

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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Editor's Letter

This Fall Issue of *The Decorator* welcomes some of our past authors who continue to enlighten us with their curiosities, discoveries in their areas of research and painting and also their restoration projects. Our feature article is reminiscent of early America's exuberance in the decorative arts through a masterfully detailed lens of a prolific decorative Folk Art painter.

In opposition to the saying that less is more, more is more in Joseph H. Davis' watercolor paintings that excite us with ornamented furnishings and accessories, occupying every available inch of real estate within his frames. Stylized floor and wall painting, grained or stenciled furniture and a variety of homey keepsakes accompany his resident sitters.

Jeanmarie Andrews, researcher and writer, captures our attention with the most salient facts about this folk artist, about whom little of his personal life is known. Her article, generously illustrated, examines his paintings that convey the most important revelations about Davis' life, interests, talent and skills.

Country Painting has always been one of my favorite categories in HSEAD's repertoire of early American painted decoration. Tin shops dotted the landscape, and the young tin peddlers, eager for the adventure of travel, crossed the country, hawking their colorfully painted and practical wares that included coffee pots, tea cannisters, lunch buckets, trays and more. The designs varied, but there was often a distinguishing consistency in these shops' color choices and compositions. What is astonishing is that the designs are often so stylized, that I find them to be an early and free form of abstract expressions. The shops' decorators were, most often, natural artists who were family or self-trained and creative. Their rhythmic designs are colorful and whimsical.

Linda Brubaker, Master Craftsman and teacher, specializes in Theorem and Country Painting. She shares her observations of American Country Painting's floral designs and palette. Linda writes about the choice of colors that the different tinsmiths chose for their designs from a variety of established tin shops from Maine, New York, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. Her article is illustrated with original antique tinware

as well as authentic reproductions.

Master Craftsman, fine artist and researcher, Astrid Donnellan, shares her experience of restoration work on clock dials over the years and refreshes our knowledge with a brief profile of painted clock dials that became popular and preferred over the brass dials. Astrid's skillful restoration conquers the toll of time that often erodes the designs on these painted faces and allows the owners to appreciate the beauty of their original painted features.

In 1818, after the death of Queen Charlotte, the wife of Charles III, it's believed that the auction of her collection of Indian ivory inlaid furnishings created an interest in this style, that for most, was too expensive. From the late 18th to the early 19th Century, the art of Penwork, with its black background and contrasting paler wood tones, was considered an appealing and certainly affordable substitute for ivory inlaid furniture.

Noel Riley, a researcher and author, takes us back earlier to *A Treatise of Japaning and Varnishing* in 1688 by John Stalker and George Parker. Noel makes a connection between the designs found for japaning and those illustrated in furnishings, painted/drawn in Penwork. Although it is unlikely that this volume would have been available to many over a hundred years later, the Pen workers would have been inspired by available decorated furnishings. This prompted the author to research design sources, and she shares her discoveries. Today, the ubiquitous presence of painted decoration continues to inspire and charm.

This issue's Book Shelf covers a lesser-known but prolific Boston ornamental and clock dial painter, John Minott. Like many early artists and craftsmen, little is known of Minott's personal life. Paul J. Foley, author of *John Minott, Boston Ornamental and Clock Dial Painter 1771 – 1826*, offers a comprehensively illustrated monograph, that is surely an important resource for studying, documenting and appreciating the talent and beauty of Minott's clock dials.

While working on this issue, my yard is blanketed by nature's colorful Fall palette, a vast variety of muted greens and reds in brilliant contrast with oranges and yellows. Central Massachusetts has been spared heavy rains, inviting leaf-peepers to leisurely enjoy driving through the country, stopping for apple cider, apple spiced coffee latte, apple pie, apple everything... and for purists, we offer just apples,

sweet, fresh and colorful, fresh from the orchard to all our friends in HSEAD.

All of us at *The Decorator* wish you and yours the healthiest and happiest Holiday Season and New Year.

Enjoy!

Sandra Cohen



Joseph H. Davis, Folk Art Portrait Painter



Davis likely painted *The York Family at Home* in Lee, New Hampshire, in 1837. Thomas York reads the *Morning Star*, published by the Freewill Baptist Church. The table displays both a large and small Bible, suggesting he might have been a preacher. Harriet York holds the couple's 4-month-old daughter, Julia Ann. The portrait is watercolor, pencil, and ink on wove paper, approximately 11 by 15 inches.

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Gift of the Museum of Modern Art, 1931.300.13
[formerly in the Collection of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller].

by Jeanmarie Andrews

Given his short career as a painter, from 1832 to 1837, Joseph H. Davis left an impressive body of more than 160 naïve portraits, no doubt proudly displayed on the original owners' walls and later passed down through generations of their families. By the second quarter of the 20th Century, when antiquarians started recognizing the value of folk art, examples of Davis's work began surfacing in private and public collections.

As the newly independent American republic grew and prospered in the early 1800s, middle-class citizens sought to emulate their wealthier peers by acquiring material goods beyond those needed for survival. Portraits served as a personal record for the sitter's family and friends and signified his/her rising social status. Joseph Davis' vibrant watercolor portraits captured the aspirations of New England's civil servants and tradesmen in their stylish clothing, fashionable settings and accoutrements that highlighted their appreciation for literacy and the arts.

These portraits were often rendered by painters who lacked formal artistic training. “At the beginning of the 19th century, the growing number of would-be artists in America relied on intuitive choices and decisions, which became the foundation of unique personal visions and styles,” wrote Robert M. Doty, guest curator of the exhibition *By Good Hands: New Hampshire Folk Art* and its eponymous catalogue (1989).

Unable to create the illusion of depth, these painters focused on the basic qualities of color, line, and shape. Nevertheless, Doty noted, “Folk art is rarely extraneous or frivolous. It is conceived in necessity, nurtured by innate skills, and born with exuberance and vitality. It is an integral part of the society in which it is made.”

Most of Davis’s work features full-length views of single subjects, usually facing to the right, as would befit his self-identification as a “left hand painter” (included on at least two known portraits). He captured a full range of ages, from babes in their mother’s arms to young children and teenage lads and lasses to married couples and families to revered elders.

His subjects usually posed in fine attire, such as a gentleman in a dark suit with a beaver-fur top hat or a gowned, bejeweled lady holding her reticule in one hand and a book or bouquet in the other. Children could be found playing with their pets indoors or chasing birds or picking flowers outdoors.

Often these subjects, particularly couples, are depicted in fashionable parlors, seated or standing near stenciled chairs and wildly grain-painted tables—a nod to the appeal of “fancy” decorative arts in the first half of the 19th Century. The table usually held a *Bible* or other books, a newspaper, writing paper paired with an inkwell and quill, or a floral or fruit arrangement.

The wall behind the sitters might display a banjo clock or an architectural or landscape painting, sometimes draped in greenery. A bold, geometrically patterned carpet or painted cloth covered the floor beneath their feet. Rarely proportionate, the subjects’ feet and hands were unusually small (though vibrant socks often appear).

Some scholars have suggested that Davis’s frequent use of similar props in several paintings alluded to his subject’s profession—such as a *Bible* for a minister or an instrument for a musician—or that Davis himself might have been a traveling handwriting teacher. Numerous portraits show paper, quills and ink pots, and the artist used a fine calligraphic script to record his subjects’ names and ages along the bottom on about half of his known works. Those subjects resided in rural areas of Rockingham and Strafford Counties, New Hampshire and York County, Maine (see map).

“Davis’s watercolors are some of the most visually arresting folk portraits for their detailed rendering of the elaborate decorative interiors in which people lived,” said Paul D’Ambrosio, President and CEO of the Fenimore Art Museum, who has extensively studied the Davis portraits in the museum’s collection.

“Patterned carpets, painted and grained furniture, embroidered shawls and aprons, flower sprays and more abound in his work,” he continued, “along with his signature calligraphic writing and sharply delineated profile likenesses.”

