AMERICAN DECORATIVE STENCILING: 1840 TO 1940

Emma Marconi

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree

Master of Science in Historic Preservation

Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation

Columbia University

May 2012
This thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognize that its copyright rests with its author and that no image (by the author) or quotation from the thesis and no information derived from it may be published without the author’s prior consent. To obtain consent to use quotations or images from this thesis or obtain higher resolution images provided by the author in this thesis contact the author at ejm2166@gmail.com.
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Abstract</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: The Stencil</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Origins and Early History of Stenciling</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: The Evolution of the Painter to the Painter Decorator</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: The Victorian Era: Its History, Design and Style</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five: Design and Use of Stenciling in the Victorian Era</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six: Decline of Stenciling in America, 1900 to 1940</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Study Sites</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Bibliography</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This thesis analyzes American stenciling from 1840 to 1940 and explores how stenciling mirrored various shifts in society and architectural and decorative styles during that time period. During the Victorian Period, the industrialization of the United States and many of the related changes in American society played a pivotal role in the development of the professional decorator/painter and the use of stencils in decorating schemes.

Additionally, this thesis provides an in depth analysis of the development of the painter into the painter/decorator thus creating a demand for the extensive use of stencils throughout the late 1800s.

Understanding the significance of stenciled interiors will lead to a better interpretation of historic structures and increase the knowledge and appreciation of stenciling. Ultimately, however, as American society moved from the Victorian era to the Modern era, the preference for simplified and streamlined architectural styles along with a decline in decorators’ abilities resulted in the decreased use of stenciling as a decorative finish.
Acknowledgements

First, thank you to Mary Jablonski, my thesis advisor. Thank you for your input and suggestions. Without your help, my thesis would be a general look at stenciling rather than an in-depth stylistic evaluation.

A special thank you to Janet Foster, one of my thesis readers, who drove me around New Jersey to look at four study sites and read numerous drafts of my thesis. I am very grateful for your help. Without it, my thesis would be missing valuable information.

And thank you to Jeffery Johnson, my other thesis reader, who provided me with photographs of two thesis sites I did not have the opportunity to visit and provided me with important feedback during my thesis jury.

Also, a very special thank you to my family and friends for your encouragement and support. Mom, Dad and Chris: Thank you for listening to me talk about my thesis day in and day out for the past few months. Mom, thank you for driving with me to the study sites in Connecticut and Massachusetts. I always enjoy our driving trips together. Dad, thank you for reading my thesis drafts. I always value your input and advice. James: Thank you for listening to me rant about my thesis ideas every day and night. And thank you for driving me throughout Minnesota in search of stenciling. To my fellow Columbia Historic Preservation classmates: Thank you for understanding the challenges of writing a thesis, listening to my ideas and providing helpful feedback.
Introduction

During the Victorian Period, the industrialization of America and many of the related changes in American society played a pivotal role in the development of the professional decorator/painter and the use of stencils in decorating schemes. Ultimately, however, as American society moved from the Victorian era to the Modern era, the preference for simplified and streamlined architectural styles along with a decline in decorators’ abilities resulted in the decreased use of stenciling as a decorative finish. This thesis will analyze American stenciling from 1840 to 1940 and explore how stenciling mirrored various shifts in society and architectural and decorative styles during that time period.

The history of decorative stenciling in America from 1840 onwards has been largely overlooked and left undocumented. The majority, if not all, of the publications pertaining to American architectural stenciling focus on structures built up until the 1840’s based on the premise that after this time period the use of stenciling declined as wallpaper became more economically viable as a decorative finish. *The Art and Craft of Wall Stenciling* by Richard Bacon states that “the height of its [stenciling] popularity was from about 1815 to 1840…by the 1840s; however, interest in the fine craft of wall stenciling had begun to ebb. Machines made it possible to manufacture a wide range of printed patterns on cheap paper.”¹ While researchers stopped studying stenciling after 1840, it remained in active use and was extremely popular during the late 1800s. Industrialization led to a growing middle class and stenciling provided an accessible way for members of society to demonstrate their growing wealth, refinement and knowledge of foreign cultures. Additionally, during the later 1800s, mass production of stencils

and the development of new stencil materials provided decorators with time saving and economic benefits.

One of the many researchers on early American stenciling was Janet Waring. Waring’s 1937 book, *Early American Stencils on Walls and Furniture*, was one of the first texts to explore the history and importance of stenciling. The time period documented by Waring ranges from the 1700s to 1840. Since 1937, researchers such as Ann Eckert Brown, Alica Bancroft Fjelstul, Patricia Brown Schad, Richard Bacon and Barbara Marhowfer have continued to focus on this time period established by Waring, leaving a gap in scholarship relating to late 19th century stenciling. It was due to this lack of published work that I decided to analyze the evolution of stenciling with a focus on the later 1800s.

The methodology of this thesis included investigating several study sites in the United States to examine the long forgotten history of stenciling. The structures, whether houses, commercial buildings or armories, provide abundant primary source material. In addition, archival resources in Manhattan included materials at Columbia University’s Avery and Butler libraries, the New York Public Library and the New York Historical Society. Research included trade catalogues at Avery Classics and late 19th century stencils from Hartford, Connecticut at Avery Archives as well as research of secondary sources and newspaper articles from the late 19th century online.²

Early stenciling played a major role in the decoration of interior spaces throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Knowledge of American wall stenciling, its history, its artists, and its use

---

of colors and patterns will provide tools for modern day preservationists, historians, conservationists, students and property owners. The lack of published research on late 19th century stenciling and an overall lack of published work on historic finishes makes this research important. By analyzing the evolution of stenciling and related trends, including the use of patterns inspired by foreign cultures, the use of motifs expressed in varying styles and the simplification of stencil patterns, connections between stenciling of the late 1800s and the early 1900s become evident. Additionally, this thesis provides an in depth analysis of the development of the painter into the painter/decorator thus creating a demand for the extensive use of stencils throughout the late 1800s. Overall, understanding the significance of stenciled interiors will lead to a better interpretation of historic structures and increase the knowledge and appreciation of stenciling. This will hopefully prevent further destruction of historic stenciled interior finishes. The identification of wall stenciling as an important element of interior decoration after 1840 must be recognized before alterations and demolitions forever erase more examples. If we continue to lose our stencil work, we are losing a part of our American heritage.
Chapter One: The Stencil

The term stencil derives from the word estenceler which is French for “to cover with sparkle” and can be traced to the Latin word scintilla, meaning spark. A stencil is “a pattern made by brushing or wiping ink or paint over a shield of metal or paper in which the required design has been cut. The paint will go through only the cut-out areas. The design can be reproduced many times over on walls, ceilings, furniture, floors, etc. In the 19th century, it was used in place of wallpaper as a method of getting an allover design on walls.”

In general, a stencil starts as a sketch or drawing that is redrawn to include ties, which hold the stencil together once the design is cut. The pattern is transferred to the desired stencil plate material and cut. The stencil is then waterproofed and used for the application of paint, leaf or metallic bronzing powders as seen in Image 1.

Image 1


Use of Stencils

Stencils were originally used as an alternative to wallpaper. During the early settlement of the American colonies, wallpaper was not a necessity, there was little manufacturing in the colonies and wallpaper could only be imported from Europe. Thus it was expensive, subject to

---


high tariffs and a luxury only the wealthy could afford. However, stenciling was an inexpensive way to decorate a room with patterns similar to wallpaper. Early wallpaper was decorated by stencils and, as a result, it was easy to create stencil patterns for direct application to walls that mirrored early wallpaper designs, specifically the use of naturalist and floral motifs.

Creating a stencil required few materials. The only materials necessary were paper, a knife, linseed oil, paint, brushes and creativity. During the 1700s, these materials were generally available locally.

**Creating a Stencil**

A description of the process of creating a stencil design can be found in the 1924 book, *New Stencils and Their Use: A Practical Working Method for the Average Painter and Decorator* by F. N. Vanderwalker. The process appears simple; find paper, draw a design, cut out the design and varnish the paper. But stencils were not that simple. Creating stencils was a complicated, time consuming process that required a level of skill and artistic talent to compose a detailed design, cut the design properly with smooth lines, and determine the number and location of repeats for applying the stencil to a wall or ceiling.

When creating a stencil pattern of original design, the decorator had to first draw the design. Traditionally, it was sketched on paper or fabric. However, by the late 1800s, white lining paper for wallpaper or the reverse side of wallpaper left over from a previous project was

---

5 Bacon 1991, 1.


Once the sketch for the stencil was complete, it would be studied to determine where it was natural to add ties. Creating stencil ties was the most challenging aspect for an inexperienced painter or decorator. Ties are a necessary component of any design. They are the pieces of the stencil plate that remain to hold the design together after it has been cut. If separate design components intersect, such as two leaves, then ties are used to differentiate the two components. Ties also allow the design to be separated so that different colors can be used such as a piece of fruit in a bowl. A tie must be drawn around the bowl or fruit to separate the two objects. Once these areas are determined, the design should be redrawn or traced with the ties added. Overall, ties help convey the design. If an outline of a circle is desired and a circle is cut, the shape will fall out and transfer a solid circle not a hollow space. In order to achieve a hollow circle, the center section must to be held together with ties. After the circle outline is painted on a wall, the
blank spaces of the ties can be painted using a small brush or left as blank space to add to the
design.⁹

Image 2

This image shows a drawing without ties to the far left and a
drawing with ties to the near left.  
Courtesy of Adelaide Mickel,  
Stenciling. Peoria, Illinois:  
Manual Arts, 1920. Web,  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89047197884> (accessed February  

The thickness and strength of the stencil plate and the design determine the number and width of
ties that are necessary. Ties were not necessary for every design. This can be seen by two
stencils created by P.C. Grierson in Image 3 and 4.

Image 3

Stencil created by P.C. Grierson. No ties were used to create this design. Courtesy of Avery Archives, Columbia University, New York, NY. Unnamed folder with P.C. Grierson stencils.

Image 4

Another stencil created by P.C. Grierson without ties in the design. 
Courtesy of Avery Archives, Columbia University, New York, NY. Unnamed folder with P.C. Grierson stencils.

⁹ Vanderwalker 1924, 48.
Once the sketch of a design is complete it is transferred to a stencil plate, the material cut to create a stencil. From the 1700s to the 1900s, stencil plate materials changed due to industrialization. During the 1700s, stencils were cut from brown paper and then oiled or coated in animal fat to waterproof the paper. Some painters used leather even though it was difficult to cut. More traditional materials for stencil plates included vellum, parchment, lead foil and thin brass. The last two materials were not recommended for detailed designs. Metal stencils were more difficult to cut compared to paper stencils; however, they were particularly useful when transferring a design to a curved surface or molding. An 1885 article, in The Decorator and Furnisher, suggested two additional materials for the creation of stencil plates; thin tin and cartridge paper; the latter being more easily used by an amateur. By 1895, manila paper, which was sold in rolls, was also used as a stencil plate material. While leather reemerged as a stencil plate material in the late 19th century, it was infrequently used since it was difficult to cut especially if detailed patterns were desired. The one constant stencil plate material, even into the 1900s when machine made precut stencils were easily available, was hardened paper.

Painters/decorators, such as Grierson, used various techniques to transfer designs to a stencil plate. One method used to create a stencil required that the sketching material be larger than the intended design and folded down the center. After the fold was made, it was opened and

---


12 Parsons Feb. 1895, 181-183.


14 Parsons Feb. 1895, 181-183.
a design was sketched on one side using charcoal. If this paper was then folded with the design on the inside and rubbed, the impression of the design showed on the paper creating a symmetrical pattern. This technique is illustrated in Image 5.

![Image 5]

To the far left is sketch of a stencil. This sketch was folded along the center line to copy the symmetrical components of the design. The center rosettes are asymmetrical. They were drawn before the design was transferred. To the near left is the completed stencil where the pattern was copied and cut. Courtesy of Avery Archives, Columbia University, New York, NY. Unnamed folder with P.C. Grierson stencils.

Another technique for creating stencils entails pricking half the design with a needle. This paper was folded and pounced with charcoal to transfer the design that could then be completed. This technique was also described in the 1803 English text *Elements of Science and Art: Being a Familiar Introduction to Natural Philosophy and Chemistry, Together with their Application to a Variety of Elegant and Useful Arts* by John Imison. A similar method was to

---

15 Parsons Feb. 1895, 181-83.

prick the entire stencil on tracing paper, place this on the stencil plate and pounce with charcoal or chalk to transfer the design.\textsuperscript{17} Grierson used this method for murals as illustrated in Image 6.

Unless a painter had experience creating stencils, it was suggested by F.N. Vanderwalker a 20\textsuperscript{th} century decorator and author, that they should not attempt to create their own designs and instead buy premade stencils from a paint supply store. Vanderwalker paid particular attention to the young decorator stating that without an apprentice system, which he believed was lacking in the early 1900s, the young painter should use stock designs rather than risk creating an ill composed pattern. Vanderwalker suggested that if pre-made stencils were used, they should fit the character of the room. He also recommended that the homeowner should not create their own designs.

\textsuperscript{17} This process has similarities to a process used in ancient China. In 1907, Sir Aurel Stein from England discovered what is still considered today one of the oldest patterns used to transfer designs. These templates were used in the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas in Thunhuang, China and date from approximately 500 to 1000 AD. The patterns were made using treated paper with holes outlining the desired design. To transfer the pattern, charcoal was pushed through the holes and the design was connected by hand. Adele Bishop and Cile Lord. The Art of Decorative Stenciling. New York, NY: Penguin, 1985, 9.
own stencils; rather they should hire an experienced decorator due to the skill needed to create a well composed design.\textsuperscript{18}

**Cutting a Stencil**

After the sketch was complete and transferred to a stencil plate, the next step was to cut out the design. To cut a paper stencil, the paper was placed on plate glass and cut with a steel blade stencil knife.

F.N. Vanderwalker noted that a paper stencil plate should be dampened with a wet cloth and the four corners should be adhered to the glass prior to cutting. This allowed the paper to lay flat while it dried and shrunk to size, tightening to facilitate easier cutting. During this process, the cutter moved the glass so the knife was always cutting towards them. If a tie broke, a strip of paper or cloth was glued in place to hold the stencil together. When cutting metal stencils, a lead block with chisels, punches, files, drills and saws were employed.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} Vanderwalker 1924, 33-38.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid 54-55.
**Waterproofing and Hardening the Stencil Plate**

A number of materials could be used to waterproof the stencil and add durability to the stencil plate material. The paper could be coated with varnish, drying oil such as linseed oil or painters’ shellac, which is a mixture of shellac and alcohol, to create a waterproofed surface.\(^{20}\) If drying oil was chosen, it needed to dry overnight while painters’ shellac only took half an hour to dry.\(^ {21}\)

For a temporary stencil that did not require many applications, beeswax could be rubbed along the edges after a stencil was cut. Another method utilized ordinary writing paper dipped into melted paraffin. Once this was saturated, it was removed and held by its corners until dry.\(^ {22}\)

**The Mass Production of Stencils**

As mass produced stencils became available in the late 1800s due to industrialization, hand-made stencils were no longer required; however they were still used by decorators. The decorator and homeowner had multiple decorating options when considering stencils. The homeowners could stencil the room themselves (although this was not easy) or they could hire a painter/decorator who would create a stencil or order a stencil from a catalogue, at the local paint shop or at a stencil specialty store.

While industrialization brought about the mass production of many items including stencils, there were skeptics. Not everyone thought this was a good idea. In 1900, George R.

---

\(^{20}\) "Stenciling" June 1885: 80.

\(^{21}\) Parsons Feb. 1895, 181-183.

Rigby, author of *Design for Stencil Work*, stated: “I see, therefore, no likelihood of our ever developing stenciling as a manufacturer’s art to any great extent. In some smaller things it may be that there are possibilities.”23 To produce and sell these stencils new companies were established such as Chicago Stencil Co., a group in Chicago which consisted of numerous decorators.24 Individuals also established stores such as the Stencil Treasury, started in 1887 by Theo. G. Wiggers at 207 East 59th Street, New York. The Stencil Treasury, which sold stencils and stenciling tools, marketed to the painter providing them with the ability to choose from a number of designs on hand at the shop, to order special designs or have custom patterns created.25

*Image 8*


---


Applying Stencils

Historically, stencils were applied with the help of apprentices. For large stencils, apprentices would hold the stencil while a painter/decorator applied the paint. For smaller stencils, the painter/decorator would hold the stencil against a surface and apply pressure to the stencil plate while painting to insure the stencil stayed in place.\(^\text{26}\)

In 1895, Frederick Parsons, author of “The Art and Practice of Stenciling” in *The Decorator and Furnisher* reflected on the changes to the stenciling profession:

> “Twenty, or even ten, years ago the expert professional decorator had to make many little accessory tools and devices which today are substituted by machine-made articles, and the modern stencil pin is one of the latter which he values highly. With a few of these points one pair of hands is able to execute a large diaper design on a wall which would otherwise have to be held in place by one or two other assistants. With the average plaster wall they penetrate readily, hold firmly, and if drawn straight out make no noticeable mark on the groundwork. For ceiling stenciling it is well to use double the quantity of pins, as the weight of the pattern is pulling them out.”\(^\text{27}\)

The machine made stencil pins referred to were invented c. 1875 to hold a stencil in place on a wall or ceiling. Each stencil, whether hand-made or pre-cut by a machine, had small holes or

\(^{26}\) Vanderwalker 1924, 90.

registers used to line up the design. Pins were placed in these registers rather than hiring an assistant with steady hands to hold larger patterns while a decorator applied the paint.  

Tools that were necessary to apply a stencil included stencil pins, stencil brushes, clean pots of water for each brush, a chalk line (to guide the stencils) and paint. Stencil brushes had short thick handles and short bristles. To use the brush, the handle would be held by the whole hand. The brush had to be proportional to the size of the openings of the stencil. Smaller patterns required smaller stencil brushes. Highlights in the design were applied with a small regular brush after the stencil was applied to the entire room.  

![Image 10](Image 10)


![Image 11](Image 11)


---

28 Parsons, April 1895, 24.

Before applying a stencil to a wall or ceiling, the room and stencil was measured. To stencil a room, the design must repeat. The location and number of repeats was calculated which was a difficult task that required basic knowledge of geometry.

