

The
Decorator

*Journal of The Historical Society
of Early American Decoration*



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The Historical Society of Early American Decoration

A Society with affiliated chapters was 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; promote continued research in that field; record and preserve examples of early American decoration; maintain exhibits and publish works on the subject of early American decoration and its history to further the appreciation of this art and the elevation of the standards of its reproduction and utilization; assist in public and private efforts in locating and preserving material pertinent to the Society's work and to cooperate with other societies in the accomplishment of purposes of mutual concern.

Vision: The Historical Society of Early American Decoration (HSEAD) perpetuates and expands the unique skills and knowledge of early American decoration.

Mission: HSEAD will develop new ways of growing and sharing its art and expertise, of expanding its membership and collaborative relationships and of awakening appreciation of early American decoration among new audiences.

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Replica by Sandra Strong, artist and teacher, Historical Society of Early American Decoration.

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Editor's Letter

The Society's 74th Annual Membership Meeting in Rochester, N.Y. was a celebration in every way. Our much-anticipated reunion with friends and the celebration of our members' work together were joyously palpable as we greeted each other with spontaneous bursts of greetings and hugs.

Thank you, members of Genesee Chapter, in particular Martha Dolan and Pat Olson, Co-Chairs, for co-hosting our happy homecoming. Our Keynote speaker was Dr. Steven Galbraith, Curator of the Cary Graphic Arts Collection at the Rochester Institute of Technology and author of *Edges of Books*, an historical treatise illustrating the skillful and handsome decoration that is literally painted on the pages' edges including the covers and spines (Review in *Decorator*, Fall 2020). Saturday's program complimented its theme, 'Precious Paper: A Potpourri of Decoration' with talks and a day of classes related to decorative paper arts. We spent half-day Hands-On Workshops in Turkish Paper Marbling, Quilling, Paper Exploration, Letterpress Calling Card and Altered Books. As always, Exhibition was spectacular with recognition of the Society's members' juried and awarded decorative painting that, this year, included Polly Bartow's achievement of Master Craftsmanship. A beautifully diverse and abundant array of "In Our Own Time" was testament to the past 2-years of creativity and artisanship. Sunday's Program featured Christopher Bensch, V.P. of the Strong National Museum of Play, who spoke to "The Heart of The Matter: A History of Valentine Cards." Bensch shared the charm and sentiments conveyed in Valentines through the Museum's Collection of these keepsakes and had all of us remembering and laughing.

The Schwenkfelder Museum in Pennsylvania is uniquely focused on the traditional Pennsylvania German Folk Art of Fraktur Painting, and houses the largest collections of original Fraktur documents/certificates in the world. Candace Perry, Museum Curator, generously shared their history and reminded us that these decorative watercolors have recorded numerous and meaningful rites of passage, from births and baptisms to certificates of achievement. Their heartfelt expressions reflected a broad range of human experiences through art, verse and calligraphy. They were not framed and displayed like many decorative reproductions of Fraktur are enjoyed today. Many of these handmade and painted hallmarks were tokens stored in family albums as well as in and under chest lids. Avoiding light and frequent handling helped maintain their almost pristine condition. Their motifs, verses and calligraphy combined and created a charming example of Folk Art that reflected the inspiration of their makers and continue to speak to collectors and decorative painters today.

This issue welcomes an article by Andrea Rapacz, Curator at the Connecticut Historical Society (CHS) in Hartford, Connecticut, home to the nation's preeminent Collection of early American painted tavern signs. In 2000,

the Connecticut Historical Society published *Lions & Eagles & Bulls, Early American Tavern and Inn Signs*. Rapacz will share her expertise on the history and decorative images painted on several of its many outstanding artifacts. These ubiquitous markers attracted travelers to lodgings and places for rest, refreshing beverages and food. The custom continues today, but in yester-year these handmade signs were attractively and creatively hand-painted. From the late 1800s to the mid 19th Century, laws required that established businesses have signs that identified their purposes. However, the law most probably compelled what, thankfully, the entrepreneurial and artistic spirit was already inspired to express. Andrea will share their history and handsomely illustrate its story with works from the CHS's Collection.

Ann Eckert Brown, longtime HSEAD member and author of several books, continues the researchers' challenge of authenticating Rufus Porter's painted floors and walls. This truly renaissance man, master of so many arts and crafts, as well as a fountain of scientific inquiry and inventions, (from founder of *Scientific American* to inventor of the Colt 45!) has seemingly left his decorative mark in so many New England homes. Unfortunately, this man of diverse interests and curiosities probably never gave a thought to signing his work, apparently not a priority for him. Ann's examples further explore and compare designs and their locations and possibilities that add to the realm of high probabilities for designating a stenciled design as a Rufus Porter. Ann's new book, *Painted Images of A New Nation*, will illustrate 50 facsimiles, many traced from walls and floors that have been researched and stenciled by her of American wall stenciling before 1840.

This year is the 100th Anniversary of *The Magazine Antiques*, and in lieu of a book, the Book Shelf will pay tribute to one of the finest magazines available today that covers America's early and contemporary material culture. This is a fitting tribute to a magazine, founded (1922) by Homer Eaton Keyes, with a commitment to publishing scholarly researched articles, and it has earned, according to this Editor, HSEAD's Good Housekeeping seal of approval. Keyes, *The Magazine Antiques'* Editor, was the first to recognize Esther Stevens Fraser's passion for America's antiquities and her curiosity that inspired her thorough research of a subject. Esther's first article was published in *Antiques*, followed by 26 more. On behalf of HSEAD, congratulations to *The Magazine Antiques* for 100 years of enlightening scholarship and illustrations of America's artistic and material legacy.

In response to members' request that *The Decorator* be published twice a year, the Board has authorized a Spring Issue. It will be a pleasure to make this an opportune time to bring the Annual Membership Meeting in the Spring earlier to many of our members who are unable to travel to attend our Meeting and Exhibition. The Spring issue of *The Decorator* will feature the President's Message as well as Keynote Speakers' presentations and other highlights of the Meeting. Exhibition and the members' juried and awarded works will also be

celebrated in its spring issue.

The Historical Society of Early American Decoration will be celebrating its 75th + 2 Anniversary Meeting in April 2023! The Society has much to show for its three-quarters of a century of research, publications and recorded early American decoration, and today's members are committed to continuing Esther Stevens Brazer's mission. Since 1946, HSEAD's publications, its products, its expanding Lending Library of Design and activities have reflected the beauty of painted decoration and continued efforts to preserve America's legacy. America's decorative arts and crafts are uniquely attractive and convey a visceral charm and accessibility that continue to make them desirable to collectors and admirers. HSEAD has the talent and resources to assure that these early decorative arts and crafts have a place in the future.

The Decorator Staff wish you all a Joyful and Healthy Holiday Season.
Sandra Cohen



Golden Era of Scripted Drawing

by Candace Kintzer Perry

Fraktur (singular and plural) are German-language handwritten or printed texts, usually decorated and created in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Fraktur was made in German-speaking Europe and North America and served specific purposes for instruction or documentation.

The group known as Pennsylvania Germans or

Pennsylvania Dutch are descendants of German speakers who immigrated to Pennsylvania from 1683 to approximately 1800. The immigrants came from the Pfalz or Rhineland, but others were originally from German-speaking eastern Europe and Switzerland. Economic opportunities and religious tolerance in Pennsylvania contributed to many seeking new homes in the colony. Most had agrarian backgrounds or were craftsmen in small towns and villages and continued with farming or their trades here. If the immigrants were indentured redemptioners, they had to work off the price of their passages with employers who paid for them. German settlers spread throughout the state, with some counties, including Lancaster, Berks, Lehigh, and Montgomery, having the highest concentrations. The immigrants and their descendants sometimes continued to Maryland, Virginia, and Ohio, taking their Germanic traditions with them.

The word Fraktur comes from the German word *Frakturschrift*, meaning “broken writing.” Henry C. Mercer of Bucks County, an early collector of Fraktur, used the term in his 1897 essay “The Survival of the Mediæval Art of Illuminative Writing among Pennsylvania Germans” referring to the “art of Fraktur or illuminative handwriting.” Subsequently, the word was adopted to provide an overall name for the decorated texts, but it was not what the German speakers called them in the 1700s and 1800s.

Maximilian I, the Holy Roman Emperor (reigning from 1493-1519), commissioned the design of *Frakturschrift* in the early 1500s for use as a printed font. The new font was meant to be an improvement over earlier fonts, such as Textura which Johannes Gutenberg developed for the printing of his famous Bible, ca. 1455. Interestingly, Textura was meant to emulate a written hand.



Huppert Cassel (b. 1751), “A Letter for Abraham Heebner,” January 24, 1773

Skippack or Worcester Township,
Montgomery County, Penn.,

Watercolor and ink on laid paper, 8” x 13”

Frakturschrift was later adapted for handwriting and became strongly linked to the German Protestant identity. In Europe, writers used *Frakturschrift* for creating all kinds of documents, both for public and personal use.

In Pennsylvania, German immigrants continued to make these documents and manuscripts. One of the earliest practitioners with an extensive surviving body of work was Christopher Dock (ca. 1698-1771), a Mennonite schoolmaster working in the Salford and Skippack vicinity of present-day Montgomery County, Pennsylvania as early as 1718. Dock was a beloved and respected figure for his kindness and patience with his students, both qualities that were not always associated with eighteenth-century schoolmasters. One of his great legacies is his *Schul-Ordnung* (*School Management*), a German-language pedagogy that was published in 1770. In the *Schul-Ordnung*, Dock wrote of presenting his students with “a flower drawn on paper or a bird” for their accomplishments. These drawings became a part of later schoolmasters’ Fraktur repertoires. Author Marguerite de Angeli immortalized Dock in her must-read children’s book, *Skippack School*. The Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center in Pennsburg, Montgomery County, owns several Fraktur made by Dock for his students from the 1740s to the 1760s.

