

# The Decorator

Fall 2003

Vol. 57 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.

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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*Front cover: Ivory and padouk wood armchair, Vizagapatam, 18th century. See article on page 10. Photograph courtesy of Mallett Antiques Archive, London.*

*Back cover: Detail of back slat of the armchair shown on the front cover. Photograph courtesy of Mallett Antiques Archive, London.*

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## Editor's Notes

This issue of *The Decorator* is a feast for those looking for award pieces by our members. With the new policy of judging just once a year, and an unlimited number of pieces allowed, our members outdid themselves. Carol Buonato took the lead with five A's. Congratulations to all.

Across the Atlantic, Yvonne Jones in Birmingham, England continues her research in the decorative arts. In this issue she shares some of that research and knowledge in an article on a little-known but very gifted artist, John Thomas. As always, another informative and interesting article by our friend and consultant, Yvonne.

On this side of the Atlantic, Nancy Corcoran has been researching penwork and shares some information with us. Samples of Corcoran's penwork were on display at the Wilmington meeting.

One of my favorite sellers on Ebay is *antiquesuncommontreasure.com*, where one can find many museum-quality pieces of the kind we collect. When I noticed a decorated box with a dog very similar to the one on the back cover of our Fall '02 (Vol. 56-2) *The Decorator*, I contacted Susan Dean, owner of *Antiques & Uncommon Treasure*. (I'll show the comparison of the dog on the back cover of the Fall '02 issue with the box from Antiques & Uncommon Treasure in a later issue.) Dean not only gave us permission to use those photos, but provided us with dozens of photographs of other treasures. Included among Dean's treasures was a pair of hand screens with a dog on a raft, similar to the one Shirley DeVoe wrote about. Imagine my excitement when I compared the hand screens to the pictures in DeVoe's articles and found them to be almost identical! Check the comparisons beginning on page 28 and see if you don't feel the two face screens were decorated by Reuben Thomas Neale.

Also in this issue is Peg Rodgers' review of HSEAD's "how-to" video on country painting, and Sandra Cohen's review of Ann Eckert Brown's book, *American Wall Stenciling*. The video and Brown's book are new to the market and well worth investigating.



## Future Meetings

Fall 2003	Killington, VT	September 19-21 (FSS)
Spring 2004	Portland, ME	April 30-May 2 (FSS)
Fall 2004	TBA	

# John Thomas

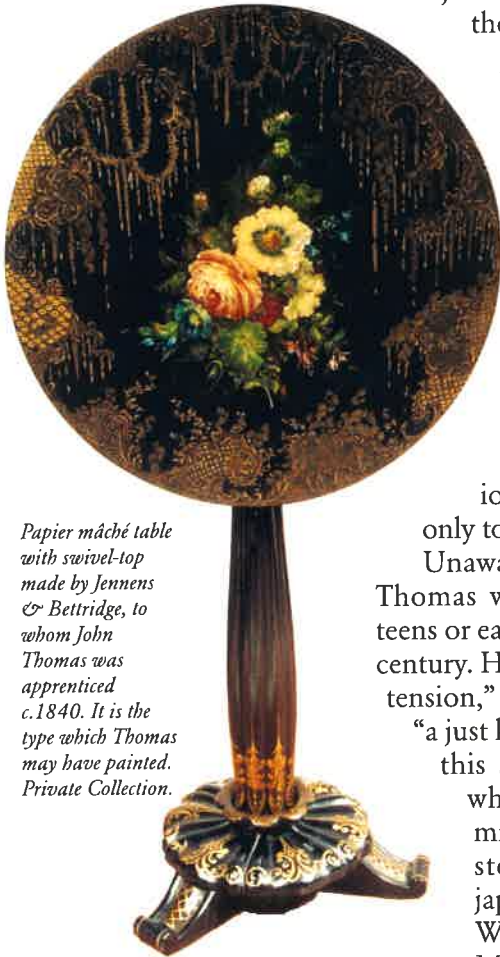
## *A Hitherto Unknown Japan Painter*

by Yvonne Jones

George Dickinson in his book *English Papier Mâché* (1925), named a number of japan artists and their specialisms, but the colorful John Thomas who worked as a decorator in both Birmingham and Wolverhampton, seems to have escaped his notice. And yet, Thomas was so distinguished an artist in his time, that he was the subject of an anonymous article published in a contemporary journal, and as far as is known, was the only japan artist to have been profiled in this way.<sup>1</sup> Besides

on occasion, making for entertaining reading, the article highlights the difficulty that at least one very talented painter had in reconciling himself to the constraints and routine of factory work, and it underlines the clout that artists had over their japan masters, for no matter how disruptive their behavior, there was always a rival factory only too willing to take them on.