To transfer the stencil it was placed flat against the wall. If necessary, pins or tacks were used to hold the stencil against the surface. For a thin, simple repeating border design, a painter/decorator started in one corner of a room and continued until the entire room was stenciled. If a larger border was used, handling corners could become an issue. In this case, corners were stenciled last. The painter would measure the wall and calculate the number of times the stencil would be applied per wall. Starting in the center, the stencil was transferred repeatedly until it was near a corner. Without bending the stencil, the space from the corner to the last completed section was measured and marked on the stencil plate. The other half of the design, meant to continue on the adjacent wall, was then marked off on the wall. From this point, the design continued. Once the entire room was stenciled, the stencil plate was bent carefully to transfer the designs at the room corners. When applying the color, the stencil brush was moved in a dabbing circular motion to properly apply the paint and help hold the stencil plate in place if pins or tacks were not used.  

In its simplest form, stencils were easy to conceive and create. Yet with imagination and careful application they were used to develop complex designs. While materials and application methods changed over time, the process a painter/decorator used to create stencils remained almost unchanged from its early origins.

30 Sherwin-Williams Company 1910, 4-8.
Chapter Two: Origins and Early History of Stenciling

The art of decoration is as old as permanent shelter. Even in the Stone Age, markings were made on cave walls. This decoration, as all decoration that has come after it, expressed the culture, the living environment and the beliefs of the people who lived during these time periods. Stenciling as a form of decoration was utilized by many cultures. The origins of stenciling began as early as the 5th century B.C., when Etruscans used copper stencils to decorate vases. Around 5000 B.C. Egyptians used templates for wall painting and enhancing tombs. In Asia, the Chinese stenciled caves while the Japanese used templates to decorate fabrics and screens. Some examples of Greek and Roman decoration also used stencils and, as early as the 6th century, lettered stencils were used to initial documents by leaders such as the Roman Emperor Justinian and Charlemagne.

Early History of Stenciling

Throughout the Middle Ages, stencils were widely used in Europe for ornate ecclesiastical decoration and to decorate manuscripts, religious texts, music scores and political banners. When wallpaper was invented in the first decade of the 1500s, stenciling was used to

---


32 Bishop and Lord 1985, 10.

apply decoration to the paper. From the late 17th century to the early 19th century, stenciling reached its peak in Europe. Ornate styles of Baroque and Rococo design called for intricate stenciled patterns throughout churches and palaces as well as on furniture, textiles and wallpaper. In addition, the popularity of stenciling in Europe corresponded to its introduction and use in the American colonies.

**Origins of Stenciling in the United States**

Three theories currently exist about the potential origins of stenciling in the United States. The first theory suggests that after the American Revolution, Hessian soldiers stenciled building interiors as they moved from town to town. The second theory states that settlers from the Rhine Valley stenciled in Pennsylvania after they arrived in the colonies. The third theory was developed by Janet Waring (1879-1941) in her book *Early American Stencils on Walls and Furniture* (1937). Waring believed English settlers from East Anglia brought stenciling with them to the American colonies. The English did play a very large role in the early history of the United States. Approximately 58,000 of these English immigrants moved to the American colonies in the early 1700s.

---

34 In 1911, at the Master’s Lodge in Christ’s College at Cambridge, England, pieces of wallpaper from the early 1500s were discovered and removed to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The wallpaper was marked with an H and a goose. This pattern was used by wallpaper designer Hugh Goes, who worked in York, England in approximately 1509.

35 Bishop and Lord 1985, 11.

colonies bringing with them their traditions and crafts. While there was an influx of English immigrants, it is possible that a combination of these three factors introduced stenciling to the American colonies.

**Design History of the American Colonies**

When the early colonists first arrived in America, the customs, traditions and designs of their homeland played the largest role in the architectural and decorative designs used to decorate their homes. These patterns were integrated with symbols of their new surroundings, largely reflecting the vast natural environment of the American colonies.

During the American Revolution resources were used in the war effort thereby fewer new houses and new forms of decoration were developed. Most early colonists were limited by the decoration available. However, Janet Waring discovered American wall stenciling that dated from as early as 1778 in Marlborough, Massachusetts. In this case, Abner Goodale, a soldier who was injured in the Battle of White Plains in New York, had five rooms stenciled for his new bride Molly Howe of Sudbury.

**Early Stencil Decoration**

After the Revolutionary War, more colonists began to add small luxuries to their everyday life such as decorating the interior of their houses. During this early period, stenciling

---


40 Fjelstul, Schad and Marhowfer 1982, 6.
was used to decorate every aspect of a vernacular home from the walls and ceilings to the chairs, tables, bed boards, chests, boxes, metal trays, pillow covers, window curtains, tablecloths and bedspreads. It was used to decorate floors if a family could not afford carpets or floorcloths and it was also an inexpensive alternative to hanging a painting over a mantel.

Stenciling grew in popularity, for a number of reasons, during the late 1700s to early 1800s even though colonists could purchase wallpaper from England and France. The primary reason was that stenciling was much less expensive than wallpaper. Additionally, stencils were a more readily available source of decoration. They were created with few materials that were all locally available while wallpaper was purchased and likely imported. For the itinerant painter, stencils were easier to travel with compared to bulky wallpaper and there was a freedom of design with stenciling. Custom patterns could be created and stenciled to signify important spaces and events. Furthermore, paint was a cleaner alternative to wallpaper; insects and rodents lived in walls and between layers of wallpaper which only further concealed their presence in a house.

Up until the mid-1800s, a limited number of stencil designs were employed. This raises some questions. Were these the most popular patterns, were they the only patterns offered or were a limited number of designs utilized? Did decorators share each other’s patterns? Were there a limited number of itinerant painters stenciling throughout the United States and, as a

41 Bacon 1977, 3.


43 The stencils used before 1840 are discussed in great detail in numerous books including: Wall Stenciling in Western New York, 1800-1840 by Janice Taurer Wass and Philip Parr, Early American Wall Stencils in Color by Alice Bancroft Fjelstul, More Early American Stencils in Color by Alice Bancroft Fjelstul, Patricia Brown Schad and Barbra Marhoefer, American Wall Stenciling, 1790-1840 by Ann Eckert Brown and Early American Stencils on Walls and Furniture by Janet Waring. For further examples from this time period please consult to these references.
result, less of a variety in stencil patterns? While currently only 15 itinerant painters have been
documented from this early time period it is also likely painters shared patterns.44 Stencil
designs could easily be copied from a wall within a home, transported and recreated. Typically,
stencil motifs reflected current events. During the Revolutionary War, murals of battle scenes
and stenciled soldiers and weapons were used. By the end of the war, the eagle became a
national symbol and a ring of thirteen stars represented the original colonies. Overall, the subject
matter of early stenciling was patriotic and it reflected the new nation, the life of Americans and
the expansive natural environment they encountered in the newly formed states. Common
patterns also included: willow trees, flowers, sunbursts, leaves, fruit, stars, geometric patterns
and horses. Pineapples were commonly stenciled as a sign of hospitality. Additionally, striping,
the use of lines, was often employed to separate a room into panels.45 By the Neo-Classical era
of the early 1800s, decoration incorporated Roman inspired patterns such as scrolls, acanthus
leaves and garlands.46

Early stencil decoration was also limited by the available paint colors. Variations of
primary and secondary colors were often used, including red, pink, yellow ochers, greens and
blues.47 A selection of these colors and patterns can be viewed in Images 12, 13 and 14 from
Deerfield, Massachusetts.

44 Fjelstul, Schad and Marhowfer 1982, 3.
46 Abercrombie and Whiton 2007, 442.
47 Bacon 1977, 3.
Hall Tavern, Deerfield, M.A., stenciling c. 1800s. Original stenciling (left) in the second floor ballroom of Hall Tavern juxtaposed to the restored design (right). Photograph by author, 12/19/2011

Hall Tavern, Deerfield, M.A., stenciling c. 1800s Stenciling above the fireplace on the second floor ballroom of Hall Tavern exhibiting a range of themes. Photograph by author, 12/19/2011
Historic Deerfield, a National Register of Historic Places historic district in Deerfield, Massachusetts, is an outdoor living museum with eleven historic houses open to the public, an old graveyard and a working inn. The photographs above show stenciling located in Hall Tavern, the visitor center for Historic Deerfield. Built in 1765 in Charlemont, Massachusetts, on the Mohawk Trail, Hall Tavern was moved to its current location in 1949 to replace a similar tavern that burned down on this site. The ballroom wing, where the stenciling is located, dates to approximately 1800 and the original stenciling dates to the early 1800s as well. The walls were painted a light yellow with deep green and red stenciling. The room has a leaf pattern border while a floral pattern further frames the space by outlining the windows and the wall above the

Image 14

_Hall Tavern, Deerfield, M.A., stenciling c. 1800s. Restored stenciling on the second floor ballroom of Hall Tavern showing the overall pattern. Here leaves and geometric designs were used to divide and arrange the room. Photograph by author, 12/19/2011_


fireplace. Framing the lower half of the wall directly above the bench and continuing along the wall next to structural supports and the doorway is a geometric pattern of four diagonal lines in a diamond shape. This mimicked the use of wallpaper where borders were placed along the edges of the wall, doors and windows to cover the seams of the background wallpaper (Image 15).  

Image 15

At Deerfield, the focal point is clearly established as the fireplace. This corresponds to design trends of the early 1800s that incorporated decoration above a fireplace when an owner could not afford a painted picture for this area. 50 As a result, at Hall Tavern detailed designs were used above the fireplace including sunbursts, groupings of flowers, a willow tree and men on horses (Image 13). These designs and color choices are similar to the work of Moses Eaton Jr. (1796-1886), a prolific itinerant painter from the early 1800s who stenciled interiors throughout Massachusetts and New England. Moses Eaton Jr. is known for his overall wall designs. 51 It is

---

50 Abercrombie and Whiton 2007, 465

51 Brown 2003, 245.
likely that early itinerant painters, like Moses Eaton Jr., were versatile and hired for a number of tasks such as painting a house, stenciling walls and floors and painting decorative furniture.

Similar to the stenciling at Deerfield, surviving examples of early stencil work are located in rural areas. By 1790, census data showed four million people were living in the United States. Only 5 percent lived in the ten largest cities while 90 percent were rural farmers. It was not until the late 1700s to the early 1800s that settlers began to move westward from the original thirteen colonies. As a result, the majority of early stencil work is found in rural areas of early settlement such as Massachusetts, Connecticut, upstate New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine with a few examples discovered as far west as Ohio. Typically, these examples have survived by neglect. While the relative lack of early examples of stenciling may be due to the ephemeral quality of the art form, few structures from the 1700s and early 1800s still exist today.

**Challenging Views**

Multiple sources state that 1810 (some say 1825) to 1840 (and as late as 1850) was the most popular time period for stenciling. Why is this period considered the “peak” of American wall stenciling? Even though tastes changed, stenciling was continually used as a decorative technique after 1840. In Richard M. Bacon’s book *The Forgotten Arts: Yesterday’s Skills*

---


53 Brown 2003, 10-11.

54 Bacon 1991,14.

55 Ibid.

Adapted to Today’s Materials: Wall Stenciling he stated that “in the 1840s it died its first death. Stenciling was replaced by the thing it had originally set out to copy-wallpaper.”

Advances in the production and availability of wallpaper were made possible by the increased production of paper. Starting in 1810 there was an increase in the number of paper mills constructed. In 1844, Howell & Brothers in Philadelphia invented the first American machine to mechanically print wallpaper using commercially produced paper. A mechanized printer was produced five years earlier in 1839 in England. Bumstead, owner of the wallpaper company Josiah Bumstead & Son from 1835 to 1868, invested in an English hand powered machine in 1841, which could produce 100 rolls of wallpaper per hour. However, these machines manufactured inexpensive, low quality paper until the technology and products were refined in the later 19th century.

Even though the production of less expensive wallpaper increased, stenciling was not replaced in its entirety. While machines manufactured wallpaper at a faster rate, new machines were also invented to produce precut stencil plates. Inventions ranged from stencil pens that facilitated easier perforating and outlining of stencil patterns to patents for new machines to produce stencil plate materials such as W.J. Reynolds 1887 machine that produced “solid metal sheets by electro-deposition suitable for compass cards, stencils or open worked, flat or articles for decorative and other uses.” These inventions were two of the hundreds of patents filed for

57 Bacon 1991, 1.


59 Ibid 2.

stencil production which only increased the availability of patterns and the potential use of stenciling. As a result, while it can be argued that folk stenciling reached its peak in the early 1800s, Victorian stenciling did not reach its peak until the late 1800s and, as a whole, stenciling did not ultimately decline as a significant form of interior decoration until the early 1900s. Throughout this shift in stencil design of the 19th century, the itinerant painter of the folk era developed into the painter/decorator.
Chapter Three: The Evolution of the Painter to the Painter Decorator

In the early 19th century, itinerant painters traveled from cities and towns in search of work. This work could range from painting, stenciling, wood graining and whitewashing a building to varnishing and painting furniture, signs and carriages. Painters carried the essential tools: brushes, powder pigments and stencils. Frequently paid through room and board, these painters remained in a location until all desired work was complete. However, as cities developed and expanded, the semi-itinerant painter evolved into a craftsman located in a city or town. During the early to mid-1800s, painters would often live in cities where work was available and travel to jobs in smaller towns or rural areas without a local painter. 61

Education of the Painter

Historically, painters were educated through the apprentice system. During the 1800s, it was the responsibility of an experienced painter/decorator to take on and educate an apprentice. Some states even had laws regarding the master’s actions towards his apprentice and the mandatory techniques to be included in their training. 62 Apprentices were taught the characteristics of architectural styles, when to use decoration, how to decorate and what


decoration should be used. They also learned a variety of techniques that included painting, stenciling, hanging wallpaper, wood graining, marbleizing, varnishing and staining. However, as decorators were in high demand to design the residences of the growing middle class by the 20th century, they did not have the available time to train apprentices. Industrialization and the division of labor are also cited as causes for the decline in the apprenticeship system. A monthly publication, The Century, stated in 1893 that the master “does not work with his men, and can give no personal attention to an apprentice. It has come about, therefore, that boys are hired to do the menial work….and, as part payment for this work, they are permitted to pick up only as much knowledge of the trade as the good nature of the foreman and journeyman will permit….From the menial nature of the employment, self-respecting boys regard it as degrading, and consequently refuse to enter upon it.” Therefore, while the apprentice system declined due to industrialization, the division of labor and the high demand of decorators, there was also a lack of young men willing to become apprentices due to the effects these changes had on their training.


By the early 1900s, the education of painters was a concern discussed in trade publications. As early as 1908, paint schools were established in the United States as an alternative to the apprentice system. In New Haven, Connecticut the public school system established a painting program, the New Haven Apprentice Shops, in 1913. This program provided boys with an understanding of paint theory, the use of tools and hands-on experience. While the New Haven Apprentice Shops was a full time program, eight hours per day for 50 weeks a year, the Chicago School of Painting, Decorating and Paper Hanging was only a three-month educational program. Headed by the master painters of Illinois, the school advertised that students could gain a greater knowledge of painting with their program than if they received years of training as an apprentice. By 1913, three to four hundred painters graduated from the Chicago School. While these painters were provided with a basic education, it is unlikely they received the skill, knowledge and experience that would be obtained during a traditional multi-year apprenticeship.

In addition to establishing school programs, painters/decorators worked to professionalize their field through the founding of professional organizations such as the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America. The Brotherhood, founded on March 15, 1887, was a society established to aid its members to become more skillful and knowledgeable.

---


66 Painting & Decorating Contractors of America. 1918, 230.

67 The Modern Painter, August 1913, 26.

Decorators using stencils were not exclusive to the Brotherhood. Artists such as Elmer Garnsey, a well-known muralist who stenciled the interior of the Minnesota State Capitol building, belonged to the Mural Painters Society. On March 26th, 1895, the Mural Painters Society was founded for those artists who specialized in paint, stained glass, mosaic and tapestry as applied to architecture.\(^6^9\) Both of these societies were an attempt to educate craftsman and bring them together as a group. They focused on providing informational lectures and producing journals, such as *The Painter and Decorator* published by the Brotherhood, thus adding to the knowledge and skill level of their members. In addition, these societies protected the rights of their members and collected funds to help support “sick, disabled, or unemployed members or the families of deceased members”.\(^7^0\)

**Publications for the Painter**

To supplement a painter’s knowledge, publications were produced and distributed across the United States. These publications became more widely available as industrialization increased factories and machinery to produce this written material. The number and longevity of the journals produced are a testament to the large audience and great demand for publications from approximately 1870 to 1940. Journals and technical publications included: *The Painter* (1870s) by Sherwin Williams, *The Decorator and Furnisher* (1882 to 1897), *Grand Catalogue*.


\(^7^0\) United States Congress 1901, 150.
(1888) by Stencil Co., *Brush and Pail* (1911 to 1923) by the Alabastine Company, *The Colorist* (1912 and 1913) by Sherwin Williams and *Acme Quality Decorators’ System with Exclusive Designs for the Treatment of Walls and Ceilings* (1915) by Acme White Lead and Color Works. These publications attempted to enhance the skills and knowledge of the painter by providing them with useful information and keeping them current on design trends and techniques. However, they were not at the forefront of styles; rather these publications followed and reported the trends, techniques and materials being used.

