The Decorator

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The Decorator

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Contents

Front cover: Nolte Venice Caddy c. 1765 Green Velvet lining with Enamel Canisters
Back cover: Trunk, probably made in Philadelphia, 1823-60. Inscribed on underside: "Jacob Guickly Diese lade gegabt mir." (Jacob Quigly. This trunk was given to me) Winterthur Museum, bequest of Henry Francis du Pont 1967.821; photo, Lazlo Bodo.

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 expanded 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.

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Letter from the Editor

I was excited when Elaine Dalzell called to tell me that she had received permission to reprint an article that had been written for the Brandywine River Museum Antiques Show catalogue. The show was held in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania last year and the catalog highlighted original tin from Winterthur. Ann K. Wagner, who is an associate curator of decorative arts at Winterthur, was guest curator of the exhibition. She exhibited some wonderful pieces of painted, punched and pierced tin that we would never have been able to see had it not been for this article.

Pat Evans from the Genesee Valley Chapter supplied us with the next article with her trials and tribulations of restoring an old mirror. Perhaps she has given some of us ideas for restoration of our own pieces or at least allowed us to see that not all of these things are destined for the junk pile.

Last October, I asked Yvonne Jones to write an article about the theme of the convention to be held in Albany, NY in May 2012. Yvonne was kind enough to write a very interesting article about boxes and their decoration. Yvonne came from England, to be a speaker for our May meeting, and brought her new book, *Japanned Papier Mâché and Tinware c1740-1940.* It can be ordered from ACC Distribution whose email is: sales@antiquecc.com

At the last convention in Danvers, Dortia Davis received her Master Craftsman Award. I have included all of her pieces that she did to receive this coveted award. The requirements for Master Craftsman were included in *The Decorator* in the Spring 2011 issue and can also be found on the hsead.org website.

Anne Dimock received her Specialist Award at this meeting so I also included her pieces. I was amazed at all of the requirements that Anne had to complete to become a Specialist so I included them so you can appreciate the work that goes into it.

Sandra Cohen reviewed Ann Eckert Brown's book *Painted Rooms of Rhode Island, Colonial and Federal.* There are some beautiful pieces included in this book as well as in her other two books. If you don't have these books, you should add them to your library.

Lynne Richards

Trunk, attributed to tin shops in the area of Berlin, Connecticut, 1815-50. Winterthur Museum, bequest of Henry Francis du Pont 1959.2072; Lazlo Bodo

Pierced, Punched, Painted: Decorated Tinware from Winterthur

by Ann K. Wagner

Many tinsmiths working today make beautiful wares inspired by surviving antiques that would have been familiar to Americans born in the early 1800s. In its heyday, tinware was a modestly priced essential material used to create everyday household and workplace items. Early Americans in urban areas visited the tinsmith's shop to order lanterns and lighting fixtures, stove pipes, pans, pails and strainers, trays and a myriad of small boxes, covered bowls, and containers to keep food or documents dry and safe from pests. Some tin-smiths specialized in providing items for architectural use, such as rain gutters and downspout heads. Household tinware was generally considered to be disposable during one's lifetime. The thin material wore out and was vulnerable to environmental degradation. Thus, examples of colonial-era articles are scarce. Much of the surviving antique tinware was made between the War of 1812 and the early 1900s.

The collection of decorated tinware at Winterthur Museum was assembled by the institution's founder, Henry Francis du Pont. During the 1920s and the 1930s, du Pont acquired examples of finely painted and decorated tinware from antiques dealers in New England and Pennsylvania, in particular from Carlisle, Ephrata, Lancaster and York. His choices reveal a penchant for objects with strong red grounds and vibrant primary colors, which he displayed amidst the painted furniture, ceramics, woven textiles and other items in the rooms he decorated at Winterthur. Tinware items signed with a maker or owner's name or associated with a family history or specific tinsmith's shop were infrequent and prized finds; most of the collection is anonymous. Selected for

their decorated surfaces, the objects featured in this exhibition reflect decades of collecting by du Pont.

Tinsmith is the name given to craftsmen who cut out, shaped, seamed and assembled iron sheet metal into useful objects. They used hammers, anvils, cutting shears called tin snips, swages and swedges, iron wire, and a heat source of brazer with solder. A mid-1800s idealized illustration of a German tinsmith's workshop depicts typical wares and tools, including the large tin snips on a stump in the background. The profession originated in Britain and Europe, where iron was first rolled into flat sheets of uniform thickness using immense heavy steel rollers and then dipped into molten tin. A metal with a comparatively low melting point, tin bonds well with iron to create a shiny, white, durable surface coating that shields the iron core from the effects of moisture and heat. Thus, such objects are called tinware, although they are actually derived from tinned sheet iron. Until the material could be produced locally, American craftsmen typically purchased prepared, standardized sheets of imported tinned sheet iron from hardware merchants.[1]

An early tinsmithing business was often a small workshop with a few skilled workmen and young apprentices. Frequently, the master's family members also participated in production and sales. By the 1830s, sizable tinware manufactories were established from eastern Canada to Virginia, with concentrations in Berlin, Connecticut, eastern New York, and urban areas such as Philadelphia. Their success substantially depended on the wide-ranging commerce of peddlers in their employ. Tin peddlers traversed country lanes, taking new plain or decorated wares into rural areas that lacked their own tinsmith shops. They also offered thrifty households repair services to extend the life of worn items. A decoratively painted box, called a trunk in the early 1800s, has a history of ownership in Londonderry, Pennsylvania, where it may have been made, but it is more likely that a peddler from Philadelphia carried it there.

Tinsmith shop. From Johann Ferdinand Schreiber, 30 Werksatten von Handwerken (Germany, 18 --). Winterthur Library

Most utilitarian tinware had plain, smooth, reflective, whitish-gray, exterior surfaces. Although these simple items did not appeal to early collectors,

Winterthur's collection includes plain tinware enhanced with subtle surface decoration. To add visual interest and appeal to a vessel, a tinsmith would raise or recess its surface. This was accomplished by hand with chasing tools or mechanically with stamps, using techniques similar to those for decorating sheet copper and brass. The shield motif raised in low-relief in the upper segment of the candle sconce was created with round-end chasing tools or with punches tapped by a hammer. Tinsmiths might follow design templates or use freehand methods, depending upon their artistic talents. More sophisticated and time-consuming chased ornamentation, often called "punched" decoration, is visible on a large coffeepot created in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. The maker, Willoughby Shade, chased the delicate, dotted, central-flower design flanked by long-tail birds and foliage onto flat sections of the coffeepot prior to shaping and asssembling it. He also personalized the coffeepot by chasing the owner's name, Catharena H. Moyer, into the flared foot rim.

Coffeepot, marked by Willoughby Shade, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, 1840-70, inscribed with owner's name: "Catharena H. Moyer." Winterthur Museum, bequest of Henry Francis du Pont 1965.2152; photo, Laszlo Bodo

Fully piercing or punching holes through a sheet of tinned iron was impractical for items that needed to be watertight, but it was a common technique for vessels used to strain or grate, such as colanders or cheese molds. Flat, pierced panels could also be fitted into cupboard doors, such as those on a pie safe, to vent the contents while protecting them from pests. Pierced sections of sheet-iron lanterns enabled them to emit light while shielding the candles from wind. Decorative piercing weakened the iron, however, and hastened

corrosion (rust) by increasing exposure to natural elements. Thus, early pierced tinware typically does not survive in good condition.

