

The Decorator

Spring 2005

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Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc.

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Front cover: "Hornet & Peacock." A painted tall clock dial with naval battle scene in arch. David Wood (Newburyport, MA), circa 1815. Photograph courtesy of Paul J. Foley.
Back cover: Close-up of dial arch scene on front cover. Photograph courtesy of Paul J. Foley.

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Ladies' Jewelry Safes

by Martha Wilbur

These two Victorian "ladies' jewelry safes" were purchased in the late 1960's from an antique dealer who found them in a home in Essex, Connecticut. They are made of iron, and each weighs 30 pounds. I showed them to Shirley DeVoe who said she had seen just one other safe before, but that it was smaller and had just stripes for decoration.

The two safes were certainly painted by the same person or in the same shop. I am sure Libbe Joy, who received the safe from her friend, Thomas Shriver, filled the first and then was given the second, which is much simpler.

Above: Side view of Safe # 1

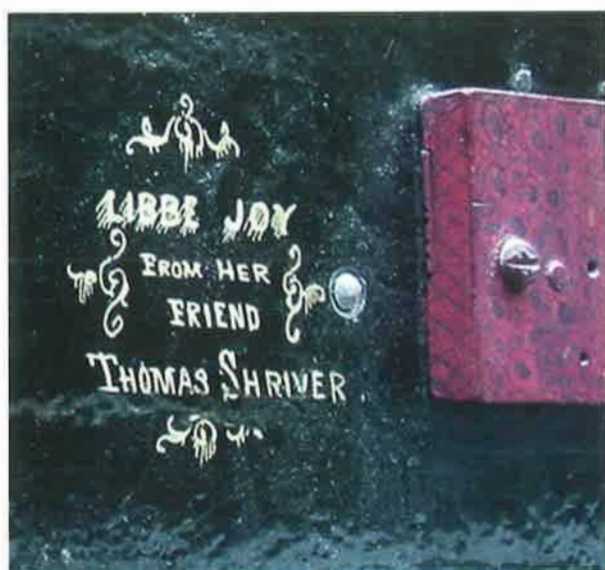


Front and top of Safe #2





When opened, Safe # 1 reveals hand decorated knobs on the drawers and an inscription on the door (below). The knobs appear to be bone. Note the inverted "acorn" feet. 9.5 x 8 x 8.75".



Decorated side of Safe # 2



When opened, Safe # 2 also shows hand decorated knobs on the drawers. The knobs are porcelain; the feet are "Chippendale style." 11 x 8 x 8.75".



Photographs courtesy of Richard Wilbur.

In Moses Eaton's Footsteps: Stenciling a Wall in the Moses Eaton, Jr. Homestead



The Moses Eaton, Jr. homestead. Photo courtesy of Historic Properties.

by Polly Forcier

In the spring of May 2004, as luck would have it, the new owners of the historic Moses Eaton Jr. homestead in Harrisville, NH, stopped in my shop to purchase stencils. They wanted to replicate the wall decoration in the front parlor, originally stenciled by either, or both, Moses Eaton and Moses Eaton Jr. I told my friend, Catherine Seiberling Pond, a freelance writer who came up with a brilliant proposal: why didn't I offer to restencil that room and she would write an article for *Old House Interiors*. My shop, MB Historic Decor would benefit from the publicity, and the Jorgensons would have a restenciled room. What a concept! The Jorgensons climbed on board and soon found themselves totally involved.

An original panel remained behind one door, and wallpaper needed to be removed from the rest of the wall. Husband Ray signed up to remove the wallpaper and repaint the room; but what color had that room been? The existing panel was so grimy from almost 200 years of wood smoke and oil smoke, and the wall beneath the wallpaper revealed so little that it was apparent only that it had once been either salmon or rose.

