

The Decorator

Fall 2015



Journal of

The Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc.

The Decorator

Fall 2015

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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

*Front cover: Child in Blue Dress, circa 1845. Approx. 30 x 25 in.
Attributed to Joseph Goodhue Chandler.*

Back cover: Edward Hibbard, 19th century. Approx. 36 x 29 in. American Unknown).

The Historical Society of Early American Decoration

A society with affiliated chapters organized to carry on the work and honor the memory of Esther Stevens Brazer, pioneer in the perpetuation of Early American Decoration as an art; to promote continued research in that field; to record and preserve examples of early American decoration; to maintain such exhibits and publish such works on the subject of early American decoration and the history thereof as will further the appreciation of such art, the elevation of the standards of its reproduction and utilization; to assist in efforts public and private, in locating and preserving material pertinent to our work, and to cooperate with other societies in the accomplishment of purposes of mutual concern.

Vision: HSEAD will be, and will become recognized as, a preeminent national authority on early American decoration.

Mission: HSEAD will maintain a core membership of practicing guild artists supported by active programs of education, research, and exhibitions to perpetuate and expand the unique skills and knowledge of early American decoration.

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Editor's Notes

Shirley S. Baer

After seven years, it is a pleasure and privilege to be back as editor. Once again, I am very fortunate to have Joseph Rice helping me with layout, design and editing. We started working together 20 years ago, and it has been, for me, a delightful and rewarding partnership.

My job will also be made much easier thanks to HSEAD President Dianne Freiner, who will be reviewing books for *The Decorator*, and Yvonne Jones, who will be a regular contributor with her articles and "Letter from Birmingham" column.

In this issue, you will enjoy Yvonne Jones' article on the papier mâché products of Spiers & Son, and her *Letter from Birmingham*. Yvonne is and will always be an integral part of our journal.

A favorite subject for many of our members is covered in Dianne's book review of "The Bible of Illuminated Letters". You will want to buy the book.

Benjamin Colman, an Assistant Curator at the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme, Connecticut has written an article on painted chests of Saybrook and Guilford, Connecticut. Our many thanks to him for this informative and interesting article.

The Barbara and David Krashes collection of American primitive portraits is one you will envy. How wonderful it must be to live with these primitives! My thanks to Joseph for letting me know about the exhibit, and for writing the article.

I would like to applaud the talented and dedicated editor Lynne Richards, who so kindly and ably took on this job for the past seven years. Not only did she tackle the challenge of learning the design and layout programs for this publication, but she wrote many of the articles. I'm looking forward to, and counting on, more of her articles. Her contributions to HSEAD are greatly appreciated.

Remember, *The Decorator* is YOUR journal! We always welcome your input, suggestions, and article proposals.

Let's share more stories and beautiful images of early American decoration.



American Folk Art, Lovingly Collected Early Portraits at the Worcester Art Museum

by Joseph Rice

While many museums have examples of folk art portraits and accessories, and there have been many other exhibits, *American Folk Art, Lovingly Collected* at the Worcester Art Museum (WAM) brings together more than 40 works from the private collection of Barbara and David Krashes.

The exhibition features an array of paintings and furniture, many on display for the first time, with a particular emphasis on portraits of children.

Few things are as charming as primitive paintings of children. In an era of digital photography, it may be difficult to realize there was a time when a family would be fortunate enough to have even one

Above: Two Children with Doll, circa 1830. Approx. 24 x 29 in. Attributed to Deacon Robert Peckham.

Mary Coffin, circa 1810.
Attributed to John Brewster, Jr
Approx. 26 x 23 in.

permanent image of a loved one, regardless of the accuracy of the depiction. Wealthy families in the major cities would have access to highly skilled, sophisticated portraiture. As their wealth and proximity to the cultural centers decreased, so did the level of skill evinced in these portraits.

In some cases, the artist seems to have captured something of the essence of the sitter, in others, it may be assumed that showing the correct hair and eye color was enough to be considered an adequate “likeness”. And ironically, these seem to be the ones most prized today for the naive qualities and charm as folk art.

We may not know if many of these artists had any formal training at all, or how much exposure they had to the works of more skilled portrait artists. Some were undoubtedly self-taught, or may have had experience as ornamental painters. In addition, some of the likenesses

were simplified due to the painters working methods, the time available to complete the portrait, or the amount of money the customer wanted to spend.

Some of the artists represented in the exhibit have interesting backgrounds. William Matthew Prior (1806 - 1873) along with associated family members, seems to have focused on the fastest

Child in Blue with Doll, probably mid 1840's. Approx. 30 x 25 in.
Attributed to William Matthew Prior.





Frances Motley, circa 1830-1833. Aprox. 37 x 31 in. Attributed to John Samuel Blunt.

and most profitable way of providing a likeness. The “basic model” portrait had a flat appearance, but was available quickly for a very reasonable price.

