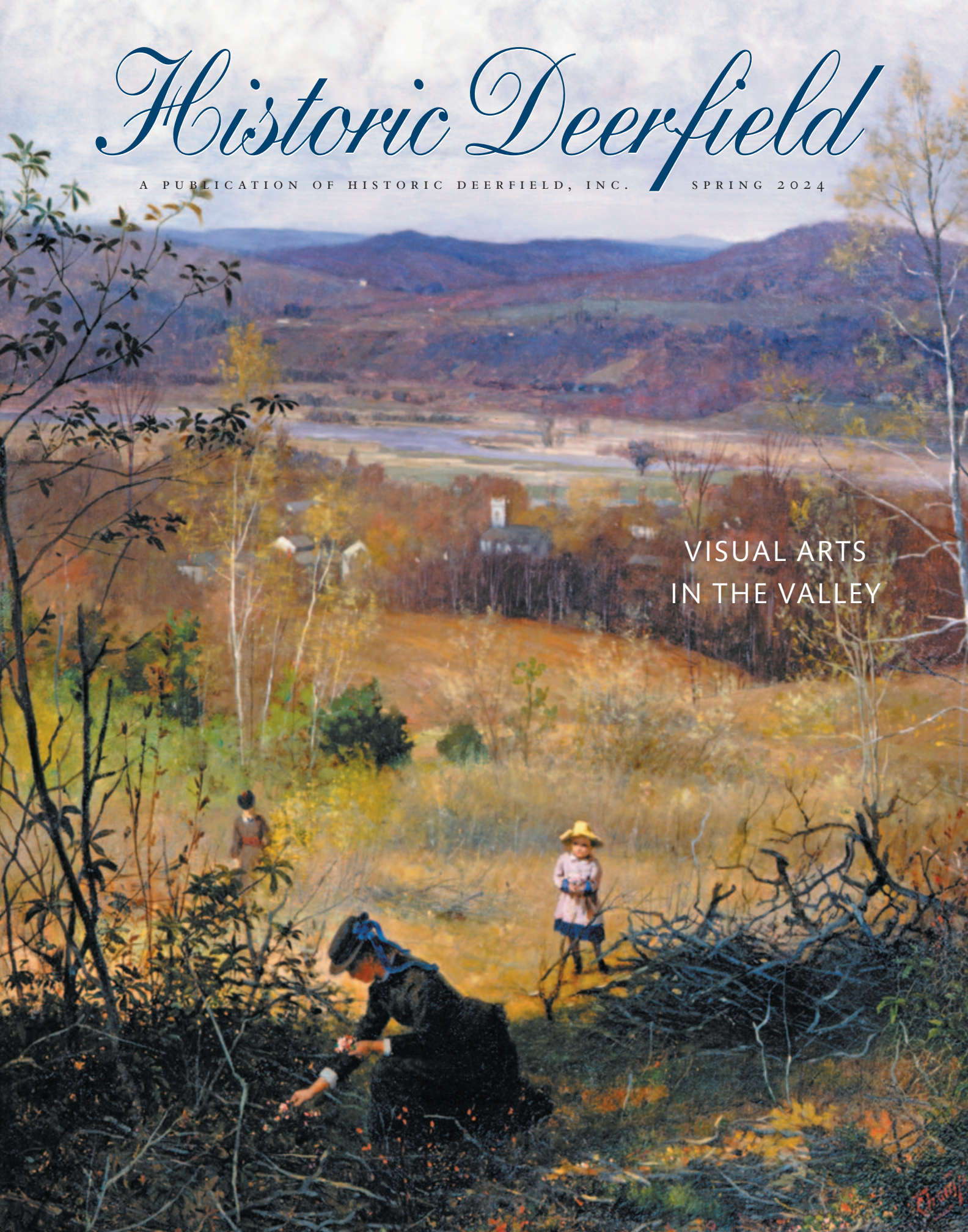


# Historic Deerfield

A PUBLICATION OF HISTORIC DEERFIELD, INC.

SPRING 2024

VISUAL ARTS  
IN THE VALLEY





IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, Historic Deerfield has been fortunate to add a number of paintings to its collection, including works by Zedekiah Belknap, Horace Bundy, James Wells Champney, Joseph Goodhue Chandler, Oliver Tarbell Eddy, Erastus Salisbury Field, Elizabeth Fuller, George Fuller, George Spencer Fuller, Charles Louis Heyde, Nelson A. Moore, Rufus Porter, Gerrit Schipper, and Madeline Yale Wynne. Notable print acquisitions have included the mid-18th-century engraved portraits of Mohawk sachem Hendrick Peters Theyanoguin and Queen Charlotte of England.

Historic Deerfield's roster of paintings, prints, and drawings is small in relation to our overall collection (some 2,000 out of 32,000 items), but it is distinguished in pedigree, having been part of founders Helen and Henry Flynt's early efforts to acquire suitably evocative framed objects for the historic houses they were restoring and furnishing in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. Some of their early purchases included portraits by John Singleton Copley, Ralph Earl, John Wollaston, and a very rare example by Peter Pelham, Copley's stepfather and teacher. Their taste in prints tended toward patriotic or historical subjects, including portraits of individuals with a connection to Deerfield (such as Massachusetts Governor Jonathan Belcher, who traveled here in 1735 for a multi-day conference with several Indigenous nations).



### From the President

Since then, we have continued to expand on those early efforts and have enlarged our collecting in the area of the pictorial arts in keeping with our overall mission to represent all aspects of culture and life of the Connecticut River Valley and beyond. Last year, our reopened Barnard Tavern debuted a new interpretive space: an upstairs chamber occupied by an itinerant portrait painter. A few months later, Historic Deerfield added to its staff our first ever full-time specialist in the history of American painting and prints: Lea Stephenson, our Luce Foundation Curatorial Fellow, whose work appears in this magazine. Look for her exhibition on James Wells Champney at the Flynt Center later this year.

This issue broadens the focus beyond easel painting, prints, and drawings to include needlework, painted furniture, architectural decoration, maps, photography, signs, letterpress printing, and even early film. We know that readers of this magazine and visitors to our galleries appreciate this variety of media. Historic Deerfield is at once a history museum, an art museum, and a historic site. Aspects of each of these facets of our work are found within these pages. We hope you enjoy the articles and make plans to visit us soon to explore all the visual arts in the Valley!

—John Davis, President, Historic Deerfield

On the cover: *Deerfield Valley* by James Wells Champney, c. 1877. Historic Deerfield 94.009.

Back cover: Watercolor of the Munn House (Lot 14) Deerfield, by Clara Alquist, c. 1930. Historic Deerfield 2006.800.

# Historic Deerfield

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# Emily Draper's Book of Journals and Early Female Education

by Susan Schulten



The centerpiece of these journals were maps, and especially maps of the nation itself. Throughout the 1810s, and especially after the end of the War of 1812, students drew maps of their nation to cultivate their new civic identity and unify a population spread across enormous distance. Draper's map of the United States appears to be copied from the 1820 edition of J.A. Cummings's common *School Atlas*. Notice the precise execution, from the neat line down to the lettering of each town and waterway. Museum Purchase in honor of David Bosse with funds provided by the Deerfield Collectors Guild. Historic Deerfield 2020.6.

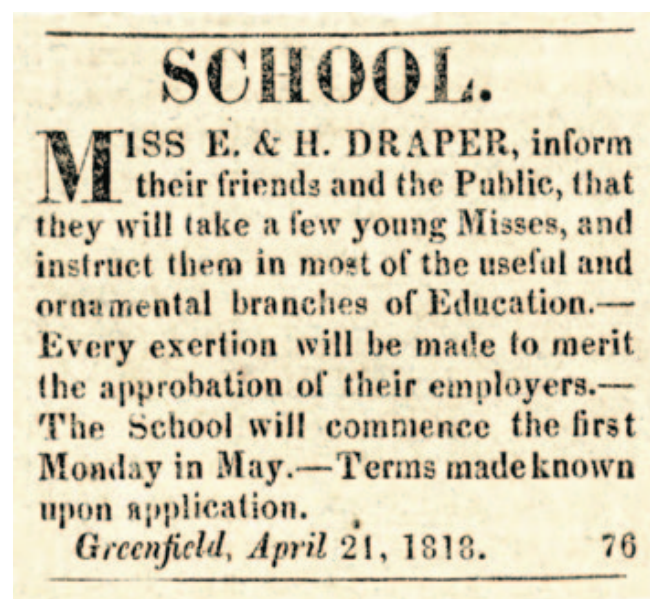


IN 2020, Historic Deerfield acquired a manuscript that is both extraordinarily beautiful and historically important: an elaborate book of maps and penmanship drawn by a young woman in Greenfield, Massachusetts, in 1822. Emily Draper (1803–1865) produced a journal with more than 50 pages of finely rendered maps and exquisite calligraphy. In page after page, she presents her lessons with stunning artistry that dazzles the eye. But the journal is also a gold mine for historians. It shows us the lived experience not just of Draper, but of thousands of young women who were among the first to be educated outside of the home. It reflects the exceptional commitment to female education in the Connecticut River Valley. And it reminds us that learning in this era was, above all, visual.

Among the many changes brought by American independence was a conviction that young women could—and should—be educated outside of the home. Many at the time believed that the survival of this new and fragile nation hinged on the cultivation of “republican mothers” who would in turn raise responsible citizens of their own. This female education would not be wide nor catholic, of course, but it still represented an important shift in thinking. It should be no surprise, then, that many new schools for girls appeared in the decades after 1790.

The epicenter of this new enthusiasm for female education was the Connecticut River Valley. In the 1810s, for example, nine schools were founded in Hartford alone, six of these exclusively for girls. Among the most well-known of these was Sarah Pierce’s Litchfield Female Academy, founded in 1792, and Catherine Beecher’s Hartford Female Seminary, founded in 1823. But there were a multitude of others, and considered together they constitute a unique and important era in the history of female schooling that lasted until the advent of coeducational common schools in the 1840s. When Draper was fifteen, two of her sisters opened a school in Greenfield; she opened a school in Northfield in 1823, and a few years later she and her sisters opened another in Hartford. While we don’t know where she herself was educated, she would have had several choices—such as the Greenfield Female Academy founded in 1819—that would have been unavailable to women just a few decades earlier.

These schools had no established standards or even uniform expectations: most were small enterprises held in homes, some of which lasted just a few years. In many of these academies, the teachers were just a few years older than their students, relying on their own experience and a few common texts. Without any standardization, the curricula mostly centered on orthography, mathematics, and geography alongside the “accomplishments” of an earlier era: embroidery, music, and dance. Needlework, for instance, played a central role in the traditional schools of Misses Royce and Patten in Hartford. Emma Willard omitted the needle arts to make room for a more advanced and scientific curricula. Yet whether these



Advertisement for the Draper school, *Franklin Herald*, 1818. Historic Deerfield Library.

schools were seeking to offer a more expansive or limited set of offerings, they all shared an emphasis on visual learning. Willard, for instance, may have rejected needlework, but she still embraced drawing—especially drawing maps—to cultivate memory and learning.

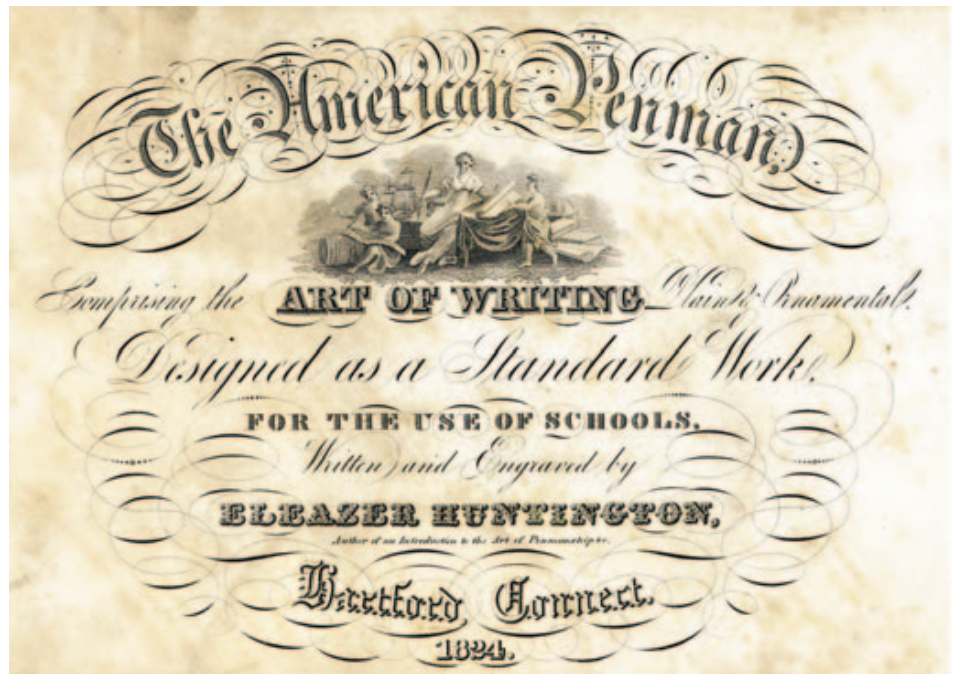
This embrace of visual learning is apparent in the educational leaders who came out of Hartford as well. Emma Willard, educated in and around Hartford before moving to Vermont and New York, established schools of her own. She extended her reach further by producing geography and history texts that asked students to draw maps and visualize information in graphic forms to facilitate memorization. Eleazer Huntington also had a deep connection to the community of female academies in the area, many of which taught penmanship and calligraphy. In 1816, he produced a guide to “round and running hand” (penmanship) that in turn extended these lessons well beyond the region. All of these schools and leaders made the Connecticut River Valley the heart of female education in the early republic.<sup>1</sup>

This regional background helps to explain not just Emily Draper’s journal of maps and calligraphy, but the hundreds of other “schoolgirl maps” now held in archives and private collections across the United States. Interestingly, no textbook of this era mandates the teaching of map drawing in a particular way: the subject is ubiquitous in advertisements for female academies, but no published texts or guides explain the style of map produced by so many young women between 1790 and 1830. As Draper’s manuscript shows, these were popular exercises because they enabled students to practice penmanship, perfect their calligraphy, hone their artistic skills, learn geographic information, and of course draw maps.



Right: Title page of Eleazer Huntington's *The American Penman*, second edition, 1824. Historic Deerfield Library.

Below: Although the city of Washington and District of Columbia had been formed by 1802, Draper's use of an eagle, the national emblem, as her cartouche may reflect New York's earlier role as the initial seat of the new republic. Note also her use of two prime meridians along the top and bottom of the map, signaling a time when several of these were in use. In 1817, the state consisted of 55 counties; Genesee Co. (formed 1802) in the far west would eventually be divided into eight other counties. Draper's depiction of St. Lawrence Co. (1805) shows it hugging the St. Lawrence River, but in fact it also occupied the unnamed portion to the south and east.





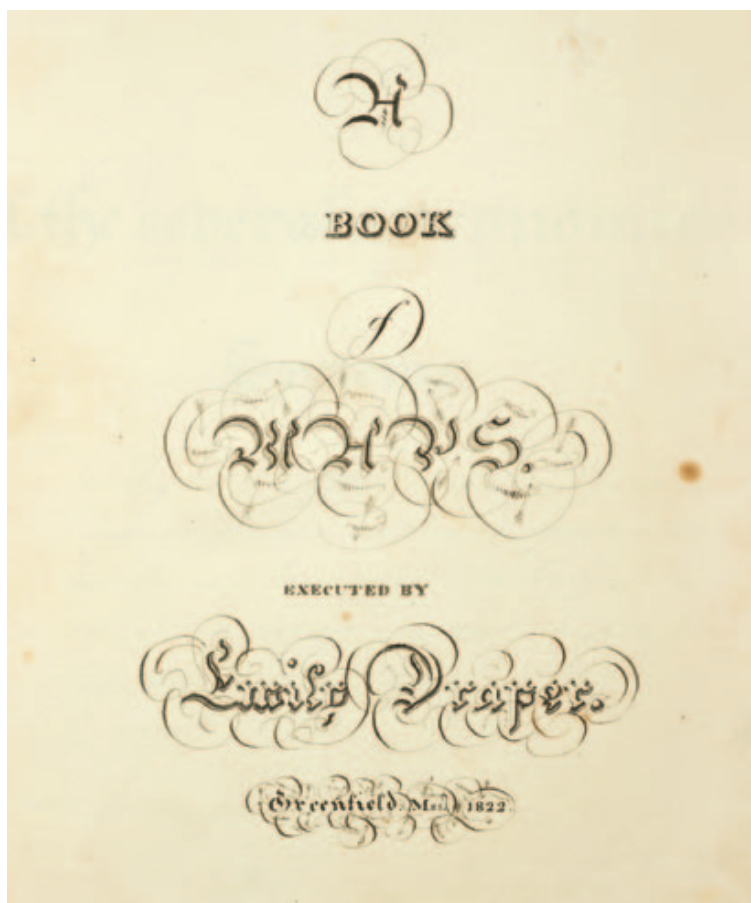
Most cartographic exercises completed by female students in this era are individual maps, usually undertaken over the course of a term as part of either “geography” or “map drawing” courses, and often judged on their merits as part of academic competitions. In this respect Draper’s lengthy journal is unusual.<sup>2</sup>

Her journal begins with several pages that showcase her knowledge of geography and skills of penmanship and calligraphy. In *The American Penman*, the narrative derives from a common geography school text, indicating that the goal was repeating textual information to commit it to memory. Geography was considered an especially appropriate science for young ladies given its breadth and accessibility. After writing out several pages of text, Draper turned toward different forms of mapping. Among the most common of these schoolgirl projects, double hemisphere world maps had been a longstanding lesson in England and France that easily migrated across the Atlantic. But after about 1810, and especially after the War of 1812, American educators often asked female students to create maps of their own nation as an expression of civic pride. Typical then is Emily Draper’s map of the United States.

Draper followed her map of the nation with maps of the individual states, beginning with Maine and working her way south and then west. Here again she showed immense attention to detail, copy-

Top right: Emily Draper was nineteen when she crafted this “Book of Maps” in Greenfield, measuring about nine inches high by seven inches wide. At that age, she had likely completed her own formal education, and may have drawn the journal as a model for the school she opened the following year in Northfield. In 1830 she went on to serve as preceptress of Deerfield Academy. Several of her sisters operated schools in and near Greenfield as early as 1818. Notice that this is a book of maps “executed by” Emily Draper, a word that suggests the importance of their finished appearance.

Right: The first several pages of Emily’s journal consist of textual information, mostly taken from common geography books of that era such as Jedidiah Morse’s *Geography Made Easy*. In copying these passages, she was committing the information to memory, but also practicing her “running hand” penmanship as well as more elaborate calligraphy. The rose garland around “The Twelve Signs” shows up in other similar journals that have recently surfaced at auction and in archives. This indicates that teachers might have been sharing models of these texts as they themselves moved from being students to teachers, and from school to school.





ing atlas maps with care while also adding flourishes of her own. Her map of Massachusetts, for example, most likely draws from a current edition of Mathew Carey's commonly available atlas of the United States. The decorative cartouche, however, was entirely her own. Equally intriguing and individual were Draper's "word maps," where she arranged text in visually striking ways to reinforce her knowledge of geographical relationships while practicing her skills of art and calligraphy. In all, Draper created word maps for 23 states and territories.

Emily Draper's map of Massachusetts typifies school mapping exercises that peaked in the early 19th century. Each state map included an elaborate decorative cartouche that reflected her artistic skills. Throughout the map, she uses different styles of penmanship and calligraphy to mark the different types of place names. The colored neat line around the edge of the map mimics printed maps of that time, and the careful execution indicates that these maps were often created to be judged for their artistic merits. That this was just one of 19 maps of equal detail shows us a young woman with enormous patience, dedication, and attention to detail.

Among the most intriguing and useful aspects of Draper's journal is its unfinished quality. Several of her incomplete geographic and word maps remind us that she was engaged in a lengthy and demanding project. For instance, consider the map of Tennessee. The map thoroughly documents the complex river systems and incorporates topographic information for the southern Appalachian system and Cumberland Plateau. But it lacks a few final elements, which indicates that she most likely began her maps by drawing state boundaries and natural features before turning to the internal boundaries and decorative elements, including coloration and the cartouche. Such complicated exercises also required sustained patience and self-discipline. One can only imagine how long it took Draper to create such a comprehensive atlas of her home country. And with such obvious attention to artistic execution, it is not surprising that her maps—like many others of that era—bear spelling and other errors. On her map of the United States, for example, we see creative spellings of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, no doubt casualties of her focus on artistry.

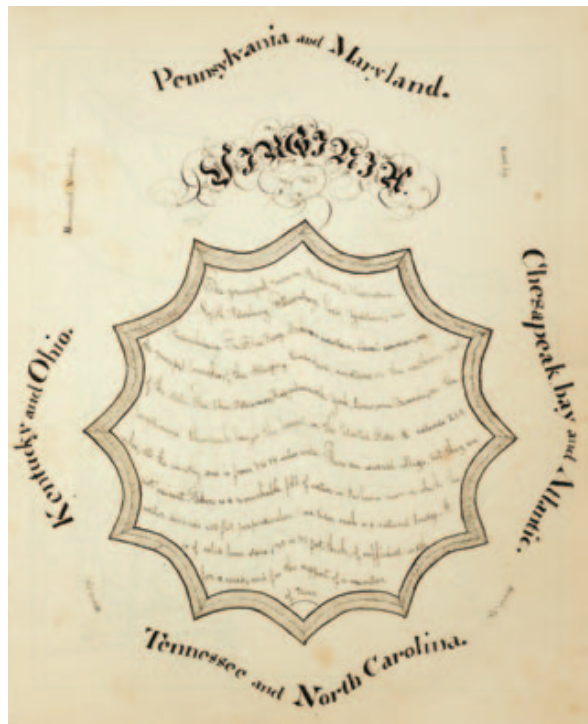




The maps made by young women—and a few men—in the early republic constitute a distinct period of American education. In an era when female education remained relatively limited, reading geography and drawing maps were among the most common school practices. Students spent entire terms developing and perfecting their maps. Often judged for their merits in schoolwide competitions, they became prized family heirlooms thereafter. With the rise of coeducation—as well as new printing techniques—such exercises began to seem less relevant. After all, students could inexpensively acquire school atlases of their own, or trace maps on ready-made templates widely available by the 1840s. Intriguingly, Emily Draper's journal is one of six that I have located with strikingly similar structure: these books of "penmanship" or "maps" begin with pages of calligraphy and narrative lessons followed by geographic maps and word maps.<sup>3</sup> Throughout, we find elaborate artistic elements such as floral motifs. All of these journals were undertaken at schools in Massachusetts and Vermont between 1818 and 1823. Yet no known published template guided these journals: instead, the format seems to have been spread by one or a few teachers exchanging models, such as Emily Draper's. As more of these maps and journals surface in archives and at auction, we can deepen our knowledge of the explosion of formalized education for young women in the early republic, especially in the Connecticut River Valley.

## ENDNOTES

1. On visual learning in this era see Susan Schulten, *Emma Willard: Maps of History* (Visionary Press, 2022). Eleazer Huntington's textbook was *An Introduction to the Art of Penmanship* (Hartford, CT: 1816).
2. For more on this tradition of schoolgirl maps and map journals, see Susan Schulten, "Map Drawing, Graphic Literacy, and Pedagogy in the Early Republic," *History of Education Quarterly* vol. 57 no. 2 (May 2017): 185–220.
3. Among these journals are Catharine Cook's of 1818 (Osher Map Library, Portland, ME); Harriet Baker and Frances Henshaw's of 1819 and 1823, respectively (David Rumsey Map Collection, Stanford University); Susan Chipman's of 1823 (Sheldon Museum, Middlebury, VT), and Jane Burt's of 1825 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA).



Following each geographic map, Draper created a "word map" that gave her another way to showcase her talents. The text at the center described the geography of Virginia, while she experimented with using different patterns to practice drawing skills in a way that almost resembles contemporary quilt work. The entire page is an exercise in geography, for the Virginia description at the center is "bounded north by Pennsylvania and Maryland," "east by Chesapeak bay and Atlantic," and so on.



Draper's unfinished map of Tennessee appeared toward the end of the journal. She thoroughly mapped the mountains and river systems, but did not include the county divisions, county names, decorative cartouche, and overall coloration shown on her other maps. This absence reveals how she worked: first laying down the broad outlines of the state, then filling in the natural features, then incorporating the county divisions and finally establishing the coloration and decorative elements. Note her reference to the new territory of Alabama, created out of the Mississippi Territory in 1817. This indicates she was working with a very recent published atlas.