Unlike some artists, Davis did not pre-paint any of his work such as creating standard backgrounds or partial figures before meeting his subjects.

A century after Davis stopped painting, his portraits began to catch the eye of Folk Art collectors. While early scholars could trace many of the portrait subjects based on his inscriptions, they could find little information about Davis himself beyond the likelihood that he lived and worked in New England.

The first known Davis portrait to be displayed in public might have been that of Nancy Scruton Cate, which was donated to the New Hampshire Historical Society in 1926. It lacks an inscription but bore a paper label on the back that read, “Nancy (Scruton) Cate / Born in Strafford, N.H. / September 15, 1815. / Died Nov. 9, 1884.”

According to Wesley Balla, retired Director of Collections at the NHHS, Nancy Cate was the mother of Leslie W. Cate of Northwood, who married Harriet Boardman Bennett, a younger sister of the painting’s donor, Helen Champion Bennett. “So, the portrait and other objects probably came to Bennett and the society upon the death of her sister in 1926,” he said.

Balla’s successor, Jonathan M. Olly, discovered photos of the front and back of a label in the object file for the portrait, listing Otis Grant Hammond as NHHS director from January 1926 until 1944. “So, this strongly suggests that the Cate painting was on view before World War II, and presumably before the donor’s death in 1939,” Olly said.

In 2017, a descendant of the Haley-Burley families of North Epping, New Hampshire, donated two paintings inscribed by Davis—one of Samuel Haley Junior with his wife, Sally Bartlett Haley, and the other of their four-year-old daughter, Sarah Elizabeth Haley. These portraits were sold out of the house where all three subjects had lived, and gave weight to the early attribution of the Cate painting to Davis.



In 1834, Davis painted Joseph and Sarah Ann Emery in or around Limington, Maine. Traces of pencil appear along the edges of the right side of the table, vertically through the center of the vase, and within the area of the inscription at the bottom. The markings indicate that Davis initially sketched his likenesses in pencil to determine order and balance and then filled in the images with watercolor. This architectural, geometric approach resulted in severe regularity to Davis's work. Joseph Emery was born on July 4, 1808, the son of James and Hannah Dunn Emery of Limerick, Maine. On June 12, 1836, he married Sarah Ann Libbey, who was born on September 19, 1815, to Ira and Fanny Libbey of North Berwick, Maine. The couple resided in Limington, where they raised five children. The painting, watercolor with glazed highlights and pencil on heavy wove paper, measures 13.5 by 13.38 inches.

Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York, Gift of Stephen C. Clark, N0323.1961, Photograph by Richard Walker.

IDENTITY SEARCH

Three known paintings bear Davis's name, but to date only two include the note "left hand painter" in the inscription, the first being the portrait of itinerant preacher and teacher Bartholomew Van Dame of Bow Lake near Strafford, New Hampshire, discovered in 1943. The discovery set early scholars searching for the painter's background. It wasn't until 1989 that folk art historians Arthur and Sybil Kern traced his family ties and travels, publishing their research as "Joseph H. Davis: Identity Established" in *The Clarion*, the magazine of the American Folk Art Museum.

The Kerns took two approaches to confirm his history. First, they narrowed their search to anyone named Joseph H. Davis living in Maine and New Hampshire between 1830 and 1840 (the surname Davis being among the five most common in early New England). Then they delved into archival and genealogical records to further trace the portrait subjects whose places of residence were listed in portrait inscriptions. These efforts yielded about 85 portraits, from which they traced Davis's movements during his short painting career.

They speculated that Davis was born on August 18, 1811, to Joseph H. and Phebe Small Davis in Limington, Maine. (His middle name might have been Harper or Hubbard, from a grand- or great-grandparent.) The elder Joseph Davis was listed in local records as a land trader, a profession his son took up after he stopped painting.

The younger Davis would have been twenty-one when he sketched his first known painting, of Sally Rogers Chamberlin of nearby Lebanon, Maine,

in 1832. His only other painting that year portrayed Sarah Ann Guppy, who lived about 10 miles farther southwest in Dover, New Hampshire.

The Kerns also used anecdotal comments recorded by earlier researchers to help pinpoint the painter's identity. Frank O. Spinney learned of a farmer called "Pine Hill Joe," who purportedly lived in Newfield, about 8 miles from Limington. Spinney recounted the townspeople's recollection that "when spring came and it was planting time, [Pine Hill Joe of Newfield] suddenly took a notion to go wandering ... because he had an itch to draw pictures." Because the legend had been passed down through generations, and Davis *did* live in Newfield years later, the Kerns assumed he was the same Joseph Davis of Limington.

Davis's clientele included military officers, farmers, lawyers, schoolmasters and clergymen, often recommended through members of his family or within the various congregations of the Freewill Baptist Church.

The many portraits Davis painted in 1833 put him in the Dover-Somerset area of New Hampshire and the Lebanon-Berwick area of Maine. His 1834 double portrait of Ira Libby of Berwick and Fanny Langdon of Lebanon, who were married in the Freewill Baptist Church of North Berwick, suggests that the church—which had several congregations in nearby towns—served as an important source for Davis's commissions. His father and uncle were active in the nearby Freewill Church of Limington, and Van Dame's diaries note the minister's connections with many families the artist painted. In some portraits of couples, Davis shows the man reading the church newspaper *Morning Star*, to which Van Dame contributed.

Marital ties among the Libby, Small and Davis families also helped confirm the painter's early residence in Limington. In 1834, Davis painted a double portrait of Joseph and Sarah Ann Libby Emery. Sarah was the daughter of Ira and Fanny Libby, while Joseph, who was just three years older than the painter, might have been a childhood friend.

In November 1835, Davis married Elizabeth Patterson, and the couple settled in Saco, Maine, according to land records. He was most prolific during his last few years of painting, 1835 through 1837, when all but one of his subjects lived in New Hampshire. The Kerns noted, "This increased productivity may have been due to the growing responsibility that marriage placed upon the young man." (Davis was said to have charged his subjects \$1.50 per painting.)

After 1837, Joseph H. Davis disappears from local records until 1840, when he is listed as a land trader on several deeds. By then, the couple had a daughter, Elizabeth Ann, born either in 1838 or 1839. In 1840, the family moved to Wilmington, Massachusetts, and by 1847 they were living in Newfield, New Hampshire, where a deed listed his occupation as "yeoman."

Davis continued to buy and sell land until 1847, when the Kerns found a newspaper account signed by Joseph H. Davis as treasurer of the Mount Eagle Manufacturing Company. The following year, the family moved to Morris-

town, New Jersey, where the former painter continued to work as a land trader. Later newspaper accounts show him running and presumably being elected township assessor.

Davis seemingly retained an interest in painting, the Kerns suggested, based on a notice in the newspaper, *The Jerseyman*, on December 15, 1853, signed by Davis, that stated: “The subscriber respectfully tenders his thanks to the citizens and Fire Companies of Morristown, whose timely and united exertions saved his Paint Mills from total destruction by Fire on the 1st. inst.”

Davis’s creativity extended to inventing parts for manufacturing processes. On August 8, 1854, he received patent number 11,476 for his “new and useful improvements in forming the ores of iron into paint by a direct process and of different colors.” A year later the family had moved back to New England, this time Massachusetts, where Davis earned two more patents—in 1858 on an arrangement “for transmitting power from any prime motor to a propelling gear or wheel” and in 1860 for “certain new and useful improvements in chimney flues and radiators for warming apartments.”

Davis died of liver disease on May 28, 1865, in Woburn, Massachusetts. He is buried, along with his wife, daughter and in-laws, in Saco, Maine.



Davis painted the double portrait of John and Hannah H. Rollins of Wakefield in 1835. Little is recorded about the couple besides their names and ages inscribed along the bottom. However, it is notable for being a rare work bearing the artist's name, shown within the swag of greenery on the wall behind the couple: “Painted July 4th at Wakefield by J.H. Davis 1835.” John is shown reading the Boston-Gazette. The 11.25-by-15.5-inch portrait sold at auction in 2011 for \$15,405. Courtesy of Pook and Pook, Inc.