John Brewster Jr. (1766 - 1854) was deaf and mute, but was able to make his living as an artist.

Joseph Davis (1811-1865) produced many similar depictions of family groups, with an emphasis on the decorated furnishings and textiles in the room settings.

Ruth Henshaw Bascom (1772 - 1848) is an interesting addition to this collection, in that women artists were decidedly in the minority at this time. Her works used a profile technique similar to that used to provide silhouettes, and were then often enhanced with additional painting and materials such as gold paper.

There is one small portrait by Rufus Porter (1792 - 1884), better known for his entrepreneurial activities in publishing, inventing and mural painting. His portraits, done with the aid of a “camera obscura” to project an image to work from show his acceptance of technology, and a foreshadowing of the age of photography that would impact the livelihoods of many painters.

As time went on, the painters or the customers (or perhaps both) became more discerning. The portrait of Frances Motley attributed to John Samuel Blunt shows movement to a more realistic, academic style of portraiture. As with formal colonial portraits, the depiction of the sitter’s blue velvet costume, and details of the elegant and up-to-date furnishings speak to the family’s position in the community.

The exhibit is given an additional sense of scale and context by the inclusion of painted architectural elements, furniture and accessories. These demonstrate the environment these paintings would have original hung in,

and in some paintings we see the sitters in chairs we would immediately recognize as painted and/or stenciled.

Some of the works show that early nineteenth century families were not so different from ours. The portrait of Edward Hibbard ca. 1845 (back cover) may seem disconcerting to us since he is shown attired in a dress as was the practice at that time, but just as today, pets were often considered part of the family, and this portrait includes the family spaniel.

Inclusion of other items such as dolls, toys, needlework; etc. give clues to the role and status of the sitter.

A double portrait (actually triple if you include the doll grasped by both subjects) includes a drapery border, similar to that seen on many of the reverse glass panels for mirrors.

Of special interest to our members are the decorated chests, chairs, an overmantel, a fireboard and a wooden dome box.

Among the painted accessories is a box attributed to the Worcester County area. A number of these boxes have been discovered over the years, all with related decoration and a Worcester County attribution. Typically, they have a black background, with gently arched “feathered festoons”. The example in this exhibit is particularly striking, as it has a bright red background.

One fireplace grouping has both an overmantel showing a farm in a landscape, and a fireboard with a vase of flowers, with a surround mimicking the Delft or English tiles that would have been used on a more sophisticated house’s fireplace. Both of these show the striving for elegance that fell somewhat short of the original inspirations.

Edith Elizabeth Nash (Girl in White with Black Hat on Lap), circa 1845. Aprox. 30 x 25 in. American, Unknown.





Overmantel of a House, circa 1830. American, approx. 33 x 44 in, possibly Eastern New Hampshire. American.



Mr. Kendall (R) and Mrs. Kendall (L), circa 1831. Attributed to Ruth Henshaw Bascom. Fireboard, circa 1800. Side chairs, circa 1830. Photo by Joseph Rice.



Dome Top Box, circa 1825. Paint on pine. One of several boxes of this style, shape and decoration found in the Worcester-Sturbridge area. An original eagle brass plate is on the lid. Approx. 6 x 15 x 8 in. American, Unknown.



Blanket Chest, circa 1830. Vinegar graining on bass wood. Found in Westmoreland, New Hampshire.

A very special thank you to Julianne Frost and the Worcester Art Museum for their assistance with this article. The exhibition: "American Folk Art, Lovingly Collected" is on view through November 29, 2015 the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester Massachusetts.

A beautiful catalog, including essays and a complete survey of the exhibit is available. (www.worcesterart.org). Unless otherwise noted, photographs courtesy of Worcester Art Museum.

Memorials for Visitors to Oxford: The Papier Mâché Products of Spiers & Son, of Oxford

by Yvonne Jones

Among the many beautiful arts, the exercise of which contributes to the decoration of our persons and homes, not one occupies so conspicuous a position as that of papier mâché work, which has during the last few years become so popular, that few houses can now be found in which some useful and elegant trifle may not be seen, made of this exquisite material'.¹

This view was expressed by an anonymous author in 1850, when the manufacture of highly decorative papier mâché goods was at its peak, and it perhaps explains why, at about the same time, the Oxford retailer, Richard Spiers & Son, added papier mâché to their already extensive range of goods. Papier mâché became so prominent a feature of their stock, that they exhibited some 'two – three hundred specimens', at the Great Exhibition in London, in 1851, which they displayed in 'a semi-octagonal dome-shaped case'² commissioned for the purpose, from



*Plate 1: Needlework Box painted with a view of Christ Church, Oxford, at the work shops of Richard Spiers & Son, circa 1851-3. W: 33.02cms, D: 22.86cms, H: 17.78cms
Courtesy of Hampton Antiques, Northamptonshire, England.*