Serendipity! Ray produced a painted board uncovered from the clutter found in the summer kitchen. When propped upon the mantle, all the ghosts of color in the pores of the plaster seemed to nod in affirmation: it was a strong salmon pink! Using today's technology at

Editor's Note: Modern day stencil artists are often called upon to replicate the work of now-anonymous craftspeople. It is rare however, to have the opportunity to recreate the work of one of the most well-known original stencilers, in their actual residence.



A section of the original wall was left intact.

the paint store, the color was perfectly matched and applied. Checking in with Joyce about the color, I found her in stunned shock. It was such a strong color, and she had so hoped it would have been the rose. Still, she was determined to follow through with the historically correct evidence.

The Moses Eatons' (father and son) historic stencils were cut from a heavy oiled paper, and with use, were re-cut time and again. In order to

be accurate, I traced and cut some of the stencils as I found them on this wall. The work began with staggered help from lots of people: Joyce and her daughter, me and my daughter, a neighbor and Ray, who looked forward to the end of his workday, to witness and join in the process. We enjoyed each other's company over tea and homemade soups, family dinners and stenciling. Five grandchildren stenciled their own motifs behind the interior door, and the youngest, baby Eathan, looked on.

As the frieze and chair rail and baseboard horizontals became effective, Joyce would exclaim that she loved it. "If only we could stop right there!" Then came the verticals and one of the two

motifs all over, first and second colors." If only we could stop right there!" And finally done, the last motif, all over, with the special weeping willow motif reserved for the over-mantle. "I really love it!"

It is not perfect but it is captivating. And guess what! The original, overwhelming salmon pink has been broken up with pattern and covered with enough red and green that the strong color has retreated to a lowly background position, bringing harmony to the wonderful primitive designs of Moses Eaton Jr.



Close-up of original wall pattern.

Photographs courtesy of Catherine Seiberling Pond.

Future Meetings

Fall 2005	Killington, VT	September 15-18 (TFSS)
Spring 2006	Burlington, MA	April 21-23 (FSS)
Fall 2006	Killington, VT	September 14-17 (TFSS)
Spring 2007	Cooperstown, NY	April 20-22 (FSS)

Naval Battle Scenes from the War of 1812

on American Clocks

by Paul J. Foley



Our second war with Great Britain was declared in June 1812 as the result of long simmering disputes about America's right to sail the seas without hindrance and to trade as a sovereign nation. The war lasted two and a half years and involved a series of often indecisive and sometimes tragic land skirmishes. Detroit was surrendered to the British without firing a shot. In the summer of 1814, British troops burned Washington, D.C. The war ended in a stalemate, and the final Battle of New Orleans was fought after the peace treaty had been signed.

When war was declared, the British were preoccupied with the ongoing European war and the defeat of Napoleon. Even so, few thought the meager American navy had a chance to stand up against the powerful

Above: "United States & Macedonian." A reverse painted tablet with gilt frame on a banjo clock. Lemuel Curtis (Concord, MA), circa 1820. On October 12, 1812, the US Navy frigate "United States", commanded by Captain Decatur, fought and captured HMS "Macedonian" between the Canaries and Azores.

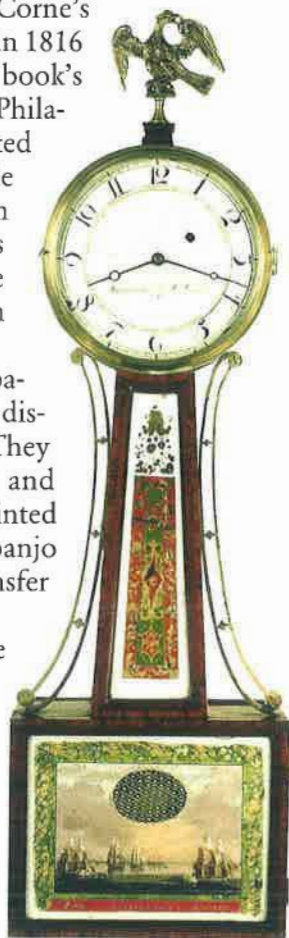
British fleet. But early in the war, the United States won a series of decisive naval battles against British war ships. These repeated naval victories were an embarrassment to Britain and a galvanizing source of patriotic pride in the U.S.

