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M. D. C A M P B E L L

309 GRANT AVENUE

HIGHLAND PARK, N. J.

Third Period (1790-1825). The excavations before 1750 at ^{San}Herculaneum and Pompeii had laid bare new Roman materials and Robert Adam in England, who had been fired by these discoveries rapidly established a new style of purely classic derivation. This influence is now felt in the new Republic in its architecture, especially the beautiful interiors and the restraint in the furniture and appointments.

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This opportunity grasped by the authorities of placing each period on its own floor is typical of the lucid arrangement of the harmonious ensemble. We start on the third floor entering thru a charming old doorway into the first period expressive of the lean severity of hardy pioneering, filled with examples of heavy crude workmanship but lightened by that hunger for self-expression, then to pass downstairs to the second floor and second period where successful business has brought wealth and opportunity of indulging all art impulse and love of luxurious appointment, then down another beautiful staircase to the first floor and third period.

Indeed that editorial in the Saturday Evening Post was right.

This isn't a "bleak storage warehouse of art objects" Instead of inspiring us with only mystery and awe we are encompassed with warmth and vitality. This is more than compiled historical data and relative souvenirs and relics, it is the telling of a story, a human story surely for doesn't it tell the throbbing tale of American development? The two hundred year story of privation, of trouble with Indians, of unrest and defiance to old mastery, of Revolution, of Independence and prosperity. People lived here, they had their every day problems, they had their momentous problems. Yes, it is a human story for all to see and read who will and it will be many a day before the colored cinema can tell a story such as the American Wing presents in fifteen different settings, each more colorful than the last!

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Third Floor, First period 1630 - 1725

Starting on the third floor we find a faithful reproduction of the parlor of the Hart House in Ipswich, Massachusetts dating about 1640, combined with it is a kitchen and entry with its short winding stair modeled after those in the Parson Capen House, Topsfield, built about 1683. In these rooms little attempt is made to hide the structural features, roughly hewn beams support the low unplastered ceiling, stout posts jut out from corners of the room, the walls sheathed with broad boards or crudely plastered, are broken by small casement windows. We can vision the family, on a severe winter night clustered round the great fireplace, eight or more feet wide and large enough for a little seat to be placed within, a warm spot on a bitter night. Above the fireplace across the chimney throat is set a sapling upon which were hung the hooks which supported the pots and kettles over the blazing logs. In these great kettles, were cooked the stews, vegetables, thick soups and porridge which formed an important part of the menu. In the small oven the bread, beans, etc. were baked while the meats, including wild birds and other game were roasted on spits.

In rooms of this type one or more chests were always found for they were indispensable as they served both as seats and storage space - other furnishings were cupboards and dressers, chairs or perhaps a settel. The furniture was chiefly of oak and pine, with other woods in combination, sturdily built for utility and durability. Early pieces follow Elizabethan tendencies, later Jacobean influence is felt in lighter construction of the framework, the more slender turnings, using slats and spindles for chair backs instead of the solid panels. The furniture in the earliest rooms is cumbersome and heavy but as we progress into the later rooms of this period, we find it lighter in form as is the woodwork and construction of the rooms themselves and showing refinement and delicacy.

The early interiors with their great beams, their panelled walls and heavy oak furniture would have been somber and gloomy were it not for the bright touches of color in chair cushions and wall hangings and the gleam of pewter and silver.

Though there were great extremes of wealth and poverty then as now this glimpse into these early homes proves that the more enterprising colonists succeeded in enjoying all of the comforts and many of the refinements of their time. In the Hart House (picture) a touch of color is shown in a molded band of red and black dentils running across the fireplace opening. The carved chair by the fireplace is reputed to have been done on the ship coming over, so the men who carved this early furniture were plainly not sour souls with their eyes set on heaven alone - they worked long hours to make life pleasant in the here and now.

Halsey says:

"It was around the firesides of rooms like these that the discussions were held which led to the founding of the college at Cambridge (1639), the planning of the campaigns of the Indian wars. Such walls encompassed as well the fevered talk which led to the executions of the Quakers on the Boston Common in 1649 and fierce denunciations of witchcraft. In fact almost all of the political history and romance of 17th Century New England could be written against the backgrounds of such interiors."

On each floor is a large central exhibition room from which the individual rooms and alcoves extend. On this third floor it takes the form of an authentic reproduction of a famous Massachusetts Church, the First Parish Church of Hingham, known as the "Old Ship Meeting-House". This great room is open to the top of the roof. The great trusses are supported upon posts at the walls emphasizing the Gothic tendencies the colonists brought with them. This room is filled with examples of furniture, and appointments of the period.