Plate 2: Detail showing the reference number for this view of Christ College. Courtesy of Hampton Antiques, Northamptonshire, England.

the eminent designer, Owen Jones. However, their involvement with papier mâché was to last only a few years; Spiers & Son, were very alert to the demands of their fashionable cli-

ents, and clearly sensed when the heyday of papier mâché was nearing its end.³

Originally established as a perfumer, hairdresser and stationer in about 1830, Richard Spiers obviously possessed sound commercial acumen, for by 1847, the shop had developed into an extensive 'fancy repository' which, six years later, was said to have 'a spacious range of shop-windows, that were crowded with a costly and glittering profusion of papier-mâché articles, statuettes, bronzes, glass, and every kind of "fancy goods" that could be classed as "art-workmanship."' ⁴ Indeed as Verdant Green, the eponymous hero of Cuthbert Bede's satirical take on life as an Oxford freshman in Victorian times, went on to observe, the shop offered 'a small but gratuitous Academy exhibition'⁵ - a facetious but not wholly inappropriate analogy, because like the sewing box seen here (Plate 1), their papier mâché articles were mostly decorated with well-painted views, or hand-coloured prints, of Oxford Colleges and their surroundings.

According to a contemporary newspaper, the rationale for this style of decoration was that 'the taste of the Oxford people seems to run in a contrary direction to that of the usual purchasers of this description of goods.' If - like the decoration on this box - architecture and landscape were treated 'in an artist-like manner, to which other ornament should be subservient' then, the report continued, it would be 'more conducive to the diffusion of sound taste; and judging from the display', its author concluded that Spiers had 'acted wisely.'⁶ A judgement which is endorsed by their enduring reputation. They were not, of course, the only makers to decorate their wares with Oxford views but, certainly, the distinctive style of their execution makes them instantly recognizable as Spiers products.

This fine box, lined with red velvet and containing its original steel and pearl fittings, is painted with a view of Christ Church,⁷ which, like many of the views found on Spiers pieces, is referenced with a



Plate 3: Side one of the advertisement found inside the needlework box in Plate 1. Courtesy of Hampton Antiques, Northamptonshire, England.

number – in this instance ‘2119’ painted along the lower right-hand edge (Plate 2). Spiers generally marked their papier mâché goods in white painted letters on their bases, or along the lower edge of the view, with the title, the reference number for the picture, and the name ‘Spiers & Son. Oxford’,⁸ yet, in spite of its evident quality, this box bears no such mark. But, this omission is amply compensated by the hidden ‘gem’ which is found within. It takes the form of a richly embellished, double-sided fold-out advertisement, or trade card, for the firm which, on close scrutiny, yields much useful information about both its shop and its customers (Plates 3 and 4). Although undated, it would appear to have been printed in 1851 or 1852, for while it references the Great Exhibition, it mentions neither of the exhibitions in which they took part in 1853, namely that in Dublin, and that in New York where they were awarded a prize medal – a distinction which they would surely have highlighted had they already received it.

Each side of the advertisement comprises five sections. The panel at the centre of the first side, lists Spiers’ premises, the main one of which cornered High Street and Oriel Street. This we already know from the illustration in Bede’s book (Plate 5). Less well known is the full extent of the premises for, to judge from the fold-out sheet, not only was its frontage onto Oriel Street greater than its frontage onto High Street, but according to the accompanying legend, it occupied all three floors of the building; small wonder that Verdant Green ‘became so confused among the bewildering allurements around him’.⁹ In addition, we find that Spiers also had premises in Cornmarket Street.¹⁰ Both shops are marked on the map provided on the advertisement, where it will be

seen that each was within easy reach of all the colleges, and thus their target customers. With this in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that Spiers main shop on the High Street was immediately opposite Brasenose College – the college where the fictional Verdant Green studied, and which Cuthbert Bede renamed ‘Brazenface’ for the purpose of his satire.

Above the view of the interior of their shop – shown in the advertisement on the same side as the map – the firm is described as a Manufactory of Papier Mâché goods ornamented with views of every college & public building in Oxford. In the nineteenth century, promoting themselves as ‘manufacturers’ was accurate but, according to today’s understanding of the term, it is misleading for Spiers did not actually make papier mâché. Instead, they bought in ready-made and japanned papier mâché blanks – chiefly from Alsager & Neville, of Birmingham – some of which, it seems, were part-decorated, perhaps with their borders and gilding already in place.¹¹ Thus, it was only the ‘views’ that were executed in Spiers painting room in Oxford. Notwithstanding, the second part of their claim is irrefutable for the articles they exhibited at the Great Exhibition were decorated with over 150 different Oxford views, some of which are listed among the Principle objects of interest in Oxford, which heads page one of the fold-out advertisement.

