The Decorator

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Front Cover: Mirror clock made by James Collins, Goffstown, New Hampshire. Free standing columns with entasis flanking case between base and entablature painted black. Rest of visible case birch. Reverse stenciled design in silver and gold on alternating red and green background using floral, foliate and shell motifs. Photo courtesy of the New Hampshire Historical Society.
Back cover: Panel from a Benjamin Morrill clock. Photo courtesy of Lynne Richards.

Office Address:

The Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc.
at the Farmers' Museum
PO Box 30, Cooperstown, NY 13326
607-547-5667
Toll-free: 866-30H-SEAD
www.HSEAD.org • info@hsead.org

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.

HSEAD's Vision and Mission: HSEAD will be and will become recognized as a preeminent national authority on Early American Decoration. HSEAD will be a strong, growing organization committed to educating an increasingly diverse audience. Through the use of expaned marketing and educational outreach, HSEAD will promote the relevance of Early American Decoration's craftsmanship and design. HSEAD will provide an opportunity for future generations to gain new skills by seeing the beauty of the past through traditional and modern methods, as well as appreciating the values of preservation and authenticity.

Letter from the Editor

Our first article is on the "Schnader" chair patterns that are in our collection. Some of my favorite pieces of furniture are chairs because there are so many beautiful designs. Chairs represent all of the periods of furniture that have been produced and the Schnader chair patterns are examples of one person's attempt to record and preserve our history in Pennsylvania.

I have always loved clock dials and have always been particularly fascinated by the New Hampshire reverse painted clock panels found on "mirror clocks". When Shirley Berman was retiring from teaching and wanted to sell many of her things, I found a beautiful clock panel labeled Benjamin Morrill, Boscawen, New Hampshire. This, of course, led me to Mary Perry, being an antique dealer in New Hampshire and a great contributor to HSEAD, to ask her if she would write an article about the New Hampshire mirror clocks. She knew the curator at the New Hampshire Historical Society and this article was born.

At the grand opening of our research center, four of our members chose to reproduce some of the pieces that are at Old Sturbridge Village. These were displayed in the glass cases in the Visitors' Center at the entrance to Old Sturbridge Village. Our next article will introduce you to those members and show you the original pieces and their wonderful reproductions of the Old Sturbridge Village pieces.

Sandra Cohen has contributed to this issue by writing an article about Walter Wright, who was one of the contributors to the heritage of HSEAD that we are now trying to preserve. He was a wonderful artist and many of his pieces and patterns can be found at the research center.

Sandra also reviewed the book *Expressions of Innocence and Eloquence: Selections from the Jane Katcher Collection of Americana, Volume 2.* This sounds like a book that everyone would enjoy.

Lynne Richards,
Decorator Editor

Detail from a Schnader pattern.

Pennsylvania Chairs and the "Schnader" Patterns

By Lynne Richards

When one of our members went to the DAR Museum in Washington, DC in December of 2011, they weren't expecting to see examples of Pennsylvania chairs. But indeed they did, and this is what started my quest for more information on these beautiful chairs. Not much is known about these, other than when you see them, you immediately know that they came from central Pennsylvania.

In 1990, Marie Purnell Musser published her book *Country Chairs of Central Pennsylvania*. In it she wrote about the country chairs found in Central Pennsylvania, mostly in the five counties of Centre, Union, Snyder, Mifflin and Juanita. Although country chairs had many different types of spindles and

On this page: Detail, and full view of a pair of Pennsylvania chairs, from a set of six in the DAR Museum, Washington, DC. Photos courtesy of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

backs, there remained a slightly different chair that acccording to Marie "as compared to the country chairs from Pennsylvania many of these chairs would be categorized as 'fancy chairs'". These chairs were recognized by having either a rectangular back or angel wing back, with a fiddle shape for the perpendicular splat. The pattern on the back splat of the chair had either country painting or freehand bronze decoration. The angel wing chairs showed the wings done in real gold leaf. The freehand bronze decoration was mostly done in gold, silver and bronze powders in many different patterns. Many of them had shells, stylized flowers and urns with fruit done all in freehand bronze with painted overstrokes. The country painted backs had roses, vines and leaves along with either the gold leaf angel wings or just a squared off back.

The story of how HSEAD acquired many of the patterns connected to Pennsylvania chairs is an interesting one.

HSEAD's contact came from Raymond Schnader of Royerstown, Pennsylvania. Mr. Schnader was a former carriage painter who learned his skill from his father. In addition to carriage painting, he was also a sign painter and at times turned out landscapes, according to a newspaper article written June 22, 1946. His love of painting eventually evolved into restoration and painting of trays, chairs, chests of drawers, settees, dough trays and similar items, first done in his two-bedroom bungalow, and then at his barn out on the Marietta pike which he made into a studio. When he did restoration on pieces of furniture he said that "every piece of furniture that was brought to him is copied exactly to size and color, and this master form is used as a guide in the repainting job later on."

Thanks to the Maryland Chapter of HSEAD, which bought and donated his collection to HSEAD, and to Linda Lefko, Charlene Bird and her husband who took pictures of all of them, HSEAD has the Schnader chair

At left and top: Details of original decoration on a Pennsylvania chair owned by Lynne Richards.

These two pages show a selection from the HSEAD catalog of "Schnader" patterns.

patterns for sale. You can see them on the HSEAD website "store". You can view the online catalog, choose the ones you want and order. They are listed by Freehand Bronze and Painted patterns.

There is also a printed catalog available to members, and you can contact the Cooperstown office for information.

A Schnader bibliography

The following sources show some examples of decorated Pennsylvania chairs of this period.

American Painted Furniture 1660-1880, Dean A. Fales, Jr., 1972, E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York.

American Painted Furniture 1790-1880, Cynthia V. A. Schaffner and Susan Klein, 1997, Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., New York.

Country Chairs of Pennsylvania, Marie Purnell Musser, 1990, Musser, Mifflinburg, Pennsylvania.

