



A display cabinet showing some of the anniversary gifts: tin hats, curls, mirror, fan, and what appears to be a crown.



Often these tokens were especially selected to please or poke fun at personal interests: a tin horse for the racing fan; a drum major's baton for someone who had led a parade; a tin high chair or cradle for proud parents; a fancy witch's hat for an October anniversary. Godey's *Ladies' Book* suggested trophies or "loving cups" as appropriate gifts.

Tin weddings were often celebrated in the mid-19th century for a couple's tenth anniversary. The bride and groom often dressed in the clothes they had worn on their wedding day. Guests would be invited to a large party and come bearing amusing gifts of tin. One such party was given on June 17, 1867 by the F. F. Thompsons of New York.

Frederick Ferris Thompson, the son of Joseph Thompson, was born in New York City in 1836. His family was wealthy, and he attended Williams College in 1852, where he was a classmate of James Garfield (who would become our 20th president). Mr. Thompson did not graduate but went overseas to attend to family business. Upon his return, he formed the House of Thompson Brothers, a banking institution, with his brother and father.



Facing page, top: Painted and stenciled horse and cart, and candle holder.

Facing page, bottom: Some of the baskets, molds, and other kitchen items.

Right: A pansy is painted on the front of a piece made up of several household items including a cup and sieve.



Mrs. Thompson, born in 1835, was the former Mary Lee Clark of Naples, New York. She was the daughter of Zilphia Watkins Clark and Myron Holley Clark. Her father was active in politics, and was eventually Governor of New York. It was at a farewell ball in Albany during Governor Clark's final days in office that Mary Clark met Frederick Thompson. A romance blossomed, and they were married on June 17, 1857.

They divided their time between their home in New York City and their summer place in Canandaigua in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York. They traveled between the two places in their private



A tin pail, gardening tools, miniature boxes, a bank, a book, a hat, and a cradle are just a few of the gifts displayed in this showcase.



A tin picture frame.

rail car. In Canandaigua, they built a large Victorian mansion called Sonnenberg, named for one of their favorite places in Europe. It was in this mansion that they held their tenth anniversary party.

Mrs. Thompson carefully preserved the many gifts they received. She even prepared an exhibition in their Manhattan home to show them to their many friends in the city.

Mr. and Mrs. Thompson were married 42 years, until Mr. Thompson's death in 1899. They were childless. In the years following his death, Mrs. Thompson devoted her time and considerable money to benefiting the Canandaigua area and its citizens. She provided land, and had

many public buildings erected, including a hospital that bears her husband's name. She died in 1923.

Mrs. Thompson's nephew, Emory Clark, donated her 113-piece tin collection to the Ontario County Historical Society in 1931. Most pieces in this unique collection are in pristine condition and do not look their age of 130 years.



One of many lovely tin bonnets in the collection. One can only assume that Mrs. Thompson liked bats.

The collection is not on permanent display but can be made available for viewing by contacting the Ontario County Historical Society, 55 North Main Street, Canandaigua, New York, 14424, 585-394-4975.

Mrs. Thompson's mansion and gardens are also open to the public and are world-famous: Sonnenberg Gardens, 151 Charlotte Street, Canandaigua, New York 14424, 585-394-4922.



Right: An egg coddler.

Below: A shelf of miscellaneous items, mostly kitchen.





Along with bonnets, curls, fans, cradles and jewelry, a tin slipper was one of the most popular and favorite item for a 10th wedding anniversary present.

All photos by the author, Lucinda Perrin.

References:

¹ Antiques and the Arts Weekly, February 15, 1985

Encyclopedia Americana, Grolier Inc. Danbury, CT 06816. Vol. 26, Pg.774, 1997. Vol. 28, pg.565

Colliers Encyclopedia, P. F. Collier. 919 Third Ave., NY, NY 10022. 1997. Vol. 23, pg. 379



Tin fans and a unique deck of tin playing cards.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Ontario County Historical Society, its Director, Edward Varno, and the staff, especially, the very patient Linda McIlveen.