The view of Christ Church seen on the box lid, almost matches the view of the same college found on Spiers printed sheet; both were clearly copied from the same source but in its detail, the box-lid shows the degree of artistic licence that painters often employed. In order to fit the shape of the box, the painter had to truncate ‘Tom Tower’, as the college’s bell-tower is called. Given the various shapes and sizes of



Plate: 4. Side two of the advertisement found inside the box. Courtesy of Hampton Antiques, Northamptonshire, England.



Plate 5: A view of Spiers shop, from *The Adventures of Verdant Green* ..., written and illustrated by Curthbert Bede, 1853. Private collection.

the objects to be decorated, such modifications were surely inevitable; compare, for example, 'A View of High Street' painted on the lid of the lap-desk illustrated in the earlier edition of *The Decorator* (see endnote), with the same view found on the reverse of the trade card, and it is soon evident that the detail of any decoration alters according to the hand which painted it.¹²

Nothing is known of the painters themselves for, in common with other decorative painters at the time, they were not at liberty to sign their work. Although many views were copied from identifiable prints, Robert Hunt, commenting on Spiers papier mâché exhibits at the Great Exhibition, implied that some of the paintings were original to the firm. 'Many of the scenes' Hunt wrote, 'are sketched upon the spot, and studies of details made by the persons who are employed to paint them. ... These remarks' he said, 'are made because some persons, not acquainted with the executive of painting imagine from the correctness of the architectural details that they are done by some block-printing process.'¹³ Nevertheless, Hunt's comments were ambiguous: did the artist who worked 'upon the spot', also paint the papier mâché object, or was his original sketch passed to a copyist who studied its details before commencing work? In the absence of any evidence, there is, of course, no way of telling.

Ever shrewd to the needs of their current market, Spiers advertised that 'The papier mâché painting-room [was] always open to visitors' – a

service tailored no doubt, to tempt clients to order specially decorated pieces like the 'fire-screen' which Verdant Green wished 'to be prepared with [his] family arms, as a present for his father; a ditto, with a view of his college, for his mother; a writing-case, with the High Street view, for his aunt; a netting-box, card-case and a model of the Martyrs' Memorial, for his three sisters ...'.¹⁴ Since we are told that 'Mr. Green, senior, would have eventually to pay the bill'¹⁵ for his son's extravagant 'generosity', it can perhaps be assumed that such large orders were not unusual among undergraduates at the time, and must have proved a lucrative line for the firm. However, given the list of 'Principal Objects of Interest in Oxford', along with the map locating not only 'the Principal Colleges and Public Buildings', but details of hotels, churches and gardens, this advertising leaflet was evidently intended as much for parents and other visitors to Oxford, as it was for undergraduates.

These 'remembrances of Oxford for which the Messrs. Spiers are so justly famed'¹⁶ were keenly sought in the nineteenth century as, indeed, they are now sought as antique mementoes by some of today's graduates. However, few if any other Spiers objects will now be found together with so splendid and informative a trade card as this 'Memorial for Visitors to Oxford'.

¹ Anon., *The Ladies' Library*, London, Darton & Co., 1850, p.1

² *Morning Chronicle*, 19 July, 1851, p.5, col. 4

³ Spiers ceased to advertise papier mâché some time between 1854 and 1863; the absence of Oxfordshire directories between those years makes it impossible to be any more precise.

⁴ Bradley, Edward (alias Cuthbert Bede), *The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green, An Oxford Freshman*, London, 1853, p.90

⁵ *ibid.*, p.91

⁶ *Morning Chronicle*, *op cit.*

⁷ Founded in 1524, on the site of a monastery. The college was re-founded by Henry VIII in 1546, and the monastery church became the cathedral of Oxford; together, they are named Christ Church.

⁸ A version of this mark was illustrated in the Fall 1999 edition of *The Decorator*, p.21

⁹ Bradley, Cuthbert, *op cit.*, p.91

¹⁰ 'Cornmarket Street' is known today as 'Cornmarket'

¹¹ Dickinson, George, *English Papier Mâché*, Leamington Spa, 1925, p.120

¹² If proof be needed, go to www.bridgemanimages.com, and search 'Spiers of Oxford'. There, you will find versions of Christ Church by three different hands, along with other Spiers pieces from the collection held by New College, Oxford.