Farther west in Ephrata, Lancaster County, the members of the Ephrata Cloister were creating Fraktur by the 1740s as illustrations for their tune books and other spiritual purposes. The makers of the Cloister Fraktur used their



Attributed to Christopher Dock (ca. 1698-1771)
Vorschrift for Gerhard Bechtel, 1747
Skippack or Salford Vicinity, Montgomery County, Penn.
Watercolor and ink on laid paper, 7"x 11.75"



Attributed to Christopher Dock (ca. 1698 -1771),
Acrostic Alphabet,
letters N through Z, ca. 1760-1770.
Skippack or Salford Vicinity, Montgomery County, Penn.
Watercolor and ink on laid paper, 8.25" x 13.5"



Maker unknown, Brother Amos (Jan Mayle)
memorial, ca. 1783
Ephrata Cloister, Lancaster County, Penn.
Ink on laid paper, From the Governor
Samuel W. Pennypacker Collection.

drawings to illuminate the extensive symbolism in their hymns, but in doing so, also left remarkable records of how the Cloister members were clothed.

The “Golden Age” of Fraktur, when the most production occurred, was between approximately 1780 and 1830 and paralleled the time when other Pennsylvania German decorative traditions were at their height. Painted furniture, redware pottery, ironwork, and traditional needlework all flourished alongside Fraktur. The Golden Age aligns with the period after the upheaval of the American Revolution in southeastern Pennsylvania through the establishment of the Free Public Schools Act in Pennsylvania in 1834. Thereafter the old Germanic traditions disappeared from schools, and Fraktur was one of them.

Men were the primary makers of Fraktur. They served as schoolmasters into the mid-19th Century and made these decorated manuscripts for educational purposes. Pastors also produced Fraktur, and with itinerant scribes, or scribes, often completed the ubiquitous printed birth and baptismal certificates (discussed in the following paragraph). These schoolmasters and pastors usually made Fraktur for children and teenagers and much less for adults.

There were some exceptions to this men’s club. Women who made Fraktur did so for their family and friends, and the number of known women artists is tiny. Schwenkfelder Susanna Heebner (1750-1818) made the Fraktur shown here for her nephew, Abraham Heebner. It is among the best known in the Schwenkfelder Collection and part of a large Heebner Family Collection given to the institution in 1920. Susanna Heebner alone made over forty pieces preserved in the Collection by the family. She was a single woman who lived on her own, most likely caring for her father in his elder years, unencumbered by children and husband and the responsibilities that accompanied them. Susanna had far more time available to her to make Fraktur, and indeed she did, from approximately 1805 until she died in 1818. Most of her output of religious texts,



Attributed to Susanna Heebner (1750-1818)
Religious Text, 1807
Worcester Township, Montgomery County, Penn.
Watercolor and ink on laid paper, 7.75" x 13.25"



Attributed to Susanna Heebner
(1750-1818)
House with Six-Bed Garden Drawing
for Abraham W. Heebner,
Worcester Township, Montgomery
County, Penn.
Watercolor and ink on laid paper,
12.5" x 7.75"

bookplates, drawings and puzzles was for her beloved nieces and nephews. Susanna also copied sophisticated mystical illustrations from a book of the German mystic and priest Johannes Tauler (ca. 1300-1361), a favorite theologian of the early Schwenkfelders. She was influenced in her decoration by her contemporaries, the Mennonite schoolmasters Huppert Cassel and Andreas Kolb and by the younger Schwenkfelder schoolmaster, David Kriebel. Though many of Susanna's designs were not original, her skill and penmanship rivaled any of the men working at the same time.

Fraktur falls into specific categories, and much of it had a practical intent. Best known because of the sheer quantity of surviving examples, the printed *Geburts und Taufscheine* (birth and baptismal certificates) were filled in and often colored by hand. These certificates were used by "church" Pennsylvania Germans, meaning those of the Lutheran and Reformed faiths. Sectarian Pennsylvania Germans, such as the Anabaptist Mennonites, Brethren, Amish and the Schwenkfelders did not practice infant baptism and therefore did not use these forms. Adhering birth



Geburts und Taufscheine,
 Scrivener/Decorator unknown
 for Miles Dengler, 1823, Oley Township,
 Berks County, Penn.
 Watercolor and ink on printed document



Birth Record for Lydia Jackelin
 (Yeakel), Maker unknown,
 adhered inside the lid of a painted
 chest created probably around 1780.
 Watercolor and ink on laid paper

and baptismal certificates under the lids of the decorated chests was a common custom. Young men and women received these chests before marriage. Schoolmasters made Fraktur as teaching tools, a tradition with deep European roots. They created *Vorschriften* (writing models) for their students; small drawings known as rewards of merit; tune books with decorated title



Drawing (Reward of Merit), n.d. Attributed to
 Andreas Kolb (1749-
 1811) Montgomery
 County, Penn.
 Watercolor and ink on
 laid paper, 4.5" x 2.5"



Vorschrift, 1769, Attributed to Huppert Cassel (b.1751-?)
 Skippack or Salford vicinity, Montgomery County, Penn.
 Watercolor and ink on laid paper, 8" x 13

been controversial within Fraktur studies. Some scholars have claimed that the flowers, birds and decorative devices on Fraktur have meaning, while others have vigorously denied it. The truth is somewhere in between. Some makers of Fraktur embellished their work as the scribes in Europe might have, with calligraphic flourishes that would later evolve into stylized hearts, flowers, birds and more. Others, such as the deeply spiritual Schwenkfelders, related the decoration specifically to the text or even drew imagery without text that someone “in the know” could understand. Dr. Peter Erb, a scholar of Caspar Schwenckfeld, the spiritual leader of the Schwenkfelders and Schwenckfeldianism, has this to say in an unpublished paper regarding garden symbolism in Schwenckfelder Fraktur:

In the Catholic tradition, as well as in Heebner’s work, Mary is a “garden enclosed” according to Song of Songs 4:12, in which all flowers and spices and fruits spring up, a garden in which a fountain springs (Song of Songs 4:15) and gives forth living water, a garden which is the sister and the bride of God (Song of Songs 5:1). As the tradition developed this garden, the Virgin Mary, came to be associated with the Church, within which those who modelled themselves on Mary and toward Christ could blossom with virtues like hers, and with the eschatological garden of the new heavens and the new earth, the garden within which the old Paradise of Eden, once lost, could be renewed with its two trees, one of the knowledge of good and evil, one of the fruit of eternal life. With the symbols of the Church were attached the images of the house of wisdom



Drawing with text, 1806, Attributed to
 David Kriebel (1787-1848)
 Gwynedd Township, Montgomery County, Penn.
 Watercolor and ink on laid paper, 13.5" x 11.25"
 Translated from German, the verse reads “A
 tiny flower is the wisdom/ that was forever
 with God/it grew up into the human Christ/
 Its [whose] power vanquishes death”

and wisdom herself (Proverbs 8 and 9:1), a house depicted in medieval and baroque Catholic art alongside the enclosed garden of Mary.

Schwenkfelders frequently incorporated garden imagery in their Fraktur and drawings of the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. Members of the Abraham Schultz family even copied a design from the German mystic and poet Daniel Sudermann's (1550-1631) book on the Song of Solomon, depicting the "garden enclosed." Similarly, flowers during this period, carried meaning on Fraktur. Dr. Erb writes:



Drawing with Religious Text for Sarah Rein, Andreas Anders (1763-1832)

Moreover, Heebner's Catholic and medieval forebears, like her, often referred to Mary's virtues by means of flowers: the white lily marking her purity, the red rose indicating her suffering, and the blue violet denoting her faithfulness. And chief among these flowers there grew up the "final" rose Jesus Christ.



Daniel Sudermann (1550-1631) Hohe geistreiche Lehren, und Erklärungen: Über die fürnembsten Sprüche deß Hohen Lieds Salomonis..., 1622.



*Drawing with Religious Text, n.d., Attributed to Adam Schultz (1775-1831)
Watercolor and ink on laid paper, 4.5" x 7".
Salomonis..., 1622.*

Likewise, carnations often bloomed in Schwenkfelder Fraktur. Schoolmaster David Kriebel used a stylized carnation image repeatedly on drawings possibly intended as rewards of merit for his students. Susanna Heebner incorporated a similar design into her work which she may have borrowed from Kriebel.



Drawing with Religious Text (Reward of Merit), 1807, Attributed to David Kriebel (1787-1848) Gwynedd Township, Montgomery County, Penn. Watercolor and ink on laid paper, 5" x 3"



Drawing, n.d., Attributed to Susanna Heebner (1750-1818) Worcester Township, Montgomery County, Penn. Watercolor and ink on laid paper, 5" x 3"

Artists have used carnations for centuries to symbolize both divine and earthly love and when accompanying an image of the Madonna, to signify motherly love and devotion.

Fraktur certainly fulfills the necessary criteria as folk art. It is highly identifiable with the persons of Germanic descent who produced it. Its production was a learned skill passed on through generations in Pennsylvania German communities, usually to men who needed the skills for their livelihoods. When the Golden Age of Fraktur faded, Fraktur making continued in families, often as drawings that incorporated typical Fraktur motifs. Fraktur served practical purposes and was not meant to be art that was framed and hung on walls. It was often stored away in chests or perhaps inserted in books, which may account for the excellent survival of so many of these fragile manuscripts.