In addition to handwork, tinsmiths used mechanical tools to shape and add ornament to their wares. One simple and elegant decorative technique was to create parallel lines in low-relief called a "bead," seen on vertical lines on the candle sconce below. Before an object was assembled, craftsmen could use hand-cranked or power-driven tools to impress a bead design on an area, such as the upper body of a coffeepot. Likewise, tinsmiths created the creased or ruffled ("crimped") edge found on candlesticks and sconces by using a mechanical tool or by hammering sheet iron into an iron swage with a V-shape recess. Crimped edges add visual flourish to the base and the drip pan for the single-candle cup used to light the tapers in this menorah.

Menorah, possibly made in Ipswich, Massachusetts, 1820-80. Winterthur Museum, gift of Cipora O. Schwartz in memory of Philip C. Schwartz 2011.20.2; photo, Laszlo Bodo.

It is difficult to appreciate the effects of artistically chased or pierced ornament on tinned sheet iron today. Brightly tinned surfaces age dramatically, darkening to deep gray. In many areas, tin coatings have been rubbed off to expose orange and black iron corrosion. The original evidence of an object's visual vibrancy and appeal can nearly be lost. Tinware that was originally decorated with coatings of lacquer or paint survive in better condition; thus, most scholarship about American tinware addresses these appealing colorful items.

Sconce, unknown maker, possibly New England, 1790-1830. Winterthur Museum, bequest of Henry Francis du Pont 1955.607; Photo, Laszlo Bodo.

Tray, made in Pontypool or Usk, Wales, or Birmingham, England, 1740-60. Winterthur Museum, bequest of Henry Francis du Pont 1958.2282; photo, Laszlo Bodo

As early as the 1690s, entrepreneurs northeast of Cardiff, Wales, developed a protective coating for vulnerable tinned sheet iron by baking onto the surface multiple layers of opaque varnish made from linseed oil, asphaltum and colorants.[2] The fashion craze for imported Asian black and red lacquered articles gave impetus to these efforts. Asian lacquer work inspired British craftsmen working in many materials to create rich black-varnished and gilded surfaces they referred to as "japanned." Welsh and English japanned tinware, such as the circular tray, soon appeared as lively, functional tea and table items. The lacy, pierced border of the tray is painted red to complement the dark center well,

Left to Right: Tray, attributed to Frederick Zeitz tin shop, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, ca. 1874. Winterthur Museum, bequest of Henry Francis du Pont 1965.1717. Basket, attributed to Harvey Filley tin shop, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1830-60. Winterthur Museum, bequest of Henry Francis du Pont 1959.2047; photo, Laszlo Bodo.

which has layers of black and golden brown varnishes in imitation tortoiseshell. The central painted scene with gold highlights depicts an idyllic shepherdess in a whimsical Asian landscape - an attractive design to customers who sought this new ware. One century later, American hardware merchants advertised

"japanned tinware," and the term lingered in usage to later describe all manner of metals painted with black, red, green, yellow, blue and white ground colors (with or without asphaltum layers). The tray and basket have a maroon/brown asphaltum varnish over the shiny tinned iron, but they were further enhanced with colorful oil-painted borders and designs. The orange central reserve (on the left) appears to be faceted. To create this visual effect, the tinsmith first heated the shiny tinned tray and then coated only the central reserve with an acid. After a set time, the tray was plunged into cold water to create the faceted area. Orange tinted asphaltum varnish enhanced the crystallizing, and the tray was further painted with a white border featuring colorful leaves and black tendrils. In particular, tinsmiths in the Mid-Atlantic region favored this vibrant type of decoration. The basket/bread tray (right) has a deep purple asphaltum varnish over the entire surface. In the classical revival taste, the painter added yellow leaves and fruit designs on the curving ends as well as red and green foliage

(Left to Right)Coffeepot, attributed to Aaron Butler tin shop, Greenville, New York, 1824-55, Winterthur Museum, bequest of Henry Francis du Pont 1959.2068; Coffeepot, marked by Willoughby Shade, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, 1840-70. Winterthur Museum, bequest of Henry Francis du Pont 1965-2152. Coffeepot, attributed to Harvey Filley tin shop, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1830-60. Winterthur Museum, bequest of Henry Francis du Pont 1959.2071; Photo: Laszlo Bodo

on the inner white border. Both of these items were created and decorated in professional workshops in Philadelphia. Oil paints, naturally derived colored glazes and materials for decorating tinware were commercially available from druggists and paint suppliers within a few years of the War of 1812, just when the synthesized color of chrome yellow was introduced.

Tinsmithing proved to be a modestly profitable profession in the first half of the 1800s, with market demand for items exceeding supplies of imported

Cradle, made by James Spencer, New York, New York, 1828-61. Winterthur Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the Henry Francis du Pont Fund for Collection Objects 1970.70; photo Laszlo Bodo.

British and French tinware. Sizable manufactories emerged in Connecticut, New York and the Mid-Atlantic region.[3] By the 1830s, newspaper advertisements from Boston to Baltimore and St. Louis sought "tin workers" to create everything from bathtubs and ash pans to quilt stencils and cookie cutters.[4] The industry's rapid growth encouraged innovation in the development of efficient construction methods, such as folding machines to create wired edges and seams and stamping machines to cut individual parts. Decorative painting, however, remained a subspecialty. Although the two red japanned coffeepots shown on page eleven were constructed in nearly the same manner, with similar shapes and dimensions, one may be attributed to a workshop in New York State and the other to a shop in Philadelpha, based on their painted ornament.

Young men and women in the trade learned a shop's particular manner of "flowering" or freehand painting designs. Some designs echoed the revival taste for ornament derived from classical antiquity, such as stylized anthemion and palmette shapes or lines of yellow "ladle" brushstrokes reminiscent of gadrooned borders. Others represented naturalistic fruit and foliage or purely fanciful inventions. Decorative painters might stay with one shop for their entire career or travel to work in others, carrying with them skills and learned patterns.[5] As a result, only the most avid of collectors succeed at identifiying anonymous freehand work. Recently, careful scholars have relied upon signed tinware or items with reliable provenance and workshop records to organize visual characteristics and identifications. Four volumes authored by Gina Martin and Lois Tucker entitled *American Painted Tinware* constitute the best references for early tinware. The authors build upon early scholarship to stylistically identify groups and origins of designs. For example, the distinctive alternating striped band above the swags on the front of the trunk on the title page is called "candy stripe" by Martin and Tucker. They compare it to other painted characteristics of tinware as originating in Berlin, Connecticut.[6]

Collectors and students of American Painted tinware today face complex identification challenges. For nearly a century, these antique items have changed

hands numerous times, often losing their early history. It is not unusual for the brittle japanned or asphaltum ground of antique tinware to be entirely worn away, with some of the aged oil paints remaining adhered to the corroded surface. In some instances, early painted objects have been completely scoured and repainted by decorators or collectors. Navigating the history of an object often requires acute visual scrutiny and knowledge of typical practices by 19th century tinsmiths and decorative painters. Only rarely is one rewarded with an identified object, such as the tiny toy cradle that bears its label from manufacturer James Spencer of New York City.

[1] Early rolled sheet iron was most often supplied by English manufacturers. By the 1780s, suppliers in Cornwall standardized their tin plate dimensions and thickness for export orders. A tinmith's hand tools might be made from English or European cast iron. One significant tool manufactory established by Jedediah North in Berlin, Connecticut, sought iron that originated in Russia, England, German countries and Sweden, according to shop bills from the 1820s; North Family Papers, no. 380, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Winterthur Library. See also newspaper ads, such as 'TIN PLATE, SHEET IRON, &c." placed by the New York firm of Austin and Drake, advertising "English, Russia, and Philadelphia Sheet Iron" for sale (The Connecticut Courant {Hartford}, January 29, 1842, p4).