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Distinguished Service Awards

Joan Austin, Roberta Edrington, Joyce Holzer, Lois Tucker

Comparing Two Painted Tables

by Joseph P. Rice

A highlight of the Winston-Salem meeting was a tour of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) in Old Salem. While most of the furnishings in the galleries were in natural finishes, there were some decorated pieces, particularly examples of Baltimore Federal period furniture.

The painted card table shown below is one of the museum's holdings. This table was made in Baltimore, c.1810-1815. The ornamentation consists of geometric gilt designs and naturalistically-painted landscape panels. This decoration is applied over a green ground, and painted shadows create a trompe l'oeil effect, which must have been very effective when the paint work was fresh and not darkened by time and use.

When closed, the mahogany top shows simple borders following the contour of the table; when open, the top reveals a surface decorated with the same gilt designs as on the exterior.

A table recently acquired by Winterthur, and currently on display in their gallery is another example of work of this period and locale. Wendy Cooper, senior curator of furniture at Winterthur, says they do not know the history of this piece or the family for whom it was made, but they feel it was probably made in Baltimore between 1800 and 1810. The



Painted table, c.1810-1850. Collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.

table had no restoration prior to arriving at Winterthur, and has had only minor restoration since, including cleaning and some inpainting.

The table is of pine, poplar and maple, decorated as the MESDA table with a lavish use of gilt geometric motifs and scenic landscape panels. The panels show a variety of scenes incorporating buildings and figures. The gilt decoration is skillfully done. The apron has gilt banding and a large geometric panel of basketweave design. Shading on the gold provides depth, making it appear almost as if it were a blind fretwork carving, and additional motifs painted in black provide interest. The corner turnings have acanthus leaf motifs, and a trail of leaves and berries are painted on the entire length of the table's graceful legs. The edge of the table top is completely covered in gold (though now worn), and banding and striping are used along the contours of the entire piece.

In addition to the use of overpainted shadow on the gilt work, painted shadow (as with the MESDA table) is used to provide a vivid *trompe l'oeil* effect. The effect is more effective on the Winterthur table due to the vivid red ground color, strong contrast, and the brighter, cleaner surface. The decoration appears to rise above the surface, and seeing a table in this condition allows us to imagine how dazzling both of these tables must have been when new and in the height of fashion.

On display alongside this table is a Baltimore armchair by John Barnhart in the same color scheme and similar decoration as the MESDA table. Please take the time to view this table when at the Spring 2003 meeting in Wilmington.

Our thanks to the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts and to Winterthur for their assistance and photographs.



Painted card table, c.1800-1810. Collection of the Winterthur Museum.

Frank Brown Stencils

by Shirley S. Baer

Over 150 finely cut stencils and a 1832-1834 day journal were found in the attic of a barber shop in Lee, Massachusetts. They belonged to Frank Brown who was a painter and repairer of furniture.

For more than 60 years, the collection was owned by Frank Kelly, a local historian whose family was in the furniture and undertaking business in Lee since the 1850s. When Kelly died two years ago, the journal and collection of stencils were purchased by antique dealer, Charles L. Flint, a long time friend of Kelly. The collection is now for sale.

In her book, *Early American Stencils on Walls and Furniture* (published in 1937), Janet Waring wrote that she too owned a collection of patterns once owned by Brown: "among the seventy-odd patterns found in Lee, Massachusetts, between the pages of a paper-covered "Weekly Time Book." The name 'Reuben Goodrich, Springfield, A.D. 1842," written on the margin of the largest pattern suggests that he had once owned the group. How these stencils came into the possession of Frank Brown, a painter and repairer of furniture at East Lee, is not remembered, but it is known that he used them. They were later discovered in the barber shop of J. K. Oliver in Lee, and the last owner, from whom I bought them about twenty years was a local painter."

One wonders about the connection between the seventy-odd patterns that Waring purchased and the collection now owned by Flint.



Some of the stencils from the Frank Brown collection are shown on this and the following two pages.



*Close-up of the above
lower middle stencil.*



Stencils from the Frank Brown Collection



Photos and information courtesy of Charles L. Flint.

