Inside the Past: The Interior and the Colonial Revival in American Art and Literature, 1860–1914

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The late nineteenth-century vogue for American antiques that became the colonial revival involved both people and objects. The interior brought them together in one place and, as a single overarching metaphor, identified them with each other. The frequently symbolic space that was the inside of the colonial revival mixed people and things, blended disparate bits of American history and historical styles. After all, as Clarence Cook instructed a new generation of aesthetically inclined Americans in his influential 1878 *The House Beautiful*, the beauty and meaning of the past would be revived not through antiquarian exactitude but by capturing the "spirit" of the past.[1] Even as American interest in a national past grew increasingly knowledgeable during the decades preceding the First World War, art, literature, connoisseurship, and collecting retained the poetic, the imaginative, the emotionally charged aspects of that spirit.

The colonial revival came to be considered an emotional, spiritual, and intellectual heritage, something that was carried inside. It was a

[1] Clarence Cook, *The House Beautiful: Essays on Beds and Tables, Stools and Candlesticks* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1878), p. 190. This book originally appeared as a series of articles in *Scribner's Monthly* in 1877.

question of character. As interiors from the past or containing reminders of the past became the symbol and setting for certain types of people and pastimes, these were in turn viewed as embodiments of old-fashioned qualities and internal characteristics that connected them to historical time. Architectural order, the pride of the colonial interior, implied moral order. The rediscovery of the American past through the colonial revival meant the furnishing of mental interiors as well as of architectural ones. These were to change over time, emotional and moral connotations shifting subtly to more social implications, and a once ingenuous enthusiasm about the interior entering the more precarious and challenging recesses of the inner self.

The architectural interior has traditionally been a symbol of permanence, stability, shelter, and enduring values, or, as Henry James's Rowland Mallett thinks to himself in the novel *Roderick Hudson* (1875), gazing at "the clear white houses" of an old New England village: "Here were kindness, comfort, safety, the warning voice of duty, the perfect absence of temptation." But the interior was pervasively called upon as such in this country for the first time really only during the second half of the nineteenth century, when, as one critic commenting nostalgically on the colonial scenes depicted by Francis D. Millet wrote, "great cities poison the air for millions, and great worldly successes poison content in unsuccessful more." Urbanization, with its physical and human squalor, and industrialization and its discontents caused much of American culture to move inside and turn inward. The great raw expansionist frontier nation, having suffered through a tragic civil war, withdrew to the interior to find the stuff of romance in a more distant past—the romance Nathaniel Hawthorne had declared extinct only a few years earlier in *The Marble Faun* (1859), when he bemoaned "the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong." As one genteel professor commented in a William Dean Howells novel, Americans cultivated the self-image of being an inherently "indoors people."[2]

[2]Henry James, *Roderick Hudson* (1875; reprint ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977), p. 67; Charles M. Skinner, "The Domestic Pictures of Frank D. Millet," *International Studio* 32, no. 128 (October 1907): 120; Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun* (1859; reprint ed., New York: New American Library, 1961), p. vi; William Dean Howells, *April Hopes* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1887), p. 33. I use the word *extinct* to describe Hawthorne's assessment of the American romance because, in such earlier works as *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and in many of his stories, Hawthorne did not conceive of his native country as quite so unromantic a place.

A primarily rural population, historians and demographers tell us, became an increasingly urban one, leaving the security of old village ways for the challenges and dangers of the city.[3] This movement was reenacted in Thomas Hovenden's *Breaking Home Ties*, the most popular American painting at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Americans wanted to revive, mentally and somehow also physically to go back to and even go beyond, the old-fashioned interior depicted there, with old folks and the home hearth, maternal affection, family togetherness, and rustic old country furnishings. This they accomplished in the way they furnished their houses, by the objects they collected, the paintings they painted, and the novels they wrote. They used the interior as a means of entering history, of bringing the country into the city and grafting an idealized agrarian past, a bucolic colonial way of life, onto an alienating and impersonal urban present. They tried to dispel the anonymity of metropolitan life by seeking after the "personal" and "individual," feelings of identity they associated with the internal accoutrements of the past.[4]

Many Americans simply excluded the outdoor realities of the city by enthusiastically hanging on their walls reproductions of such colonial genre scenes as Frank Millet's *Cosy Corner* (1884; fig. 1). This particular scene was popular for decades after he painted it: "His pictures tell a story with so pure and appealing a touch. . . . Those [reproductions] that have the widest sale are scenes of old-time life—white-washed rooms, peopled by men and maids in seventeenth and eighteenth-century costume, and quiet corners that invite one to muse upon the charm of bygone days."[5]

Americans also read novels and art books that specialized in such illustrations as those by Percy Moran depicting an eighteenth-century

[3] See, for instance, Gunther Barth, *City People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Stephan Thernstrom, "Urbanization, Migration and Social Mobility in Late 19th Century America," in *Towards a New Past*, ed. Barton J. Bernstein (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968); and Arthur Schlesinger, *The Rise of the City, 1878–1898* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1933).