The Ornamented Chair: Its Development in America, Zilla Rider Lea, 1960, Charles E. Tuttle Company, Rutland, Vermont.

"Pennsylvania Chairs" by Ruth Hershey Irion, from *The Decorator Digest*, Natalie Ramsey, Editor, 1965, Charles E. Tuttle Company, Rutland, Vermont.

Windsor-Chair Making in America: From Craft Shop to Consumer, Nancy Goyne Evans, 2006 University Press of New England, Hanover, New Hampshire.

At top and bottom: Details of original decoration on Pennsylvania chairs owned by Joseph Rice.

New Hampshire Mirror Clocks

By Mary Perry

Figure 1: Black and gold split balusters. Front surface of door frame and corner blocks also gilded. Reverse stenciled design of stylized floral motifs in green, red, purple and yellow. Unless otherwise noted, photographs are courtesy of the New Hampshire Historical Society.

The style of wall clock known as the New Hampshire mirror clock was developed in Boscawen, New Hampshire by Benjamin Morrill and possibly his brother-in-law Joseph Chadwick. The clocks have a round white painted steel dial visible through a circular reserve of clear glass in the upper panel of a two-panel glazed door. The clear glass reserve has a gilt border usually surrounded by reverse stenciling in a floral, shell or foliate design. The lower door panel, about twice the height of the upper, is mirror. The outer framework of the door is usually decorated with split balusters with ring and cylinder turnings, alternately gilded and painted black, on all four sides. Applied projecting corner blocks have stamped brass rosettes. They all have some variety of eight-day weight powered movements made of brass and steel. They were introduced around 1825 and were popular until 1838.

The New Hampshire mirror clocks or looking-glass clocks get their name from looking-glasses popular in Boston and on up the east coast in the early 19th century: the architectural or Sheraton looking-glass (1780-1820), the American empire or baluster looking glass (1810-1840) and the later ogee or flat mahogany veneered mirror. Clockmakers freely copied various design aspects of these looking glasses and sometimes added simplified versions of columns and pediments seen on formal coastal furniture and clocks.

Clockmakers were essentially trained as metal workers, jewelers or in watch repair. They did much of their own work with the help of one or

Figure 2: Mirror clock c. 1830. 8-day time only cast brass weight-driven movement, pendulum suspended from stud at upper right corner, right side of plates slanted to clear pendulum crutch, upper left corner cut away, winds at 10:30. Round painted iron Roman dial signed James Collins, Goffstown. Darkly stained pine case with formerly gilt and painted half columns surrounding looking glass and painted glass dial surround, brass corner mounts.

Photo courtesy of the National Watch and Clock Museum, Columbia, PA.

more apprentices, making their own brass castings, weights, dials, small springs and sometimes cases. Wheels were cast blank, and teeth cut on hand-operated gear engines. They purchased glass, mirror and bells. Little is known about who did their decorative painting.

New Hampshire clockmakers worked in competition with Connecticut and Massachusetts makers to supply the local market with attractive, efficient timepieces in the latest fashion. Nearly all New Hampshire clockmakers working between 1815 and 1840 had learned their trade in small family businesses or apprenticed to fine clockmakers. Their names are seen on tall case clocks, spire or tower clocks, and fancier wall and shelf clocks. But orders for these custom clocks were insufficient to provide a satisfactory living, so those that succeeded innovated, by varying designs to improve timekeeping accuracy, moving from 30 hour to 8-day movements, or by saving on materials.

Benjamin Morrill, a young innovative clockmaker working in Boscawen, New Hampshire, is credited with the design of the New Hampshire mirror clock and making major changes in clock mechanisms, notably developing his "wheelbarrow" movement that reduced the need for expensive brass. As compared with Willard's Massachusetts wall clocks, Morrill's mirror clock eliminated the need for finials, dial bezels, metal feet and banjo sidearms. The single door required fewer hinges and catches. Cases, whether self-made or made by a neighborhood cabinetmaker, were made of cheaper local wood without inlay or carving. The bright stamped brass rosettes and bold gold leaf ornamentation added the status symbols customers sought.

Figure 3: Not all mirror clocks were made in New Hampshire. This fine example was made by Frederic Wingate in Augusta, Maine.

Figure 4: This New Hampshire mirror clock by Abiel Chandler has reverse stenciled design of stylized foliage in red, gray-green, gold and silver on a black ground.

The Morrill mirror clock that hangs in the Boscawen Historical Society Museum *(figures 7 & 8)* shows some of the changes Morrill made in his clock mechanism, putting the weight on the left and the pulley on the right *(figure 8)*. Other changes are hidden by the dial.

Other Makers of "Mirror Clocks"

Joseph Chadwick (1787-1868), also of Boscawen, was Benjamin Morrill's brother-in-law. He was slightly older than Morrill and possibly apprenticed to Timothy Chandler of nearby Concord. Morrill (1794-1857) may have depended on Chadwick to get his start, but seems to have been the more inventive of the two. They had shops/homes next door to, and across the street from each other. In 1830 Morrill and Chadwick produced about 100 mirror clocks. By 1840, Chadwick had moved on to Vermont, and Morrill was making musical instruments such as melodeons and seraphines (a keyed wind instrument, similar to a reed organ).

Abiel Chandler (1807-1881) lived his entire life in Concord, some nine

Figure 5: The case of this James Collins clock is grain-painted in black and brown (woodwork on door largely repainted, reverse painting retouched).

Figure 6: Another James Collins clock. Tinsel painting is a copy of original.

miles south of Boscawen. He and two clockmaking brothers were sons of clockmaker Timothy Chandler. Abiel's name appears on some classical carved mahogany veneer lyre wall clocks. He is listed as a clockmaker with a Main St. address in 1834, but by 1850 is listed as an instrument maker on South St. and from 1856-1880 as a horticulturist. He was born too late for clockmaking to provide a lasting career.