[2] Asphaltum is a black or brown resinous substance, bituminous in origin, found in many regions of the world. Early American pharmacists and paint suppliers sold "asphaltum gum," which was combined with mineral or linseed oil and colorants, such as amber or burnt umber, to create durable layers of varnish for metals and woods. Although called "japanning," the Western technique is a simplified adaptation of Chinese and Japanese artistic natural resin (urushi) lacquerwork.

[3] *A Book of Prices of Journeymen's Wages for making Tin-Ware* (Philadelphia, 1796), records an agreement among 10 master tinsmiths to establish equitable pay for employees based upon items listed in the booklet, including stew pans, watering pots, tinder boxes, candle molds, house drain pipes and all manner of domestic items and lighting produced in Philadelphia tinsmith shops.

[4] Charles Collier, Baltimore, Maryland, advertised: "Wanted four tin workers, those used to factory work would be preferred" (*The Sun,* November 22, 1845, p.3).

[5] The record of several women recruited from Berlin, Connecticut, to paint in Harvey Filley's tin shop in Philadelphia is noted in Filley family letters of 1824-25, reprinted by Gina Martin & Lois Tucker in *American Painted Tinware,* volume 3 (Cooperstown, NY.: Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc., 2004), pp. 71-72.

[6] *Ibid.,* vol. 1, p.32.

About the author:

Ann K. Wagner, Associate Curator of Decorative Arts at Winterthur, was guest curator of the exhibition. She is responsible for the metalwork collection at the Museum.

Ann wrote this article for the Brandywine River Museum Antiques Show catalogue. The show was held in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania in 2012 and Elaine Dalzell asked for and was given permission to have the catalogue reprinted for our publication.

From Wreck to Wow: Restoration of a Gold Leaf Mirror

by Pat Evans

In June of 2010 I went to an auction preview at a historic house built in 1830. Looking around with a flashlight, in one of three attics, I found a large Federal mirror tucked behind the massive chimney. Later at the auction I was able to purchase the mirror. It was a wreck. The frame itself was loose. Decades spent in that attic with the extreme temperature changes had broken up the gesso. What was not loose was gone. Several large areas had at one time been in-painted with radiator paint. Some of the decorative elements and an upper left hand corner block were missing. The top mirror was intact, but the large lower mirror was shattered.

I got it home, removed the glass and cleaned off maybe one hundred years of dust with a soft brush. Then I got in touch with Joseph Rice. He agreed to look it over at the Albany meeting and advise me how to restore it. Joseph also helped me out several times as I ran into questions throughout the process. Anne Dimock also had a suggestion that was a big help.

So with their expertise guiding me I began to work on it. My son helped me to tighten the loose frame by drilling pilot holes in the back and inserting screws. I carefully, gently, took the frame apart. I labeled each piece, left or right, drew a sketch of the front of the frame to note which elements were original, and the numbering of the spheres and acorns. As I carefully removed the spheres and acorns, I wrapped masking tape around each wire and numbered them so they would go back in the same place. My furniture repair

man replaced the missing block.

Joseph told me to mix a thin batch of rabbit skin glue and carefully work it under the remaining loose gesso. I then added whiting to the glue to make a size for all the areas of new and bare wood. This has to be applied warm, so I kept the jar of size in a pan of warm water. Then I applied gesso to the missing areas of the frame. Gesso is applied wet-on-wet, and warm. I kept an eye on it until it was almost dry, then brushed on another coat. Six coats in all to bring it up to the level of the original gesso. I let this dry overnight, then sanded the gesso with fine paper.

Since I am not proficient with a gilders tip, here I took advice from Anne Dimock. I gave the entire frame a thin coat of Pratt and Lambert #38 gloss varnish, then two more coats of varnish right from the can. This got a good week to dry. Then I applied slow size to 1/3 of the frame at 8:00PM. The next morning I mounted the gold leaf onto waxed paper and laid it on the sized areas of the frame. I did the same thing for the next two days. For me, this method was so much easier than water gilding.

I prefer things that look old, and going over the elements I had removed from the frame, I realized I liked how they looked, so why re-gild them? I did have to make one new sphere. I used a wooden bead, stuffed the hole with wood putty and inserted the wire into the putty, coated it with gesso and gilded it with skewing. Using plastalina modeling clay I was able

to make a mold for a missing bow and flower. I mixed up some Durham's rock hard wood putty and with a small brush worked it down into all the crevices of the mold and leveled off the top with the edge of a hack saw blade. When hard, these got three coats of Pratt and Lambert #38, slow size and skewings. The frame and new elements were burnished with cotton.

Now I had a newly gilded frame and two hundred year old elements. Joseph had said to build up age with layers of toned shellac and varnish. I had laid some gold on a scrap piece of wood molding for a test area. Two coats of unwaxed blond shellac was my first step, then the Pratt's #38 satin mixed with a little asphaltum. I applied this with a brush, working it into all the corners and cracks, then wiped it off with a soft cloth. A coat of oil based glaze, old walnut color, brushed on, worked into the corners and crevices again, and wiped right off, brought the frame to the same color and sheen as the old elements.

Re-assembling the frame was a joy – seeing it coming together so nicely; I replaced the original upper mirror with a reverse painting I had done in Anne's class last fall. Best of all, I found an early mercury-backed mirror to replace the original one. The look is complete.

I am very grateful to Joseph and Anne for walking me through this process. I could never have done it without their help!

A Boxed History

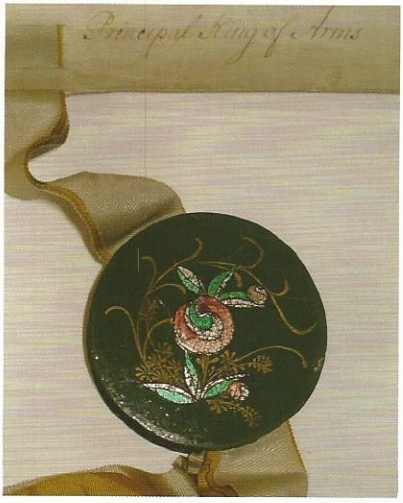
English Japanned Tin and Papier Mâché Boxes

Part 1

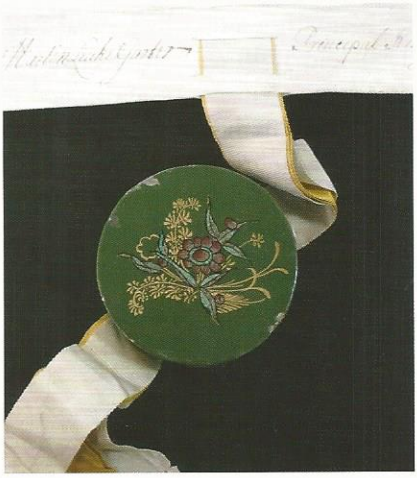
by Yvonne Jones

Boxes, the theme of this year's annual conference of the HSEAD, were one of the mainstays of the japanning industry. They were among lacquered goods imported into the West by the East India Company in the 16th century, and they were some of the earliest objects to have been made in Europe when Western craftsmen and amateurs alike, set about imitating and thus competing with Eastern lacquered goods. Dismayed by the tawdriness of some early imitations, Stalker and Parker, published their influential and instructive book *A Treatise of Japanning and Varnishing*, in 1688, and included several designs suitable for the decoration of boxes. Accordingly, soon after japanning was taken up commercially, first in Wales, then in the English midlands, and subsequently across Europe, boxes, and snuffboxes in particular, were one of the industry's earliest products. They were made in myriad forms until the close of the industry and as such, provide an overview of the industry as a whole. For reasons of brevity, it is possible, here, to focus only on English japanned boxes.