Drawing, 1843, Attributed to Sarah Kriebel (1828-1908) Worcester Township, Montgomery County, Penn. Watercolor on wove paper, 10"x 8.5"

Fraktur differs from other forms of Pennsylvania German folk art in its spiri-



*Vorschrift, no date but probably ca. 1815, Maker unknown
Hereford Township, Berks County, Penn
Watercolor and ink on laid paper, 8" x 13.5"*

tuality. Although it may have motifs like those on painted chests or redware pottery, the Fraktur makers' intent is far different from the artisans who created other objects. The spiritual nature of Fraktur fell away as the decades passed, and the makers became further removed from their Eu-

ropean roots. The glorious visual celebrations of faith and piety, so apparent during Fraktur's Golden Age, reflect the efforts of schoolmasters and others to instill the ideas of their communities in the hearts and minds of the next generation.

Source:

All images are from the collection of the Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center.



Candace Kintzer Perry is the Curator of Collections at the Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center, Pennsburg, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

Tavern Signs, Early America's Main Street Broadsides

by Andrea Rapacz

From the mid-1700s through the mid-1800s, Connecticut's and all of America's roads were studded with taverns and inns - places for weary travelers needing a place to stay. As early as 1672, Connecticut law mandated all taverns and inns have a sign that made it distinguishable from all other buildings. Based on research by Margaret C. Vincent, CHS Tavern Sign Project Researcher, there were approximately 5,000 signs hanging outside taverns, inns and hotels during this period in Connecticut. Dr. Susan P. Schoelwer conservatively estimated at least 50,000 signs were painted in America between 1750 and 1850. Of these thousands of signs, the Connecticut Historical Society's (CHS) Collection numbers approximately 67 signs, the



Fig 1. Sign for Bull's Inn, dated 1749,
Centerbrook, Conn.
attributed to Saybrook sign maker
CHS Collection, Collection of Morgan
B. Brainard
Gift of Mrs. Morgan B. Brainard,
1961.63.9. (LEB, Cat. 1)

largest single Collection of American signs in the world (*Zimmerman, LEB, 34*). (At least two signs have been added to the Collection since publication.) In aggregate, the Collection documents a range of styles, iconography and their makers' skills over a 100-year period. The signs in this article were chosen to show that range, from the earliest sign in the Collection with a solitary image, to signs that are more nuanced and detailed and tell a story about the tavernkeepers and their allegiances, interests, and aspirations.

In the late 1990s, CHS initiated a major project to research and conserve its Collection of tavern signs and document taverns and tavernkeepers across Connecticut. The result was the publication *Lions & Eagles & Bulls: Early American Tavern & Inn Signs from the Connecticut Historical Society*, edited by Dr. Susan P. Schoelwer and the creation of a traveling exhibition of the same name. The information in this article draws heavily on the research and essays written for that project, and the acronym *LEB* found through this article refers to the publication. The corresponding catalog number for each sign depicted is listed at the end of each image

caption, with the exception for the *Sign for Holcomb's Tavern* that was acquired by CHS after the publication of the catalog.

The earliest sign in the CHS Collection dates to 1749. It is also the earliest documented American sign that has not been overpainted. (LEB, 184-5) The *Sign for Bull's Inn* in Centerbrook, Conn. has a simple, straightforward image of a single horse that was commonly used during this period. The image accompanies the innkeeper's initials with the inscription. "ENTERTAINMENT./ FOR MAN & HORS" This sign clearly lets a traveler know that this establishment would take care of their horses' needs, as well as their own. The horses on both sides of the sign are identical, which suggests they were made using a template. It also appears the lettering was done by hand, and there are guideline marks visible on the sign. (LEB, 184) Of note, there are five bullet holes in the horse's chest on one side of this sign.



Fig 2. *Sign of General Wolfe*, around 1768
Brooklyn, Conn., unidentified maker
CHS Collection, Gift of Rufus S. Mathewson, 1841.11.0. (LEB, Cat.2)

This *Sign of General Wolfe* is from an inn owned by famed Connecticut Revolutionary War General and innholder, Israel Putnam. It depicts Putnam's former commander, British Major General James Wolfe (1727-1759). Wolfe became a hero at the Battle of Quebec during the French and Indian War and later died from wounds sustained during the fight. Prints of Wolfe circulated widely through the American colonies and he would have been recognizable to many people. The image painted on this sign was copied by hand from a mezzotint by Richard Houston in London around 1760 after a sketch by Hervey Smith. (Finlay, LEB, 59) Sign painters sometimes had other skills, like engraving and used prints and other avail-

able materials to which they had access as inspiration for images on their signs. (Finlay, LEB, 56) It is clear that the image on this sign was painted by a skilled artist, as the clothing details remain true to the source, and the subject's body and limbs are in proportion to each other. Mylar tracings taken of both sides of the sign show that they are identical, and like with the *Sign for Bull's Inn*, indicate that a template was used. Researchers suggest it may have been painted by William Johnston (1732-71), who was considered Connecticut's first professional artist. (LEB, 189) This is another sign in the CHS's Collection with bullet holes! Because Wolfe is wearing a red coat associated with the British army, notes in CHS's files indicated it was shot at by Patriots during the American Revolution.

Despite the large number of signs created, only a select few have been

definitively attributed to an artist or shop. One prolific and documented sign painter was William Rice (1777-1847). Rice had a distinctive style, but more importantly, he signed his work. Rice did more than just paint signs, and the following is from an advertisement Rice placed in the *Connecticut Courant* in 1818:

*“WILLIAM RICE, Painter, INFORMS the citizens of Hartford and its vicinity, that he ... offers his services in the various branches of Painting, such as **SIGNS**, Of all descriptions in the newest style. **CARRIAGES**, Coaches, chaises, sulkeys, stages, 1 horse waggons, &c. **LETTERING**, Fire-buckets, window shutters, guide boards, vessels, &c. **MILITARY**. Standards for cavalry, artillery and militia, drums, knapsacks, caps, canteens, &c. **DOORS**. Inside and out painted in imitation of satin, wood, mahogany, and curled maple, nearly as handsome as the real wood. **FURNITURE** Painted and varnished to imitate satinwood and curled maple. **GUILDING AND VARNISHING**. Furniture, chairs, apothecaries’ draws and bottles, picture-frames, &c. **FAN-LIGHTS** Made in the newest style and handsomely gilt. **House-Painting & Glazing** done in the best manner, and with pure stock. **Floors painted in imitation of Italian marble**, &c.”* (*Connecticut Courant*, May 12, 1818)

Many of Rice’s signs include images of eagles. This is not a surprise, because after the American Revolutionary War, images of eagles started to turn up everywhere including on architectural ornaments, currency, decorative arts



Fig 3., & 4. Sign for Tarbox's Inn and Village Hotel, dated 1807 and 1824 possibly overpainted around 1831, East Windsor, Conn.

signed by William Rice, CHS Collection

Collection of Morgan B. Brainard

Gift of Mrs. Morgan B. Brainard, 1961.63.21. (LEB, Cat. 19)

and, of course, tavern signs! (Finlay, *LEB*, 59-60)

This Sign for Tarbox's Inn and Village Hotel is an example of how determining the history of a tavern sign can be tricky. Frequently sign boards were repainted or reused by different proprietors, so one needs to dig a little more to assign a date or determine the original owner. When the sign was sent to the Williamstown Art Conservation Center for treatment, both sides promoted the

Village Hotel. (Fig. 3) When a layer for the Village Hotel was removed on one side, conservators discovered William Rice's signature and one of his eagles. (LEB, 202) (Fig. 4) This *Sign for Tarbox's Inn* was used to promote at least three different concerns. If you look closely at the image, you can see there are dates and the Tarbox name that had been over-painted by E. Ely. The shape of this sign indicates that it was constructed in 1807, but the painting by Rice would have been done in 1824. It is estimated that it was painted for the Village Hotel around 1831. (LEB, 202-3)



Fig 5. *Sign for Arah Phelps's Inn*, around 1826, North Colebrook, Conn. signed by William Rice, CHS Collection
Gift of Nancy Phelps (Mrs. John A.) Blum, Jonathan Phelps Blum and Timothy Alexander Blum, 2000.135.0. (LEB, Cat. 37)



Fig 6. *Sign for the Vernon Hotel*, dated 1834

Manchester and Vernon (now Rockville), Conn. signed by William Rice, CHS Collection
Gift of the Sabra Trumbull Chapter, Daughters of The American Revolution, Rockville, Conn., 1960.9.0. (LEB, Cat. 46)

Unlike Rice's other known eagles, this one on the *Sign for Arah Phelps's Inn* does not include any patriotic imagery, instead it shows an eagle in flight with its talons outstretched. (Fig. 5) It is possible that Rice used a natural history print as the inspiration for this eagle. (LEB, 221-2)

The most ornate and certainly largest sign painted by Rice is the Sign for the Vernon Hotel. (Fig. 6) This detailed sign features an eagle grasping the Connecticut State Seal with its talons. Below are canons painted along with what is described as fronds. There are other techniques used in this image including low relief carving, blue and green smalt, as well as glass flakes. (LEB, 227) Smalt is crushed glass mixed with pigment to create a glittering effect.

This is the last example of an eagle painted by Rice on a sign in the CHS. The eagle on this sign is similar to eagles found on at least three other signs. (Fig. 7) What is distinctive



Fig 7. *Sign for Wadsworth's Inn*, dated 1844
Hartford, Conn., signed by William or Frederick Rice
CHS Collection, Collection of Morgan B. Brainard
Gift of Mrs. Morgan B. Brainard, 1961.63.49. (LEB, Cat. 55)



Fig 8. Sign for Wadsworth's Inn, dated 1844
Hartford, Conn., signed by William or Frederick Rice
CHS Collection, Collection of Morgan B. Brainard
Gift of Mrs. Morgan B. Brainard, 1961.63.49.
(LEB, Cat. 55)



Fig 9. Sign for Arah Phelps's Inn, around 1826
North Colebrook, Conn., signed by William Rice
CHS Collection, Gift of Nancy Phelps (Mrs. John A.) Blum,
Jonathan Phelps Blum and Timothy Alexander Blum,
2000.135.0. (LEB, Cat. 37)



Fig 10., & 11. Sign for Holcomb's Tavern,
dated 1802, unidentified maker
Simsbury, Conn., CHS Collection, 2010.188.0
(LEB, Cat. 44)

on this eagle is the use of copper leaf. Rice's son advertised the option in the 1850s, but the sign is proof that it was being used by William Rice years before.