James Collins (1801-1882) worked in his father's shop in Goffstown from 1826-1844. In *New Hampshire Clocks and Clockmakers*, Charles Parsons states "they made tall clocks, a striking banjo and a wide variety and quality of mirror clocks. There is quite a variety in details in the movements showing some ingenuity, if not a fine quality finish."

James Cole (1791-1867) was born in Boston and learned the trade from Edward Moulton. Cole became a prominent Rochester citizen and New Hampshire state legislator. He had a brick store where he sold jewelry, repaired watches, made spoons and ladles, and manufactured clocks.

Leonard W Noyes (1779-1867) went to Boston at age 17 to work as a clerk and manager on Long Wharf. He moved to Nashua at the age of 44 to

Figures 7 & 8: Exterior and interior of the Morrill mirror clock that hangs in the Boscawen Historical Society Museum. It hung in a prominent Boscawen home for several years before the owner donated it to the BHS about five years ago. The museum is housed in the old Boscawen Academy, built on land donated by Joseph Chadwick and flanked by Chadwick and Morrill homes and/or shops.

Figure 9: Benjamin Morrill clock with a mahogany case and a panel with reverse stenciled stylized foliage in red, green, gold and silver on black ground.

Figure 10: This James Collins clock has a scalloped gilt border around circular reserve of clear glass at center of upper panel. Reverse stenciled design of stylized motifs in gold on red ground.

manage a cotton mill. He had a clock factory in Nashua from1832 to 1838, making tall clocks, banjos, some strikers and New Hampshire mirror clocks. The factory had no power and used treadle (foot) operated lathes.

Author's Notes:

The NHHS collection of New Hampshire mirror clocks were primarily collected by Donald K. Packard and Charles Parsons.

Packard and his wife summered in New Ipswich, New Hampshire and collected locally-made furniture and New Hampshire clocks. He wrote on New Hampshire mirror clocks in the *Boston Clock Club Bulletin and Special Papers* sometime

Figure 11: James Collins clock with entire visible case painted red-brown (replaced glass panel and mirror).

Figure 12: Clock by Leonard Noyes. Reverse stenciled with simplified anthemion in spandrels, each on a triangular grass-green patch spotted with red against a blue ground.

between 1934 and 1939, and continued to write on clocks for the National Association of Watch Collectors in 1948 and for the NHHS in 1950. His family gave eight New Hampshire mirror clocks to the NHHS in 1971 and 1978.

Charles Parsons acquired his mirror clocks between 1953 and 1971 and gave them to the NHHS as part of a larger clock collection in 1972 before the publication of his book. Parsons amassed a huge New Hampshire clock collection while living in the old Collins house in Goffstown. He donated 100 clocks to the New Hampshire Historical Museum in 1972.

Figure 13: The case of this Abiel Chandler clock shows influences of two periods: the flat, tapered pilasters on the front reflect the classical revival, but the scroll top is a more traditional form. Glass panel with eglomise shells is possibly a replacement.

Figure 14: Mirror clock by Benjamin Morrill. Frame has cup and ring baluster turnings gilded (high burnished and matte), cylindrical turnings painted black. Reverse painted free-hand with dot-diaper pattern and leaf design in green, black and gold.

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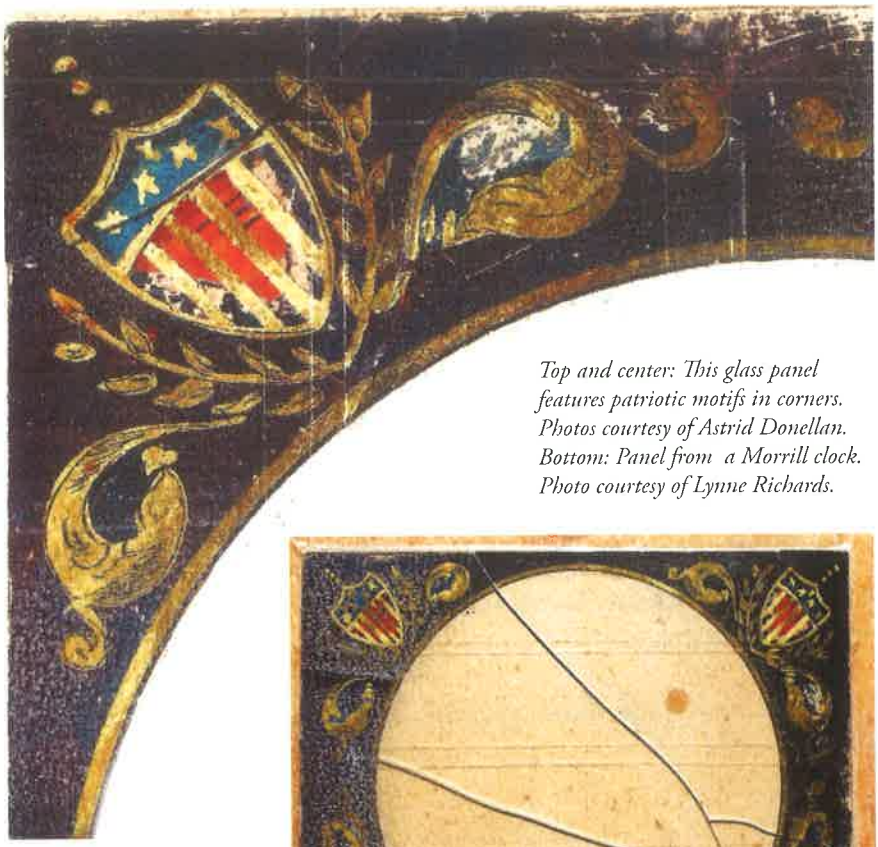
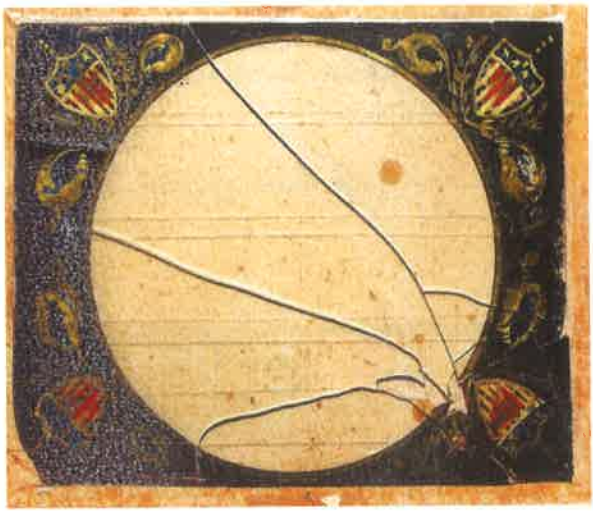