Although not the earliest japanner in Birmingham (see John Taylor, below), George Orton advertised, in 1742, that 'any person may be served, wholesale or retail with a variety of the best japanned snuffboxes &c., upon the shortest warning.'[1] There is no record of whether these boxes were of wood or tin, nor is there any information about their decoration, but as a painter of coaches, escutcheons and signs, it is likely that some of Orton's boxes were painted with the crests and armorial bearings of his clients. Or, they may have been painted with motifs taken from Stalker and Parker's book which, with twenty-four plates of 'Patterns for JAPAN-work', remained a frequent design source for decorators for many years after its publication. However, when John Baskerville, one of the first japanners of significance in Birmingham, was described as a 'boxmaker' in a legal document issued in 1747, we can be confident from what is known of his workshop, that the reference was to tin boxes.



Front and back of box containing the seal of the Grant of Arms 1757



The flower-motifs seen here, on a small tin box containing the seal of the Grant of Arms bestowed upon Sir George Lyttleton, of Frankley in Worcestershire, in 1757, though not drawn directly from Stalker and Parker, owe much to the influence of imported lacquer. The box is interesting on two counts: first, it is a dateable example of early English japanned tin, and second, its function as protection for an official seal, endorses the status of japanned tinware at the time. We can not now be sure whether this box was made in London, Pontypool, or the English Midlands. Since the parchment document to which it is attached was issued by the College of Heralds in London, it is tempting to suppose the box hailed from that city. However, its date would argue against that for at the time, japanning in London was closely linked with cabinet-making. We know that small decorative boxes were made at the Pontypool Japan Works in South Wales, because when Reinhold Rucker Angerstein visited in 1754, he remarked on some 'ordinary snuffboxes' he had seen there, which were decorated with 'golden flowers'.[2] He noted their cost - two-shillings, or one-shilling-and-sixpence each, according to size – but tantalisingly omitted to give any further information about their decoration. Nevertheless, to judge from other contemporary accounts, the so-called 'golden' ornament on Pontypool japan ware did not involve the use of gold leaf, but was the result of applying thin washes of asphaltum varnish over silver leaf to achieve a gold effect. Dr. Richard Pococke, who visited Pontypool two years later, was more specific, and stated categorically that its tinware was decorated 'with Chinese landscapes and figures in gold only, and not with colouring as at Birmingham'.[3] On balance therefore, it would appear that the seal-box, with its colourful decoration, was probably made in the Midlands. In spite of Pococke's observation that Pontypool 'ware is much better' than Birmingham ware,[4] the seal-box, by virtue of its important function, would almost certainly have been superior to the ordinary boxes which Angerstein had observed in Wales.

The method by which the above box was decorated is not readily apparent. At first glance, it would appear that silver-leaf was used, as at Pontypool. However, the silver areas are only part-washed with colour which begs the question of why the exposed areas have not tarnished? Since English japanners had yet to discover a suitably clear varnish which would not discolour the surface beneath,[5] the more likely explanation is that the shiny silver effect is due to the tin-plated surface of the box, and not to the application of silver-leaf.

Notwithstanding Taylor and Baskerville having commenced japanning in 1738 and 1740 respectively, and Orton's advertisement of 1742, the earliest detailed evidence of japanned box manufacture in the Midlands, is found in the journal of Samuel Schröder, a Swedish metallurgist who, between 1748 and 1751, toured the workshops of Britain.[6] He visited Wednesbury, then a small village between Birmingham and Wolverhampton, where he learnt that the best iron plate for making snuffboxes was forged from old horseshoes and nails at a nearby hammer mill, and in a later visit to Birmingham, he saw how the iron was cut with large shears into small rounds, ovals, and squares ready for assemblage into boxes. These, he said, were japanned in red and other colours, decorated with various designs, and fitted with polished brass or other metal rims round their bases and lids; sometimes, he noted, their interiors were gilded. The boxes which Schröder described conform to an early, and now rare type of Birmingham box which has brightly coloured japanned copper sides, a lift-off lid containing a printed and sometimes painted enamel, and polished metal mounts. Besides commenting on the heat from the workshop stoves, and the length of the japanning process, he remarked on the difficulty of observing box manufacture from beginning to end; no doubt the workshop-owner had suspected Schröder's true purpose, namely industrial espionage for the Swedish government.

The re-cycling of used iron for making small boxes was evidently common practice, for when Schröder's fellow countryman, Reinhold Rücker Angerstein,[7] visited Wednesbury some five years later – again to collect information for the Swedish government - he too saw a forge where 'old bushel iron'[8] was melted down for the purpose. From there, he travelled to nearby Bilston where metal boxes and other cast and punched work were the main manufactures, and noted 'lacquered' iron boxes which, he said, sold at high prices according to their novelty and inventiveness.

In the eighteenth century, Birmingham, Bilston, and Wednesbury, were important centres for the production of enamelled snuff- and patch-boxes,[9] decorative plaques, buttons, and much more besides; in fact, like japanners, the enamellers' product-lists were exhaustive. Since both trades required similar metal-working skills and called for decorative artists, it is not surprising to find links between the two industries. John Taylor, for example, was described by William Hutton as an 'uncommon genius' to whom 'we owe the gilt button, the japanned and gilt snuff-boxes [and] the numerous race of enamels.'[10] A later commentator told how Taylor decorated some of his boxes and tea-caddies with coloured abstract swirls, by working his 'unusually broad and coarse-grained thumb' into the second coat of colour while it was still wet; they were, he said, very popular and sold in large numbers.[11] It has also been suggested that Henry Clay, who would become the leading japanner of his day, began his working life as a painter of enamels. Also, when the Bow China factory

in London, required decorators, the advertisement they placed in a Midland newspaper for painters 'brought up in the Snuff-Box Way, Japanning ... &c.',[12] was almost certainly directed at enamel painters as well as japanners.

Perhaps some of the finest objects in which japanning and enamelling are seen in combination, are the handsome sets of rectangular tin toilet boxes made about 1755/60. Generally japanned in either black or crimson with gilt chinoiserie borders, their lift-off lids are inset with fine white enamels which have been transfer-printed and hand-coloured with views of Italian palaces sourced from engravings by Antonio Visentini (1688-1782), and others. The sets comprise as many as seven boxes of various sizes, the largest of which is about 25cm wide. They were made for display on ladies dressing tables where the smaller boxes would serve as containers for rouge and other cosmetic powders used to concoct the toxic pastes and potions with which they whitened their complexions, and maybe to hold silk patches with which to cover blemishes or pock-marks. It was customary for a fashionable lady to spend the morning at her dressing table where simultaneously, she would be attended by her hairdresser, issue the day's instructions to her housekeeper, and receive various visitors – the quality of her toilet set, therefore, was important in defining her status to the social world.

