The Decorator

Fall 2004 Vol. 58 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.

Front cover: Aaron Willard Jr., gilt frame patent timepiece, c. 1812-15. Photograph courtesy of Paul J. Foley

Back cover: Close-up of timepiece on front cover, showing excellent detailed painted design. Photograph courtesy of Paul J. Foley.

The Decorator

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Boston State House "On Glass"

by Paul J. Foley

In 1802 Roxbury, Massachusetts clockmaker Simon Willard received a patent for his "improved timepiece" or what is commonly known today as a banjo wall clock. One original patented feature of these timepieces was colorful reverse-painted glasses on the front of the clock. These Willard-designed timepieces became immensely popular. Simon's earliest timepieces contained glasses of conservative geometric design, but by 1810-15 much more colorful, and varied designs were being used. Mythological, allegorical and biblical scenes were widely used. Patriotic and historic scenes, especially naval battles from the War of 1812, were popular for many years. Landscape tablets and views of well-known buildings were regularly used as well.

Houses and famous buildings were popular themes. Probably the most commonly depicted were George Washington's home, Mount Vernon, and the Boston State House. This article contains for

Above: Printed engraving of Boston State House published in 1825 in Snow's "History of Boston."

6a

Aaron Willard, Jr. gilt frame patent timepiece original tablet, c. 1812-1815. Excellent detailed painted design.

Unsigned Concord, MA gilt rope frame patent timepiece original tablet, c. 1815. Excellent quality visible in spite of paint deterioration.

Close-up of original tablet from timepiece below. Good quality painting, but not as detailed as earlier tablets.

comparison a selection of reverse painted glasses from patent timepieces depicting the Boston State House.

The Massachusetts State House in Boston stands atop Beacon Hill across from the Boston Common. Native architect Charles Bulfinch designed the building. The cornerstone was laid in 1795 and the building completed in 1798. The site had been a rural meadow belonging to John Hancock, whose house sat next to it. When completed, it was one of the most important public buildings in the United States. Its classic imposing design placed prominently on a hill made it an instant landmark. Today it is considered one of Boston's historic and architectural treasures.

This frequently painted scene was usually viewed from across the grassy slopes of Boston Common. People and occasionally livestock were pictured on the grass. These scenes were often copied by the reverse glass ornamental painters

Unsigned Concord, MA half round mahogany frame patent timepiece, c. 1825.

Unsigned Boston, MA crossbanded mahogany frame patent timepiece tablet. Excellent quality restored tablet.

Waltham Watch & Clock Co., Waltham, MA crossbanded mahogany frame patent timepiece tablet, c. 1922. Later simplified design.

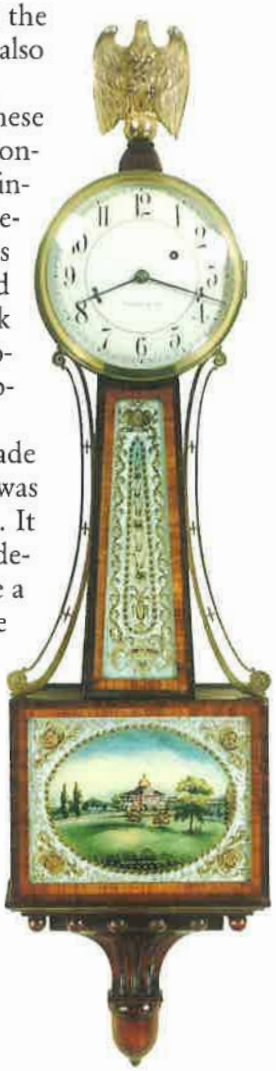
Unsigned Boston, MA half round mahogany frame patent timepiece tablet. Good quality restored tablet.

Waltham Clock Co. crossbanded mahogany frame patent timepiece tablet, c. 1916. Excellent quality painted tablets were utilized in some reproduction banjo clocks.

from contemporary engraved prints such as the engraving on page 4. These painted scenes were also popular on the tops of Federal mirrors.

Most of the patent timepieces utilizing these colorful tablets were made in the Boston and Concord areas between 1815 and 1840. At the beginning of the 20th century, these timepieces became popular again and many reproductions were made in the style of the earlier Willard clocks. In the 1900-30 period, the Waltham Clock Company in particular made high-quality reproductions, some of which copied the original tablets including the Boston State House scene.