Members' "A" Awards



Carolyn Hedge
Metal Leaf



Deborah Grabner
Clock Dial



Roberta Edrington
Special Class

Members' "A" Awards



Parma Jewett
Country Painting



Anne Dimock
Glass with Border



Ursula Erb
Country Painting



Patricia Smith
Freehand Bronze Painting

Members' "A" Awards



Ann Baker
Country Painting



Ann Baker
Special Class



Parma Jewett
Country Painting



Carol Buonato
Clock Dial



Anne Dimock
Gold Leaf Panel

Members' "A" Awards: Theorems



Martha Kinney



Linda Brubaker



Mary Perry



Susan Laime



Inez Gornall



Alexandra Perrot

Members' "A" Awards: Theorems



Sonja Bridges



Sonja Bridges



Amy Finley



Pamela Benoit



Martha Kinney



Charlene Bird

Members' "A" Awards



Alice Smith
Theorem



Roberta Edrington
Freehand Bronze Painting



Future Meetings

Fall 2002	Killington, VT	September 20-22 (FSS)
Spring 2003	Wilmington, DE	May 2-4 (FSS)
Fall 2003	TBA	
Spring 2004	Portland, ME	April 30-May 2 (FSS)

Members' "B" Awards



Georgiana Coles
Country Painting



Judith Thornton
Country Painting



Georgiana Coles
Country Painting



Dolores Furnari
Stenciling on Tin



Parma Jewett
Country Painting

Members' "B" Awards



Martha Kinney
Country Painting



Dee Samsell
Glass with Border



Carol Buonato
Clock Dial



Dee Samsell
Stenciling on Tin

Members' "B" Awards

Amy Finley
Country Painting



Dorcas Layport
Pontypool Painting

Dorcas Layport
Pontypool Painting



Ann Baker
Country Painting

Members' "B" Awards



Mae Fisher
Victorian Flower Painting



Robert Flachbarth
Stenciling on Tin



Robert Flachbarth
Theorem



Roberta Edrington
Special Class



The Bookshelf

"Willard's Patent Time Pieces, A History of the Weight-Driven Banjo Clock, 1800-1900"

by Paul J. Foley

Hard Cover, 368 pages, 650 illustrations of which over 300 are in color, Roxbury Village Publishing, Norwell, MA, 02061, \$90.

Reviewed by Sandra Cohen

More than 4000 years ago, our early ancestors observed that certain natural phenomena repeated themselves: the rising and setting of the sun, the phases of the moon, the changes of the seasons, and the appearance of different constellations in the night sky. Their desire and attempts to measure these intervals gave rise to the meaningful and useful concept of time. The journey from sun dials to hourglasses, from water clocks to mechanical weight-driven timepieces, is one of the most interesting once-upon-a-times ever told.

Paul Foley visits the period from 1800 to 1900 with his history of the weight-driven banjo clock. His book is sufficiently technical in its explanation of the mechanics of the works to be appreciated by clock aficionados, and yet readable for the novice. The topic is focused on the history of the weight-driven timepieces, the banjo clocks. Foley's comprehensive research is generously sprinkled with colorful pictures that make the reading much



*Joseph N. Dunning, Burlington, VT patent timepiece.
Landscape tablet with sailboat and country house, c.1835.*



Reverse painted tablet from an Aaron Willard, Jr., Boston, MA timepiece, c.1822.

more memorable. His book begins with the brothers Benjamin, Simon, Ephraim and Aaron Willard, names synonymous with early America's best timepieces, especially the tall case and banjo clocks. Benjamin, the eldest, received some training from Benjamin Cheney of Connecticut, where he became familiar with wooden clock works. He opened his own shop at the family's home in Grafton, Massachusetts in 1766. Later he worked with Nathaniel Mulliken with whom he learned to work with brass mechanisms. After Mulliken's death in 1768, Benjamin took over his shop in Lexington. He eventually moved the business to Roxbury, but had to move again when Roxbury was occupied by the British in 1775. At this time, he moved his shop to Brookline, and later to Medford. His brothers, who had been running the business in Grafton, moved to the Roxbury Village/Boston Neck area after the war, and eventually operated their own shops. Roxbury was an ideal location because it was the crossroads for land traffic in and out of the Boston area.