By the eighteenth century the vigor and independence that had enabled these colonists to establish homes in the wilderness were reaching out into new fields, finding their fullest development in the merchants and mariners of the seaboard towns, who sailed their home-built ships across far distant seas. Of these seaports none was busier than Newport. From its bustling harbor ships went forth with cargoes of lumber, salt fish, grain or horses and returned laden

with sugar, molasses and indigo from the West Indies, wines and silks from France, manufactured goods from England and slaves from Africa. Its merchants grew rich and on account of their growing wealth and contact with foreign lands there were in their homes a spaciousness and an elegance not possible under the stern condition of living fifty years previous. It is the room from Portsmouth, Rhode Island, that illustrates this development to us. (Pictures)

This is a room from the country house of one of Newport's most prosperous and patriotic merchants, Judge Bowler. It is filled with pieces of fine colonial adaptations of William and Mary and early Queen Anne styles which show a degree of elaboration, a desire for grace, a delicacy of detail and a lightness of construction different from the simplicity and massiveness of the first part of the period. Here we meet for the first time the high chests of drawers (later called high-boys), they have flat tops and straight legs. There is a charming desk of veneered walnut with brass drop handles, mirrors of simple outline, and a variety of high backed caned chairs. These chairs make an interesting study of foreign influences, the style of the French brought by the Huguenot craftsman, the oriental fashion of caning, Flemish scrolls and Spanish feet are all illustrated in these pieces of furniture. The window curtains of painted cotton from India (a man was copying a floral detail in this fabric when we were there), the Dutch tiles which frame the fireplace and a few pieces of Chinese porcelain are such touches of color as Judge Bowler's foreign trade might have brought in.

Now, adjoining the Portsmouth Room, is one taken from the home of a prosperous Long Island farmer, Captain Hewlett, Renaissance architectural detail furnishes inspiration as in the Portsmouth woodwork. In a cupboard at the left of the fireplace is an array of Delft which links up with the Delft scriptural tiles round the fireplace, the woodwork has been painted a blue-grey, the usual color for interiors in this region at this time, and blue printed linen is used for curtains and cushions. (See picture). Beyond the cupboard a narrow door formerly led to a small clothes closet, its back formed a sliding panel which

opened upon a steep narrow staircase winding up behind the cupboard to a trap door in the floor above. History tells us that in their growing spirit of independence the colonists resisted by every possible means the various measures taken by the King to limit their commerce, and, to evade royal commissioners and excise-men, resorted to smuggling and to secret staircases. (History repeats itself!) But in this case Justice Hewlett was a Tory and while British forces were encamped near, he commandeered his neighbors cattle to feed these soldiers. Well, when the day of reckoning came, bringing the neighbors with blood in their eyes, the Justice sought refuge on the stairs. In this very room, shown in the picture, the neighbors met and during a silence heard the loud ticking of the culprits watch, the stairway was discovered and he was taken away a prisoner!!

Second Period, (Second Floor) 1725 - 1790
Italian Rococo - following Georgian style

As we descend to the second floor we find rooms in the elegant Georgian style. In the southern and central colonies the houses usually were of brick, in New England, because in the cold masonry tended to produce dampness the majority were of frame. In the south where food was abundant, the climate mild living very easeful and where the aristocratic class maintained a manorial state and elegance the houses were far more spacious and rambling than was possible or practical in the north.

The earliest Georgian sample at the Museum is a room from a house in Somerset County, Maryland. The walls are painted putty color with greenish caste, ascents of color show in the two finely modeled shell topped cupboards which flank the fireplace, their interiors painted lacquer-red touched with gold. Traces of this decoration lingered beneath layers of modern paint giving a clue to the original color scheme. To suggest the imported wares which brightened many a colonial home, these cupboards have been filled with portions of Chinese blue and white porcelain while early Georgian furniture chiefly in walnut furnishes the room.

In the late seventeenth century tea began to be popular in England and in the next century its vogue here developed until the tea-table with its

porcelain or silver service became the center of social life. A particularly graceful table appears here, also several pieces of Japanned furniture suggesting the Colonial fashion of imitating Oriental lacquer.

Adjoining this room is a ballroom from a tavern built in 1793 at Alexandria, Virginia. (Picture) This room surely does let your imagination go aromancing! For at this Inn, in the days of its glory, Washington often dined and here in 1798 his last birthday was celebrated. As on preceeding occasions the festivities began with a military parade and ended with a Birthnight Ball. Lafayette too was feted and dined here. This historic building known as Gadsby's Tavern eventually fell from its high estate becoming successively, the City Hall, an auction house, a storage warehouse and finally an Italian lodging house! An interesting feature in the ballroom is the musician's gallery, which is hung from the ceiling instead of supported by posts which rise from the floor which would have interfered with the dancers.

This room, as the many others, are filled with charming pieces of the period which I can't go into detail to describe, mentioning only the beautiful mahogany, in the elaborate Chippendale secretaries and high-boys and the beautiful silver, some by Paul Revere himself!