It was around this time, and certainly before 1758, that experiments were begun to manufacture papier mâché in Birmingham. The French were considerably ahead in this respect having introduced paper boxes in the 1740s and the English were certainly aware of this: 'I must inform the Reader of a late French invention of Snuff-Boxes... made of the same Materials as Paper', wrote R Campbell, in The London Tradesman in 1747.[13] The challenge to compete appears to have been first seriously taken up by Stephen Bedford, one of the most successful of Birmingham's early japanners, and not least because he was anxious to stop 'the importation of French Paper Boxes in the manufactory of which articles I am largely concerned.'[14] He was of course, also greatly involved in devising a clear copal varnish to enable English papier mâché goods to rival those made by the Martin brothers in Paris, and known as vernis Martin. Bedford's contribution to the history of the Midlands japanning industry cannot be overstated yet save for a tray, marked with his name, in the collection of the National Museum of Wales, none of his products can be identified today. However, on the evidence of that tray, and a newspaper advertisement in which he expressed his expectation of the nobility visiting his workshop, Bedford's japanned tin and papier mâché boxes would have been very fine indeed.

During these early days, and according to Robert Dossie, paper snuffboxes were made by layering pieces of strong brown paper over a mould, in much the same way as they were made in France. Larger boxes, were made from sheets of papier mâché, made either from pulp or layered pasteboard, which were used exactly as wood; thus their overall shape was restricted to straight lines. The tea

caddy seen here, was made in about 1765, and constructed in just this way. Painted with views of Venice and other Italian scenes copied from prints by AntonioVisentini, after paintings by Canaletto (1697-1768), the caddy would have been made for a rich and fashionable market, eager perhaps to purchase reminders of their grand tours of Europe. Lined with green velvet, it contains three enamel canisters: one for sugar and a canister each for black and green tea-leaves – another instance of japanning and enamelling seen in combination. Tea was an expensive commodity in the eighteenth century so, like all caddies at the time, it is fitted with a lock to guard against servants stealing the leaves and selling them on. In spite of the exquisite workmanship of caddies of this type, none are known to have been marked with their maker's name. However, their fine gilt mounts may hold the key to where and by whom they were made.

Tea caddy c. 1765 with Italian scene Lined with green velvet

Matthew Boulton (1728-1808), a leading Birmingham manufacturer, a pioneer of the Industrial Revolution, and producer of 'what all the world desires', together with his partner, John Fothergill (1730-1782), made among other things, exceedingly fine ormolou mounts. In 1765, they established a japan workshop at their Soho Works (then on the outskirts of Birmingham), but it was a relatively short-lived venture because of poor management by Francis Egington (1737-1805), a distinguished artist and decorator, and they closed it down in 1779. Boxes and trays, in various states of completion, had been allowed to stock-pile over a number of years, and two inventories of the remaining contents of the japan shop were drawn up, one in 1779, and another in 1782. The later inventory, listed eight tea caddies, two of which were fitted with 'gilt mounts' and valued at the considerable sum of one guinea each. Could it be that the caddy, seen here, with its fine mounts and an overall quality worthy of their rich and aristocratic clients, was made by the firm of Boulton & Fothergill? It is a tempting notion but, as ever with unmarked japanned pieces, in the absence of documentary evidence, we can only speculate.

Within a few years, Henry Clay, the most celebrated early English japanner, had successfully applied for a patent to cover his improved method of 'Making in Paper High Varnished Pannels'.[15] Curiously boxes were excluded from the list of objects for which Clay thought his panel suitable. Nevertheless, the boxes seen here, show that such goods were soon included among his manufactures. Although neither box is impressed with his name, their silver handles are hallmarked HC for Henry Clay - one of the first manufacturers to register

his mark at the Birmingham Assay Office when it opened in 1773. [16]

At present, only three of Clay's hallmarked boxes are known, two of which are shown here; the third is an oval papier mâché tea caddy, and thus was made slightly later in about 1780. Like the shallow rectangular box, the oval caddy is decorated with Demeter in the House of Kelos, a scene taken directly from engravings of Sir William Hamilton's antique vases, which were published in four volumes as *Antiquités Etrusques Grecque et Romaines*, between 1766 and 1767. Clay frequently drew on these engravings as a source of decorative motifs not only for small objects like boxes and trays, but for larger items of furniture like corner cupboards, and tables. A German visitor to Clay's factory in 1775, noted that 'Coffee trays and all sorts of vessels are made and decorated in black with orange colour figures in the manner of Etrurian vases' and he thought them 'beautiful beyond words.'[17] More generally, the classical figures on Clay's ware were white, but whichever colour: white or orange, they all appear to have been stencilled onto the japanned surface and had their details added with a camel-hair brush dipped in asphaltum varnish; for a richer effect, some of the white stencils were given thin washes of colour, like the box shown here.

Scene taken from antique vase engravings 1766-1767

The small green tea caddy which belongs to this group of hallmarked pieces, incorporates jasper-ware medallions made by the celebrated firm of Wedgwood & Bentley. Clay introduced these ceramic ornaments in his japanned ware in about 1775, and to judge from correspondence between Wedgwood and Bentley, he appears to have been a good customer for their medallions. Contemporary with the decoration seen here on the black box, these jasper motifs with their white figures set against variously coloured grounds, reflect contemporary interest in classical styles. Similar cameos are found on Clay's oval tea caddies.

Jasper-ware medallions on tea caddy by Wedgwood & Bentley

Although the introduction of papier mâché began to monopolise the fashionable end of the market, it did not totally supercede tinware.

Views of Windsor Castle, Greenwich

When William Barrow compiled a list of the 'Principal Japan Articles' in general production in 1794, it included for example, japanned tin caddies, snuffboxes, dressing boxes, tobacco pots, and canisters.[18] A small oval tin caddy, painted with views of Windsor Castle, The Queen's Hospital, Greenwich, and on its lid, a view of the River Thames, would have been a less expensive alternative to a paper caddy, but given the extent of its decoration would, nevertheless, have been a costly item.

Notwithstanding, when Fanny Burney enquired of the painter, Sir Joshua Reynolds why he used 'such a vile and shabby tin' snuff box, he replied 'because I naturally love a little of the blackguard'[19] – a telling indication of the relative status of tin snuffboxes produced for the popular market, and one which can perhaps be explained by the speed at which they were produced. Tin snuffboxes were manufactured in huge quantities. In the late 1770s, James Bisset, an apprentice-decorator at the japan factory of Thomas Bellamy in Birmingham, claimed that in busy periods he could paint up to 2,880 snuffboxes per week, with 'roses, anemones, and various coloured flowers, with three tints to every flower, and three to every leaf.[20] If true, it gives some idea of the mechanical manner in which they were painted.

A superior style of ornament for tin snuffboxes, which is found also on tea caddies, was introduced in Wolverhampton, and Bilston, in about 1780.

Fine engraving seen in the metal surface of these snuffboxes.

It involved cutting or incising designs into the metal surface with a graver or burin in imitation of bright-cut silver. Precisely how the effect was achieved, is to some extent a mystery, but the design appears to have been cut through the japanned surface after stoving, and before the varnish had thoroughly hardened. It remained a popular style until well into the early nineteenth

century when similarly decorated boxes might incorporate a facsimile half-sovereign showing the head of George IV (1762-1830). Not surpringly, incised decoration was used on boxes which owed their shape to contemporary silver patterns. A particularly interesting example of this style of decoration may be seen on a caddy commemorating the life of Lord Nelson. Although the caddy has a tin carcase, it is veneered with a thin layer of japanned lead or pewter through which the decoration was cut. As yet, the source of such caddies, clad in this way, is not known, but stylistically they have so much in common with contemporary Midlands japanned ware, that they surely have a place in this essay.