Picturesque Summits & Excursions

# James Wells Champney's *View from Sugarloaf*

by Lea Stephenson



THE PANORAMIC VIEWS of the Connecticut River Valley attracted American artists and travelers throughout the 19th century. Some artists, including Thomas Cole, would focus upon the sublime wilderness, while others, like Charles Louis Heyde, would be drawn to bucolic farmland. In a painting executed around 1877, guests at the nearby Summit House pause at the summit of Mount Sugarloaf to view the surrounding mountain ranges. As a gentleman points to the distant scenery, the female members of this small group spy distant landmarks through optical devices. One woman handles binoculars, as another looks through a telescope to examine the scenery—her veil blowing in the wind to suggest the elevation and weather conditions. Accoutrements, including a parasol, are left aside, as if the travelers were immediately captivated by the picturesque scene. In this landscape painting, *View from Sugarloaf, Looking South Along the Connecticut River to Holyoke Range*, American artist James Wells Champney (1843–1903) captured a group of tourists on Mount Sugarloaf surveying the Connecticut River Valley. Champney incorporated quick brushstrokes to suggest the mountain terrain and distant ranges. The impressionistic style suggests he painted the scene *en plein air* (painting outdoors). The canvas underlines how Champney worked outside to study the surrounding landscape and recorded Americans engaging with the environment.

During the late 19th century, Champney became central to Deerfield's emerging role as an art colony. Known for his genre scenes and pastels, the artist worked in a range of materials and media during his career (oil, watercolor, pastel, photography, graphite), and completed numerous scenes of the Deerfield surroundings and picturesque landscapes. Working in New York City at his 96 Fifth Avenue studio, he would spend the summers in Deerfield at his family's residence, Elmstead.<sup>1</sup> In 1876, the Champneys had moved into the house on Lot 15 North, inherited by his wife Elizabeth Williams Champney, and Champney added a studio to the property. When he painted this landscape scene he was based in Deerfield while serving as professor of art at Smith College in Northampton (1877–1884). During and after this period, he spent a great deal of time in the surrounding environment of western Massachusetts.



Above: James Wells Champney's summer art classes in the meadow by his Deerfield residence, Historic Deerfield Library.

Opposite: *View from Sugarloaf, Looking South Along the Connecticut River to Holyoke Range*, by James Wells Champney, c. 1877. Oil on canvas. Museum Collections Fund, Historic Deerfield 2012.29.

By the 19th century, American artists increasingly ventured outdoors and encountered the natural landscape. Champney would often interact with the countryside around Deerfield while completing sketches. Photographs of the artist record him teaching painting classes outside to female students by the Deerfield meadows and river, underlining the importance of immersing oneself in the landscape. For this particular scene of Mount Sugarloaf, Champney likely produced studies of the summit before returning to his studio. He created a pencil and wash sketch of the Connecticut River moving south toward the Holyoke Range, which he then translated into the oil composition. In a similar fashion, Champney also completed quick pencil studies in his sketchbooks during his travels in Europe to capture the varying scenery, such as the Swiss and French countryside. Within his landscape paintings he also included human figures to populate the scene. For example, *The Deerfield Valley* (c. 1877) includes a woman picking flowers near Pocumtuck Ridge, bending down to gather flora and intimately interact with the terrain.

Rather than travel with a canvas, easel, and palette up Mount Sugarloaf, he likely brought a sketchbook or watercol-



Right: Study of countryside in Airolo region, Switzerland, by James Wells Champney, August 21, 1890. Graphite. James Wells Champney Sketchbooks, Historic Deerfield Library.



Below: Study of bridge, Draveil, France, by James Wells Champney, July 1899. Graphite. James Wells Champney Sketchbooks, Historic Deerfield Library.



or set to study the Holyoke Range and summit lookout. Historic Deerfield Library holds several Champney sketchbooks and studies, giving a sense of how the artist traveled and brought along materials (often graphite or watercolor) to complete quick sketches en route to a destination and convey the atmosphere, such as a watercolor study of a lake in Switzerland. *Plein-air* painting depended upon portable materials an artist could carry and the ability to handle changes in light and weather conditions. Additionally, these portable painting and sketching materials were especially useful for artists like Champney in reaching higher elevations or lookout points, such as Mount Sugarloaf. By the 1870s, *plein-air* painting became especially popular due to the production of portable tube paints.<sup>2</sup> Rather than remain rooted to the studio to make their own paints by mixing ground pigments, artists could venture outside more easily and directly engage with the natural world.

Landscape painting was popular at the time of Champney's creation and became the genre of American art during the mid-19th century. American landscape painters who would set the stage prior to Champney included Thomas Cole, Frederic Edwin Church, Albert Bierstadt, and Sanford Robinson Gifford—all artists who would complete outdoor oil sketches in order to observe their natural surroundings (including sites in New England). Originating with this generation of artists, *plein-air* work served as a means to judge a painter's finished work and whether the landscape was based on direct observation and, therefore, "truthful."<sup>3</sup> Such studies could reflect an artist's process and their method of translating these studies into the final easel painting.

Champney's work grew out of this increasing focus upon artists painting on-site or completing *plein-air* oil sketches. Rather than practicing the detailed precision of American

artists who looked to the British art critic, John Ruskin, and his adherence of truth to nature, Champney instead conveyed the atmospheric conditions and changes in light across the landscape.<sup>4</sup> In this painting he did not delineate every detail with his brushwork, but utilized quick brushstrokes to indicate the distant mountains, foreground terrain, and figures. For instance, he incorporated single, gestural marks to suggest fall foliage and the subtle shifts in light. By focusing on the glint of color upon the autumnal trees or tonalities of the distant valley, Champney sought to capture his impressions of the terrain and natural elements.

His technique and attention to light and color perhaps derived from his exposure to the work of the French Impressionists while studying in France.<sup>5</sup> Like many late-19th-century Americans after the Civil War, the artist traveled to Paris to receive artistic education. He would make several trips to Europe throughout his career, and early on he had studied with the French artist Edouard Frère in Ecouen, near Paris. Several sketchbooks from Champney's trips to Europe showcase the artist's studies of sites and daily life across France. With his new wife, Elizabeth Williams, Champney traveled to Europe in 1874 and exhibited in Paris at the Salon in 1875, before returning to the United States that same year.<sup>6</sup> In Paris the first Impressionist exhibition had already debuted in 1874, and it encompassed canvases rejecting Academic subject matter and techniques. Impressionist work instead embraced quick brushstrokes and an attention to the conditions of natural light, while also focusing upon intimate subjects and scenes of everyday upper-middle-class life. Perhaps Champney

Study of a lake, likely in Switzerland, by James Wells Champney, 1890.  
Graphite and watercolor. James Wells Champney Sketchbooks, Historic Deerfield Library.







Above: *Study at Marbletown, Ulster County, New York*, by Asher B. Durand (1796–1886), c. 1845. Oil on canvas. The New-York Historical Society, New York. Purchase, Durr Fund, 1887.7.

Below: Sketch box used by Thomas Cole (1801–1848) and inside lid painted by the artist, c. 1840. Mahogany with brass fittings. Courtesy of the Bronx Museum, Greene County Historical Society, Coxsackie, New York. Gift of Edith Cole Silberstein. Photograph by Michael Fredericks.



Above: "Table-Rock, Sugar-Loaf Mountain," illustrated by J. Douglas Woodward (1846–1924). *Picturesque America; or, The Land We Live In*, Vol. II, ed. William Cullen Bryant. New York, D. Appleton, 1872–1874. Historic Deerfield Library.

Below: Mountain House, c. 1865. *Carte de visite*, Mountain House Photograph Collection (PH 042). Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Research Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.



viewed the Impressionist canvases in that exhibition or was at least aware of the avant-garde style emerging across France. At the time he painted Mount Sugarloaf and moved to Deerfield in 1876, his exposure to French art forms and Salon exhibitions would have still been fresh in his mind.

Rather than depict a scene untouched by human presence, the artist decided to incorporate travelers venturing to the region and experiencing the New England landscape. Similar to his American contemporaries such as Winslow Homer (1836–1910), Champney captured the rise of regional tourism in North America. In a *Harper's Bazar* wood engraving, Homer illustrated tourists surveying the view from the popular New Hampshire destination, Mount Washington. He focused upon the tourist activity in the landscape and the group relaxing on the lookout, rather than the New Hampshire wilderness. Travel for many middle-class Americans shifted to the countryside to escape rising industrialization and urbanization. By the 19th century, Americans gravitated toward natural attractions and scenery, including the Hudson River, the Catskills, Lake George, Niagara Falls, the Adirondacks, and the White Mountains. Tourism and travel to the Connecticut River Valley grew out of this interest in scenic vacationing.<sup>7</sup> The concept of tourism in the wilderness also coincided with the 19th-century belief in the restorative powers of nature and its benefits for health. In this period, tourism furthered the “sentimentalization” of New England.<sup>8</sup> Travelers gravitated toward a fictionalized vision of old New England, one that emphasized rural and preindustrial settings.<sup>9</sup> Touring New England and its sites was further promoted by travel guidebooks, accounts, prints, and postcards of the area.

Champney's painting coincides with this vision of a romanticized, old New England, one that was marketed and created by white American writers, artists, and historians. Rather than focus upon romanticized New England antiques, ancestral homes, or 18th-century traditions, the artist instead drew attention to the natural, picturesque side of the region. In a sense, Champney captured the allure of the New England landscape.

Mount Sugarloaf in South Deerfield was a popular site for tourists and locals because of its proximity to the Connecticut River Valley and its sweeping views. The group of figures in Champney's scene are perhaps hotel guests who ventured to the summit via carriage trails or on foot. By 1864, the Summit House, also termed “Mountain House,” had been built on the summit by Granville Wardwell, on property owned by his father-in-law, Dwight Jewett, and it served as a tourist destination. The structure situated on the southern side of the mountain offered panoramic views of the Valley. In a *carte de visite* (c. 1865) of Summit House, men and women pose alongside a large-scale telescope and tripod suggesting the sight-seeing activities in the region and presaging the figures in Champney's painting. One guest stands on the hotel steps, gesturing toward a distant picturesque scene for his female companion. In his canvas, Champney chose to highlight the presence of the female tourist and independent traveler. The two female figures, active in the mountain landscape, indicate the growing emergence of the “new woman” type in the post-Civil War environment and their shift away from the feminine, domestic sphere to a greater degree of independence.<sup>10</sup> Rather than remain at the hotel, Champney's female



*The Artist Sketching at Mount Desert, Maine*, by Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823–1880), 1864–1865. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Gift of Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr. in honor of John Wilmerding, 2004.99.1.





*The Coolest Spot in New England—Summit of Mount Washington*, by Winslow Homer (1836–1910), 1870. Wood engraving. National Gallery of Art, Avalon Fund, 1986.31.208.



*Detail of View from Sugarloaf, Looking South Along the Connecticut River to Holyoke Range*, by James Wells Champney, c. 1877. Oil on canvas. Museum Collections Fund, Historic Deerfield 2012.29.

figures ventured onto the summit to engage with the natural environment and rough terrain.

In the 1872–1874 publication, *Picturesque America*, the section on the Connecticut River Valley described the opportunities for picturesque views in the country: “... an artist will find in all this region abundant opportunities for the exercise of his skill, and that the man of taste may wander wherever his inclinations may direct, and be sure of finding enough to gratify his most ardent love of Nature.”<sup>11</sup> In the American context, the term “picturesque” referred to a type of visual effect that relied on both natural and designed elements to produce a prospect or view.<sup>12</sup> The “picturesque” was intended to evoke surprise or a pleasing scene, rather than the awe connected to the sublime.<sup>13</sup> Tourists ventured up Mount Sugarloaf or traversed the mountain via carriage trails in search of panoramic views and astonishing vistas. In his own canvas, Champney chose to include the travelers, rather than focus entirely on the extensive landscape. His inclusion underlined the relationship between a New England tourist and the Valley, in other words, a pursuit of natural beauty.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Hilson Gallery American Studies Group, *James Wells Champney, 1843–1903* (Deerfield: Deerfield Academy & Hilson Gallery, 1965), 12–13.
2. Eleanor Jones Harvey, *The Painted Sketch: American Impressions from Nature, 1830–1880* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1998), 26.
3. *Ibid.*, 48, 50.
4. Linda S. Ferber, “‘Determined Realists’: The American Pre-Raphaelites and the Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art,” in *The New Path: Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites*, eds. Linda S. Ferber and William H. Gerdtz (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum and Schocken Books, Inc.), 11.
5. Hilson Gallery American Studies Group, *James Wells Champney, 1843–1903*, 25–26.
6. *Ibid.*, 12.
7. Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 33.
8. *Ibid.*, 8–9.
9. *Ibid.*, 9.
10. Holly Pyne Connor, “Not at Home: The Nineteenth-Century New Woman,” in *Off the Pedestal: New Women in the Art of Homer, Chase, and Sargent*, ed. by Holly Pyne Connor (Newark: The Newark Museum; New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 12–13.
11. *Picturesque America; or, The Land We Live In*, Vol. II, ed. William Cullen Bryant (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1872–1874), 81.
12. “Picturesque,” History of Early American Landscape Design, National Gallery of Art, Center for the Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts, last modified April 1, 2021, <https://heald.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php/Picturesque>.
13. National Gallery of Art, “Picturesque.”

# VIRTUE IN SILK



## *Rachel Willard's Schoolgirl Needlework Picture*

by Lauren Whitley



RACHEL WILLARD of Greenfield, Massachusetts, died suddenly of “apoplectic fit” at age 23 on October 30, 1808. She had been married to Dr. Alpheus F. Stone for only fifteen months. Little remains to illuminate her abbreviated life aside from the usual town birth, marriage, and death records except for an exquisite piece of art, an embroidered mourning picture, which she created when still a schoolgirl. Worked with silk threads on a silk fabric with a gilded wood frame and elegant reverse-painted and gilded glass in a process known as *eglo-mise*, the work epitomizes the most fashionable and sophisticated type of needlework of the Federal period.

Its composition features a cylindrical monument directly in the center of the picture surmounted with a plinth pedestal against which leans a female figure. To the right of the monument stands another fashionably dressed female figure. Two intertwined trees form the background to the left. An inscription on the upper pedestal reads “They are pure beings In a Nobler Sphere,” while the cylinder below features another inscription, “In Sacred Remembrance of Beriah Willard who died August 31st, 1801, Age 13 and Catherine Willard who died September 10, 1802, age 6.” Rachel Willard was the oldest daughter of Beriah (1757–1819) and Catherine Wells Willard (1759–1815), names that appear in the lower inscription. The ages of the deceased, thirteen and six years,

indicate they were not Rachel’s parents, but siblings of the same names.

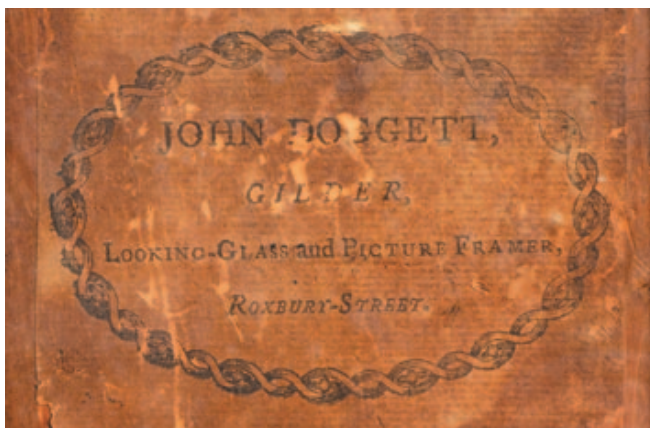
In creating this memorial needlework, Rachel joined many other schoolgirls commemorating dead family members with mourning pictures. These works were especially popular in the early years of the 19th century after the death of George Washington in 1799. The passing of America’s leader produced a public outpouring of grief and a proliferation of printed memorials as well as a new artform of embroidered mourning pictures that were often more of fashionable sentiment than actual mourning.<sup>1</sup> Made of luxurious materials—silk on silk—mourning pictures formed part of the core curriculum at girls’ schools and served as emblems of their accomplishment.

Rachel Willard most likely made her picture at a female academy. A Freeman’s Auctions entry (2022) attributes Rachel Willard’s embroidery stylistically to the Rowson Academy of Roxbury, Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1797 by Susanna Rowson, an English-born playwright, novelist, and former stage actress, the Rowson Academy was Boston’s best known girls’ school in the early 19th century. Rowson’s reputation included careful guidance of her pupils in all subjects as well as instruction in fancy needlework of high quality, often with literary or religious subjects.<sup>3</sup>









Left: Mourning picture by Rachel Willard, Boston, MA, about 1804. Silk on silk fabric, paint, glass, gilded wood frame. Museum purchase with funds provided by a bequest from Joseph Peter Spang III in honor of the Flynt Family, the Museum Collections Fund, and the Mr. and Mrs. Hugh B. Vanderbilt Fund for Curatorial Acquisitions. Historic Deerfield 2023.12.

Above: Detail of John Doggett label on reverse of mourning picture. Historic Deerfield 2023.12.

It is more likely, however, that Willard attended another Boston area girls' school. An aged paper label still attached to the back of Rachel Willard's picture suggests an alternate attribution. Within an entwined decorative oval appears the name "John Doggett, Gilder, Looking-Glass and Picture Framers, Roxbury Street." According to Richard Nylander's research, John Doggett (1780–1857) was a successful cabinet maker, gilder, and framer who worked in Boston in the early 19th century.<sup>4</sup> Doggett operated in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and his two surviving daybooks, held in the manuscript collection at Winterthur Library, reveal invoices for varied objects such as looking glasses and chairs, as well as gilded, enameled, and varnished frames.

Of particular interest are 43 transactions recorded between 1804 and 1809 pertaining to "Mrs. Saunders and Miss Beach," most of which were for "straining, framing and glass" for embroideries at costs that ranged from \$1.00 to \$12.00. According to needlework scholar Betty Ring, Mrs. Saunders and Miss Beach ran one of the finest female academies in the Boston area, educating girls from elite families throughout New England. Judith Foster Saunders (1772–1841) and Clementina Beach (1775–1855) met in Gloucester where Saunders was already working as a well-respected teacher. Clementina Beach had emigrated from Bristol, England, with her father and sister around 1793. With the assistance of Saunders' influential cousin, Judith Sargent Murray, a well-known literary figure and advocate of female education, the two women established the school in a nine-room house in 1803 on Meeting House Hill in Dorchester, then an elegant suburb of Boston. At times referred to as the Clifton Hill Seminary or

the Ladies Academy, the Mrs. Saunders and Miss Beach Academy operated until 1834, its founders remaining lifelong friends. Typical of the time, the school instructed girls in plain and fancy needlework in addition to reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic, French, painting, and geography. In 1804, the Mrs. Saunders and Miss Beach Academy boasted 36 boarders and 20 day scholars, ranging from six to eighteen years of age.<sup>6</sup>

The Mrs. Saunders and Miss Beach Academy is the only girls school noted in Doggett's daybooks. Several of his entries even identify the maker of the embroidery being framed.<sup>7</sup> Rachel Willard's name does not appear in any of Doggett's entries for the school, implying that she most likely purchased the frame privately, typical of non-boarders students. Other daybook entries give clues as to where Rachel Willard might have been living during her studies. Doggett recorded more than 150 transactions with Simon and Aaron Willard, members of a family of successful clockmakers who operated their business nearby in Roxbury.<sup>8</sup> The Willards were second cousins to Rachel Willard's father, Beriah, who grew up in Shrewsbury, a town adjacent to Grafton where his Willard cousins were born and raised. Rachel Willard may have been in the care of her father's prosperous cousins while attending the Mrs. Saunders and Miss Beach Academy in 1804. After Rachel created her needlework picture, Aaron Willard engaged Doggett to frame it. The entry for July 21, 1804, notes Doggett's charges to Aaron Willard for "1 picture frame \$9.17, glass for ditto \$3, Straining for embroidery .75."<sup>9</sup> It is the only reference to embroidery in the numerous entries for Aaron and Simon Willard; the rest pertain to aspects of framing and gilding for clockmaking.

Further evidence of Rachel's attendance at the Mrs. Saunders and Miss Beach Academy can be found in similar needlework pictures. Her unusual composition—two female figures and a stacked pedestal on a column—appears in two pictures worked by girls who likely attended the same school. One picture in the collection of the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History bears a dedication to Sarah and Timothy Newell, most likely made by Mary (Polly) Newell around 1804. Another picture in the collection of Colonial Williamsburg was begun by Isabella Caldwell Dana (1789–1805) and finished by her sister, Sarah Sumner Dana (1792–1867), after Isabella's premature death at age sixteen.

In all three needlework pictures the top figure leaning on the pedestal is almost identical in pose, hand gesture, and background twisting trees (although in reverse) to a mezzotint print entitled *Virtue Weeping over the Tomb of George Washington*, published by Francis Anone in London in 1800. The subject of George Washington became common as printed memorials to America's leader proliferated after his death in 1799 and served as templates for numerous needlework pieces. School teachers generally selected the designs for their students and





Far left: *Needlework Memorial for the Dana Family* by Sarah and Isabella Dana, Dorchester, c. 1805, silk embroidery thread, paint, and pencil on silk in a gilt and plaster frame with an eglomise glass mat. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Gift of the John D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund, Inc., through the generosity and interest of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, 3rd, and members of the family, 1979.604.1.

Left: Memorial picture, probably made by Polly Newell, Boston, MA, 1803–1810. The Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, Gift of Mary F. Lord and Katherine L. Lord, 1938.24.140.

transferred the designs to the silk fabric, frequently using the help of professional artists. Some designs came pre-printed on silk.<sup>10</sup> In this case, Clementina Beach probably sketched out the composition for her students. She was also likely responsible for the painted faces and painted background sky of the pictures. Acknowledged for her taste and artistic skills, Beach had studied with the painter Gilbert Stuart.<sup>11</sup> A later portrait of Clementina Beach by Stuart, now in the collection of Historic New England, attests to their connection.

One curious detail appears on all three needlework pictures—a painted, rather than embroidered radiating star-shape on the chest of the Virtue figure. This motif is absent from the original print source and has not been found in other representations of Virtue of this period. Instead, it seems to recall earlier Baroque and Rococo conceptions of the Allegory of Virtue. Elisabetta Sirani's *Allegory of Virtue*, painted in 1657, shows Virtue adorned with a radiating sun on her chest, a visual symbol noted by Cesare Ripa in his *Iconographia, or Moral Emblems* of 1603, where the sun signifies “Virtue inspires Virtue to the whole body.”<sup>12</sup> Clementina Beach was probably the source for this unusual depiction of Virtue. As an amateur painter and accomplished student of art, Beach nurtured her sophisticated knowledge in an extensive library of 1,500 books which she brought from England. The *Columbian Centinel* (Boston) mentioned the impressive library housed at the school, inviting parents of prospective students to “call and view the collection of fine drawings, English and French books provided for use of the pupils.”<sup>13</sup>

Through the Mrs. Saunders and Miss Beach Academy, Rachel Willard became part of an elite cadre of young women educated in traditional subjects along with fine needlework. Her superb picture remains a fascinating synthesis of varied artistic contributions—her own skilled hand embroidery with silk threads, Clementina Beach's design sensibilities, and John

Doggett's elegant framing. After Rachel's death in 1808, the picture passed down in the family of her only surviving sibling, David, through the Willard and Dickinson families, eventually descending to an heir who put the piece up for auction in 2022. In acquiring this needlework picture in June 2023, Historic Deerfield has succeeded in adding an exquisite neo-classical mourning picture to its outstanding collection of early-19th-century needlework.



Gilbert Stuart, *Clementina Beach*, about 1817–1820. Historic New England, Museum Purchase, 2012.39.1.





*Allegory of Virtue and Nobility* (1747–48)  
by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. The Norton  
Simon Foundation, F.1972.26.P.