The first major naval battle was won by Captain Isaac Hull, commander of the USS *Constitution*, who decisively won this battle against HMS *Guerriere*. This boosted morale not only in the navy but nationwide, and Hull and his crew became instant celebrities. The encounter on August 19, 1812, is considered a classic among naval battles. The *Constitution* received the nickname "Old Ironsides" due to the legend that during the battle cannon balls bounced off her thick wooden sides.

A series of other naval victories followed. These battles were almost immediately illustrated by artists depicting the victorious scenes to satisfy the public's patriotic fervor. Four paintings representing the stages of the naval engagement between the *Constitution* and *Guerriere* were painted in 1812 by artist Michele Felice Corne. He also painted or sketched most of the other major battle scenes. Corne's images were engraved and printed in book form in 1816 by Abel Bowen in *The Naval Monument*. This book's frontpiece was drawn by John Ritto Penniman. Philadelphia marine artist Thomas Birch was also noted for his War of 1812 paintings which were made into engravings. Philadelphia engraver Benjamin Tanner published a series of naval battle prints which he distributed and advertised around the country. (See copy of Tanner's advertisement on page 14.)

These painted naval battle scenes became patriotic icons that were reproduced as prints and distributed in many cities around the country. They were replicated on many items both during and after the war and were very popular as reverse painted tablet scenes on Willard patent timepieces (banjo clocks), tall clock dials, federal mirrors, and transfer printed pottery.

Many ornamental painters copied these paintings and engravings. Those who are known to have painted these scenes on clock tablets include Spencer Nolen (1784-1849),



"The Constitution's Escape." A Lemuel Curtis (Concord, MA) banjo clock with reverse painted tablet, circa 1815. See close-up of tablet on page 18.



Above: "Hornet & Peacock". A banjo clock by Joseph Dyar (Concord, MA) with reverse painted tablet, circa 1820. See close-up of tablet on page 22.

In a newspaper advertisement for prints of "Perry's Victory," Benjamin Tanner mentions the earlier prints of "Macedonian" and "Guerriere" and advises that they are for sale in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.
Boston Daily Advertiser, March 4, 1814.
(Courtesy of Boston Public Library.)

Samuel Curtis (1785-1876), Benjamin B. Curtis (1794-1860), and John R. Penniman (1782-1841).

The most memorable naval battles were the *Constitution & Guerriere* and the *Battle of Lake Erie*. These scenes were the most popular and frequently reproduced at the time.

The Treaty of Ghent was signed on Dec. 24, 1814 officially ending the war. But due to poor communication, the news did not reach many of the soldiers and sailors for weeks. On Jan. 8, 1815 General Jackson defeated the British forces in the Battle of New Orleans. Two significant naval battles also occurred in 1815 after the war was officially over.

Companion to the Macedonian and Guerriere. **TANNER'S PERRY'S VICTORY.**

BENJAMIN TANNER proposes to engrave and publish by subscription, a correct representation of the *Capture of the British Fleet on Lake Erie*, by the American Squadron, commanded by Commodore PERRY, after an original Drawing by BARRALET, representing the most interesting period of the action from correct information afforded by the Officers of the American Fleet.

This Print is intended as a Companion to the *Capture of the Macedonian*, and will therefore be the same size, 22 by 28 inches, and will be executed in the same style.

The Price to Subscribers will be Five Dollars in the sheet. Subscribers to the *Macedonian* will be entitled to it at Four Dollars.

Subscriptions received by the Publisher, No. 74, South Eighth-street, Philadelphia; Charles D. Vecchio, No. 136, Broadway, New-York, and P. MONDELLY, No 63, Cornhill, Boston.