In addition to journals, manuals were published that discussed different architectural finishes. In these manuals, the painter was provided with recipes for varnishes and paint, directions for the use of these materials and decorating suggestions. Manuals include: *How Shall We Paint Our Houses? A Popular Treatise on the Art of House-Painting: Plain and Decorative* (1868), *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork, and Furniture* (1877), *Practical House Decoration: A Guide to the Art of Ornamental Painting* (1886), *Interior Painting: A Series of Practical Treatises* (1910) and *New Stencils and Their Use: A Practical Working Method for the Average Painter and Decorator* (1924). These manuals, such as the *Painting and Decorating Working Methods: A Text Book for the Apprentice and Journeyman House Painter and Decorator* which was published in 1922 and edited by F.N. Vanderwalker, a decorator and author, were intended as a supplement for an apprenticeship.71

To inspire local painters and advance their decorating skills, the journals and manuals often cited the work of well-known decorators. These well-known decorators were tastemakers who developed new decorative techniques and were at the forefront of design trends during the Victorian period. One of the more recognized decorating groups was Tiffany Studios and its

71 Vanderwalker 1922.
group Associated Artists, which was founded in 1879. Associated Artists had four members, Samuel Coleman (painter and decorator), Louis C. Tiffany (painter and decorator), Lockwood De Forest (decorator who focused on woodwork and Indian design), and Candace Wheeler (needlework and textile designer). Another popular American decorator was John LaFarge, a painter, muralist and stained glass window designer. LaFarge is mostly known for his stained glass windows where he used new and unconventional materials such as glass jewels, small semi-circular pieces of glass. Through publications such as *The Decorator and Furnisher*, local decorators followed and attempted to use the designs and new techniques developed by these great decorators. In June 1883, an article titled “Ornamentation” stated “The best features of the new effects introduced by our true artists, Tiffany, Coleman, and their coadjutors, are the “all over” designs, in which architectural paneling and cartouches are replaced by gracefully flowing or entwining lines, or fields of soft tints besprinkled with snow flake or starry forms. Such decoration can never be called by any other name….it is simply ornamentation.” Due to these articles, the designs of great decorators were explained and made available to the local decorator who would attempt similar patterns to elevate their work and skill level.

In addition to their educational benefits, trade journals and catalogues were used as a marketing tool. Companies, such as John Lucas & Co, Inc., the Sherwin-Williams Co. and the Alabastine Co., marketed their paint and stencils in journals, catalogues, pamphlets and cards. By showing the stencil designs and how they enhanced a room, the companies were selling their products while also providing design advice to the client. Many companies sold stencils at a very low cost or even offered them for free which suggests that advertising stencils benefited a paint company and encouraged increased sales of paint and other products.

Additionally, trade catalogues promoted and explained new materials. In the late 1860s, ready-made paint sold in cans became easily available. To sell this product to painters, publications discussed the components of this paint, how to use it, how to mix it and how to obtain decorative effects with new ready-mixed paint.

As paint itself was mass produced, so were stencils. Purchasing pre-made stencils was a very popular design solution during the late 1800s and, as a result, there were a number of stencil stores across the country. For stencil stores to remain in business and earn profit, the stores must have sold a large number of stencils thus showing the active use of stencils throughout the Victorian period. These stores also sold stencils through mail order, making them readily accessible to the middle class and local painters throughout the United States. Stencil stores and decorators frequently advertised themselves in local newspapers during the late 1800s and early 1900s. By 1915, these advertisements decreased and nearly stopped by 1935, mirroring the decreased use of stenciling. Advertisements for manufacturers and stores where painters could purchase stencils were also found in publications of professional organizations such as the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America.

73 Some of the many resources viewed to determine this shift in advertisements included:


EDWARD MAYHEW
Designer of Decorative Sketches,
and MANUFACTURER of
POUNCES, STENCILS, ETC.

Everything that a Decorative Painter Requires.

EDWARD MAYHEW, 44 W. 29th St., New York.

Image 16

Courtesy of "Official Journal of the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America." Painter and Decorator 17 (1903).


Image 17

Courtesy of "Official Journal of the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America." Painter and Decorator 17 (1903).


Image 18


Image 19


To better understand the painter and sources of the decoration, a number of journals were examined chronologically. The first publication viewed was the manual *How Shall We Paint Our Houses? A Popular Treatise on the Art of House-Painting: Plain and Decorative* from 1868. This focused on techniques and materials for plain and decorative house painting. Unlike this manual which provided step by step instructions for painting, *The Painter*, a journal published by Sherwin Williams from the 1870s to the 1890s, assumed their reader understood the basic steps to painting. However, it did offer guidance for complicated and new painting techniques and designs. Additionally, it often provided stencil patterns for the painter that reflected Asian and Middle Eastern designs. These patterns could be copied directly or altered in size, color or style to fit the painter’s needs for a project or to better reflect his own artistic style. During the 1870s, if a painter wanted to expand their knowledge on painting, woodwork, furniture and interior design they could also read *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork, and Furniture* which was published in 1877 as a manual on house decoration. The uses of decorative techniques, such as stenciling, were included with directions on what furniture should be used within a room. It discussed ornamentation as a process the decorator would complete when designing a room suggesting ornamentation was a main component of interior design. Overall, these three examples show the diversity of manuals and journals that were available for painters of different skill levels during the 1870s.

---


75 Sherwin-Williams Company. *The Painter*. Cleveland, Ohio, 1870s – 1890s.

In the 1880s, *The Decorator and Furnisher*, a monthly publication from 1882 to 1897, was established. It contained articles covering paint, stenciling, wallpaper, embroidery, tapestry, carpeting and furniture as well as articles about designers and recent events. *The Decorator and Furnisher* often referenced Renaissance, Victorian, Japanese, French, Persian, Indian, Pompeian, Chinese and Middle Eastern styles and ornamentation. From its wide array of articles and topics this publication must have been particularly useful for a decorator. Articles often referenced designs of great decorators and artists to provide readers with ideas; however, articles also described simple step by step directions for creating stencils recognizing that their clientele had varying skill levels. Primarily, the journal suggested ornamentation by showing examples and often describing the patterns and the decorators and artists who designed them.

A number of additional resources were produced during the 1880s. In 1886, the manual *Practical House Decoration: A Guide to the Art of Ornamental Painting* provided a comprehensive understanding of the relation of ornament to color, the arrangement and combinations of colors, the styles of ornamentation and the use of stenciling. It showed interior elevations with stenciling and wooden molding to provide examples of decorative techniques. Additionally, the manual provided its reader with a better understanding of how to add shadow and depth to ornamentation by blending color and creating transitions between colors. *Practical

---


House Decoration was specifically produced for the painter similar to the Grand Catalogue. The Grand Catalogue which was produced from 1888 by the Stencil Co. of New York, located at 223 East 59th Street in Manhattan, advertised stencil designs by A. Wiggers and J. Trischka. This catalogue contained a number of different stencil types which included rosettes, scrolls, friezes, corners, centerpieces, borders and diaper (an all-over pattern consisting of one or more small repeated designs) for the wall and ceiling. The majority of the designs were floral patterns; however, large ornate swags and Asian and Middle Eastern inspired patterns were also popular.79 The primary purpose of this catalogue was to sell stencils. While painters could purchase stencils from the catalogue and arrange them in any configuration, painters could also use the designs as inspiration for their own stencil plates they could create.

By the 1900s, journals and manuals were more instructional than their earlier counterparts. In 1909, a manual titled House Decoration: Comprising of Whitewashing, Paperhanging, Painting, etc., which was produced for the local painter, discussed how to compose a room, how to sketch stencils and what colors should be chosen. Here ornamentation was suggested as a component to be included when designing all rooms. A comparison of 1880s manuals to those of the early 1900s demonstrates the necessity for manuals to provide additional entry level information as time progressed. This was likely caused by the decline of the apprentice system and loss of basic knowledge of painting and decorating by the early 1900s. When advertising ornamentation, the House Decoration manual suggested very ornate Neo-Classical dados and friezes showing the shift from Victorian to Neo-Classical designs.80 A year

79 A. Wiggers, author of the “Grand Catalogue” by the Stencil Co. of New York, also founded The Stencil Treasury discussed in Chapter 3.

later in 1910, the manual *Interior Painting: A Series of Practical Treatises* continued to discuss painting basics. It provided information on the materials necessary for painting, how to cut a stencil, the process of stenciling and tips for interior decoration. At the end of each chapter a series of questions were provided to test the reader’s knowledge.\(^8\) It is likely this manual was a lesson book produced to educate painters attending the new school programs that were being developed. This was a new type of publication for painters. If a painter was an apprentice, a textbook was not necessary; they learned through experience rather than in a classroom setting. The publication of this book implies there was a need to teach this information, a need caused by the end of the apprentice system.

As a source of information, journals continued to be published throughout the 1900s. From 1911 to 1923, the Alabastine Company published their trade journal *Brush and Pail*. This publication was written specifically for the painter and often included colored sample cards showing stencils patterns. These patterns included a broad range of styles such as an Etruscan stenciled border for a bedroom, an Arts and Crafts border for a school room and an ornate frieze and wall stencil for a living room. When suggesting ornamentation, *Brush and Pail* also provided a small photograph of a room and stated which effects were used. In the descriptions, designs such as a Hepplewhite design were referenced yet no definition was provided, suggesting their readers were educated and were familiar with this style.\(^2\) The journal also featured articles about specific buildings and products as well as the prices of paint materials and instructions for the proper way to apply paint. While this journal provided instructions for painters, it was more

---


concerned with readers’ comments, labor issues, and the earnings and career prospects of painters.  

Unlike manuals which were produced by a decorator or group of decorators, journals such as *Brush and Pail*, were often produced by paint companies. Their purpose was to educate the painter and to advertise the paint company and its products. For example, in *Brush and Pail*, the Alabastine Company advertised its paint and related products and announced competitions and winners of display case designs of Alabastine products. In addition, on the back cover of issues, a free paint brush was offered with purchase of Alabastine paint.  

By 1912, Sherwin Williams published the journal titled *The Colorist*. It showed the viewer elevations with stencil patterns and decorative paint effects. Also, it provided readers with examples of detailed Victorian ornamentation for living spaces and commercial buildings thus exhibiting the continuation of certain older styles even though earlier catalogues advertised Neo-Classical and Art Nouveau patterns.  

Styles were never pure in that they were the only architectural decoration used during a time period. Older styles continued even if only used by a small number of decorators.

In 1915, another paint company, the Acme White Lead and Color Works produced the Acme Quality Decorators’ System with Exclusive Designs for the Treatment of Walls and Ceilings for painters. This publication described how to achieve blended and glazed effects while providing examples of these effects and stenciled borders of Art Nouveau and Neo-Classical patterns. When discussing ornamentation, they advertised their own stencils, providing

---

84 Ibid  
elevations to show the designs, color charts to advertise their paint and a design and color combination chart to match designs with colors.\textsuperscript{86} By 1924, the second edition (the first edition was published in 1918) of the manual, \textit{New Stencils and Their Use: A Practical Working Method for the Average Painter and Decorator} was published. This source recognized that the average painter did not have an understanding of basic stenciling techniques and as a result it was produced to train painters in the art of stenciling. It specifically instructed the decorator on the ornamentation that should be used in different situations.\textsuperscript{87}

Printed material was also produced to educate the consumer. These catalogues, which displayed potential patterns and interior styles, were generally available by 1910. For example, \textit{Your Home and its Decoration: A Series of Practical Suggestions for the Painting, Decorating, and Furnishing of the Home} by Sherwin-Williams provided the homeowner and local painter with examples of decoration, including thin stenciled borders for each room of a house, and directions for decorating fabric.\textsuperscript{88} A local painter would bring this catalogue to a client to discuss potential design options with them.

Generally, manuals focused on instructing the new inexperienced painter while journals focused on topics ranging from high style design to the interior of a cottage. However, by the late 1800s, decoration was changing. By 1893, \textit{The Decorator and Furnisher} devoted a section of their publication to “Amateur House Decoration” which was specifically addressed to the


\textsuperscript{87} F.N. Vanderwalker, 1924.

housewife. With the mass production of goods and publications it was easier for the general public to be involved in decoration. However, the quality of decoration certainly would have declined if educational programs and publications had not compensated for the decline in knowledge and experience attributable to the end of the apprentice system. Ultimately, trade journals and manuals aided in educating the painter through their instructional information, including discussions of materials and explanations of techniques and designs. They also exhibit very clearly the changes in styles that occurred during this period, including the transition from the ornate Victorian diaper patterns of the 1880s to the thin Neo-Classical borders of the 1910s.

**The Evolved Decorator**

While examples of Victorian stenciling remain in high profile structures, much of the decoration during this time period was focused on the middle class. The painter/decorator showed clients designs that should be used within an interior space, becoming tastemakers who brought design and artistic finishes, including stenciling, to homeowners and commercial, civic and religious clients. They used a variety of decorative skills, such as painting, wood graining, marbleizing, composing furniture, creating stencils, choosing wallpaper and designing molding, stained glass windows, tiles, textiles and lighting fixtures, to exhibit their high level of artistic skills. Although the apprenticeship system was ending, catalogues, publications and manuals supplemented the painter’s knowledge with new ideas, techniques, materials and designs thus allowing the painter to become a painter/decorator.

The vast distribution of publications dispersed knowledge across the United States making it possible for the average painter to learn about decorative practices. It provided the

---

painter with education, step-by-step processes of techniques and design ideas that could be applied to stencils. Since stencils could easily be custom made by a skilled painter, even patterns advertised for tiles or wallpaper could be transferred into a stencil design. With the increase in available publications, painters were no longer restricted to the knowledge of the master painter of their apprenticeship. As a result, their designs expanded beyond the older styles and techniques. This allowed the painter/decorator the opportunity to enhance their education and familiarize themselves with current styles within the United States and the influences of Asia and the Middle East on design of the late 19th century.
Chapter Four: Victorian Era: It’s History, Design and Style

Victorian interior design reflects the changes that affected American society and culture during that period. By comparing time periods, such as the 1840s to the 1880s, factors that influenced interior design become apparent. The 1840s was the height of folk stenciling in America. During this period, most Americans lived in rural settlements in the original thirteen states and there was a relative lack of access to transportation which slowed the exchange of goods, services and ideas. Stenciling was applied by the itinerant painter who moved from town to town in search of work. Itinerant painters had a number of skills that included decorative painting, plain wall painting, varnishing, wood graining and hanging wallpaper. In general, work was bartered for room and board until the projects were completed. However, by the 1880s, which corresponds to the height of Victorian stenciling, American society had drastically changed as a result of the Industrial Revolution which fostered widespread economic growth and the rise of the middle class. These dramatic changes in American society had a corresponding impact on late 19th century interior design.

Economic Growth

During the late 1800s, cities expanded as factories and housing for workers were built. This economic growth corresponded to a significant population increase within the United States. By 1880, the U.S. population reached over 50 million from 17 million in 1840 with the three major urban areas being New York, Philadelphia and Brooklyn.⁹⁰ The introduction of

---

⁹⁰ From 1840 to 1880, the U.S. population increased and settled in different cities. In 1840, the three largest urban areas and their respective populations were New York City at 312,710; Baltimore, Maryland at 102,313 and New Orleans, Louisiana at 102,193. By 1880, the population increased and the three largest urban areas were New York City at 1,206,299 residents; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania at 847,170 residents and Brooklyn, New York at 566,663 residents. From 1840 to 1880, U.S. population experienced a 194% increase.
factories in cities provided income and low skilled jobs to the growing population thereby shifting the economy from one that was agrarian and rural-based to an industrial economy located in urban areas. This transition was facilitated by advances in transportation which significantly changed by the mid-1800s when roads, railroads and canals connected cities providing for the transport of materials, goods, people and ideas.

**The Middle Class**

Industrialization also spurred the creation of a growing middle and upper class, including factory owners, businessmen, merchants and professionals (accountants, architects, builders). As a growing group within society that had available money and leisure time, they wanted to demonstrate their new wealth by building lavish houses and decorating them according to the most current design trends. Newly published books, catalogues and trade magazines advertised design ideas and discussed foreign cultures and new materials thereby expanding possible influences on decoration. The later 1800s also saw the shift from the painter to the decorator who designed the houses of the middle class according to popular revivalist styles shown throughout the newly published journals and manuals.

**Victorian Interior Design**

Victorian design was eclectic; it focused on revivalist styles and the use of applied ornamentation. As with all architectural styles, it was an expression of its time period. It adapted

---


previous styles in new ways with new materials that were made available by industrialization and innovations in technology. While it is not unusual for a society to return to previous architectural styles, the range and the vast use of these styles makes the late 1800s stand out. Revivals of English and French Gothic, Italian Renaissance, Romanesque, Second Empire and Queen Anne along with design influences from Asia and the Middle East contributed to the diverse architecture of the Victorian period. By the mid-1840s, the Gothic revival became more widely used than the Greek revival style which was popular during the early 1800s. In the United States, the Gothic revival emerged due to the widely read publications such as those by Andrew Jackson Downing. In his writings, Andrew Jackson Downing called for architecture to focus on a connection between the building and the building site. He preferred the picturesque instead of formal designs of Greek revival architecture stating that these buildings were mere imitations. By casting Greek revivalist architecture as “imitation Greek temple(s)” Downing proclaimed the classical style was unsuitable. As a planned, orderly and predictable architectural style it could not express the ever-changing and developing Victorian society. The Gothic revival, which drew inspiration from medieval Gothic architecture, used a diverse variety of materials, architectural features and motifs. Common architectural features included asymmetrical forms, varying

---


92 Roth 2001, 177.

93 Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852) was a horticulturist and architectural critic. His books were popular and widely read; each went through a number of editions: *A Treatise of the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1841, received eight editions up to 1879), *Cottage Residences* (1842, had 13 editions up to 1887) and *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850, had nine editions up until 1866). Ibid.

proportions, ornamentation, pointed arches, masonry construction, steep gables, groupings of chimneys, intricately cut and turned wooden trim and stained glass windows, thus providing more freedom of expression than the Neo-Classical style.95

From approximately 1870 to 1890, the Aesthetic Movement played a large role in interior design and branched into all aspects of life from architecture, interior decoration, furniture, wallpaper and stenciling to literature. It was a philosophy that placed beauty as the highest value. The movement was summarized by the French writer and poet, Théophile Gautier who stated “Art for Art’s Sake.”96 Aesthetics believed the purpose of art was pleasure. Art and architecture were not designed or created with the intent to convey a sense of morality. Decoration was not didactic; it was purely art. Influences of this movement are seen in the work of Associated Artists, Herter Brothers and Pottier and Stymus, all of whom designed rooms at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City c. 1880. In general, Aesthetics appreciated pattern, bright colors and designs from Asia.