Incised decoration honoring Lord Nelson

To return to the more frequently found tin boxes which, with their quickly and deftly executed decoration, they are now wholly associated with the town of Bilston. These brightly coloured snuffboxes and tea caddies, reflect the humour, taste, and topical interests of the popular market for which they were produced, and this imbues them with a naïve charm which is so attractive to collectors today.

It is seldom that the maker of an unmarked tin box can be identified but the red box seen here, is a notable exception. Sarah Wood for whom this box is named, was Miss Sarah Ryton, prior to her

Bilston tea caddy and snuffboxes (above)

marriage in 1810/1812. She was the sister of Obadiah and William Ryton who, from 1790 until 1818/20, were proprietors of the Old Hall Japan Works, then the leading japan factory in Wolverhampton. The box was part of a collection of japanned ware which descended through the Ryton family to recent times and was thus, almost certainly made at the Old Hall. It shows how simply such early boxes were constructed, with folded edges at its lid and base, and a length of wire inserted around its sides, just below the opening edge, to increase its stability. A humble box, but nevertheless an important one in the history of the japanning industry.

By about 1830, new and faster methods of manufacture were introduced which allowed for a greater variety of box-shapes, especially for those made from papier mâché. The industry gathered momentum as these new production methods brought tinware and papier mâché to an ever-increasing market, both at home and overseas. This, and changing tastes, heralded a wholly distinctive range of Victorian goods which will be the subject of a later article.

Notes and References

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2. Berg, Torsten & Peter (trans.), *R R Angerstein's Illustrated Travel Diary,* 1753-1755, vol.1, journey 5, p163. Science Museum, London, 2001
3. Pococke, Dr Richard, *Travels through England,* 1756, Camden Society re-print, 1888-9, vol. ii, p210
4. 'Birmingham' here, refers to the Midlands manufacturing district which would have included, Wolverhampton, Bilston and Wednesbury
5. Simon Etienne Martin patented a clear copal-based varnish in Paris, in 1753. Known as *vernis Martin,* it was much admired by English japanners and 1757, the Society of Arts, in London, offered a premium to anyone who could make a varnish to rival Martin's.
   Stephen Bedford of Birmingham, was awarded thepremium in 1761
6. Schröder, Samuel, *Dagbok ... 1748-1751,* manuscript in the Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm, vol.X:303 (no English translation currently available)
7. Angerstein, *op cit.*
8. Bushel iron was made from small, molten scraps of iron

9. 'Patches' were variously-shaped pieces of black silk or velvet worn generally on the face, by both men and women; often worn for effect, but also to cover scars left by smallpox which was rife at the time.
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17. Lichtenberg, Georg, *Brief 1775,* quoted by Huth, Hans, *Lacquer of the West* Chicago, 1971, p118
18. Correspondence: William Barrow to Matthew Boulton, *A Statement of the Cost of the different Operations of Fine Trays & Waiters etc.,* 29 May, 1794. Birmingham Archives and Heritage [POU/B.I./177]
19. *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay* [Fanny Burney], ed. by her niece, London, 1842, vol.II, 28 Dec., 1782, p218.
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Specialist Award: Reverse Painting on Glass
Anne Dimock

At the May 2012 meeting in Danvers, Ann Dimock completed her requirements for Specialist Award in Reverse Painting on Glass. I have included the requirements so you can see her accomplishments.

The society will grant Specialist Award to those craftsmen who exhibit their expertise in the painting techniques and their knowledge of any category of early American decoration recognized in the standards Manual, with the exception of theorem painting and penwork.

Prerequisites for the Specialist Award: All must be A awards.

1. An article, written by the petitioner, pertaining to the chosen category and published in *The Decorator* or other publication.

2. Five painted patterns in the chosen category are to be donated to the HSEAD lending library. These must be recorded from the originals and accompanied by one or more color photograpahs of the original which will be mounted with the pattern. Electronic color copies are unacceptable.

3. Be a teacher certified or accredited by HSEAD in the chosen category.

The petitioner need choose only TWO of the above three prerequisites.

4. Presentation of a lecture and/or demonstration in the chosen category at an HSEAD function.

5. Be an HSEAD member in good standing.

Reverse Painting on Glass Requirements are:

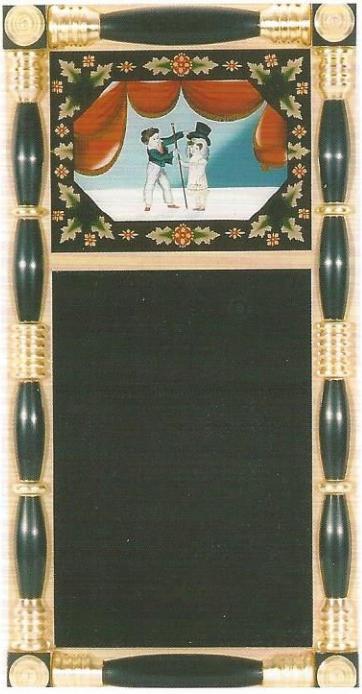
1. Painted glass with a stenciled border - minimum of four awards. Designs shall include one seascape with ship; one landscape; one with figures; and one with a gold leaf band. Borders to include one backed with asphaltum or suitable substitue and two using negative stencils.

2. Painted glass with gilded border - minimum of two awards. Design shall include one architectural scene rendered in ink.

3. Gilding on glass - minimum of four awards. Design shall include two with figures and one with some elements rendered in silver leaf of equivalent.

Note: Two glasses must have the design enclosed within a round or oval gilded band.

Anne joins Specialists Roberta Edrington (Victorian Flower Painting) and Lois Tucker (Country Painting). Deceased members who also became Specialists were Carol Buonato (Clock Dials), and Ann Baker (Country Painting)




DON'T TREAD ON ME
BON HOMME RICHARD & SERAPIS


CONSTANT

Congratulations Master Craftsman
Dortia Davis

At the meeting in Danvers, in 2012, Dortia Davis of Perkinsville, Vermont, became a Master Craftsman! Enjoy these beautiful pieces. She joins the other Master Craftsmen in our Guild: Deborah Lambeth, Carol Heinz, Astrid Donnellan (also a Master Teacher), Roberta Edrington and Phyllis Sherman. We know that there are several others working on their pieces to become Master Craftsmen. We hope that this will inspire them to finish!

Country Painting
Spring 2010

Pontypool
Fall 2007

Country
Painting
Spring 1987

Stenciling on Tin
Spring 1989

Stenciling on Tin
Spring 1988

Reverse Glass with a
Stenciled Border
Fall 1988

Gold Leaf on glass
Spring 1989

Stenciling on Wood
Spring 1998

Metal Leaf
Spring 2009

Freehand
Bronze
Spring 2003

Victorian Flower
Painting
Spring 2010

Book Review

Painted Rooms of Rhode Island, Colonial and Federal
by Ann Eckert Brown

Reviewed by Sandra Cohen

Some of the most revealing testaments to our country's past are found in the homes of its early settlers. Here we may find paintings and photographs that put faces on remarkable events and the people who initiated and participated in making the nation's history. The owners' pamphlets and books document an area's story while its literature and art unveil the hearts and souls of their occupants. Rhode Island played a pivotal role in our country's history; the initial violent confrontation, the burning of the British ship, HMS Gaspee, took place in Narragansett Bay, 1772. This colony was first to sever its ties with England and under the leadership of an enlightened thinker, Roger Williams, became a place he names Providence, a sanctuary for all to practice their own religious beliefs.