LASTING LEGACY

As folk art gained in popularity with modern collectors, Davis’s vibrant portraits began appearing in important Folk Art Exhibitions in the 1970s and 80s, even before the Kerns had confirmed his identity. His work can be found in the collections of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, American Folk Art Museum, Fenimore Art Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the New Hampshire Historical Society and elsewhere.

Along with the Van Dame portrait are two other known portraits signed by the artist—*Trueworthy Chamberlin and Wife*, painted at Brookfield,

May 1835, according to the inscription (the second signed painting to come to light); and *John and Hannah H. Rollins of Wakefield* in 1835, as noted in an oval swag on the wall behind the couple.

Notable among collectors, international gem dealer Ralph Esmerian possessed the discerning taste and financial means to obtain many of the genre's finest examples. His purchases included folk portraits by Davis and Pennsylvania German artist, Jacob Maentel, along with needlework, painted furniture, pottery, weather vanes, wood carvings, and more—a wide-ranging collection that he later gifted to the American Folk Art Museum. The collection formed the basis for the 2001 book *American Radiance*.

In the book's introduction, Senior Curator, Stacy C. Hollander, discussed Esmerian's sensitivity to works on paper, noting that among his first purchases were portraits by Maentel, which provided context for his many examples of Pennsylvania German material culture.

She wrote, "Joseph H. Davis offered the same magical window into 19th Century New England that Maentel had opened in Pennsylvania. Because he collected numbers of works by both artists, a compelling picture emerges of past lives and aspirations, with an immediacy that elucidates those very different cultural communities."

During a 2016 taping in Boston of an "Antiques Road Show" episode, a man presented a painting, telling Sotheby's appraiser Nancy Druckman, "This is an original painting which has been hanging in my house since it was originally painted in 1836. The people in the picture are my grandfather William Foss and his wife, Polly, who are still buried on the family property. It was painted by Joseph B. Davis, an itinerant painter. He used to go from town to town, painting pictures of the local people," Druckman finished his sentence. The owner continued, "And this is one of the few that are still with the same family. It goes back five generations to my grandfather, William, here."

The owner also pointed out the picture hanging on the wall behind the couple, which showed an old blacksmith's shop with a farmer making a wagon wheel. Druckman told him it was the only such depiction known in a Davis painting. The inscription identified the portrait as having been painted in Strafford, New Hampshire. (Davis also painted a double portrait of Sylvanus C. and Mary Jane Foss, also from Strafford, also in 1836, strongly suggesting the couples were related.)

The man told Druckman that a local dealer had appraised the painting in 1975 for \$5,000. She replied, "This thing, I would love to see it in an auction estimated at something like \$40,000 to \$50,000 ... but I have a feeling that in the right circumstances, on the right day, this could bring well, well in advance of that."

Other previously undiscovered portraits inscribed by Davis or attributed to him based on his distinctive style continue to appear on the market at Sotheby's, Christie's, Skinner and other regional auction houses when descen-

dants of the original owners or previous collectors sell them. A quick survey of auction prices since 2000 shows that collectors still value his work, with estimated prices for single-subject portrait starting in the low thousands, and double portraits bring as much as ten times more.

One double portrait, offered by a New England dealer in an online auction in 2011, had an estimated value of \$80,000 to \$100,000 based on its inscription and provenance as “Property of a direct descendant of the sitters.”

Asked about the discrepancy in value, Elizabeth Muir, Senior Specialist and Head of Sales for Americana at Bonhams / Skinner, said “I think that while the simple answer is that the market determines these trends, in particular, the family portrait was such a wonderful example of the artist’s delicate painting, as well as the cultural shift towards imagination and expression in American folk art in this period.”

She continued, “From the carpeting to that marvelous clock, I think for the family portrait, you get such a sense of the 19th Century’s love of bold patterning. For me, the value in American folk art lies in how these self-taught geniuses like Davis were not held back by academic boundaries of what fine art could be. The creativity of these artists is so evident in these wonderfully modern examples of flat planes, bright colors and simplified forms that redefined artistic ideals of representation.”



Separate Tables, painted c. 1835 in New Hampshire, depicts a husband, wife, and two children rendered in watercolor with glazed highlights and pencil on heavy wove paper, 11.75 by 17.75 inches.

Note the fashionable tortoiseshell comb in the woman’s hair.

Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York, Gift of Stephen C. Clark, N0290.1961, Photograph by Richard Walker.



Davis painted Portrait of Lucy Vickery, likely in 1834 in Dover or possibly Wakefield, New Hampshire, using watercolor and pencil on wove paper, approximately 9 by 7 inches. Her portrait lacks an inscription, but an early label on the back identified her as the 10-year-old sister of John Vickery. She died less than a month after her brother's wedding. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Gift of the family of Martha Ellen Vickery Eden, 1993.300.3



Mary D. Varney, age 21, painted in 1835, is one of several single-figure compositions of young women by Davis. Other than information contained in the artist's inscription, little is known about Varney except that she was the child of Miles and Jane Varney, who were married in Rochester, New Hampshire, on October 7, 1807. The watercolor, pencil, and ink portrait on heavy wove paper measures 11.38 by 9 inches. Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York, Gift of Mrs. Mable Smith, N0198.1951, Photograph by Richard Walker.



Joseph Davis painted *The Azariah Caverly Family* and several other family portraits in 1836, in or near Strafford, New Hampshire. Included here as props are a detailed drawing on the table at left and a carpenter's square held by 3-year-old George, which suggest Azariah was an architect, engineer, or carpenter. He was also a member of the Freewill Baptist Church, as were his father and brother, both named John. Azariah's wife, Eliza, holds their 7-month-old daughter, Sarah Jane. The watercolor and pencil portrait on paper measures 10.38 by 14.25 inches. Among five known portraits of Caverly family members are Asa and Susanna Caverly, painted and inscribed in Strafford in 1836; Asa's brother Elder John Caverly and his wife (Nancy); and Asa's nephews, Everett and John Hoit Caverly (ages 11 and 8). Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York, Gift of Stephen C. Clark, N0061.1961, Photograph by Richard Walker.



Perhaps indicative of his early work, Davis painted the portraits of Mr. Jonathan H. Hoitt and Mrs. Hoitt standing separately on stylistically similar floor coverings in different colorways, with few embellishments. An oval shadow beneath the flowers in Mrs. Hoitt's hands suggests the presence of a table. Each watercolor on paper portrait is 9 by 6.75 inches. The pieces sold together in November 2023 for \$1,100. Casco Bay Auctions Freeport, Maine/Invaluable.com
 Courtesy of Pook and Pook, Inc.



Joseph H. Davis painted both the Portrait of Mary Ann Cook [later, Mrs. John Stockbridge Vickery] and Portrait of John Stockbridge Vickery in 1834 in Dover, New Hampshire, using the same materials—watercolor, pencil, gum Arabic, and ink or watercolor on wove paper. At various times, both worked at the local cotton mill, the Coheco Manufacturing Company. Occasionally John's job there was described as "watchman," but Mary Ann's role is unknown. The couple married on May 31, 1837. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Gift of the family of Martha Ellen Vickery Eden, 1993.300.4. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Gift of the family of Martha Ellen Vickery Eden, 1993.300.2.



Davis painted Portrait of Lucy Vickery, likely in 1834 in Dover or possibly Wakefield, New Hampshire, using watercolor and pencil on wove paper, approximately 9 by 7 inches. Her portrait lacks an inscription, but an early label on the back identified her as the 10-year-old sister of John Vickery. She died less than a month after her brother's wedding. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Gift of the family of Martha Ellen Vickery Eden, 1993.300.3



Man Facing Woman is typical of Davis's painting of couples, with fancy painted furniture, a boldly patterned carpet or floorcloth, and a banjo clock on the wall. The man holds a fashionable beaver-skin top hat, while the woman wears a tortoiseshell comb in her hair. Technically this portrait deviates from most of Davis's other likenesses in the use of a pale blue painted background, although a pair of half-length miniatures attributed to him employ the same device.