Detail from *Iconographia or Moral Emblems* by Cesare Ripa,  
(London: Benjamin Motte, 1709), 79, fig. 315. Winterthur  
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## ENDNOTES

1. Betty Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers & Pictorial Needlework, 1650–1850*. (New York: Knopf, 1993), 20–21, and Davida Tenenbaum Deutsch, "Washington Memorial Prints," *Antiques*, 111, no. 2 (Feb. 1977): 324–71. Davida Tenenbaum Deutsch and Betty Ring, "Homage to Washington in Needlework and Prints," *Antiques* 119, no. 2 (Feb. 1981): 403.
2. See Freeman's, Lot 139, American Furniture, Folk and Decorative Arts sale, November 15, 2022, Philadelphia, PA. <https://www.freemansauktion.com/auctions/american-furniture-folk-and-decorative-arts-1748/lot/139>.
3. Betty Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 88.
4. Richard C. Nylander, "Framing the Interior: The Entrepreneurial Career of John Doggett," *Boston Furniture 1700–1900* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2016), 293.
5. John Doggett collection, The Winterthur Library, The Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera. <http://contentdm.winterthur.org/digital/collection/Doggett/search>
6. Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 94; Ring, "Mrs. Saunders' and Miss Beach's Academy, Dorchester," *Antiques* 110, no. 2 (August 1976): 302.
7. Miss Curtis, Hannah Coffin, Sarah Peterson, Miss Buck, and Miss Chamberlain are just a few of the names that appear in Doggett's daybook for the Miss Saunders and Miss Beach School. Betty Ring notes 22 names in total and that none of them can be connected to embroideries that survive today. Ring, "Miss Saunders and Miss Beach Academy," 308.
8. In fact, Doggett capitalized on the status of his well-known neighbors, advertising his proximity to them in his own advertising. See Nylander, 293.
9. John Doggett collection. <http://contentdm.winterthur.org/digital/collection/Doggett/id/535/rec/1>
10. See Deutsch, 325 and Jane Nylander, "Some Print Sources of New England Schoolgirl Art," *Antiques* 110, No. 2 (August 1976): 292, and Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 94.
11. George C. Mason, *The Life and Works of Gilbert Stuart* (New York: Burt Franklin Reprints, 1972), 136.
12. Cesare Ripa, *Iconographia or Moral Emblems* (London: Benjamin Motte, 1709), 79. <https://resources.warburg.sas.ac.uk/pdf/noh390b2714105.pdf>
13. As quoted in Nylander, 296.





by Carolyn Anderson

## Deerfield in Early Cinema

# *Ononko's Vow, A Colonial Tale*

HOLLYWOOD immediately comes to mind when the topic of the movie industry arises, but in the earliest days of American cinema, the east coast was the locus of film invention and production. Thomas Edison, whose inventions had made him famous, turned his attention to a new form of entertainment in the 1890s. Lawyers for Edison and his associate W.K.L. Dickson applied for patents for a motion picture camera (the kinetograph) and a single-person viewing device (the kinetoscope) in 1891.<sup>1</sup> The next year Edison built a film studio in West Orange, New Jersey, and publicly demonstrated the new devices at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. After forming the Edison Manufacturing Company he launched the motion picture business, opening the first kinetoscope parlor in New York City in 1894. Soon kinetoscopes appeared in amusement parks and other urban sites, showing films that lasted from 20 seconds to a minute and drew on popular entertainments from boxing matches to Wild West Shows. At the Edison studio two prominent stage actors re-enacted the climax of a celebrated musical comedy. A close-up of their embrace, *The May Irwin Kiss*, became the most famous film of 1894 and introduced romance as a central motion picture topic.

Projection on a screen was the next major innovation in 1896. A year later several hundred screen projections operated across the United States, reaching audiences all the way to Honolulu. Edison attached his name to the new projection machine, the Vitascope. Most of these moving pictures were one-shot "actualities" of events. As audiences lost interest in actualities, the new industry's attention moved to creating short narratives. By 1904, 85% of American productions were multi-shot story films. New companies formed and production quickly accelerated with more than 3,000 American films released in 1910. A typical program presented three one-reel fifteen-minute films: a comedy, a drama, and a western, with live musical performances between the reels, as the projectionist readied the next film on the single projector. Around this time the term "movies" caught on as a descriptor of the popular new entertainment form.

As story films lengthened and narratives became more complicated, audiences sometimes had difficulty following the plots. The solution: intertitles, first introduced in 1903 in an Edison adaptation of the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Intertitles usually appeared before a scene to set the time or action. In theaters with a largely illiterate clientele, titles were often

read aloud by a theater employee. Some immigrants remembered this as how they learned to read English.

In 1910, one out of five American movies was a western.<sup>2</sup> The most prominent sub-genre of westerns featured Natives, usually filmed on the east coast, at the rate of ten a month. The “eastern westerns,” made between 1908 and 1911, typically drew on James Fenimore Cooper’s novels of settler-Native friendships and pictured a forest world surrounded by water. They rarely featured Native actors. When the movie studios moved to California in 1912, western narratives changed drastically, with a new emphasis on the Plains Wars. “The Indian” turned into a convenient villain.

When the Edison Manufacturing Company publicized a desire to produce films depicting important moments in American history, Greenfield businessman Herbert S. Streeter answered the call by submitting a scenario labeled *Ononko’s Vow, A Colonial Tale*. Streeter’s “eastern western” intertwined two violent historical events—the Bloody Brook battle of September 28, 1675, during King Philip’s War and the February 29, 1704, Deerfield raid by a French and Native coalition during Queen Anne’s War—with the fictional additions of a love story, a captivity narrative, and a tale of self-sacrificing Narragansetts.

To match the seasons of the historical events, members of the Edison Company traveled from New York to the Deerfield area in both early March and July, 1910, to shoot exterior scenes, a rare (and expensive) gesture toward authenticity. “Stage Manager” Frank McGlynn recreated the winter raid and the early fall battle with an Edison cast and crew of 32, along with scores of locals hired as extras. No Native Americans appear to have participated as cast or crew.

The spectacle of filming outdoors at Whately Glen, and in Deerfield on Pine Hill, a nearby hillside of the Pocumtuck Ridge, and village streets attracted hundreds of onlookers. The premier Edison director, Edwin S. Porter, later filmed the eight interior scenes at the company’s studio in the Bronx.

*Ononko’s Vow* is a typical one-reel motion picture of the period, running for just over 13 minutes, with 39 one-shot scenes. For the exterior scenes, two cinematographers operated hand-cranked cameras, fixed in place. Each shot runs for a relatively long duration; the viewer sees action unfolding as one might watch movement on a theatrical stage. Actors (rather than the camera) provide motion, whether crossing the New England landscape or fighting. In only a few shots do actors move dynamically toward the camera. We usually see actors’ bodies in full length, as we would on a stage. Even in interior scenes there are no close-ups of actors’ faces; the acting style is broad.

The story of *Ononko’s Vow* is split into two time periods, linked by place, fictional characters, and the theme of resolute colonists besieged by hostile forces. There is no historical context offered in the 18 intertitles, nor any indication that the



Deerfield Academy students watching filming of *Ononko’s Vow*. Courtesy of the Frank Mt. Pleasant Library of Special Collections & Archives, Leatherby Libraries at Chapman University.



Film still of George Sheldon and two visitors to Deerfield in an opening scene of *Ononko’s Vow*. Historic Deerfield Library.



Film still of Natives attacking English settlers in *Ononko’s Vow*. Historic Deerfield Library.





Film still of Ononko as a child pledging allegiance to English settlers in *Ononko's Vow*. Historic Deerfield Library.



Film still of Natives taking English captives in *Ononko's Vow*. Historic Deerfield Library.



Film still of the adult Ononko alone at the story's end. Historic Deerfield Library.

two fierce attacks occurred within larger conflicts. Although the first part of the film's title—*Ononko's Vow*—establishes the importance of the Native's promise, the rest of the title—*A Colonial Tale*—makes clear that the "tale" will be told from the perspective of the colonists (and their descendants).

*Ononko's Vow's* first title card, "A Visit to Deerfield, Massachusetts," introduces a theme of historical curiosity. A young, well-dressed couple read (in the film's only close-up) the inscription memorializing the 1675 ambushade on the neo-classical monument located on North Main Street in South Deerfield. They approach an elderly man with a long white beard, identified as "Mr. George Sheldon, the venerable historian of Deerfield." A local celebrity, Sheldon would have been immediately recognizable to area residents. In 1910, Sheldon was 92 years old, admired for his historical work as author of a two-volume *History of Deerfield* (1895–1896) and as founder and president of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association. Sheldon was known for his lineage as a descendant of Ensign John Sheldon, a survivor of the 1704 raid whose home subsequently became known as "The Old Indian House," with a front door that retained the scars of tomahawks and became a tourist attraction.

As Sheldon recounts the Deerfield past to the couple, the image dissolves into visualizing the historian's tale. A title card—"Ungagook, a friendly Narragansett and his son Ononko see Lathrop and his men escorting the ox-teams to Hadley"—establishes place and names central characters. We see a series of long shots of a cavalcade coming down a hill, and then, suddenly, "An Ambuscade" as Natives, seemingly unprovoked, attack Lathrop's troops. A title announces "The Bloody Brook Massacre-September 19th, 1675. Ungagook saves Jonathan Smith and is mortally wounded." Linking these statements suggests their historicity, despite the fact that Ungagook and Smith are fictional. The film shifts to the interior of a Puritan dwelling where a group includes a Native boy. "Ononko promises his dying father to be faithful to the Smiths." That promise, acted in the histrionic style of early cinema, ends the first section of the story.

Viewers are alerted that "28 years later, Jonathan Smith bestows his daughter's hand on Ebenezer Dow." The character of Smith returns smiling, with an adult daughter and a future son-in-law; however, a title card warns "The next day, February 29th, 1704, preparing to attack Deerfield" as we are shown a Native camp. The specificity of the date encourages a historical reading of the events visualized in a series of shots of Natives attacking while Puritans pray for help inside a stockade ("The Last Refuge"). In the raid scenes the film cross-cuts between outside and inside the stockade to represent simultaneous action, an editing device becoming understandable to audiences by 1910. The Natives break the stockade door and attack the colonists. Women and children are dragged across snow-covered fields. "Ruth Smith is made captive."

Ononko, now a grown chief, arrives after the abduction and follows the kidnappers' trail.

Dialogue titles began to appear in American movies in 1910, adding a sense of immediacy and drama. There is only one dialogue title in *Ononko's Vow*; it appears in the film's climax when Ononko locates the captive Ruth and fulfills his childhood vow to protect the Smith family. He bravely proclaims "I am Ononko. Take me and set the white maiden free." However, Ononko's sacrifice is not necessary as colonists (including Ebenezer Dow) surprise and overcome the hostile Natives, rescuing Ruth and Ononko. Colonial order has been restored. Sheldon's tale ends with a static image of the noble Ononko and a now-calm New England landscape. The film returns to the Deerfield historian and the young couple who bid him goodbye, having received instruction (along with the movie audience) about colonial frontier history.

Like many actors in early movies, Mary Fuller and Gordon Sackville, who play the romantic leads, had previous stage careers. They go unidentified in the film itself but are named in current listings in the International Movie Data Base. The actors cast as Ungagook and the adult Ononko are not identified in film records. Around the time *Ononko's Vow* was released audiences began lobbying exhibitors to name players as part of film advertising and projection. Movie companies responded to fans and began to identify actors. Consequently, the star system was born.

Where might audiences have seen *Ononko's Vow* in 1910? The first theater expressly created to show motion pictures opened in Pittsburgh in 1905. By 1910, more than 10,000 theaters nation-wide showed motion pictures.<sup>3</sup> The majority were called nickelodeons, named after the admission price of five cents. They often occupied converted store fronts, usually seating fewer than 200 patrons, with programs that typically ran from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. Ventilation was poor, seats were uncomfortable, but working-class people flocked to conveniently located nickelodeons before or after work—or both. In 1910, immigrants or children of immigrants comprised 3/4 of the population of big cities; they became devoted movie-goers, and their viewing tastes greatly influenced early movie story lines. In a country of 92 million, daily attendance exceeded five million.

In small cities like Greenfield (1910 population of around 10,000), movie-going was not as stratified by class as in large cities. Urban middle-class patrons rarely frequented nickelodeons; they usually watched films in lecture halls or established theaters. These screenings often included a lecturer who stood at the side of the screen offering a running commentary during the projection and also speaking along with slides between films to add a tone of respectability. Showing George Sheldon at the opening and closing of *Ononko's Vow* turns the film into a history lecture no matter its screening location or audience.

Although early movies were silent, their exhibition was not. With sound accompaniment the responsibility of the exhibitor, a variety in choice and quality resulted. Pianists commonly accompanied films, sometimes with a trap drummer who provided sound effects, less often with a small orchestra or mechanical piano. Beginning in 1909 the Edison Company issued suggestions for specific music for special films, but typically a pianist improvised.

Released September 30, 1910, and advertised by the Edison Company as "the greatest Indian picture ever presented," *Ononko's Vow* screened within days in the Deerfield area. The film premiered on October 3rd, then continued playing on the 4th, and 5th, in the second-floor auditorium of Washington Hall on Main Street in Greenfield. For this special event, tickets for reserved seats had gone on sale in mid-September. Balcony seats cost 20 cents; other adult seats ten cents; five cents for children. Local newspapers reported robust sales, with many people from neighboring towns making reservations to see a film touted as a "masterpiece" with "great educational qualities." Along with the much-anticipated motion picture, movie-goers were promised "finely illustrated songs" at the Washington Hall screenings.

On October 6th, 7th, and 8th, *Ononko's Vow* moved down Main Street to the Bijou, Greenfield's first movie theater. Owned by the film's author, Herbert S. Streeter, the Bijou charged adults 25 cents and children 15 cents. Musical acts—the Glendale Male Quartet of Boston and the Vassar Girl, Ray Hope—preceded and followed the screenings. Several commercial tie-ins to the movie connected to a general revival of interest in the colonial era: a movie-goer could purchase a new series of War Souvenir Postcards of Old Deerfield at the theater. And, provocatively, the Bijou offered a ten-cent souvenir "tomahawk," claimed to have been made from an elm tree that grew on the edge of Bloody Brook.

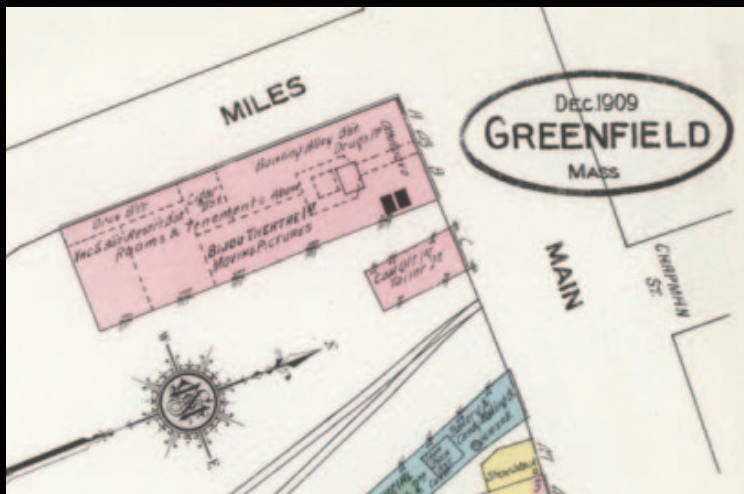
On October 15, a screening at the South Deerfield Red Man's Hall, a fraternal organization of non-Natives, was followed by dancing to the Wesley Orchestra with reserved cars to transport Greenfield residents home after the dance. Late in the month, what became known as "the Deerfield history film" returned to Washington Hall as part of the regular program.

At the time, city newspapers did not yet carry movie reviews, but a cluster of papers devoted to the movie industry did. The trade press responded to *Ononko's Vow* with almost uniform praise. *Motion Picture World* described it as "a valuable historical document" and "one of the most elaborate Indian pictures ever put on screen." *The Film Index* claimed, "no more realistic picture has ever been presented than this one" and considered *Ononko's Vow* "vivid, patriotic, wholesome, and soul-stirring." *The Moving Picture World* said the film "emphasizes anew what it cost to make this land a fit habitation for the millions that are now here." A lone dissenter, the critic for *Nickelodeon*, found the story difficult to





Postcard of the Davenport Building on Main Street in Greenfield. The Bijou Theater operated on the upper floors. Courtesy of Jonathan Boschen.



Detail of 1909 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing location of the Bijou Theater on the corner of Main and Miles Streets in downtown Greenfield. Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, Sanborn Maps Collection.



Souvenir tomahawk advertised in local newspapers for sale at the Bijou. Historic Deerfield 2013.9.

follow, but concluded that “It doesn’t much matter, though, for the action is at all times stirring, even if not coherent, and the film is undoubtedly impressive, owing to the beauty of the production.”

Like most one-reelers, *Ononko’s Vow* largely disappeared after its initial showings with the exception of Herbert Streeter’s singular devotion to the project he had authored. Streeter began screening the film, accompanied by his lectures on colonial life, in neighboring New England towns soon after the initial 1910 showings. He continued traveling with *Ononko’s Vow*, going as far as Florida and Cuba as late as 1917.

Film historians estimate that 90 percent of early films have been lost. Fortunately, a 35mm nitrate negative of *Ononko’s Vow* was donated to the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1940. A print struck around 1960 and later transferred digitally made it possible to show the film at Historic Deerfield in the 1990s and at the Greenfield Historical Society in 2004. In the summer of 2023, with live musical accompaniment by Jeff Rapsis and remarks by Margaret Bruchac and Carolyn Anderson, it was reprised at Historic Deerfield.

Although the great era of the eastern-filmed Westerns was very brief (between 1908 and 1911), characteristics of historical dramas present in *Ononko’s Vow* existed in films produced before 1910 and have continued for more than a century. These narratives grow from a grounding in actual historical events (the Bloody Brook Battle, the Raid on Deerfield, the abduction of colonial women) which are recreated vividly and sometimes filmed in historic locations such as Deerfield. Fictitious characters (the Smith family, *Ononko*) combine with historical figures (Captain Lathrop) to create stories that emphasize adventure and romance and offer what white audiences would perceive as a happy ending. *Ononko’s Vow* remains an early, and telling, example of what would become known as Hollywood history.

Thanks to Jeanne Solensky for research assistance.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990), 71. Details of early cinema history are from Musser, *passim*.
2. Scott Simon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre’s First Half Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), *passim*.
3. Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907–1915* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990), 6. Details of early exhibition are from Bowser, *passim*.



# Nathan Negus

## The Brief and Stormy Life of an Itinerant Artist

by Christine Mandel

*Thur 19 [March 1801] Storm continues with unabated Fury — all low Land is under Water many Bridges are swept away — I made brushes — at 11 O.C.P.M. I collected Doctor & women — Fri 20 had a Son born about 4 O.C. this morning. Storm continues.*

—From “A Journal Began Sept. 3rd, 1798” by Joel Negus<sup>1</sup>

THUS BEGAN the life of Nathan Negus (1801–1825), an itinerant portrait artist born in rural Petersham, Massachusetts, during the post-Revolution era that saw the broad concepts of gentility and improvement seep into the countryside. Blessed with natural artistic talent, Nathan benefitted from this advancing culture to the extent that he dared dream of becoming “one of the first modern Artists in the United States.” He worked tirelessly toward that lofty goal until his premature death from consumption at age 24. Despite constant adversity and the brevity of his life, Nathan created a body of work reflecting the skill and sensitivity of a truly accomplished artist. Centuries later, his few extant paintings underscore the tragedy of his loss.<sup>2</sup>

It is doubtful that Nathan would have been able to pursue art were it not for his father, Joel Negus (1767–1816), a third-generation yeoman farmer. An avid reader and Freemason, he frequently borrowed books of poetry, literature, and philosophy from the Petersham Social Library. Joel’s journals, account books, and letters reveal the breadth of his knowledge and the depth of his commitment to self-improve-

ment and refinement. His keen interest in drawing and portraiture, recorded in essays entitled “Of Drawing Faces” and “Rules for drawing human figures at Length,” undoubtedly strengthened his perception that Nathan had promising talent. When Nathan was thirteen years old, Joel secured six weeks of training with the established artist, Ethan Allen Greenwood (1779–1856), in Boston. Joel wrote his sister, Catherine, on February 19, 1815, “I have engaged Mr. Greenwood, a portrait painter of considerable merit to instruct Nathan in the rudiments of Art. I was prompted to this by the exhibition of his uncommon genius in this most beautiful accomplishment.”

Instead of returning home after the training, Nathan began to receive instruction from John Ritto Penniman (1782–1841), a well-known ornamental painter. Nathan had written “importuning [Joel] to let him tarry at Boston one year as he is well pleased with his business and his Master Mr. Pennyman.” Reluctant at first to forgo Nathan’s help at home, Joel records a month later that he “Wrote to Mr. Penniman concerning N’s living with him.” What thus began as a brief training became a binding apprenticeship agreement with Penniman until Nathan reached his age of majority.

Above: Self-portrait of Nathan Negus (1801–1825), no date. Oil on board. Unsigned. Likely completed after 1821 while Nathan lived in the South, the portrait remained in the possession of Negus descendants until the 1990s. Petersham Historical Society, Petersham, MA. Photo by Danaë DiNicola.





The first two years with Penniman were instructive and productive. Steadily improving his technique, Nathan was content to ornament furniture, military standards, signs, and Masonic ritual objects. Nathan also eagerly put his burgeoning skills to use during free time, writing that, “Shubael & I have lately got a fifteen Dollar job for ourselves for painting Drums which keeps us pritty busi from day light till Penniman comes out, then from sundown till 10 O.C. P.M.” Although Nathan quickly tired of ornamental painting, in later years he relied on it to subsidize his income from portrait commissions.

Life changed dramatically for the Negus family when Joel was stricken with a fatal illness in January 1816. Joel’s death in

Master Mason Apron by Nathan Negus, 1817. Paint on silk, cotton. Signed. Painted during his apprenticeship under John Ritto Penniman, Boston, MA. Nathan supplemented his income with Masonic painting throughout his later career. The Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, Lexington, MA, 79.47.

November of that year was devastating, emotionally and financially. His unmarried older daughters scattered to distant relatives to teach school or produce outwork. Nathan and his older brother, Joseph, felt the heavy responsibility of mentoring their younger sisters. Adding to this burden, in March 1817 he wrote to his Aunt Catherine, “My health at present is verry poor owing to the painters colluk.” This alarming report sig-

## To the Patrons of the FINE ARTS

NEGUS & CODMAN have taken the Masonic Hall, Dauphin Street, formerly occupied by Harding & Negus.

The public in general are respectfully informed that they are ready to execute in the first style, the following branches of PAINTING, VIZ:

PORTRAITS of all sizes,  
MINIATURES in Chiaro Oscuro,  
MILITARY STANDARDS,  
TRANSPARENCIES,  
MASONIC PAINTING, of all descriptions  
SIGNS, &c.

Mr. NEGUS would inform his Masonic brethren throughout the country, that all orders will be punctually attended to.

Theatrical corps can be supplied with Scenery.

The theory and practice of Drawing and Perspective taught.

nov 12—82tf

An advertisement announcing the newly established Negus-Codman partnership offering multiple branches of "FINE ART in the first style," published in the *Mobile Commercial Register*, Mobile, Alabama, on November 26, 1823. Photostatic copy. Petersham Historical Society, Petersham, MA. Photo by Danaë DiNicola.

naled the onset of a sickness that would dominate his life and career.

In January 1818, an array of emotions — despondency over his father's death, the yearning to expand his artistic skills, resentment of Penniman's restrictions, his own poverty, and perhaps the volatility of youth — all boiled over. Penniman's insistence that Nathan work on Sundays caused a desperate Nathan to turn to Joseph with his complaints:

... [Penniman] knows I have no Father to make my complaints to! but I will let him know that I was not born in the woods to be frightened at a d—d Owle and had no where to fly for refuge. not a picture can I paint, but what he will pass some of his blackguarding slurs upon it: instead of telling me the faults in it and telling me what would mend it. And now, do you call this encouraging!! O, no, no, no! It is worse than if I had no Master at all.

Joseph's response was sympathetic but measured: he reminded Nathan that the price for his artistic instruction was "labour" since they had no "cash to procure it with."

By the middle of 1818, friction with Penniman eased as Nathan became more confident in his artistic abilities. He practiced landscapes and portraiture, using sisters, friends, and himself as models. In September Nathan reaffirmed his desire to succeed as a professional artist, writing "I am so wound up with ambitions that it is impossible for me to pay attention to my relations ... otherways I should not be recorded in that column of Modern history that I wish to be." He ended this letter stating, "my productions meet the eye of my Master with the utmost satisfaction . . . and [I] am beloved by Mr. Penniman and duly respected by his Wife."

The dramatic burning of the Coffee Exchange building in Boston on the night of November 3, 1818, awakened and shocked city residents. Witnessing the inferno, Nathan viewed it through the lens of an artist, writing, "... the Pencil! the Pencil! — that's my Forte . . . I improve in Drawing very much . . . I saw the Exchange coffee Building burn down. O — Joseph! this was a subject for a painting. It was the most Grand—most Sublime!! and yet, the most horroble scene I ever realized."

Penniman's commission to paint a large mural transparency for the one-year commemoration of the fire made Nathan one of the principal artists who brought the fifteen-foot canvas to life. When the exhibit opened on November 3, 1819, the transparency, backlit by flickering candles, reenacted the conflagration and enthralled the public.<sup>3</sup>

With eighteen months remaining in his apprenticeship, Nathan was confident he had made "considerable progress in [his] profession . . . especially portrait painting." He and other apprentices formed the cheekily named Pennimanic Society to study the theory and fundamentals of Fine Art. Nathan recorded these lessons on "Perspective," "Osteology: Of the Structure of Bones," and "Miniature Painting" in a journal

## Miniature Painting?

To prepare the Ivory, Scrape it with a steel scraper to abrade the scoriaceous left by the saw &c. and then to take from the surface of the Ivory the graininess left by the scraper. powder some pumice stone fine and sift it through a gauge sieve to keep back the coarse particles which would scratch the Ivory. — Put some of this powder on to a piece of glass with a little water, and laying the Ivory flat, commence rubbing it, having it down with your hand. — Continue the rubbing untill the whole surface appears equally and completely grayed or dead. which will appear when dry.

My light is 3 feet square and two feet from the ground. placed the sitter on a stool 8 or 10 inches high exactly fronting me and the light.