Unaware of his own date of birth, Thomas was born "somewhere in the teens or early twenties" of the nineteenth century. He was apparently "without pretension," but had what was described as "a just knowledge of his capacity" and this showed itself at an early age when, disinclined to become a miller like his father, he asked instead, to be apprenticed as a japanner to Charles Mander of Wolverhampton. In 1840 when Mander sold the japanning



*Papier mâché table with swivel-top made by Jennens & Bettridge, to whom John Thomas was apprenticed c.1840. It is the type which Thomas may have painted. Private Collection.*

branch of his business to William Shoolbred<sup>2</sup> the boy moved to Birmingham and completed his apprenticeship at the well-known firm of Jennens & Bettridge.

The article, written in 1889, gives flesh to the lives of apprentices during this earlier period:

'The dainty skins and susceptibilities of our boys nowadays are innocent of the roughing it which boys had to endure as part and parcel of what was then considered to be necessary discipline, and there can be no doubt but that the boy who did weather this stern schooling was tolerably hardened in the process, and prepared to stand the kicks and 'arrows of outrageous fortune,' no matter what the shape in which they came.

In other words, an apprenticeship was about "the survival of the fittest." The young Thomas, "small and frail of body, though of indomitable will" and "the object of much rough horseplay," rose to the challenge in a manner which was to become the pattern of his career. Confident of his abilities over other apprentices "and indeed over most of the journeymen," he carried out an oft-repeated threat to run away if he was not given better work. Even as an apprentice, his confidence was evidently not misplaced for on his return, and after appearing before the magistrates, Thomas was rewarded with his own room "where he could work unmolested by his comrades and also find an outlet for his artistic predilections."

After his apprenticeship, Thomas took classes in figure drawing and landscape painting at the newly established Birmingham School of Art, and he worked briefly for the japanners Alsager & Neville, before commencing as a journeyman painter. Life as a journeyman was altogether more independent and lucrative, and it "suited him exactly."

Papier mâché tables decorated with "flowers, birds, figures, and landscapes" were then very fashionable and Thomas soon found steady employment in painting them, earning as much as "six or seven pounds sterling a week." But his choice of employer was not always wise. One, "H--by name" who had exhausted his credit with others in Birmingham, heard about this "greenhorn" artist, and "swooped down on him with vulture-like appetite." Like others before him, and doubtless glad of the work, Thomas fell victim to this charlatan and decorated some tabletops for him "in a most ornate manner." But Thomas quickly got the measure of H--, and would not allow him to take any completed work until he paid some of his outstanding debt. The situation rapidly got out of hand:

Thomas locked the door and put the key in his pocket. But this by no means disconcerted H--, for he suddenly threw

up the sash of the window, seized a table top, and, jumping out of the window, fled. But Nemesis was on his track; for Mr. Thomas, arrayed in *deshabille* costume, *sans* coat and *sans* waistcoat seized a handsaw which lay on the table and fled after the delinquent. And then "began a combat grim and great" in the streets of Brummagem.<sup>3</sup> Outraged justice, in the person of Mr. Thomas, and grasping commerce, as represented by Mr. H---. Handsaw *versus* tabletop; for the greedy H---used the decorated table alternately as a shield and as a club, whilst Art, in the person of Thomas, swooped and whirled the handsaw in a most alarming fashion.

Not surprisingly, the skirmish "attracted a large crowd" and "both combatants" were taken to court, where Thomas, although his behavior was deemed "extra-legal," won the case.<sup>4</sup>

He returned to work for Alsager & Neville who had received a large, and urgent, order from a London publisher for decorated book-covers for luxury editions of works by Burns, Byron and Walter Scott. The papier mâché covers which were to be painted with Burns' Cottage, Newstead Abbey, and Abbotsford, were completed on time, and Thomas was paid "60s. the gross," or 5d each.<sup>5</sup> This work so impressed Jennens & Bettridge, that they were said to have offered Thomas "an advance of 50 percent on the prices he was then getting," to paint their highly successful new range of ships' panels, but tantalizingly, the article did not say whether he accepted.

He then went to Glasgow as a decorator and foreman with a Mr. T. Laurie. There, he displayed a considerable talent for "ship decoration," together with his not inconsiderable predisposition to cause havoc. In fairness, this was not entirely his fault since some of the old hands not only resented being "ordered about by one so young," but they refused to work with an Englishman.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding this initial opposition, Thomas stayed for nine years before returning to Wolverhampton, where he spent five years working with Frederick Walton at the Old Hall Japan Works—a period which although financially good, he later regarded as a waste of his artistic abilities on account of what he described as routine work. He was then tempted by an offer of a three-year contract with Jones Brothers, a firm set up in 1854 by a former Old Hall employee, but "the ink of the agreement was hardly dry" before he received another offer much more to his liking.