The painting, 9.75 by 15.5 inches, is done in pencil and watercolor on wove paper.
The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Museum Purchase, 1958.300.9



Davis painted *Woman in Profile on Patterned Floor*; c. 1835, likely in New Hampshire. She wears a pendant, possibly a portrait miniature, on a long gold chain. The portrait, watercolor and pencil on wove paper, is slightly larger than 8 by 4 inches. Davis's likenesses in this format often bear identifying inscriptions in margins below the images. This example might have been trimmed, or Davis might have deleted the space.
The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, 1935.300.1.



Davis painted *The Hayes Family* in 1835 in Strafford, New Hampshire, using watercolor, ink, and graphite on wove paper. In Davis's inscription, the phrases slant alternately right and upright with decoratively embellished letters. Joseph Hayes (1783-1872) married Lois Demeritt (1790-1878) on January 7, 1808. Both of them died in Dover, New Hampshire, although all 12 of their children were born in Strafford. Mrs. Hayes holds the youngest, Asa Brewster Hayes (1835-1842), while her husband reads a copy of *Zion's Herald*, an independent Methodist paper published by the Boston Wesleyan Association. Davis also painted at least four of Lois Hayes's Demeritt cousins. *The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Gift of Juli Grainger, 2008.300.2.*



Davis painted sisters Mary Elizabeth Furber (11 yrs.) and Martha Nelson Furber (3 yrs.) in 1835 in either Maine or New Hampshire using watercolor, graphite, and ink on wove paper, approximately 9 by 12 inches. Facing one another on a patterned floor, each girl is shown with objects related to her interests and pursuits—a bouquet, a basket of flowers, an embroidered purse, and a book. Mary's necklace holds a loved one's silhouette. Portraits like this one, noting the sitters' ages and full names, were not only family heirlooms but also records of lineage. *RISD Museum, Providence, RI, Museum Works of Art Fund, 45.034.*



Davis painted Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Otis and Child in 1834, in watercolor, gum arabic, and graphite on wove paper, 10.75 by 16.625 inches. The elaborately penned inscription notes that Daniel is 46, Betsy is 40, and Polly is 7 months. The most obvious individualizing touch is Daniel's newspaper, the *Great-Falls Journal*, which was issued between 1832 and 1836 in Great Falls, a mill town in southeastern New Hampshire, about 20 miles northeast of Portsmouth. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, 1972.263.6.



Betsy Dowst, age sixty-nine on August 27, 1837, sits in her black-painted rocking chair with gold stenciling and wears a white ruffled cap held to her head by black straps tied in a bow under her chin. The handwork on her lap and the eyeglasses perched on her head suggest that she stopped her knitting or crocheting for a few moments to pose for the artist. She may have been related to either Henry Dowst or Isaac Dowst of New Hampshire's Merrimack County, both of whose names appear in the 1840 United States census. A second, nearly identical, portrait of Dowst, inscribed with the same personal data, varies in the details of the chair and floor covering, and the placement of the ball of yarn, eyeglasses, and cat. It was among the works featured in the exhibition *Three New England Watercolor Painters*, held at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1974. The version shown here, watercolor, ink, and pencil on paper. American Folk Art Museum, Gift of Ralph Esmerian, 1998.17.1.



When he painted Mary Antoinette Lorian Pike and Sarah Adeline Pike, Davis portrayed them with short hairstyles, balloon-sleeve dresses, long ribbon neckties, and pantaloons that were the height of the fashion in 1835. The sisters, ages 6 and 4, face each other over an ornate dollhouse. In pre-Civil War America, dolls and dollhouses were relatively rare acquisitions that were given to young girls as part of their informal training in the domestic arts. The portrait, in watercolor, pencil, and ink on paper, is 8.5 by 11 inches.
 American Folk Art Museum, Gift of Ralph Esmerian, 2005.8.8.



In William B. Chamberlain with Violoncello and Music, 1835, Davis seems to focus as much on the instrument as the subject by articulating the musician's fingers on the instrument's neck and bow. The score on the stand is fictional, lacking a fifth line in the staff, measure bars, or a clef. The identification of the subject is somewhat questionable—while Davis was meticulous about inscribing the names correctly, this man is most likely William B. Chamberlain (with a second A), who in 1836 married Betsy Chamberlain Sanborn, another of Davis's clients. A member of the Freewill Baptist Church in Brookfield, New Hampshire, Chamberlain died at age 29 in 1842. The portrait, watercolor, pencil, and ink on paper, is 10.75 by 15.1875 inches.
 American Folk Art Museum, Gift of Josephine B. Griswold Revocable Trust, 2020.17.2.



Rather than precise facial figures, Davis's portraits created a picture of community and cultural refinement through symmetrical arrangements of persons united by their comfortable and colorful homes, fine clothes, and tasteful art, as in the portrait of siblings Sylvanus C. Foss and Mary Jane Foss of Strafford (New Hampshire) in 1836. Props indicate Sylvanus' achievement as a scholar and Mary Jane's musical proficiency. Their material comfort shows in the fancy grain-painted table, blue Klismos chairs and gaily colored floor covering. The portrait is 10.75 by 15 inches in watercolor, pencil, and ink on paper.

American Folk Art Museum, Gift of Ralph Esmerian, 2013.1.14.

American Folk Art Museum, Gift of Ralph Esmerian, 2005.8.8.



Two months after painting their parent's portrait, Davis limned Eunice E. C. Marden and Lurana G. Marden, with the inscription "Eunice E. C. Marden. Aged 6, Octbr 11th, 1837. Lurana G. Marden. Aged 2 Years, April 28th, 1837." The portrait is a rare example of the artist's work in an outdoor setting, the children captured amid bouquets, baskets of flowers, potted plants, a cat, a doll, birds, and butterflies.

Davis often painted multiple portraits of members of one family.

Sotheby's



Davis painted this ink and watercolor portrait of Catharine T. Dockum, age 14, in 1837. It measures 10 by 8.25 inches and sold in late September 2024 for \$950. It appeared in several exhibitions and publications in the 1970s and '80s. Also in 1837, Davis painted Emily P. Dockum, age 16, which appeared in the 1974 exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago. The two girls likely were sisters. Both portraits are among at least six known that have corner decorations. The New Hampshire Historical Society owns another, of four-year-old Sarah Elizabeth Haley of Epping, New Hampshire, also painted in 1837. Courtesy of Pook and Pook Inc. The portrait is 10.75 by 15 inches in watercolor, pencil, and ink on paper. Courtesy of Pook and Pook Inc.



This watercolor and pencil portrait of an unidentified father and daughter emerged from a private collection in California and sold for \$750 last September. It is attributed to Davis though it has no inscription. It measures 8.25 by 5.25 inches. Courtesy of Pook and Pook Inc.



Davis is credited with the portrait of William H.A. Copp Aged 12 April 3 1835. The inscription offers no other information but illustrates the tiny floral decorations the artist sometimes incorporated into the capital letters of his calligraphy. The boy holds a small book and an unusual short-brimmed cap, perhaps for riding? (In Davis's 1837 portrait David P. Glidden, the 16-year-old holds a similar hat.) The 8-by-5-inch watercolor on paper portrait of Copp sold in 2023 for \$1,600. Casco Bay Auctions Freeport, Maine/Invaluable.com

WHERE JOSEPH H. DAVIS TRAVELED



The Kerns's 1989 article establishing the identity of Joseph Davis included this map of the many towns he traversed in southwest Maine and southeast New Hampshire in search of commissions. American Folk Art Museum



The Davis portrait, *The Johnson Family*, has emerged at least twice at auction from private collections. The inscription reads "John B. Johnson. Aged 34 Jan 7th 1836. Belinda M. Johnson. Aged 11 Years. / May 22 1836. Lydia H. Johnson. Aged 33. April 18th 1836." The watercolor on paper, 10.25 by 14 inches, was sold in 2020 for \$6,875.