In 1854, Americans were introduced to Japanese design and culture when Commodore Perry visited Japan.97 At the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition, the Japanese pavilion, with a pagoda


imported from Japan, amplified curiosity about the “Land of the Rising Sun”. In regards to the Japanese pavilion, a report published in 1877 stated that “Orientals [are] superior to European[s] in surface decoration.”98 “The general effect of the Japanese exhibition was very striking,” and “the Japanese collection especially was of first rate value and may be acknowledged as the most important contribution to the Ceramic Department brought together by any one country.”99 Japan used the Exposition to showcase their culture to the American public. They sent thirteen hundred tons of their products to Philadelphia, making the products easily available to the Western world.100 People were drawn to Japanese design since it was so vastly different from the Gothic patterns with which they were familiar. Japanese designs were often asymmetrical patterns with strong lines and understated forms. Visitors to the Exposition were also drawn to the novelty of geometric and natural motifs of bamboo, plum blossoms, swallows and cranes.101 Overall, Japanese designs played a major role in Victorian decoration; entire stores were dedicated and furnished in the Japanese style. In 1885, The Decorator and Furnisher, reported on the First Japanese Manufacturing and Trading Company, located in New York. The store

98 While this book was published in Great Britain, it shows the influence of the Exhibition. For Americans, who had easier access to the Philadelphia Exhibition, the influence of the Japanese pavilion would have been far reaching and similar to that stated by this source.

99 Ibid, 64, 44.

100 Zukowski 2006, 17, 19.

even constructed a miniature house shipped from Tokyo to draw clients to the show. In general, they sold cast metal vases, trays and kettles along with fans and room dividing screens. Japanese fans, which could be purchased for a penny, were often cited as an easy decorating solution to add an artistic touch to a room. This decoration was inexpensive, widely available and suggested by journals since it could be incorporated into any interior, from the vernacular house to the high style mansion.

While Japanese ornamentation was popular, Moorish and Persian designs were also commonly used in interiors of the 1870s and 1880s. In 1882, *The Decorator and Furnisher* reported that Moorish decoration allowed the most freedom in design, ornamentation and color since it had strong architectural forms making even repeated decoration seem subtle and not monotonous. In 1884, *The Decorator and Furnisher*, reported the increased use of Moorish styles for textiles, carpets, carved furniture and brass ornaments. It also noted the use of Persian design in the “newest mansions” showing its popularity with the growing middle and upper classes. These interiors used arabesque patterns and Persian tiles and rugs to add a sense of eclectic design. This article referenced these varied patterns to stress the possibilities of Eastern design compared to the limited possibilities of Gothic architecture. Even though the Gothic style was frequently used throughout the late 1800s, there was a clear tension between the

---


105 Ibid.
different styles. By the 1880s, the Aesthetic Movement promoted the utilization of eclectic foreign patterns reducing Gothic Revival interiors.

**Design Principles for a Room**

In the Victorian house, interior spaces were stratified and designed according to their intended purposes. The middle class had a much more limited ability to segregate rooms. However, rooms of the wealthy were designed specifically for women, men, children, servants or special activities such as billiards. For example, a masculine space was the library while a feminine space within the house was the drawing room, a place where women could gather. The hallway became a multipurpose space for people of all social classes. Entry hallways were usually large and had a place for sitting and gathering before dinner, leaving for an event or waiting for visitors. As the first room a guest would enter, special care was taken to decorate a hallway. The most impressive and ornate finishes, whether stenciling or wallpaper, were used in the public rooms of a house while inexpensive, less detailed work was reserved for the family’s bedrooms and private spaces.  

**New Victorian Materials, Techniques and Finishes**

To design a Victorian interior, traditional materials such as wallpaper, stenciling and wooden molding were used in addition to inventive and creative new techniques and materials. For example, new techniques in furniture production included the laminating and the bending of wood. The efficiency of glass making was also improved. New steam powered cutting machines easily cut glass while ornamental lamps were produced by allowing molten glass to cool in cast-iron molds. The tile industry was reinvigorated by Pugin, an English architect, who advocated

---

for the use of tiles and even designed tiles during the 1830s and 1840s. The textile industry also expanded as new machines could quickly produce complex patterns. Additionally, wallpaper increased in popularity in the 19th century as it became more widely available since it was much less expensive than other decorating alternatives such as woodwork or plasterwork.\textsuperscript{107}

Merchants, inventors, scientists, decorators and painters experimented with non-traditional materials and used new machines to create products that were more durable, easier to manufacture and less expensive. For example, in 1863, Frederick Walton patented linoleum, made of cork, linseed oil and gum, as a floor covering replacing wooden or stone floors in service areas.\textsuperscript{108} In 1877, Walton invented Lincrusta, a wall and ceiling covering pressed with designs and made of linseed oil, wood pulp, gum and paraffin wax, which offered the appearance of tooled leather wall coverings for a fraction of the cost.\textsuperscript{109}

\textbf{Ornamentation}

Before industrialization, the majority of ornamentation was hand-crafted and a client was limited by the skills of their craftsmen. Rooms were simply decorated and received less ornamentation since it was not easily available. Additionally, materials were more expensive than labor thereby further restricting the use of ornamentation and furniture. However, industrialization and improved mechanical processes decreased the cost of goods, making commercial products more widely available and easier to produce. As a result, rooms had more furniture with tapestries, carpets, and detailed wooden molding. Walls were decorated with a

\textsuperscript{107} Abercrombie and Whiton 2007, 496, 500, 502, 508.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid 508.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid 506-507.
number of different finishes including wallpaper, stenciling, plain painting, texture painting and gilding.

Even though lavishly ornamented rooms were in style, some questioned whether ornamentation was decoration or only an outdated backdrop for large quantities of commercially mass produced furniture that detracted from the overall design. In 1883, Charles Eastlake, an English architect, stated his concerns: “In the Middle Ages it was customary to decorate the walls of the most important rooms of a public building or private mansion with tapestry; and there is no doubt that a rich and picturesque effect was thus obtained which no other means could produce. But it is obvious that the mere expense of such a practice, to say nothing of the consideration of cleanliness (especially in town-houses, where dust collects with great rapidity), would render it out of the question for modern appliance. In later times stencil-painting was the first step towards a simple style of mural ornament, and indeed it is still in vogue throughout Italy and other parts of the Continent.”110 By stating that stenciling was popular in Italy he was attempting to suggest it was old fashioned. Stenciling had lived out its usefulness similar to the tapestries of the Medieval period. While Eastlake was influential, many continued to use traditional designs and inexpensive, commercially mass produced furniture and ornamentation that focused on past styles.

In late 19th century interior decoration, there were two primary sources for the design of ornamentation. The first was nature and the second was geometry.111 Usually, ornamentation was designed in repeating, symmetrical patterns. This repeating rhythm and symmetry created a balanced pattern that was considered “effective ornamentation.”112 It had to be distributed properly throughout a space, acknowledging the interior structure. Ornamentation could not look like an afterthought or as if it was planned years or even decades after the structure was built. Rather, good ornamentation appeared as if it was intended for that specific room.113 This could be achieved by integrating the pattern with the surrounding architectural features such as wood paneled, coffered or vaulted ceilings, arched doorways and bay windows. While wallpaper was restricted to the size and length of a wallpaper roll, stencil decoration could be manipulated to fit onto any space while having the appearance that it was an original component of a room. This resulted in ornamentation appearing natural rather than forced.114

Walls

When decorating walls, traditionally a tripartite wall division was employed; a dado at its base, a frieze below the cornice, and the wall in between the dado and frieze. The proportions of these elements changed based on styles and personal tastes. By dividing a wall, a decorator could employ multiple architectural finishes in a single room to create a pleasing design.


112 "What Ornament Should Be." Nov. 1881, 128.

113 Ibid.

In addition to the tripartite wall division, there were a number of distinct prevailing design principles for Victorian interiors. As early as 1869, the degree of decoration within a room was discussed in the publication *The Workshop*.\(^{115}\) It stated that a uniform, subtle design was necessary to decorate walls since they are located at eye level; however, the ceiling, which was only glanced at, would have a more colorful and lively pattern.\(^ {116}\) While rooms may have used multiple patterns and finishes on the walls and ceiling, curtains, carpets and mass produced furniture and ornamentation, the rooms were not haphazardly pieced together and cluttered. If the walls had stenciling or wallpaper then the window curtains and carpet would have subdued patterns and colors so that they did not detract from the ornamentation of the walls. However, if

\(^{115}\) *The Workshop*, was a monthly journal from 1868 to 1881 that was “devoted to progress of the useful arts.” Each issue of this journal published a section on ornamentation. Examples of furniture, rugs, wallpaper, stenciling and lamps were provided for the reader. Published in New York by E. Steiger the journal listed I. Schnorr and others as their editors. *The Workshop* 2.7 (1869): 97-102. JSTOR. Web. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25586626> (accessed April 14, 2012), 97.

the walls were painted a plain color then the curtains and carpet should have flowers and geometric patterns to add a level of decoration to the room.\footnote{117}

**Ceilings**

In 1869, *The Workshop* noted that ceiling design, throughout history, has held the “greatest importance.”\footnote{118} During the late 1800s, ceilings received special treatment whether in their form, flat or vaulted, or in their decorative elements, exposed timbering, painting, wallpapering, coffering, stenciling or plaster work.\footnote{119} Ceiling decoration, while designed to complement wall decoration, gained such popularity during the late 1800s that wallpaper was specifically produced to adorn ceilings. These wallpapers often had square patterns in the four corners of a room to provide a footing for the design. If a room was not a perfect square or rectangle, stenciling could more easily decorate a ceiling than wallpaper.

\textit{Image 21}

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}


\footnote{118}{"The Decoration of Ceilings." 1869, 97.}

\footnote{119}{Blakemore 2006, 401.}
Ceiling decoration was continually suggested in decorator’s journals. An 1882, *Art Amateur* article stated that “we cannot have completeness or harmony in an apartment unless the ceiling be decorated as well as the walls; and as the ceiling is the only surface in the room which can be seen as a whole, it is desirable that it be the recipient of the most careful ornamentation.”¹²⁰ It was suggested that ceiling design should use flat ornamentation without shading or shadow to express its true flat quality. Additionally, the decoration used should focus towards the center of the ceiling rather than one side being more heavily decorated than the other thereby creating an unbalanced room. Ceilings could receive more decoration and color than walls since they did not provide a background for photographs and furniture.¹²¹

**Color**

When decorating a room, Victorians favored a range of colors from deep reds and greens to mauves and browns. To balance an interior, a dark color was used near a lighter color.¹²² This can be seen at the Mark Twain House, built in 1874 and stenciled in 1881, in Hartford, Connecticut where black and dark red paint were used with silver colored leaf in the hallway, as seen in Images 29, 47 and 48.¹²³ The use of colors varied greatly and color choices were dependent on a room’s purpose. An 1882 article in *The Decorator and Furnisher* suggested the dominant color should be a neutral hue with bright smaller designs incorporated. Another article


suggested that one color, either a primary (red, yellow and blue) or secondary (orange, green and purple) color should dominate a room. Hues of these colors can be used as background while smaller quantities of varying hues and tones of the primary and secondary colors are used for decoration. When choosing colors for a room, there were three things to consider: the walls, the curtains and the carpets. Each of these components should not match; however, if they did match then only the walls and curtains or the carpet and curtains should have matched in color as to not overwhelm the client.

All parts of a Victorian room were designed with an attempt to achieve harmony of design, form, color and pattern. Every aspect was added to improve another aspect, connecting all design decisions to form a finished room. A room was only completed once the ceiling and walls had harmonizing decoration.

**The Arts and Crafts Movement**

By the 1890s, the Victorian era was ending and with this there were changes in style. Even though revivalist styles were common, Victorians did not use these styles in their entirety; rather they searched for form and pattern within the styles and adapted various aspects in their designs. During this era, the Aesthetic Movement was founded with the intent to reform the

---

124 Crace Dec. 1882, 85.

125 Ibid


design and bring beauty to mass produced goods. However, some reformers questioned whether these mass produced goods could have artistic qualities. These craftsmen created the Arts and Crafts movement from approximately 1890 to 1920. The Arts and Crafts movement followed the philosophy of Ruskin in believing that good art could only be produced by good people and a good society thus merging aesthetics, design and morality. Members of the Arts and Crafts movement attempted to use design to reform society and suggest a return to a pre-industrial focus on craftsmanship and design.\textsuperscript{129} These designs focused on the true representation of organic forms rather than using abstracted forms of ornamentation similar to the Aesthetic Movement. Overall, the Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements have a complex relationship. While Aesthetes used historicist ornamentation, they also used mass produced furnishing. However, the Arts and Crafts movement sought to return to historic methods of the artisan and yet they considered their ornamentation as modern.\textsuperscript{130} While both groups grew out of the intent to reform design, they followed drastically different methods to achieve this goal.

When designing an interior, the Arts and Crafts movement focused on simple forms, natural materials, clean lines and handcrafted design whose construction was visible. A well-known philosopher, author and designer from this era, Gustav Stickley, established \textit{The Craftsman}, a popular journal, in 1901. The journal featured sample designs and articles on the principles of the Arts and Crafts movement. For example, articles focused on the extensive use of woodwork and wainscoting in Arts and Crafts design. Proponents advocated for “finishing interior woodwork so that all its natural qualities of color, texture and grain are brought out by a

\textsuperscript{129} Stankiewicz 1992, 169.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid 170.
process which ripens and mellows the wood as it by age without changing its character at all.”

Additionally, the movement advocated for the walls to have an active role within a room. By providing built-in bookcases, seating and cupboards they could be practical, convenient and beautiful thus preventing a crowding of furniture throughout a room. Overall, while the Arts and Crafts movement and Victorian style coincided, they advocated for vastly different forms of interior design, as seen the Arts and Crafts designs in Images 22 and 23.

Image 22


132 Ibid 144.
Art Nouveau

From approximately 1890 to 1910, Art Nouveau was influenced by a number of movements and architectural styles including the Arts and Crafts movement, Gothic revival, Rococo design and styles used throughout Asia; however, the most significant influence on Art Nouveau was nature. Similar to the Gothic period, architects and decorators turned to nature for inspiration. Art Nouveau used nature in a purely aesthetic treatment as seen in the work of Louis Sullivan, an American architect. Through his designs he used natural forms, their fluidity and rhythm to exhibit their power and immense capability for expression of beauty. Nature was not only used in decoration, it became a part of the architecture and design of a building.

transforming a building into art.\textsuperscript{134} Sullivan pushed the boundaries of ornamentation and its place in architecture and design. He used non-historicist methods regarding the use, amount and placement of these natural forms. Ornamentation was not restricted to the interior; rather it could delicately adorn the exterior walls of a structure to emphasize its strong geometry while not dominating and detracting from the building’s form.

By the early 1900s, Art Nouveau and the Victorian period ended leaving behind a rich history of design and stencil ornamentation.

\textsuperscript{134} Grady 1955, 189.
Chapter Five: Design and Use of Stenciling in the Victorian Era

To better understand how stenciling was used for interior decoration during the Victorian period, trade catalogues and study sites were examined. However, due to the ephemeral quality of stenciling, its history is full of gaps and is biased by the material and context that has survived.\textsuperscript{135} For example, sites with stenciling from the 1850s and 1860s were not found during the research for this thesis. Additional study sites need to be examined to determine if sites from the 1850s and 1860s support the conclusions and trends noted in this thesis.

During the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, industrialization and the associated increase in production of inexpensive ornamentation provided the new middle class with a wide variety of attractive and cost effective options for interior decoration. Even though there was an increase in the popularity and production of wallpaper, stenciling remained an important form of ornamentation.

The Advantages of Stenciling

There were three basic reasons a client would choose stenciling rather than wallpaper during the late 1800s. The first factor dealt with the increased skills of the painter/decorator. Decorators had a range of artistic abilities and had a familiarity with popular styles both within the United States and abroad. They were able to convey a sense of taste and style to their middle class and wealthy clients through unique designs. Decorators used stenciling because it had the ability to form unique patterns as well as exhibit their high level of skill and taste. The decorator had complete control over the pattern and the final outcome of a room. This was not always possible with wallpaper since the use of wallpaper did not demonstrate the full extent of the decorator’s creative abilities. As early as 1869, an article in The Workshop stated that in regards

\textsuperscript{135} Saunders 2002.
to ceiling decoration, lively and colorful painted patterns could be used “although the substitutes for a real artistic decoration, paper-hangings, carton-pierre, etc., require a careful consideration.” This suggests wallpaper was not considered the highest and best method of decoration, while stenciling was clearly promoted in this way.

A second factor that elevated stenciling over wallpaper during the late 1800s was related to the design possibilities of stenciling. The manual *Painting and Decorating* stated, “The capability of the stencil as a factor in painted decoration is far greater than many writers are disposed to admit. Indeed, the possibilities of the method are far from exhausted and are only limited by the patience and resource of the decorator.” Stenciling provided individualized decoration that allowed a client the freedom to choose any style or mixture of styles with any number of colors. The new middle class could select a pattern from a number of pre-made stencils, have a stencil custom made or leave the design entirely in the hands of the decorator. Once patterns were selected, they could be arranged in countless configurations. Additionally, gold, aluminum or platinum leaf, and bronzing powders could be added to enhance a design. Clients wanted to demonstrate their wealth and social status. Stenciling did just that by mimicking patterns either seen throughout their travels or read about in new publications. This freedom of design could not be achieved with wallpaper. In the case of wallpaper, a client or painter could only select the patterns and colors available, thereby limiting their opportunity to create a uniquely customized design.

---

136 Carton-pierre was used to create raised ornaments for walls and ceilings. "The Decoration of Ceilings." *The Workshop* 1869, 97.

To decorate ecclesiastic buildings, buildings of the church or clergy, stenciling and/or striping were the decoration of choice. Wallpaper did not provide the desired patterns unlike stenciling which offered religious themed designs.