First Floor, Third Period 1790 - 1825

One of the many inviting realms in this vast treasure house for an art student or decorator must be to follow the evolution of the interior motifs. Going from the second floor of elaborate ornamentation we come to the first floor and last period, with every line and proportion influenced by the chaste classic style revived and popularized by Robert Adams in England.

The authorities have gathered together from the proper representative homes, doorways, archways and moldings, such detail from which to build the interiors on this floor.

It is not alone the rooms themselves that show a change in style but also the furniture and all embellishments, gone are the pompous curves of Chippendale, for the straight restrained beauty of his successors, Sheraton and Hipplewhite - they having many faithful followers on this side of the water

culminating in the outstanding American cabinet maker Duncan Phyfe. You all know the lovely examples of this man's workshop and some of you, no doubt, are lucky enough to even possess some of them. (Pictures)

It is on this last floor that the decorators and furniture manufacturers have their best inspirations for present day adaptations. It is a great temptation for me not to go over such a room in detail with their color schemes and gems of furniture and I can't leave without mentioning the fascinating wall papers, one a yellow brocade, another a french paper from a house in Allentown, N. J., the bill for this paper was dated 1794, and still another french scenic paper of a hunting scene, the red coats of the riders standing out in vivid contrast to the green foliage background.

So we have explored the Wing merely touching on its interesting points and we go out the wide doorway from the main exhibition room down the broad steps to the court-yard with its flagged walks and appropriate shrubbery and then look back at an old building! For Mr. deForest had the vision at the time the old facade of the United States Assay Office, at 15 Wall Street, was torn down to have each stone carefully taken and numbered and stored until they could be re-erected to stand here as an example of the architecture of the period (1822).

This accomplishment of Mr. deForest is so expressive it typifies the comprehensive ideals that the man must have who can be the president of a great museum, head of the Russell Sage Better Housing Foundation and New York's First Tenement Commissioner. He has shown how to beautify every-day human living and now in his American Wing he has shown how the beautiful, the artistic can be humanized.

In conclusion, may I quote something by Ethel Davis Seal, expressive of the human side of the American Wing?

"At no time in our history or in the history of furniture could this complete collection of Americana have appeared so definitely in answer to a popular public taste ready and eager to assimilate it; and it may be looked upon

to supply perhaps the greatest influence that could be brought to bear on the present and future homes of America. Never before has any exhibition of furniture in a museum been capable of arousing such keen interest in the mind of the average housewife. For, while she may admire the magnificence of Italian credences and kingly chairs, while she may be educated by seeing the world's finest carvings of Louis' models and Chippendale originals, she never may hope to possess them. But, in the American Wing, she may find pieces very similar to those she has in her home today, pieces she sees copied in her local stores or which remind her of simple antiques often to be found tucked away in some roadside shop. So it is not merely material for club papers that she finds in the American Wing, but something more vital, a practical inspiration toward the furnishings of her own home. It is because of this practical and strong human interest that the crowds have flocked hourly into the American Wing for they are going to see something they recognize, live with and love, something that belongs to them.

Room from Portsmouth,
N.H., c. 1670-c. 1710

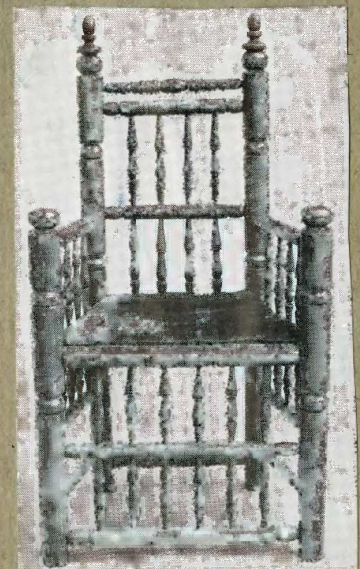


Entry and staircase from
the Samuel Wentworth
house, Portsmouth, N.H.,
c. 1671



Paneled wall from Newington,
Conn., c. 1730

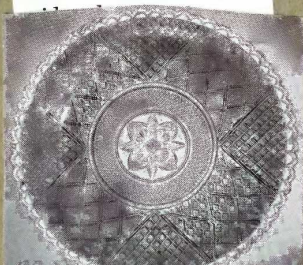
Brewster-type chair,
Mass., c. 1650



Detail of turning and "sun-
flower" carving from a Con-
necticut chest, 1650-1700



Pressed glass dish, Mass.,
c. 1700



Fireplace detail, room from
Haverhill, Mass., 1818



Room from Baltimore, Md.,
c. 1810





Room from Woodbury,
L.I., c. 1740-50
Hewlett House

Paneling from Ulster
County, N.Y., 1752



The Verplanck room,
1763-67