At the invitation of Heywood, Higginbottom & Smith, a "famous" firm of Manchester paper stainers, Thomas left the japan trade to take control of their design room. The considerable freedom he was allowed, and in particular, the times of his "coming and going" brought him once again into conflict with his fellow workers. The way in which his employer, Mr Smith, managed the dispute endorses John Thomas' skill and

value to the company, for instead of reprimand or dismissal, he took Thomas on a two-week pleasure trip to the Lancashire coastal town of Southport—a tactic which clearly paid off, as “after that there were no more deputations.” And three years later, on relinquishing his post, Heywood, Higginbottom & Smith, treated Thomas with “a long visit to Paris at their expense.” Thomas at last, felt able to look back “with much pleasure” on a period of employment having worked “for employers who appreciated it, and gave many evidences of the esteem in which they held their employee.”

From Manchester, John Thomas went to Wales where he concentrated on easel painting and found a ready market for his work through introductions made by his former employer, Mr Smith. In little over a year however, his skills had been spotted by John Harwood (later Sir John Harwood), a “painter in the North of England,” whose invitation to decorate the interior of the Royal Exchange in Manchester, marked the beginnings of a long and fruitful partnership. Harwood, was at the peak of his career, and receiving commissions “by the score” to paint churches and chapels, many of which he asked John Thomas to supervise. One of their major commissions was the decoration of the Manchester Reform Club, the walls of which Thomas “megilped<sup>7</sup>, combed, and stencilled” to create a tapestry effect. The experience of working with Harwood prepared Thomas for his next move, to London, where, engaged by many “leading firms of decorators” and architects, he worked mainly in private houses. By 1879, he was based, once again, in Manchester, although he made a point of maintaining his London contacts.

Thomas then was a “versatile and assimilating” artist whose facility for painting birds, beasts and flowers, was attributed to his early training as a japanner when speed was of the essence. He painted the figure only “fairly well,” but “in flat ornament he is at home in any style, though probably his best work is done in Italian and Pompeiian styles”—a comment which, coming late in the article, probably related to his wall paintings rather than his earlier japan work—and his so-called “Japanese Sketches” were apparently much admired.

Thomas published two books: *Bird and Flower Studies* in two volumes, and “a little work on Interiors.” Two plates from the former were used to illustrate this profile of his career, but apart from confirming his skill with a pen (or engraving tool), they say nothing about his japanning style. Without documentary evidence, and with the possible exception of the book covers he painted for Alsager & Neville, it is unlikely that any papier mâché goods decorated by John Thomas, will ever be identified. Nevertheless, his career shows the ease with which the best and most talented artists moved from factory to factory and it underlines the futility of attempting to link a painter's style with any given factory; not only did John Thomas paint for Charles Mander, Jennens &

Bettridge, Alsager & Neville, and Frederick Walton, but he worked as a journeyman painter, taking work where and when he could find it. And if that work were outside the trade to which he had been apprenticed, then so be it—the skills of a Japan artist were readily transferrable.

John Thomas was a loose cannon, but that alone would not have precluded him from Dickinson's book where, for example, the "rather eccentric" Newman was mentioned and the "Bohemian" temperament of Luke Amner was commented upon. In researching his book, Dickinson had the good fortune to speak with "two or three old workers in papier mâché factories," one of whom was Charles Neville, of Alsager & Neville—a firm for which Thomas had worked. What emerges from the published profile of John Thomas, is that at times, he was an arrogant, conceited and difficult man. He was not an endearing character about whom to reminisce, but he stands as a sobering reminder perhaps, that in spite of their talents, such individuals are sometimes air-brushed out of history. In 1889 however, his abilities as an artist and designer were recognized, for as the author of the article concluded, John Thomas had "won for himself the good opinion and esteem of most of those who know him"—a respect which he believed had been his due from the outset.

1 *The Journal of Decorative Art*, August 1889, p120ff

2 Later Shoolbred & Loveridge

3 "Brummagem" an old name for Birmingham

4 As a sidelight on tabletops, it is interesting to find that "H—" continued his disreputable practices. He and an accomplice "bought up large quantities of papier mâché tables highly decorated," took them to London "where their real value was not known...and pledged them for three times their value."

5 5d equalled a little under 2.5p after decimalization, although this of course, does not take inflation into account

6 The author of the article observed that at the time of writing, improved travel had made such nationalism a thing of the past "and a Glasgow man today would as soon think of standing on his head as refuse to work with a man because he came from across the Border."