The third factor that favored stenciling over wallpaper related to the architecture of the particular building being decorated. Complex architectural design lent itself to the use of stenciling. Stencil patterns could be altered to fit, form and follow arches, columns, confined spaces or large rooms. This is another reason stenciling was used in ecclesiastic buildings since it is difficult to wallpaper uniquely shaped ribbed vaults, colonnades and multiple side aisles. Frequently, the amount of wall space was too expansive for wallpaper; if wallpapered, it would have created a busy and overwhelming interior. Similarly, at Central Synagogue in New York, the Moorish architecture made it impossible to wallpaper the space. Only stenciling could provide an ornamented surface due to the Synagogue’s large open interior and the extensive use of arches and columns.
Stenciling was easy to use to renovate an interior as well. At the Mark Twain house, located in Hartford, Connecticut, the house was decorated with wooden paneling when built in 1874. By 1881, the owners renovated the house and added stenciling. The pre-existing wooden molding on the ceiling was well suited to stenciling since it could easily decorate the spaces in between the molding, unlike wallpaper which needed to be cut to the specific size of each space. It would have been painstaking work to wallpaper each of the many odd shaped components, as seen in Image 29. While stenciling often worked well with and complemented the architecture in interior renovations, the use of stenciling with woodwork was a very popular style during the 1870s and 1880s. In 1877, The Art Journal included a drawing of a room with stenciling on a wooden beamed ceiling. Similar to the Mark Twain house, this stenciling decorated the spaces in between the wooden beams. This style was also utilized at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City completed in 1881 for the Seventh Regiment of the National Guard. Each room of the Armory was designed by a different decorator for a different client. In the room created for

---

138 Philippon and Auerbach.

Company D, Pottier & Stymus designed the stenciling and wooden molding as complimentary elements. The molding framed the stenciled borders and divided up the space, as seen in Image 31. As can be noted from these examples, stenciling worked well with varied types of architecture. Whether a new building or a renovation of an existing building, stenciling could be incorporated with wooden panels, beams or other architectural trim to create a complex yet integrated interior design.


Use of Stenciling

During the Victorian era, stenciling was used on the majority of interior architectural elements. While more commonly used on the walls and ceilings, it has also been discovered on doors, wooden moldings, baseboards, furniture, trays and fabric. Its popularity ensured it was used to adorned churches, synagogues, state capitol buildings, institutions, museums, music halls, houses, schools, universities, banks and offices. While stenciling was primarily chosen for its unique design opportunities, it was also an easy way to decorate. Painting a room was a quick and easy solution if architectural styles or the owner of a building changed.
Like most finishes, stenciling is a temporary decoration and can be easily covered over. In addition, unlike wallpaper, which should be stripped off a wall prior to the application of paint or new wallpaper, paint is applied directly over older layers of painted decoration. This allowed clients the freedom to change designs and styles. Unfortunately, this also eliminates the visual record of many stenciled designs. Due to the ephemeral quality of stenciling, its history is full of gaps and is biased by the material that has survived. While researching for this thesis, few vernacular examples of 19th century stenciling were found. From the publication of trade catalogues, it is clear stenciling was used in vernacular structures. However, these interiors have either been destroyed or are covered by layers of paint and wallpaper that correspond to changing styles and taste during subsequent time periods.

**Stenciling Designs of the Victorian Era**

Stenciling was one of several forms of ornamentation used to decorate during the late 1800s. It was often used as a flat finish and, as a result, it was not overwhelming in its design. When composing a stencil pattern for a room it had to be balanced; one section could not stand out too prominently from the other areas. This would draw a viewer’s attention and distract from the overall pattern. Additionally, “a building painted from half a dozen patterns, well grouped and matched as to color, will look better, and be in far better taste than one crowded with a heterogeneous medley of designs.” A majority of the study sites examined for purposes of this thesis abide by this common approach and use more than one pattern. When examining stenciling from the late 19th century, three common themes can be traced through the stencil designs used. These themes are the influence of Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, the adoption

---

and continued use of specific stenciling motifs and the simplification of stencil patterns over time.

**Influence of Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures on Stencil Patterns**

During the 1800s, significant advances in transportation and technology facilitated a broader exchange of designs, patterns and ideas. Unlike previous architectural styles in the United States that were influenced by designs mainly from Europe, the increase in printed material made it possible for the average American citizen to become familiar with Asian and Middle Eastern design. Furthermore, the influence of the Aesthetic Movement lead to the increased use of these designs to provide beauty, art and the eccentric to a room.

In 1872, Moorish architecture and stencil patterns were used at Central Synagogue in New York City. At the Synagogue, most patterns are abstracted geometric designs. Rather than using monotonous diagonal lines, patterns fill the spaces created by these lines to add depth to the design, as seen in Image 34 and 37. Moorish ornamentation never copied nature directly; instead it took the principles of nature and created a representation as seen in the stylized flower in Image 33. Typically, Moorish architecture used primary colors such as red, blue, and yellow (gold) which were widely used throughout Central Synagogue. Generally, blue occupied the largest area of diaper patterns and walls to balance the use of yellow and red throughout the stenciled patterns. However, in the Synagogue there is a noticeable color difference between the bimah (Image 61), the elevated area where the Torah is read during services, which was painted in light pastel colors, and the primary colors of the walls. This difference highlights the bimah as a focal point.

---

The side aisle of Central Synagogue, New York, N.Y., 1872. While the bimah used pastel tones, the aisles used varying tones of brown with bright blue, red, yellow and green. Stenciled borders were used to frame the space. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.

Stenciling on the ceiling of the aisles at Central Synagogue, New York, N.Y., 1872. The border’s placement mimics structural beams. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.

A border and diaper pattern on the end walls of the aisles at Central Synagogue, New York, N.Y., 1872. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.

Multiple stencil borders and a diaper pattern located between the windows of the side aisles at Central Synagogue, New York, N.Y., 1872. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.
The Moorish stencil designs at Central Synagogue reflect designs in Owen Jones’ popular book *The Grammar of Ornament*. Owen Jones (1809-1847), an author and designer, published *The Grammar of Ornament*, in 1856 with large color examples of ornamental design motifs from early tribes through to the decorative arts of the 1850s. The Moorish geometric interweaving pattern advertised in *The Grammar of Ornament* and used at Central Synagogue was continually advertised to painters well into the 1900s. While many motifs were represented by different styles throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, this pattern remains unchanged. This may be due to the popularity of Moorish designs during the late 1800s and its simple geometric pattern which corresponds to ornamentation from the 1900s.

---

143 Edgar Kaufmann, Jr 1960, 60.
Well known designers, such as Associated Artists, also drew inspiration from other cultures, including Japanese, Moorish and Celtic. In 1880, one year before they stenciled the Mark Twain house, Associated Artists created a purely eclectic room at the Veterans Room of the Park Avenue Armory in New York City. Comparatively, the Veterans Room is vastly different in design and style from the Mark Twain house. The Mark Twain house used compact forms with a strict geometry. The Veterans Room, however, has looser winding and interweaving patterns. While the wooden beams of the Veterans Room are stenciled with linear designs, the recesses between the beams have abstracted patterns of birds and flowers. These patterns are representative of Japanese ornamentation and the linear designs represent Moorish and Celtic decoration. Due to the diversity of patterns and the use of silver colored leaf this is an archetype of an Aesthetic Movement room. While both the Veterans Room and the Mark Twain house were completed by the same decorators, with similar motifs and cultural influences within a year of each other, the designs themselves are vastly different. Both sites did employ a chevron pattern; however, the chevron patterns at the Veterans Room appear haphazard compared to the orderly, neat and tight composition of the many rows of chevron patterns at the Mark Twain house (Images 43 and 44). Overall, these rooms show the diversity and skill of Associated Artists along with the popular use of Asian and Middle Eastern designs.

As seen at both the Veterans Room and the Mark Twain house, Associated Artists and their successor firm Tiffany Studios extensively used metallic leaf and bronzing powders as a primary material to transfer their stencils. In 1924, F. N. Vanderwalker discussed the use of

---

Celtic ornament and Gothic ornament differed in that Celtic ornament focused on patterns of interweaving lines. While Gothic ornament used similar patterns, floral motifs were incorporated. Jones 1856.
metal bronzes and leaf in stenciling for theaters and churches. Vanderwalker suggested transferring a whole design using leaf or bronzing powders or using these materials highlights within a stencil. Further research is necessary to determine if the use of metallics to transfer a stencil in its entirety was originally a signature of Associated Artists and Tiffany Studios that was later advertised in decorator’s manuals.

145 Vanderwalker 1924, 94.
The Mark Twain house located in Hartford, Connecticut, was stenciled in 1881 by Associated Artists on the first floor and stairwell while the stenciling on the second and third floor rooms was completed by a local painter. Designs stenciled throughout the house were inspired by the Moorish, Indian and Chinese cultures. These exotic patterns exhibited the wealth, knowledge and worldliness of the homeowners.

In the entry hallway, the decoration consists of many minute geometric components used to create a larger overall design. These patterns resemble Moorish textiles and the stenciling appears as if it were woven together. The use of silver colored leaf draws the viewer’s attention to the stenciling as the patterns enhance the preexisting wooden paneling. The complexity of

---

*Image 45*

*Two birds stenciled on the wooden ceiling of the Veterans Room at the Park Avenue Armory, New York, N.Y., designed in 1880 by Associated Artists. Photograph by author, 4/19/2012.*

*Image 46*

*Flower stenciled pattern on the wooden ceiling of the Veterans Room at the Park Avenue Armory, New York, N.Y. designed in 1880 by Associated Artists. Photograph by author, 4/19/2012.*

---

146 Philippon and Auerbach.
these geometric patterns shows the skill of the decorators, their ability to create stencils and, more importantly, their ability to compose an overall design. The hallway ceiling, which has a similar pattern, can be seen in Image 29.

Located directly off the richly designed hallway, is the formal drawing room/parlor stenciled in silver colored leaf over light pink paint. Influenced by Lockwood DeForest, one of the four Associated Artists, the room was stenciled with Indian motifs. Rather than creating a
solid form, Associated Artists used minute repeating geometric shapes to convey the design.

While the area below the chair rail in the parlor is styled differently than an example from Owen Jones’ book, Image 51, the same motif was used showing the connection to the Indian culture.

Additionally, paisley motifs were abstracted and stenciled on the walls and ceiling.

Images 49 and 50

The Mark Twain house located in Hartford, C.T., designed by Associated Artists in 1881. Every surface, even the wooden doors, is stenciled in the Clemens’ parlor. Note the different patterns used throughout the elevation, as seen in Image 49. The silver paisleys eventually are enlarged to create a paisley floral pattern in blue below the chair rail. Even the baseboard is stenciled with chevrons. Since each of these patterns is complex, Associated Artists chose to convey each in one color to harmonize the composition within the entire room. Image 50 is a close-up view of the door. The size and detail of these chevron patterns show the skill of Associated Artists. Photographs by author, 12/20/2011.
The Mark Twain house also has Chinese inspired stenciling in the dining room. In this case, the stenciling was completed on wooden paneling and only a small portion of the original stenciling remains visible. This stenciling references Chinese designs with its depiction of stylized mountains and borders of repeating, flowing patterns similar to scales on a fish, Images 52, 53 and 54.


Image 51

Plate XL, No. 13 “Woven Fabrics.” While this pattern was used in stenciling it can also be seen in other mediums such as this woven fabric pattern. Courtesy of Owen Jones. The Grammar of Ornament. London: Day and Son, 1856.


Chinese inspired stenciling in the dining room at the Mark Twain house, Hartford, C.T., designed by Associated Artists in 1881. Photograph by author, 12/20/2011.
Asian and Moorish ornamentation was frequently advertised in trade catalogues during the late 1800s making these patterns available to the vernacular painter. One example is the *Grand Catalogue* of 1888 by the Stencil Co. of New York (located at 223 East 59th Street in Manhattan). Designs for this catalogue were created by A. Wiggers and J. Trischka. The Stencil Company had been established around 1868, at a time when Wiggers and Trischka believed there was a shortage of properly composed stencils. The 1888 catalogue shows a number of different stencil types including rosettes, scrolls, friezes, corners, centerpieces, borders and diaper (all over stencils) for the wall and ceiling. The majority of the designs were floral patterns; however, there were numerous Asian and Middle Eastern designs. For example, Japanese inspired patterns usually included bamboo (Images 55 and 56).\textsuperscript{147}

\textit{Image 55}


\textit{Image 56}


The Moorish inspired patterns in this catalogue were linear interweaving complex motifs similar to the designs provided by Owen Jones in his book *The Grammar of Ornament.*

As shown by these examples, the use of Asian and Middle Eastern patterns was common during the late 1800s especially in relation to the Aesthetic Movement which focused on beauty, form and pre-industrial societies. These patterns were new and exotic to Victorians who used them to demonstrate their knowledge of design and other cultures.

**Adoption and Continued Use of Stenciling Motifs**

Motifs, used for decoration, were fairly consistent throughout the late 1800s; however, the style used to convey these motifs changed over time. Two of the most common stencil decorating themes during this time period were floral and geometric patterns. Stenciling often combined these themes to create a holistic design as seen in Images 60, 61 and 62. While each of

---

148 Kaufmann 1960, 60.
these diaper patterns has similar motifs, their style is different. Image 60 and Image 61 are almost identical Moorish designs whereas Image 62 is a Gothic revival pattern. In Image 62, the forms are more ridged and less abstracted than the other two examples. Image 60, is from Owen Jones’ book on ornamentation. Due to the popularity of his book and the use of these designs throughout architecture, it is not uncommon that a Moorish styled building would have a similar diaper pattern.

Image 60

Image 61
Stenciling on the back wall of the bimah of Central Synagogue, New York, N.Y., original pattern painted in 1872. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.

Image 62
Stenciling at the Connecticut State Capitol building, Hartford, C.T., c. 1878 designed by William James McPherson. This stenciling is similar to the stenciling at the bimah of Central Synagogue. Photograph by author, 12/19/2011.

The use of similar motifs can be seen by comparing the Connecticut State Capitol building, 1878, and the Park Avenue Armory, 1881. A border at the Park Avenue Armory by

---

149 Jones 1856, Plate XLII.

150 Park Avenue Armory Conservancy.
Pottier & Stymus has many similarities to a variety of geometric and floral borders found throughout the Connecticut State Capitol building, suggesting that these were consistent with popular styles and trends. Each used a single flower, or an abstracted design representing a flower, and vertical lines to divide up the space and form a thin border. Clearly this design was popular during the 1870s and 1880s. A similar pattern is shown in Owen Jones’ book *The Grammar of Ornament* indicating the influence of the book and suggesting this was a common motif, used by different cultures to decorate a variety of objects.\(^{151}\)

\[\text{Image 63}\]

*Border at the Connecticut State Capitol building, Hartford, C.T., c. 1878 by William James McPherson. Photograph by author, 12/19/2011.}\(^{151}\)

\[\text{Image 64}\]

*Border at the Connecticut State Capitol building, Hartford, C.T., c. 1878 by William James McPherson. Photograph by author, 12/19/2011.}\(^^{151}\)

\[\text{Image 65}\]

*Stenciled border in Company E room by Pottier & Stymus at the Park Avenue Armory, New York, N.Y, c. 1881. Photograph by author, 1/30/2012.}\(^{151}\)

\[\text{Image 66}\]

*“Ornaments from Mexican pottery in the British Museum.” Courtesy of Owen Jones. The Grammar of Ornament. London: Day and Son, 1856, 37.}\(^{151}\)

Common stencil patterns used in professionally decorated interiors during this period also appear advertised in trade journal. At St. Mary’s Covent Chapel, built c. 1885 to 1887 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Johnson & Griffiths Studio uncovered simple Victorian stencil

\(^{151}\) Jones 1856, 37.
patterns. These patterns have a number of breaks (due to ties) used to enhance the overall design. Even though thicker lines were used to convey the design, the effect of the stencil pattern is refined and delicate. Multiple stencil catalogues advertised similar designs to the patterns that were uncovered, showing that common but simple stencil patterns could be found in vernacular structures.

*Image 67*

Reveal taken by Johnson & Griffiths Studio at St. Mary’s Convent Chapel, Lancaster, P.A., c.1885 to 1887. Photographs courtesy of Jeffrey B. Johnson, principal Johnson & Griffiths Studio.

*Images 68, 69, and 70*

These three designs from stencil catalogues are similar to Image 67 showing the popularity of this pattern and possible variations. Image 68 and 69, courtesy of Acme White Lead and Color Works, Acme Quality decorators' system of artistic and sanitary wall decorations: with exclusive designs for the treatment of walls and ceilings: stencils and stenciling materials. Detroit, Michigan: Acme White Lead and Color Works, c1925, 44. Image 70, courtesy Sherwin-Williams Company. Decorative Studios. Stencils and Stencil Materials. Cleveland, Ohio, 1929, 17, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York.

The use of specific stencil motifs throughout the late 1800s continued into the early 1900s. The 1900 James Library building of Madison, New Jersey has designs that clearly harken back to patterns of the 1870s and 1880s.\textsuperscript{153} Further, a number of parallels can be drawn between the James Library building, the Connecticut State Capitol building and the Park Avenue Armory. For example, a similar scroll/leaf pattern was used in a border at each structure. This was a frequently used motif; out of the small sampling of thirteen study sites, three sites share this design. While these patterns are quite similar, one difference is that gold leaf was used at the State Capitol building to enhance and elevate its appearance.

\textit{Image 71}

\textit{Border at the Connecticut State Capitol building, Hartford, CT, c. 1878 by William James McPherson Photograph by author, 12/19/2011.}

\textit{Image 72}

\textit{Border at the Park Avenue Armory, New York, NY, c. 1881. Photograph by author, 1/30/2012.}

\textit{Image 73}

\textit{Border at the James Library building, Madison, NJ, c. 1900. Photograph by author, 2/24/2012.}

Additionally, connections can be made between the motifs used at the James Library and motifs offered in stencil catalogues, Owen Jones’ book and wallpaper catalogues. In the James Library, the primary motif was a pomogrante design, altered in size and complexity to cover the

walls of the central circulation area, the walls and ceiling of the original reading room and the walls of the original stacks. While this pomogranate pattern was not found in other study sites, clearly it was a popular design and was easily adjusted to different styles. Image 74 from Owen Jones’ book *The Grammar of Ornament*, shows a Medieval version of this design. The lines of the diaper pattern and the stars dispersed throughout are thicker and less delicate than most Victorian ornamentation. Since this was a popular book, painters would copy and alter this design to suit their own tastes.\footnote{154} Similar to Image 74, Image 75 from the 1888 *Grand Catalogue* of stencils shows this motif as a Gothic revival diaper pattern with thin delicate lines. This catalogue states that all designs advertised in the catalogue were original creations of two decorators, A. Wiggers, and J. Trischka.\footnote{155} While the style was their own, the motif was not an original design. By looking through catalogues, painters could familiarize themselves with motifs that they could alter when creating their own stencils. Due to the popularity of this motif, it is not surprising that different stylistic representations had been stenciled. Having viewed these different sources, it can be concluded that Image 76 from the James Library was influenced by the earlier use of this pattern throughout other buildings and catalogues. The Library was designed in Romanesque Revival. By 1900, architecture was transitioning to Classical Revival, and lighter, more delicate ornamentation was popular. Stencils, too, reflect this change in taste. In comparison to Images 74 and 75, the James Library stenciling is not a diaper pattern. It has no lines framing and confining it to a set space, thus this historic motif was simplified to better suit the shift in styles. Even into the 1930s, this motif continued in use. Image 77 shows a similar

\footnote{154} Jones 1856.  
\footnote{155} Wiggers and Trischka 1888.
pomogranate diaper pattern for wallpaper; however, its colors were neutralized to appeal to current tastes that focused on clean designs.\textsuperscript{156}

One of the primary advantages of stenciling is the flexibility it provided to decorators to design a room and create patterns. While there were a wide variety of patterns used, it is clear that decorators adopted certain motifs and continued to apply those motifs in the many different styles of the period.