Rice was also fond of lion imagery and paired them with eagles on a number of his signs. Rice also used a lion on the sign for his own shop in 1818. (LEB, 251) The lion images were often inspired by natural history engravings of the time. The lion on Rice's *Sign for Wadsworth's Inn* (Fig. 8) can be traced back to an image of a lion printed in *Natural History of Foreign Quadrupeds* by Thomas Bewick in England in 1809, that was later copied by Alexander Anderson who was among the many other artists copying this image in the 1830s. (Finlay, LEB, 63-4)

Rice chose to paint a far more stylized looking lion on this sign for Arah Phelps's Inn. (Fig. 9) The style has been compared to Edward Hicks' paintings, but it is also likely that both Hicks and Rice were influenced by the prints and images circulating at the time. (LEB, 219)

Masonic symbols and images were popular design elements on tavern signs around Connecticut. Margaret Vincent has noted that there were many instances of tavern keepers who were also members of the local militia and Freemason lodges. (LEB, 44) The most stunning sign in CHS's Collection with masonic imagery is the *Sign for Holcomb's Inn* from 1802. Luther Holcomb was a Freemason and inn-keeper whose sign boldly depicted his allegiances. This incredibly detailed sign included over 10 masonic imag-

es painted in a variety of colors and gilding. (Fig. 10) The reverse side of the sign has a spread eagle as seen on the Great Seal. (LEB, 44) (Fig. 11) Even the turned side rails of the sign were painted with vines. This sign was added to the CHS's Collection after the publication of *Lions & Eagles & Bulls*.



Fig 12., & 13. Sign for Carter's Inn, around 1823

Clinton, Conn., possibly painted by Jones & Bush, Middletown, Conn.

CHS Collection, Collection of Morgan B. Brainard

Gift of Maxwell L. Brainard, Charles E. Brainardk, Mrs. Edward M. Brainard,

Mrs. Morgan B. Brainard, Jr., Mrs. H.S. Robinson, Jr. (Constance Brainard), 1971.30.1. (LEB, Cat. 33)

One of the more delightful signs in the CHS Collection is the *Sign for Carter's Inn* dated around 1823. This sign has more detail than most and is in exceptional condition. At the time this sign was made, the words "strangers" and "resort" were starting to be used in favor of the word "entertainment." One theory for this choice is that Jared Carter wanted to position his hotel as a destination rather than a stop along the road. One side of this sign shows two men, one a civilian, the other a soldier, sitting at a dining table with dogs lying at their feet, giving the impression that J. Carter's Inn would be a destination and a place where people are welcome to come and mingle. (Fig. 12) The other side depicts a man and woman traveling in their personal vehicle with a driver. (Fig. 13) The hotel in Clinton, Connecticut was located by the shore, and newspaper advertisements promoted sea air as an amenity of staying there. (LEB, 215)



Fig 14. Sign for The Collins Hotel, around 1825-1835

Naugatuck, Conn., unidentified maker

CHS Collection

Gift of Newton C. Brainard, 1957.66.1. (LEB, CAT.42)

As more Americans learned to read, some sign painters relied solely on words, instead of images on their signs. A sign painter would rely on geometry and skill to produce a sign like this *Sign for the Collins Hotel*. (Webber, LEB, 74) (Fig. 14) To create this exquisite sign, the painter used bold gilded letters and simple design mo-

tifs to attract the attention of passersby. The sign has a dark blue smalt background that makes the gold letters with red shading stand out. The Collins Hotel was founded in 1811, but based on the size and style of the sign board, it is likely it was made in the 1820s and repainted in the 1830s or 40s. (*LEB*, 224)

These rare pieces, that are admired as fine examples of American Folk Art today, were a common and familiar part of the landscape for people traveling through and living in Connecticut. CHS's Collection is a rich resource for examination and study of travel, styles, techniques, symbolism and artistry in the era when America became the United States and the country transitioned from an agrarian to industrial nation.

Sources:

Schoelwer, Susan P., ed. *Lions & Eagles & Bulls: Early American Tavern & Inn Signs from the Connecticut Historical Society*. Hartford, Connecticut, and Princeton, New Jersey: The Connecticut Historical Society in association with Princeton University Press, 2000.

Vincent, Margaret C. "Some suitable Signe... for the direction of Strangers': *Signboards and the Enterprise of Innkeeping in Connecticut*" in *Lions & Eagles & Bulls: Early American Tavern & Inn Signs from the Connecticut Historical Society*. The Connecticut Historical Society in association with Princeton University Press, 2000. 36-55.

Exhibition labels written by Kate Steinway for the accompanying CHS Exhibition of the same name, 2000.



Andrea V. Rapacz has worked at the Connecticut Historical Society for over 25 years in the Exhibition and Collections Departments and is currently serving as the Director of Collections. One of the highlights of her career was traveling to install the signs for the exhibition, "Lions & Eagles & Bulls" at different museums in the northeast and Williamsburg in the early 2000s.

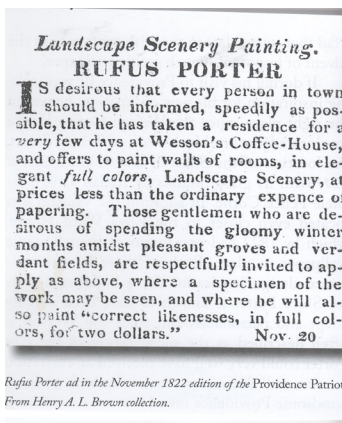
Rufus Porter – Floor Ornamentor

Did This Well-Known Muralist Stoop To Stenciling Floors?

by Ann Eckert Brown

Rufus Porter was born in 1792 in West Boxford, Massachusetts and died ninety-two years later at his son's home in West Haven, Connecticut. An obituary in an English journal said of Porter "[he] will live as one of the brightest examples of the versatility of American invention." He went on to couple his name with Benjamin Franklin as a great man who represented the genius of American invention for over three-quarters of a century. To this glowing 19th Century obituary should be added a 21st Century postscript stating that he was also a dedicated educator, pioneer journalist and a prolific and gifted artist who was destined to become one of Americas most important and renowned folk painters.

From 1816 to 1822, Porter's primary means of support was as an itinerant painter of portraits. He left samples of his talent as a portraitist from Portland, Maine to Harrisburg Hot Springs, Virginia, and all cities and towns in between. The transition from portraiture to mural painting as his primary livelihood was first mentioned in an advertisement which appeared in a Providence, Rhode Island paper in spring of 1822. While in Providence, Porter roomed at the 1792 Wesson's Coffee House which was located on the town's Market Square. Porter stated in his ad that for interested persons, "a specimen of the work may be seen" at his place of residence. Chances are that some of Porter's earliest scenic paintings disappeared with this ancient tavern in 1852. One wonders if, while



Ad appearing in Providence, R.I. paper in spring of 1822



Wesson's Coffee House, which was located on Providence's Market Square

in Providence, Porter viewed and was influenced by some of the decorative painting that was in place at the time of his visit. A fine example of mural painting was located just one block up the hill from Wesson's on Benefit Street. The Sullivan Dorr House contained murals and marbling by Italian artist, Michele Felice Corne, who arrived in Salem, Massachusetts in 1800. In addition to fine murals, this classically trained artist, painted portraits and nautical subjects. His series of paintings of naval battles during the War of 1812 served as a subject matter for many Salem area clock painters.

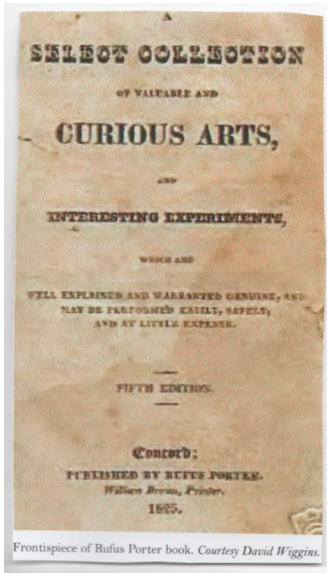


*Floor in the front center hall of the
Benjamin Clifford house, 1800,
Providence, artist unknown.*

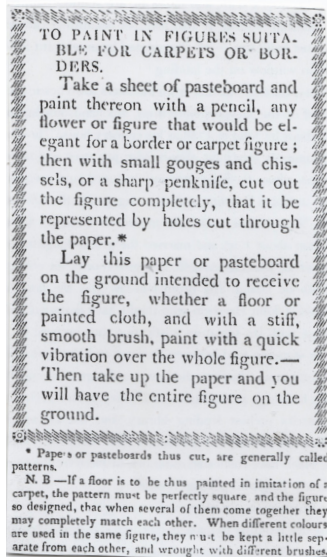
Across the street from the Wesson stood the 1775 First Baptist Meeting House, meeting place of the oldest Baptist Congregation in the country, founded by Roger Williams in 1638. Originally stenciled designs ornamented the early floor boards of the entire front stair-hall. Fragments of original work were found under multiple layers of paint during a massive renovation in the 1950s funded by the Rockefeller family. Designs, identical to those in the Meeting House, once ornamented a parlor floor in a second, now demolished Benefit Street House, known as the Harris Homestead. This floor painting was recorded by Esther Stevens Brazer in the 1940s and is in the collections of the American Folk Art Museum, NYC. Further south on Benefit Street, the Benjamin Clifford House also

has floor stenciling in the front stair-hall which was recorded by the author before being recovered with carpeting in the 1980's. All of these Providence examples seem to pre-date Porter's visit in 1822.