The first thing now, is, to study the character of the person, examine his features and see if they are regular or irregular, and to see in what light he appears best, turning from the right to the left profile, moving him about in every part of the room, to try the light with a smaller for in some

Above: Detail of instructions on how to properly prepare ivory for miniature painting, recorded by Nathan Negus in his personal Journal, Boston, 1819. Petersham Historical Society. Photo by Danaë DiNicola.





Portrait of an unidentified man by Nathan Negus, 1821. Oil on board. Historic Deerfield 84.042.



Nathan Negus' signature in his journal, Boston, 1819 during his final year as an apprentice. Petersham Historical Society, Petersham, NH. Photo by Danaë DiNicola.

interspersed with excerpts from Milton, Pope, Moore, and Burke. But the more he learned, the more impatient he became to strike out on his own. Joseph suggested that Nathan buy out his contract with Penniman and join him in the South. The terms of Nathan's release are unknown, but Penniman's confusion about Nathan's age, Nathan's frequent absences due to illness, and the economic Panic of 1819 affecting Penniman's own commissions all led to Nathan's independence in May 1820.

The timing could not have been better. The rising middle class in rural New England was rapidly acquiring both the desire and the means for material amenities. Portraits that would embellish a parlor wall and leave a lasting legacy were of particular interest. To satisfy the growing demand for art, young limners of widely varying skills crisscrossed the countryside to offer "correct likenesses" at affordable prices.<sup>4</sup> Nathan was eager to join them, hoping his years of formal training would prove an advantage in the ready market.

To establish his reputation in central Massachusetts, Nathan initially offered some of his work for free (or, in one case, bartered for volumes of Shakespeare). Reviews were encouraging and paying commissions followed. But ill health repeatedly interrupted his travels and prompted him to think seriously about joining Joseph in the South, where the climate might cure his illness. Finally, on November 20, 1820, Nathan sailed for Georgia and his life as an itinerant artist began in earnest. Arriving ten days later, he sought commissions in Savannah for portraits and ornamental work. At first, Nathan met with only marginal success, recording on December 31, "Hope next year will bring me onto better sledding."

Nathan and Joseph reunited in March 1821, and a successful year of painting followed. They settled in Eatonton, Georgia, where prominent families were eager for portraits. Having become a Freemason, Nathan received

steady commissions from the Eatonton Masonic lodges. Additional work painting signs and theater scenery supplemented their income. That summer the brothers traveled westward to Indian Springs where Nathan painted a full-length portrait of the biracial leader of the Creek nation, General William Macintosh (1775–1825). The painting, which still hangs in the Alabama Department of Archives and History, is considered a “masterpiece of frontier art.” But misattribution to the romantic painter Washington Allston (1779–1843) deprived Nathan of artistic credit until 1997 when conclusive evidence proved him to be the artist.<sup>5</sup>

Increasing commissions could not disguise the challenges of an itinerant lifestyle. Instability, poverty, and loneliness were constant companions. At year’s end Nathan wrote to his mother, “I have grown so tough in the *School of Adversity*, that I can make myself contented and happy under any circumstances capricious *Fortune* places me.” While longing for “the fireside of home” he admitted that his battle with consumption continued unabated.

As Nathan’s health deteriorated, other misfortunes multiplied. A falling out with Joseph (and the latter’s subsequent death), a betrayal by his oldest friend Shubael, and the realization that his health prevented him from marrying Martha, the “girl of [his] heart,” clearly weighed on his spirits. Still, Nathan resigned himself to these disappointments and resolutely pursued new opportunities. He hoped to abandon itinerancy by styling himself a “Professor of Drawing and Painting,” and in November 1823 formed a partnership with William P. Codman (1798–1831), a fellow apprentice from Penniman’s shop. Offering work in multiple branches of “FINE ART in the *first style*,” their Mobile, Alabama, business thrived for several months but ultimately dissolved as Nathan’s health declined and Codman proved less than honorable.

Nathan’s portfolio during these years testifies to the maturing quality of his work, his idealism, and his perseverance. Although far from achieving the greatness he once desired, by the end of 1824 Nathan proudly assured his mother, “... my reputation as an *Artist* is extensively and *well* established ... and I entertain no doubts, but I shall have patronage enough to ensure a *good living*—while I do live.” Sadly, though his popularity as an “eminent Artist” was secure, every treatment for his consumption failed.

It was a dying young man who packed his few possessions and booked a return passage to Petersham in May of 1825. In one final trial of ill fortune, Nathan’s ship was becalmed for 28 days. He didn’t reach home until July 15 and died a mere four days later.

Once, while taking stock of his misfortunes, Nathan uncharacteristically despaired: “It requires all the philosophy I am master of to withstand this. No, rather let me sink into naught, unknown, unpitied and unwept for.” This lament all but became his epitaph, as his art *did* fall into oblivion. But



The gravestone memorializing the brothers Nathan and Joseph Negus, located in the Center Cemetery in Petersham, Massachusetts. Nathan died in Petersham and is buried there; the exact location of Joseph’s burial site in Cohawba, Alabama, is unknown. Photo by Barbara Hanno.

years later, Nathan’s nephew, Deerfield native and respected artist George Fuller (1822–1884), held one of Nathan’s self-portraits in his hands and admiringly observed that, had Nathan lived, he would have been “the very first in his art in America.”

## ENDNOTES

1. Except where noted, all quotations are from documentary material in the Negus Family Papers, Petersham Historical Society, Petersham, Massachusetts, and Negus and Fuller-Higginson Family Papers, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library, Deerfield, Massachusetts.
2. For comprehensive biographies of Nathan Negus, see: Mary W. Fuller, “Nathan Negus: An American Painter 1801–1825,” typescript, n.d., private collection; Monica Anke Hahn-Koenig, “Nathan Negus, painter (1801–1825): An ornament to the American name” (Master’s thesis, Syracuse University, 1995); and Laquita Thomson, “Fine Art Fruit on a Vernacular Vine: Nathan Negus in Early Alabama” (Master’s thesis, University of Alabama, Huntsville, 2000).
3. For more on the fire, see: Jane Kamensky, *The Exchange Artist: A Tale of High-Flying Speculation and America’s First Banking Collapse* (New York: Viking Press, 2008), 289–97.
4. For more on the rise of the middle class, see: Jack Larkin, “From ‘Country Mediocrity’ to ‘Rural Improvement’: Transforming the Slovenly Countryside in Central Massachusetts, 1775–1840,” in *Everyday Life in the Early Republic*, ed. Catherine E. Hutchins (Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis Du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1994), 175–200.
5. Laquita Thomson, “Nathan Negus and the Portrait of Gen. William Macintosh,” *Alabama Heritage*, March 12, 2018. <https://www.alabamaheritage.com/from-the-vault/nathan-negus-and-the-portrait-of-gen-william-mcintosh>



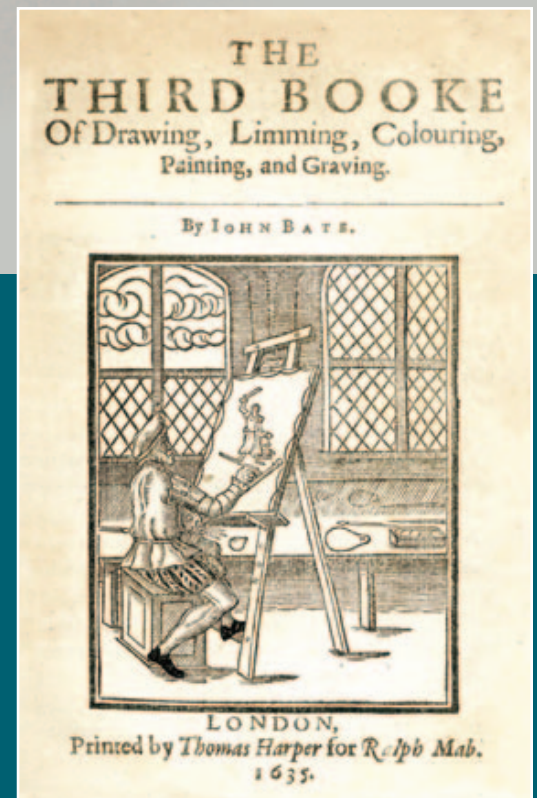
# The Material Culture of Painting



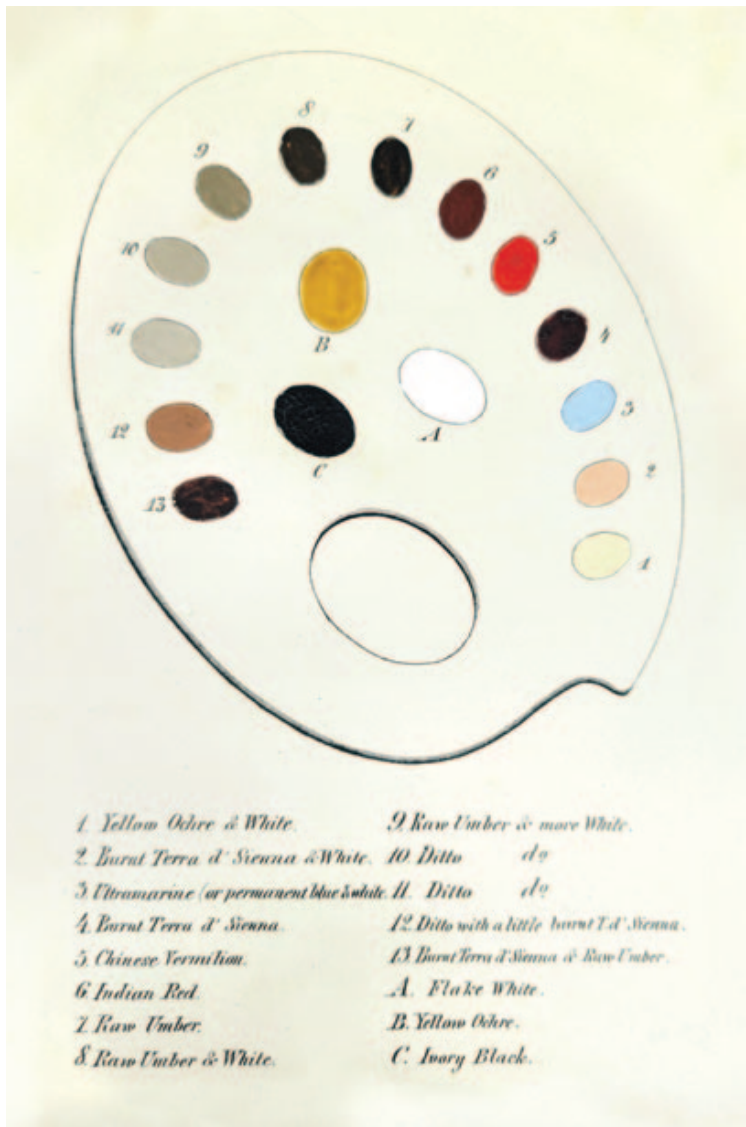
Early 19th-century watercolor box made by Reeves and Inwood, London. William Reeves and his brother, Thomas, are credited with inventing watercolor cakes in 1781. By 1796 the partnership of Reeves and Inwood had begun manufacturing boxes of watercolors. Historic Deerfield 68.122.

FOR CENTURIES apprentices learned the occupation of painting from their masters in painting workshops or *ateliers*. Some genteel men and women looked to painting and drawing as a way to accentuate their refined accomplishments, and more and more printed sources offered guidance on materials and techniques. The title page of one of the earliest illustrated English examples, John Bate's *Third Booke of Drawing, Limming, [sic] Colouring, Painting and Graving* (1634), depicts a painter before an easel using some of the tools of his craft with others in the background. Bate's text forms a "how-to" manual derived from a number of sources.

The writings of English-born artist, Thomas Sully (1783-1872), afford a more recent, focused example of painting instruction. Sully spent most of his career in the United States, primarily executing portraits of renowned or wealthy sitters (e.g., Andrew Jackson), and capturing obscure subjects ("Gypsy Maidens"). Beyond leaving an extensive body of artwork his *Hints to Young Painters, and the Process of Portrait-Painting as Practiced by the Late Thomas Sully* (Philadelphia: J.M. Stoddart & Co., 1873) discusses some of the tools of the painter's craft, drawing on his experience and conventions that date from previous centuries.



Illustrated title page of the 2nd edition of Bate's manual showing a painter at work. Stephen L. Wolf Collection, Historic Deerfield Library.



Left: Hand-colored palette from Thomas Sully's *Hints to Young Painters* (1873). Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library.



Burnt sienna pigment from iron-rich clay mined in Whately, MA, by Belder's Paint Manufacturing Co. in the mid-19th century. Whately Historical Society. Photo by Allison Bell.

As the title suggests, this brief monograph, extracted from his unpublished memoirs begun in 1851, provides guidance on materials and methods. Early on he noted:

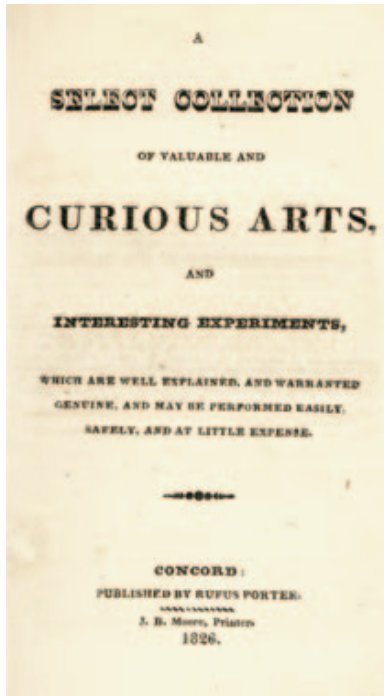
*The articles required by the beginner are the following: an easel (I prefer one that stands upright); a maul or resting stick; a palette and brushes, crayons that are used by those who draw upon stone [i.e., lithography], palette knives (three will do), a foot-rule, and compasses. These articles may be had at any artists' furnishing store.*

Sully further advised painters to keep plenty of clean rags on hand. He recommended washing brushes with "common soap," and when not in use protect them from "the ravages of the moth" by dipping in olive oil. For a painting surface Sully preferred panels of straight grained oak or mahogany and warned against poplar which he described as a "treacherous" material prone to warping and splitting. In his view "Russian sheeting" (a strong, coarse linen) coated with "white lead ground in skimmed milk to the consistency of ordinary paste" made the best canvas. A pumice stone would remove irregularities in the surface.



Early- to mid-19th-century brushes used for stenciling, applying glue, and other purposes. Courtesy of Gerald Mingin. Historic Deerfield L2023.2.2.





Above: Title page of Rufus Porter's *A Selection Collection of Valuable and Curious Arts* (Concord, NH, 1826). Addressing such diverse topics as painting, gilding, faux finishes, dyeing, and making inks and varnishes, Porter's popular handbook went through several editions. Gift of Juliene and Carl M. Lindberg. Historic Deerfield Library.

Right: Anonymous portrait of Harriet Parker of Pepperell, MA, with Reeves and Inwood paintbox, c. 1815. Colors were mixed in small ceramic dishes. Collection of Ralph and Bobbi Terkowitz.



Sully's contemporary, Rufus Porter (1792–1884), offered his own painting advice in the pages of his publication, *Scientific American*, in 1846 and 1847. As an artisan promoting a “fancy” aesthetic, Porter addressed decorative painting. Like Sully, he offered guidance on preparing paints using a stone muller to grind dry pigments with boiled linseed oil. When performing imitation painting on doors, chimney pieces, furniture, etc., Porter applied a colored ground with a sponge or bunch of moss. A flat brush called a “grainer” also came into play. Cork would smooth or remove a ground, and different softwood “combs” drawn across a wet ground imitated desired wood species.

Each early artist and artisan experimented with various tools and receipts (recipes) to achieve the effect they sought. If the cost of twill was prohibitive, could tow suffice as the painting surface? Was one species of wood preferable to another for a palette to hold paint? When using watercolors, was Rufus Porter's preference to create depressions in a plank of coated pine more efficient than taking it directly from a watercolor box? The many surviving craft manuals, and the occasional memoir or copy book, offer a window into the processes that remain largely hidden below the surface of the finished item.

*“fine, free, careless rapture”*

# Carl Purington Rollins

at

## ❧ MONTAGUE ❧

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by Martin Antonetti

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AT THE TIME of his death in 1960, Carl Purington Rollins was considered one of the most eminent names in American printing and graphic arts of the first half of the 20th century. Indeed, as Printer to Yale University and director of the Printing-Office of the Yale University Press from 1918 to 1956, he was at the center of a design and typographical movement in this country that was influenced by the concepts and preoccupations of the first generation of British Arts & Crafts printers such as William Morris, C.R. Ashbee, and T.J. Cobden-Sanderson. Rollins, along with Bruce Rogers, W.A. Dwiggins, D.B. Updike, Will Bradley, and others, took these concepts, fashioned them into something that was distinctly American, and passed them on to a future generation of printers and designers: Leonard Baskin at his Gehenna Press, Barry Moser at the Pennyroyal Press, and Roderick Stinehour, all in the Connecticut River Valley—who revived and reinterpreted those concepts for the later 20th century.

Rollins’s work as a printer, designer, teacher, and scholar at Yale is well-known and well-documented.<sup>1</sup> His earlier career, however, as a country printer in Montague, Massachusetts, just across the river

from Deerfield, and his association with the thriving Arts & Craft community in Montague and Deerfield in the first decades of the 20th century, are not.<sup>2</sup> By examining the work of the young Rollins we discover the roots of his mature style: historically informed allusive typography, the use of high-grade materials, and “classic” canons of design. We also see from the very start a sensibility based on practicality and sparing in its use of decoration, understated in a Yankee sort of way.

Another reason for exploring Rollins’s early work at Montague is that it sheds light on the very vibrant efflo-

rescence of Arts & Crafts activity in America from 1890 to around 1920. Along with Madeline Yale Wynne, Margaret Whiting, Frances and Mary Allen, and others in Deerfield, Rollins was responding to the appeals for social and design reform called for by John Ruskin and William Morris in England. The new movement promised a return to the conditions of earlier modes of craft production, including simplicity of design, integrity of materials, and an ennoblement of work, all in order to lift men and women from the dehumanization of the modern industrial world. By the mid-1890s, Deerfield had become



A shop-sign for the Montague Laundry printed on card stock at the Montague Press, c. 1910. Rollins always added a touch of wit, even to mundane jobbing work. Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library.



**The Village Shop**  
Incorporated 1909.  
Everything for education in handicrafts and for a more interesting and profitable country life.

**New Clairbair Press.**  
Visions, Classic and New:  
The Vision of New Clairbair.  
The Book of Visions.  
**Hill Town Puritan Series.**  
History of Montague (in press)  
Notes (in preparation)  
1001 Hill Town Nights (coming)  
**New England Countryman.**  
(the only Agricultural Review in America)



**The Book Store.**  
Radical Books, (Religious,  
Social, Economic).  
Modern Agriculture.  
Arts and Crafts.  
**The New Education.**  
For Catalogue Address  
**Edward Pearson Presser,**  
Montague, Massachusetts.

✠ where there is no vision the people perish. ✠

Left: Stationery of The Village Shop in Montague, the headquarters of New Clairvaux crafts, printed by Rollins c. 1909. Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library.


Below: Rollins printed many good-humored keepsakes for neighbors and friends of the Press. His *Almanack* for February 1913 contained little besides a fulsome encomium for the Montague Press itself, but it was impeccably printed. Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library.

Of  
**Bayberry Dips**  
&  
*Where to find Them*

---

PI, 'Tis dark as Egypt's night. Though there be gold,  
I fear to fare within.  
AUX. Ho, boy, a light!  
Speed, bring a lucky taper of the bay:  
So shall this darksome cave shine like the day.  
AUXWELL'S QUEST.

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Printed for and Published by *The Dyke Mill*, at Montague, Massachusetts. 1911.

A little catalogue of "Bayberry Dips," the popular scented candles produced at the Dyke Mill. Rollins's faux-colonial style highlights the historical associations of the product. Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library.

**One customer says:**  
I PERSONALLY think people are lucky to get Dyke Mill printing at any price. I am glad for our policy of buying printing that you come so near the cost figuring printers here." (Name if you want it).  
Well, we feel that we are blessed when we get an appreciative customer like that. We have a very select list of them already, and we are willing to do Dyke Mill printing for a few more. Do you want us to show you how your printing can be done in attractive ways at a fair price? The Montague Press, Carl P. Rollins, Montague, Mass.

**February 1913**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	

2. *Ground Hog Day.* Watch the nearest one to see what the weather will be during the rest of the winter.  
12. *Lincoln's Birthday.*  
14. *St. Valentine's Day.* Be sure to send one. (The Dyke Mill has a few hand-colored at twenty-five cents.)  
22. *Washington's Birthday.* Cherry trees have been safe since about 1742.



A wood engraving of the south side of the Dyke Mill in winter, showing the mill pond, based on a drawing by Rollins's friend Bruce Rogers, c. 1915. Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library.

an important node in the national movement, with its Village Industries, Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework, and annual exhibitions of handicrafts.

Rollins was born in Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1880. Already in high school he showed a keen interest in printing as a career. He entered Harvard University as a “special student” in 1897 and explored the curriculum very broadly, especially in history and what we would call today the social and political sciences. After three years—until he got “restless” (as he said)—he left Harvard without a degree in order to put his newly acquired social theories to work as apprentice printer, first at the *Georgetown Advocate* and then in the respected printing shop of Carl Heintzemann in Boston, considered at the time second only to D.B. Updike’s celebrated Merry-mount Press in terms of quality of workmanship and design.<sup>3</sup> But Rollins was not enchanted by city life, so when in the summer of 1903 Heintzemann informed him of a temporary printing project in the rural village of Montague, in the Connecticut River Valley, Rollins jumped at the opportunity.

Heintzemann had been contacted by the social reformer Edward Pearson Pressey, the founder of the New Clairvaux utopian community in Montague, who was looking for someone to advise on typographical matters and set up a printing course in the community’s trade school. New Clairvaux had been established a few years previously as an experiment in communal living that would revivify the New England countryside by teaching “industrial trades” and by establishing crafts workshops in depopulated rural villages.<sup>4</sup> New Clairvaux’s marriage of Ruskin’s notions of the humanizing potential of handicraft in the pre-industrial mode and Pressey’s reformist vision for wholesome rural socialism greatly appealed to the idealistic young Rollins, and after only a few months on the job he decided to stay.

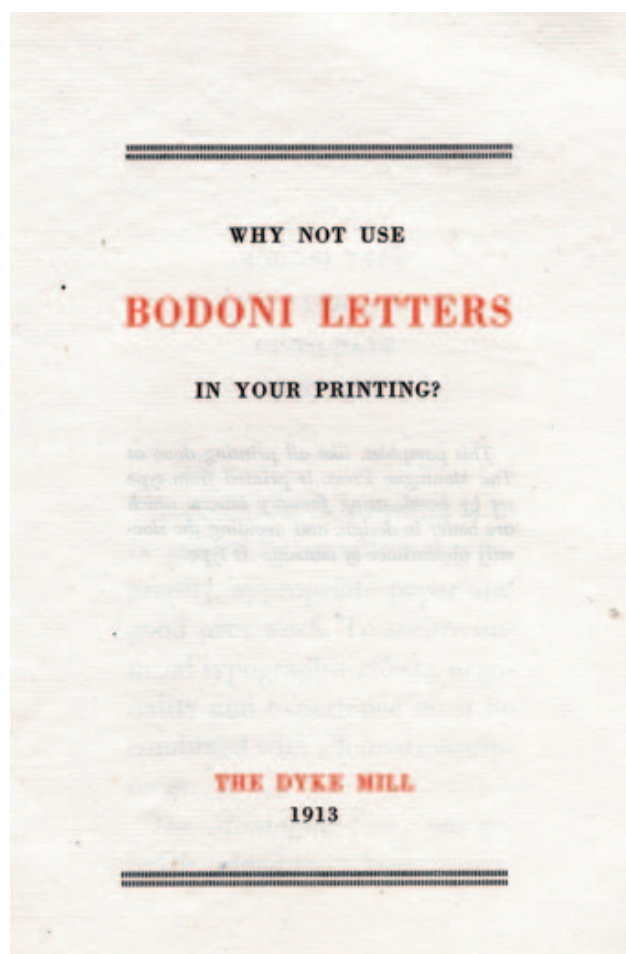
Not much evidence survives for Rollins’s life and activities in those early years in Montague, but from his—and his wife Margaret’s—reminiscences, both published decades later, and from some correspondence now housed in the Rollins Papers at Yale University, we know that Rollins readily identified with Pressey’s revolutionary vision for a settlement dedicated to social reform and the promotion of craft skills in a rural New England setting. His enthusiasm for the project is attested by his purchase from Pressey of the New Clairvaux Press in the later summer of 1903, just months after his arrival in Montague. As the new pressman, Rollins printed for the

New Clairvaux community of course, but also did job work for residents of Montague and nearby towns, including for the Deerfield Society of Arts and Crafts and the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework. For Pressey he produced New Clairvaux’s journal, *Country Time and Tide*—whose name derived from John Ruskin’s book, *Time and Tide* (1867), on the nature and value of work—and other promotional pieces. Pressey and Rollins moved the press from Pressey’s home to New Clairvaux’s Village Shop (“Everything for education in handicrafts and for a more interesting and profitable country life”), a purpose-built crafts cooperative that provided studios for woodworkers, weavers, dyers . . . and now, printers.