Those Gentlemen who are in possession of the *Macedonian*, engraved by Mr. Tanner, or of Mr. Tiebout's *Guerriere*, will need no other recommendation of the subject of the present proposal: they are to know that it is to be done by Mr. Tanner in his style of unexcelled taste & skill, and is particularly intended as a match to those elegant and superior prints, besides the advantage of saving 20 per cent in the price to those who have been subscribers to the former works.

The Public who have not seen the engraving referred to, will find on calling at the Stores above named, a specimen of the graphic art, highly honorable to this Country, and seldom equalled in the Capitals of the Old World.

March 4.

ep3w

These naval battle scenes were popular on tablets of Willard patent timepieces made in Boston and Concord, MA between 1815 and 1835. At the beginning of the 20th century, these banjo 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 and the Chelsea Clock Company in particular made high-quality reproductions, some of which copied the original tablet scenes. Some of the best reproduction tablets were painted and signed by Boston ornamental painter Daniel J. Steele (1888-1927).

References:

- Bowen, Abel.* The Naval Monument, Boston, MA, 1816.
Foley, Paul J. Willard's Patent Time Pieces: A History of the Weight-Driven Banjo Clock, 1800-1900, Norwell, MA, 2002.
Groskin, Jerome C. "Banjo Tablets - The War of 1812 Revisited." NAWCC Bulletin, Number 130, October 1967, Columbia, PA.
Roosevelt, Theodore The Naval War of 1812. New York, NY, 1882. Reprinted by Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 1987.



"Capture of the Cyane & Levant." An unsigned gilt frame reverse painted tablet from a banjo clock, circa 1815-20. On February 20, 1815, the frigate Constitution was the only US Naval ship at sea. Sailing off the coast of Gibraltar, she engaged and captured two smaller British sloops, the Cyane and Levant. Because word of the war's end did not get out in time, this battle was fought after the peace treaty was signed.



Left: "Constitution's Escape from the British Squadron." A Riley Whiting (Winchester, CT) stenciled column and splat shelf clock with reverse painted tablet, circa 1830.

Below: Close-up of tablet.

Note: Early in the war on July 17, 1812, the US Navy frigate *Constitution*, commanded by Captain Isaac Hull sailed into the midst of a five-ship British squadron off the coast of New Jersey. For three perilous days, Hull out-sailed and out-maneuvered his adversaries to barely escape.





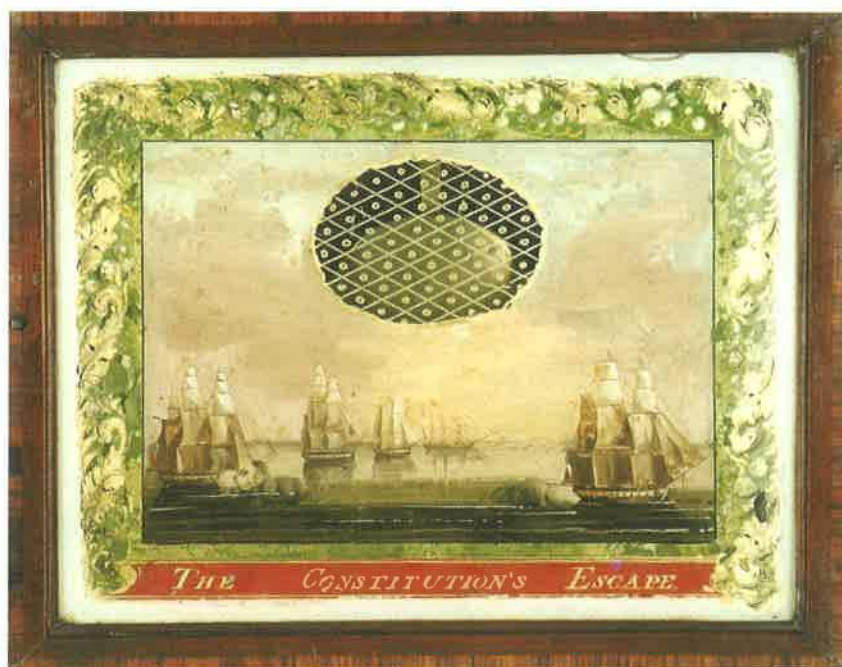
"Belvidero, Guerriere, Ecluse, Shadow, Constitution, Africa. The Constitution's Escape." A gilt frame reverse painted tablet on a banjo clock. David Williams (Newport, RI), circa 1815-20.