The famous capitol dome was originally made of wood and covered with shingles. In 1802, it was clad in rolled copper supplied by Paul Revere. It was first gilded in 1874. Original early color depictions show a pale colored dome; this can be a guide to when some of these images were painted. Many restored glasses and even newer (1900s) Waltham tablets portray the State House in a pastoral scene of the early 1800s, but include a brightly gilt dome. This view is historically incorrect and can help identify later replaced or restored tablets in period banjo clocks.



Waltham Clock Co., Waltham, MA crossbanded mahogany frame patent timepiece, c. 1916. See close-up of tablet on facing page.

Photos courtesy of the author.

Editor's Note: The author's book "Willard's Patent Time Pieces" was reviewed in our Fall 2002 issue of The Decorator. For a full discussion of reverse glass paintings on patent timepieces and historical details on the ornamental painters who produced them, contact the author at Roxbury Village Publishing, PO Box 141, Norwell, MA 02061.

Thomas Lane and Patent Pearl Glass

by Yvonne Jones

Thomas Lane's *Royal Papier Mâché Works* occupied a handsome building behind a small garden on Great Hampton Street, a continuation of the road on which the better-known factory of Jennens & Bettridge was situated, on the edge of what is now known as Birmingham's "jewellery quarter."

Today, as in his own time, Lane is best known for making papier mâché articles inset with designs and pictures painted on the underside of glass and highlighted with thin flakes of pearl, which he called "patent pearl glass." Though this style of decoration is generally known as "Lane's Patent" – and indeed, some products are marked as such – the patent was actually taken out in 1844 in the name of Joseph Gibson, a japanner, two years prior to his being employed by Thomas Lane.

Gibson's patent (#10,046) gave him exclusive rights to two methods of fixing thinly ground flakes of pearl to flat sheets of glass. In the first method, one side of the glass was thinly coated with copal varnish onto

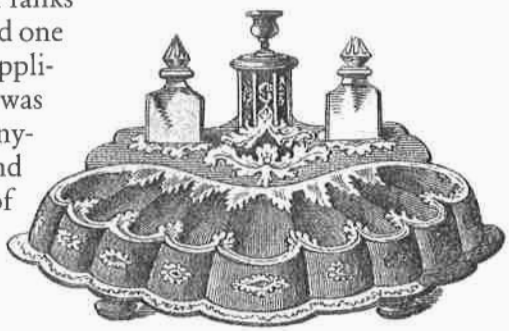
Writing box inset with glass panels showing "Roslyn Chapel" on the lid, and a river landscape on the front. Stamped "Lane, Birmingham," width 34cms. Photo courtesy of Gilding's Auctioneers, Market Harborough, Leicestershire.

which pieces of pearl, cut to shape, were gently pressed by hand before being stoved for six to seven hours at about 120°F (much higher, and it would have discolored the varnish). After a second coat of varnish and a further stoving, the same side of the glass was painted all-over with the intended background color.

The second method involved tracing an outline of the design on the glass and, save for those parts to be pearled, painting the entire surface with the intended ground color. When this was quite dry, the whole surface was coated with copal varnish, sheets of pearl were pressed into position, and the panel stoved as above. When viewed from the other side, the shell, in both cases, was set off against a single-colored ground sometimes enriched by gold or silver leaf. Gibson considered it a particularly suitable decoration for "buttons, panels for articles of furniture, or for decorating rooms, door or finger plates, table tops, fire-screens, chimney pieces, work boxes, and cabinet work generally."

However, few, if any, examples decorated in the restrained manner described above have survived, and "patent pearl glass" is now mostly associated with the colorful pearled and sometimes gilded glass pictures found on box-lids, cake-baskets, book covers, and in particular, blotter-covers. While executed according to the patent, the colors were usually painted over transfer-printed outlines mostly depicting famous buildings and prominent landmarks, such as Joseph Paxton's building for the Great Exhibition of 1851. To judge from the goods shown by Thomas Lane at the Exposition of British Industrial Art in Manchester in 1846, these pictures must have been introduced at his Great Hampton Street Works soon after Gibson commenced work there. Among the exhibits, for example, was a glass picture of "the Palace of Francis I, from a drawing by Müller," set in a table similar to one that Lane had presented to Prince Albert, and copies of a pair of pole screens he had presented to the Queen. It was, presumably, through the acceptance of these gifts that the firm was allowed to advertise as the "Royal Papier Mâché & Patent Pearl Glass Works, by special appointment to Her Majesty and His Royal Highness Prince Albert."