Top and center: This glass panel features patriotic motifs in corners. Photos courtesy of Astrid Donellan. Bottom: Panel from a Morrill clock. Photo courtesy of Lynne Richards.



Stenciling in 1927

By Joseph Rice

I came across the advertisement shown below in an old magazine - *The Antiquarian*, October, 1927 issue.

The Mount Holly Historical Museum in Belmont, Vermont was able to provide some information, from a granddaughter of the advertiser, Edward Everett White, who passed away in 1931.

"He was a prominent citizen: He played drums leading school children to the cemetery on Memorial day, ran a rowboat rental business and had a bandstand on the lake, and rented several cottages around town. His wife provided room and board to summer boarders for what today sounds like a ridiculous amount of $7.00 with room and three meals a day for a full week."

Neither the Historical Society nor the family have one of these kits, as they were not made up in advance, but were assembled as ordered.

Has anyone seen one of these kits? They were advertised (at least according the magazines I have) for several years, so I am surprised I haven't turned one up in my antiquing forays.

Many thanks to Robin Eaton, Curator of the Mount Holly Community Historical Museum, Belmont, Vermont.

Side by Side

By Lynne Richards

At the opening of the HSEAD Research center last October, four of our very talented members each exhibited a reproductions of an item from the Old Sturbridge Village collection. This endeavor started in December of 2010 when Pat Smith, Sandra Strong, Betsy Salm and Rhonda Nolan met with Rebecca Beall from Old Sturbridge Village. Pat Smith says that "Rebecca was our liaison and guide and asked what aspect of painting and/or decorating we had an interest in pursuing." We were then allowed to look through their archives.

At top: Sandra Strong's version of OSV's painted slide-top. Bottom: Original box from the OSV collection. Photograph courtesy Old Sturbridge Village, Inc.

Three of our members reproduced decoration on wooden items: Sandra Strong painted a wooden box, Betsy Salm replicated a piece of school girl art, and Rhonda Nolan decorated a cornice board. Pat Smith chose to paint a reproduction of a portrait of Sarah Davis Spurr.

Slide-Top Box

The slide-top box painted by Sandra is small (7" long, 4 ½" wide, 4"high), but the charming paint decoration probably made this a young woman's humble, yet prized posession. As is often the case with replicas of painted items, seeing the paint as it would have appeared when new can change our ideas about the use of color in the nineteenth century. The OSV original, while in an excellent state of preservation, shows the effects of time and environment on a painted surface. Most notable is the transformation of the bright blue background as originally applied, to a much deeper and more slate-like color. Very little is known about the box in the OSV collection, and we cannot know if it was painted at home, or done by someone who painted professionally.

Top view of the OSV box.
Photograph courtesy Old Sturbridge Village, Inc.

"School-Girl" Box (Betsy Salm)

Betsy Salm painted the second box, and with its "school girl-decoration", it might show the contrast in social status and wealth between a young woman sent for a refined education, and the possible owner of the slide-top box.

It is described as a compartmented wooden box lined with pink paper. The painted decoration has trompe l'oeil herringbone inlay on all edges except the top and bottom of the lower section. The top is painted with a cornucopia with peach, melon and grapevine within a grapevine border. The front and sides have swags of roses and convolvulus, and the lid has simple band of leaves, red berries, and a five-petaled blue flower. On the back is a round cartouche of oak and laurel leaves with "JT" in the center; below this is a banner with "Ann Somes Trask" (one name in each section of banner). It is lined with pink

At top: OSV box decorated by Ann Somes Trask; below is Betsy Salm's version.

paper, and inside the lid is the pencil inscription "ANN".

The box 13¼" long, 9 1/8" wide and 3 5/8" high, and is signed by Ann Somes Trask, daughter of Israel and Judith (Somes) Trask. She was born in Gloucester, Massachusetts July 14, 1795, and married Zebedee Cook, Jr., Esq. of Boston on April 2, 1834. Ann probably made this box for her mother Judith Trask, although possibly for her sister Julia Maria Trask, born in 1791.

Ann Trask attended Susanna Rowson's Academy in Boston. Old Sturbridge

Above: OSV box decorated by Ann Somes Trask.

Village also owns her silk embroidery of Cymbeline (20.6.12), worked while she was a student at Mrs. Rowsons. See *The Magazine Antiques*, September 1970 for illustration of "painted Fable by Sarah Eaton of Dedham, Massachusetts done while she was a student there." Other examples of painted furniture done at Mrs. Rowson's Academy are known.

Elias Nason's biography of Susanna Rowson lists "The Misses Trask" of Gloucester as pupils at the school, implying that either Julia Maria (b.1791) or Adeline (b.1793) or both girls, also attended Mrs. Rowson's Academy in Boston.

Left: OSV's portrait of Sarah Davis Spurr, ca. 1844.

Sarah Spurr Portrait (Pat Smith)

Pat Smith painted a version of OSV's portrait of Sarah Davis Spurr. The original was probably painted in 1844, when Sarah was about two years old. In her portrait, Sarah wears a white dress and holds an orange in her right hand. She has blue eyes and blond hair, and a romantic landscape appears in the left background.