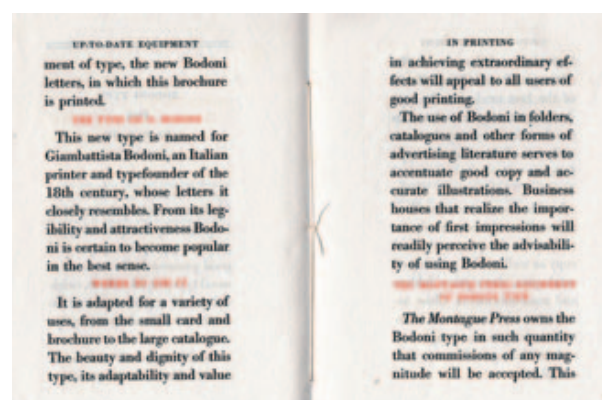
At the end of 1903, Rollins unexpectedly lost sight in one eye, an affliction that sent him back home to Newburyport for medical treatment. Even though he did a bit of printing at Montague in the following years, the crisis seems to have precipitated a lengthy sabbatical, which included a *wanderjahr* in England, financed by his mother, which allowed him to visit important English Arts & Crafts sites such as C.R. Ashbee’s Guild and School of Handicraft at Chipping Campden in the Cotswolds, in some respects the successor to William Morris’s famous Kelmscott Press.<sup>5</sup> This would certainly have been an inspirational pilgrimage for Rollins, since Ashbee’s guild had been established along lines similar to Pressey’s New Clairvaux. An added enticement for Rollins was the presence of Morris’s printing equipment at Ashbee’s Essex House Press, purchased by Ashbee after the close of the Kelmscott Press in 1896. It is entirely possible, but not documented, that Rollins paid a call on the great book binder and printer, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, the proprietor of the Doves Press and Bindery in Hammersmith, during his tour in England.<sup>6</sup>

Inspired by what he saw at Chipping Campden, Rollins returned to Montague in 1907 to take up his duties as pressman at the New Clairvaux Press. At this point the New Clairvaux community had begun to unravel—for a variety of reasons—but Rollins was committed to making a go of it one way or another. In the summer of 1908, he bought an old mill building on the eastern edge of the village from Joseph Dike and transferred all the old printing equipment from the Village Shop to it. Rollins conceived of “The Dyke Mill” as a strictly commercial venture, stripped of New Clairvaux’s ideological baggage, incorporated in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with capital stock and shareholders, and

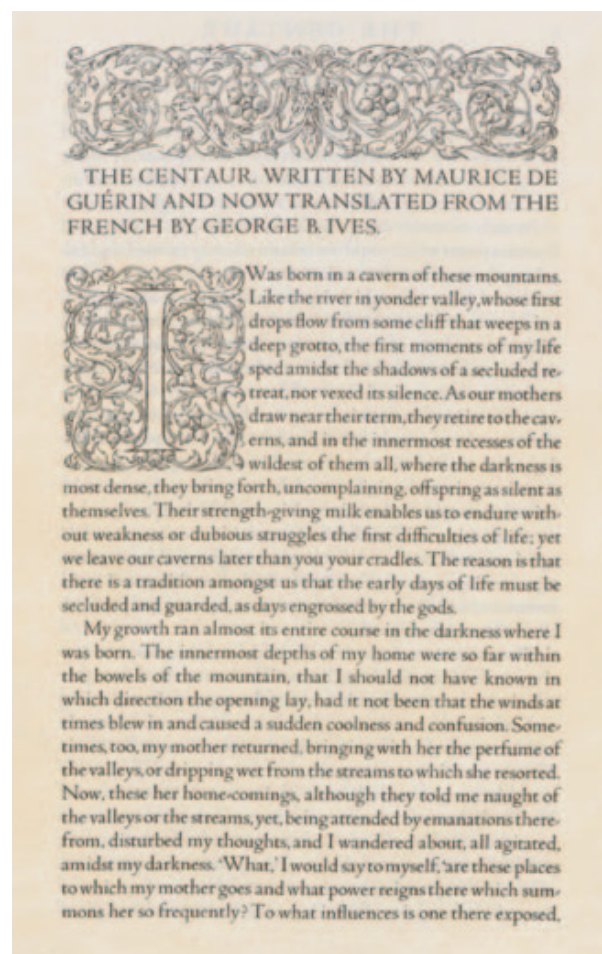




Notecard designed and printed by Rollins for the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework, c. 1905-1915. Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library.



Left and above: Rollins loved historic typefaces. In this little pamphlet from 1913 he extolls the virtues of the revived letterforms of the 18th-century printer, Giambattista Bodoni. Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library.



Title page of *The Centaur* by Maurice Guerin, designed by Bruce Rogers and printed at the Montague Press in 1915. It is considered by many to be a masterpiece of printing and typography. Smith College Special Collections.

a slate of officers.<sup>7</sup> As capitalistic as this sounds, The Dyke Mill was organized under faintly socialistic lines, with “semi-monthly conferences of workers” an important part of the ethos. It was indeed a craft cooperative, with studios for printing, dyeing, rug making, thread spinning, furniture making, and—most profitable of all—candle making: the famous Bayberry Dips, “satisfactory for use in any place where refinement in detail is deemed essential.”

His flyer for the new venture describes The Dyke Mill as the home for a variety of crafts, but over time printing rose to the fore as the most productive as the other crafts fell to the wayside. It became the headquarters of the Montague Press—as the successor of the New Clairvaux Press was christened—for the next ten years, until 1918.<sup>8</sup> Limited to printing only—the Montague Press was not a publishing firm—nor would it establish a house style as the English private presses had (“unless the restricting of its compositors to two or three only of the best faces of type can be called a style”). Rollins promised clientele that his work would be carefully executed with the best types—Bodoni and Caslon primarily—laid out according to “the spirit which underlies all of the good work of the past.”<sup>9</sup>

The new business continued to maintain its fruitful relationships with the Montague Arts & Craft Society, the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework, and the Deerfield Society of Arts and Crafts, reorganized in 1906 as the Society of Deerfield Industries, designing and printing ephemera and catalogs for these organizations. Rollins also printed announcements and flyers for the photographers Mary and Frances Allen and for Old Deerfield Pageants.<sup>10</sup> Working even further afield he edited and printed *Handicraft*, the influential nationally circulating periodical published by Boston’s Society of Arts and Crafts. Through these organizations he became connected with Arts & Crafts societies across the country.

Largely through these associations The Montague Press came to play an important role in supporting the



Carl Purington Rollins, taken during his early years at the Yale University Press. Robert B. Haas Family Arts Library, Yale University.

larger national Arts & Crafts movement. Not only did Rollins print and publish for a much larger audience than the New Clairvaux Press had ever engaged, but he also attracted the attention of specialists and connoisseurs by writing articles on the typographic arts and the history of printing.<sup>11</sup> But even as both his workload and his reputation increased, Rollins never lost sight of his duties as a village printer; he continued to publish the weekly *Montague Calendar* and an occasional monthly *Almanack*, as well as signs, invitations, and cards for his neighbors in Montague.

Freed from the yoke of the New Clairvaux’s social agenda, The Montague Press began to attract attention in the region for its fine design and printing, a cut above the local job printers in

western Massachusetts. Rollins clearly excelled in all the mechanical aspects of printing: typesetting, presswork, etc. But his studies of the history of books and printing, especially his familiarity with the work of contemporary practitioners in the historicizing Kelmscott mode, refined his design skills as well. Like others in this period, Rollins felt that marshalling typographic design enhanced the meaning of a text by alluding to a particular historical period, presenting a text in an appropriate graphic setting.

The most important advocate of this allusive typography was Rollins’s friend and advisor, the eminent Bruce Rogers, an independent type designer, typographer, and—in the first decade of the century—director of the Riverside Press in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Rogers visited Montague on several occasions, sometimes accompanied by his wife, to enjoy the beauty of picturesque western Massachusetts as well as to check up on his protégé. On these occasions they often spent long hours in the Mill together, collaborating on printing projects. Indeed, as a token of friendship, Rogers presented Rollins with a drawing of a wintry Dyke Mill as a Christmas gift one year.<sup>12</sup>

Over the years Rollins and Rogers together saw three books through the press, one of which was the



Montague Press's most enduring achievement: the slender volume of Maurice De Guerin's *The Centaur*, printed in 1915. In Rollins's own words, "The Centaur was, of course, the 'high spot' in the list of books printed at the Mill . . . We knew we were doing a fine piece of work, but I doubt if even Mr. Rogers anticipated the position which the thin little folio has come to have in American printing."<sup>13</sup> In the typesetting of it Rollins had the assistance of Margaret, a "lively young school teacher" who was then boarding in the village . . . and who later that year became Mrs. Rollins.

Rollins's somewhat understated appraisal of the "thin little folio" still rings true today. The design was elegant and the paper very fine, but the renown of *The Centaur* rests primarily on the beauty and clarity of its type, used for the first time in this book, and so named "Centaur." This is one of the most important and popular typefaces designed by Bruce Rogers, or any other American type designer. Based on a brilliant Renaissance-era roman designed by Nicholas Jenson in Venice

in the late 15th century, it is still widely used by book designers and publishers more than a century after its first appearance in Montague.<sup>14</sup>

The Montague Press ceased operations in 1918 when Rollins and Margaret set off for their new life in New Haven. But almost 30 years after that, given the chance to reminisce about his work at Dyke Mill, Rollins paraphrased Robert Browning's poem *Home-Thoughts, From Abroad*: "That work was not of supreme importance in the long history of printing, but inasmuch as we had a lot of fun doing it, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the collector may discern something of the 'fine, free, careless rapture' which was the better part of the day's work at the Dyke Mill."<sup>15</sup> An accurate, perhaps overly modest, assessment of the foundation period of a great career in graphic arts on the one hand. But on the other, we should understand Rollins in Montague as the catalyst or seed for the internationally acclaimed flowering of fine printing and the book arts in the Connecticut River Valley in Massachusetts in the latter half of the 20th century.



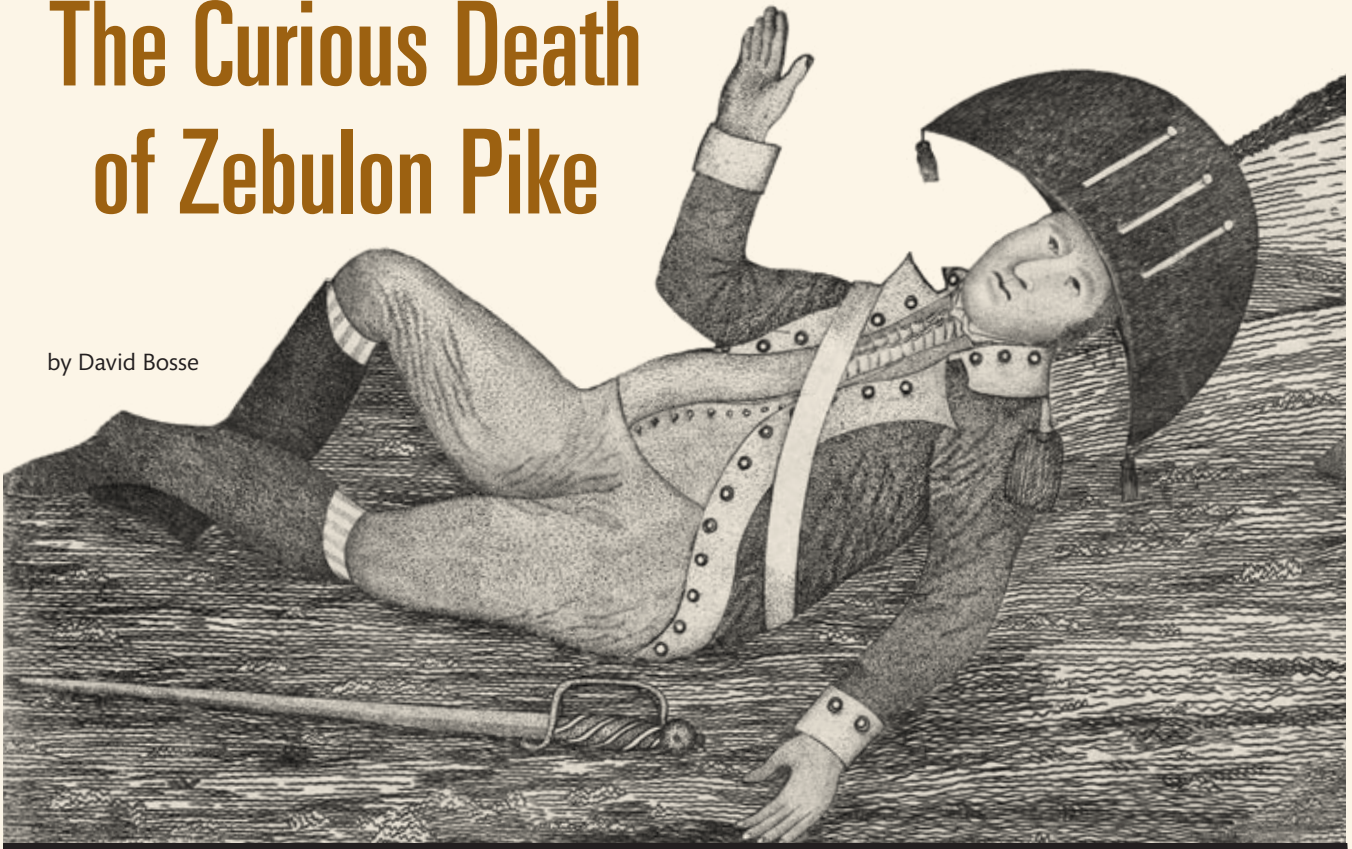
## ENDNOTES

1. Currently the best source for Rollins's entire career is Katherine M. Ruffin, "Carl P. Rollins and the Bibliographical Press at Yale University," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 115/3 (September 2021): 343–72. The extensive Carl Purington Rollins Papers can be found in the special collections department of the Robert B. Haas Family Arts Library at Yale University (<https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/arts.aob.0009>).
2. More information about Rollins's pre-Yale career can be found at Margaret Rollins, *Carl Rollins at Montague, 1903–1918; a Talk by Margaret Rollins at a Meeting of the Columbiad Club, 10 December 1963* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963). For young Rollins in a larger context see Walter Muir Whitehill, "Boston Artists and Craftsmen at the Opening of the Twentieth Century," *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 50, no. 3 (September 1977): 387–408.
3. Gay Walker, *The Works of Carl P. Rollins* (New Haven: Yale University Library, 1982), vi; Rollins, *Carl Rollins at Montague*, 2–4.
4. Edward P. Pressey, *Solution of the Country Problem in Relation to the City Problem* (Boston, 1901), 2; Jeannine Falino, "The Monastic Ideal in Rural Massachusetts: Edward Pearson Pressey and New Clairvaux," in Bert Denker (ed.), *The Substance of Style; Perspectives on the American Arts and Crafts Movement* (Winterthur, DE: Winterthur Museum, 1996), 375–95.
5. Falino, 377, 390. Ashbee had set up the Essex House Press on the Kelmscott model in Chipping Campden, a visit to which would have been a pilgrimage of sorts for Rollins who had recently published an encomium to Morris's typographical contributions in the *The Printing Art Quarterly* (1903).

6. Cobden-Sanderson was also the sometime teacher of Ellen Gates Starr, the famous Deerfield bookbinder; he visited this country in 1907 on a lecture tour to promote education in craft techniques. For more on the influence of the English Arts & Crafts movement on American designers see Susan Otis Thompson, *American Book Design and William Morris*, 2nd ed. (New Castle DE: Oak Knoll Press, 1996), 70–72.
7. Carl P. Rollins, *The Dyke Mill Bulletin* (Montague, March 1911, no. 1), 4.
8. *Ibid.*, 2.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Suzanne L. Flynt, *Poetry to the Earth; the Arts & Crafts Movement in Deerfield* (Stockbridge: Hard Press Editions, 2012), 30–46.
11. Published in *Country Time and Tide* (1904, 1908), *The Printing Art Quarterly* (1903–1904, 1909, 1915), and *Handicraft* (1911). For a complete list of Rollins's published writings (as distinct from his work for the New Clairvaux, Montague, and Yale University presses) see Gay Walker, *The Works of Carl P. Rollins* (1982), 123–36.
12. Carl P. Rollins, "BR at the Dyke Mill, 1911–1915," in *BR Marks and Remarks* (New York: The Typophiles, 1946), 51–61.
13. *Ibid.*, 55.
14. For the interesting and complex story of the genesis of this typeface see Jerry Kelly and Misha Beletsky, *The Noblest Roman; a History of the Centaur Types of Bruce Rogers* (Boston: David R. Godine, 2016).
15. Rollins, "BR at the Dyke Mill," 60–61.

# The Curious Death of Zebulon Pike

by David Bosse



ONE OF THE MOST intriguing examples of War of 1812 iconography came from the hand of a teenaged apprentice engraver working on the banks of the Connecticut River far from the scene of conflict. In his father's workshop in Weathersfield, Vermont, Oliver Tarbell Eddy (1799–1868) engraved a sizeable image (15  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 14 inches) that remains the largest depiction of its subject. The reasons behind creating this rare print remain obscure, as does its intended audience. That two states of the print exist only adds to its curious history.

## THE EVENT

On June 1, 1812, President James Madison sent a message to Congress asking for a declaration of war against Great Britain, partly in retaliation for years of naval harassment. The decision to go to war met with general opposition in Vermont and elsewhere in New England where anti-war feelings ran high.

Despite a woeful lack of military preparation, invading British Upper Canada (Ontario) became a strategic priority for the United States. After suffering defeats on the Niagara frontier in 1812, an amphibious attack on York (now Toronto), the Canadian capital, became the next objective.<sup>1</sup> A force consisting of some 1,700 troops embarked from Sacketts Harbor,

New York, on April 23, 1813, reaching their objective four days later.<sup>2</sup> Although meeting resistance to their landing west of town, American forces overwhelmed the outnumbered British regulars, Canadian militia, and their Native American allies. Led by Brigadier-General Zebulon Montgomery Pike (1779–1813) the Americans captured two redoubts beyond the town's main fortifications and prepared to launch their main assault. Having been ordered to retreat, British troops ignited their munitions supply, causing a tremendous explosion. Most American casualties resulted from the ensuing deluge of rocks, timber, and debris that killed 38 and wounded more than 200. Among them, Zebulon Pike who succumbed to his wounds later that day.

As the first significant American land victory of the war, the battle received extensive newspaper coverage. Pike had previously achieved national attention for his explorations in the American West, and as a fallen hero his name gained even wider exposure. Within weeks newspaper reports of the battle and Pike's death appeared in Boston, New York City, Albany, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC. More locally, papers in Windsor, Brattleboro, and Rutland, Vermont, and the *Franklin Freeman* of Greenfield, Massachusetts, included coverage. Many of these articles borrowed heavily or entirely from





DEATH OF GENERAL PIKE, AT L. YORK.

First state of the undated engraving/etching by Oliver T. Eddy. Hall and Kate Peterson Fund for Paintings, Prints, Drawings, and Photographs. Historic Deerfield 2019.11. A 2022 Wendy Shadwell Bequest from the American Historical Print Collectors Society provided funding for the conservation of this print.



one another; most described Pike as gallant, dashing, or heroic. Some compared his death to that of General James Wolfe at the battle of Quebec in 1759.

## THE PRINT

The son of printer, engraver, and inventor Isaac Eddy (1777-1847), Oliver Tarbell Eddy earned his limited renown as a portrait and landscape painter. He signed only two engravings, both done early in his career. Unlike the second plate that he engraved, an 1817 map of New Hampshire, his first published effort was a work of imagination. Did national pride or hero worship motivate the young Eddy to portray that distant event? Perhaps an account told by a returning veteran embellished the newspaper reports that had reached Weathersfield and moved him to create his arresting image.<sup>3</sup> Did he take on the project as a painstaking apprenticeship exercise with his father's encouragement and assistance? Although somewhat naïve in design, the competent, dense line work and tones executed with burin, needle, and roulettes suggest that Eddy spent months on his plate, even adding a patterned border.<sup>4</sup>

Pike's rearing horse, an invention of the young printmaker, dominates *Death of General Pike, at L. York*. More care seems to have been given to the saddle and tack than to the poorly proportioned animal in *Levade* posture. Together with a framing tree it occupies two thirds of the print, thereby excluding any indication of the battle. Military correspondence and reports confirm that the amphibious assault by American forces did not involve horses.<sup>5</sup> Eddy's depiction of Pike's uniform indicates that he had access to military attire that served as a model. Pike's dress, however, varies from other known examples.<sup>6</sup> Some features, such as his bicorne hat (*chapeau de bras*) with feather plume and tassels, and three button and looped silvered cords, seem somewhat fanciful.

The only graphic source on which Eddy might have partly based his depiction of Zebulon Pike, if a copy were at hand, is a head and shoulders frontispiece portrait of Pike in a major's uniform. Engraved by David Edwin from the 1808 oil portrait by Charles Willson Peale, the small, oval image (less than four inches in height) appeared in Pike's *An Account of Expeditions to the Sources of the Mississippi* (Philadelphia, 1810) and does not seem to have factored in Eddy's engraving.



Top: View of Bellows Falls and Mansion House Hotel engraved by Isaac Eddy. Detail from *New Hampshire, from Late Survey* (Walpole, NH, 1817; "Revised Edition," 1837). Historic Deerfield 2021.8.

Above: Detail showing the mysterious cabin. Historic Deerfield 2019.11.





Lower right portion of the print in the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution showing the area where the cabin was removed. NPG.83.171. This copy has had the title and part of the right-hand portion of the image trimmed along with the engraved border.

A credible account of Pike's death appeared as a letter written by Donald Fraser, Aide-de-Camp to Pike, first published in the *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia) on May 14, 1813. Other publications, such as *Niles Weekly Register* (Baltimore), a widely read news and literary magazine, picked up the letter in June, making it generally available. In the moments just before the explosion, Fraser recalled:

*The general had just aided in removing a wounded man with his own hands, and had sat down on a stump with a British sergeant we had taken prisoner whom the general, with Capt. Nicholson and myself were examining, when the explosion took place. The general, Capt. Nicholson and the British sergeant were all mortally wounded, and I was so much bruised in the general crash that it is surprising how I survived....*

Eddy's illustration incorporates none of these facts. One wonders if he was unaware of them or disregarded them to dramatize the moment.

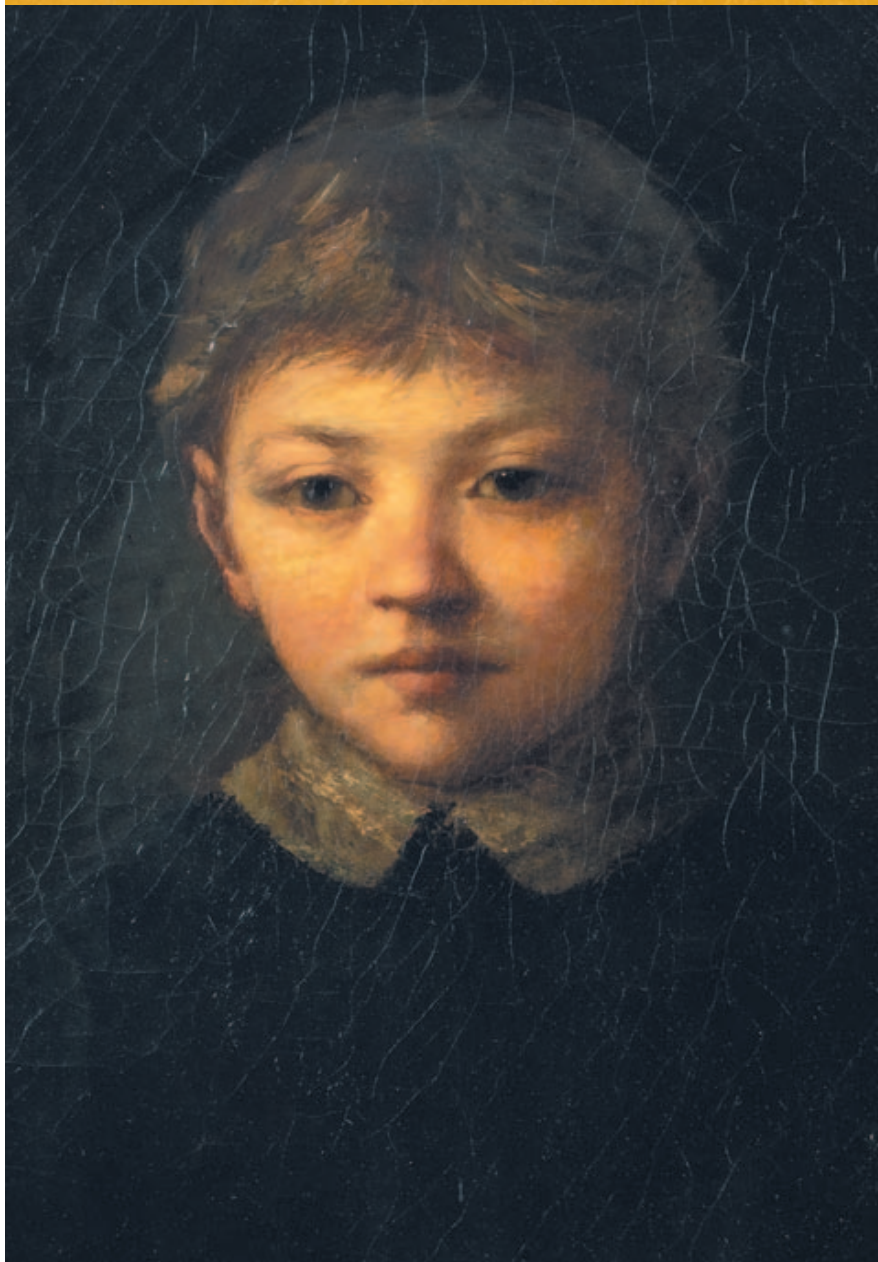
Another unanswered question jumps out from the print itself. Historic Deerfield's copy includes an image of a small cabin and trees situated near the horse's rear hooves. The two other known institutional copies of the print (American Antiquarian Society and National Portrait Gallery) bear evidence of rough crosshatching that eliminates the building. Was its inclusion in the first version youthful mischief or added as a sort of insignia? Had it been left, intentionally or not, on a recycled copperplate? Or does some altogether different circumstance account for it?