An article published in the *Art Union* in 1846, while it described Lane's factory as one "which ranks high in popular estimation, and one of considerable merit in the application of Art to the material," was not wholly uncritical. The anonymous author believed him – and Jennens & Bettridge – guilty of



Inkstand exhibited by Thomas Lane at the Birmingham Exhibition in 1849, and illustrated in the Art Journal of the same year.

perpetrating "a great number of errors in the selection of mal-shapes," which was held "scarcely pardonable" in a material such as papier mâché. Why this was more unacceptable in papier mâché than in other materials was not explained. Whatever the reason, it was observed that, with Lane's son being "one of the most assiduous pupils of the [Birmingham] School of Design ... a better and worthier system is making rapid way into his establishment." By way of demonstration, several objects decorated with glass pictures were singled out for praise, including some fire-screens – "exquisite specimens" of their type – and a chess board which was judged the most effective of all their products.

The emphasis in contemporary reports on the success and popularity of Lane's patent pearl glass makes it easy to overlook the extent of his other manufactures – in the 1850s, for instance, he advertised on a trade card as a "Manufacturer of Paper, Iron and Tin Japan Goods." Moreover, because (like so many japanners) he was inconsistent about marking his wares, many examples of good quality papier mâché and tinware that have survived to the present day are attributed to better-known firms, when they might well have been made by Thomas Lane. This is borne out by the accompanying illustration of a parlour maid's tray (below) which bears his imprint, and by the breadth of his display at the Birmingham Exposition of Arts & Manufactures in 1849.

Despite the furniture Lane had exhibited in Manchester three years earlier, he chose to focus on smaller but nevertheless showy goods in Birmingham, like "the beautiful cabinet which occupie[d] the centre of

Tray of so-called "parlour-maid's shape," stamped "Lane of Birmingham"; width 82cms. Photo courtesy of Tring Market Auctions, Tring, Hertfordshire.

Cabinet with pearl glass shown by Thomas Lane at the Birmingham Exhibition in 1849 and illustrated in the "Art Journal" of the same year.

his stand" and the "Louis Quatorze" inkstand. By far the largest group of objects, however, consisted of "portfolios for drawing room tables" inset with pearl glass and variously decorated with views of historic buildings such as Warwick Castle, Stratford-on-Avon Church, Windsor Castle, Eaton Hall and Bath Abbey, or famous London landmarks such as the Houses of Parliament. Other exhibits included finger-plates, several glass panels of different sizes – including one decorated in the style of the French 18th century artist Jean-Antoine Watteau – and a pair of cabinet doors inset with panels of "birds, flowers etc." against a white ground. Alongside these were trays, candlesticks, pole screens, decorative paper panels for ship cabins, and boxes of every description – in short, a display of goods that was typical of most leading japanners at the time.

Lane also showed at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, where he was awarded a prize medal for his painted glass, and at the Paris Exhibition in 1855. His contribution to the London exhibition, which included large pieces of furniture, was the most ambitious of all his displays. To select from the *Official Catalogue* of the exhibition but a few of the articles he exhibited is to demonstrate, yet again, his leading edge as a japanner: a "table with inlaid border of mother-of-pearl and landscape and figure centre," a cheval screen decorated with flowers on a white ground, pole screens, a reading table, cabinets on stands, and a chess table, as well as "panels for ship cabins, rooms and other decorations."

Also listed in the catalogue of Lane's exhibits were "Specimens of patent gem painting on glass invented by Miss E. Tonge, Boston, Lincs. [i.e. Lincolnshire]" – an interesting item which was almost certainly included as a means of avoiding Theodore Hyla Jennens' patent of 1847 for so-called "inlaid gems."