Pat says that in the sur-

Above: Pat Smith's version of the Spurr portrait.

rounding archives of flat primitive paintings at OSV, Sarah Davis Spurr stood out with her appealing smile, white dress, and piece of fruit. The classical ambience presented spoke of a more schooled artist, and Pat felt a link with the classical background. Sarah was the daughter of John Wheelock Spurr and Sarah Davis. She was born in Charlton, Massachusetts June 28, 1842, and died in Westborough, Massachusetts, February 27, 1914.

Cornice Board (Rhonda Nolan)

While the origin of this cornice board is uncertain, OSV believes that it is from New York. Rhonda notes that some of the stencil motif is exactly the same as on the one shown in *American Folk Art Decoration* by Jean Lipman, where it is described as a cornice for Venetian blinds from New York. The board is 44½" long and 8½" wide.

As with the slide-top box, the background color shift as the original aged can give the mistaken belief that early items were only painted in muddied, subtle colors. The replication by Rhonda shows that this cornice must have been an eye-catching element in the room.

Above: Original cornice board from the OSV collection.
Photo Courtesy of Old Sturbridge Village, Inc.

Below: rendition of the OSV cornice board by Rhonda Nolan.

About the Artists:

Sandra Strong - A Connecticut resident, Sandra has taught EAD classes in her home studio since 1993. She has given workshops for HSEAD chapters and at the Fall Workshop meetings, and has been HSEAD Chapters' Coordinator since 1990. "HSEAD and its members have enriched my love of Early American Decoration."

Pat Smith - For over thirty years, Pat Smith studied and practiced HSEAD techniques with Mary Jane Clark. Pat says that "Mary Jane instilled an awareness of the classical ties in ornamentation as well as the history of the times." Pat also has attended weekly classes in oil painting as well as various oil painting workshops.

Betsy Salm - For over thirty years, Betsy has channeled her creative and artistic talents into the study, appreciation and replication of Early American decoration and now, since 1996, American Academy School Girl Art. Ms. Salm commissions fine cabinet makers to create period furniture and accessories using elegant woods of curly (tiger) and birds-eye maple, mahogany, satinwood, ebony, and flame birch. Elaborate motifs are then delicately and whimsically applied, using India ink and watercolors. Her book, *Women's Painted Furniture 1790 - 1830: American Schoolgirl Art* provides a detailed insight of the history and techniques of School Girl Art.

Rhonda Nolan lives in the southwest corner of New Hampshire in the small town of Winchester. Rhonda researches, records, preserves and reproduces authentic historical patterns using early American decorative techniques on furniture, trays, boxes, window cornices and other home accessories. Her specialty is 19th century bronze powder stenciling and freehand techniques as well as decorative wood graining. Rhonda has studied with master craftsmen, as well as conducting independent study and research at museums such as Winterthur, The Farmers' Museum, Historic New England and Old Sturbridge Village. Her work has been displayed at Strawbery Banke Museum in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and at Restoration and Renovation in Boston. In 2008 and 2009, *Early American Life* magazine honored her as one of "America's most accomplished heritage artisans" and listed her in *The 24th Directory of Traditional American Crafts.*

The Legacy of Walter Wright

Charter Member & President of HSEAD 1959-1961

By Sandra Cohen

HSEAD's research, recordings, photography collection, publications and instructional videos comprise an "embarrassment of riches" that document members' dedicated interest and talent in early American decorative arts. HSEAD's treasury of historically authentic recordings/patterns is truly a unique resource in this genre. These major assets serve as important parts of our mission that we share through a number of educational programs and exhibitions. It is with appreciation and respect that the Society pays tribute to those members who have contributed to this body of work. Just as we promote historical authentic decorative art, we also acknowledge the pioneers of these arts as well as those who have researched and recorded originals to preserve them for posterity and recognize their relevance to America's history in the arts.

In the Spring/Summer 1996 issue of *The Decorator*, Shirley Baer wrote an enlightening biography of Esther Stevens Brazer that offers a personal and professional profile of her early life and

Top: Detail of design from a deep dish owned by Mrs. Clyde B. Holmes, Belfast, Maine, recorded by Walter Wright in 1951.

Right: Walter Wright.

work as a researcher, author, artist and teacher of early American decoration. Brazer's students, HSEAD's Charter Members, established the Society in her memory. Their goal was to preserve and promote an understanding of historically authentic early American decorative art, an appreciation and skill imbued in them by their mentor.

Today, Brazer's research is housed at the HSEAD Research Center in the David Wight House at Old Sturbridge Village, along with a major portfolio of our patterns from several other researchers and artists, many of whom knew and/or painted with Brazer. Their studies and recordings provide the historical references for the Society's reproductions of decorative arts found in the homes of early American settlers. The Society will continue to recognize and honor them in *The Decorator*. Among those avid researchers and artists is Walter Wright.

Walter Herron Wright was born June 10, 1915, to Ernest and Lois (Straw) Wright, at his grandparents' home in the village of Stowe, Vermont. The one consistent feature about Walter, and one that was observed quite early by all who knew him, was his love of drawing. Walter completed twelve years of school, but his textbooks better served him as a 'cover-up' for his sketching during class instruction. His younger sister, Eleanor, recalled that whenever the teacher called upon Walter (drawing behind his books), he always knew the answers! What quickly became apparent to family, friends and his teachers was that Walter was a very bright and talented young boy.

The family attic, with its abundance of "treasures," combined with Walter's ability to take found objects and transform them into artistic expressions, fueled

Box lid pattern worked in metal leaf and freehand bronze, from an original owned by Mrs. William Carum.

his imagination. One of Walter's earliest favorite rooms, this attic was a place where cardboard boxes became a designer dollhouse, with fashioned wallpapers, curtains and handmade period and painted miniature furniture. His sisters, Jean and Eleanor, the recipients of his creative endeavors, were happy to do his chores while Walter enveloped himself in his creativity.