"The Constitution's Escape." A gilt frame reverse painted tablet from an unsigned banjo clock. (Concord, MA), circa 1820.



"The Constitution's Escape from the British Squadron." A gilt frame reverse painted tablet from a banjo clock. Samuel Whiting (Concord, MA), circa 1820.



"The Constitution's Escape." A reverse painted tablet from a banjo clock. Lemuel Curtis (Concord, MA), circa 1815.



Left: "Constitution and Guerriere-1812." A gilt frame banjo clock with reverse painted tablet. Waltham Clock Company (Waltham, MA), circa 1917.

Below: Close-up of tablet signed by artist, "D. J. Steele," on lower left.

Note: On August 19, 1812, the US Navy frigate *Constitution* commanded by Captain Isaac Hull engaged HMS *Guerriere* near Bermuda. In less than two hours, the *Constitution* destroyed the British ship. It was the first single-ship victory of the war, and caused intense embarrassment in Britain.





"Hull" depicting Constitution & Guerriere. A gilt frame reverse painted tablet of the naval battle titled "Hull" in honor of Captain Isaac Hull. Waterbury Clock Company (Waterbury, CT), circa 1915



"Hull" depicting Constitution & Guerriere. A reverse gilt frame painted tablet of the naval battle titled "Hull" in honor of Captain Isaac Hull. Waterbury Clock Company (Waterbury, CT), circa 1918.



"Victory on Lake Champlain," signed by artist, "D. J. Steele," on lower left. A gilt frame reverse painted tablet on banjo clock. Waltham Clock Company (Waltham, MA), circa 1917.



"Wasp and Reindeer." A reverse painted tablet from a mahogany frame banjo clock. Waltham Clock Company (Waltham, MA), circa 1908. On June 28, 1814, the US Navy sloop Wasp defeated the British brig Reindeer.



"Hornet & Peacock." A gilt frame reverse painted tablet on a banjo clock. Joseph Dyar (Concord, MA), circa 1820.



"The Hornet Captures the Peacock." A gilt frame reverse painted tablet on a banjo clock. Lemuel Curtis (Concord, MA), circa 1819.



Close-up of dial arch scene from the David Wood shelf clock below.

Right: "Perry's Victory." Mahogany shelf clock by David Wood (Newburyport, MA), circa 1815-20.

Notes:

In the Battle of Lake Erie (September 10, 1813), Commodore Oliver H. Perry with a squadron of ten U.S. ships defeated the British flotilla and won control of the Upper Great Lakes. After the British surrender, Perry issued his famous dispatch "We have met the Enemy and they are Ours."

Facing page: The US Navy ship *Hornet*, commanded by Captain James Lawrence, sank the British brig *Peacock* off the coast of Brazil on February 24, 1813.





"Lake Erie-Perry's Victory-Sept. 10, 1813." A mahogany frame reverse painted tablet on banjo clock. Waltham Clock Company (Waltham, MA), circa 1920.



"Lake Erie-Perry's Victory-Sept. 10, 1813." A mahogany frame reverse painted tablet on banjo clock. Waltham Watch Company (Waltham, MA), circa 1928.



"Perry's Victory." A gilt frame reverse painted tablet on a banjo clock. Aaron Willard, Jr. (Boston MA), circa 1815.