¹³ Hunt, Robert, *The Art Journal, London, 1851, Papier Mâché Manufacture*, p.278

¹⁴ Bradley, Cuthbert, *op cit.*, p.91

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.91

¹⁶ *ibid.* p.91

Members' "A" Awards



Pontypool
Expanded Class
Deb Lambeth



Gold Leaf on Glass
Joanne Balfour



Country Painting
Deb Fitts



Freehand Bronze
Roberta Edrington

Members' "A" Awards

Honors Class
Victorian Flower Painting
Roberta Edrington



Stenciling on Tin
Doris Houghton

Stenciling on Wood
Linda Brubaker



Stenciling on Tin
Polly Bartow

Members' "A" Awards



Country Painting
Linda Mason



Watercolor Theorem
Dolores Furnari



Country Painting
Dolores Furnari



Country Painting
Linda Mason

Members' "A" Awards

Oil Theorem
Donna Hartz



Oil Theorem
Ann Kline



Oil Theorem
Linda Brubaker



Oil Theorem
Linda Brubaker

Members' "A" Awards



Country Painting
Expanded Class
Parma Jewett



Oil Theorem
Jeanette Biddle



Oil Theorem
Diane Tanerillo

Country Painting
Dolores Furnari



Members' "A" Awards

Oil Theorem
Donna Hartz



Oil Theorem
Diane Tanerillo



Watercolor Theorem
Mary Avery



Country Painting
Expanded Class
Parma Jewett

Members' "A" Awards



Country Painting
Parma Jewett



Country Painting
Parma Jewett



Left: Country Painting
Expanded Class
Parma Jewett



Country Painting
(Expanded Class: Spring 2014)
Linda Mason

Members' "A" Awards

Oil Theorem
Dianne Freiner



Country Painting
Expanded Class
Parma Jewett

Oil Theorem
Dolores Furnari



Country Painting
Expanded Class
Parma Jewett

Members' "B" Awards



Pontypool
Expanded Class
Deb Lambeth

Watercolor Theorem
Dolores Furnari



Country Painting
Nancy Toombs

Pontypool
Expanded Class
Deb Lambeth



Members' "B" Awards

Gold Leaf on Glass
Linda Mason



Pontypool
Expanded Class
Deb Lambeth



Country Painting
Joan Briggs



Oil Theorem
Carolyn Clough

Members' "B" Awards



Oil Theorem
Pat Evans

Below:
Country Painting
Nancy Toombs



Oil Theorem
Joan Bradford



Stenciling on Wood
Dolores Furnari



Members' "B" Awards

Country Painting
Nancy Toombs



Country Painting
Expanded Class
Roberta Edrington



Oil Theorem
Kat Britt



Country Painting
Nancy Toombs

Members' "B" Awards



Gold Leaf on Glass
Linda Brubaker

Country Painting
Pat Kimber



Oil Theorem
Pat Oxenford

Reverse Painting on Glass
Betty Nans



Members' "B" Awards

Stenciling on Wood
Dianne Freiner



Reverse Painting on Glass
Betty Nans



Gold Leaf on Glass
Joanne Balfour



Country Painting
Nancy Toombs

The Painted Chests of Saybrook and Guilford, Connecticut

by Benjamin W. Colman

(Assistant Curator, the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme, Connecticut)

The beautiful and beguiling painted chests of Saybrook and Guilford present a peculiar paradox in the story of American furniture. They appeared during a period when English colonists in New England were beginning to cultivate an independent identity. Yet the chests paint a complicated picture of Connecticut politics in the early years of the eighteenth century. If some colonists embraced a new American identity, others embraced the signs, symbols, and trappings of the British Empire.

We know of only some two dozen surviving examples of the painted chests made in the coastal Connecticut towns of Saybrook and Guilford between 1700 and 1740. Known as Guilford Chests, Saybrook Chests, or Saybrook-Guilford Chests, their richly polychrome surfaces captured the attention of collectors and scholars in the early twentieth century. Their inventive decorations still captivate the eyes and imaginations of viewers today, reflecting the cultural heritage of the region as well as the influence of fashionable European styles introduced through oceanic trade (figure 1). This group of chests was the subject of a 2014 exhibition at the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme, Connecticut, with an accompanying catalogue titled *Thistles and Crowns: The Painted Chests of the Connecticut Shore*.

The historic towns of Guilford and Saybrook encompass a 20-mile stretch of the Connecticut coast of Long Island Sound. The area was settled in the 1630s during the first wave of English colonization of New England. The earliest furniture built



Figure 1: Chest (detail), ca. 1710–1730. Made in Saybrook, CT. Pine, oak, tulip poplar; paint. Approx. 22 x 44 x 20 in. Old Saybrook Historical Society.

Figure 2: Chest with Drawer, 1710–1730. Made in Guilford, CT. Oak, pine, tulip poplar; paint. Approx. 32 x 45 x 20 in. Henry Whitfield State Museum, Guilford, CT. Gift of Mr. Wilbur Pardee.



in each town reflected the late-medieval English vernacular tradition, and that background continued to influence regional furniture into the early eighteenth century. In the eighteenth century, craftsmen began to adapt those traditions to better suit changing demands. The painted chest shown in figure 2, now at the Henry Whitfield State Museum in Guilford, shows a step in the gradual evolution of craftsmanship in small Connecticut communities such as Guilford.¹ Like earlier chests from the same town, it was constructed with a riven oak frame joined together with old-fashioned mortises-and-tenons. But unlike earlier chests, which were made completely of oak, the side panels are pine, with tapering, chamfered edges that sit securely within the frame. The large front panel of tulip poplar serves as a ground for a painted composition of scrolling leaves, vines, and blossoms.