Their father, the head of the household, had a shop and worked as a plumber and electrician, and Eleanor fondly recalled that while she and her sister helped organize their father's inventory, Walter would "busy himself making beautiful things." When Walter was sixteen years old, Mrs. Smith, teacher and a painter herself, recognized that Walter was a gifted artist.

Among the family furnishings, boxes and trunks, were two violins "worse for wear," prompting Walter to explore and nurture his appreciation and natural talent for making music. He took the instruments to a gentleman, reverentially referred to as "the old man," who repaired them and kept one as payment. After "the minister's wife taught Walter to read and play music," he formed his own band, Walt's Kings, where cousins and friends (with their coronet, xylophone, piano and drums), entertained at local dances and radio stations. After breaking his wrist in an accident, he left the violin and taught himself the piano accordion. Walt was a natural, and played with the popular Pony Boys, a name given to groups of improvisational jazz musicians. Designing his own shirts and ties, he sometimes played with the famous Fats Waller and Danny Wynn's Sun Dodgers, but this was all an amusement on the side.

Detail of a snuffer tray pattern in metal leaf taken from an original by Julia White, Delmar, New York shows Wright's skill at finely detailed work.

Walter's reputation as an artist preceded him and became his passion. When a local couple opened a dairy business they asked him to design a logo for their bottled milk. Today, a milk bottle, featuring Walter's "Skiing Cow" logo, is a collectible and valued at $200! He also worked in the Stowe Ware Studio where he designed and decorated wooden plates,

bowls, trays, etc. He began to record his own designs and patterns with instructions for others to follow. Eleanor recalled that an agent from New York City was quite impressed as he watched this young self-taught artist at work. She believed that Walter inherited their mother's artistic skills. "Mother had three children to raise, but she was very creative; a skilled seamstress, she hooked rugs and she loved to sketch portraits." Their home reflected her artistry as well as "Walt's."

In April 1942, Walter received military orders to report to Fort Devens, but

Three snuffer tray patterns painted by Walter Wright. Top: Original owned by Florence Wright, copied by Peg Watts 1952; Middle: This pattern demonstrates his skill with stormont work; Bottom: From an original owned by Gina Martin and copied by Walter in 1951.

because of poor eyesight, he was rejected. However, determined to serve his country, he entered Merchant Marine Training, graduated in October of 1943 and sailed with the Merchant Marine until November of 1945. His scrapbooks indicate that during his trips abroad, he continued to sketch landscapes, local architecture and men at sea. World War II ended, and he returned home to Stowe where his mother, who was very ill, sadly passed away in January, 1946.

Walter remained in Stowe and resumed his life as an artist. He converted the barn into a studio where he decorated items and shared his skills by teaching and producing painted works for sale. Some of his early works were commissioned by America House in NYC. In 1948 Walter spent some time in Arlington, Vermont where he lived near Paul Benjamin with whom he became a partner in Benjamin's Warm Brook Shop. Eleanor remembered that Paul referred to Walter as a "genius, a man of many natural, artistic skills." Both men worked together, Paul honing woodenwares and Walter decorating them. In 1950 Walter wrote and published, *Twenty Patterns for Decorating Wood.*

Eleanor recalls that a woman, who had moved from the Montpelier area, immediately recognized Walter's natural talent, was very encouraging and introduced him to her friend, Esther Stevens Brazer, who also became his friend and teacher. Walter's appreciation of historically authentic decoration prompted him to travel to visit numerous libraries and museums where he could study, research and paint from original art work. His sister's home and his letters document his experiences, discoveries and recordings.

Like most artists of early American decoration, Walter thrived on discovering original painted tinware and learning and sharing the early techniques used

Design from an original lace edge tray owned by Charlotte Reed, Larchmont, New York.

Card tray design copied in 1948 from an original owned by Louise Dearing, Royalton, Vermont.

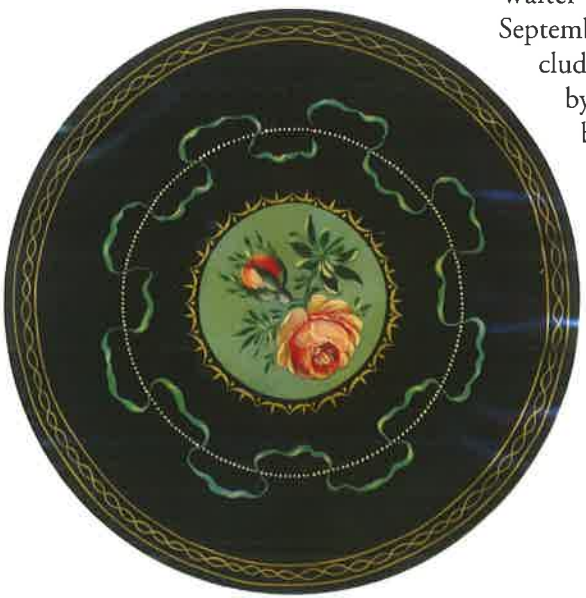
to achieve the beauty reflected in these original artifacts; many of his works document from whom the originals were borrowed and with whom he painted.

Ruth Bogni, an HSEAD member who taught during the 1940s, 50s and 60s, noted that Walter would arrive unannounced, paint with her for a couple of weeks and then depart for his next painting destination to paint with fellow friends and teachers. He taught at Fletcher Farm in Ludlow, Vermont from the mid 1940s to the mid 1950s and continued to develop one of the largest personal pattern portfolios of early American decoration (numbering more than 1,500 patterns and tracings). He recorded patterns of Traditional Country Painting, Stenciling, Metal Leaf, Bellows, Victorian Flower Painting, Pontypool and Free Hand Bronze, (although his body of work seems to indicate his preference for Victorian Flower Painting, Pontypool and Free Hand Bronze). Walter was a Charter Member of the Society, a recipient of several "A" awards, Trustee and Society President from 1959-1960. He often gave demonstrations at the Society's Annual Membership Meetings, sharing his techniques and tips. His recordings accompanying this article as well as some of his artwork in his sister's home modestly represent the beauty and breadth of his work.