Courtesy of DOYLE Auctioneers & Appraisers



Davis's watercolor on paper portrait of Jonathan and Abigail Hill, 1836, sold in April 2024 for \$10,000. The inscription identifies both the subjects and artist: "Painted at Bow Pond July 2nd 1836 by Joseph H. Davis Left Hand Painter" in the center flanked by "Jonathan Hill. Aged 73 May 22, 1836." and "Abigail Hill. Aged 71 July 8th 1836."

The painting measures 9.625 by 14.625 inches.

Courtesy of Vose Barridoff American Fine Art Auction



An example of Davis's full-length single portraits is that of Mary V. Lowe, aged 22 years 1833, watercolor on paper. It measures 10.5 by 8 inches and sold in 2023 for \$1,100. Courtesy of Eldred's



The double portrait, Page Batchelder and Betsy Batchelder, appeared in various exhibitions in the 1960s and '70s, before the artist's identity had been confirmed. The inscription reads "Page Batchelder: aged 48. July 8th 1836. Betsy Batchelder: aged 50. June 18th 1836." According to [Frederick Clifton Pierce in *The Batchelder Genealogy* (1898)], Page Batchelder was a farmer in Deerfield, New Hampshire. He was born July 8, 1788, married Betsy Bartlett Darrah on February 28, 1811, and died November 11, 1859. Davis painted a similar portrait, *The Tilton Family*, also in 1836, in Deerfield.



In 2011, Bourgeault-Horan Antiquarians offered at auction Davis's Wedding Portrait of Alfred and Sally Tailor of Strafford, New Hampshire, 1836, with an estimated value of \$80,000 to \$100,000, based on the provenance as the property of a direct descendant of the sitters. (It did not sell.) Rendered in pen and ink with watercolor on paper; 11 by 15 inches, the portrait carried the inscription "Alfred Tailor. Aged 24 Years. July 5th, 1836./ Painted at Strafford N.H. 1836/ Sally L. Tailor. Aged 20 Years. June 27th, 1836." Bourgeault-Horan Antiquarians/Invaluable.com



Davis painted Portrait of Sewell and Sally Marden in Deerfield, New Hampshire, with the inscription, "Sewell Marden. Aged 43 Years, September 18th, 1837. Painted January 1837. Sally Marden. Aged 43 Years, November 12th, 1837." Watercolor, pencil, and ink on paper, it measures 9.5 by 13.5 inches. Sewell Marden (1794-1856) of Epping, New Hampshire, married Sarah Avery (1794-1862) in Deerfield on October 1, 1817. Bourgeault-Horan Antiquarians/Invaluable.com

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Jeanmarie Andrews is a researcher and writer about early American life, decorative folk art and artists.

American Country Painted Tinware: Musings of An Admirer

by Linda Brubaker

For many years, I have loved American Country Painted Tin. A friend from Delaware first introduced me to what she, and many others called, Toleware. The colors and designs were so exuberant and radiated happiness. It was a year or two later that I met some ladies from the Historical Society of Early American Decoration, and it was here that I truly fell in love with Country Painting and really began to learn the history of Early American Country Painting.

The four-volume set of *American Painted Tinware: A Guide to Its Identification* by Gina Martin and Lois Tucker and published by the Historical Society of Early American Decoration, has become my go-to whenever I want to research more information about the tinsmiths of early America. The authors, Martin and Tucker, have done a wonderful job of researching the various tin shops. They painstakingly researched each shop and the families who established them in a variety of locations where they lived and worked. Featured were the decorators, whose work, designs and palette we still admire, preserve and record today.

While perusing these books, visiting museums and antique shops, seeking out more pieces to study, I've noticed some interesting aspects about the colors and floral designs. Let's dive into some of these observations.

I'd like to start with the northern most state, Maine, where there were three prominent tinsmiths, Zachariah Stevens Elijah & Elisha North, and Oliver Buckley, all of Stevens Plains, Maine. My focus is on Zachariah Stevens and Oliver Buckley. The features that strike me the most are the color palette and flower choices of these two shops. Stevens and his painters preferred the lively, colorful Spring palette.



A Stevens Plains' Trunk, with spring flowers and cherries, is flanked with pussy willows. C. 1830, Private Collection.



Reproduction of a Stevens Plains, Maine piece, Private Collection.

The design on his document trunk illustrates the bright yellows, reds and crisp whites of the flowers. The leaves also have the appearance of that new green of spring. The daffodils, tulips and crocuses have colors that happen when one loads a brush in one color and then tips it in another, creating a wonderful splash of color to define the simple flower. The same result occurs when painting leaves from that tin shop.



This Oliver Buckley Round Canister has thin salmon flowers with deep red and snowy white overtones. C. 1830, Private Collection.



A reproduction of a Buckley 2-piece waiver, Private Collection.

Now, let's take a look at the palette that the painters from Oliver Buckley's Shop created. His painters seemed to prefer Fall colors. Notice that the Buckley shop used salmon, burnt oranges and mustardy yellows. Even the green has that end of summer look, and the reds are more subdued. It seems like Fall might have been their favorite time of year, and they wanted to capture those wonderful colors before winter's arrival. His fruits and flowers remind me of my garden's last bounty. It would be wonderful to have a conversation with Stevens and Buckley and learn from what they could tell us.

Heading south towards Connecticut, we come across the Berlin area



This unusual Berlin, Connecticut Trunk is a traditional piece that includes both Country Painting and Stenciling. The large white serpentine S-strokes embellished with red and green are similar to designs on other Berlin trunks. C. 1820 - 1830. Collections of James and Linda Brubaker.



The reproduction is Linda's A-Award which shows what the piece would have looked like when new. Painted in 2022.

shops where the colors used by most of the tinsmiths and decorators are strong, pure summer colors. The reds of the apples, rose buds and other flowers are reminiscent of a long summer day and the bounty of a fruitful garden. The yellows are shimmering like the sun through trees on a summer day, and the greens are lush in appearance.



The Upson Tin Trunk is decorated with snowy white flowers, trimmed with fingered off red overtones. C. 1830, Private Collection.



Reproduction of an Upson Tin Trunk. Private Collection.

Another tin shop from Connecticut, the James Upson shop in the town of Marion, takes those summer colors to new heights with crisp white peaches and shimmering white flowers with vibrant red kisses from the sun. Morning



A new York Filley Shop, 1/2 Pound Conical Tea Caddy has deep red flowers with white and blue grey calyx which is characteristic of this shop. C. 1830, Private Collection.

Glories and white flowers are gaily decked out in red with black detail. The yellows are slightly muted while the greens sing and are dressed up in either yellow or black detail. Sigh...you just have to love these painters.

Moving west, we find ourselves in New York State where Augustus Filley ran a shop for his cousin Oliver Filley. Also, Stephen North of Fly Creek, New York, and Arron Butler of Greenville, New York, had burgeoning businesses in the tin trade. Here, the reds become tinted with green, giving them the deep red of ripe apples on a tree. The yellows are reminiscent of standing corn stocks, sunflowers and the deep golden ears of late summer corn. I think those decorators chose the colors of their favorite fruits and flowers found in nature surrounding them.

The Filley Shops, one in Connecticut, one in New York State and one in Pennsylvania, have different color palettes. The Augustus Filley Shop in Connecticut and the Filley Shop in New York State reflected the colors that were being used in and around their area. However, the color palette



The front of this Philadelphia Filly Shop Tin Trunk has two large white scalloped bands embellished with red, blue and yellow flowers along with green and brown leaves. These colors are reminiscent of those seen in coverlets. C. 1830, Private Collection.