Porter must have been inspired by the many examples of decorative painting which were in place before his travels up and down the eastern seaboard. Floor and woodwork painting had been practiced since the second half of the 18th Century with various types of wall painting, murals, free-hand and stenciling starting slightly later. Porter's unquenchable curiosity must have drawn him to houses with interior decorative painting in order for him to unlock the secrets of its execution. Gaining entrance was probably not a problem, since his social skills seemed to be sufficiently developed to warrant invites into the finest of homes. Obviously, Porter's "artist persona" studied and mastered these techniques in order to execute the numerous charming murals he painted free-hand with stenciled details, embellishing simple pine woodwork with flamboyant graining. One wonders when his "educator persona" came to the



Frontispiece for Porter book.



Directions for painting floors from Porter book

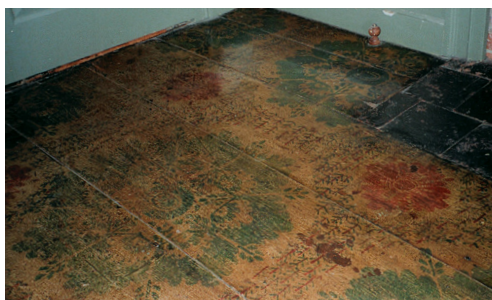
murals grace the walls of the same house. The second candidate piqued the author's interest because it is a stunningly attractive, well preserved and unique example of floor painting, featuring mural painting of a type often credited to Porter.

Let's see if we can shed light on this Rufus Porter conundrum! Floor painting in the Amos Parker House built, 1792 in Reading, Massachusetts, could very well be by the hand of Rufus Porter. If so, it is of great interest to

forefront, causing him to perceive the need to record these techniques in book form to educate and inspire budding artists, past and present in the American folk art traditions. It's interesting to note that all his personas seemed to function simultaneously, while traveling, inventing and painting. In 1824, he found the time to publish a small (6 x 4 1/2 inches and 102 pages) book with a grandiose name *A Select Collection of Approved, Genuine, Secret and Modern Receipts, For the Preparation and Execution of Various Valuable and Curious Arts* or *Curious Arts* for short!

Most pages of this book contain information of a non-painterly type, to which Porter added entries on the painting of murals on plaster walls and the graining and marbleizing of woodwork. He also devoted one page to the ornamentation of floors. Numerous wall murals have been attributed to him either because they are signed or because they contain elements identical to those found on a signed wall. They all conform to his instructions in *Curious Arts*. Thus far, not one painted floor with any certainty has been attributed to Porter's hand. Could it be that this renowned inventor, educator and muralist never stooped to use his time and talents to paint something as pedestrian as a floor?

Recently while conducting an extensive search for extant examples of American paint decorated floors, two caught the author's attention as possible candidates for a Rufus Porter attribution. The first because of its location – next to his birthplace – the town of West Boxford, an area where many extant attributed murals exist – and perhaps more importantly, because Porter



Parker House Floor.

(photo shows floor going into the corner of the room)

American paint researchers and enthusiasts. The well-preserved floor stenciling, retained in a front bed chamber and adjacent stair-hall, is large in proportion and exuberant in design. Three colors, namely red and green on a yellow ochre ground, were used to create an intricate facsimile of woven floor covering of the type popular during the second quarter of the 19th

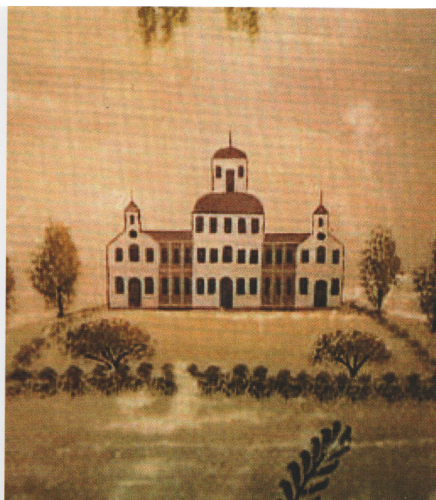


Parker House Floor, Detail

Century. It is positioned on the floor in imitation of in-laid carpeting sans a border at the peripheral, as was most carpeting of that period. All criteria mentioned by Porter for successfully painting “in imitation of carpeting” that he published in “Curious Arts” are met exactly.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the ultimate proof of accreditation – his signature – is no where to be seen! This is problematic but not an unusual situation for paint researcher’s trying to identify the work of the numerous itinerant artists responsible for the great bounty of Colonial and Federal Period painted interiors in American homes. A handful of names have been assigned to some stenciled and free-hand painted walls, but not one definite attribution has been made for an American painted floor. When a signature is absent, the next best way to make an attribution is by comparison with signed work by a known artist. Since a signed floor by Porter has never been found, and only one floor has ever been even tentatively attributed to him, comparison with signed work is impossible.

However, there is one substantial clue to resolve the conundrum about the Parker House. The upper sections of the walls in the front stair-hall are covered with scenic murals attributable to Rufus Porter, even though there is no signature. This is not unusual because he often did not sign his work, and if he did, he might have placed his moniker on a section of wall which has been damaged to the point that his signing is no longer visible. The attribution can be made however through comparison with signed walls in Eastern Massachusetts which contain elements exactly matching those on the Parker House



(left) Mural panel from front stair-hall of the Parker House on the left.

(right) Similar Mural in Massachusetts House

walls. At least two of the stenciled buildings on the Parker Walls can be seen on walls painted by Porter during the 1835-1840 periods in towns neighboring on Reading. One is a very distinctive public building with three-stories, five-bay center section topped with an impressive bell tower. This is flanked by twin two-storied ells with matching but smaller towers. Porter used this motif in the Emerson House, which once stood in Wakefield, Massachusetts and the Dr. Francis Howe House, Westwood, Massachusetts. The Howe House was demolished sometime-ago, but nine wall panels from the Howe House are now in the collections of the Rufus Porter Museum and Cultural Heritage Center, Bridgton, Maine. Porter left his signature on walls of both the Emerson and Howe Houses. This use of exact motifs constitutes a positive attribution for the murals ornamenting the stair-hall of the fine Amos Parker House. However, what about the faux woven carpet in the bed chamber and hall. Can it, too, be the creation of this Renaissance man?

The floors in question were created by stenciling two intricate round foliated motifs at regular intervals on pine floorboards which measure between ten and fourteen inches across. The larger motif measures about twenty-three inches in diameter and is executed in French Green; the second roundel measures about thirteen inches and is painted with red ochre pigment, voids between the roundels are filled with red and green cross hatching which might be intended to represent the weft and warp of woven carpeting. Red and yellow decoration are applied to yellow ochre floor boards. The artist seemed to start in the middle of the room and let pattern run its course, just as stripes of ingrained carpeting would have been laid. The hall floor is similar in style and in the same colorations, but smaller in scale.

The stencil plates necessary to achieve such intricate designs would have

been drawn on heavy paper or cardboard and cut out with scissors or knife by an experienced artisan. Porter used numerous intricate multiple layered stencils to add building, boats, wind-mills, people and animals to his landscapes and was thought to have used stenciled borders at the top of his murals. The free-hand landscapes he painted were designed to fit the wall panel he was decorating at the time, and therefore, they differed with each house. However, the objects placed in the scene were executed by precut stencils carried with him from house to house, and therefore, they would be identical. Porter was a more than competent cutter of stencils. Another clue is the notable similarity between the palette of colors used to paint the murals and the floors. Porter was in the right spot, had published directions for painting a floor to resemble woven carpet, was a proficient stencil cutter and favored the same paint pigments. This might be enough evidence to dub Porter the creator of the painted floors in the Parker house.

Researching local folklore, which can be defined as the study of the traditions and history through verbal stories passed down from generation to generation, is another aid to uncovering anonymous artists. The problem with this approach is that often there is no written documentation. In the case of the Parker House, it has long been a tradition that a member of the Parker family is responsible for the painted decoration in the family home. Written documentation of this has not been found, but it could be partially true. Betsey Parker, born in 1804, was the daughter of Amos Parker for whom the house was built by his father Jonah in 1792. She had artistic talent, and in 1832 she rendered a water color portrait of her home which now hangs in the Parker Tavern, home of the Reading Antiquarian Society. Her date of birth places her at home while Rufus Porter was covering the plaster walls of the front stair-hall with bucolic scenes. The probable date of the murals is around the time that Betsey's father, Amos, passed away in 1841 and her brother, Dana, inherited the House. Perhaps, she took an active part in the renovation of her families then seventy-year old farm house by hiring the popular Rufus Porter to spruce up the front stair-hall and master bed chamber. Perhaps, she even assisted him in some way. At very least she was inspired by his book, *Curious Arts* which was printed in nearby Concord in 1825. It was so popular that three additional printings were required to keep up with demand. Her artistic leanings, plus association with Porter himself, aided by his published recipe for "painting floors in imitation of carpeting" might have been sufficient for her to create these fine examples of early American painted floors. We probably will never know for sure whether Betsey, Rufus, or neither spent numerous tedious hours on their knees wielding a large round stencil brush! However, my hunch is that Betsey can take credit for commissioning the renowned Rufus Porter to ornament the walls and floors of her home in the very latest style!

