



THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT IN DEERFIELD

by Suzanne L. Flynt

Detail from *Garden of Hearts* chest by
Madeline Yale Wynne, 1903, oak, copper,
wrought iron, cabochons. Museum
Purchase with Funds Provided by the
Deerfield Collectors Guild. 2022.3.



THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT

was a late-19th-century social and design reform promoted by British designer, craftsman, and reformer, William Morris (1834-1896), who admonished “have nothing in your home that is not useful or beautiful.” Motivated by the movement, a small group of artistic women in Deerfield—with its picturesque 18th-century homes, scenic rural surroundings, and illustrious colonial history—shaped their community into one of the earliest and most revered Arts and Crafts centers in America.

In 1896, Margaret Whiting (1860–1946) and Ellen Miller (1854–1929) founded the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework. Serving as designers and managers, the two trained and employed up to 30 women who worked in their homes to stitch embroideries from provided patterns and materials. While initial designs were based on 18th-century indigo-dyed New England embroideries—with the notion of preserving patterns—Whiting and Miller also utilized designs and colors that resonated with contemporary life. The managers directed the work and tracked the time spent on each piece, and only after the needlework met their approval was it marked with their logo—a D within a flax wheel. The success of the Blue and White Society and their exceptional linen on linen bed hangings, table and cushion covers, doilies, and wall hangings brought publicity, fame, and orders to Deerfield.

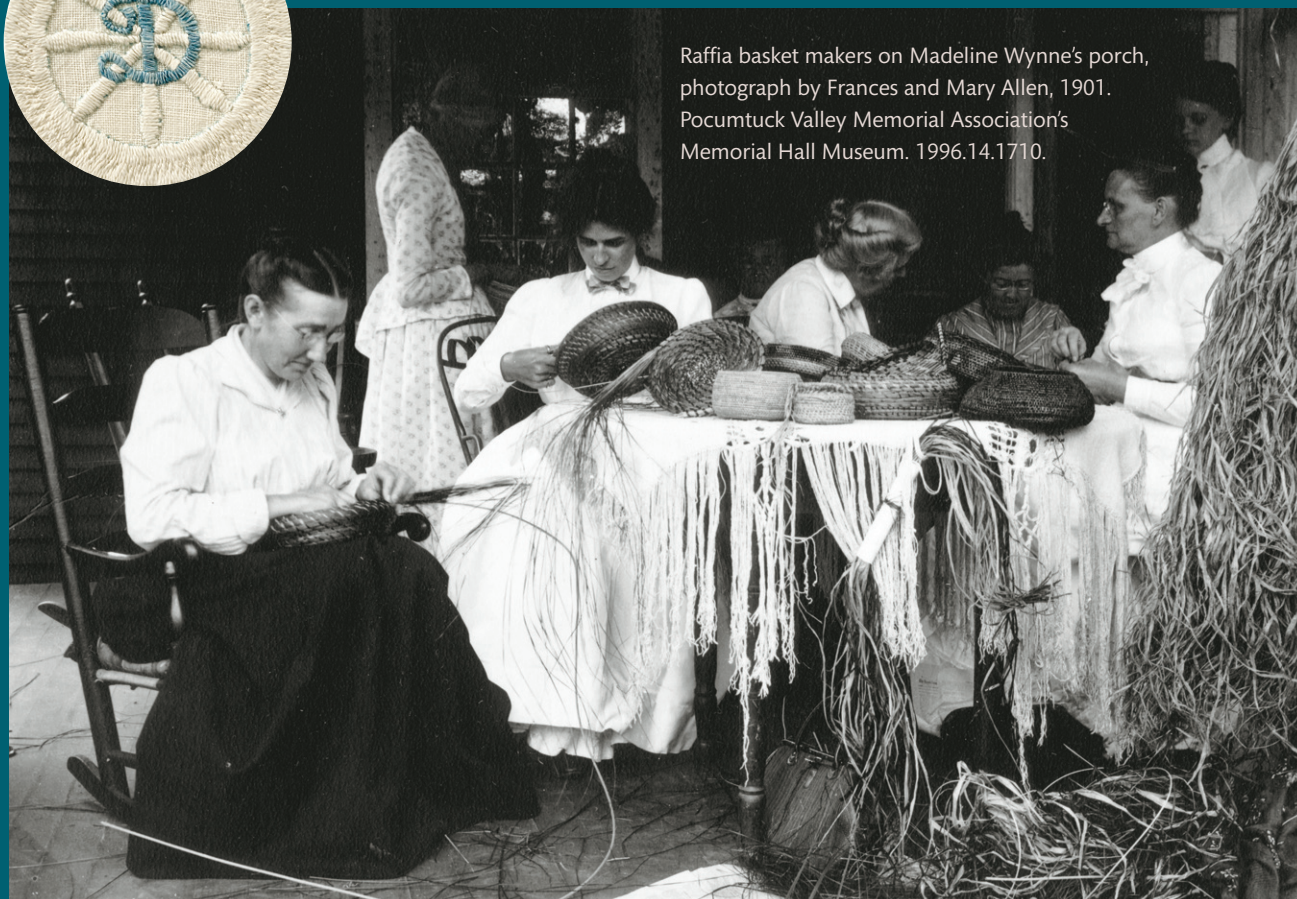
With heightened interest in handicraft's potential, a rapt audience at the Brick Church gathered to hear artist and author Madeline Yale Wynne (1847–1918) talk about the simple, well-designed, and unique Arts and Crafts furnishings being created in Chicago. She explained that hand craftsmanship provided an alternative to poorly designed and