**Simplification of Stencil Patterns**

The third theme connecting stenciling is the simplification of patterns over time. Designs were simplified in the number of patterns used, the pattern itself or the number of colors chosen. This theme becomes clearly apparent after viewing stenciling of the later 1800s in relation to stenciling of the 1900s. To more easily facilitate this comparison, examples of stenciling at the study sites are organized in chronological order to demonstrate the range of patterns used during the late 1800s from a diaper pattern to a border, as seen in Images 78 through 90.

These examples also show the use of stenciling in all building typologies from the high style to the vernacular. At the height of Victorian stenciling in the 1870s and 1880s, diaper patterns were frequently used with ornate, detailed designs. Both Central Synagogue, 1872, and the Connecticut State Capitol building, 1874, demonstrate the extensive use of diaper patterns within a single building. Central Synagogue was designed in the Moorish style and used a narrow range of colors. The State Capitol building is a High Victorian Gothic structure with eclectic Aesthetic Movement stenciling by William James McPherson, a Boston interior decorator. Each of these examples was designed with a grid of diagonal lines to provide structure for the pattern since they were used to cover a large portion of a wall. Additional examples of diaper patterns at these sites are shown in Images 61 and 62.
Interior of Central Synagogue in New York, N.Y. built in 1872. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.

During the 1880s, the use of diaper patterns continued (Images 84 and 85); however, vernacular sites, such as the Tarrytown Music Hall c. 1885 (Image 86) and St. Mary’s Convent Chapel c. 1885-1887 (Images 87), utilized much simpler designs. Thus stenciling was done at every level of architecture. Even in modest buildings, people still wanted ornamentation. While diaper patterns continued into 1890s, at sites such as St. William’s Church c. 1890 (Image 88), only a single stencil pattern in a single color was used. In some structures of the 1890s, stenciling was reduced to a single border within a room as seen at Willow Hall c. 1890 (Image 89) and The Willows c. 1896 (Image 90).

**Image 84**
Park Avenues Armory, New York, N.Y. 1881. Original unrestored stenciling from 1880s in “Company M” room. A colorful floral pattern and an abstracted subtle floral pattern were used to divide the space. Photograph by author, 1/30/2012.

**Image 85**

**Image 86**
Reveal showing original stenciling on the second floor of the Tarrytown Music Hall in Tarrytown, N.Y., built in 1885. Photograph by author, 12/20/2012.

**Image 87**
Reveal by Johnson & Griffiths Studio at St. Mary’s Convent Chapel, Lancaster, P.A., c. 1885 to 1887. Photograph courtesy of Jeffrey B. Johnson, principal Johnson & Griffiths Studio.
In general, stenciling was used throughout all forms and levels of architecture during the late 1800s. People wanted to decorate their houses with ornamentation, whether they could afford Associated Artists to stencil entire rooms with gold leaf or they could only afford a local painter to stencil a basic border from a trade catalogue.

Even though stenciling became simplified at the turn of the century due to influences of the World Columbian Exposition of 1893 which focused on Neo-Classical design, the early 1900s was a transition period between styles. It is not unusual for later buildings to use designs from an earlier time period. For example, the James Library Building of Madison, New Jersey was built in 1900, but utilized stencil patterns typical of the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s. A better understanding of the simplification of patterns is possible when comparing stencil patterns from the late 1800s to that of the early 1900s, as seen in Chapter 6. During the 1900s, even high style buildings reduced stenciling to a border.

For photographs and a history of the buildings refer to Appendix A.
Ultimately, while many aspects of stenciling changed during the Victorian era, there are three themes that connect stenciling. These themes are the influence of Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, the adoption and continued use of specific stenciling motifs and the simplification of stencil patterns over time. The use of Asian and Middle Eastern designs was common throughout the Victorian period and was a direct result of increased trade and the Aesthetic Movement. Decorators of the late 1800s, borrowed architectural styles from previous periods which played an important role in the continued use of specific stencil motifs. However, the motifs were primarily used as inspiration and were interpreted and adjusted over time to conform to popular styles. Decorators altered the patterns to current tastes which could include a simplification of these patterns as architectural design shifted from the 1800s to the 1900s and styles overlapped from Victorian to the Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, Neo-Classical and Modernist styles. Into the 1900s, the use of similar motifs and the simplification of stencil patterns continued.
Chapter Six: Decline of Stenciling in America, 1900 to 1940

Following the end of the 1800s, while certain common stencil motifs continued to be used as interior decoration, styles dramatically changed and stenciling experienced an irreversible decline. An understanding of why this decline occurred is possible after comparing American society in the 1880s, the apex of Victorian stenciling, to that of the 1940s. The 1880s was a time of economic growth and expansion. It was the height of Victorian design which was accessible to the middle class through trade journals and inexpensive factory made furniture and ornamentation. In contrast, society of the early 1900s reacted negatively to the poorly designed furniture and opulence of the Industrial era resulting in a significant shift in architectural styles. Other factors that contributed to the decline of stenciling post-1900, included the shift from the decorator back to the painter, changes to society and world events.

Architectural Styles

While the Arts & Crafts Movement and Art Nouveau continued into the 1900s, the Neo-Classical style reemerged as a reaction to the architecture and design of the Victorian era. The Neo-Classical style gained popularity through the World’s Columbian Exposition of Chicago in 1893 which celebrated the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America. The World’s Fair constructed the “ideal city” displaying order, cleanliness and Neo-classical designs earning itself the name “The White City.” It was part of a long history of international fairs held frequently after 1851. The fair showcased technology, provided entertainment and educated attendees on the host nation’s culture. Daniel Burnham, a local architect, was the director of the fair site. The legacy of the Columbian Exposition can be seen throughout the City Beautiful movement (1900 to 1910) which was a response to the problems of the urban environment. It
focused on comprehensive city planning and the use of Neo-classical architecture to purge cities of the perceived disarray of the late Victorian era.\textsuperscript{158}

Modernism also developed and gained popularity in the early 1900s. However, interior design was split between new innovative designs and historical, classical decoration. The Modernist viewed stenciling as a historic style found either in overly decorated and cluttered houses or quaint and homely interiors; two styles that were out of date.\textsuperscript{159} The beginnings of Modernism started 20 years earlier during the 1880s when Sullivan devised a way to organize the skyscraper. While Sullivan is known for his use of ornamentation, his method of dividing up the form of a skyscraper set a path for Modern design. From his principle “form follows function”, Sullivan developed the modern skyscraper with shops and large display windows at the ground level and uninterrupted stories above that were adorned with a bold cornice. From his contributions to architecture which placed an emphasis on function, Sullivan is considered the “father of modern architecture.” Many architectural firms, such as Holabird & Roche, followed his design principles when constructing the new Modern skyscraper.\textsuperscript{160}

Similar to Sullivan, who focused on new principles and forms in commercial buildings, Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) focused on new forms for the suburban home. In 1888, Wright


\textsuperscript{160}Roth 2001, 268, 276
started working for Adler & Sullivan as a draftsman.\textsuperscript{161} During the early 1900s, Wright transformed interiors and used asymmetrical layouts by breaking away from previous styles and the historicist methods.\textsuperscript{162} He broke down interior walls of a structure to allow rooms and a single architectural style to flow throughout an interior unlike the traditional building method where rooms were clearly defined by walls and possibly different design styles.\textsuperscript{163} Wright also designed furniture and interior decoration as an integrated aspect of each room. From 1900 to 1910, he designed and built six of his most well-known structures and developed the Prairie Style, which consists of long low-lying horizontal houses that have ribbon windows and cantilevered roofs.\textsuperscript{164}

By the 1920s, Modernism gained strength in Germany from the Bauhaus, a design school founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar, and in France from Le Corbusier, a pioneer in Modern design.\textsuperscript{165} As Modernism continued to grow in popularity throughout Europe and the United States, decoration was used less often, especially in high profile spaces that tended to follow architectural trends more closely than vernacular structures. In 1925, Le Corbusier stated: “The

\textsuperscript{161} Roth 2001, 301.


\textsuperscript{163} Ibid 112.


\textsuperscript{165} Ibid 293.
more cultivated a people becomes, the more decoration disappears.”

Architects, such as Adolf Loos, determined Victorian decoration was unnecessary. In his work, “Ornament and Crime,” he compared the use of excessive ornamentation to an underdeveloped culture. According to Loos, the crime of ornamentation produced during the late 1800s was its insincerity of design unlike the clean, simplified and streamlined forms of Modern architecture.

The use of Neo-Classical and Modernist designs also affected paint colors. In general, paint colors lightened during the 1900s as a reaction to the darker color schemes used in Victorian interiors. By the Depression and World War II, colors continued to lighten and became less vivid as dyes were rationed and there was economic decline.

**Shift of the Decorator back to the Painter**

The decades from the 1880s to the 1940s also saw the shift of the painter/decorator back to a painter. Due to industrialization and new divisions of labor, there were no longer apprentice systems within the United States. Schools and educational programs were established; however, they did not provide the same level of education received during an apprenticeship. In addition, with the shift in popular architectural styles from Victorian to Modern, painters were no longer taught how to decorate or create decoration. In 1922, F. N. Vanderwalker, an author and decorator, stated “No attempt has been made to teach advanced painting subjects, to teach special branches such as sign painting, ornamental design, decoration, automobile painting, nor

---

166 Le Corbusier, The Decorative Art of Today, 1925, 214.

167 Abercrombie 1956, 91.

168 Ladau, Smith, and Place 1989, 68.
estimating, contracting and general business information needed by the contractor.” Since painters did not have an understanding of decoration, they no longer suggested decorative techniques, such as stenciling, to their clients. Additionally, there was a significant decline in the number of decorator’s manuals explaining stenciling and other decorating techniques by the 1940s.

**Changes to Society and World Events**

The 1900s also marked the beginning of women’s entrance into the work force. Due to industrialization, which expanded the economy and increased the number of businesses, it became more socially acceptable for women to have careers. As women increasingly entered the work force, there was less of a focus on ornate and time consuming decoration of their homes. Interior design became much more concentrated around convenience and functionality. Designs and materials appeared crisp, streamlined and easy to clean.

Furthermore, major world events contributed to the decreased use of ornamentation in buildings. During the U.S. involvement in World War I (1917-1918), the Great Depression (1929-1933) and our involvement in World War II (1941-1945) new construction halted; focus shifted away from the excessive interior decoration of the Victorian era towards ease of construction and reducing costs. For most people, the finances and leisure time were not available to lavishly furnish their houses in a similar fashion to the late 1800s. During both wars, materials were rationed and there were fewer painters/decorators available since many men were serving in the military. Additionally, the cost of labor increased while the cost of materials for building and decorating became relatively cheap. This both welcomed a do it yourself (D.I.Y)

---

169 Vanderwalker 1922, iv.
approach with less skill applied and further discouraged the development of specialized skills in painter/decorators.

Many of the changes to American society between the 1880s and 1940 were either caused by or in reaction to industrialization. These changes influenced the introduction of Modern design and contributed to the loss of the skilled decorator which in turn decreased the use of stenciling.

**Stenciling from 1900 to 1940**

By 1900, stenciling had already begun to decline as a decorating technique and, as a result, there are fewer study sites from the 1900s than from the late 1800s. Although there are fewer study sites, more trade publications from the 1900s have survived thus providing valuable information regarding stenciling and decoration from the post-1900 period. Similar to the late 1800s, major themes are evident in stenciling. While exotic Asian and Middle Eastern inspired patterns were no longer frequently used after the end of the Aesthetic Movement (ca. 1890), floral motifs remained in use even with the introduction of new styles. Furthermore, the process of using simplified ornamentation continued especially as the Modernist movement became popular. Only after viewing the stenciling from the late 1800s and the early 1900s does the simplification of stenciling become truly apparent. In many respects, stenciling of this era was a continuation of trends that had developed in the late 1800s.

While motifs remained the same, styles clearly changed during this time period exhibiting a shift to simpler patterns even in high profile spaces when compared to study sites from the late 1800s. The primary motifs used throughout the 1900s were naturalistic patterns. At the Minnesota State Capitol building in Minneapolis, Minnesota the stenciling, designed in 1905
by Elmer Garnsey, a well-known muralist, and influenced by the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, shows the use of simpler Neo-Classical patterns to form thin borders. Garlands and bunches of flowers were used to frame the vaulted ceilings and emphasize the building’s architectural elements.

Image 91

*Stenciling on the ceiling of the Minnesota State Capitol building in Minneapolis, M.N. This was completed in 1905 by Elmer Garnsey. Photograph by author, 12/28/2011.*

Naturalist simplified borders were also used in the houses of wealthy families. The Turnblad Mansion, now named the American Swedish Institute, in Minneapolis, Minnesota has a muted, simplified border. Designed in 1908, this site clearly demonstrates that stenciling transitioned from the primary form of interior decoration to a lesser component of a room. The stencil has a delicate appearance which may derive from the lighter painted colors. These colors are very similar to the surrounding plasterwork and, as a result, the stenciling tends to blend into

---


the plasterwork especially from the first floor where it is difficult to distinguish the border as stenciling.

The use of abstracted motifs in simplified borders is also documented throughout paint catalogues. During the early 1900s, the majority of catalogues were produced by paint companies for the painter. However, by 1910, catalogues were also produced for the homeowner providing necessary information to better understand vernacular ornamentation. Although Modernist designs were popular, ornamentation was still used well into the 1900s. To stress its importance, Sherwin-Williams in 1910 stated, wall decoration “is the foundation upon which all
other decorations are based.” These catalogues, along with the study sites, show a clear shift from ornate diaper patterns of the late 1800s to simple borders. By 1918, the majority of patterns advertised by John Lucas & Co. were borders of thin floral designs, geometric patterns or swags, as seen in Images 94 to 96. Similarly, by 1925, the Acme White Lead and Color Works catalogue only sold two types of stencils: thin borders or borders with draping designs, as seen in Images 99 to 101. Sherwin-Williams expanded upon this trend and suggested rooms with low ceilings should have a simple border while public buildings or rooms with high ceilings could receive large, intricate, colorful borders. Wallpaper also received similar changes in that floral designs were continually advertised; however, in many instances these designs were limited to borders, as seen in Image 98.

172 Sherwin-Williams Company 1910, 1.


By 1910, Sherwin-Williams was advertising thin borders for placement in the frieze of each room of the house. Many of these were floral patterns. Courtesy of Sherwin-Williams Company Decorative Studios. Your home and its decoration: a series of practical suggestions for the painting, decorating, and furnishing of the home... Cleveland, Ohio: Sherwin-Williams Company Decorative Department, 1910, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York.

This narrow wallpaper border is similar to the stencils advertised by Sherwin-Williams. Here an approximately 3 inch wide floral border is shown with its accompanying plain wallpaper. Courtesy of Richard E. Thibaut. Thibaut Wall Papers: Economy, Beauty, Style in Wall Decorations. New York: Richard E. Thibaut, 1922, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York.
The trend toward simplification and the use of naturalistic motifs is also visible in restoration projects of this time period. In 1932, the Board of Officers room at the Park Avenue Armory in New York was restored by Irving and Casson, a Boston interior decoration and furniture design firm.\(^{176}\) Originally designed in the 1880s by the Herter Brothers, an interior design and cabinet making firm, the stenciling was significantly altered during the restoration. Currently, the room is being restored to its original 1880s appearance.\(^{177}\) The new stenciling of the 1932 restoration was a simplified version of the original and it also closely matches ceiling wallpaper advertised in 1881 in *The Art Amateur*.


\(^{177}\) Park Avenue Armory Conservancy, "Park Avenue Armory Drill Hall and Interiors Guide." Tour of the Park Avenue Armory, April 19, 2012.
The main visible differences between the original and the restoration stenciling are that the original is a darker muddy teal color, no gold leaf was used, bundles of flowers were randomly incorporated throughout the flower burst pattern and four bands were used at the bottom and top of the pattern unlike the two bands gilded from the 1932 restoration. Whether or not the ceiling paper from 1881 was known at the time of the original design or restoration is unknown. The original designers, Herter Brothers, were well-known Aesthetic Movement decorators; while it would not be unlikely for journals, catalogues and other decorators to copy their designs, this chrysanthemum pattern was a common Japanese motif. When the stenciling
was restored, Irving and Casson added the teal paint and gold leaf since this is how they perceived the Victorian period and Aesthetic Movement. They also simplified the overall pattern to reflect current tastes. Ultimately, even though the 1932 stenciling is now historic, it will be removed to restore the original 1880s stenciling.¹⁷⁸

By the 1930s, there was a clear shift in interior design; designs offered by paint catalogues transitioned and mixed traditional and Modern architectural styles; however, no stenciling was shown. Rather than offering examples of stencil ornamentation, The Glidden Company, provided the homeowner with new simple, clean and streamlined designs. These rooms had light colored plain painted walls and simple furniture representing the increased use of the Modern style in vernacular spaces.

¹⁷⁸ For the last half a century, the Park Avenue Armory was poorly maintained and received a number of alterations and new interior decorating campaigns. Since December 2006, when the Park Avenue Armory Conservancy, a non-profit organization, leased the Armory, extensive cleaning and restoration of the interiors have occurred. These restorations will return the Park Avenue Armory to its original 1880s splendor since the Conservancy has determined this as their period of significance. While unique finishes cover over the original decorating scheme, these will be documented prior to erasing these layers. For the restoration, the architect is Herzog & de Meuron, the executive architect is Platt Byard Dovell White and the historic preservation consultant is Building Conservation Associates, Inc.