With no available documentation on the print's creation or the number of impressions pulled from the plate, *Death of General Pike, at L. York* largely remains shrouded in mystery. Historic Deerfield's copy may represent a proof sheet as no others retain the cabin. But with such a tiny sample few conclusions can be drawn. Nevertheless, Isaac Tarbell Eddy's first attempt at printmaking remains a remarkable, if perplexing, accomplishment.

## ENDNOTES

1. American newspapers and government documents referred to York, founded in 1793, as Little York, possibly applying the adjective derisively. Eddy's title designates it L. York.
2. A detailed account of the battle appears in W. E. Hollon, "Zebulon Montgomery Pike and the York Campaign, 1813," *New York History*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (July 1949): 259–75.
3. Edith Bishop wrote that Eddy's father, Isaac, commanded a regiment during the war and may have been present at the battle. No evidence has been found to confirm either contention. *Oliver Tarbell Eddy, 1799–1868; A Catalogue of his Works Compiled by Edith Bishop in Connection with an Exhibition Shown at the Newark Museum, March 28–May 7, 1950* (Newark, NJ: Newark Museum, 1950).
4. The time required to engrave a copperplate varied, based on size of the image, subject matter, amount of lettering, and the engraver's proficiency. Most research in this area has focused on maps. One frequently cited example, Thomas Jefferson's 25 x 24-inch map accompanying his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), took seven months to professionally engrave in London. Mary S. Pedley discusses the labor of engraving in a European context in *The Commerce of Cartography: Making and Marketing Maps in Eighteenth-Century France and England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), 53–56.
5. E. A. Cruikshank's multi-volume *Documentary History of the Campaign upon the Niagara Frontier 1813* Part 1 (Welland, Ont., 1902) compiles extant British, American, and Canadian reports.
6. See, for example, James Kochan, *The United States Army, 1812–1815* (Botley, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2000).

*The Puritan Boy*, c. 1877. Oil on canvas. Museum purchase with funds provided by the Deerfield Collectors Guild. Historic Deerfield 2023.36.1.



## Three Paintings by George Fuller

by John Davis

DURING THE LAST 250 YEARS, an impressive number of artists have chosen to work along the banks of the Connecticut River, from Ralph Earl's itinerant portrait work during the Federal Era; to Thomas Cole's and Frederic Edwin Church's antebellum sublime landscapes; to the late 19th-century community of figure painters (George de Forest Brush, Maria Oakey and Thomas Wilmer Dewing) working in Dublin, New Hampshire; to contemporary views of these same landscapes by living artist Stephen Hannock.

A smaller number of painters chose to work in one very special location in the Connecticut River Valley: Deerfield, Massachusetts. Of these, George Fuller (1822–1884) was perhaps the best-known artist in Deerfield's history, but he did not achieve national attention and renown until the very end of his career. Three paintings recently acquired by Historic Deerfield shed light on Fuller's deep connection to Deerfield and his surprising "second career" that brought so much unexpected fame in his later years.

Born on his father's farm ("The Bars") at the edge of the South Meadows in Deerfield, Fuller likely received early artistic inspiration from the work of his grandfather, aunt, uncle, and half-brother, all of whom were painters. His education included three terms at Deerfield Academy before he decided in 1840 to launch his own career as an artist (initially, though unfruitfully, as a daguerreotypist). The next two decades brought only moderate success for Fuller. In Boston and Albany (where he studied drawing with sculptor Henry Kirke Brown for nine months), and on several itinerant expeditions in western Massachusetts and New York State, he barely sustained a livelihood as a portrait painter.







Once he had moved to New York City in 1847, Fuller made an effort to break into professional artistic circles, entering the Antique Class (drawing from casts) at the National Academy of Design in autumn 1848, and advancing to the Life Class (drawing from the human figure) in January 1849. That year he exhibited a crayon portrait for the first time at an Academy annual exhibition, and five years later he was elected an Associate National Academician by his fellow artists. During the decade of the 1850s, Fuller also left New York three times to make extensive tours of the antebellum Southern states.<sup>1</sup> His initial impetus for these trips was a search for portrait commissions, but while there he did a series of pencil sketches that visually documented the institution of plantation slavery, placing him in a small group of artists willing to take on the subject (his observations of the South are contained in a series of letters preserved in Deerfield's Memorial Libraries). Fuller was in the process of planning a new type of work—Southern genre paintings based on his sketches—when tragedy struck back home in Deerfield in June 1859: the death of his father, Aaron.

Two of Fuller's brothers died the same year as his father, but there were still three younger brothers and three older half-brothers living during the period following their father's death. Nonetheless it was decided that George would be the son called home to Deerfield to take over the family farm at The Bars. Fuller allowed himself one last artistic trip before returning to Deerfield: a six-month sojourn in Europe in 1860, where he studied the Old Masters and contemporary

painting in Belgium, England, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.

Two of the paintings recently acquired by Historic Deerfield relate to this transition in Fuller's life. Within three months of his return from Europe and following the autumn harvest, the artist executed a pair of small and intimate Deerfield scenes on his own property, *At the Bars* and *Farm-Yard at the Bars*. In a letter to his wife Agnes, then in the Boston area at the end of November 1860, Fuller referred to one of these sketches: "On Saturday I painted or commenced a little picture. Subject 'the woodshed with coop and chickens' seen from the dining room window where I sit and paint quite at my ease."<sup>2</sup>

As might be expected, the two sketches are more directly and quickly painted than Fuller's later works, which often show many layers of additive paint and varnish. The same group of eight or so fowl (both compositions featuring a large, white cock as a central focus) are shown in different arrangements: in the corner of a shadowed shed and gathered around a makeshift coop covered by a red figured cloth. In the former, Fuller gives most of his attention to the highlighted straw piled in the wagon. The other, more finished composition is framed by the weathered arches of the shed, with a few anecdotal touches such as the overturned basket and the blue coat hanging from a nail on the post. They both have an aura of familiarity from an artist who had spent much of his life in this homey setting.

As personal as these oil sketches of his birthplace are, they were also appreciated outside of the Fuller family, for the artist presented them as gifts to Catherine Brooks Yale, the mother of Madeline Yale Wynne, and they then passed to her daughter. Wynne, of course, is the creator of the *Garden of Hearts* chest, the Arts and Crafts masterpiece acquired in 2022 by Historic Deerfield. The Fuller paintings were likely exhibited at Wynne's Deerfield residence, The Manse, before they returned to the Fuller family at some point (likely after her death), and happily, they retain their period frames.

Nineteenth-century accounts of Fuller's life indicate that he intended his agricultural career to be short, but he ended up pursuing cranberry, corn, and tobacco farming for 15 years until the falling price of the latter crop forced him to declare bankruptcy. Then began Fuller's "second" artistic career, when in 1876 he exhibited a group of paintings in Boston in an effort to recoup his financial losses. Ten of the works sold, and by the time of his second one-man show in 1877, he was hailed as a visionary wonder, emerging from years of rural anonymity in Deerfield to become an important exponent of a new type of poetic, contemplative painting inspired by the French Barbizon school. His canvases became thickly worked, tonal, and somewhat abstractive—often taking vague Deerfield landscapes with historical Puritan overtones and literary heroines from the pages of Nathaniel



Above left: *Farm-Yard at the Bars*, c. 1860. Oil on millboard. Museum purchase with funds provided by the Deerfield Collectors Guild. Historic Deerfield 2023.36.2.

Left: *At the Bars*, c. 1860. Oil on millboard. Museum purchase with funds provided by the Deerfield Collectors Guild. Historic Deerfield 2023.36.3.

Above: *At the Bars* in its original frame. Historic Deerfield 2023.36.3.





George Fuller House at The Bars, 1890–1920. Allen Sisters photograph. Historic Deerfield.

Hawthorne as their subjects.

Boston was an especially receptive city for Fuller's mature style, and the artist (who began spending part of every year there) developed a close friendship with William Morris Hunt, an important teacher and fellow exponent of the French Barbizon style. Unlike Hunt, Fuller did not take students into his studio, but he nevertheless had a pervasive influence among the younger generation of Boston painters in the 1870s. The same was true in New York, where his work was welcomed in the annual exhibitions of the progressive Society of American Artists, an avant-garde group of younger painters inspired by European art who rebelled against what they saw as the dry naturalism and humdrum subjects of the older American generation. They included Fuller's work in every one of their annual exhibitions until his death, and they elected him a member in 1880 (an unusual honor for an artist approaching his 60th birthday).

The third painting by Fuller, *The Puritan Boy*, like the two Bars sketches, was acquired by Historic Deerfield directly from descendants of the artist, the Arms family of Deerfield. It dates from this period of Fuller's reputational efflorescence in the late 1870s. In subject it represents his later, more ethereal, Colonial Revival style with its dark but luminous chiaroscuro, and it may well be the painting shown at Doll and Richards Gallery in the summer of 1877 and described in the *Atlantic Monthly*:

*The most satisfactory, upon the whole, of these studies of heads is that of a boy, whose light hair, rebellious to the brush, bristles over his forehead and short round face, and whose serious gray eyes, looking straight out from the canvas, have that dreamy, vacant gaze, susceptible of various interpretations according to the mood of the beholder, which is so often in portraits by the old masters—in those of Rembrandt especially—lends the charm of a certain mystery and unfathomableness to the expression.*<sup>3</sup>

This is a typical reaction to Fuller's suggestive depictions of vaguely colonial figures, which seemed to evoke a wistful, melancholic mood of loss. "Their haunting, piercing, poignant sadness could only have come from a nature that was in subtle sympathy through birth in New England and nurture upon its historic soil in a primitive unspoiled neighborhood," commented one critic after Fuller's death.<sup>4</sup> More often than not, his sitters were young, softly and tenderly rendered as though slowly emerging from a veiled, atmospheric haze. This is certainly true of *The Puritan Boy*, with his full lips, wide eyes, and warm tonality achieved through layered, loosely touched highlights on the cheeks and forehead. As is often the case with Fuller, this dim subjectivity creates an expression that is unusually thoughtful and sedate for such a young boy.

All three of these paintings were exhibited at Fuller's memorial exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1884, the largest group of works by the artist ever assembled. The essay in the exhibition catalogue was provided by Marianna Griswold Van Rensselaer, perhaps the greatest American art critic of the period, whose keen, analytical intelligence and empathy for the challenges facing the creative artist made her an especially sympathetic interpreter of Fuller.<sup>5</sup>

In the final eight years of his life, and certainly in the months following his death, Fuller and his art were celebrated with lavish praise and wonder that would have been impossible to imagine in the earlier decades of his career. Writers and fellow artists competed for the most enthusiastic encomia and accolades: "he possessed beyond any other artist known to America the mastery of the ideal," "one of the most original and important of our native painters," "the forerunner of a new tendency in our art," "Rip van Winkle of the arts newly awakened," "more truly modern in feeling than the younger men who were then returning from Paris."<sup>6</sup> One can only imagine the pride felt by Fuller's small community of family and friends at the national spotlight that shined so brightly on this modest son of Deerfield.

Historic Deerfield is very grateful to the members of the Deerfield Collectors Guild, whose contributions made it possible for the museum to purchase these three paintings.

#### ENDNOTES

1. See Sarah Burns, "Images of Slavery: George Fuller's Depictions of the Antebellum South," *American Art Journal*, vol. 15 (Summer, 1983): 35–60.
2. Quoted in Suzanne L. Flynt, *George Fuller: At Home (1822–1884)* (Deerfield: Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, 1984), 7.
3. "Three Boston Painters," *Atlantic Monthly* XL, no. 242 (December, 1877): 715–16.
4. "The Fuller Paintings," *Art Amateur* XI, no. 1 (June, 1884): 4.
5. See Sarah Burns and John Davis, *American Art to 1900: A Documentary History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 864–67.
6. Quoted in Sarah Burns, "A Study of the Life and Poetic Vision of George Fuller (1822–1884)," *American Art Journal* 13 (Autumn, 1981): 11–37.

# Vermont Painted Furniture

by Daniel S. Sousa

IN THE UNITED STATES, painted furniture reached a new level of popularity between 1815 and 1840 as Americans' desire for "fancy" goods increased. Characterized by its colorful and lively surface decoration, painted or "fancy" furniture catered to a growing middle-class market that sought an affordable and economical option for decorating interiors. Painters and decorators responded to this growing demand for painted furniture and even authored numerous essays and guidebooks—such as Jacob B. Moore's *The Cabinet-Maker's Guide: or Rules and Instructions in the Art of Varnishing, Japanning, Polishing, Lackering, and Beautifying Wood* (1827)—that provided patterns and techniques for simulating the appearance of various wood grains. Vermont painted furniture, such as this blanket chest, imitated the appearance of native or exotic woods. While the decoration on some pieces could be quite abstract or exaggerated, the painting on this example skillfully mimics veneer panels with cross-banded borders, revealing the painter's familiarity with more expensive case furniture with actual veneer panels.

Although successful in imitating highly figured maple cross-banded veneers and oval and circular blue motifs resembling stone, the painter's choice of colors was imaginative. Fancifully painted in blue, burgundy, and yellow, this chest is characteristic of the type of furniture traditionally attributed to members of the Matteson family of Shaftsbury, Vermont. However, recent research suggests that a wider group of craftsmen extending beyond the Shaftsbury area also followed this painting tradition. The inscription on the bottom, "E. Harwood / Hartford," the presence of nail holes along the front edge of the lid, and the use of painting on all four sides suggest that the chest served as a traveling trunk intended to be seen from all four sides.



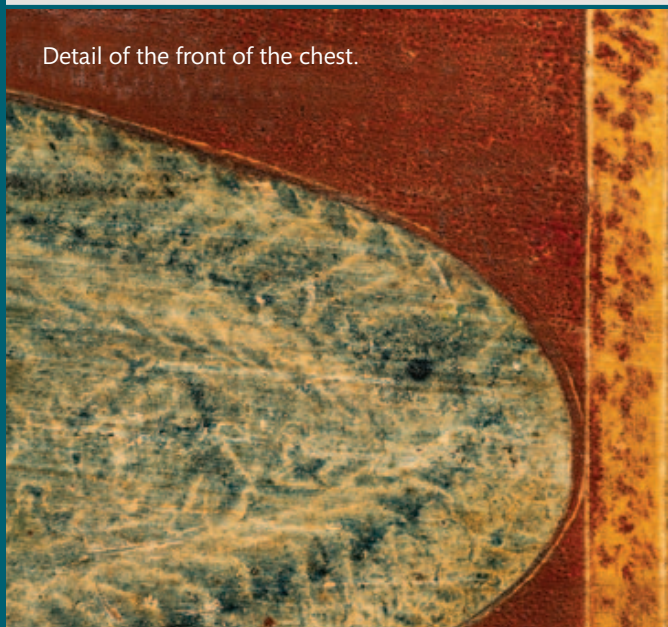
Top: Blanket chest, probably Shaftsbury, Vermont, c. 1825. Eastern white pine, paint. Gift of Patricia Passmore Alley and F. William Alley. Historic Deerfield 2023.9.10.

Above: Detail of the inscription on the underside of the chest.





The reverse of the chest.



Detail of the front of the chest.



Detail of the side of the chest.

The painter of the chest employed several techniques, resulting in bold, contrasting colored surfaces. To create the effect of cross-banded veneers outlining the edges of the lid and sides, he first covered the entire chest with a ground of mustard yellow and let it dry. Next, using a brush lightly loaded with a burgundy paint, he gently drew the brush across the surface, thereby creating the striations so characteristic of figured maple. He employed a similar technique to create the effect of crotch veneer—veneers cut from the area below two forking tree branches—on the chest's feet. To simulate the effect of a textured surface in the center of the blue

oval and circular panels, he likely pounced a crumpled piece of paper or rag along the surface. Imaginatively conceived and executed, the decoration on this chest and other comparable examples offers greater visual interest than natural wood alone.

*The blanket chest along with other examples of Vermont painted furniture are currently on view in the exhibition "Vermont Furniture from the Alley Collection" at Historic Deerfield's Flynt Center of Early New England Life.*

# *Colonial Revival Fantasy*



## A Photograph Album of a Late-19th-Century Costume Ball

by Lea Stephenson

ON A NEW ENGLAND summer night in 1892, Deerfield residents and guests donned powdered wigs and ancestral silks. Assembled in the rooms of Frary House, the costume ball attendees appeared to have revived the 18th century. Guests would return the following day to pose before the camera of Emma Lewis Coleman (1853–1942). The festivities at Frary House (c. 1760) and the resulting photographs embodied the spirit of the Colonial Revival.

After Charlotte Alice Baker (1833–1909) purchased the Frary House in 1890, she set about restoring the interiors to approximate their 18th-century appearance. To unveil her restoration, Baker organized a colonial-style ball in the adjacent Barnard Tavern Assembly Hall on August 25, 1892. The 200 invited guests were requested to dress in early 18th-century costume. The event transformed into an opportunity to celebrate the 18th century and Deerfield's past as Baker unveiled her 16 rooms filled with colonial antiques and memorabilia. These types of pageants and costume extravaganzas would typically last one night. To document the celebration and guests, Emma Lewis Cole-

man, one of Baker's lifetime companions, took photographs.<sup>1</sup> The ball was an ephemeral event, but Coleman's photographs and the resulting souvenir photo album prolonged the glamor of this 1892 night.

A morocco-bound photo album became a scrapbook for the gathering. This album, acquired by Historic Deerfield in 2009, comprises 67 photographs, including those of the attendees dressed in costume, letters of acceptance and refusal, and a typed description of the ball. Pages also include photographs of the Frary House and its interiors and grounds, as if showcasing Baker's work as an early preservationist and her particular vision of the 18th century. Rooms displayed her collection of 18th-century furnishings and New England antiques such as needlework, pewter ware, basketry, and a spinning wheel—a hallmark of any Colonial Revival interior.

Above: Guests dancing at the colonial ball. Photograph by Emma Coleman. Matte collodion photograph in morocco-bound album, compiled c. 1920. Hall and Kate Peterson Fund for Minor Antiques. Historic Deerfield 2009.5



Coleman's photographs of the costumed guests portray them in different vignettes and poses. These images capture contemporary sitters wearing revival costumes or their ancestors' garments. Women are dressed in silk brocade and powdered hair, alongside the male guests in satin and velvet frock coats. Groups of attendees reenact dances or 18th-century conversation pieces to evoke a bygone gentility. In some examples, the photographs highlight a single guest in costume displaying individual sartorial choices. Other attendees pose with each other or gesture in a theatrical manner upon receiving a glass of refreshment. Pages in the album also include the ball fiddler and servants attired in early colonial dress. An additional photograph records a table display of 18th-century shoes, suggesting artifacts on display for party goers. In her work, Coleman conveyed a nostalgia for a pre-industrial past when photographing scenes of New England rural life and handicrafts or New Englanders within their homes.<sup>2</sup> In these images Deerfield residents and guests pose as if 18th-century ancestors have been revived.



Above: Madeline Yale Wynne and Annie Putnam at the Frary House ball. Historic Deerfield 2009.5.

Right: Madeline Yale Wynne posing in costume, possibly with Henry Blake Fuller. Historic Deerfield 2009.5.

Opposite: Receiving line at C. Alice Baker's 1892 ball at the Frary House; includes Margaret Miller, Emma L. Coleman, Susan Minot Lane, and C. Alice Baker. Historic Deerfield 2009.5.

The Colonial Revival drew on a fascination and deep connection between Euro-Americans and a picturesque New England. These elite Euro-Americans would repeatedly reference visual and material culture from the 18th century in hopes of forming an intimate connection to a long-ago past. In other words, New Englanders hoped to "revive" the colonial era, one tied to the British colonies and a pre-revolutionary moment. This revival appeared in the form of reproduction furniture, interior design and decoration, photographs, architecture, paintings of New England towns, costume balls, pageants, and the rise of historical societies and heritage organizations. The Colonial Revival in the late-19th and early 20th centuries coincided with the rise of industrialization and served as an escape into the past and "simpler" times. Old New England and its regional identity became central to the Colonial Revival and was celebrated in private antique collections, preservation efforts, and historical writings.<sup>3</sup> An integral part of this Revival involved the transformative act of dressing up and performing. Euro-Americans would hold 18th-century themed costume balls, organize *tableaux vivants*, and orchestrate pageants to celebrate New England ancestors and heritage. With Baker's ball, Deerfield became a Colonial Revival center and space for performances.

However, this idea of the "colonial" was largely a fabrication, pulling together different motifs and colonies into a picturesque 18th-century version. The late 19th-century



Colonial Revival became a particular way to remember the past, one manipulated by an Anglo-white-elite class.<sup>4</sup> At times, this revival held dark undertones. For many elite, white Euro-Americans, the Colonial Revival reinforced racial hierarchies and xenophobia in order to combat the rise of immigration.<sup>5</sup> These pageant events solidified ancestral connections and worship, allowing white Anglo-Saxon Protestants to dress up as their purported forebearers.

Baker's performative event and Coleman's photographs coincide with similar Colonial Revival practices and pageants occurring across the Northeast in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The photographer and antiquarian Wallace Nutting would stage and photograph models in period costume within colonial interiors across New England. A year before Baker's event, one pageant in New York City involved women of the Daughters of the American Revolution at Sherry's restaurant reenacting colonial tea drinking using their ancestors' cups and wearing their great-grandmothers' gowns.<sup>6</sup> Descendants could resurface in the form of *tableaux vivants*, as seen with the Frary House ball attendees dressed in costume and displaying 18th-century shoes. Besides the photographs serving as a means to

document the occasion, the images also memorialized these sitters in costume. The photographs, especially when compiled together in an album, capture the performative nature of the Colonial Revival and its entangled politics long past the summer night in 1892.

#### ENDNOTES

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3. Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 205.
4. Richard Guy Wilson, "Intro," in: *Re-creating the American Past: Essays on the Colonial Revival*, eds. Richard Guy Wilson, Shaun Eyring, and Kenny Marotta (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 6.
5. Celia Betsky, "Inside the Past: The Interior and the Colonial Revival in American Art and Literature, 1860–1914," in: *The Colonial Revival in America*, ed. Alan Axelrod (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, Published for The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1985), 266–67; Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England*, 206.
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# Signs of the Time

PAINTED SIGNBOARDS displaying an emblem, image, or text appeared throughout the early American visual landscape. When displayed on a shop, tavern, or hotel they benefited both proprietor and customer. By the second half of the 17th century, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island had each passed laws making it mandatory for any licensed innholder, victualler, or retailer of alcoholic beverages to exhibit a sign. The phrase, “in the dwelling house of the said A. B. [licensee] in C. [location] commonly known by the sign of ——— and no other,” became part of the legal language that associated a sign with the business.