Figure 3: Chest with Drawer, 1710–1730. Made in Guilford, CT. Oak, pine, tulip poplar; paint. Approx. 43 x 47 x 20 in. Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum, Wethersfield, CT. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ellsworth Grant.

Although decorative painting was used in New England furniture from the start, the Saybrook and Guilford chests are distinctive in their use of paint as a pictorial tool—that is, the painting depicts specific images rather than abstract geometric patterns or trompe-l’oeil emulations of exotic materials. The styles can be divided into two groups: The first includes chests painted with vegetal ornamentation in an all-over decorative scheme; The second includes a diverse range of forms painted with highly specific motifs derived from 17th-century political iconography.

The first group includes examples such as the chest illustrated above and the joined chest pictured in figures 3–4. They predominantly incorporate a generalized language of vegetal decoration. Although much altered in the twentieth century by restoration efforts that removed some of the ground color, the joined chest retains in passages the painted images of its original decoration. The large central panel on the front was composed with vertical symmetry around a central vessel -- a two-handled cup not unlike ceramic versions imported to North America from Europe, or made of silver in New England -- painted with a pinwheel blossom growing from the aperture. A vine scrolls to left and right, sprouting leaves and blooms in different colors. As on this chest, thistles may be part of the pictorial vocabulary of this style.

The second group of painted chests employs a wider variety of forms with a specific set of politically charged icons, including thistles, Tudor roses, fleurs-de-lis, and crowns. The remarkable chest pictured in Figures 5–6 is thought to have been owned by William Tully (1676–1744) of Saybrook. Tully came from a prominent regional family, and as indicated by the luxuries in his probate inventory, this chest would have been used

in a home filled with useful and beautiful objects. In keeping with the period taste for the Baroque, expressive ornament, dynamic forms, complex surfaces, theatricality, bold contrasts, and eclecticism took the place of the geometric purity of earlier decades. Although Baroque style found its purest expression in seventeenth-century Continental design, it also



Figure 4: Chest with Drawer (left side detail), 1710–1730. Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum, Wethersfield, Connecticut. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ellsworth Grant.



Figure 5: Chest, circa 1710–1730.
Old Saybrook Historical Society.

reshaped English style, and its influences came to New England with imported goods and immigrating craftsmen.

Why did thistles, crowns, fleurs-de-lis, roses, tulips, and birds appeal to Connecticut colonists in the early-eighteenth century? The thistle, a hardy plant known to thrive in harsh conditions, was a national symbol of Scotland carried to London by the Stuarts. The rose, abstracted from the red and white Tudor rose, was an icon of the English monarchy. The fleurs-de-lis, a stylized lily flower still an emblem of modern France, had been for centuries an icon of the French monarchy. Those old symbols acquired new meanings in colonial Connecticut as the British Empire took shape in the early-eighteenth century. Following the 1707 Acts of Union, a unified Great Britain was formed from the Kingdoms of England and Scotland. This was not always a peaceful process, and it took place during an extended period of political instability in England and international conflict across Europe. Scottish dissenters regularly arose against British rule in the first half of the eighteenth century in a series of Jacobite rebellions. English monarchs claimed historic dominion of France in the period. European wars of royal succession found their way to North America throughout the century. In the extended wake of the English Civil War (1642–1651), Interregnum (1649–1660), and Glorious Revolution (1688–1689), new iconographic combinations emerged to buttress the uneasy position of new monarchs. Old symbols were put to modern uses.

Images of thistles, roses, crowns, and fleurs-de-lis had long histories of circulation in North America. Early colonists of Saybrook and Guilford were surely familiar with Stuart-era coins, which depicted both the Scottish thistle the English Tudor rose. Ornamental thistles, crowns, roses, and fleurs-de-lis also appeared in 17th-century books, which likely found their way to New England.

In translating European style to New England consumers, colonial craftsman had the opportunity to offer distinctive interpretations to suit local tastes. The Saybrook and Guilford chests clearly reflect the current fashion for the Baroque, with bold colors and rich natural imagery. Craftsmen and consumers were familiar with new styles, but, removed from urban centers, were free to experiment with idiosyncratic responses using the tools they had at hand. And if the wealthiest citizens of small towns like Saybrook and Guilford could purchase expensive goods from Europe or from other colonies, a joiner serving the local population was wise to work with a diverse set of tools. The distinctive colonial expressions of Baroque taste that emerged during this period on the Connecticut shore reflect this condition.