Park Avenue Armory Conservancy "Park Avenue Armory Drill Hall and Interiors Guide."

While new interiors reflected the plain painted walls advertised in catalogues, civic buildings, continued to use historic Neo-Classical styles as a representation of democracy and government. At the Colonial Revival styled Hartley Dodge Memorial Municipal Building (1935) in Madison, New Jersey stenciling was used; however, it was reduced to a thin border in the entry stairwell (Image 107). Running leaf motifs were not new; one example was advertised a decade earlier in 1925 confirming the continuation of motifs, through time and multiple architectural styles. The catalogue example shaded the leaves to create a sense of realism while the Hartley Dodge example is flat, abstracted ornamentation enhanced by its use of gold leaf. Later, during the 1930s and 1940s, paint catalogues advertised thin borders similar to the Hartley Dodge stenciling.
The stenciling at the Hartley Dodge Memorial Municipal Building in Madison, N.J. from 1935. This is such a thin border that it is barely visible in the overall photograph of the stairwell. Photograph by author, 2/24/2012.


The Decline of Stenciling

Study sites and catalogues demonstrate the relatively limited use of stenciling during the early 20th century. Stenciling continued to use naturalistic motifs; however, the styles changed, producing simplified streamlined borders and patterns. Over time, the use of borders declined and the border itself was abstracted and became so narrow it was practically nonexistent. This reduction and ultimate decline in the use of stenciling can be attributed to many factors, including the introduction and acceptance of Modernist simplicity which replaced stenciling with simpler plain painted walls.179 In the 1946 article, “Modern Design Does Not Need Ornament” it was stated that “ornament in the sense of applied pattern is dead.”180 Ultimately, the use of stenciling continued to decline and as a result stenciling became an infrequently practiced craft of a bygone era.

179 Bishop, Lord 1985, 12.

Conclusion

During the Victorian era, the industrialization of America and many of the related developments in American society played a pivotal role in both the development of stenciling as an interior decorative finish and the establishment of the professional decorator. Due to industrialization, cities expanded, a middle class was created, transportation advances occurred, production of publications for the homeowner and decorator increased, inexpensive ornamentation and furniture was widely available, the painter developed into a decorator, and these factors all contributed to the development of the Victorian style. In particular, as industrialization led to a growing middle class with more wealth, education and refined tastes, stenciling provided a way for them to demonstrate their growing wealth and refinement. In addition, during the later 1800s, mass production of stencils and the development of new stencil materials provided decorators with time saving and economic benefits throughout the stenciling process. However, by the early 1900s, reactions to the growing industrialization and changes in architectural and decorative styles and tastes contributed to the decline of stenciling as a decorative finish. Styles shifted to clean, streamlined Modern designs. The apprentice system declined and, as a result, painters were not taught decorative techniques. Women entered the workforce placing less of a focus on the interior design of their houses. Furthermore, WWI, the Great Depression and WWII greatly affected the availability of materials and painters.

The primary goal of this thesis has been to discuss a topic that preservationists should recognize as significant for our understanding of the styles of interior spaces over time and the people that used them. This thesis concluded that several specific trends, including the use of patterns inspired by foreign cultures, the use of motifs expressed in varying styles and the simplification of stencil patterns, are reflected in and connect stenciling throughout the late
1800s into the early 1900s. Thus decorative finishes, such as stenciling, provide a record of history expressing how societies during previous time periods lived and decorated their buildings. Finishes and other materials show how people viewed and portrayed themselves. Did they use ornate or simple designs? Did they use a variety of colors or a single color? Was metallic leaf or bronzing powders used? Answering these questions helps us to better understand society during a particular time period.

Due to the ephemeral quality of stenciling, its history is full of gaps and is biased by the material and context that has survived.\textsuperscript{181} Few vernacular examples of 19\textsuperscript{th} century stenciling survive today leaving even more questions unanswered. This thesis acknowledges that the importance of wall stenciling as a form of decoration, expression and history must be recognized before alterations and demolitions forever erase more examples. Currently, the stenciling at one of the study sites discussed is threatened. The owners of Willow Hall in Morris County, New Jersey plan to paint over their historic stenciling. It is likely that most of the stenciling at the property has already been covered with paint and wallpaper.\textsuperscript{182} This is the primary reason why stenciling must be documented and preserved. For stenciling to be preserved, building owners need to understand the value of historic stenciling and more preservationists need to advocate for its documentation and restoration. Without the documentation and preservation of stenciling, a part of our American heritage will be lost.

Stenciling is a significant interior finish. The industrialization of America led to many changes in society during the late 1800s and these changes can be discerned through an analysis of the development and use of stenciling during that time period. Stenciling ultimately declined

\textsuperscript{181} Saunders 2002.

\textsuperscript{182} Ella Fillippone. "Visit to Willow Hall." In person conversation. February 24, 2012.
in use as a decorative finish as the Victorian era evolved into the Modern era and the corresponding changes in architectural and decorative styles and tastes. Thus an analysis of stenciling during different time periods provides us with a valuable sense of the history of our society during those eras.
Appendix A: Study Sites, 1840 to 1940

A number of study sites were examined to document and better understand stenciling from 1840 to 1940. However, due to the ephemeral quality of stenciling, its history is full of gaps. Sites with stenciling from the 1850s and 1860s were not found during the research for this thesis. For this appendix, the sites were organized chronologically to show the changes in stenciling and to make this information easier to navigate.

Stencilining of the 1870s

Central Synagogue, New York, New York, Stenciling Restored to 1872 Appearance

Central Synagogue, located at 123 East 55th Street in Manhattan, was opened in 1872 and designed by Henry Fernbach, an early prominent Jewish architect. Henry Fernbach (c. 1829-1883) was born in Germany and moved to New York City in 1848 as an architect. Buildings Fernbach designed include Temple Emanu-El on Fifth Avenue; Synagogue Ahavath Chesed on Lexington Avenue and the First Jewish Orphan Asylum on 77th Street and 3rd Avenue.

Unfortunately, Central Synagogue experienced two fires within its long history. The first fire occurred in 1886 and the more recent fire occurred in 1998 when workers accidentally ignited a fire during the final stages of a three year restoration. The roof, its supports, the choir

---


loft and the organ were completely destroyed. Due to the fire, the Synagogue entered into another period of reconstruction and restoration from 1998 to 2001. The damage allowed the Synagogue to reestablish the original 1872 paint scheme as seen in historic photographs and documented by paint analysis.\textsuperscript{185} Today, every wall and ceiling surface of the restored interior is bright, lively and highly patterned with geometric shapes, floral designs and Moorish decoration. The Moorish design is visible in the stenciling and the Synagogue’s architecture, specifically the arches. Most patterns are abstracted geometric designs. In the aisles, stenciled borders mimic wooden beams in their placement (Images 3A-4A). On the second floor of the aisles, multiple borders were used to develop the space between the wall and the ceiling. Here the frieze is similar to a hanging textile with abstracted patterns. The blue resembles mosaics while the yellow design is a simplified flower (Image 10A).

\textit{Image 1A}

\textit{Image 2A}

\textit{The interior of Central Synagogue, New York, N.Y., 1872. The interior architecture and stenciling both reflect Moorish design. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.}

\textit{Central Synagogue, New York, N.Y., 1872. Stenciling marking the archway that separates the bimah from the seating area. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.}

\footnote{Up until the fire, a paint scheme completed by Ely Jacques Kahn, a prominent Jewish architect, in 1949 remained in the interior. Hardy 3, 13.}
The side aisle of Central Synagogue, New York, N.Y., 1872. The aisles were stenciled in varying tones of brown with bright blue, red, yellow and green. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.

Stenciling on the ceiling of the aisles at Central Synagogue, New York, N.Y., 1872. The border’s placement mimics structural beams. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.

A border and diaper pattern on the end walls of the aisles at Central Synagogue, New York, N.Y., 1872. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.

Multiple stencil borders and a diaper pattern located between the windows of the side aisles at Central Synagogue, New York, N.Y., 1872. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.
A diverse range of patterns are found throughout the sanctuary at Central Synagogue, New York, N.Y., 1872. While the patterns vary between the first and second story, there are similar colors used throughout the aisles. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.

Central Synagogue, New York, N.Y., 1872. Stenciling at the frieze, cornice and ceiling of the second story of the aisles. Photograph by author, 2/7/2012.
Connecticut State Capitol Building, Hartford, Connecticut, c. 1878

The Connecticut State Capitol building located in Hartford, Connecticut, was built from 1872 to 1879 and opened in 1878. The architect, Richard Upjohn (1802-1878), was born in Shaftesbury, Dorset, England. He arrived in the United States a cabinetmaker and changed his career to architect by establishing a small practice. After constructing Trinity Church from 1839 to 1846 in Manhattan, he was known as a successful religious architect who worked primarily in the Gothic Revival style.

The State Capitol building is a High Victorian Gothic structure with eclectic Aesthetic Movement stenciling by William James McPherson, a Boston interior decorator who also designed the Capitol’s light fixtures and stained-glass. The building pushed stylistic limits and attempted to achieve the highest style of the time period. Within the interior there is an unrestricted use of colors and metallic leaf. Also, the designs often fool the eye. For example, in the main entrance hallway there is an interesting border, shown in Image 13A. Within each triangle of this border there is a figure resembling an architectural drafting tool; however, it also looks like a goat’s head. This exhibits the creativity and skill of the decorator.


The interior of the Connecticut State Capitol building, Hartford, C.T., c. 1878. Stenciling by William James McPherson. Patterns vary from geometric designs (like those seen in at the base of the rotunda in Image 36A) and floral patterns to goats (as seen in the triangles of the borderer in Image 37A). Overall, the interior stencil work forms a lavish eclectic design. Photograph by author, 12/19/2011.

Stenciling of the 1880s

Park Avenue Armory, New York, New York, 1881

Park Avenue Armory was built in 1881 for the Seventh Regiment of the National Guard as a headquarters for National Guard regiment with reception rooms, a drill hall and company rooms. Located at 643 Park Avenue, New York, NY, the building was designed by Charles W. Clinton, later a partner of Clinton & Russell. Interiors were decorated by a number of the most prominent designers of the Victorian Era including Louis Comfort Tiffany, Harter Brothers and Pottier & Stymus.\textsuperscript{189}

At the Armory, since each room was designed by a different decorator for a different client, some rooms focus on floral patterns while others incorporate geometric designs confirming the diversity of patterns used during this era. In many of the rooms, multiple borders and diaper patterns were combined to create unique designs. These vary from thick flat shapes and abstracted patterns to delicate sinuous florals that use a mixture of colors. Additionally, stenciling was used to divide and section off walls. This can be seen in Images 18A and 19A where two different stencil designs were separated by striping.

\textsuperscript{189} Park Avenue Armory Conservancy.
Ceiling of Company D at the Park Avenue Armory in New York, N.Y. Designed in 1881 by Pottier & Stymus. Photograph by author, 1/30/2012.

Stenciled border in Company E by Pottier & Stymus at the Park Avenue Armory, New York, N.Y., from 1881. Photograph by author, 1/30/2012.

Stenciled border in Company D by Pottier & Stymus at the Park Avenue Armory in New York, N.Y., from 1881. This is a stenciled floral border with blended colors. Photograph by author, 1/30/2012.
Mark Twain House, Hartford, Connecticut, Built 1874, Stenciling 1881

The Mark Twain House, located on Farmington Avenue in Hartford, Connecticut, was built by Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) and his wife Olivia “Livy” Clemens. In 1873, the Clemens’ hired Edward Tuckerman Potter, a New York architect, to design their house. Edward Tuckerman Potter (1831-1904) was born in Schenectady, New York and attended the University of Pennsylvania in 1850. He left before the start of his junior year, graduated in 1853 from

---

190 Philippon, and Auerbach.
Union College, in Schenectady and worked for Richard Upjohn in New York City. Livy worked closely with Potter while designing the house. Construction started in August 1873 and the family moved in on September 19, 1874 before the house was completed. In 1881, the stenciling and color pallet of the first floor and hallway was chosen and completed by Associated Artists. While known for his stained glass, Louis C. Tiffany started as a painter. Interested in commercial interior design he created Associated Artists to decorate interiors for prominent citizens. Tiffany’s designs became iconic and, as a result, his stenciled patterns were recreated countless times by local painters and designers throughout the United States.

At the Mark Twain house, special care was taken that the entry hallway ornamentation was impressive as it was the entry point for house guests. The ornamental woodwork was designed by Leon Marcotte. Associated Artists stenciled the wainscoting in a silver colored leaf and painted the ceiling and walls red with black patterns drawing inspiration from designs of the Middle East. These exotic patterns exhibited the wealth, knowledge and worldliness of the homeowners. The decoration consists of many minute geometric components used to create a larger overall design which resembles textiles and appears as if it was woven together. The use of silver colored leaf (assumed to be either aluminum or platinum as sliver leaf tarnishes and


192 Philippon and Auerbach.


194 Philippon and Auerbach.
turns black) draws one's attention to the stenciling as the patterns enhance the preexisting wooden paneling.

Mark Twain house, Hartford, C.T., stenciling 1881. In the entrance hallway, the ornate designs by Associated Artists were used to display the wealth of the Clemens’. Here the wall below the chair rail is stenciled, there is a stenciled border above the chair rail, a border directly below the ceiling and the ceiling itself is also stenciled. Photograph by author, 12/20/2011

Mark Twain house, Hartford, C.T. Stenciling by Associated Artists in 1881. A close-up photograph taken of the area surrounding the chair rail. Photograph by author, 12/20/2011
Similarly, Associated Artists designed the ceiling patterns to highlight the ornamental woodwork. Through the use of different patterns and colors, the stenciling complements the wood, connecting its components to form an overall pattern. Additionally, the stenciling draws one’s attention to the center of the woodwork creating a mesmerizing ceiling. The patterns used are similar in size and shape to the wall stenciling. If the pattern were larger it would detract from the overall design. By using a small and geometric pattern it gives the ceiling depth while not being distracting.

In the formal drawing room, the influence of Lockwood DeForest is seen in the stenciled silver colored leaf Indian motifs over light pink paint. Due to the colors chosen, the complexity
of the stenciling does not immediately stand out; the design is understated. If colors with a higher contrast were used, the room would be overwhelming. In the drawing room, a paisley pattern on the wall was carried over onto the ceiling. Also, striping was used to frame rectangular spaces mimicking thin wood molding that guides the stenciled pattern. Overall, these designs relate in color, with their use of leaf, and pattern to the hallway creating a cohesive flow throughout the house.

Image 23A

Mark Twain house, Hartford, C.T. Stenciling by Associated Artists in 1881. The parlor, located off the entry hallway, is also stenciled. Here a light pink ground color is covered with silver colored leaf. There is less diversity in the patterns, when compared to the hallway. Photograph by author, 12/20/2011.
A close-up of the stenciling in the formal parlor reveals the use of a chevron pattern to frame the space. These small thin lines are close together giving it a delicate appearance. Even the repeated paisley patterns were composed of small chevron designs. The use of small tightly composed geometric patterns is a continuous theme throughout the stenciling in the public rooms of the Mark Twain house. The Associated Artists stenciling then continues into the library where gold leaf was used on a soft blue ground color.
Mark Twain house, Hartford, C.T., stenciling 1881. Every surface, even the wooden doors, is stenciled in the Clemens’ parlor. Note the different patterns used throughout the elevation, as seen in Image 26A. The silver paisleys eventually are enlarged to create a paisley floral pattern in blue below the chair rail. Even the baseboard is stenciled with the chevrons of the door. Since each of these patterns is complex, Associated Artists chose to convey each in one color to prevent the room from seeming busy and distracting. Image 27A is a close-up view of the door. The size and detail of these chevron patterns show the skill of Associated Artists. Photographs by author, 12/20/2011.
Library ceiling stenciling at Mark Twain house, Hartford, C.T. Stenciling by Associated Artists in 1881. Photograph by author, 12/20/2011

Stenciled frieze in the Library at the Mark Twain house, Hartford, C.T. Stenciling by Associated Artists in 1881. Photograph by author, 12/20/2011

Wall stenciling in Library at the Mark Twain house, Hartford, C.T. Stenciling by Associated Artists in 1881. Photograph by author, 12/20/2011
In the library, a room for family activities, Associated Artists chose a basic design and varied it to compose the room’s decorative scheme. Here a geometric pattern of a small broken squares was used on the wall, turned inside out for the frieze and circles were added to this pattern for the ceiling ornament.

Upstairs through the hallway stenciling continues to the third floor. Associated Artists only stenciled areas within the house that guests could enter such as the first story and the stairwell. Most guests would never see past the first floor; as a result, any stenciling completed in the rooms of the second and third floors were by local, lesser known painters whose work was less expensive. An original section of stenciling remains on the second floor seating area, which is open to the stair landing and located between two bedrooms, as seen in Image 32A. For this stenciling the local painter used a similar technique of small markings to create a larger geometric pattern and striping to provide boundaries for the design.

Stenciling continues onto the third floor Billiard room, also Samuel’s office, study and leisure room where friends would visit, smoke cigars and play pool throughout the night. Due to its informal setting, the stenciling of the billiards room is drastically different from the rest of the

---

house. It reflects Samuel’s interests rather than the family’s status. In the center of the room, the ceiling is stenciled with pool cues and balls and the corners of the ceiling each have sets of stenciled pipes. In 1891, the Clemens family moved to Europe due to financial problems and poor investments. They sold the house in 1903.196

![Image 33A and 34A](image33A.jpg)

**Mark Twain house, Hartford, C.T., stenciling completed in 1881. The billiard room, also Clemens’ office, was stenciled by a local painter with pool sticks and smoking pipes. Photographs by author, 12/20/2012.**

**Tarrytown Music Hall, Tarrytown, New York, c. 1885**

The Tarrytown Music Hall is located at 13 Main Street, Tarrytown, NY, and was built in 1885 by William Wallace, a chocolate manufacturer. Today, the Tarrytown Music Hall is the oldest theater located within Westchester Country, New York. Built by Theodore DeLemos and August Cordes, who designed Macy’s Herald Square, the Music Hall was constructed during an era when the Rockefellers and Vanderbilt’s were Tarrytown summer and weekend residents. Notably, in 1901, the Music Hall was one of the first theaters to show silent films. By 1976, the building was closed and the Village of Tarrytown proposed to demolish the structure. In 1980, a 501(c) (3) nonprofit, the Friends of the Mozartina Musical Arts Conservatory was established.