Walter earned his living by applying his artistic talents in many different ways. During the 1960s, Walter's work and correspondence convey that he spent winters with his sister and brother-in-law at their Del Ray Beach Hotel in

Bread tray decorated by Walter Wright, owned by Peg Emery. He painted it at the request of Austin Emery for Austin and Peg Emery's 10th wedding anniversary in 1958.. Photo courtesy of Lynne Richards.

Florida and summers in their hotel at Cape May, New Jersey where he created murals, and floral and painted decorations for special events. Health issues, worsening tunnel vision and loss of his driver's license limited his travel, but he continued painting from his apartment in Florida and sending his special hand painted Christmas cards to family and friends; his greeting cards have become cherished keepsakes.



Walter Herron Wright died in September 1974. His legacy includes fond memories shared by his friends and art shared by family, friends and admirers as well as hundreds of exquisitely hand-painted patterns, most referencing the originals and their owners with whom he often painted. These recordings stand as testimony to his tal-

Design taken from an original owned by Anne Waddell, Willimantic, Connecticut in 1951.

Toy furniture decorated by Walter Wright (photo courtesy of Eleanor Beckely)

ent and a tribute to the beauty of early American decorative art. A living testimony to Walter is his franchise of friendships that he fostered. His family and friends in the Society always speak of him with fondness and recall his quiet and tender demeanor as well as his phenomenal talent and creativity and his love of art.

Eleanor proudly displays her brother's work in her home. Hundreds of Walter's recordings of early American decoration (patterns that are part of the HSEAD Collection returned to the Society from the American Folk Art Museum) are housed in the HSEAD Research Center in the historic David Wight House at Old Sturbridge Village. Walter's portfolio amply reflects a legacy of early American decorative arts and his lifetime dedication and talent to promoting and preserving this genre.

Walter Wright playing the accordion. Photo courtesy of Eleanor Beckely

Acknowledgement and gratitude to the following: Eleanor Beckely, Walter Wright's sister, who graciously welcomed us into her home, granted us an interview and shared fond family memories of her brother; to Eleanor's daughter, Pauline Martin and to Richard Sample and Jan Gendreau, friends, who helped facilitate this visit and who shared their recollections of Walter.

Expressions of Innocence and Eloquence: Selections from the Jane Katcher Collection of Americana, Volume 2.

Catalog by David Schorsch and Eileen Smiles, Published by Yale University Press, Hard Cover, 451 pages, hundreds of color photographs fill every page.

Review by Sandra Cohen

American folk art continues to resonate with a small but grateful audience who respond to its naïve charm and endearing personal expressions that, above all else, convey a sincere and universal range of human experience and emotions as well as a variety of skilled craftsmanship. Modern art may challenge us with its abstract imagery and its subtle minimalism, and it may claim that its lack of specificity enables its universal appeal. However, early American folk art continues to enthrall many of us who are attracted to and touched by its naïve simplicity and its familiar traditional and representational style. Take for example, a brass locket with a watercolor portrait of smiling, wide-eyed, four-year old Harriet Mann (1834-1838) wearing a blue smock and holding her kitten; the memento is backed with an encasement holding a lock of her hair and somewhat unconvincingly inscribed, "Why should we weep that thou art free...sainted and loved? Farewell." Image and sentiment tug at common chords of love and loss.

Harriet Mann's locket is one of hundreds of works shared in *Expressions of Innocence and Eloquence: Selections from the Jane Katcher Collection of Americana, Volume 2.* (Vol.1 reviewed in the Fall 2007 *Decorator*). This tome further catalogues Katcher's abundantly rich collection of American folk art, and the public is fortunate to have an additional preview of more works from her collection. The book is also testimony to a hopeful future of hard copy publishing. This 11" x 11", 2" thick volume of treasures, the art covered jacket and embossed linen covers, its deliberate attention to graphics and layout, the quality of illustrations, artwork and printing on heavy stock with pages of appropriate background color, all endow this book with its value as a rare, unique and signature folk art publication. The experience of appreciating Katcher's folk art collection (most of her 18th and 19th century Americana come from New England, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia) through this book is the next best thing to viewing these works in person.

This presentation differs from the first introduction of Katcher's collection in that it is a presentation of select works modeled on five themes reflected in the Table of Contents: *Introduction*, the collector's curiosity and attraction to these works; *Family*, fascinating history of the families who owned these works; *Makers*, new information about the history of the artists and craftsmen; *Interpretation*, information that illuminates and expands our understanding of the works; *Connections*, attributes that relate specific pieces in volume one and two.

In the 'Family' grouping, we are treated to more of John Brewster's portraits of the Mygatt clan. However, we learn that behind the penetrating gaze of Col. Eli Mygatt (painted in 1799) is a commander of the 16th Conn. Militia Regiment who served in the American Revolution, 1776 -81. Is this a thoughtful reflection of both Ely and his wife, Mary, on the British raid on Danbury where "the village was unavoidably burnt," their home (and room where Mary lay ill) was looted and invaded leaving them with barely the clothes on their backs? Eli is said to have made a diary entry, "God give me guts," perhaps written on April 26, 1777, "the perfect time to do so."

The miniature portraits of John and Mary Marsh's children by Mary's nephew and artist, Edwin Plummer (1802-1880), are windows into the lives and promise of a future that children represent as well as a reminder of the fragile nature and brief lives of infants in the 18th century. The Marshes lost their first two children, as well as their youngest, Charles William. He is captured sweetly in profile, several months old, clasping his rattle and sitting-up in his yellow painted wooden cradle decorated with a "ubiquitous pattern produced by coach lace hand weavers along the eastern shore of Massachusetts." Charles William Marsh passed away at two and a half years of age.