This reproduction of a Philadelphia red ground tin trunk also has large white scalloped bands decorated with blues, yellows and browns.

of the Filley Shop in Pennsylvania reflected the culture of the people in the area. The people who settled in the colony of Penn's Woods, later known as Pennsylvania, were from Switzerland, Germany, Ireland and England. The colors in the designers' palettes were mostly influenced by the Germanic speaking people. They added blue to the vibrant yellow, crisp reds and warm yellows. Snowy whites were used as bands and then gaily decorated. The blues remind me of the blues they used in their coverlets as well as some of the red tones. The yellows the Pennsylvania decorators used not only could be pure clear yellow, but also have strong tones of freshly made mustard or the deep yellow of saffron. The greens are heavily tinted with blue, again picking up on the indigos of the coverlets.

Therefore, when deciding to paint a tin piece using an American Country Painted Tin Pattern, remember those who came before us, those whose lives were so influenced by their everyday surroundings. For me, this is a reminder to take time to soak in the beauty of nature that is around us and to reflect on how these colors and shapes influence me and my painting



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The Art of The Painted Dial

by Astrid Donnellan

The painted tall clock dial of the 18th Century is known by British historians as a form of British Folk Art. Birmingham had become the center of the industry, even though the production of japanning was flourishing in Pontypool, Wales. The artists of the period were known as industrial artists, and their talents were used not only in Pontypool for decorating japanware, but also, in the porcelain factories. The purpose of this article is to stress the importance of proper authentic art techniques and good craftsmanship. Having restored antique dials for many museums, antique dealers and private collectors since 1985, I fully appreciate how much thought and design went into the creation of this Folk Art. Many of the artists were self-trained; they were ordinary local town folk with artistic skills willing to work for a clockmaker during the winter months, allowing them time to tend their farm land and property in the warmer weather. Although the art work was never signed, the style of decoration is a clue to the clock manufacturer and an approximate date of manufacture.



Restoration of an early clock dial with fine gold leaf decoration on applied gesso, C. 1776.

Clockmakers and decorative artists have left behind a trail of history for us to investigate and document. Early tall case clock dials, prior to 1760, were made of brass. They were engraved with numerals and attached brass decoration to which the recessed engraving was filled with black wax. Although these brass dial tall clocks were of British origin, they were also made in other countries but not on the scale of what was produced in Britain.

White painted tall clock dials were first advertised in Britain in 1772 by the firm of Thomas Osborn and James Wilson. The new dials were advertised as the newest and most fashionable and in imitation of enamel. The partnership of Osborn and Wilson lasted for five years, after which each opened his

own business. Clock making is a separate trade from dial making and dial painting. The white dial was less expensive to produce and could be read quite easily in a dimly lit room.

The japanning industry was coming into prominence at this time and there was an abundance of proper sheet iron for this new exciting product.



Restoration of a Tall Clock Dial with hand painted floral bouquet, raised gesso and gold leaf surrounding spandrels, C.1800.



Restoration of a tall clock dial with unusual all black break arch and spandrels. Time ring with no 5-minute marks, C. 1835.



Restoration of a tall clock dial, with portrait of King George, depicts the British flag with cleaver and cannon in break arch. Spandrels have an urn and eagle in gold leaf on black background, C. 1815.



Restoration of a tall clock dial with a portrait of Sir Isaac Hull, Commander of the U. S. Constitution, C. 1810. Painting is attributed to John R. Penniman, ornamental artist. Dial is signed on the front by the clockmaker, Samuel Martin, New York. Note the early "Betsy Ross" flag.

By 1820, the painted white dial was reaching its height of popularity and continued until 1860-1870. Although the decoration was simple to begin with, the dial art work gradually filled the entire dial's surface outside of the time ring, but it was not as refined as in the beginning. A craftsman was assigned to paint the graphics and another artist painted the colored decoration. The arch and spandrel area were soon used as an artist's "canvas" to document important events in history and famous people as well as flowers, fruit, religious legends, historical buildings, poetic figures and historic battle scenes.



A tall clock dial from Scotland, depicting a poem from Robert Burns, arrived in this condition for restoration. Note the decorative work, probably painted by two artists, is in perfect condition with the center time in deplorable condition, a valuable piece in need of preserving for its history. C. 1830 – 1850. uel Martin, New York. Note the "Betsy Ross" flag.



The Scotland dial had the center removed and replaced with the usual priming and paint colors, mixed to match, now saved for future generations.

The hand painting was done with oil paint, and only the arch and four spandrels had a coat of varnish for a sealer, leaving the center time ring without protection. Thus, it was not unusual to see beautifully painted break arch and spandrels in perfect condition while the center time ring has paint loss from chipping and wear. Hand painted decoration was often the whim of the artist. However, some dials were ordered with special scenes by the buyer.

I offer here a collection of photographs of dials that I have restored over the years. Some needed minor repairs and others were quite challenging. Some needed to have the surface stabilized before any repair could be addressed. Many of the Scottish tall clock dials, especially the ones with scenes by poet Robert Frost, have sent me to the computer to educate myself on the origin of the poem.



Restoration of a tall clock dial from Scotland, depicting a poem from Robert Burns, arrived in this condition for restoration. Note the decorative work, probably painted by two artists, is in perfect condition with the center time in deplorable condition. A valuable piece in need of preserving for its history and value, C. 1830 – 1850. uel Martin, New York.

Note the early “Betsy Ross” flag.

The one depicted here is a Scottish dial, THE FAIR MAID OF PERTH, character from a novel by Sir Walter Scott and was likely painted around 1830. Robert Burns died at the age of 37 (1759-1796), but his poetry lives on today. This dial was a perfect example of the preserved arch and spandrels and its dial center in deplorable condition. The painted scenes had to be stabilized before the center could be taken out.

Also shown here is the tall clock dial depicting THE BATTLE AT WATERLOO between The British and Napoleon in 1815. This dial, in itself, tells the complete story of the battle. There are portraits of the Naval officers and the crew during battle. A stunning piece of work.



The Waterloo dial shows hand painted scenes of the battle, on land and on sea.



Restoration of a tall clock dial, fully decorated with Battle of Waterloo, C. 1815. The scene depicts generals and important military figures.

Sources:

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Astrid Donnellan is an HSEAD Master Craftsman, teacher and fine artist. The restorations shown here were done by Astrid who continues to restore paintings and decoration on clock dials for museums and collectors.

Penwork and Japanning: Some Thoughts on Design Sources

by Noel Riley

The search for design sources for 19th Century penwork is a fascinating one and ranges widely. Direct copying of patterns, occasionally provided in contemporary art magazines, has been traced in some of the classical subject matter of 19th Century penwork, notably in such publications as *Ackermann's Repository of Arts* (1809 -1829) and in the fine reproductions of classical iconography in books such as William Tischbein's *Collection of Engravings from Ancient Vases* (1791), Thomas Hope's *Costume of the Ancients* (1809) and John Flaxman's illustrations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (1793).



An 18th Century octagonal table with an embroidered top in tent stitch wool and silk. Later pen workers could have taken inspiration from embroidered floral borders such as this. Courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

However, the far more prevalent chinoiserie designs in penwork are less easy to pinpoint. At least some of the inspiration can be traced in the much earlier publication, *A Treatise of Japanning and Varnishing* of 1688 by John Stalker and George Parker¹, but one wonders how many 19th Century amateur artists would have had access to a book that must have been rarely available more than a hundred years later. Many of the oriental designs, which form the majority in this period, are loosely reminiscent of those in the *Treatise*, yet they cannot be attributed to this source precisely, and it seems likely that penworkers copied the designs they noticed on actual examples of japanned furniture, inspired by the *Treatise*, which would have had 'antique' appeal by the 19th Century. Thus, the *Treatise* would have provided indirect inspiration and a feeling for the genre, rather than exact models for their designs. As readers of *The Decorator* will be particularly aware, this is the way many

decorative artists tend to make use of design sources.