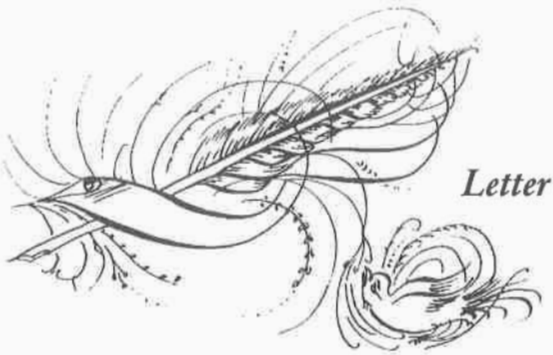
Before the patent for pearl-glass had expired, Woodward & Midgley, a firm of Birmingham japanners, mindful of its success, resolved that the patent "had to be rivalled or imitated," and "soon turned out representations of every picturesque ruin or building in England." They neatly evaded any infringement by using colored tinfoil instead of pearl which, according to Woodward's son (writing some years later in 1877), was not only cheaper and better for moonlight scenes, but "sufficiently near enough in effect to the patent to spoil its sale." In Woodward's opinion, had his father and Midgley patented their idea, "it would have paid better than the one it was meant to rival." In time, it too was copied by "other and lower houses, and acquired a vulgarity" which Woodward sharply observed was "of little use to its introducers."

When Gibson's or "Lane's" patent finally expired in 1858, pearl glass pictures were taken up by other manufacturers, particularly in Wolverhampton, where they became especially popular for ornamenting the lids of decorative tin coal boxes which, depending upon their shape, were known as vases, scoops or purdoniums.

Both pearl glass and tinfoil pictures were vulnerable styles of decoration. The glass was very fragile on account of its having to be "as thin as is compatible with sufficient strength," and the copal varnish often deteriorated, causing the paint, gold leaf and pearl to detach from the surface. Today, damaged examples abound and give an impression of tawdriness, but in a pristine specimen - albeit vulgar to some tastes - when the picture appears very much at one with gloss of its japanned and gilded frame, the original allure is readily apparent.

The time is therefore long overdue for Thomas Lane to be reassessed. He was, and rightly remains, best-known as the leading maker of japanned goods inset with painted glass panels, but he cannot be held responsible for them all, and nor should he be judged by these alone. He was an all-round japanner whose name should be included in the reckoning when any good, but unmarked, example of japanned tin or papier mâché is under discussion.

Yvonne Jones of Birmingham, England, is a regular contributor to the ***Decorator****. She writes the column "Letter from Birmingham" which appears in each issue. Trained as a painter, she taught art in colleges before joining Wolverhampton Art Galleries & Museums in 1971. There she organized the exhibition of Georgian & Victorian Japanned Ware of the West Midlands. Today, Jones' emphasis is on researching and lecturing on the history of the japanning industry. She has written a book on the history of papier mâché that will be published in the near future.*



Letter from Birmingham

by Yvonne Jones

Occupational Hazards in the Japan Trade

In response to factory exploitation in the early 19th century, Charles Turner Thackrah, a Leeds surgeon, undertook the first serious study of the new industrial diseases. From the many trades listed in his book*, I have selected a few of those which impinged upon the japanned papier mâché and tinplate industries. If his comments conjure up the impression of a generally ailing workforce, it should be borne in mind that these were very desirable occupations in relation to many.

"JAPANNERS have varied and moderate muscular exertion, in rooms not crowded, and generally well ventilated. The majority are females; but men are employed in the 'dressing' and 'painting.' The dust scraped from the paper articles is too heavy to injure the atmosphere, and that which arises from 'rasping' does not appear to affect the workmen. In the 'turning,' however, a fine dust is produced so copiously as to impair the digestive organs, and excite serious bronchial disease. This process, the 'stoving' [see below] ... and the 'painting' from its posture and confinement, appear to be the only injurious parts of the employment. Japanning, at least as carried on at Birmingham, is remarkable for the comparatively late period at which the day's labour commences. The operatives begin at eight and end at seven and have the usual intervals of an hour and a half for meals."

"Of the DRESSERS** of JAPANNED GOODS, the few who are employed in 'turning,' inhale much fine dust. Pallor, sickness, impaired appetite, difficulty in breathing, cough,and expectoration, are the results. Few men, if any, bear the employ constantly for many years."