Rhode Island, the smallest colony, attracted free thinkers and entrepreneurs and became a major commercial seaport and industrial state. Its economy was initially based on farming, but, it must be said, by the eve of the American Revolution, Rhode Island's busy maritime merchants played prominently in the Triangle Trade, turning sugar from the West Indies, and molasses, into rum that was traded for slaves. It would take almost a hundred years for abolitionists and patriots like Moses Brown, a Quaker, and other patriots across the nation, to eradicate slavery and help build a strong moral nation.

Ann Eckert Brown explores the historic homes in this state she calls home and walks us through its five counties and forty-seven homes, documenting and sharing a plethora of painted walls, floors and decorative embellishments. True to her interest in historically authentic architectural painting (pre 1840),

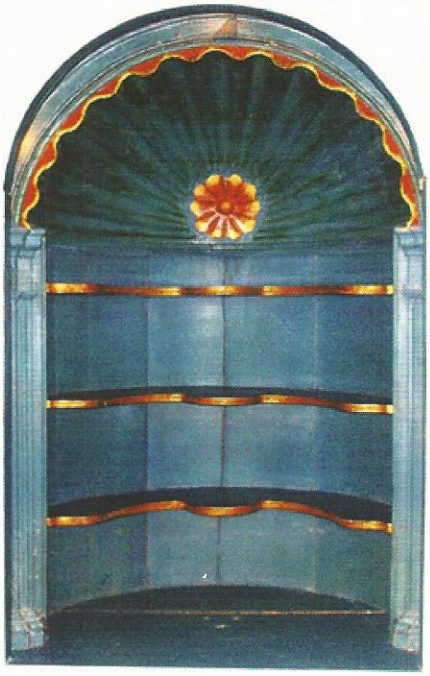
she records the designs on their walls and floors. However, her chapters probe and share the dwellers' personal stories, elevating this book to more than a chronical of early American decoration.

Believed to be the oldest residence in Newport County, the Stephen Mumford House, c.1680, (altered 1765) outwardly reflects the modest aesthetic of a predominantly Quaker community. Its many successive owners with varied tastes are reflected in the enhanced additions, comforts, conveniences and artistic embellishments. As with many historic homes, it is frequently Historical Societies, benefactors or history buff / home buyers who come to the rescue of these often dilapidated domiciles. During such a rescue by the Newport Historical Society and Norman Isham, prominent architect at the turn of the 20th Century and responsible for the restoration of other New England homes, layers of the Mumford House were peeled away, revealing "many periods, providing a unique look at the evolution of one of the state's earliest structures." The inside walls exhibit vivid red stenciled lattice work in the kitchen, (a ubiquitous pattern also found in the Peter Wentz House, PA) as well as faux decorated wall panels on the second floor.

Across the Saconnet River in Little Compton stands the William Briggs House, early to mid 18th Century. It features "fantasy graining" and brings the author together with Esther Stevens Brazer, HSEAD mentor, researcher and author, who photographed this graining for her book, *Early American Decoration* in 1945. Brown juxtaposes her color image with Brazer's black and white photograph revealing the vitality intended by this painting technique. One after another, Brown spotlights in glorious color these historical homes and their fancifully painted interiors, some of which have been previously photographed in black and white by Edward Allen, Esther Stevens Brazer, Janet Waring, Nina Fletcher Little and others.

Kings and Washington County (its name before and after the American Revolution) lies west of Narragansett Bay and is the location of the trading post, Cocumscossoc, founded by Roger Williams who purchased this substantial piece of land along the Bay from the Narragansett Tribe. Williams later sold this major trading post to Richard Smith, whose daughter, Catherine, married Dutch Merchant heir, Gysbert Updyke. The union between these two successful trading families resulted in an association between Cocumescossoc and the Dutch West India Company. Successful merchant families and plantation owners in Narragansett enjoyed the influx of luxuries from abroad, including porcelain, delft tiles and other decorative accessories from Europe, Japan and China. Here, along the Narragansett shoreline in Saunderstown, lies the Rowland Robinson House, a fine specimen of the elaborate plantation of the early to mid 18th Century. The Rowland plantation, one of the few stately houses remaining architecturally intact, boasted a one hundred-ten foot (110') frontage (including slave quarters) and initially occupied 300 acres.

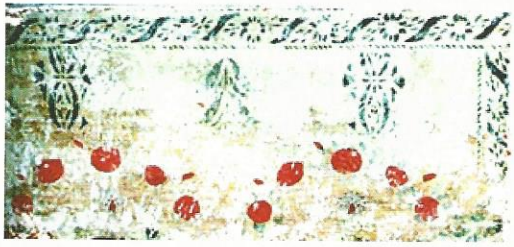
The house's exterior conveys a typical modest and prevalent style, i.e., a gambrel roof, twelve over twelve paned windows and pedestal bonnet over the paneled front door. However, the interior is richly adorned. The over-mantel painting echoes an "English equestrian painting by James Seymour." Etchings of his work and other artists were available in the colonies and provided inspiration for paintings over firewalls. An equestrian painting seemed appropriate here because it is believed that the Robinson family was the first to introduce the 'Narragansett Pacer,' the first horse that was bred in the colonies. The Delft tiles that frame the fireplace's opening and porcelain plates filling the cupboards reflect more restoration work by prominent architect, Norman Isham. Brown also treats us to a close-up of a shell-topped cupboard with original marbling and gilding.



Shell -topped cupboard with original marbling and gilding

The John Potter House, c.1740, depicted in a 2008 (pre facelift) photograph, (house has been restored and renovated and on sale today for $1.8 million) sadly reflects its age on the outside, but like most things worth knowing, its best features reside beneath the surface. Once known as the "Great House," its eccentric owner is described as a "man of great contradictions." A convicted counterfeiter, not only did he manage to avoid the gruesome fate of having his ears lopped off, but later was voted to the state legislature; his accomplice was not so fortunate. Potter was a slave-holder, and an over-mantel painting depicts a young African American boy serving tea to him and his family. The naively painted portrait, the handiwork of an itinerant painter, also features a handsomely attired family and some of their fine possessions such as a porcelain tea set and silver tea pot. Brown offers us a view of the (faux bois and marbling) ornamented paneled firewall from the Wetmore House in Middletown, CT c. 1746-1765 as a possible facsimile for the original firewall in the Potter House. Some of the most ubiquitous painted patterns and designs were achieved through stenciling, and examples of this technique are found in numerous historical homes. Practiced by itinerant painters, stenciling walls and floors was more affordable than expensive

wallpapers from abroad. The Aaron Peck House in Wickford, c. 1785 is an example of "classical wall stenciling, distemper on pigmented white wash" and of more interest because its itinerant artist is believed to be D. Bartling from Philadelphia whose "well executed stencil motifs have been recorded on walls from Sag Harbor on Long Island, NY to Walpole, NH and... inland areas east of the Conn. River." An elaborate example of his work is featured from the Tuttle House, CT (he eventually sets-up shop in New Haven with partner, S. Hall) and his high style is also found in northern New England. His simple designs in the Peck House indicate that he may have started his stenciling work in RI. A more elaborate and embellished stenciled swag and tassel pattern, believed to be his and Hall's, is found in the Robert Potter House c. 1770. However, because of the poor condition of the work, the author juxtaposes his Potter House design with his work in the Jonathan Clough House, c.1790, Loudon NH.