constructed machine-made objects. As a painter, metalworker, and woodworker, Wynne convinced her neighbors to try their hand at weaving rag rugs or basket making. And so they did. With encouragement and practice, in 1899 they contributed rag rugs, ornamental wrought iron work, netted fringes, photographs, woodwork, and metalwork alongside the Blue and White embroideries at Deerfield's first Arts and Crafts exhibit.

After two more successful summer exhibitions, in 1901 Wynne assembled the craft participants to establish the Deerfield Society of Arts and Crafts. The organization's mission was to further Deerfield industries and to provide a standard of excellence of design and workmanship. The governing body included four officers, with Wynne elected as president; an

Opposite: Bed cover made by the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework for Phoebe A. Hearst, 1898, linen on linen. C. Alice Baker Bequest, 69.1222.

Left: Detail of Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework insignia, a "D" within a flax wheel, on Kentucky Bow Knot bed cover, c. 1900, linen on linen. C. Alice Baker Bequest, 69.1208.



Raffia basket makers on Madeline Wynne's porch, photograph by Frances and Mary Allen, 1901. Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association's Memorial Hall Museum. 1996.14.1710.

executive committee with directors representing furniture, palm leaf, netting, metal, raffia, Blue and White needlework, weaving, dyeing, rugs, and later photography; and an advisory board. After reconsideration, the Blue and White Society split off in 1916. The Arts and Crafts society renamed itself Society of Deerfield Industries.

The "Morris wave" in Deerfield stimulated widespread handicraft participation, especially in basket making. Emma Coleman (1853–1942) taught palm leaf basket making in the Frary House assembly room, now part of Historic Deerfield's Barnard Tavern, an Eastern European farmhand taught local men how to harvest and weave willow and red osier into work baskets, and Madeline Wynne taught her neighbors raffia basket making. Interest was so great that an article in the *Greenfield*

Recorder (July 23, 1902) noted: "Every one may be a basket-maker in Deerfield and nearly every woman is. Grandmother and mother and daughter, and the Polish servant in the kitchen, are in the democracy of weavers of the imported raffia, the panama straw that used to be wrought into hats at every farmhouse, and most interesting of all the native grasses." Deerfield Basket Makers produced palm leaf, reed, willow, and pine needle baskets, and Pocumtuck Basket Makers created raffia, grass, and corn husk baskets. In her first ten years at the craft, Gertrude Porter Ashley (1858–1936) reported having made more than 3,400 raffia baskets.