"Perry's Victory." A mahogany frame reverse painted tablet on a banjo clock. Waltham Clock Company, (Waltham, MA), circa 1920.

Naval battle scenes reproduced on clock tablets:

The Constitution's Escape - July 17, 1812
Constitution & Guerriere - Aug. 19, 1812
United States & Macedonian - Oct. 12, 1812
Wasp & Frolic - Oct. 13, 1812
Constitution & Java - Dec. 29, 1812
Hornet & Peacock - Feb. 24, 1813
Chesapeake & Shannon - June 1, 1813
Enterprise & Boxer - Sept. 5, 1813
Battle of Lake Erie (Perry's Victory) - Sept. 10, 1813
Wasp & Reindeer - June 28, 1814
Battle of Lake Champlain - Sept. 11, 1814
Constitution's Capture of the Cyane & Levant - Feb. 20, 1815
Hornet & Penguin - March 23, 1815

All photographs courtesy of the author.



Untitled "Constitution & Guerriere." A gilt frame reverse painted glass from a banjo clock. William Cummins (Roxbury, MA), circa 1815-20.

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



The Bookshelf

American Fancy: Exuberance in the Arts 1790-1840

by Sumpter Priddy

Published by Chipstone Foundation, Milwaukee Art Museum, 2004
Heavily illustrated in color, 267 pages

Reviewed by Sandra Cohen

It is no surprise that America, during the period of 1790–1840 would give birth to the arts and crafts celebrated in *American Fancy: Exuberance in the Arts* by Sumpter Priddy. Emerging successfully from their war for independence, Americans established a constitutional government, a Bill of Rights, and elected its first President, George Washington. Over the next 50 years, the United States nearly doubled its territory and increased its



Rufus Porter, "Landscape Mural with Farm Scene," Dr. Francis Howe House, Westwood, MA, 1838.
Paint on plaster on chestnut lath. 69" x 93 1/2". Courtesy, Donald Heller and Kimberly Washam.

William Thompson Bartoll, "Girl with Cat," probably Marblehead, Massachusetts, ca. 1840. Oil on canvas, 27 1/2 by 22 1/8".
Courtesy, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, VA.



population from approximately 3 million to 22 million. By 1840, many Americans with a pioneering spirit began to journey across the Great Plains to the Far West. Exuberance was undoubtedly a personality trait that was reflected in almost every aspect of life on the new frontier.

The profile of the American derives itself from a mosaic of immigrants with their different languages, traditions and backgrounds. This intellectual and cultural diversity created an environment rich in imagination and ideas. The vernacular of American Folk Art during this period tells this story. The invention of the kaleidoscope contributed to the creative juxtaposition of elements that border on the abstract. Organic and naïve patterns and designs are sparked by a flight of fantasy and executed with a vibrant sense of color. However, foremost there is a feeling of freedom to experiment with decoration, painting techniques and personal expression. "Fancy came to signify almost any activity or object that delighted the human spirit or stirred the imagination— it occupied people's minds, pervaded their homes and shaped their perspectives on the world."

American Fancy: Exuberance in the Arts 1790-1840 is a catalog representing an exhibit initiated by the Milwaukee Art Museum. The collection from various sources was also displayed at the Peabody-Essex Museum and the Maryland Historical Society. However, this publication far exceeds the standards of most catalogs. Conscientious attention is given to every detail, resulting in an artful presentation. Using calligraphic style for some of the text including literary excerpts that introduce the chapters as well as the chapter numbers enriches this volume. The binding is sewn, and the cloth cover in Chinese red and gold is echoed in the two attached colored ribbons there to mark your place.

These are unusual attributes, and they only begin to illustrate the quality of this publication.