[4] Lorinda Munson Bryant, "Painters of American Home Life," *Mentor* 8, no. 18 (December 1920): 18; Elizabeth Stillinger, *The Antiquers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), p. 7. Both *personal* and *individual* were used frequently in late nineteenth-century American interior decorating manuals, such as the particularly influential *Principles of Home Decoration* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1903) by Candace Wheeler. See also William Seale, *The Tasteful Interlude: American Interiors through the Camera's Eye, 1860 to 1917* (New York: Praeger Books, 1975), pp. 10–27.

[5] Bryant, "Home Life," p. 16.



Fig. 1. Francis Davis Millet, *A Cosy Corner*. New York, 1884. Oil on canvas; H. 36¼", W. 24¼". (Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of George I. Seney.)

squirearchy. Typical pictures, like *Knights of Old*, featured women who were themselves reading about the nobles "in one of those decorative old interiors dear to the artist's heart . . . of a delicate and poetic suggestiveness." Or in the painting *Gossip*, ladies were shown engaged in that activity amid surroundings and in poses so authentic that "they do not suggest the model, but seem to have come down from a beautiful civilization."[6]

[6]George W. Sheldon, *Recent Ideals of American Art* (New York: D. Appleton, 1890),

Americans flocked to exhibitions featuring Thomas Wilmer Dewing's paintings of elegant interiors (which he discovered were more popular than his ethereal outdoor scenes) furnished with aristocratically attenuated American antiques, dispelling any sense of mundane actualities with an air of reverie and secluded mystery (fig. 2). They inspired the psychological realism of Thomas Eakins, who, in a painting like *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River* (1877), carefully researched vignettes of public as well as personal history in the middle of Victorian Philadelphia.[7] They lapped up the rural renovations and revival styles championed by architects McKim, Mead, and White, who, in the words Clarence Cook used to describe the *House Beautiful* illustration *Things New and Old*, showed "an uncommon sort of skill in finding out what was left of [an] old house to build upon for modern comfort and elegance." William Mead's novelist brother-in-law, William Dean Howells, was doubtless thinking of him when he had an architect in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) advise some nouveau riche city dwellers to decorate their parlor "like those pretty old country houses."[8]

The idea art and literature shared of the interior as past was bolstered, then, by many real contacts. Common stylistic traits and subject matter were absorbed from interiorization as well—intimacy, a sense of craft, a moral outlook, a taste for the personal and the romantically authentic, a well-furbished subjectivity, and a host of character types regarded as embodiments of colonial interiors and interiority. Often the figures portrayed were women. Not only was interior decoration in female hands by the 1870s and the indoors increasingly considered woman's sphere, but womanhood supposedly possessed certain enduring inner qualities—not the least of which was expressed in a favorite phrase, "the

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p. 114; Alfred Trumble, *Representative Works of Contemporary American Artists* (New York: Scribner's, 1887), n.p.; Sheldon, *Recent Ideals*, p. 8.

[7]Thomas Wilmer Dewing to Charles Lang Freer, February 16, 1901, Charles Lang Freer Correspondence, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as AAA). Eakins's *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure* is, despite its historical subject, full of autobiographical references to Eakins's life and his ideas about art, especially in view of the controversy in which he was embroiled at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where, as an instructor, he wished both male and female students to be able to study the human body from live models rather than from classical casts. Autobiography rather than historical accuracy seems to be responsible for the nude model depicted in the painting. Rush's actual model probably did not pose nude.

[8]Cook, *House Beautiful*, p. 189; William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885; reprint ed., New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1949), p. 43.

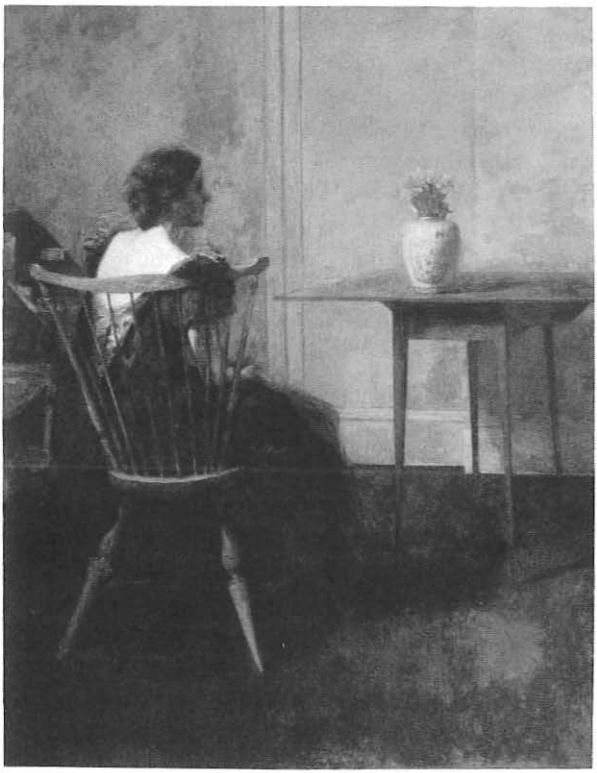


Fig. 2. Thomas Wilmer Dewing, *Yellow Tulips*. New York, 1908. Oil on wood panel; H. 20″, W. 15⅞″. (Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution.)