Peck House stenciling

Rhode Island's seaports played a prominent role in its history, commerce and culture. Bristol, although the smallest county with only three townships, was endowed with a lengthy coastline, and its abundant shipping trade contributed to the wealth of its inhabitants. This affluent community attracted "commission-seeking artisans from the Boston area and from abroad." Unfortunately, time has taken its toll on the original stenciling in the Joseph Reynolds House, c1698 in Bristol, the John Martin House, c1701 in Barrington and the S. Martin House, c.1797 in Warren, but Brown shares facsimiles that revive their best images. However, the William Lindsey House, c1803 in Bristol treats us to original classical stenciling (distemper on pigmented white wash) possibly by artist John Woodberry whose advertisement in a 1749 Philadelphia newspaper states that he "proposes to paint walls in the imitation of [wall] paper."

Jonathan Clough House c.1790

Providence County is literally a home to some of the most sophisticated painted wall decoration, from stenciling to wall murals. During the Federal Period, mid 18th to early 19th Century, Providence became a leader in maritime trade and industrialization fostering a building boom of "a remarkable number

William Lindsey House c. 1803

of structures---commercial, residential and religious...." as well as a significant market for decorative artists who were advertising in local newspapers and leaving examples of their handiwork in local buildings. In addition to the ornamented interiors that were often unsigned, promotional blurbs in local circulations assisted Brown in her thorough research uncovering a trail of discovery in some of the least discernable designs. The author comes to reasonable assumptions by matching vaguely distinguishable strokes and patterns with work in either neighboring historical homes or dwellings in other states and by following the potential path of the artist through ads and decoration resembling similar handiwork. The sections on the Walker Homestead in East Providence, c.1724 and the Major Thomas Hughes Tavern in the Greater Providence area, pre-1796 provide valuable insights into this researcher's odyssey as well as a thorough investigation (aided by technology) into the materials and techniques used at that time.

William Lindsey House c. 1803

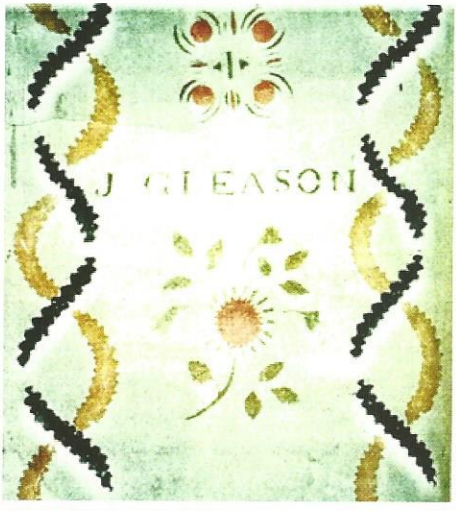
The Sullivan Dorr House in Providence c1810 features sophisticated wall murals painted by Felice Corne a professional Neapolitan artist who immigrated to Salem, MA in 1799 and later lived in Newport. His numerous commissions for scenic landscapes and seascapes provided him with a generous livelihood. Photos of his Bay of Naples, featured in the parlor, the rural hunting scenes, pastoral landscapes, classic ruins and moonlit water and fields cover the Dorr walls, illustrating his skill as a fine artist. The murals in the Dorr House (restoration was done in the 1960's) are believed to be the best surviving examples of Corne's work.

Whereas Corne's classical work was more prolific in the early 19th Century, Rufus Porter's walls cover the second quarter. The Wesson Coffee House c.1792 in Providence may have boasted a typical Porter painting featuring his stand

of trees in the foreground, body of water with a sprinkling of sail boat and ship and a body of land with lighthouse and row of trees in the background. In a bulletin entitled *Landscape Scenery Painting,* Rufus Porter writes that "every person in town should be informed, speedily as possible, that he has taken a residence for a very few days at the Wesson's Coffee-House, and offers to paint walls of rooms....[where prospective customers] are invited to apply.... where a specimen of the work may be seen...." Itinerant artists often offered to decorate walls to cover their room and board.

Wesson Coffee House walls c. 1792

Although Porter's style is in the more primitive folk art genre, some of his work reflects that he was aware of Corne's work and having stayed at the Wesson, this encounter is likely. Porter was interested in perspective and its rendering in classical painting as he indicated in "Scientific American" (he founded the magazine), and its influence are conveyed in his layouts. However, his wall murals reflected a truly American scene.



Hopkin's House walls

The Deacon Daniel Hopkins House in Foster, c.1800 and the Smith-Appleby House, (first part) in Smithfield c.1696 (wall stenciling c.1810), the Mowry Tavern in Smithfield c.1800 and the Wetherbee House in Foster c.1810 "seem" to share wall stenciling designs executed by the same hand. The Hopkins House walls bear an incredibly legible stenciled signature, "J GLEASON." This signature along with evidence demonstrating "the sharing of three design components: the stencil motifs, wall design layouts and paint colorations—which, when shared, can give a fairly positive attribution even with an extant signature being found" often represent the closest way of attributing work to an artist.

In 1772 Rhode Island patriots sank the HMS Gaspee, a British customs ship, becoming the first act of violence leading to the American Revolution. This incident took place off the shoreline of "the first planted tract of land in

what is now Kent County." Here, the township of Warwick is home to the Thomas Arnold House c.1800 described at one time to be "undoubtedly the grandest Federal-era residence in Apponaug," (native name of Warwick). Pictured in Brown's book is a folk painting from the right front parlor depicting a profile of a rabbit between two tall stylized trees. There are rolling hills in the background with diminutive trees against the hills, indicating their reduced size due to the distance. A limited palette of blues and greens and mottled sky indicate that although the genre is primitive, the artist had a sense of perspective. The over size of the rabbit may serve as an interpretive value. One can also see graining just below the painting and above the ornately carved mantel. Another room features stenciling resembling work by the "Classical Group." Brown provides better examples from other homes of the "classical stenciling" designs executed in different colors reflecting the owners preference. Unfortunately, very little of the stenciling could be saved but has been reproduced by Steve Tyson, a restoration architect.

Painted Rooms of Rhode Island, Colonial and Federal follows Brown's last two books, *American Wall Stenciling* 1790-1840 and *American Painted Floors before 1840* and resumes Ann Eckert Brown's journey of discovery and historical revelation of early American decoration in landmark homes across the country. Needless to say, this genre of decoration is prolific and the author thoroughly enjoys bringing these homes with their artistic interiors to the attention of all who appreciate interior painted ornamentation. The author lists an Appendix of [known] Rhode Island Decorative Painters and Early Paint Materials. She also includes an extensive Bibliography that is always helpful, as many of these books would be available in out-of-print book stores.

Brown's books are fascinating to read because of the characters, places and events to which we are introduced and that played a vital role in the making of this nation. American history is inextricably woven into these historic houses and the stories they tell. Brown has a wonderful recipe for making her books on early American aesthetics not only charming because of the art that ranges from naïve to sophisticated, but because they give the reader an opportunity to learn about the hearts and souls in the homes and around the hearths of our nation.

Stairs in the Christopher Rhodes House c1800. The blue runner going up the stairs still shows the original stencil design. The side stencils were added later.

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The building's interior is now a showcase of EAD disciplines, where HSEAD can host both public and membership events.

Thank you to all who visited, taught, demonstrated and supported the HSEAD Research Center during 2012.

Information about HSEAD Research Center classes, displays and events on www.hsead.org

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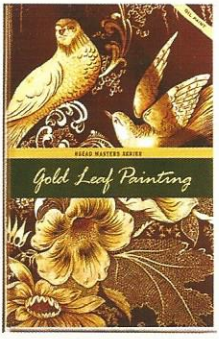

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