The second candidate for Porter attribution is a floor originally in the Thomas Dodge House built 1790 in Lisbon, New Hampshire. Unlike many



Floor Painting from the Thomas Dodge House
Floor Painting from Thomas Dodge House, Detail

early 19th Century American painted floors which are struggling to survive, the free hand painted floor, which once ornamented the Dodge House front parlor, has a very secure future. Years ago, this perhaps most unique American painted floor could have been painted over, considered worn and old fashioned as were many of the once plentiful examples of this important American Folk Art. It could have been destroyed in the fire that ravaged the house in the early 1990s. Instead, it is now in the collection of Jamie Wyeth, one of America's most admired and respected artists. It is installed in a room designed to protect and correctly display this one-of-a-kind early American floor.

Unique in its style, it features a wide landscape boarder which ranges in width from 29 to 31 inches. Depicted in natural colorations are: mountains; tall trees in foreground and tiny in the back; flowering bushes; sketched houses and three figures which seem to be soldiers with their backs towards the viewer, dressed in once red jackets with spike-like head-dresses and rifles in their raised right hands. These figures, in their regularity, appear to be executed with a stencil with details brushed on. Among the leaves of the larger trees, can be seen over-sized bright red pears, which also appear to be stenciled. These pears have become the signature for an anonymous artist known only as the "Bear and Pears Artist". "Bear" because at least one fire-board and one wall by this artist has a bear at the base of the pear tree, looking longingly upward at the luscious fruit. It has also been suggested that the pears could be sides of meat curing in the open air!

The center of the fifteen-foot square floor is gray with black curved brush strokes, each beginning and ending at the crack between pine boards which vary in width between 8 and 14 inches. Their half circle shape echoes that of the mountains in the scenic border. This artisan is responsible for a group of paint decorated items such as walls, floors, fire-boards, etc, all dating to the first

quarter of the 19th Century. A fire-board matching floor once in the Dodge House, was removed before the floor and its location is unknown; the New York Historical Association, Cooperstown, NY, has another fire-board and the American Folk Art Museum in New York City has, in its collections, four walls removed from a Thornton, New Hampshire House. These are but a few examples of this anonymous artist's work who is thought by some to be Porter's.

The Dodge House also contained wall stenciling of the Classical type in the room with the painted floor and in the front stair-hall. It was described in 1948 as:

“wall is ochre colored – around doorways and above the base-board runs a stenciled boarder in rich red and black – next to the ceiling is a swag border in greenish blue with red and pinkish white accents – borders are carried up the stairs and are used through the upper hall.”

This type of stenciling seems to date to as early as 1790 and apparently traveled up the Connecticut River Valley into Vermont and New Hampshire, predating the very popular Moses Eaton group from Eastern New England by 10-20 years. In fact, a house was documented in Vermont with Classical stenciling under the later Eaton-type work. In addition to the scenic painting and stenciling, a third type of decoration graced the Dodge House. Much of the woodwork and front stairway apparently sported original faux marbling originally. If scenic painting, marbling and stenciling are by the same hand, all this interior decoration could predate, by a least ten years, work of the Porter school.

The Dodge House interior with matching scenic painting on floor and fire-board, marbled front stairway and doors and stenciled walls with blue-green swags and red and black borders on yellow ocher, must have been stunning – an extraordinarily fine example of early American domestic painting.

Establishing the attribution of the mural painted floor in the Dodge House has been a puzzle of long standing among American folk art/paint experts. In order to shed some light on the subject, this author conducted an informal survey among contacts in the American paint field. All emphatically voiced the opinion that the “Bear and Pears” artist is not Rufus or one of his followers. Robert McGrath, in his book “Vermont Wall Painting,” suggested that many of the landscape murals found in the upper Connecticut River Valley predate those of Porter by one or two decades. The artists arrived in the area from the southern New England states by way of the Connecticut River. Some might have traveled northward from the mid-Atlantic seaport towns, such as New York or Philadelphia, where numerous artists arrived from abroad to the turn of the 19th Century.

It is interesting to note that landscape painting, sharing many elements with Porter's work, has been found as far away as Versailles, Kentucky, where murals were found in a house dating to 1820. They are attributed to an Alfred

Cohen, an artist who migrated from Bordeaux, France, in the 1820s by way of New Orleans!

The landscape floor from the Thomas Dodge House cannot definitely claim Rufus Porter as its creator, but it will begin its 3rd Century of life safe and celebrated as a stellar example of American Folk Art under the curatorship of a member of America's foremost dynasty of artists – the Wyeth family!

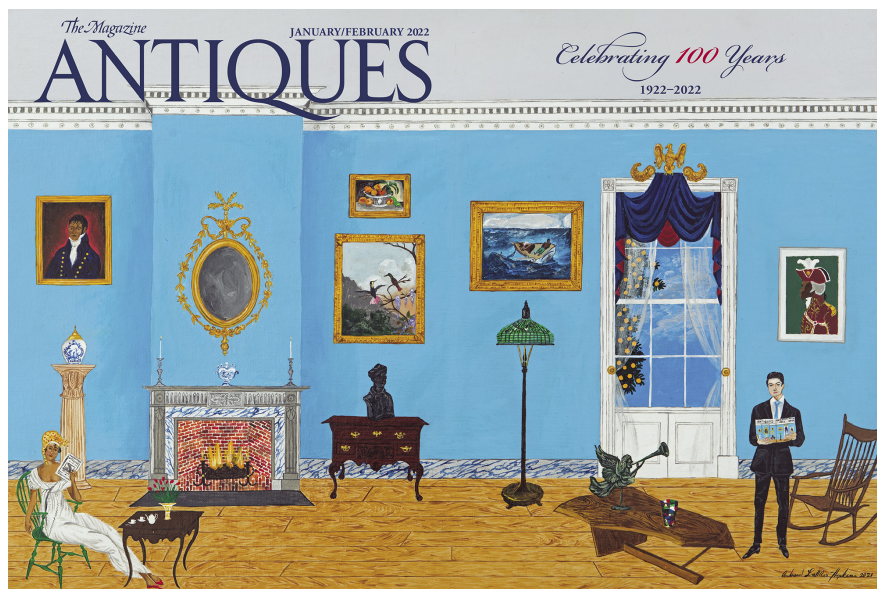


Ann Eckert Brown is a researcher and author of *American Painted Floors before 1840*, *American Wall Stenciling, 1790-1840* and *Painted Rooms of Rhode Island, Colonial and Federal*. Her new book, *Painted Images of A New Nation* will be available soon.

Book Shelf

The Magazine Antiques
A 100th Anniversary Tribute

by Sandra Cohen



In the early 19th and 20th Century, Boston, immersed in our country's history with fine examples of early American architecture and furnishings, was the center of the antiques' market. In 1921, 46-year old Homer Eaton Keyes (1875-1938) and his former classmate, Frederick Atwood, considered starting a magazine, singularly focused on antiques. Atwood was encouraged by his cousin, Sydney Mills, who together with his wife, Ethel, were avid collectors with a knowledgeable, as well as aesthetic, appreciation of antiques. The Mills had been purchasing the interiors of antique homes, refinishing their wooden architectural moldings and panels and selling them to restorers. Keyes, Atwood and the Mills recognized the growing interest in antiquities and were confident that there would be a market for a professional, scholarly and visually attractive magazine dedicated to promoting the history, distinctions and beauty of furnishings and artifacts from America's past.

Keyes had studied art and design at the Pratt Institute of Art for a year before attending Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H. and graduating Magna Cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa, later earning his Master of Arts degree at Princeton. Keyes had a natural and cultivated penchant for the arts and an in-

terest and ability to promote them in a magazine on antiques. During his senior year at Dartmouth, he was Editor of *Dartmouth*, the school newspaper, and *The Dartmouth Literary Monthly* and was later appointed Professor of Modern Art. Keyes' innovative and artistic sensibility also enhanced the Hanover community. Elizabeth Stillinger's article in *The Magazine Antiques*, quoted from a local newspaper:

"Much of the 'charm of Hanover is traceable to his artistic spirit and his efforts to make Hanover beautiful... [making] it lovely to the eye."

Keyes married in 1903 and spent a 2-year honeymoon in Europe. They returned to Hanover, where he designed and built their Arts and Crafts Style home. His love of antiques was evident in their furnishings. Alice Winchester, his protege, who became Editor of *Antiques* in 1938, had shared with Stillinger their antiques forays with Keyes in the Hanover area and with friends, that included Alice Van Leer Carrick.¹ Keyes eventually made Carrick Consulting Editor of *Antiques*; Carrick also contributed articles and later authored *A History of American Silhouettes, A Collectors' Guide - 1790-1840*

In 1922, *Antiques* was established and Keyes became Editor; Atwood, who had experience in the printing and publishing side of business, took charge of *Antiques'* finances. He initially paid the start-up costs, including furniture, equipment and office expenses that included their secretary, Miss Clark's weekly salary of \$20. The Mills took on the responsibility of finding advertisers. The first issue contained approximately 30 advertisers, from antique dealers and shop owners to companies selling fine furniture and accessories. Keyes wrote:

"In October of 1921, a small office was opened at 683 Atlantic Ave in Boston, [Atwood's business address] and the actual work of preparing the first number of ANTIQUES for publication was begun... Those were the hardworking days."²

Keyes and his colleagues further developed their expertise, and like their contributing authors, became authorities of the various antiquities. Keyes became well informed on Chinese Lowestoft, now known as Chinese export porcelain. His research expanded along with his interests, particularly in early American furniture, and as Stillinger's article stated, he "brought Biedermeier furniture to the attention of American collectors."³

In 1921, a young ingenue, Esther Stevens Fraser, was in the process of authentically restoring the historical John Hicks House in Cambridge, Mass. that would result in her first major in-depth research project on the bronze powder stenciled designs found on furnishings, including chairs and clocks.