In 2000, Historic Deerfield acquired a signboard for the Clapp Tavern, in what became Easthampton, Massachusetts. The first public house there opened in 1727. Joseph Bartlett (1683–1755), the initial settler in the district north on the Manhan River, held the license until 1750. According to *History of Easthampton, Its Settlement*



*and Growth* (1866), travelers between Connecticut and Vermont frequently stopped at this popular spot. Bartlett's nephew, Jonathan Clapp (1713–1782), who moved in with his uncle around 1730, began running the tavern in 1750; he became owner upon the heirless Bartlett's death. Known as Major Clapp for his service in the American Revolu-

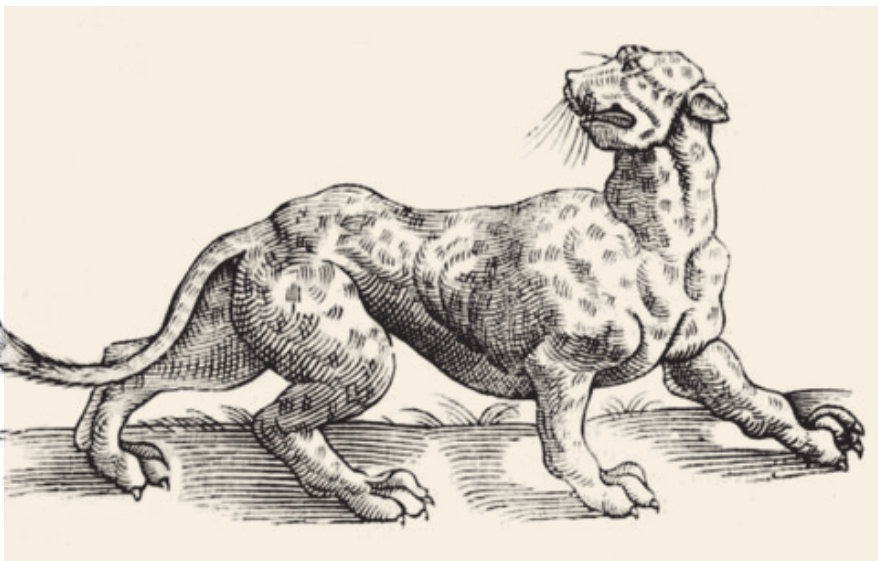
tion, Jonathan also ran a gristmill on the Manhan River and operated the nearby Clapp Tavern until 1782. The continuity of Clapp owners—Submit, Jonathan's widow, Jonathan Jr., Luther, and Thaddeus—sons or grandsons of Major Jonathan—made the tavern a local landmark. When demolished in the summer of 1882, the *Springfield Republican* and



the *Boston Journal* ran stories summarizing its history and importance in the community.

Measuring 57 x 26.5 inches, the Clapp Tavern sign would have been made by a local woodworker who attached hanging wrought iron hardware to the frame. A decorative painter, whose work more than likely included signs, wagons, and blanket chests, applied the images and lettering on each side. Variations in the spacing of the text and position and depiction of the beast reveal the painter's artistic limitations. Although undated, the sign appears to have been made in the late 18th century during Major Jonathan's tenure and is seemingly the one described by the *Springfield Republican* as "surmounted by a ferocious looking wildcat." As forms of public art and advertising, tavern signs like Clapp's became iconic markers of the time and place they occupied.

Left and below: Signboard of the Clapp Tavern, late 18th century, Historic Deerfield. Gift of the Submit Clark Corporation, Daughters of the American Revolution, named for the daughter of Major Jonathan Clapp. 2000.3.1.

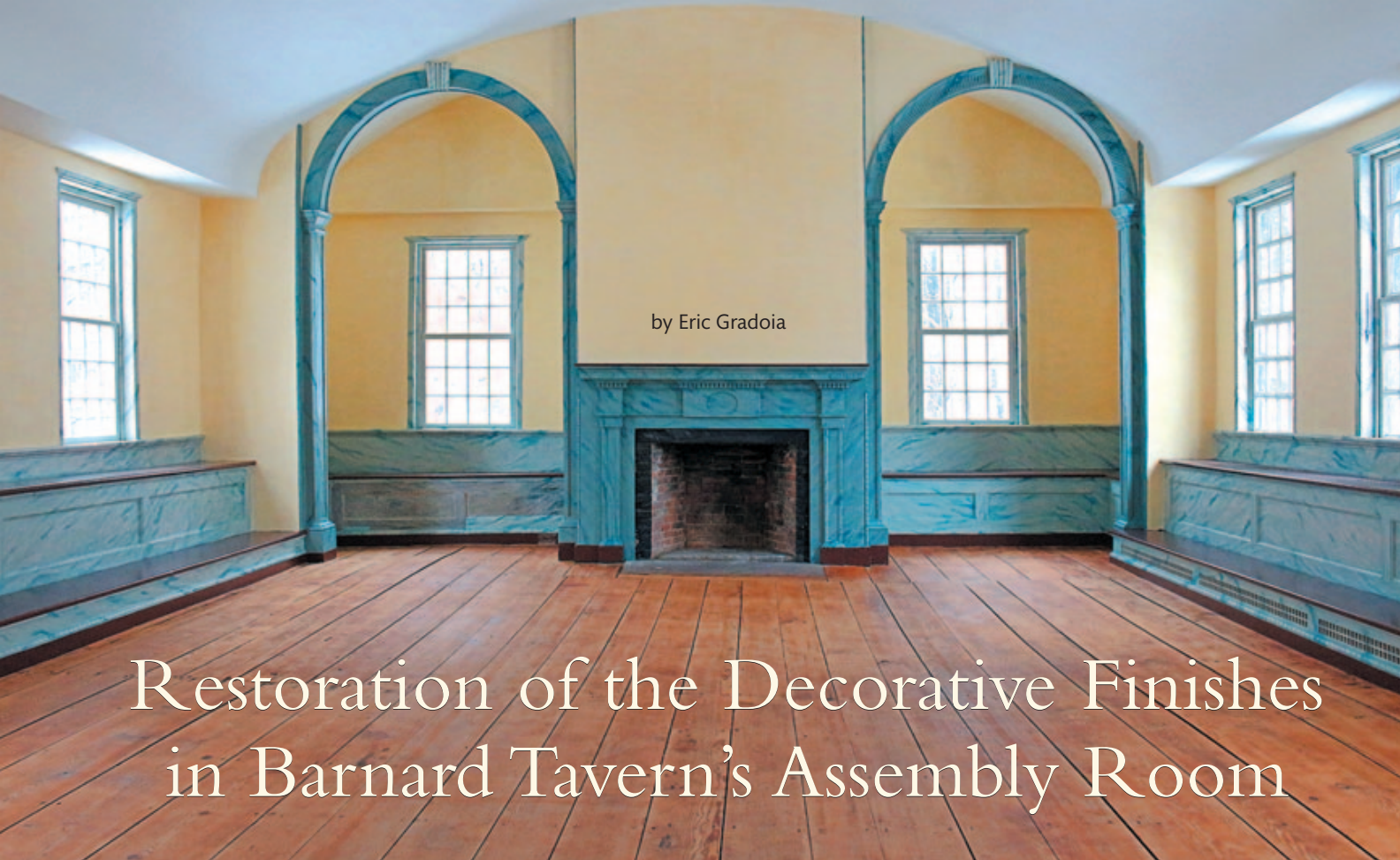


Images like this first appeared in Medieval manuscripts and entered Western visual culture through bestiaries, books of fables, armorial displays, and needlework. Variants of this woodcut from Edward Topsell's *History of Four-footed Beasts* (1658) helped inform later public art on signs. Duke University Library.



Early 20th-century pastel of the Clapp Tavern, as envisioned by N[orman] Copson. Historic Deerfield, Gift of the Submit Clark Corporation, Daughters of the American Revolution, 2000.3.2.





by Eric Gradoia

# Restoration of the Decorative Finishes in Barnard Tavern's Assembly Room

THE USE OF DECORATIVE paint work—stenciling, murals, and faux finishes—as a means of ornamenting and embellishing the interiors of 18th- and 19th-century New England dwellings has been the subject of interest and study for nearly a hundred years.<sup>1</sup> Remaining examples of these decorative treatments provide us with an idea of the broad range of designs and motifs employed by the artisans who created them. The number of extant examples makes it clear that these treatments were more common than one might think. Owing to their age, the fragile nature of materials they were applied to, and shifting tastes in fashion, many of these works have been lost in the centuries since their creation. Thankfully, examples remain in various states of preservation in private dwellings and house museums throughout New England. While stenciling and graining are found in several of Historic Deerfield's houses, the discovery of faux marbling in the Assembly Room of Barnard Tavern was surprising, owing to the unique character of the finish and the scale of its employment.

As he studied the building during its repair and restoration, Bill Flynt, Historic Deerfield's Architectural Conservator, discovered the faux marbling in Barnard Tavern's Assembly Room. Noticing that the door to the Assembly Room was not original to its opening caused him to search the building to see if the original door remained elsewhere in the tavern.

Incredibly, in an adjacent doorway he found a door with hinge and latch evidence that lined up with their corresponding markings on the Assembly Room door jambs. Studying the scars on the door he noticed the remains of early paint finishes which led him to remove some of the overpaint and expose an area of faux marbling. This discovery encouraged him to look elsewhere in the room, where he began to find remnants of faux marbling on the paneling, window architraves, and mantel covered by layers of later paint.

Stripping the original door of later paint exposed the faux marble finish. This provided an excellent representation of what would have been seen on the other surfaces. Unfortunately, efforts to expose the faux finish elsewhere in the room proved extremely difficult. It seems that the door was removed from its original location early in the 19th century and moved to fill the adjacent door opening. Soon after moving the door the Assembly Room was painted, covering over the marbling. The finish applied over the marbleized surfaces throughout the room (but not applied to the door) proved impossible to remove with chemical strippers. While small “windows” of the marbling could be exposed by physically picking away the later layers of paint, large-scale removal of the overpaint was not an option owing to this impenetrable layer of paint. Ultimately, areas of paint were removed from

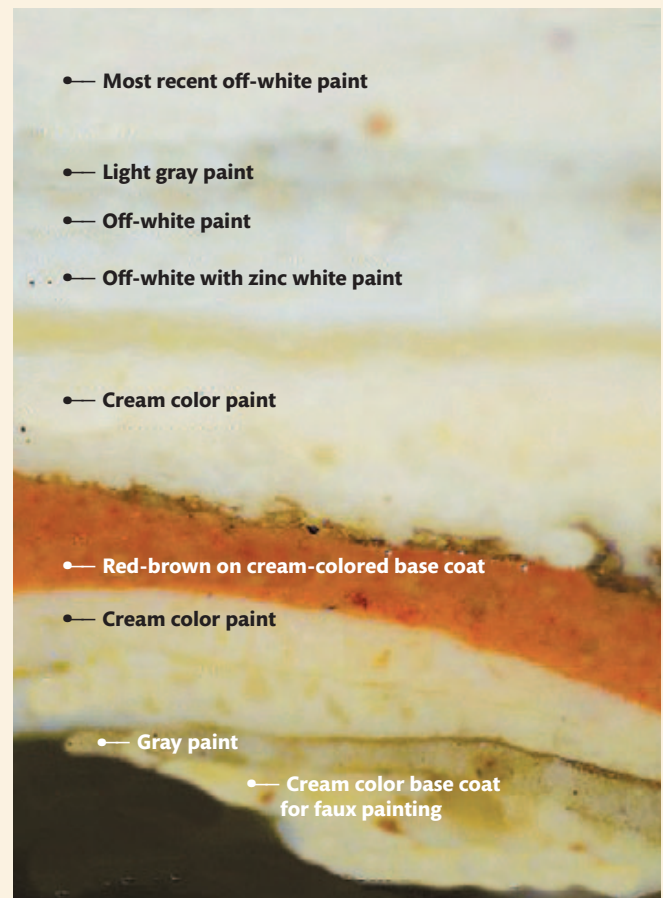
the paneling, architraves, and mantel to expose a good representation of the painted surface's appearance and its patterning.

With a general understanding of the finishes that remained in the tavern, paint analysis further revealed the stratigraphy of finish schemes and more accurately determined the colors and types of finishes used throughout the building. Paint analyst Susan Buck conducted cross-section paint microscopy on samples of interior paint finishes throughout the tavern, including the Assembly Room.

Cross-section paint microscopy examines a small specimen of a painted surface that, ideally, contains the surface layer of paint through to the substrate, in this case wood. By bedding the sample in a clear resin, it can then be sanded and polished to reveal a cross section of the paint finishes, showing their stratigraphy. Samples are then examined under high magnification (upwards of 400x) to observe, test, and record the characteristics and colors of each layer. While the details

from a single sample can provide much information, the process is most useful when looking at a range of samples removed from the same space.

Dr. Buck's findings revealed that paint finishes from the date of construction remained on the woodwork throughout the tavern. In the case of the Assembly Room, samples were obtained from known pieces of original woodwork and plaster. Study of these samples revealed that the first generation of finishes consisted of a pale yellow paint on the plaster walls, evidence of faux painting on samples taken off the woodwork (door and window architraves, paneling, arches, and mantel), and a red-brown finish on the bench tops and baseboards.<sup>2</sup> Additional paint analysis performed on the mantel and arched flanking openings clarified differences observed in the base coat of the marbling on the paneling. This confirmed that the marbling on the mantel and arched openings consisted of a blue-gray base coat while an off-white was used for the marbling elsewhere in the Assembly Room.<sup>3</sup>



Above: A photomicrograph of a paint sample taken from the Assembly Room viewed at 200x.

Left: The door to the Assembly Room stripped of later finishes and returned to its original location.





Above: The mantel showing the blue-gray base coat used on the mantel and arched openings.



Top left: Limewash being applied to the raw plaster. Notice the white appearance of the dry, raw plaster compared to the gray color when wet. The limewash here is freshly applied and still has a mottled appearance.

Bottom left: A detail of the yellow limewash on the plaster, new marbling on the paneling, and original faux finish on the door.



With the initial layers of finishes identified, loose (uncast) samples of paint specimens were measured digitally using a chroma meter to identify an exact color signature and match it to established color systems such as the Munsell system. With the colors accurately identified, they could be matched to commercial paint manufacturer color swatches that best represented the colors found in the specimens.<sup>4</sup> These colors were used to develop the decorative scheme recreated in the room.

After repairing the plaster and woodwork during the restoration of the tavern, the prepared surfaces could receive paint finishes. A variety of paint types were used in painting the Assembly Room. The original plaster ceiling, replaced during repairs done in 1969, offered no original paint evidence. Retained during the recent restoration of the space, the ceiling was finished to create the appearance of whitewash, a typical treatment found in buildings on The Street throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Decorative painters then replicated and applied the limewash finish on the plaster and faux marbling on the woodwork.<sup>5</sup>

The raw plaster walls were finished with a modern lime-wash mixed to match the color identified in the paint analysis. A stock yellow ochre limewash tinted with white matched the color identified in the paint analysis. After achieving a suitable



Decorative painter Christopher Mills applying the Prussian Blue glaze, using his non-dominant hand to apply the paint.

shade, three coats of the tinted limewash were applied to the wetted surface. Once dry, the limewash produced a finish with a depth and character to complement the plaster, unlike latex paints which create a uniform film that appears to coat a surface.

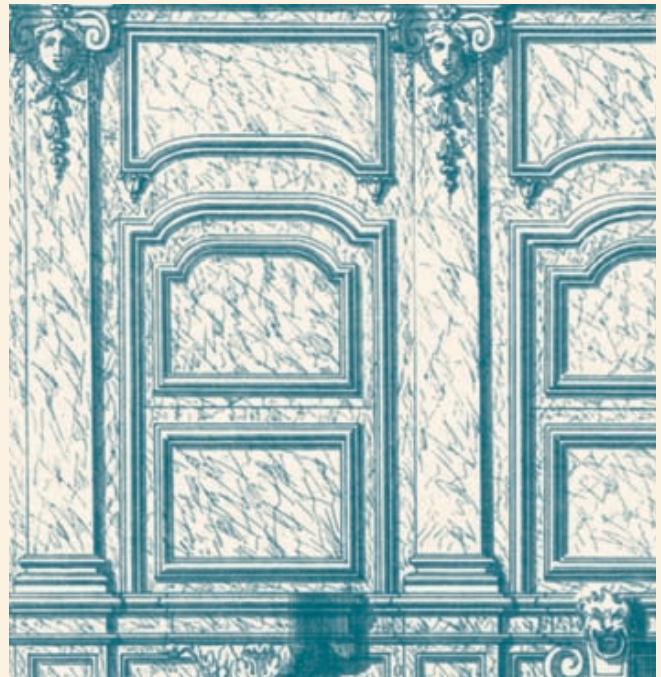
The new faux marbling would strive to replicate the original work as it appeared at the time of its application and not incorporate the natural discoloring that had taken place in the centuries since. Modern oil-based paint was used for the base coat on the woodwork, bench tops, and baseboards, custom formulated to match the historic colors and produce the ropy texture of early hand-mixed oil paints. All of the woodwork received two coats of the base color in preparation for the glaze used to create the marbling effect. Following the application of the base coats, the bench seats and the baseboards were painted in the red-brown color. With this work completed the application of the faux marbling occurred.

The glaze used for the faux marbling was hand mixed using Prussian Blue pigment and chalk (calcium carbonate) in linseed oil with turpentine to thin the paint and act as a drier.<sup>6</sup> By testing and adjusting the mixture on mockups an acceptable color and appearance was reached for the final finish. The color of the marble glaze was only one aspect of the faux finish; the figure of the marbling also needed developing.

Owing to the whimsical character of the original marbling, a variety of techniques were tested in an effort to produce the random nature of the existing finish found on the door and exposed examples. After much trial and error, the painters developed a technique where they applied the glazed finish together, one painter following the other. The first painter applied several flourishes of the tinted glaze, occasionally changing the hand in which they worked or the type of brush used to add to the irregularity of the strokes. The second

painter would immediately follow, occasionally removing some of the first painter's work by wiping it away with a rag, and adding their own work, or simply adding to the first's with their own brush strokes. Like the first painter, the second would occasionally change hands and brushes to alter the appearance of their work. Repeating this approach across each elevation, the entire room was completed.

Armed with a general understanding of the colors and figure of the stone, country painters created their interpretation of the material using the paints and tools at hand. Applying different paints in multiple applications and layers, the artisan produced various effects with the tools of their craft, including different sizes and types of brushes, feathers, pieces of leather and cork, even crumpled rags. This produced a rustic interpretation of the material with a dramatic effect, especially when illuminated in the artificial light of the time.



Detail from a plate from Nicolas Langlois, *L'Architecture et la Mode*. Vol. I, c.1700 showing *menuiserie feinte en marbre* (faux marble joinery). This plate reveals how an already high-style design can be elevated to another level simply by the application of a faux finish. The National Institute for Art History (INHA), Paris.



The basic ingredients of traditional oil paint — boiled linseed oil, pigments and turpentine. Prussian Blue and yellow ochre pigments together with a variety of other earth pigments.



### Traditional Oil Paint

Compared to today's modern commercially manufactured paints, the ingredients of traditional oil paints typically used by 18th- and 19th-century housepainters were relatively simple, consisting of pigments, a binder, and solvents as needed. Pigments provide color; the binder, typically linseed or fish oil, carries the pigments in liquid form and binds them to the surface as it dries and forms a film. Solvents, such as turpentine, could be added to thin the binder and adjust the viscosity of the paint. Owing to their volatile nature, solvents ultimately dissolve away, letting the binder form its film.

Pigments are defined by *The Grove Encyclopedia of Materials* as, “Finely powdered coloring matter...”<sup>7</sup> Pigments may originate from either natural or artificial processes. Earth pigments, such as Raw and Burnt Umber and Sienna, Yellow Ochre, and Carbon Black are all the products of natural processes. These pigments are found naturally in the earth, commonly dug from the ground and separated from other organic matter until only the desired minerals are left.<sup>8</sup>



Another source of colorant are pigments created from chemical processes; examples include Red Lead, Vermillion, Cadmium, and Cobalt.<sup>9</sup> Artificial pigments produce some of the most brilliant colors and were commonly used to great effect for decorating architectural elements and features such as beaufats (corner cupboards), mantels, and frontispieces.

Earth pigments were relatively cheap compared to artificial pigments and saw greater use for house painting, both inside and out. While the individual colors produced from different pigments offered a wide palette of colors, the mixing of

colors generated a near endless number of hues and shades.

Linseed oil was one of the most common binders used in making paint. Extracted from flax seed, the raw linseed oil was processed, typically by boiling it in copper kettles with driers (metallic salts). Boiling the oil helped to thicken it, and the driers accelerated the oxidation process/drying time of the oil.<sup>10</sup>

The mixing of paint begins with the grinding of the pigments into the oil, typically with a muller and slab. As with a mortar and pestle, the mixture of pigments and oil would be ground together between the flat bottom of the muller and surface of the slab, ensuring that the coarse pigments get broken down and evenly covered with oil. This thick mixture of colors ground in oil could either be used on its own or thinned with turpentine.

Turpentine, a distillate produced from the extracts of pine trees, is a “...volatile liquid consisting of aromatic hydrocarbons known as terpenes.” Turpentine’s property of easily mixing with vegetable oils, such as linseed oil, and its volatile nature make it an excellent solvent and vehicle in the mixing of oil-base paints.<sup>11</sup>

### Prussian Blue

Prussian Blue, a synthetic pigment, was accidentally discovered in or around 1707 in Berlin by Johann Jacob Diesbach, a Swiss chemist and paint maker. While attempting to create a different pigment, Diesbach unexpectedly produced a blue-black color that offered great tinting strength when mixed in oil. Prussian Blue is technically ferric ferrocyanide, a complex iron compound. One pound of Prussian Blue pigment will tint one ton (2,000 pounds) of white lead a sky-blue color.<sup>12</sup>



Because it could be manufactured synthetically, Prussian Blue ultimately became the predominant colorant in blue paints. Prussian Blue began to show up in New England as early as the 1720s. The blue paint found on Historic Deerfield's Wells-Thorn House was a mixture of Prussian Blue and White Lead. Use of this expensive pigment displayed the status of individuals wealthy enough to afford it.<sup>13</sup>

### Yellow Ochre

Following White Lead, Yellow Ochre was one of the most widely used pigments in house painting in the 18th and 19th centuries. Yellow Ochre is an earth pigment produced from the erosion of stone, principally those with high concentrations of iron oxides, along with clay.<sup>14</sup> It produces a bright color on its own but was commonly mixed with white pigments to form a range of tints from warm yellows to pale creams.



### White Lead

Lead Carbonate or White Lead, one of the oldest known pigments, goes as far back as antiquity. While naturally occurring, lead carbonate was manufactured for use as a pigment through a number of methods, all of which essentially encouraged the natural oxidation of lead to produce lead carbonate. As a pigment, White Lead in oil creates a pure white paint with a smooth, tough finish used extensively in house paints, both alone and mixed with other pigments to soften colors.<sup>15</sup>

### Limewash

Limewash is a waterborne paint as opposed to an oil-based paint. Whitewash and limewash are both terms for finishes defined as "...inorganically bound paints, which solidify through crystal formation."<sup>16</sup> With the addition of animal glue/size to act as a binder, a durable distemper paint could be made.

Countless recipes exist for producing whitewash. A typical mixture from the early 20th century reads: "*For dry interiors, a simple non-rubbing formula is recommended: 3 lb. of glue dissolved in 2 gallons of water; and add slowly to a cream made with 50 lb. of hydrated lime or from ½ bushel of lump quicklime carefully slaked and strained through a fine screen after slaking, with 7 gallons of water; thinning as required.*"<sup>17</sup> Given the inclusion of lime, these commonly used cheap, interior finish paints were traditionally the work of the plasterer and mason rather than house painter. The addition of earth pigments, stable when mixed with the alkaline lime, created colored washes. References to blue, yellow, and even pink wash are found in 18th- and 19th-century ledgers and documents.

### Marbling

Faux (false) finishes, the imitation of wood, stone, or some other natural material in paint, have gone on for centuries throughout a great many cultures.<sup>18</sup> While commonly used on furniture, it also found employment architecturally to improve the appearance of common materials, transforming them into exotic or highly figured woods or stone.

Faux marbling, the decorative effect to create the appearance of marble, appears in a couple of different styles. Polite marbling, where efforts are made to produce a realistic impression of the imitated material, can be quite convincing and at a distance can trick even the trained eye. The product of a skilled hand, it illustrates the work of someone familiar with the material they are copying and likely trained in how to copy it. Alternatively, vernacular marbling, more commonly found in rural settings, is seen on country furniture and architectural elements that offer a more stylistic and whimsical take on the material.<sup>19</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

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# Clara Alquist: A Life

by Daniel S. Sousa

A RESIDENT OF DEERFIELD, Massachusetts, from 1920 until her death in 1944, Clara Alquist (1876–1944) was a prolific painter, known best for her views of local landscapes and domestic architecture. Although a number of her oils, pastels, watercolors, and illuminated texts survive in local public and private collections, much of her life story has remained a mystery. Recent studies of her life provide valuable insight into her time in Deerfield and work as a painter in the village, but offer only limited facts about her origins and life prior to her arrival in Deerfield.<sup>1</sup> This article offers an overview of Alquist's life and seeks to add to the existing body of scholarship by sharing new research on Alquist's early life and Deerfield years, and drawing attention to some of her lesser-known artwork.