It was Simon, described by his colleagues as an "ingenious artist," who began to work on designing a portable weight-driven clock jack. Because there were no patent laws at the time, Simon petitioned the Massachusetts legislature to grant him a patent. His colleagues also petitioned the legislature to encourage Simon "to improve his genius in the inventing or perfecting of useful machines." He was given five years of exclusive rights with certain limitations. This was just the beginning.

There was competition from other traditional clock makers, but the Willard brothers were able to control their costs by controlling the manufacture of all the parts, from the clock's works to the faces and cases.

The impetus for developing smaller timepieces was probably his innate New England Yankee common sense and practicality. There was a limited demand for his tall case clocks, which were exquisite and expensive, and he realized that there would be a larger market for a smaller, portable, dependable model. Foley explains in layman's terms and in much more detail how Simon basically compressed the time train from his tall clocks, along with other modifications to the pendulum, which helped create the clock's smaller size. His *Glossary of Common Timepiece Terms* is very helpful, and not overwhelming. One can understand the workings of these clocks without being immersed in *Advanced Clock Making 401*. In 1802, Willard registered his "improved timepiece" patent which was signed by Thomas Jefferson and protected his design for 14 years.

Although the Willard brothers continued to make the tall case clocks, the production of the patent timepiece was much more prolific, and during this time their business was joined by other journeymen and apprentice clock makers. Simon became less involved in production around 1818, at age 65, and became more involved in creating other designs. He lived to enjoy great success, as well as to witness the success of many of his family members before his death at age 95. His son, Simon, Jr., carried on the business.

Needless to say, the Simon Willard patent timepiece found itself fodder for some very talented and unauthorized clockmakers. However, Foley provides us with a section on "Willard Patent Time Piece Characteristics" to help identify authentic work. For example, Simon did not sign his timepiece dials; his signature is found on the lower tablet in gold leaf, "S. WILLARD'S PATENT." He also used large, heavy iron dials, primed and covered with multiple coats of white enamel base paint – no skimping on materials and quality of decorative techniques as sometimes observed in unauthorized pieces, in Simon's words, "of such vile performances."

Chapters 6 through 13 cover clocks from Charlestown, Concord, and the North and South Shores of Massachusetts, to Newport, Rhode Island, and to New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont. As we can see from the colorful examples, the beauty



David Williams, Newport/Providence, RI patent timepiece.
Circa 1820.

One of the many close-up illustrations from the book. This shows a rare stencil decoration found on the side of a Lenuel Curtis girandole timepiece.

of the timepiece was never sacrificed in the pursuit and creation of the smaller models.

These chapters showcase one example after another of handsomely decorated banjo clocks. The timepiece from Boston by Ezekiel Jones has gilt rope frames, a turned gilt wood acorn finial, and a tablet of a city harbor scene with a mustard yellow border. Another clock by David Williams from Newport/Providence, Rhode Island sits in a mahogany grained case with a landscape tablet. A timepiece by Joseph N. Dunning from Vermont shows glass areas painted in red, blue, green, and gilt with a white background framing a landscape with a sailboat and a country house.

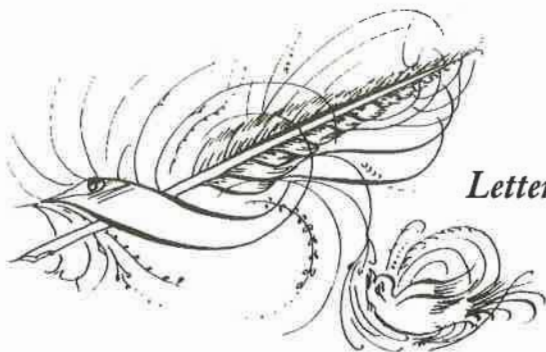


Moon-faced dials on tall-cased clocks display the handiwork of the decorative artists. However, it is the body of the banjo timepiece that captures a decorative painter's attention. There are many authentic examples of reverse-glass painting throughout the book that will encourage you to add this title to your library. Chapter 24 discusses ornamental painters, and highlights more than 40 separate full color tablets large enough to appreciate and examine in detail. There are patriotic tablets of flags and cannons, several with naval scenes, other tablets with mythological figures in their chariots, some with landscapes and homesteads, and of course, there are our draped scenes with a woman and child, or a woman with a floral urn. All appear with their borders distinct and intact, complete with information about their origins.