7 A painting medium consisting of linseed oil and mastic varnish or turpentine.



### **Applicants Accepted as Guild Members**

Pauline Bartow • Dorothy Berube • Sara Cook

Mary Harbey • Lorraine Harrigan • Martha Lord

Mary Ann Lutz • Agnes McCloskey • Lena Neri

Mary Ann Pietrzykowski • Diane Piorkowski • Jane Roberts

Sally Schul • Meredith Swan • Jane Treggett



## Vizagapatam One Source of Penwork Design

*Nancy E. Corcoran*

**V**izagapatam: what a nifty word to slide off the tongue! A city on the East coast of India between Calcutta and Madras, Vizagapatam was the home to extraordinary craftsmen who decorated furniture, boxes, and other miscellaneous items with ebony and ivory inlay in the mid 18th century. Veneers of ivory were inlaid on ebony or sandalwood, then etched and filled with black lac in much the same manner as scrimshaw. The contrast of black and white was exquisite.

The British East India Company began settling in various Indian cities in 1668. Vizagapatam, with its natural harbor, was one of these cities. The English had long recognized the quality work of the craftsmen there, and set up a factory for the production and export of inlay work. The factory at Vizagapatam produced various small items such as game boxes, small chests, work boxes, tables and small cabinets for export to Europe. These pieces were well-received in England and became known as “Vizagapatam.” By the mid 18th century, the factory was thriving. For the export market, craftsmen copied English furniture designs of the Queen Anne and George I periods and inlaid these pieces with ivory. Larger pieces such as chairs, tables and secretaries were usually

*Above: Penwork boxes with Vizagapatam inspired designs. Photograph courtesy of Hyde Park Antiques.*

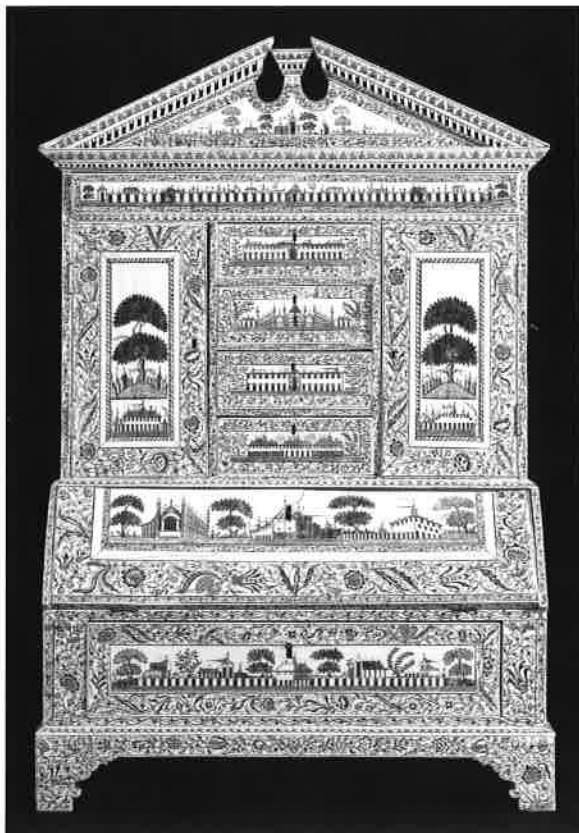
commissioned and very rare. These pieces were very expensive, even for the affluent, and were owned mainly by royalty and government officials.

It is interesting to note that the craftsmen memorized their patterns. If you look closely at the miniature bureau figure below, notice that the left door floral border is just slightly different from the right border. All the borders on this chest are typical Vizagapatam designs. These designs were repeated over and over again.

As the 18th century drew to a close, the trend in Vizagapatam went from the inlaying of ivory into wood, such as the arm chair on the cover to pieces which were totally veneered with ivory, such as the revolving chair on page 12. This resulted in a less labor-intensive product and thus a cheaper means of production. However, it did not detract from the beauty of the pieces.

In England, Vizagapatam or the broader term, "Anglo-Indian" pieces, had become increasingly popular. As with most popular and expensive items of the day, it was imitated. This imitation became known as "penwork," which is the decoration of boxes, chests, tea caddies, table tops, hand screens and small pieces of furniture by the use of pen and ink to simulate etched ivory, and ebony and ivory inlay. Some profes-

sional cabinetmakers employed artists and writing masters to decorate special pieces with penwork. However, it appears that the majority of penwork was done by amateurs, specifically upper-class ladies of leisure as a hobby. The word "amateur" should be used here with great respect because some of the penwork produced by these ladies was truly exquisite.