In the 1930s, based on a 1727 probate inventory discovered by a local historian, a high chest now in the collection of the Winterthur Museum in Delaware was attributed to the shop of a Saybrook cabinetmaker named Charles Guillam (1671–1727). His name alternately spelled Guillaume, Gyllam, and Gillam, he was an immigrant cabinetmaker of French heritage originally from the English island of Jersey.²

When Guillam died in Saybrook, his workshop included books on architecture and design, two unfinished chests of drawers, a “great chair,” a “carved chair,” and “a painted chest with drawers.” The inventory also mentions a large selection of woodworking tools, including two workbenches, bench hooks, molding planes, a mortising chisel, carpenter’s chisels, a scraper, several vises, a variety of saws, and a glue pot. Many yeoman farmers of the period had basic carpentry tools, but specialized tools like these suggest a trained cabinetmaker who earned a living from the craft. The inventory also listed “a parcel of collours,” “boxes, brushes & gum,” and “109 lbs. oaker,” indicating that he had what was needed to paint as well as construct furniture.³

But the frequent attribution of such chests to Guillam is not always accurate. While he certainly owned the necessary tools and lived near an 18th-century owner of one chest, there is no direct evidence that any particular chest was actually his. He may have made one, or several, but

Figure 6: Chest (left side detail), Approx. 1710-1730. Old Saybrook Historical Society.

he certainly did not make all attributed to him. The painted decoration on one piece, for instance, is dated 1730, three years after Guillam's death.⁴ Other hands were clearly at work on the coast of Connecticut.

That this style of painting does not appear on furniture in England or Scotland is a testament to the complicated processes that brought fashions and tastes from English shops to New England homes. The craftsmen who made these chests and the consumers who purchased them wanted fashionable goods in the latest local styles, but they also wanted objects that reflected their identity as modern British citizens. Using bold colors to paint images of imperial power and unity, they created a distinctive tradition that achieved both ends.

These chests stand testament to the transformational powers of painted decoration on American furniture, elevating simple functional pieces into something mysterious, aspirational, and filled with complex meanings. By encoding the painted surfaces with beautiful images that referenced important events of the day, the decorators left behind important clues about the culture and politics of coastal Connecticut in the early eighteenth century.



Photos by Paul Mutino.

¹ Martha Willoughby, "From Carved to Painted: Chests of Central and Coastal" Connecticut, c.1675–1725," 1994. Master's thesis, Winterthur Program in Early American Culture, University of Delaware, 1–4."

² Robert F. Trent, "A Channel Islands Parallel for the Early Eighteenth-Century Connecticut Chests Attributed to Charles Guillam," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 2:1 (Fall 1994), 77–79."

³ Gilman C. Gates, *Saybrook at the Mouth of the Connecticut* (Orange, CT: Press of the W.H. Lee Co., 1935), 182.

⁴ Christie's, New York, *Property from the Collection of Mrs. Insley Blair* (Sale 1618), Lot 521, Jan. 21, 2006.



The Bookshelf

The Bible of Illuminated Letters

by Margaret Morgan

Published by Barron's. Illustrated in color, 256 pages

Reviewed by Dianne Freiner

Illumination, simply expressed, is the art of decorating books with color and gold. In our HSEAD collection of scrapbooks, artfully compiled by Maria Murray, illuminated letters decorated the pages with a stunning effect. Hence, my desire to find a book to review that our members could use as a guide in creating their own artworks.

For all of us who have a passion for illuminated letters, here is a wonderful book to guide us in their creation from start to finish. Margaret Morgan takes us into her studio and, step by step, show us how to set up our workspace and select the necessary tools: pens, inks, paints, and brushes. She explains in detail invaluable techniques such as the selection, handling, and preparation of vellum. In-depth demonstrations of the various methods of laying gold leaf are very well formulated.

Chapters One and Two explain how to get started creating your own illuminated letters.





Tools and Techniques (Chapter 1) introduces the range of tools and materials you will require, and explains all the important techniques you will need to master, from preparing vellum to gilding on plaster gesso. Preparing to Work (Chapter 2) describes how to design and plan your work in order to produce well-crafted pieces, with illustrations of page layouts and a discussion on choosing colors.

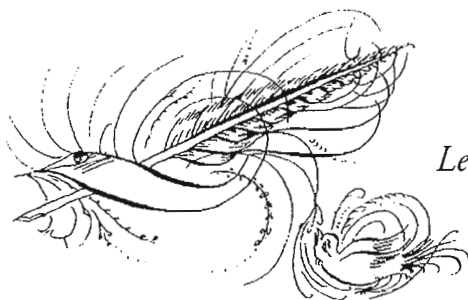
In Chapter Three, each section of the Alphabet Directory begins by putting the work into its historical context, with an explanation of how each style arose and what it was used for. Its particular characteristics are described and images from original manuscripts from the period are included. Step-by-step demonstrations are pictured so that one can learn how to create their own illuminated artwork in the style of each historical period. Numbered arrows indicate the number and order of individual strokes needed to create the letter. A selection of borders and motifs are offered to complement the letters and finish off ones pieces appropriately.