Boston had a 'small town' reputation; Esther and others heard, through the antiquarian grapevine, about a new magazine that would focus on antiques. Never shy about promoting herself and her work, she approached Keyes about

her research on the history of bronze powder stenciling. Her passion for her work, their discussion about her hands-on restoration of the John Hicks House and her comprehensive research fit his profile of a writer for *Antiques*. Keyes had written:

“Furthermore, the search for satisfactory contributions was complicated by the sad discovery that most contemporary American magazine writers engaged in discussing antiques were not investigators,... [*Antiques* would] search out and encourage a new group of contributors who really had something worthwhile to impart...Many, who did their first writing for ANTIQUES,...have subsequently received general recognition as authorities in their chosen fields of study.”

Esther's passion for research had resonated with Keyes, and her article, “The Golden Age of Stenciling,” published in the April issue of *Antiques*, was the first of 27 articles for one of the finest magazines on America's material culture, a reputation that has continued to be earned from its inception. It was also the beginning of a life-long professional relationship. Esther wrote in “My Story:”

“[Keyes] encouraged me to pursue my studies because he found in me the unusual combination of good research mind, an art training, a love of history and a keen interest in Antiques. He showed me that I could be a pioneer in this field of antique painted design, and he guided me constantly in my research. He told me that I should start the life-long task of collecting material toward a history of early American decorative design, a task that seemed utterly beyond my abilities when he first proposed it.”

For Esther, her lifetime of research and writing earned her the distinction as an authority on early American painted decoration, and as Keyes predicted about his contributors, she became an author; *Early American Decoration* was published in 1940.

In the first issue, Jan. 1922, Keyes set forth his magazine's mission and goal in a treatise entitled, “*Antiques* Speaks for Itself.” He began,

“Yes this is Antiques: Volume one, Number one: venturing into a super-modern world, a world self-consciously intent upon newness; purposefully disdainful of tradition, sublimely certain of its own special ability to invent, devise, design in and for the future,...without recourse to an obviously, indeed confessedly, incompetent past... Yet, there are arguments to the contrary. The past is, indeed, sorely dispraised; yet, there are those who love it; many more who respect it - sometimes pity it - if for no other reason than that it is progenitor of the present.”⁴

He continued, somewhat dramatically and amusingly, tongue-in-cheek,

because there were, at this time, colonies of collectors, like himself, who would appreciate and benefit from *Antiques*. Keyes created the following delightfully distinctive categories: The *connoisseurs* were those who believe they are looking at the perfect object, “far better than indeed they are likely ever to be done again.” Others are admirers “of a more friendly-and-homely complexion... [who] find value in the “humane acquaintance with their forefathers... and of such folk is the tribe of *amateurs*.”⁵

However, the *collectors*

“court the encounter, go prodding and prying after it; and drag home their varied spoils delightedly... The *collector* invariably... becomes an *amateur*...and frequently develops into a *connoisseur*; while it is manifestly difficult to become *amateur* or *connoisseur* without first having suffered the exquisite pangs of the *collector*.”⁶

His ‘treatise’ also attributes museums as reliable sources, as “trustworthy bases for critical study and comparison” and also recommends historical and antiquarian societies, “the long-time preservative and conservative institutions.”

Keyes prophetically anticipates and addresses a criticism, “an unduly dominant aroma of cod fish... suggesting that New England concerns occupy a rather disproportionate amount of space...” However, he assured readers that *Antiques* “has no intention of sticking to...New England...But,...a start must be made from somewhere—why not make it from the Hub?” He promised that “*Antiques* will do some traveling abroad...there are pawn shops and back alley book-stalls and obscure junk dealers in every European city - more of them perhaps, than in America.” He painted a broad horizon for *Antiques* and also stated that it would not cover the ancient and middle ages, already well covered. Keyes suggested an abundant list of categories that *Antiques* would consider, from Books to Clocks and Coins, from Fabrics and Furniture to Laces and Lamps as well as Paintings, Pottery, Porcelain, Samplers, Silver and more.

Keyes character, personality and sense of humor were evident in his writing. In the beginning, Keyes wrote his editorials, “Cobwebs & Dust” elaborating on a variety of collectible objects. His brief and succinct profiles, such as his early ones, “Little Known Masterpieces: Block-Front Chest-on-Chest,” and “A Cabinet Maker’s Cabinet-Maker: Thomas Sheraton,” were always well researched. Keyes developed his expertise on Chinese Lowestoft, known as Chinese export porcelain, that notably contributed to this area of research. He was also interested in furniture from the New York pre-Revolutionary period and Thomas Sheraton pieces. *Antiques* covered auctions, exhibitions and offered books and reviews on a variety of Americana. The first issue, Jan.1922. also included an article by Walter Dyer, author of *The Lure of the Antique*,1910, who also co-authored a book with Brazer, *The Rocking Chair: An American*

Institution.

Both Homer Keyes and his wife, Caroline, died in 1938, she in May and he, five months later in Oct., much too soon for both of them.

Alice Winchester (1907-1996), like her mother and sisters, graduated from Smith College in 1929. She spent her junior year studying at the Sorbonne, becoming fluent in French. Alice said that she went to work at *Antiques*, “a young periodical created to provide some kind of link among those people interested in the American decorative arts.” She worked as a secretary, “typed ‘yards and yards’ of manuscripts and made final copies of Keyes’ edited articles.”⁷ She stated that Keyes detected her growing interest and took time to use her as a sounding board and discussed the antiques with her. In her words:

“I quite fell for him...he was a charming person, very sympathetic, very appreciative, didn’t seem to mind that I was a greenhorn. In fact, it appealed to his own tutorial background...here was a fresh pupil for him...I thought I’d learned a good deal of art at Smith and in Europe, but I didn’t know anything about a ladder-back chair.”⁸

Alice recalled that according to Keyes, antiques would be considered such if they dated prior to 1830. However, Stillinger noted that “by the second half of the 20th Century,...this date has been pushed forward by more than a hundred years.” After comfortably assuming her role as Editor, Winchester began broadening the perspective of *Antiques*. She began a series, “Living With Antiques” and “History in Houses” and “History in Towns.” The series “focused on ideas about collecting, using and preserving antiques and architecture.”⁹ In 1959 she introduced *The Antiques Treasury* featuring museums, (Colonial Williamsburg, Historic Deerfield, Winterthur, etc.), whose Collections had been highlighted in *Antiques*. It included essays and articles elaborating on their most important pieces.

In 1982, Winchester remarked that if the period following WW1 were considered the Golden Age of collecting, then the 2nd Golden Age would be the period following WWII, characterized by exuberance for collecting and exhibiting treasures from America’s past. Forums and lecture series were ubiquitous among the curators, dealers and collectors in the field, with names like Nina Fletcher Little, Helen Comstock, (instrumental in the founding of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA), Electra Havemeyer Webb, (prominent contributor to the Shelburne Museum) Maxim and Martha Karolik, Bernice and Edgar Garbisch and many more distinguished names in the antiquarian world. Winchester developed a close friendship with Nina and Bertram Little, and they began to share their interest in Folk Art. Winchester said, “Less familiar, perhaps, are the personal possessions of the yeoman class, where these were kept, how they were used and what variety of domestic goods was conveniently obtainable in rural America from 1750 to 1850.”

Alice thrived in the company of collectors, researchers and speakers, and Stillinger noted that although Winchester said she did not collect antiques, Alice said she was “a collector of collectors.” Due to *Antiques* strict retirement policy, Alice Winchester retired in 1972 at the age of 65. However, her interest in America’s material culture continued. In 1973, she authored *Versatile Yankee: The Art of Jonathan Fisher*; co-authored *Primitive Painters in America 1750-1950* with Jean Lipman and also co-curated the exhibition and catalog, *The Flowering of American Folk Art, 1776-1876* in 1974 held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in NYC. A prolific author, she also wrote the following: *The Antiques Treasury of Furniture and Other Decorative Arts at Winterthur; Williamsburg, Sturbridge, Ford Museum, Cooperstown, Deerfield, Shelburne; Living With Antiques* and *How to Know American Antiques*.

Homer Eaton Keyes established a magazine dedicated to the goal of excellence and accuracy in its portrayal of America’s material legacy. Keyes nurtured a staff that respected his principles and commitment to scholarship and wisely mentored a young woman, Alice Winchester, who took the reins prematurely, but confidently, to lead his magazine into its future. *The Magazine Antiques* reputation and respect for scholarship continues to be earned. The Historical Society of Early American Decoration is proud to note that he also mentored its mentor, Esther Stevens Brazer, who inspired her pupils to found the Society in her memory.

There were quite a few magazines started in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, but few have survived to the present. One of the earliest magazines, *Scientific American*, founded by folk artist and inventor, Rufus Porter in 1845, is still available as a monthly journal. *Reader’s Digest*, which shared its birth year with *Antiques*, publishes ten issues a year. *The Saturday Evening Post*, established in 1897, published weekly until 1969 after which it was issued every other week and now produces six magazines a year, as does *The Magazine Antiques*. Esther had written an article, entitled “What Is New In The Antiques Game” in the *Post’s* May 1927 issue.

With progress comes change; technology is able to deliver volumes of researched information and images with a click of the cursor. However, there remains a readership that still prefers the tactile experience of thumbing through a magazine, the palpable observation of a decorative illustration on glossy paper and reading words on a page. *The Magazine Antiques* beautifully illustrates art and artifacts from past times and cultures, and it continues to be reviewed through a meaningful and appreciative lens. Knowledgeable writers continue to share their facts and perspectives, informing us about the origins and practical and aesthetic roles of the featured objects. *The Magazine Antiques* has earned recognition as one of the country’s and the world’s prominent and reliable magazines, available to readers through subscription or purchase at book stores.

Happy 100th Anniversary and wishes for many more to come.