There are 28 pages of chapter notes. The author offers an extensive bibliography which he basically categorizes his primary and secondary sources which, not surprisingly include John Locke, Alexis de Tocqueville, Edgar Allan Poe and so many more literary figures who play so well in the text. You will be familiar with many authors such as Nathaniel Whittock, Robert Bishop, Jean Lipman, Zilla Lea, Natalie Ramsey, Ann Eckert Brown, Shirley DeVoe, Cynthia Schaffner and Susan Klein, Dean Fales, Paul Foley, Wendall Garrett, Deborah Lambeth, Nina Fletcher Little, Rufus Porter and others.

The stage is set with an introduction to "Fancy," and in chapter two "Fancy Takes Form." Paintings, decorative objects, textiles, earthenware and more appear on the scene. A lovely little watercolor by Samuel Folwell depicts a drawing class in his school. So many of these arts were the handiwork of schoolgirls or young women. Needlework, watercolor drawing, quilting and more bring to mind *Anonymous Was A Woman*.

"Fancy Furnishings" in chapter four is filled with colorful painted furniture, faux finishes, reverse painting on looking glasses and clocks. The color plates and close details enable you to appreciate the exhibition over and over again.

In addition to the creative imaginings of an artist is the serendipitous meeting of science and design. Scottish physicist, David Brewster, experimented with light, mirrors, glass and a hollow cylinder, and he aptly named his invention the "kaleidoscope," Greek for "beautiful image viewer." The marriage of the kaleidoscope and Fancy gave birth to a legacy of designs. The mesmerizing beauty of the colorful collages popularized the device for its entertainment value, but its beauty is also echoed in quilts, grained furniture and our own tinware patterns with asphaltum and crystallized decoration, all illustrated in vivid colored plates.

"Spirited Ornamentation," "Bold Furniture for All Americans" and "Wares to Enrich Home and Mind" take us into the familiar territory of HSEAD's basic disciplines. Heavily annotated color plates include some beautiful examples from the Societie's collection. Picture decorated boxes, tables and chairs, clocks and cornice boards. Admire the sophistication of the professional hand-craftsmanship of American Sandwich Glass, English Staffordshire, the naive simplicity of Rufus Porter's landscape murals, and the early schoolgirl arts.

By the mid-19th century, a focus on social reforms, industrial changes, and The Panic of 1837 precipitated a brief but crippling economic depression that gradually eclipsed the flair for Fancy. On one hand, less money was available for the traditional production of Fancy. However, new tools and manufacturing resulted in less expensive goods. Initially, quality suffered, but as always, the times and different attitudes inspired

innovations in the arts and crafts. Designer, Orson Fowler expressed the pervasive feeling that "A fancy man will build a fancy cottage; a practical man, a convenient home."

From cover to cover, Priddy's text is filled with descriptive research on the pieces in the exhibit, with literary excerpts and social commentary on the times and lives in the late 18th and early 19th century. His prose is a pleasure to read and the chronological and historical context offer such reasonable and spirited inspiration for this Fancy style. For those who are seriously interested in this genre, *American Fancy: Exuberance in the Arts 1790-1840* is a welcome treatise on an exhibit of arts and crafts that is so infrequently available for viewing in museums today.

Below: Chest with drawer, Rhode Island, c.1830. Pine and painted decoration. Private collection; photo, Gavin Ashworth.)