There are possibilities for inspiration to modern penworkers in lavish volumes such as George Smith's *Collection of Designs for Household Furniture*, in 1808, with a reprint by Praeger, New York in 1970, where classical and floral borders and motifs are clearly delineated. Thomas Hope's *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* in 1807, with a reprint by Tiranti, London,

1970, gives similar patterns, and some precise parallels have been recorded between its illustrations and examples in penwork.

Images of exotic birds, often perched on rocky or leafy outcrops or in stylised trees, on late 17th and early 18th Century lacquer cabinets, also lend themselves to re-interpretation. An early 18th Century Chinese black lacquer cabinet on stand, from Montacute House in England, offers a fine collection of motifs, including birds, plants, butterflies and even a family of monkeys on its inner surfaces. The insides of the doors on the magnificent red japanned cabinet, from Erddig in North Wales, dating from about 1720 (National Trust) have vases of flowers and exotic birds in gilded splendour. The inner doors and drawers of other red or black japanned cabinets on chests show figurative motifs and exotic birds and plants of great vivacity, to inspire today's artists.

Embroidery was an even more obvious and ubiquitous source of inspiration for penwork designs. The borders and fillings of stylised flowers and leafy patterns, seen on so many examples of penwork, are overwhelmingly reminiscent of the sorts of embroidery motifs that would have been widely accessible and familiar to the penwork artists, many of whom – probably most – would also have been embroiderers. The repeating scrolled borders, of leaves, flowers and fruits in 16th and early 17th Century blackwork, form a striking parallel to some of the designs seen in penwork. Early 19th Century magazines, directed towards the leisured classes, included patterns just as suitable for penwork as for embroidery. Ackermann's *Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashions and Politics* (1909-1828) is the most well known of these, and this source can be identified occasionally in the embellishment



An English sampler dated 1660 and signed with the initials MD. Many patterns on samplers such as this would have been suitable for pen workers of a later generation. Courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.



A late sixteenth century pillow cover, worked with a vine pattern. Courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.



A Pattern for Needlework published in Ackermann's Repository, May 1812; such designs could equally have been used by penworkers.



'Embroidery' pattern on a penwork table painted by Henzell Gough. Courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.



A design published in Ackermann's Repository, June 1820, which would have been suitable for embroidery or penwork.



The top of a penwork box with flower patterns reminiscent of embroidery. Formerly with O.F. Wilson, London.



Side view of the same box.

of penwork objects such as boxes and small items of furniture. Ackermann additionally published a *Selection of Ornaments* (1817) for use in various decorative schemes, including penwork. Many of the artists' suppliers produced their own printed patterns that were suitable for penwork. Their ephemeral nature meant that few of these paper relics have survived, but they were probably widespread.

Today's penworkers certainly have no lack of historic design sources for inspiration, and their own work will undoubtedly inspire future generations of decorative artists; conversely, perhaps embroiderers will be among them

Footnote:

Tiranti, Alec, a facsimile of *A Treatise of Japanning and Varnishing* by John Stalker and George Parker. Facsimile from a digital copy of legible portions from Stalker and Parker original text. Alec Tiranti Ltd. Publisher, 1998.



Noel Riley is a lecturer and the author of Penwork, a Decorative Phenomenon, Wetherby: Oblong Creative, 2008.

Book Shelf



John Minott: Boston Ornamental and Clock Dial Painter, 1771-1826 by Paul J. Foley. Willard House and Clock Museum, Grafton, Mass., 2023, 48 pages.

Overview, Sandra Cohen

John Minott was born in Concord, Massachusetts on September 26, 1771, in the midst of America's rebellion and just before its declaration of independence from Great Britain in 1776 and the American Revolution. Little is known of John Minott's childhood or his training as a decorative painter, but it's likely that he apprenticed for several years with his brother, Timothy, who was 14 years older and owned a coach and chaise building business in Boston. After his apprenticeship and a year or two spent as a journeyman, John acquired the skills to work unsupervised and train those with less experience. The following advertisements from local newspapers document Minott's early training and activities.

On February 26, 1794, an ad in the *Columbian Centinel* announced:

“The Subscribers, Coach and Chaise Makers, [had] entered into partnership... where they intend carrying on the Coach and Chaise Making Business, in all their branches, with fidelity and dispatch...

Timothy Martyn Minot and John Minot

N.B. Painting, Gilding, Japanning, Varnishing, done equal to any on the Continent-

On January 10, 1799, in an ad in the *J. Russell Gazette*, John Minott



Fig. 1. 12 inch tall clock dial with floral corners and arch, (no gilt borders), signed John Minott / 118 on rear of arch, signed on front "Aaron Willard." In print lettering. Courtesy of Delaney Antique Clocks, West Townsend, Mass.

“respectfully informs his friends and the public, that he continues to carry on the Coach, Chaise and Sign Painting, Gilding, Japanning and Varnishing [business], at his shop, in Broomfield’s Lane...Clock and Time Piece Faces, Bed and Window [Cornices] Painted in the [neat] manner...”

Their partnership had lasted for two years after which John opened his own storefront, and an ad in the *Boston Patriot* on February 19, 1814, announced his new address on Bromfield’s Lane to Hawley Place. John adds “Fire Buckets, Military Standards, Ornamental Gilding and Painting on Glass...” to his repertoire. He further writes, “J.M. flatters himself that the experience and practice of twenty years will enable him to give complete satisfaction...” Although Minott offered a variety of ornamental painting projects, only his clock dials bear his signature.

John Minott’s early advertising doesn’t mention decorating clock dials, and Boston tax records as late as 1803 indicated that he is “a painter” or “a chaise painter.” Foley’s illustrations indicated that Minott likely painted for the Willards during his training and apprenticeship as early as 1790.

Records indicate that Minott married Thomazine Elizabeth Fielder Bond in 1803 when he was 32 years old. Foley noted that “she was the sister of noted Boston watch and chronometer maker William Cranch Bond.” John

and his wife had several children, two were sons, neither of whom joined their father's business. Foley excerpted a letter from Thomazine to her aunt, Mary Wilcocks in England on June 15, 1815, literally just months after the War of 1812. The letter conveys several personal details about their lives.

“During the last five years, many things have happened to us,...some pretty severe trials – the war – the destructive restrictions on commerce that preceded it, ...the heaviest weight fell as is usual on the midling and lower classes and thousands of mechanics, who before that supported their families in comfort have been reduced to want bread – a share of the general evil fell to our lot – We had purchased 16 acres of fine land...6 miles from Boston,...had built a handsome house; Mr. Minott had every prospect of being soon able to quit a business that injured his health, and spend the rest of his days in rural peace...But it was not to be so...loss followed loss and disappointment...baffled all our attempts to stem the tide – we were compelled to sell all our property much below its value...return to Boston where Mr. M. kept his business, or rather his shop – for business, there was none, months and months elapsed...not a job to do...such a change from affluence...My husband's mind is timid and retiring...he is not fitted to encounter the storm, no match for the cool, designing, knavery of his Yankee brethren... I have borne the struggle far better than he...Now business revives again, and he revives too, his spirits mend every day,...I hope we shall yet see good days...”

Thomazine's letter illustrated the daily struggles of tradesmen in the aftermath of the War of 1812, where Boston and other ports were blockaded by the British for years. The reference to the effects his work had on his health is familiar today as we learn more about the risks of exposure to lead based paints and other toxic solvents.

Foley's research also uncovered deeds showing the purchase of their land and home, “situated in Roxbury in the County of Norfolk, on the upper road leading from Jamaica Plain meetinghouse (so called) to Dedham...” in April 1806 for \$2,900 which Minott mortgaged twice and finally sold in December 1813 for \$1,800. Thomazine filed for divorce claiming Minot “has utterly deserted her, and for more than three years...grossly and wantonly neglected and refused to provide any support or maintenance for the Libellant & their children.” Thomazine was granted a divorce in spite of Minott's protestations. Three and a half years later, on May 14, 1826, Minott died at the age of 54.