Knotted and tufted coverlet made by Emma Henry for C. Alice Baker, 1902, cotton. C. Alice Baker Bequest, 69.1208.





Above: Showroom of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework in the Nims house parlor, hand-colored photograph by E.M. Howard, c. 1915. Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association's Memorial Hall Museum. 1988.25.07.



Left: Chest made by Edwin Thorn, Cornelius Kelley, and Caleb Allen, c. 1901, oak, wrought iron, zinc. Gift of Preston Bassett, 1979.053.

Right: Andirons made by Cornelius Kelley, wrought iron, 1900–1934. Museum Collections Fund, 2015.8.1.

Below: Hammered and stamped bowl by Madeline Yale Wynne, c. 1899, patinated copper. Museum Collections Fund, 2022.26.

Opposite: Rose Tree wall hanging made by the Society of the Blue and White Needlework, 1910–16, linen. Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association's Memorial Hall Museum, 1992.031.



"The successful introduction of these crafts is an untold blessing to the town of Deerfield, not merely from the world-wide fame it has given the town, but in the money it has brought in, enabling the old homes to be kept up, and permitting those who must stay in the town or who love it too much to move away, to earn their living at home."

Gazette and Courier,
Greenfield (April 30, 1904)

Garden of Hearts chest by Madeline Yale Wynne, 1903, oak, copper, wrought iron, cabochons. Museum Purchase with Funds Provided by the Deerfield Collectors Guild. 2022.3.



Madeline Wynne contributed distinctive metal-work (necklaces, brooches, and belt buckles) and carved, painted, and ornamented boxes to Deerfield's exhibitions. She also designed and built two chests inspired by late-17th to early 18th-century Connecticut River Valley oak chests. Following Wynne's lead, Dr. Edwin Thorn and Caleb Allen also built and exhibited chests, dressing tables, and boxes. Leaving behind horse shoeing, blacksmith Cornelius Kelley started his Arts and Crafts career by creating wrought iron hinges for the carved boxes and chests. His talents revealed, he went on to fashion a range of ornamental wrought iron work such as candle sticks, lighting devices, and fireplace sets. Textile production was done by Emma Henry, who created candlewick spreads and netted testers, and Eleanor Arms and Luanna Thorn, who wove rag rugs, table covers, blankets, and wall hangings. From the start, photographers Frances and Mary Allen were active in the Deerfield Industries. They exhibited and published their artistic platinum photographs, and Mary Allen's articles and Allen sisters' photographs of the crafters and their crafts furthered the reputation of Deerfield's handicrafts.

In the years following World War I, summer exhibitions were put on hold, and there occurred a changing of the guard. After Madeline Yale Wynne died in 1918, and the much-reduced Blue and White Society disbanded in 1926, new crafters joined the remaining first generation of handcrafters. In 1930, William Abercrombie opened the Indian House Memorial on Deerfield's Main Street for use as Deerfield Industries' studio and exhibition space. After the Bloody Brook Tavern in South Deerfield was relocated behind the Indian House Memorial, Randolph Johnston established Old Deerfield Pottery. Later, in 1938, Johnston and his wife, Margot Broxton, moved to South Deerfield where they set up a pottery and foundry known as Turnip Yard, Inc., which produced enameled copper wares, ceramics with hand-hammered aluminum lids, and trays into the 1950s.

From the start, handicrafts created by the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework and Deerfield Industries were featured in and won awards at important juried exhibitions throughout the country. Through articles in magazines such as *The Craftsman*, *House Beautiful*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *Handicrafts*, and critical reviews in Boston, Chicago, and New York newspapers, the world took note of the extraordinary work produced in Deerfield. Rewarded by artistic satisfaction, financial gain, and Colonial Revival sensibilities, Deerfield's skilled hands and creative minds continued creating distinctive handicrafts well into the 20th century.