196 Philippon and Auerbach.
and purchased the Music Hall. It was under restoration by Preservation Architecture and Lacey-Convertino Architects at the time the site was visited in January 2012. Unfortunately, at this study site, the overall design is not visible; however, what is visible is a thin geometric pattern used as part of a larger design scheme. These reveals show original stenciling on the second floor of the Tarrytown Music Hall. The thin, simplified and abstracted stenciled geometric border used striping and a diamond pattern.

Image 35A and 36A

Reveals showing original stenciling on the second floor of the Tarrytown Music Hall in Tarrytown, N.Y., built in 1885. In Image 36A, it appears only the vertical grey pattern to the right is stenciled while the blue and green patterns are free style painted. This vertical pattern matches the pattern in Image 35A showing the use of the same design throughout the interior applied in different ways. Photographs by author, 12/20/2012.

St. Mary’s Convent Chapel, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, c. 1885 to 1887

St. Mary’s Convent Chapel, located at 119 South Prince Street in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is a side chapel of St. Mary’s Church. Construction of the current church begun in 1852 and in 1867 a fire caused partial destruction. Reconstruction started in 1868 and changes continued well after from 1885 to 1887 when the church was enlarged and side chapels were

---

added after the design of St. Peter’s in Rome. Convent Chapel at St. Mary’s was constructed during this time period. The existing stenciling in the Chapel it is not original. However, reveals were made by Johnson & Griffiths Studio to uncover the historic stencil patterns. It is believed that Lorenzo C. Scattaglia was the decorative painter for the Chapel. Little information is known about Lorenzo except for his specialty in Catholic Church decoration. An advertisement from 1904 lists some of the most prized churches he decorated. Overall, this chapel has a simple design. The patterns used have a number of breaks (due to ties) to enhance the overall design. While thicker lines were used to convey overall pattern, the effect of the stencil design is refined and delicate.

---


Image 37A

This photograph shows St. Mary’s Convent Chapel, Lancaster, P.A., c. 1885 to 1887. Through the use of reveals and testing it was determined by Johnson & Griffiths Studio that the current stenciling is not original. Photograph courtesy of Jeffrey B. Johnson, principal Johnson & Griffiths Studio.

Image 38A


Images 39A and 40A

Reveals taken by Johnson & Griffiths Studio at St. Mary’s Convent Chapel, Lancaster, P.A., c. 1885 to 1887. Photographs courtesy of Jeffrey B. Johnson, principal Johnson & Griffiths Studio.
Stenciling of the 1890s

St. William’s Church, Racquette Lake, New York, c. 1890

St. William’s Church, built in 1890, is a modestly sized Shingle style church constructed after a donation of funds and property by William West Durant. Born in 1850 in Brooklyn, New York, William West Durant, along with a few other men, was responsible for providing the funds for the construction of the United States’ first transcontinental railroad. He was the vice president and manager of Union Pacific Railroad. Additionally, he held over 500,000 acres of land in upstate New York which he later used to build large camp sites, called Great Camps, transforming the area from Saratoga Springs to Ogdensburg, New York.  

Durant commissioned both churches located on Raquette Lake, New York. The first, which began in 1880, was the Church of the Good Shepard on St. Hubert’s Island, designed by J.C. Cady & Co. of New York City as an Episcopal Church for the summer residents who visited the area. The second church, St. William’s, was a Catholic Church built in the 1890s to serve Durant’s Catholic employees who were constructing his camps and running his sawmills. St. William’s was also designed by the architectural firm, J.C. Cady & Co founded by Josiah Cleveland Cady (1837-1919). Throughout its career, the firm built 26 churches, mostly Presbyterian. They built mainly in the Romanesque Revival style and their only Shingle style church was St. William’s.  

The same abstracted naturalistic diaper pattern was used on the walls and the ceiling of the church blurring any division of space. This is similar to Shingle style exteriors where the

---


walls and roof merge. On the wall there is a brown background with silver colored leaf stenciling. The pattern used was similar to a pattern from the 1888 Stencil Co. catalogue (Image 43A). Both were diaper patterns of circles with a naturalistic design inside the circle and another pattern connecting each circle. Rather than using numerous small geometric shapes to compose a design, the geometric shapes were larger in size. The stenciling at this site was recently restored by Johnson & Griffiths Studio.

Image 41A

*St. William’s Church, Racquette Lake, N.Y., c. 1890. As a result of historic photographic research, it was concluded by Johnson & Griffiths Studio that this ceiling pattern (Image 42A) continued onto the entire wall. Image 41A shows the interior after restoration of the stencil pattern by Johnson & Griffiths Studio. Photograph courtesy of Jeffrey B. Johnson, principal Johnson & Griffiths Studio.*

Image 42A

*St. William’s Church, Racquette Lake, N.Y., c. 1890. The original stencil pattern on the ceiling. Photograph courtesy of Jeffrey B. Johnson, principal Johnson & Griffiths Studio.*
Willow Hall, Morris County, New Jersey, c. 1890s

Willow Hall in Morris County, New Jersey was built in 1848. The owner, George Vail and his family lived there from 1848 to 1875. George Vail had many hobbies and considered himself a blacksmith, engineer, businessman, politician, diplomat and judge. In 1843, he was elected a member of the New Jersey Legislature and in 1852, he became a U.S. Congressman. He also financed his brother’s, Alfred, work with Samuel F.B. Morse as they designed the telegraph.²⁰³

Willow Hall is a replica of Andrew Jackson Downing’s Design V: A Cottage Villa in the Bracketed Mode in his book *Cottage Residences*. Since this book is from an earlier period, the design is simpler. In designing the house, Vail used materials from the local surroundings. As a result, the façade was constructed with purple puddingstone, a stone excavated in Morris County. Recently, after the house was nearly divided into condos and the surrounding property developed, the Passaic River Coalition (PRC) purchased the building as their permanent headquarters. While the land will remain open and the building in its original exterior condition,

²⁰³ Passaic River Coalition, Welcome to Willow Hall: Home of the Passaic River Coalition Passaic River Coalition, Willow Hall: Built by George Vail in 1848 partly with the income from the telegraph whose implementation he financed for his brother Alfred Vail and Samuel F.B. Morse.
the interior is being redecorated. The PRC agreed to complete a historic resources survey before any interior changes were carried out. 204

During the paint analysis survey, stenciling was revealed in the stairwell by Keystone Preservation Group. The survey states that this stenciling was added at some point between the 1870s to the 1890s. 205 After considering the appearance of the stenciling, trends in stencil patterns and the popularity of thin stencil borders in the 1900s, the stenciling at Willow Hall is likely to date from the 1890s. The stenciling at the site is a thin border consisting of red striping and a green floral pattern. The floral pattern is abstract and refined. It has a range of line weights giving the design movement which is balanced by the striping that follows the path of the stairwell and grounds the design. Unfortunately, even though this stenciling was revealed and documented, the Passaic River Coalition plans to paint and wallpaper the walls.

Image 44A

204 Passaic River Coalition Pamphlet
Ella Fillippone. ”Visit to Willow Hall.” In person conversation. February 24, 2012.

205 Passaic River Coalition Pamphlet
The Willows at Fosterfields, Morris County, New Jersey, c. 1896

The Willows, at Fosterfields in Morris Country, New Jersey was built in 1854 by the grandson of Paul Revere. General Joseph Warren Revere sold the land in 1881 to Charles Foster, a business man, who changed the property name from The Willows to Fosterfields and used the property as a farm. Here stenciling was added to the parlor for his daughter’s, Caroline Foster,
coming out party c. 1896. While the house has multiple rooms of wood graining from the original decorating campaign, stenciling is only located in the parlor.206

Similar to the Mark Twain house, visually small geometric shapes were used to form an overall design showing the continuation of trends throughout the later 1800s. Abstracted floral patterns were also used. To create this stenciled frieze, a number of borders were combined to create a single finished product. At most, approximately six to four borders were used. Due to its many components, it required a painter/decorator to properly apply the stencils. As a stenciled frieze, it divides the space, from the wall to the ceiling. Even though this is a large border it appears delicate because of its thin lines and small geometric shapes.

Image 47A

*Renaissance Revival stenciled border at The Willows, at Fosterfields in Morris Country, N.J. The stenciling was completed in 1896. Photograph by author, 2/24/2012*

Image 48A

*A photograph of The Willows at Fosterfields in Morris Country, N.J. in the late 1800s showing the stenciled border. This photograph and a small section of original stenciling aided in the restoration of the room. Courtesy of Foster Family Photographs, Collection of the Morris County Park Commission.*

Stenciling of the 1900s

James Library Building, Madison, New Jersey, 1900

While the James Library building in Madison, New Jersey was opened to the public on Memorial Day 1900, its design harkens back to earlier Victorian styles. This shows that a structure’s date is not necessarily the determining factor for its placement in larger design trends. The James Library building corresponds to trends seen throughout the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s.

The Library was a gift from D. Willis James, a philanthropist, and his wife, who spent summers in Madison, New Jersey. James hired Willard and Charles Bringham, two architects from New England, to design the Romanesque Revival structure. In 1900, the building cost $65,000 to build and decorate. To put this into perspective, the average income for U.S. households in 1901 was only $750. Today, the building is listed on both the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The building is owned by the Museum of Early Trades & Crafts, and in 1996, it was renovated. During the renovation, the Museum took off the previous wall coverings to find original stenciling still intact. This is a rare example of stenciled brick walls. Usually, a brick wall was covered with plaster prior to stenciling since this provided the best surface to apply flat color and patterns. Brick walls are not a flat surface thus it


[210] Throughout researching for this thesis no other study sites or written examples of stenciling on brick walls were identified.
was more difficult to paint and apply the stencil. Some of the stenciling has since been restored; however, the majority remains original.

Image 49A


Image 50A

The James Library Building, Madison, N.J., 1900. Stenciling from behind the original circulation desk, Image 51A. Photograph by author, 2/24/2012.

Image 51A

The James Library Building, Madison, N.J., 1900. Historic photograph showing the original stenciling. Historic photograph courtesy of The James Library Building.


Central hallway of the James Library Building, Madison, N.J., 1900. Photograph by author, 2/24/2012.

The James Library Building, Madison, N.J., 1900. Thin leaf border that frames the groin vaults in the central hall. Photograph by author, 2/24/2012.

The James Library Building, Madison, N.J., 1900. This border, used to frame the inside of the archways, has depth and appears three dimensional showing the advanced skill of the decorator. Photograph by author, 2/24/2012.
At the Library, a single pomegranate pattern was altered in size and color for different architectural elements and rooms within the building. The pattern remained at its largest on the tall, wide and expansive walls of the original reading area which catered to library visitors (Image 58A). In the room behind the circulation desk, the pattern was decreased in size and complexity since this was a space for employees (Image 50A). The pattern was also simplified for the reading room ceiling where it was painted yellow/gold (Image 56A). On the ceiling the designs are centered between wooden beams. These designs are smaller and are proportionally less wide compared to the same design on the wall. This, along with its flanking striping, helps elongate the ceiling.

Image 57A

The original reading room of the James Library Building, Madison, N.J., built in 1900, shows that every surface of the interior was stenciled similar to buildings of the Victorian era. A basic pattern was used throughout the space and modified to create a larger overall design. Photograph by author, 2/24/2012.

Image 58A

The James Library Building, Madison, N.J., 1900. Wall stencil in the reading room. This was a popular pattern and appears to be a pomegranate. Photograph by author, 2/24/2012.

Image 56A

The James Library Building, Madison, N.J., 1900. A smaller, less detailed version of the stencil in Image 58A was used between the wooden beams on the ceiling of the reading room. Photograph by author, 2/24/2012.
Minnesota State Capitol Building, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1905

The Minnesota State Capitol building opened to the public on January 2, 1905. The structure was 12 years in the making as the State’s third capitol building. As early as 1893, legislature was drafted to appropriate funds for the new structure. Two years later, a design competition was held to pick the architect. Every design entered was inspired by the “White City” of the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893. Cass Gilbert, who was only 35 years old, created the winning design. He was born in Ohio in 1859 and was raised in St. Paul, Minnesota. Early in his architecture career he worked in New York for the famed McKim, Mead & White.²¹³

The stenciling at the State Capitol building, completed by Elmer Garnsey, a well-known muralist, is more ornate than the typical 1900s example.²¹⁴ As a state capitol building it is likely the stenciling would reflect the highest form of design during this time period; care was taken to decorate it appropriately as a government building and according to popular styles. At the State Capitol, thin floral borders of Neo-Classical garlands were used to frame the space as they follow the ribs of each vault. This enhanced the architectural detail by drawing in one’s attention. The interior also used stenciling to express pride in the agricultural production of Minnesota. Customized stencils, such as ears of corn, were connected to form a border, frame the space and reflect the agricultural economy of the state.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

Close-up examination of the stenciling at the Minnesota State Capitol building shows the high level of detail. Striping was used to frame the various borders and patterns. While lighter paint colors were chosen, to define the shapes these lighter colors were paired with either a darker tone of the original color or a different light color to add definition and depth to the ornament.

Swan J. Turnblad Mansion, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1908

The Swan J. Turnblad Mansion, now named the American Swedish Institute, is located at 2600 Park Avenue in Minneapolis, M.N. The structure was built from 1903 to 1908 at a cost of
$1.5 million. Built of Indiana limestone, it occupies six lots on Park Avenue, which was the principal street in Minneapolis for affluent families during the late 1800s early 1900s. Three architectural groups submitted designs for the house. Turnblad chose the Minneapolis group, Christopher A. Boehme (1865-1916) and Victor Cordella (1872-1937). During the 1920s, the house became vacant for a few years. In 1929, Swan Turnblad decided to donate the house to the Swedish American community. The home, its contents and Svenska Amerikanska Posten, the newspaper he owned, were donated to establish the American Institute of Swedish Arts, Literature, and Science, now called the American Swedish Institute, making it the oldest Swedish American museum in the United States. Here stenciling has been reduced to a simple border surrounded by ornate wood work and plaster molding. Due to the muted colors and size of the border, when compared to the entry hallway, it blends in with the other decorative ornament such as the plaster work (Image 65A). Stenciling was not the focal point of this interior, it accompanied the other designs and did not stand out.

---


At the Turnblad Mansion, stenciling was not a focal point of the design. The stenciled frieze had muted colors and without close examination it appears to be a wallpaper border due to the consistency of the color. Photograph by author, 12/28/2011
Hartley Dodge Memorial Municipal Building, Madison, New Jersey, 1935

The Hartley Dodge Memorial Municipal Building in Madison, New Jersey was dedicated in 1935 as a municipal building. It was built by Ethel Geraldine Rockefeller Dodge as a memorial for her son, Marcellus Hartley Dodge Jr. who died in a car accident at 22 years of age, and as a way to support local workers and craftsmen during the Depression. The stencil decoration at Hartley Dodge represents the limited use of stencils in design and the decline of stenciling. By this time stencils were restricted within a building and limited to thin borders and abstracted designs. In this case, the border is limited to the central stairwell. While the stenciling is a thin, abstracted, streamlined border, it was elevated by its use of gold leaf. Stenciled on top of the gold are green leaves and acorns. A sinuous line divides the stencil creating a sense of movement; as a result, while the pattern is confined it is not rigid.

The stenciling at the Hartley Dodge Memorial Municipal Building in Madison, N.J. from 1935. It is such a thin border that it is barely visible in the overall photograph of the stairwell. Photograph by author, 2/24/2012.

Appendix B: Bibliography

Archival Trade Catalogues, Manuals and Pamphlets


Hasluck, Paul N., ed. *House Decoration: Comprising Whitewashing, Paperhanging, Painting, Etc.* David McKay, 1909


Le Corbusier, The Decorative Art of Today, 1925, 214.


Stencils and Stencil Materials, Sherwin-Williams Co. Decorative Studios, 1929.


<http://books.google.com/books?id=aQvOAAAAMAAJ&pg=RA1-PA26&dq=Painter's+trade+schools&hl=en&sa=X&ei=bW-ET7HRJMLJQHV5LVzBw&ved=0CF8Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=Painter's%20trade%20schools&f=false>


<http://books.google.com/books?id=aQvOAAAAMAAJ&pg=RA1-PA26&dq=Painter's+trade+schools&hl=en&sa=X&ei=bW-ET7HRJMLJQHV5LVzBw&ved=0CF8Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=Painter's%20trade%20schools&f=false>


<http://books.google.com/books?id=aQvOAAAAMAAJ&pg=RA1-PA26&dq=Painter's+trade+schools&hl=en&sa=X&ei=bW-ET7HRJMLJQHV5LVzBw&ved=0CF8Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=Painter's%20trade%20schools&f=false>


<http://books.google.com/books?id=PcpPAAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Painting+and+decorating+working+methods&hl=en&sa=X&ei=I1N-T63qLuLy0gHAiLmJDg&ved=0CFIQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=Painting%20and%20Decorating%20Working%20Methods&f=false>


**Resources**


Landmarks Preservation Commission, NYC. *Church of the Transfiguration (The Little Church Around the Corner).* 1967. *Neighborhood Preservation Center.* Web. 18 Feb. 2012. <http://www.neighborhoodpreservationcenter.org/designation_reports/index.php?action=detail&resource_id=1302&request=a%3A5%3A{s%3A6%3A%22action%22%3B%3A%22list%3A%22%3B%3A5%3A%22title%22%3B%3A31%3A%22Little+Church+Around+the+Corner%22%3B%3A8%3A%22keywords%22%3B%3A0%3A%22%3B%3A14%3A%22year_published%22%3B%3A0%3A%22%3B%3A7%3A%22boolean%22%3B%3A3%3A%22AND%22%3B} &start=0>.


Passaic River Coalition, “Welcome to Willow Hall: Home of the Passaic River Coalition”

Passaic River Coalition, “Willow Hall: Built by George Vail in 1848 partly with the income from the telegraph whose implementation he financed for his brother Alfred Vail and Samuel F.B. Morse”.