Foley's introduction to John Minott's early life is brief but substantive, revealing newspaper ads and other documentation to paint a profile of a talented decorative painter about whom so few personal details are known. Naturally talented at ornamentation on a variety of furnishings, Minott's ad in 1799 specifically mentioned “Clock and Time Piece Faces.” He was a prolific clock dial

painter, and Foley generously illustrates his book with Minott's painted dials.

Foley begins by giving us background on the early white painted clock dials from England and their makers. One can appreciate the appeal of a decorated white dial over its predecessor, the brass dials. Months after Osborne and Wilson, the earliest makers of japanned (white) dials, advertised these dials in Birmingham, England; Birmingham became the center of English painted dials. Across the pond, Philadelphia japanner and hardware dealer, Timothy Berrett, first advertised and introduced these dials to America. Several tradesmen offered these dials, including, John Knowles, John and Daniel Carrell, as well as Paul Revere, who advertised in Boston's *American Herald* on May 23, 1785, "Imported and to be sold by Paul Revere, ... Enamelled Clock Faces."

Foley's brief but comprehensive book, focuses on Minott's ornamental clock dials and their identification. Like many American clock dial makers and painters, Minott used the design and decorations from Birmingham. Similarly, using sheet iron, but "a slightly thinner gauge, ... instead of falseplates, [he]



Fig. 2. Aaron Willard tall clock dial arch attributed to John Minott with painted scenes instead of transfer maps.

used four long dial feet [and before having his own engraved plates for transfer maps,] his early dials have hand drawn maps or small scenes painted in their place." Foley wrote that Minott likely developed his own transfer

maps around 1793 that are "distinctively...found only on early Boston moon dials (up to about 1805)." However, they are similar to the "Birmingham transfer 'half maps' and were undoubtedly copied from an imported Osborne dial."

John Minott signed many of clock dials with his signature, sometimes just initials and a number, but there are some unsigned and unnumbered dials "that have been confidently attributed to him." The book generously illustrates a variety of Minott's painted faces, fashioning floral spandrels, starry skied moon dials and gold leaf embellishments, many initially echoing the designs on the earlier imported dials.

Foley states that Minott and other ornamental decorators, including William Prescott, Ritto Penniman, Willard & Nolan, Samuel Curtis and Spencer Nolen, painted dials for the Willards, and that they shared a close, working relationship. It's also likely that Minott offered apprenticeships to them.

Signed dials indicated that Minott's primary patrons were the Roxbury and Boston Willard clockmakers. As of 2023, there are forty-nine known signed tall clock dials. The meaning of the number after his signature is not



Fig. 3. Aaron Willard tall clock dial signed on rear "J Minott / 150." Black and gilt background design is unusual on an American dial. Minott, likely copied it from an imported Birmingham dial. Courtesy of Skinner Auctioneers, Marlborough, MA.



Fig. 4. 14 Inch illegibly signed English tall clock dial signed on rear falseplate, "F. BYRNE" Francis Bryrne / Birmingham.

absolutely known and may be account numbers, lot numbers, or, since they are progressive, they may be serial numbers. The known numbers are from #8 to #226 ("all, but one, are numbered"). Foley illustrated each of these dials and signatures in his book. Interestingly, "there are many more unsigned/unnumbered ones attributable to Minott than there are signed/numbered dials." The author thinks that the approximate count for Minott, around two hundred-thirty dials, seemed low, and he believes that "for some reason, Minott may have stopped signing."

In 1815, his wife, Thomazine, in a letter to her sister, had referenced Minott's health, his personality, the competitive business climate and the political changes, to which she thought he was not well suited, "He is not fitted to encounter the storm." His state of mind, health and divorce may account for some of his work habits.

Unfortunately, Minott's dials are not dated, but other features aid in discovering when they were painted. For example, Foley cited an inscription on the front plate of the movement of an Elnathan Taber clock; Tabor apprenticed with Minott.

Minott painted his moon dials on heavy brass probably because it was easier to cut, but unfortunately, the paint didn't adhere as well, resulting in the need for repainting and restoration. Foley writes that there were earlier clock dial painters in Boston such as Rea & Johnson (painted dials for Benjamin



Fig. 5 13 inch tall clock moon dial with floral and fruit corners and raised gilt borders, transfer printed small “half map” hemispheres, signed “J. Minott 89” on left rear edge of dial arch, signed on front “Elnathan Taber.” in print lettering. Skinner Auction Science, Technology & Clocks, June 2, 2012. Sale 2600M, Lot 391.



Fig. 20. Four corner decorations from signed Minott dials.

Fig. 6. Four corner decorations from signed Minott dials.

Willard in 1774), Robert Pope and Joseph Pope. However, “Minott is the first recorded Boston clock dial painter whose dials can be identified.”

Foley’s examination of a clock dial’s details, particularly those of Minott, include “the tension springs that engage the moon and calendar discs on the rear.” The section on Identification is exhaustive and supported by numerous illustrations. A few examples follow: Minott had basically three styles for his clock makers’ signatures; print lettering, script lettering and Old English lettering, each of which is described. Likewise, the vertical stems on his five-minute numbers are depicted. Aaron Willard was known to place printed labels inside the doors of his tall case clocks. Early ones indicated “Roxbury,” later ones, “Boston,” where he moved in 1794. Therefore, the Minott dials signed and numbered, #61, #111, #109, #131 and #150 with the Roxbury label were likely painted before 1794.

Minott’s body of work, especially for the Willards, signifies that he was recognized and appreciated for his skill and talent for ornamentation in the clock making and decorating industry in the Boston area. The Willards, John Minott and his fellow ornamental painters, Prescott, Penniman, Nolen and Curtis, would be credited for establishing Boston’s reputation as a center of American dial painting.



Fig. 7. 12 inch Aaron Willard tall clock moon dial with floral corners and raised gesso gilt borders, transfer printed small “half map,” hemispheres, signed “J. Minott / No. 222” on rear upper left, signed on front “Aaron Willard.” in print lettering. Courtesy of Gary R. Sullivan Antiques, Sharon, Mass.



Fig. 8. 12 inch Simon Willard tall clock moon dial with floral corners and raised gesso gilt borders, transfer printed small “half map” hemispheres, signed “J. Minott / No.221” on rear upper left corner, signed on front “Simon Willard.” in print lettering. (Robinson, Roger W., Dr. and Herschel B. Burt. *The Willard House and Cock Museum and the Willard Family Clockmakers*. Columbia, Penn, 1996, pp. 54, 56.



Paul J. Foley is an independent horological researcher and also author of Willard's Patent Time Pieces: A History of The Weight-Driven Banjo Clock, 1800-1900.



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Wallace, Louise 1970
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Sources:

Chairmen of *The Decorator*, Standards & Judging, Specialist Awards





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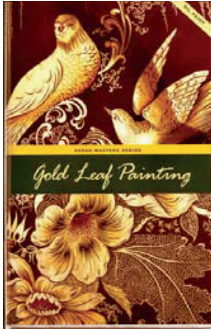
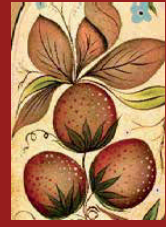
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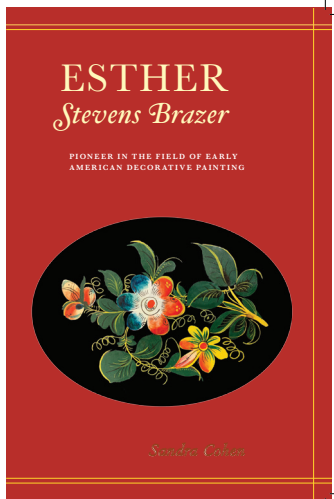
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*Tall Clock Dial with hand painted floral bouquet, raised gesso and gold leaf surrounding spandrels, C.1800. Restoration by Astrid Donnellan, artist and teacher.*