*Miniature bureau-cabinet  
(H:36", W:25", D:11"),  
Vizagapatam 1780-1790.  
Photograph courtesy of Peabody  
Essex Museum.*

*Right: Penwork work table with Vizagapatam inspired border, c.1826. Photograph courtesy of Hyde Park Antiques, New York.*



*Above: Penwork box with Vizagapatam inspired border, very similar to the border on the Vizagapatam rosewood games box, c.1815. Photograph courtesy of Hyde Park Antiques, New York*



*Right: Revolving round chair, Vizagapatam, c.1760-70. Photograph courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.*



*Ivory dressing box,  
Vizagapatam, c.1820.  
Photograph courtesy of  
Mallett Antiques Archive,  
London.*

The finest etched ivory pieces came from Vizagapatam. They were the ones most copied, and provided professional pattern makers with an outstanding source for penwork designs. Bits and pieces were used here and there, or the whole pattern was copied and reproduced outright. Vizagapatam patterns provided elaborate borders for penwork, and were usually used to enclose oriental scenes. These penwork patterns were published in ladies' magazines or sold as sheets in stationers' stores along with all the supplies one needed to accomplish a finished piece of penwork.

Thus once again we have come full circle from the labor-intensive inlay of ivory to the copy in pen and paint. But these penwork pieces have a charm all their own and standing on their own they are every bit as beautiful as their relatives from Vizagapatam.



*Detail of the lid on the above ivory dressing box Vizagapatam, c.1820. Photograph courtesy of Mallett Antiques Archive, London.*



Left: Close-up of an early ivory and rosewood games box (shown below), Vizagapatam, c.1770. Photograph courtesy of Mallett Antiques Archive, London.



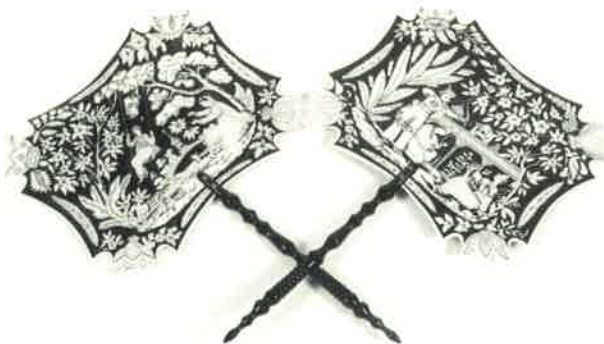
## Bibliography

Mallett Antiques, 141 New Bond Street, London W1S 2BS, [www.mallettantiques.com](http://www.mallettantiques.com), A short essay on Vizagapatam: "A Rare Pair of 18th Century Anglo Indian Arm Chairs."

Hyde Park Antiques, Ltd., New York, Penwork: *The Triumph of Line*, Exhibition Catalogue, October 12 – November 10, 1989

Riley, Noel, "Elegant and Useful Accomplishment of Penwork," *Antique Collector*, March 1983

Wilbur, Martha, "Penwork," *The Decorator*, Spring 1978



*A pair of penwork hand screens reproduced by the author, originals c.1810.*

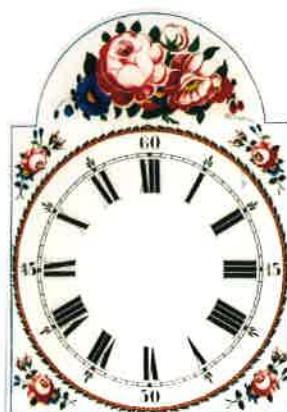
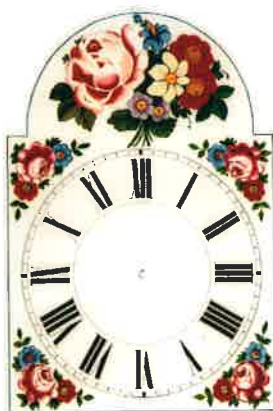
Author's Note: I wish to thank Mr. Nicholas Wells of Mallett Antiques, London, and Ms. Rachel Karr of Hyde Park Antiques, New York, for their generous contributions of photographs for this article.