Chapter Four is a gallery of modern pieces and demonstrates the use of both traditional and new techniques in the creation of contemporary lettered art.

For all who have a passion for illuminated letters, here is a wonderful book to guide us in their creation from start to finish as Margaret Morgan takes us into her studio.

Welcome New Members

Dennis Lambert • Tammy Parubchenka
Diane Robinson • Sandra Senft
Carol Strait • Susan Tash



Letter from Birmingham

The stylised arrangement of fruit and its execution in bronze powders, are both unusual for a small papier mâché snuff-box of the type shown here. But of equal interest is the dated, hand-written inscription found inside the box, it reads:



April 1817

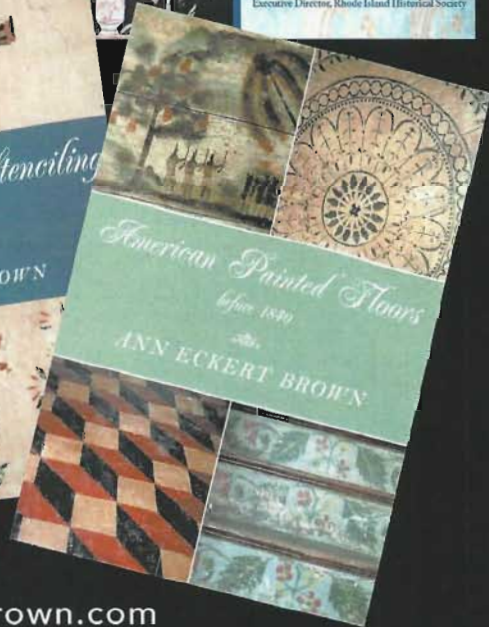
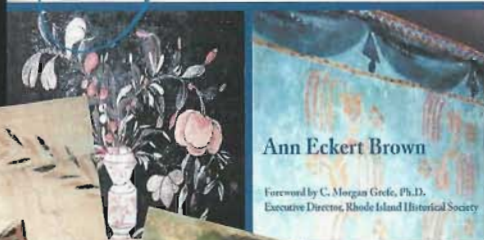
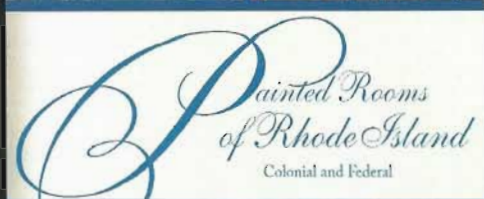
*This box was bought for me in Plymouth Fair by my Grandpa
Mr Samuel [sic] Gillard of Plymouth I being then about 6
months old. Nov. 25th 1887 J Perone*



Thus, an early dated example of bronze decoration, and an intriguing gift for one so young. It was obviously treasured.

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

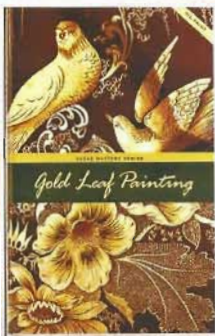


**Thank you to all who visit, teach, demonstrate and support the
HSEAD Research Center**

**Information about HSEAD Research Center classes,
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Historical Society of Early American Decoration

Products and Publications



Instructional Videos:

Videos include pattern(s), materials/supply list, color data and instructions by "Masters" of the craft. Like having a teacher at your side, these videos allow you to learn or refresh your EAD skills.

Country Painting (VHS tape)	\$25
Bronze Powder Stenciling (DVD)	\$40
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Coming soon: Reverse Glass Painting

Books

American Painted Tinware:

A Guide to Its Identification (Vol. I, II, III, IV), *hard cover*

This handsome, hard cover, four volume set is the only authoritative and comprehensive source on American painted tinware. A rich historical text, along with hundreds of full color photographs of original pieces and line illustrations of motifs and patterns, will allow you to visually identify the products of these regional tin shops.

\$55 each volume (plus S&H)

A list of HSEAD publications and supplies is available on the website or from the office in Cooperstown.



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Patterns and Supplies

Six stenciling and six country painting patterns are available and are appropriate for applicants. See images on HSEAD.org.

Country Painting on Tinware	\$25
Stenciling on Tinware	\$25

Theorem Kit: Includes tracing, laser cuts, color picture and instructions. Contact Office for price and information

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Freehand Bronze & Painted Chair Patterns: (Include 8" X 12" digital color photo & tracing) \$12; Color Catalog of patterns: \$25



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