* Thackrah, C.Turner, *The Effects of Arts, Trades and Professions, and of Civic States and Habits of Living, on Health and Longevity.* London, 1832 (2nd ed.)

** "Dressing" was the final shaping and smoothing of papier mâché "blanks" prior to their being japanned.

The Bookshelf

American Painted Tinware: A Guide To Its Identification

by Gina Martin and Lois Tucker

Published by The Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Cooperstown, NY. Volumes 1, 2 & 3.

Reviewed by Sandra Cohen

The story of early America's arts and crafts, including American painted tinware, is embraced in the history of the United States and its people at the grassroots level. Many of their personal legacies are preserved by historical societies which have long been custodians of Americana. They house rich collections of antiques, personal letters, periodicals, ledger entries and inventories that offer a window to life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some collections tell the story of the American tinsmiths, their shops and their tinware.

American Painted Tinware: A Guide To Its Identification, Volumes 1, 2 & 3 by Gina Martin and Lois Tucker are filled with quotes and passages revealing an historical context and process for recognizing and distinguishing these decorative wares. Other sources used include Maryjane Clark, Margaret Coffin and Shirley DeVoe, HSEAD members who were avid researchers and authors of several books on tin, the tinsmiths and their shops. For these reasons and more, Martin and Tucker's books will be a valuable tool to collectors, decorative artists, teachers and students of Americana and country painted tinware.

The most visually striking aspect of these books is the collection of antique decorated tin. Each book contains over a hundred colorful pieces that are described in every detail and stroke. One is reminded that these bread baskets, snuffer trays, trunks and trinket boxes, while serving a utilitarian purpose, also have charming aesthetic appeal that brightened the lives and homes of early settlers.

A Pennsylvania bread tray, c. 1820, painted with vibrant colors. The floor of the tray was crystallized by treating the tinplate with acids.

Volume 1 introduces Edward Pattison, a Scottish immigrant, who in the mid eighteenth century pioneered the manufacturing of household tinware in the first tinshop in Berlin, Connecticut. It was this industry that "made peddling a major business ... and gave rise to the Yankee Peddler." Volume 1 also covers the Upson Shop, the North Shop, and the Butler Shop. Volume 2 explores the role of the peddler along with the many shops and tinware of Stevens Plains, Maine. The tinware produced by the Filley families of Connecticut, New York and Philadelphia is surveyed in Volume 3. The entrepreneurial talents of the Filley family resulted in the establishment of several shops that flourished from Bloomfield, Connecticut to St. Louis, Missouri.

These tinshops became the major suppliers of tinware. Coffee pots, candle holders, tea canisters, tumblers, trunks, sugar and snuff boxes are just a few of the tinplated items that were found in many homes on the new frontier and featured throughout the three volumes of Martin and Tucker's books, which trace the history and decorative style of a craft considered to be truly American in origin. Although there are similarities in the designs on tinware from different shops in different parts of the country, the authors demonstrate their expertise in reading the fine details in the language of country painting and assigning the different painted pieces to their shops of origin. Signed pieces are easier to place, but the unsigned pieces need to be scrutinized like any fine early work of art where the signature is revealed through the painting. For example, red and green are dominant colors on Connecticut pieces. A scalloped band across the front may indicate an Upson piece. Large red balls thought to be stylized flowers with tightly wrapped petals may be from a Filley Shop. Maine shops issued pieces with fruits and a wide variety of more realistic flowers. Symmetry is a signature of the Butlers of New York.