## Members' "A" Awards

*All Clock Dials*

*by*

*Carol Buonato*



## Members' "A" Awards



Lois Tucker  
*Country Painting*



Sonja Bridges  
*Stenciling on Wood*



Mae Fisher  
*Country Painting*



Alice Smith  
*Stenciling on Wood*

## Members' "A" Awards



Patricia Lacy

*Country Painting*



Parma Jewett

*Country Painting*



Anne Dimock

*Glass with Border*



Parma Jewett

*Country Painting*

## Members' "A" Awards



Dortia Davis  
*Freehand Bronze*

Right: Alice Smith  
*Stenciling on Wood*



Laura Bullitt  
*Freehand Bronze*

## Members' "A" Awards: Theorems



Sandra Levy



Diane Freiner



Karen Graves



Parma Jewett



Robert Flachbarth



Robert Flachbarth

## Members' "A" Awards: Theorems



Pam Benoit



Linda Brubaker



Laura Bullitt



Alice Smith



Martha Kinney



Charlene Bird

## Members' "A" Awards: Theorems



Alice Smith



Linda Brubaker



Susan Laime



Inez Gornall



Susan Laime



Charlene Bird

## Members' "A" Awards



*Left: Roberta Edrington*

*Freehand Bronze*



*Right: Dolores Samsell*

*Glass with Border*



*Left: Laura Bullitt*

*Glass with Border*



*Right: Dorcas Layport*

*Glass with Border*

## Members' "A" Awards



Roberta Edrington

*Victorian Flower Painting*



Amy Finlay

*Theorem*



Laura Bullitt

*Pontypool*

## Members' "A" Awards: Special Class



Deborah Lambeth



Lois Tucker



## Seal of Approval Award



Harold Fisher

## Members' "B" Awards



Mae Fisher

*Country Painting*



Joan Austin

*Freehand Bronze*



Dolores Samsell

*Stenciling on Wood*



Ursula Erb

*Country Painting*



Linda Brubaker

*Country Painting*

## Members' "B" Awards



Anne Dimock

*Pontypool*



Joan Austin

*Freehand Bronze*



Susan Laime

*Stenciling on Wood*



Anne Dimock

*Gold Leaf Panel*



Susan Redfield

*Theorem*

## Members' "B" Awards



Martha Kinney

*Theorem*



Dorcas Layport

*Glass with Border*



Susan Redfield

*Theorem*



Roberta Edrington

*Special Class*



Anne Dimock

*Glass with Border*

## Seen in the Marketplace

### Hand Screens by Reuben Thomas Neale?

by Shirley Baer



Reuben Thomas Neale was born in Birmingham, England in 1859. At the age of 16, he joined the firm of McCallum and Hodson, manufacturers of paper mâché and japanware, and successors of the Jennens and Bettridge firm. There Neale became a japanner painter. He remained with McCallum and Hodson until 1920, and was the last employee to leave the firm.

During his 45 years with McCallum and Hodson, Neale decorated lap desks, sewing boxes, face screens, albums, blotters and other familiar objects. Unfortunately only a few pieces known to be his work still exist.

Blakesley Hall of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery has five pieces. The papier mâché casket with the horse on the cover (page 30) is one of the five. According to an article by Shirley DeVoe in *The Decorator* (Vol. 19-2, 1965), the Neale's home was bombed in 1941 leaving the family with about six small trays.

As DeVoe also noted, "Without doubt, there are many examples in existence which cannot be definitely identified as his work." Read DeVoe's article in our 1965 *Decorator* along with her book, *English Papier Mâché of the Georgian and Victorian Periods*."



*My thanks to Susan Dean of Antiques & Uncommon Treasure for permission to use the photographs of the face screens shown above and on the following two pages.*



*Papier mâché lap desk with painting attributed to Reuben Thomas Neale. The dog depicted on the life raft was Friend, who became famous when he saved his master's life. Friend was frequently portrayed on papier mâché and was a favorite subject with many artists. Photograph courtesy of the City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.*



*Close-up of one of the pair of face screens. Courtesy of Antiques & Uncommon Treasure.*



*Papier mâché casket decorated by Reuben Thomas Neale in 1890. Courtesy of Blakesley Hall of City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.*



*Close-up of one of the pair of face screens. Courtesy of Antiques & Uncommon Treasure.*



## The Bookshelf

### American Wall Stenciling, 1790-1840

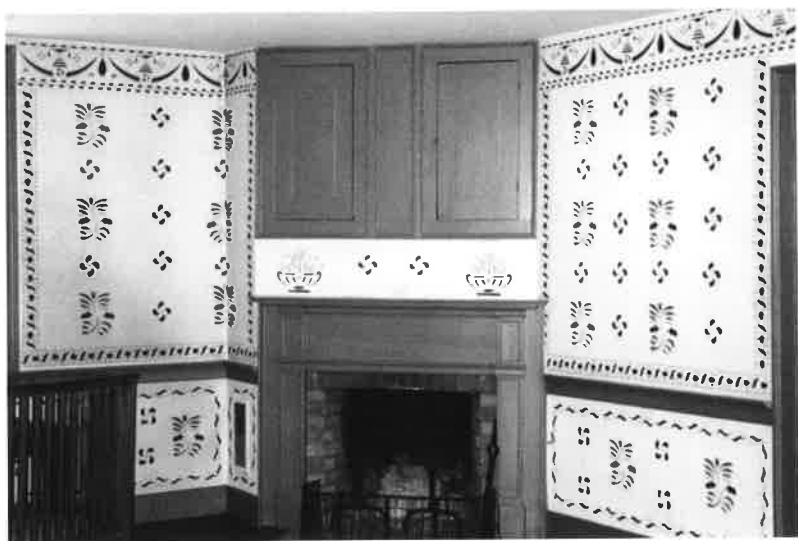
by Ann Eckert Brown

University Press of New England, 2003, hard cover, 269 pages, \$60.