## Early Life

The daughter of Swedish-born parents John Lars Alquist (1835–1924) and Johanna Larson (1833–1882), Clara Alquist was born December 18, 1876 in Spencertown, New York, a hamlet of Austerlitz.<sup>2</sup> According to census records, her father and mother both emigrated from Sweden, the former likely arriving in the United States around 1871.<sup>3</sup> Clara also had two Swedish-born older siblings, Emily Alquist (1864–1931) and Anna (Alquist) (Smith) Hanks (1860–1922). After arriving in the United States, the family settled in New York City, where Clara's older brother, Edward (1874–1931), was born.<sup>4</sup> By the following year the family had relocated north to Austerlitz, where Clara's father appeared in the 1875 New York State Census as a farm laborer.

By 1880, the family had moved south to Stepney, a district of Monroe, Connecticut, located in the southwest portion of the state.<sup>5</sup> The next several years appear to have been unstable times for Clara and her family. She experienced the loss of her mother in 1882 when she was only six years old.<sup>6</sup> Her father quickly remarried to a woman by the name of "Marie C.," who died October 25, 1889. Clara undoubtedly had developed a close bond with her stepmother. Marie, as her obituary in the *Newtown Bee* of November 1, 1889, noted,

was "the second wife of Mr. Alquist, to whose two small children she was all that an own mother could be, loving and caring for them with a mother's devotion, working hard to give them an opportunity for education and improvement."

Clara's participation in certain community activities suggests a less than ideal home life during her adolescent years. Newspapers show that both Clara and her sister Emily attended events sponsored by local temperance organizations, suggesting there might have been problems with alcohol in the family. In July 1890, Clara attended a meeting organized by the local Company D of the Loyal Legion—which had just entered "its sixth year of work and battle against King Alcohol"—and won a prize for attendance.<sup>7</sup> A month earlier, Emily participated in a contest sponsored by the Women's Christian Temperance Union, where she offered a presentation titled "Rumselling our country's scourge."<sup>8</sup> However, both organizations offered educational opportunities to young people, rendering it possible that John encouraged his daughters' attendance at the events not due to problems with alcohol at home, but because he thought it might help improve his daughters' situation in life.

Clara's absence from home for prolonged periods may also indicate an unstable home environment. The *Newtown Bee* of November 7, 1890, reported that she would be spending the winter with the family of Philo Clarke—a prosperous farmer, president of the Newtown Savings Bank, and well-respected local figure—in Newtown, Connecticut. A year later, in September 1891, she saw Philo Clarke again, when her sisters visited her there, and she would visit Philo Clarke again in 1895. Years later, when writing in her diary, Clara reflected fondly about her time on Clarke's farm looking through the "bins of apples in Clarke's cellar when a girl."<sup>9</sup> Again, John may have approved of or even facilitated these visits in order to provide Clara with a nurturing atmosphere that he may have been unable to provide.

Clara's greatest educational opportunity presented itself around 1891, when at the age of fifteen, she entered Newtown

Academy just north of Monroe. She appears to have excelled as a student, likely taking advantage of the school's extensive offering of courses, including Latin, Greek, history, English literature, botany, physiology, algebra, and bookkeeping.<sup>10</sup> The *Newtown Bee* several times noted Clara's inclusion on the school's honor list—once on November 20, 1891 and another on April 15, 1892—and in the paper's June 10, 1892, issue she appeared among a small group of students having the highest average in the school's second division at the close of the school year. Clara must have boarded at the school during the year as her sister, Emily, is frequently noted in the local newspaper visiting her in Newtown.<sup>11</sup> However, in 1893 she was living with Emily in a rented home in Stepney owned by Henrietta Turney, staying there for only a little over a year.<sup>12</sup> Clara probably finished her studies in or before 1895 and moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut.<sup>13</sup> She may have joined her brother Edward, who worked for a lumber company there.<sup>14</sup>

Clara's whereabouts over the course of the next five years are largely unknown, but by 1900, as noted in the Federal Census, she worked as a "typewriter" in Manchester, Connecticut, to the east of Hartford. In 1901 and 1902 she lived and worked in Hartford, where she was listed in city directories as a bookkeeper—employed by Wise, Smith, and Co., a department store.<sup>15</sup> Several decades later, when writing in her diary in 1934, she recalled having "kept the Charge Ledger for Wise & Smith in Hfd." In the same entry, she explained how after leaving her position at Wise, Smith, and Co., she worked at the "H.P. Arms Commercial Design Office":

*H.P. Arms Commercial Design Office—my first work along the line of Art. I found out however there was very little "Art" in that Business. All copying & tracing, but good practice learning to letter and use square & ruling pen. Oh, a good lead up to Art.*<sup>16</sup>

The owner of the H.P. Arms Commercial Design Office, Hiram Phelps Arms (1852–1926), a deaf West Hartford-based

artist and illustrator, undoubtedly influenced Clara's later artistic career. Arms seems to have thought highly of Clara's work, apparently telling her, "you are the only woman in New England who can use a ruling pen perfectly."<sup>17</sup> Arms came to Hartford in 1898 from Baltimore, where he had operated a "studio in commercial and art engraving."<sup>18</sup>

Shortly after his arrival, the Billings & Spencer Company of Hartford commissioned Arms to produce a large watercolor of their factory building, which he completed in 1898.<sup>19</sup> In *The Hartford Courant* of April 25, 1903, Arms was noted as being the "manager of the Arms Art Press Company." According to the *Evening Sentinel* (South Norwalk, CT) of October 1, 1903, he later received a patent for "producing plates for printing," and might have instructed Clara in the art of printmaking. A young girl visiting Deerfield in the 1930s recalled how when she visited Clara she saw a number of her prints. The girl explained how printing "took her [Clara] two years and a half to master [and] when he had finished teaching



Top: Painting of Frary House, Clara Alquist, Deerfield, MA, 1920–1935. Watercolor on paper. Gift of Mr. & Mrs. J. Douglas Abercrombie. Historic Deerfield 71.142.

Right: Drawing of the Billings & Spencer Company of Hartford, Hiram Phelps Arms, Hartford, CT, 1898. Watercolor on paper. Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, 2014.138.2.





her, the instructor informed her that she was the best printer in the United States.”<sup>20</sup>

While living in the Hartford area, Clara apparently met and married a man by the name of William H. Thompson, an engraver with whom Clara was living at the taking of the 1910 U.S. Federal Census in Hartford. According to the census, the couple had been married for seven years, suggesting a marriage date of 1903. While writings on Clara’s life frequently identify Ernest Sherman (1870–1934) as her husband, no mention is made of her earlier marriage to William Thompson. Regardless, evidence of Clara’s prior relationship with William is evident in her personal writings and artwork. In a December 13, 1937, diary entry, Clara signed her name “Clara Alquist Thompson Sherman.” Moreover, in the collection of Historic Deerfield are two still life oil paintings—one of a basket with oranges signed “Clara Thompson /15” and the other of a brass bowl signed “Clara Alquist Thompson.” Oddly enough, in the 1930 census, Clara—then living in Deerfield and married to Ernest Sherman—was enumerated

as “Clara A. Thompson,” and identified as a “widow” and “boarder” living in the same household as Ernest Sherman, Sr. and their son Ernest, Jr.<sup>21</sup>

As with Thompson, Clara likely met Ernest Sherman while living in the Hartford area. In 1902, Sherman was working in the Hartford Trust Building on Main Street where he advertised “heraldry, coats of arms, book plates,” and “monograms,” not far from Clara’s place of work at 839 Main Street.<sup>22</sup> His work undoubtedly influenced Clara’s later efforts in the same medium, and he may have even instructed Clara in the art of heraldry and illuminated drawing. Ernest’s status as a skilled and respected artist can be inferred by state government commissions for works from him, including a senate resolution referenced in the *New Haven Morning Journal and Courier* of November 25, 1907.

Where and when Clara married Ernest is unknown, but it likely occurred before June 9, 1918, when their son Ernest, Jr. was born in New York City. The couple did not stay long in New York. Clara later recalled in her diary on November 11, 1934, that when Ernest was only five months old the family lived in Agawam, Massachusetts. They were still in Agawam at the taking of the 1920 Federal Census in January of that

Still life of basket with oranges, Clara Alquist, 1915. Oil on canvas.  
Historic Deerfield 2016.809.2.







year. While the census listed Ernest's occupation as an "artist" working in "water colors," Clara's occupation is listed as "none," suggesting that she had not begun to seriously pursue her art full-time.

### The Deerfield Years

After January 1920, the family relocated up the Connecticut River to Deerfield. There art became Clara's primary focus, as she and Ernest quickly became involved in the artistic life of the town. They opened the Acanthus Studio on Albany Road and later joined the Deerfield Industries in 1922.<sup>23</sup> The family relocated to Greenfield, Massachusetts, in 1924—living at 241 Wells Street—but returned to Deerfield in 1926, where they would continue to work for the remainder of their lives.

At the Acanthus Studio, Clara and her husband pursued painting, and as noted on their business cards, produced "coats-of-arms emblazoned," and "illuminations and book-plates." A number of Clara's works survive from these early years, revealing her productivity shortly after her arrival in the village. These include several illuminated works and various

Painting of Allen House, Clara Alquist, Deerfield, MA, 1922. Watercolor and pencil on paper. Gift of Mr. & Mrs. J. Douglas Abercrombie. Historic Deerfield 71.156.

watercolor landscapes, including a painting of Allen House dated 1922, and a painting of the Indian House Memorial dated 1929, the year of its construction. Clara also worked to display her art in several public exhibitions. In 1928, she organized an exhibition in Deerfield sponsored by the Connecticut Academy of Fine Art (CAFA), established in 1910, at which she displayed 16 paintings and an unknown number of "illuminated quotations."<sup>24</sup>

In addition to organizing a CAFA-sponsored exhibition, Clara became active with the Deerfield Industries in the late 1920s. In the summer of 1928, she displayed paintings of Deerfield houses in a Deerfield Industries exhibit at the Village Room located next to the present-day post office.<sup>25</sup> The following summer several of Clara's paintings were included in an exhibition organized by the Deerfield Industries to mark the completion of the Indian House Memorial,





Top: Drawing of the Thomas Dickinson House front door, Clara Alquist, Deerfield, MA, 1920-1935. Watercolor on paper, pencil. Gift of Mr. & Mrs. J. Douglas Abercrombie. Historic Deerfield 71.152.

Above: Illuminated quotation, Clara Alquist, Deerfield, MA, 1930. Watercolor and ink on paper. Historic Deerfield, 2016.809.56.



a replica of the 1699 John Sheldon House. According to the *Greenfield Recorder-Gazette* of August 10, 1954, Clara contributed “pictures of old houses and doorways” to the summer 1929 Indian House Memorial exhibit, which may have included a drawing of the Thomas Dickinson House front door.

When creating her artwork, Clara looked to several sources. For her coats of arms, she consulted volumes on heraldry, including Hugh Clark’s *An Introduction to Heraldry* (London, 1884).<sup>26</sup> The variety of quotes found on her illuminated texts also reveals Clara had access to a wide assortment of literary sources. Clara may have also used photographs as a source of inspiration for her work. The recent discovery of a large number of photographs from an undated Alquist-Sherman family album in the collection of Historic Deerfield reveals that both Clara and Ernest pursued amateur photography. All of the photographs feature local subjects and were likely taken when Clara and Ernest lived in Deerfield and Greenfield in the early to mid-1920s. The scenic vistas captured in some of these photographs are reminiscent of some of Clara’s landscape paintings of the Deerfield Valley.

Local architecture and the natural landscape served as Clara’s greatest inspiration, which she captured using two very different styles. While her calligraphic works and some of her architectural drawings (such as doorways) are done in a precise linear style, her other paintings could be more impressionistic. Many examples of the latter, painted *en plein air* or outdoors, bring to mind the work of Deerfield artist Augustus Vincent Tack (1870–1949) and the watercolors produced by a largely Boston-based group of artists known as the aquarellists.<sup>27</sup> From her writings Clara clearly enjoyed working outdoors, painting and observing nature’s transient beauty. She recalled a time travelling “to the north end of town” to paint, noting “the shadows I was after were shortening so set to work to hurry my painting along and as usual thoroughly immersed myself to unconsciousness of others which were rushing past.”<sup>28</sup>

Beginning in the 1930s, particularly the latter portion of the decade, Clara exhibited her works with greater frequency at a variety of venues. At the start of the decade, Clara became quite active with the Deerfield Valley Arts Association (DVAA), founded in 1931. Over the next decade she contributed regularly to their annual summer art exhibitions, the first of which took place in 1932. When she first participated, she contributed a wide variety of material. In 1934, she displayed a pastel of her son Ernest, an illuminated text titled *Ode to Pan*, oil paintings, and watercolors.<sup>29</sup> She and her husband received positive press for their illuminated works. The June 26, 1934, *Greenfield Daily Recorder-Gazette* wrote, “This work is considered unique and must be examined closely to realize to the full its craftsmanship and beauty. It seems to belong to some other age, when time and hourly wage were never in the



mind of the artist, but only the perfection of the work.” At later exhibitions she limited herself primarily to oil paintings and watercolors, including one titled *Old Deerfield Neighborhood* in 1937 and another, *Sunny Bank*, in 1938.<sup>30</sup>

Clara also contributed to several smaller DVAA-sponsored exhibitions, including a Christmas Bazaar in 1935, and another smaller exhibition in 1936 featuring the work of 24 women, all DVAA members.<sup>31</sup> She worked to exhibit her paintings outside of Franklin County when she participated in a small exhibition at the Stoneleigh-Burnham School in Springfield in 1935, and showed several paintings at CAFA exhibitions in Hartford in 1934 and 1935.<sup>32</sup> Her reputation as an artist appears to have grown during this period, as her diary noted several interested parties who visited her in Deerfield on October 7 and 13, 1934, to inspect her artwork. Reflecting her growing success, Clara showed a painting titled *New England Meadow Landscape* at the 1939 Exhibition of Contemporary Arts at the New York World’s Fair.<sup>33</sup>

As a result of the Great Depression, Clara, widowed in 1934, sometimes found herself lowering her prices for her art and even accepting non-monetary compensation. In one instance, she completed a \$75 coat of arms but was paid in food and \$2.00 in cash.<sup>34</sup> Her appointment in 1936 as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) easel painter, a position she held until 1937, proved to be life altering as it “brought her a regular paycheck on which she could depend, gave her new

Top: Deerfield Valley from Greenfield, Clara Alquist or Ernest Sherman, c. 1920. Historic Deerfield Photographic Archive.

Above: Letter opener, Clara Alquist, Deerfield, MA, 1938. Wood, ink. Hall and Kate Peterson Fund for Minor Antiques. Historic Deerfield 2023.1.

opportunities to exhibit her works outside of the Connecticut River Valley, and likely earned her the attention of a wider range of artists and exhibitors as well.”<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps as both a marketing device and a means to supplement her income, Alquist pursued other art projects. This practice was heretofore unknown until Historic Deerfield’s recent acquisition of a hand-carved wooden letter opener inscribed, “Old Deerfield / C. Alquist,” in black and blue ink. While it is not known whether Alquist carved the letter opener herself, she undoubtedly applied the inscription. The “O” and “D” in “Old Deerfield” are similar to her illuminated texts, and on March 11, 1938, she recorded in her diary, “painted initials on paper knives.” Clara also employed her calligraphic skills to supplement her income by drawing diplomas. On November 25, 1934, she wrote in her diary “went down to Academy to see Mrs. Heselton [?] about Diplomas.”

During this period of slow business and meager returns, Alquist experimented with other forms of drawing. Three undated watercolors—all signed by Alquist—in Historic Deerfield’s collection depart quite radically from her other





Drawing of an outdoor scene, Clara Alquist, Deerfield, MA, ca. 1935. Watercolor on paper. Historic Deerfield 2016.809.54.





Cartoon strip, Clara Alquist, Deerfield, MA, ca. 1935. Paper, ink. Historic Deerfield 2016.809.53.

artwork. Unlike many of Alquist's surviving watercolors and oil paintings, these watercolors include caricatured human subjects. Each of these watercolors feature outdoor scenes, possibly of the area immediately around Alquist's Deerfield home on Eaglebrook Hill, and may even depict Alquist working in her garden, a topic she frequently referenced in her diaries from the mid-1930s. Clara even translated this type of drawing into cartoon strips, including a heretofore unknown six-panel strip that tells the story of a man who has run into problems training his dog. Alquist undoubtedly experimented with these caricatures and comic book illustrations with the intention of selling them to local newspapers or other sources. In fact, in November 1935 as noted in her diary, Clara sent a letter to Frank Sterner, the local supervisor of the Federal Art Project (a New Deal Program), outlining a number of artworks she would be sending him in Boston. The list included a pastel, an oil painting, two illuminated designs, and "3 Cartoons or Cover Designs."

By 1940, evidence suggests that Clara still worked as a WPA painter, based on her listing in the census for that year as a "Painter Artist" for the "W.P.A. Project."<sup>36</sup> In her sixties, Clara continued to show at the annual DVAA summer and other DVAA-sponsored exhibitions, such as those held in Greenfield for National Art Week in 1940 and American Art Week in 1942. She also continued to send paintings to Hartford for CAFA exhibitions, including one titled *Over the Hillside*, now owned by Historic Deerfield, in March 1940.

Unfortunately, Alquist spent her final years largely separated from family. Clara did not remarry following Ernest's death in 1934 and lived primarily with her son throughout the 30s and early 40s. However, the Second World War separated Clara and her son for a little over a year starting in January 1942, when Ernest enlisted in the United States Naval Reserve. Clara died on May 5, 1944, of acute heart failure at the age of 68 and was buried next to her husband Ernest in Deerfield's Laurel Hill Cemetery. The relatively short obituary that appeared the next day in the *Greenfield Recorder-Gazette* eulogized Alquist as a "widely known landscape artist," reflecting the status she had achieved.

From very humble beginnings, with apparently little formal art training, Clara had managed to rise to a place of prominence in Deerfield's early-20th-century art scene. In Deerfield, Alquist matured as an artist, frequently choosing the natural landscape, with which she had a great personal fascination, as the subject of her paintings.

She expressed her love for the landscape when copying a stanza into her diary from a poem by William Herbert Carruth titled "Each in His Own Tongue." In it, Carruth reflects on the autumn season:

*A haze on the far horizon,  
The infinite, tender sky,  
The ripe rich tint of the cornfields,  
And the wild geese flying high —  
And all over upland and lowland  
The charm of the golden-rod —  
Some of us call it Autumn  
And others call it God.*

"This is my excuse for living in the D— [Deerfield] Valley," Clara noted immediately following the stanza. For Alquist, Deerfield and its enchanting natural landscape was not only her adoptive home, but the inspiration and life blood of her work.



## ENDNOTES

1. See, in particular, Samuel Schiffer, "Lost and Found: Clara Alquist and Her Art in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s" (Deerfield, MA: Historic Deerfield Summer Fellowship Paper, 2016), and Suzanne L. Flynt, *Poetry to the Earth: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Deerfield* (Stockbridge, MA: Hard Press Editions, 2012), 201–3.
2. "Mrs. Clara A. Sherman," *Greenfield Recorder-Gazette*, May 6, 1944.
3. 1920 U.S. Census, Ridgefield Park, Bergen Co., NJ, household of Edward J. Alquist, FamilySearch.org.
4. 1875 New York State Census, Austerlitz, Columbia Co., NY, household of Lewis Alquest [sic], FamilySearch.org.
5. 1880 United States Census, Monroe, Fairfield Co., CT, household of John L. Alquist, FamilySearch.org.
6. Find A Grave, database with images, findagrave.com, memorial 92772178, Joanna Larson Alquist (1833–1882), Stepney Cemetery, Fairfield Co., CT.
7. "Stepney," *Newtown Bee*, July 4, 1890.
8. *Ibid.*, June 27, 1890.
9. Entry for November 16, 1934, Clara Alquist diary, Box 1, Folder 1, Alquist-Sherman Family Papers, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library.
10. *Newtown Bee*, June 10, 1892.
11. "Stepney," *Newtown Bee*, April 15, 1892.
12. *Ibid.*, April 21, 1893; "Fairfield County Chat: Stepney and Vicinity," *Newtown Bee*, November 23, 1894.
13. "Affairs About Town," *Newtown Bee*, September 27, 1895.
14. "Fairfield County News: Stepney and Vicinity," *Newtown Bee*, May 17, 1895; "Fairfield County News: Stepney," *Newtown Bee*, January 19, 1894.
15. *Geer's Hartford City Directory* (1901), 40; *Geer's Hartford City Directory* (1902), 48.
16. Entry for February 19, 1934, Clara Alquist diary.
17. Entry for September 7, 1934, Clara Alquist diary.
18. "His Skull Fractured: H.P. Arms Seriously Injured by Runaway," *The Hartford Courant*, April 25, 1903.
19. Richard C. Malley, "A Legacy in Steel: Billings & Spencer Co.," *Inside the CHS*, the blog of the Connecticut Historical Society, posted May 1, 2014, <https://manuscripts.wordpress.com/2014/05/01/a-legacy-in-steel-billings-spencer-co/> (accessed October 27, 2023).
20. Letter written by Helen Carr, October 23, 1934, copied into Clara Alquist diary.
21. 1930 United States Census, Deerfield, Franklin Co., MA, household of Ernest Sherman, FamilySearch.org.
22. *The Owl Annual* (Hartford Public High School Yearbook), vol. 7 (1902): xvii; *Geer's Hartford City Directory* (1902), 48.
23. Flynt, *Poetry to the Earth*, 202.
24. "Exhibition of Paintings by Clara Alquist, C.A.F.A., Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1928," Box 1, Folder 2, Alquist-Sherman Family Papers.
25. "Deerfield: Industries to Exhibit," *The Greenfield Recorder*, July 7, 1928.
26. Undated page of notes written by Clara Alquist, Box 1, Folder 2, Alquist-Sherman Family Papers.
27. Schiffer, "Lost and Found," 19–23.
28. Entry for September 24, 1937, Clara Alquist diary.
29. "Deerfield Arts Opening Third Annual Exhibit," *The Daily Recorder-Gazette* (Greenfield, MA), June 16, 1934. The pastel of her son and the illuminated text are in the collection of Historic Deerfield.
30. "Deerfield Valley Arts Association 6th Annual Exhibition" and "Deerfield Valley Arts Association 7th Annual Exhibition" pamphlets, Deerfield Town Papers, Voluntary Societies, Art Groups, Deerfield Valley Arts Association, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library.
31. "Valley Arts to Conduct Bazaar," *Greenfield Daily Recorder-Gazette*, December 3, 1935; "24 Women to Exhibit Art," *Greenfield Gazette*, January 22, 1936.
32. Schiffer, "Lost and Found," 38, 47–48.
33. *Ibid.*, 49.
34. *Ibid.*, 38.
35. *Ibid.*, 42.
36. "Valley Artists Exhibit Works," *Greenfield Recorder-Gazette*, November 25, 1940; "Stores Exhibit Artists' Work

## CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

**Carolyn Anderson**, Professor Emerita, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, has published and lectured widely on film. She is the co-author of three books about American documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman.

**Martin Antonetti** is the Printer in Residence at Historic Deerfield's Wilson Printing Office. He has written, lectured, and taught on various book-history subjects at Northwestern University, Smith College, and Rare Book School at the University of Virginia.

**David Bosse**, retired Librarian of Historic Deerfield and the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, has been a contributor to *Historic Deerfield* for the past 25 years.

**John Davis** was Provost and Under Secretary for Museums, Education, and Research at the Smithsonian Institution before becoming President of Historic Deerfield in 2021. His most recent book (co-authored with Michael Leja) is *Art of the United States, 1750–2000* (2020).

**Eric Gradoia** is an Architectural Historian with the Albany firm of MCWB Architects. Prior to his current position, he was the Director of Historic Preservation at Historic Deerfield. He has worked as an adjunct faculty member in the Historic Preservation programs at Roger Williams University and the Boston Architectural College (BAC). His primary expertise is in 17th, 18th, and 19th century vernacular architecture, construction technology, and domestic conveniences.

**Christine Mandel** is a long-time resident of Petersham, Massachusetts, where she served for many years as curator of the town's Historical Society. Her current research focuses on 19th-century Petersham history.

**Susan Schulten** is Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Denver, where she has taught since 1996. She is the author of several books, including *A History of America in 100 Maps* (Chicago) and, most recently, *Emma Willard: Maps of History* (Visionary Press). She is an avid student of schoolgirl maps and looks forward to continuing this research.

**Daniel S. Sousa**, Assistant Curator at Historic Deerfield, previously worked as a researcher at the New England Historic Genealogical Society and contributed to the Boston Furniture Archive, an online database organized by the Winterthur Museum.

**Lea Stephenson** is the Luce Foundation Curatorial Fellow in American Paintings & Works on Paper at Historic Deerfield. She is a PhD candidate in Art History at the University of Delaware and specializes in late 19th-century American and British art.

**Lauren Whitley** is Curator of Historic Textiles and Clothing at Historic Deerfield and previously worked at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where she was senior curator in the Department of Textiles and Fashion Arts. She is currently organizing an exhibition that will open in April 2025 and feature highlights from Historic Deerfield's collection of fashionable dress.

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