Footnotes:

1. Stillinger, Elizabeth, "Antiques in the Beginning Part 1: Founding Editor Homer Eaton Keyes." *The Magazine Antiques*, Jan./Feb. 2022.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Keyes, Home Eaton, "Antiques Speaks for Itself." *The Magazine Antiques*, Jan. 1922.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Stillinger, Elizabeth quoting Alice Winchester. "Antiques in the Beginning Part 2: The Enterprising Editor, Alice Winchester." *The Magazine Antiques*, March/April 2022.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.



Sandra Cohen is Editor of *The Decorator* and a Docent at the Worcester Art Museum.



Standards for Excellence

“The Historical Society of Early American Decoration grants “A” and “B” and Reproduction Awards for those entries that show excellence in craftsmanship and meet the Society’s Standards” as outlined in more specific detail in *The Standards’ Manual*. The tradition of research and of encouraging excellence through evaluation of members’ work began at the Fall Meeting at the Wellesley Hills Country Club, Wellesley, Mass. in 1947 (recorded in Vol. 1, No.2 of *The Decorator*).

The following excerpted overview offers a perspective of the guidelines (reviewed and revised with respect to ongoing research over the years) for recording historically authentic reproductions submitted for Judging.

“The design of the article submitted must be authentic and appropriate for the piece in size, period and type of decoration. The work must demonstrate techniques that meet the requirements of the category.

The design must include adequate work to demonstrate the craftsman’s ability and to afford the judges enough painting to enable them to make their assessment.

The design and work must meet all General Requirements as well as the Category Requirements. If the design includes other techniques in addition to those of the category, each technique will be judged according to the requirements of that specific category.”

Congratulations and appreciation to all who choose to undergo this process.



Historical Society of Early American Decoration

Master Teachers, Master Craftsmen and Specialists

HSEAD Master Teachers

Clark, Maryjane 1962
Watts, Margaret 1965
Martin, Gina 1968

Hutchings, Dorothy 1969
Gross, Helen 1972
Donnellan, Astrid 1994

HSEAD Master Craftsmen

Bond, Jessica H. 1952
Martin, Virginia (Gina) 1952
Underhill, Emilie 1952
Watts, Margaret 1952
Clark, Maryjane 1955
Hague, Helen 1957
Drury, Bernice 1960
Murray, Maria 1960
Gross, Helen 1962
Cruze, Annetta 1964
Burns, Florence 1967

Hutchings, Dorothy 1967
Keegan, Cornelia (Phil) 1969
Wallace, Louise 1970
Lambeth, Deborah 1979
Donnellan, Astrid 1981
Sherman, Phyllis 1981
Edrington, Roberta 1983
Hedge, Carolyn 1989
Heinz, Carol 2010
Davis, Dortia 2012
Brubaker, Linda 2017
Bartow, Pauline 2022

HSEAD Specialists

Tucker, Lois / Country Painting 1993
Baker, Ann / Country Painting 1995-96
Edrington, Roberta / Free Hand Bronze 1997
Victorian Flower Painting 2000
Buonato, Carol / Clock Dials 2004
Dimock, Anne / Reverse Glass 2012
Jewett, Parma/ Country Painting 2016

Sources:

The Decorator; Chair, The Standards and Judging; Chair, Specialist Awards



Rochester, New York, Spring Exhibition 2022
Members' "A" Awards



Gilding on Glass
Alexandra Perrot

Women's Painted
Furniture
Linda Brubaker



Country Painting
Linda Mason

Members' "A" Awards

Reverse Glass Painting
with Border

Kat Britt



Theorem
Oil on Velvet

Debra Fitts

Theorem
Watercolor on Silk

Linda Brubaker



Members' "A" Awards



Country Painting

Linda Sheldon

Women's Painted
Furniture

Nancy Toombs



Victorian Flower
Painting

Roberta Edrington

Members' "A" Awards

Women's Painted
Furniture
Nancy Toombs



Women's Painted
Furniture
Rebecca Kidder



Members' "A" Awards



Victorian Flower
Painting

Polly Bartow

Master Craftsman
Qualified

Women's Painted
Furniture

Nancy Toombs



Free Hand Bronze

Roberta Edrington

Members' "A" Awards



Women's Painted
Furniture
Nancy Toombs

Theorem
Oil on Velvet
Alexandra Perrot



Country Painting
Linda Brubaker

Members' "A" Awards

Reverse Painting on Glass
With Border

Linda Mason



Country Painting

Linda Brubaker

Women's Painted
Furniture

Nancy Toombs



Members' "A" Awards



Country Painting
Linda Brubaker

Women's Painted
Furniture
Martha Dolan



Theorem
Watercolor on Paper
Rebecca Kidder

Members' "A" Awards



Women's Painted
Furniture

Joan Welch

Country Painting
Linda Brubaker



Women's Painted
Furniture

Nancy Toombs

Members' "A" Awards



Country Painting
Linda Brubaker



Reverse Painting on Glass
With Border
Linda Brubaker



Country Painting
Linda Sheldon

Members' "A" Awards



Penwork
Polly Bartow



Country Painting
Linda Brubaker



Rochester, New York, Spring Exhibition 2022
Members' "B" Awards



Free Hand Bronze

Alexandra Perrot



Country Painting

Dennis Lambert



Free Hand Bronze

Roberta Edrington

Members' "B" Awards

Country Painting
Nancy Toombs



Stenciling on Wood
Dennis Lambert

Country Painting
Nancy Toombs



Members' "B" Awards



Women's Painted
Furniture

Martha Dolan

Stenciling on Tin

Debra Fitts



Country Painting

Nancy Toombs

Members' "B" Awards

Women's Painted
Furniture

Glenda Barcklow



Country Painting

Nancy Toombs

Country Painting

Debra Fitts



Members' "B" Awards



Free Hand Bronze
Kathy Hutcheson

Stenciling on Tin
Debra Fitts





HSEAD Research Center



HSEAD Research Center, Historic Stockade District, Schenectady, N.Y.

The Historical Society of Early American Decoration (HSEAD) maintains its Archival Collections and Library at its facility in Schenectady, New York. Located in the Historic Stockade District at 26 N. College Street, the center also houses the research papers of several prominent experts and teachers of early American decoration. Visits are available by appointment.

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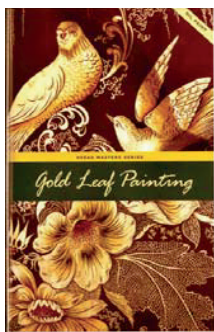
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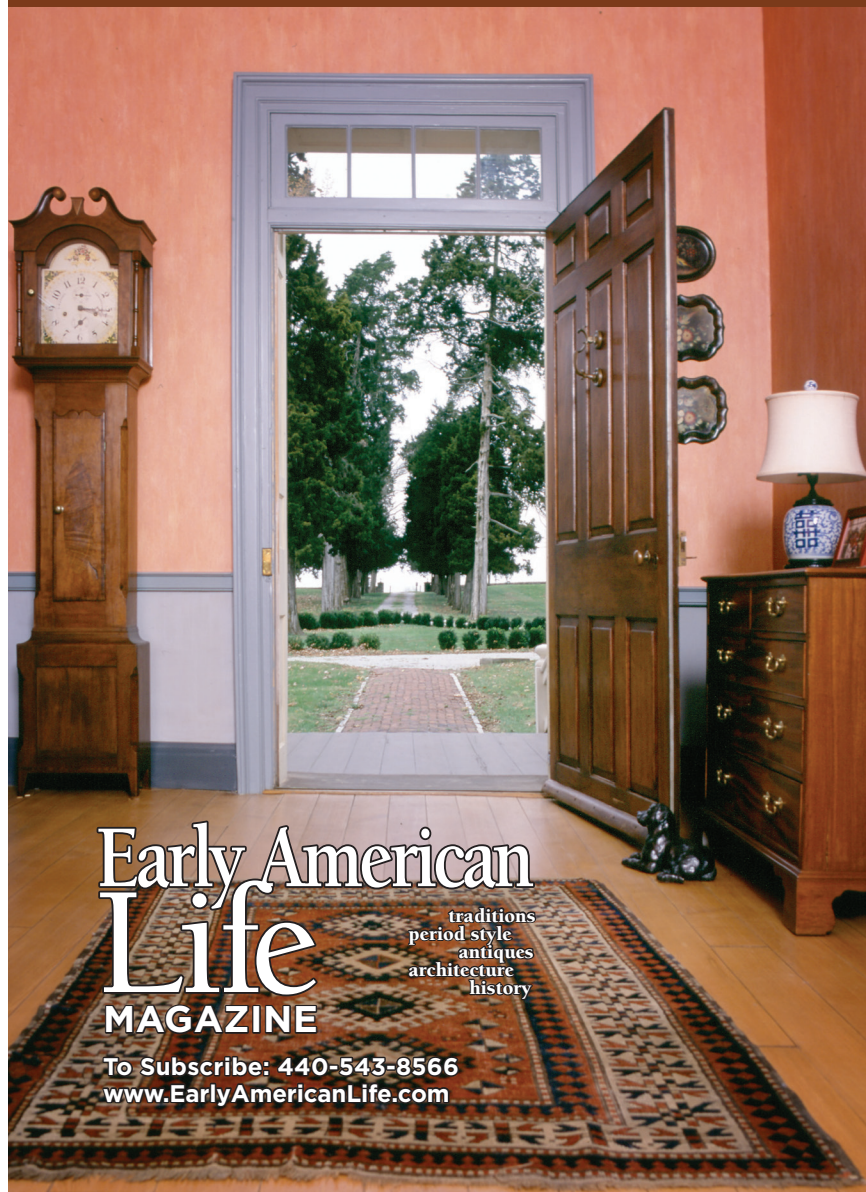
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