Reviewed by Sandra Cohen

Walls can talk, and American stenciled walls have found a voice. *American Wall Stenciling, 1790-1840* by Ann Eckert Brown is a comprehensive analysis of the painted patterns that adorned early American homes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Brown chronicles the story of stenciling in American homes in a narrative style that reads like a diary telling tales of houses, their inhabitants and their decorated walls. She reads these patterns like a



*A view of the ballroom stenciling re-created by Shirley DeVoe in the Bump Tavern in Cooperstown, New York. The original stenciling was attributed to Stimp, c.1820.*

*Stenciled panel from a second-floor bedchamber of the Solomon Aster house (a log house) in Westminster, Maryland, c.1820.*

detective, connecting their signature style, elements and geographical placement. Her research has resulted in an impressive list of historic homes which she shares with the reader in her heavily illustrated and annotated book.

Some of the material will be familiar to those of you who have read accounts of wall decoration by Edward Allen, Jessica Bond, Margaret Coffin, Rufus Porter and Janet Waring. Browns extensive bibliography includes these and many other distinguished sources, and her book is a scholarly and encyclopedic work on this genre.

The author reminds us that most artists applied wall stencils with a paint mixture of dried pigments, hide glue and boiling water. Oil paint was used on woodwork. Every page complements the text with pictures. Historical authenticity is the focus, and there are plenty of photographs of original although faded remains of wall painting. However, the author has taken the time to recreate some of these stenciled patterns to highlight and reveal to the reader their original appearance. Also, when you look at some of the scarce remnants of these painted patterns alongside her reproductions, you have a greater appreciation of the author's dedication, personal affinity and fondness for this style of early American wall decoration. Brown also makes a distinction between Folk and Classical genres of stenciled designs and offers generous examples of both these styles.

The Folk designs are more prolific and the typical choice for farmhouses and taverns. The motifs echo the designs of the early English settlers and wallpaper patterns, and they were often executed in red and green. The author shows us the authentic preserved patterns by J. Gleason, Caleb Stimpson (Stimp), Moses Eaton and others as well as her own vivid and accurate copies of their faded remains.

The Classical style appears after the American Revolution, and like many of the decorative arts in the colonies at this time, it is inspired by a desire to create a typically American design. Many artists looked back to the Greco Roman period for inspiration, and decorative elements take on a classical look. Silver, furniture and wall decoration of the Federal Period have a more sophisticated style. Swags, urns and Greek key stencils grace the walls of stately Federal homes.



*Facsimile of ballroom stenciling in the  
Thomas Harper house, 1788,  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

Brown's house tour covers New England, the northern states including Canada and some middle and southern states. Her visits to these homes and her research meticulously inform the many intimate profiles and genealogy of the original inhabitants. When possible she also identifies the artists, if not by name then by their familiar hand and style. All of these homes have names and a pedigree, and Brown narrates their stories like an historian. Deacon Daniel Hopkins house in RI, (direct descendent of Stephen Hopkins, signer of The Declaration of Independence), John Coolidge Homestead (ancestral home of President Coolidge), Daniel Davis House (nephew of Ethan Allen)...the list continues with homes that bear the names of their first families. Browns book presents each of these houses as an interesting piece of Americana that tells us about life in colonial times. Their stenciled walls also mirror some of their graceful character and beauty.



Brown concludes her book with a generous serving of appendices. Appendix A covers early paint materials. Appendix B lists prominent names in American wall stenciling which includes HSEAD members Jessica Bond, Esther Stevens Brazer, Polly Forcier and Gina Martin. Appendix C lists resources, and HSEAD is among them. It would have been helpful had the author checked HSEAD's current web site and office addresses. The glossary of terms could have been more extensive. However, her footnotes and bibliography are thorough.

Brown has mapped the way for many interesting field trips, but more importantly, she has given us a resource that historians and admirers of early American decoration will find valuable, enjoyable and fascinating.



The author is offering an autographed book to fellow HSEAD members at a special price of \$50. Brown's address is listed in *HSEAD's Membership Book*.

*Photographs courtesy of Ann Brown.*

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

# Traditional Country Painting

## Early American Decorative Painting on Tin

*Reviewed by Margaret Rodgers*

**T**raditional Country Painting makes its debut on video starring Lois Tucker offering a three hour workshop. This is the best thing HSEAD has ever produced! Many favorable comments have been heard by this reviewer, such as: "When is the next category going to be ready?," "Maybe it will be on DVD," and "I can't wait to view it!" I've shown it to my students in 20 minute segments over their lunch hour and they don't want to go back to their painting classes!