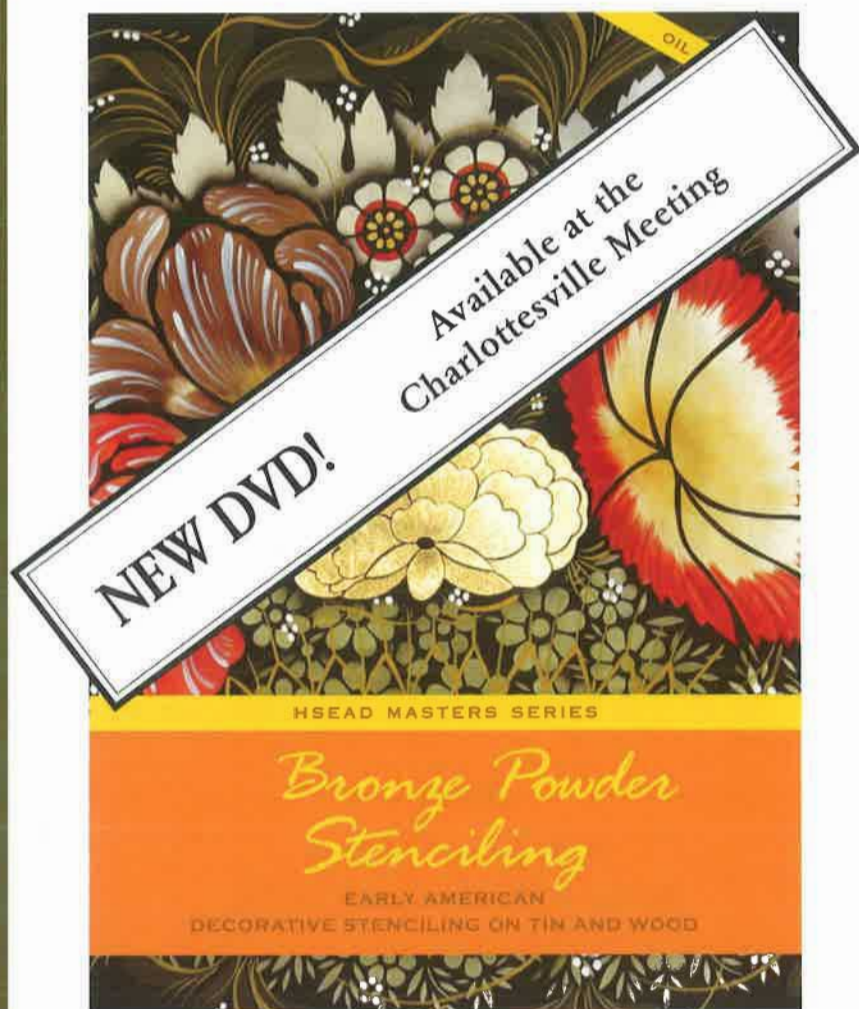


Photographs from American Fancy: Exuberance in the Arts 1790-1840 by Sumpter Priddy, published by Chipstone Foundation, Milwaukee Art Museum.

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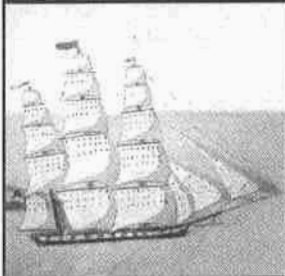
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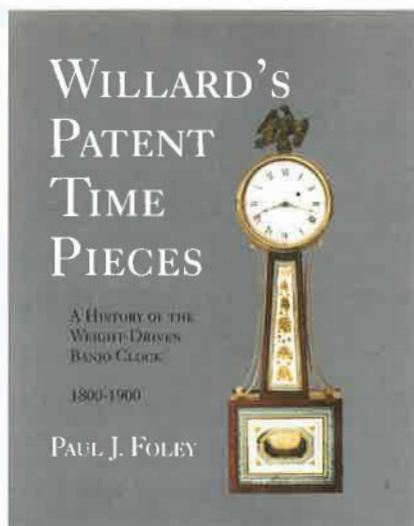


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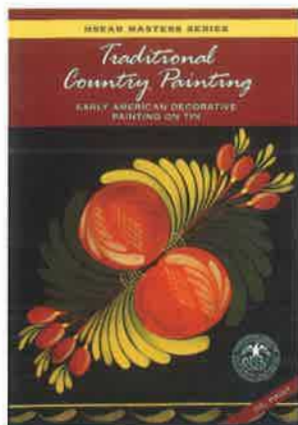
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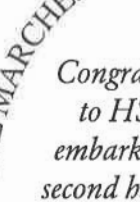
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