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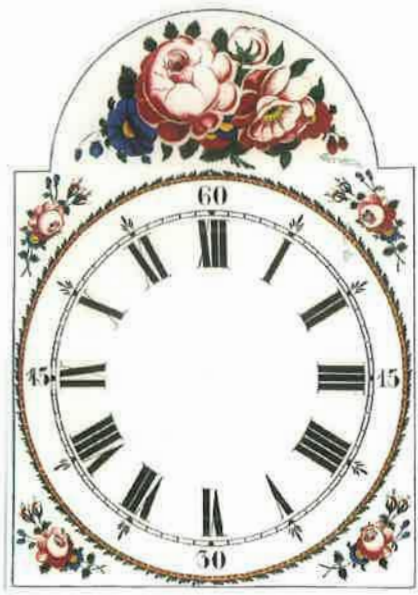
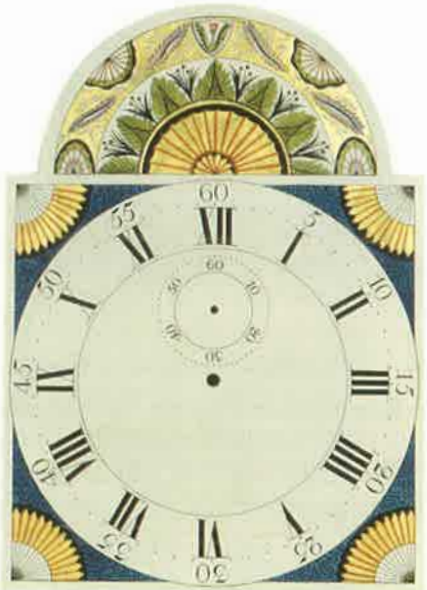
Specialist Award in Clock Dial Painting

Carol Buonato



Specialist Award in Clock Dial Painting

Carol Buonato



Specialist Award in Clock Dial Painting

Carol Buonato

Carol Buonato is our first *Specialist in Clock Dial Painting*. Carol graduated from Dickinson College with a B.S. and Honors in Biology.

She was inspired and encouraged by the late Peg Watts, a much loved and renowned HSEAD Master Craftsman and Master Teacher who was also very active in clock associations.

Carol and her husband own *The Moon Dial,* an antique clock repair and restoration business in Pennsylvania.

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Betty Taylor
Stenciling on Tin

Lois Tucker
Country Painting

Mary Ellen Halsey
Stenciling on Wood

Lois Tucker
Country Painting

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Members' "A" Awards: Theorems

Susan Laime

Alice Smith

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Stenciling on Tin

Amy Finley
Theorem

Elaine Dalzell
Clock Dial

Members' "B" Awards: *Stenciling on Tin*

Robert Flachbarth

Members' "B" Awards

Tamara Lindsey
Theorem

Lois Tucker
Country Painting

Pamela Benoit
Theorem

Roberta Edrington
Special Class

Amy Finley
Theorem

Members' "B" Awards

Tamara Lindsey
Theorem

Danielle Lott
Country Painting

Danielle Lott
Stenciling on Wood

Alexandra Perrot
Stenciling on Wood

Members' "B" Awards

Danielle Lott
Country Painting

Joanne Balfour
Stenciling on Wood

Betty Taylor
Country Painting

Lois Tucker
Freehand Bronze

continued from page 17

Much of the Pennsylvania tinware has a red background. These few clues are only the tip of an investigative process. Every piece of tin in this book is described and categorized. *American Painted Tinware* is an exhaustive education in country painted tinware.

Historians, teachers, collectors and decorative painters will all find the format of these books to be "user friendly." Brief but substantive family histories of the shops owners and tinsmiths introduce the chapters. This is followed by numerous color illustrations, heavily annotated, of antique decorated tinware. The quality of the pictures is remarkably clear allowing one to distinguish all the charming details of the designs. This section is followed by a delineated list of characteristics of that particular shop, which is followed by a section of line drawings of the designs by the authors, their elements and the brush strokes used to create them. This sequence is repeated throughout the three volumes presenting the reader with a thorough analysis that facilitates the greatest understanding and appreciation for this craft

Generous appendices summarize and reinforce the information in these books. All contain appendices for: a checklist for identifying the decorated tinware; a list of tinners and peddlers; examples of ledger entries and/or inventory; a glossary; and a bibliography.

American Painted Tinware: A Guide To Its Identification, Volumes 1, 2, & 3 by Martin and Tucker is the only comprehensive guide to identifying painted tin. These books are a necessary and valuable asset to everyone interested in this subject. To the authors' credit, they have combined meticulous research, color photos of originals, and detailed drawings to guide both the collector and the ingénue toward a better understanding and appreciation of early American decorated tinware.

A tea canister from Volume 2 of "American Painted Tinware, A Guide To Its Identification."

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

Large and unusual square trunk from Volume 3 of "American Painted Tinware: A Guide To Its Identification."

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The Decorator is published twice a year by
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Subscription rate is $18.00 for two issues (add $3 per year for Canada).

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