I have often recommended books in this column and told the readers that they really should have the reviewed book. I can most emphatically recommend this video to all teachers and students of EAD techniques. After viewing it once, you will come back again and again to clarify some point or other. During a recent convention, I manned an HSEAD booth and we had the video going nonstop for three and a half days. I can honestly say I learned something, or confirmed my knowledge of a particular part of the country painting technique each time it was replayed.

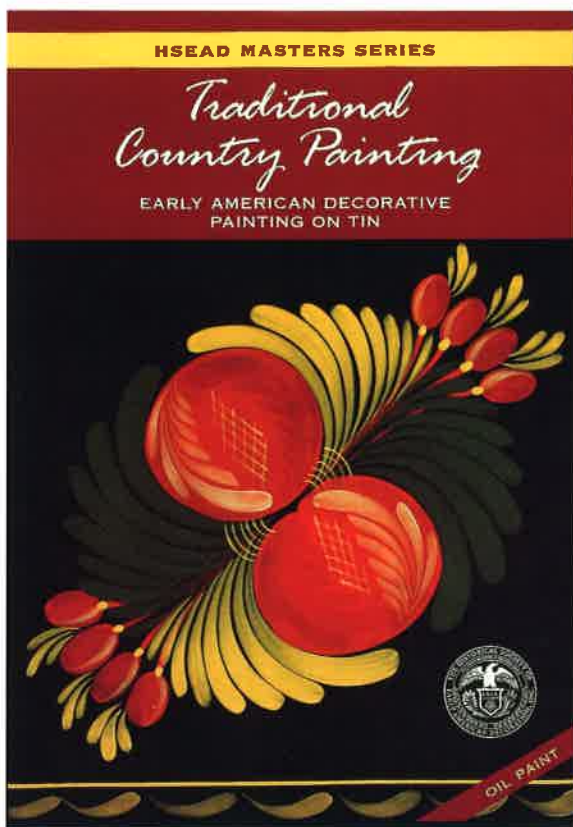
Lois Tucker's skills as a patient and comprehending teacher are self evident in this video. The viewer is taken through the entire process of painting a one sheet waiter. All avenues are carefully and fully explained and I defy anyone to watch the video and not come away with a new thought or process to try the next time they begin to paint on such a piece. This video is especially worthwhile for the applicant who isn't close to a teacher as well as the ones who have regular classes.

Included in the video box are a color swatch, a tracing of a pattern, and a supplies resource list. Nothing is left to chance. It is all too easy to slip into the habit of thinking a student already knows the basics, but often this is not true. Lois' care and attention to even the most insignificant detail is most carefully explained in the presentation. An example of this care are the instructions for the left handed person. I can say from experience that not many teachers can do this. Perhaps you have fought with the dreaded white band—this too is explained. Color mixing, varnishing, backgrounds, sanding, mediums, and many more topics are demonstrated.

The three hours video is well worth purchasing. Everyone who paints should definitely own this video. For many years the idea of having some of our teachers filmed doing EAD techniques was discussed. Now thanks to the Board of Trustees this is in fact a reality. I look forward to the video on stenciling.

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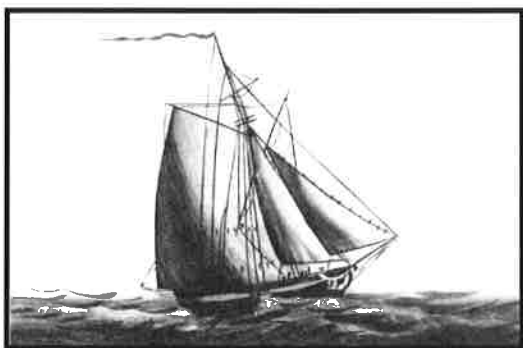
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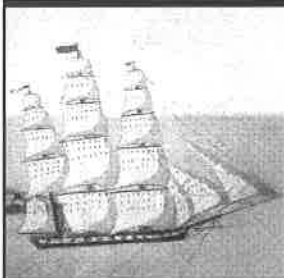
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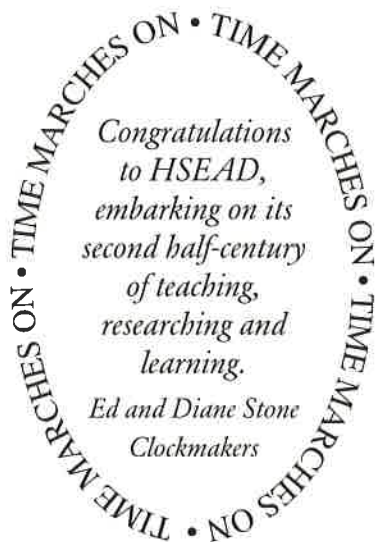
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