However, Plummer's detailed watercolor portraits of their other children, Elizabeth, John, Moses and Mary, convey so much about family values, an enlightened view





of children and expectations of the family's sons and daughters. Their daughters holding flowers and pets suggests femininity, fertility and a nurturing maternal nature while their sons, with books and kites (echoing B. Franklin's scientific forays), convey an interest in the importance of literacy and acquiring knowledge. Inspired by these portraits, Robin Jaffe Frank's essay complements their likenesses with historical, philosophical and social commentary of the time, enriching our appreciation of them.

Paul D'Ambrosio (author of *Folk Art's Many Faces*) similarly explores several portraits by Ammi Phillips (1787-1865). Phillips, a prolific artist, portrays several members of the prominent Dorr family and their descendants who first settled in Boston in 1670, Lyme, Connecticut by 1719 and Chatham Center and Hoosick Falls, New York by 1778. The portraits reflect their success and status, and D'Ambrosio's account of the Dorr dynasty is a familiar story of an early American's military and civil service, entrepreneurial adventure, risk and pursuit of economic possibilities. Phillips captures the somber and thoughtful adult gazes, the children's delicate and subtle expressions of innocence, the deliberate props that mirror values from literacy to domesticity as well as the accessories, fashion and decorative furnishings that accompany wealth and social prominence. These attractive and painted furnishings capture our attention and our curiosity.

Attributing works to their "Makers" is a fascinating section that examines telltale elements and similarities while sharing

their anecdotal provenance and stories. The chapter, "Father (1813-1885) and Son (1839-1883): The Painted Furniture of George Robert Lawton, Senior and Junior," explores the recent recognition (1983) of this talented twosome. Two boxes with meticulously painted geometric decoration initially attributed to John Colvin of Scituate, RI, were ultimately attributed to George Robert Lawton Sr. and son. A compass point was employed to create their precisely elaborate designs, which are similar to those found on Pennsylvania made boxes. Rhode Island natives, the family moved to Wisconsin, (for reasons unknown) perhaps drawn by its natural resources and their potential or perhaps drawn by promotional materials to entice settlers.

One of the founders of Portage County, Wisconsin, Lawton Sr. was elected as Justice of the Peace. Father and son painted furniture, frames, a wall box and other furnishings in the Collection that illustrate complex and densely arranged painted designs. Lawton Jr., unlike his father, signed his work, helping curators distinguish between the two. The Lawton family returned to Rhode Island in 1876. However, the unsigned tall-case clock with its "compass-scribed geometric motifs.....with an adaptation of the freehand-painted representational imagery of his son's Wisconsin" decoration is directly related to the early boxes of Lawton Sr. and is sufficiently recognized as his work.

Traditions, celebrations, announcements and other commemorative expressions have been beautifully symbolized through decorative art. William Penn's Pennsylvania colony, primarily settled by Scottish Presbyterians and German speaking Lutherans, was known for its religious tolerance and was a welcoming environment for immigrants, including Jews. Pennsylvania Germans comprised approximately one-third of the state's population in the mid 1700's, and their household furnishings displayed distinctively colorful German motifs along with a manuscript art referred to as fraktur a combination of calligraphy and watercolor decoration that was used to compose birth and marriage certificates as well as other documents celebrating milestones and achievement.

Fraktur artists were numerous and prolific. One of the most prominent is Samuel Bentz (1792-1850), a schoolmaster known for both his fraktur and scherenschnitte (papercutting). This fraktur is a mizrach (Hebrew for east), which would have been placed on the home's eastern wall (orientation facing Jerusalem for prayer). The theme is traditional; the central motif is a menorah under an architectural pediment, surrounded by geometric motifs. Another work, the multi-cut and painted schenerschnitte, displays cut archways, draped with leafy vines and a heavily cut ornamented border.

In contrast to the decorative arts is "The Innovation and Refinement in Shaker Design" where the simple forms and utilitarian purpose are guidelines for Shaker ingenuity. Among the highlighted objects are the revolving chair, a spool box and a Sister's desk echoing its original New Lebanon form, a clean feminine, symmetrical design, slender tapered legs and the ubiquitous Shaker knobs.

Not so common were portraits of African Americans, and these two silhouettes (probably painted in Philadelphia in 1838-39) of a young couple, is attributed to James Gillespie (1793-after 1849). Paired portraits were often tokens celebrating engagements and marriage, and the pleasant, proud de-

meanor of the sitters and their formal attire reveal a personal enjoyment of 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' not afforded to all African-Americans at this time.

Finally, In "Continuing Themes and Connections," Katcher shares her personal perspective as a collector, how she experienced an immediate affinity for some works, and for others, how she developed a growing appreciation through her "comprehensive study" of the various mediums and expressions American folk art. For example, initially, Katcher was not drawn to American folk portraits; "I mistook a mood [in folk portraits] of seriousness for a scowl," but later discovered that their "way of life and comportment...were intended as touchstones for future generations." Katcher's second volume highlights treasures in her vast and eclectic collection, views them in the context of their makers, provenance and history that are explored in essays by several prominent specialists in this genre. This contextual perspective provides us with one discovery after another and deepens our appreciation of these works beyond the obvious attraction of craftsmanship and design.

The book concludes with a Catalogue of the Collection, a lengthy detailed description of each piece accompanied by a small color image. This scholarly treatise of early American decorative art is a reader-friendly and comprehensive exploration of naïve art and craftsmanship; this quality of this abundantly informative and attractive publication more than compensates for the dearth of literature in this genre.

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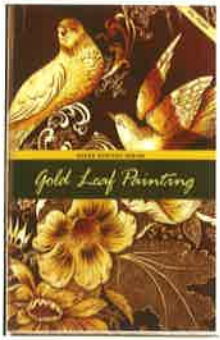

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