Foley also includes a large biographical section of "Patent Timepiece Makers, Ornamental Painters, Cabinetmakers, and Allied Craftsmen," as well as a bibliography. For many of us, our primer was Drepperd's *American Clocks and Clockmakers*. We prize our copy of *Horology, Americana* by Dworetzky & Dickstein with over 200 color plates, beautiful but small, and Loomes' *Painted Clock Dials*. Willard's *Patent Time Pieces* is the latest and most welcome addition to this genre. It is a scholarly book that interests us with personal anecdotes as well as the facts about these works of precision and time-keeping. He punctuates his text with clear close-ups of the mechanisms that will interest clock makers, and he offers plenty of colorful pictures and illustrations upon which to pause and reflect. You will want this beautiful presentation of valuable research in your library.

Note: This book may be purchased from the author, see ad on page 36.

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



Letter from Birmingham

by Yvonne Jones

The Transfer of Skills Within the Decorative Arts Industries

The following notice leaves little doubt that painters skilled in the "japan way", would have had any difficulty in adapting to other contemporary decorative manufactures:

"Decorators Sought by the Bow China Manufactory"

"This is to give notice to all painters in the blue and white way and enamellers on chinaware, that by applying at the Counting House near Bow they may meet with employment and proper encouragement according to their merit; likewise painters brought up in the snuff-box way, jappanning, fan-painting etc. may have an opportunity of trial."

Aris' Gazette, November 1753



The artist who painted this pair of leather covered bookends would certainly have been given an "opportunity of trial." Courtesy of Elizabeth Nibbelink.

A Menagerie of Decorated Antiques

Since the theme for the Danvers meeting was *Animals in Art*, we are presenting some of the pieces displayed in their exhibition, plus a few from a private collection.



Painted scene with horses, coach, footmen and lady on large tin tray. Probably French. Courtesy of Margaret Rodgers.



Freehand bronze painting of horse and dog on metal tray, referred to as the "Smuggler's Cove." A typical George Morland subject, c.1818. Courtesy of Inez Gornall.



*Stenciled tray features
"burdy-gurdy" with
monkey on dog,
English, c.1850.
Courtesy of
Shirley Baer.*



*Stenciled zebra tray,
English, c.1850. Courtesy
of Dorcas Layport.*



*Fish is dropped when one
bird chases another. English
stenciled tray, mid 1800s.
Courtesy of Maryjane Clark.*



A Newfoundland on an album, English, c.1850. Courtesy of Janice Hight. Photo by Joseph Rice.

Painting of a Newfoundland on coal vase (or coal scuttle), English, c.1850. Courtesy of Janice Hight. Photo by Joseph Rice.



Left: Papier mâché portfolio cover with "Scottie" in center, mother-of-pearl border, English, mid 1800s. Courtesy of Shirley Baer.

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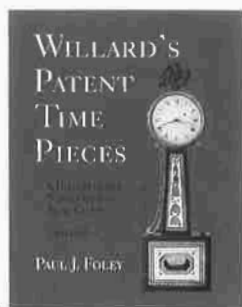
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Roxbury Village Publishing
is proud to announce the publication of
**Willard's Patent Time Pieces:
A History of the Weight-Driven Banjo
Clock, 1800-1900** by Paul J. Foley

See *"The Bookshelf"* in this issue of
"The Decorator"



The Definitive Guide to Patent Time Pieces

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- Over 90 reproductions of contemporary newspaper advertisements.
- Guide to identifying early Simon Willard Patent Time Pieces.
- History of Roxbury Village and Boston Neck.
- History of Boston area ornamental painters and cabinetmakers.

368 pages, Hard Cover, 8.25 x 10.5 in., Bibliography, Fully referenced and indexed, ISBN 0-9718736-2-3, Printed in USA.

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