eternal feminine"—which connected them to the past.[9]

The many old people we find in historical interiors were viewed in similar ways (fig. 3). Articles like Mrs. M. E. W. Sherwood's 1881 "The Influence of Aged People" declared that "No genre picture is so

[9]Seale, *Tasteful Interlude*, p. 19. Howells invoked "eternal feminine" in an essay attacking what he considered the American national habit of keeping antique furniture in storage so that it could never grow old naturally (William Dean Howells, "The Standard Household-Effect Company," in *Literature and Life* [1902; reprint ed., Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1968], p. 291).



Fig. 3. Edward Lamson Henry, *The Old Clock on the Stairs*. Philadelphia, 1868. Oil on canvas; H. 20¾", W. 16½". (Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vt.)

ornamental to the fireside as an old lady with gray curls." Social commentators often reflected on the wisdom and goodness of old age. The combination of femininity and old age stressed in Sherwood's article was in fact highly typical and took on increasingly symbolic dimensions. The figure of the grandmother and the concept of "the generation of our grandmothers" came to stand more and more for the American past, helping to link the meaning of history to a feminization of American culture. Henry James knowingly presented the figure of Columbia

herself, ensconced under the Capitol dome, "motherly, chatty, clear-spectacled . . . who reads all the newspapers . . . and is fenced off, at worst, but by concentric circles of rocking-chairs." Americans were in less and less danger of having to be warned, as Jennie June Croly had done in 1864: "Don't Be Ashamed of Grandmother." Quite the opposite. Louisa May Alcott was only one of the first to populate her stories with exemplary old ladies, and by the time James came to write his complex international romance, *The Golden Bowl* (1904), he tenderly endowed his heroine, Maggie Verver, with a "small still passion for order and symmetry, for objects with their backs to the walls" that "spoke even of some probable references, in her American blood, to dusting and polishing New England grandmothers."[10]

A further attraction of the colonial revival interior in art and literature was that it allowed for a masculine presence at a time when the absence of men from the domestic scene had increasingly become the frequently regretted norm.[11] The communal togetherness of the family was felt to be in peril during the late nineteenth century. The historical interior helped alleviate such fears. During a period when men seemed to be turning into mere cogs in an industrial machine, into rapacious businessmen, or affected aesthetes, any rustic interior worth its salt included a gun over the mantel, like the one watching over Millet's *Cosy Corner*, to signify, even in the absence of a male figure, the presiding masculine qualities of bravery, concerned courage, and aggressive caring, harking back to the days when pioneering souls had carved a civilized colony out of the wilderness.

If a single object, like a gun over the mantel, could evoke such powerful associations, the multiplicity of styles brought together under the roof of the colonial revival—objects from the sixteenth century to the 1830s—were endowed with even more meaning. Decorating manuals

[10] Mrs. M. E. W. Sherwood, "The Influence of Aged People," in *Amenities of Home* (New York: D. Appleton, 1881), p. 79; Henry James, *The American Scene* (1907; reprint ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 362; Jennie June Croly, *Jennie Juneiana: Talks on Women's Topics* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1864), p. 136; Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (1904; reprint ed., Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 403. A helpful summary of the numerous references to "grandmother's generation" during this period is David P. Handlin, *The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815–1915* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), pp. 412–13.

[11] See, for instance, Mrs. S. W. Oakey, *From Attic to Cellar: A Book for Young Housekeepers* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1879). Mrs. Oakey was Thomas Dewing's mother-in-law.

and social histories, fiction and art discussed styles and objects as the products of historical periods, assigning each epoch certain human traits—traits that late nineteenth-century America suspected it had lost. The inclusion of an English Restoration revival chair in William H. Lippincott's *Punch and Judy Show* (1896), for instance, infused a touch of robust class and educated strenuousness into the midst of the mass-produced Grand Rapids furnishings surrounding the children in a formal scene of stuffy affluence. The Queen Anne style evident in so many paintings offered—perhaps in the form of a Queen Anne-ish chair—memories of the chairs brought over on the *Mayflower* and made a statement about a gracious mode of existence that recalled the "unostentatious people of gentle manners and culture" modern-day revivalists hoped they were imitating properly.[12]

The prevalent Chippendale style was a form of shorthand in fiction for a durably patrician personality; there was hardly an interior in the historical novels or society romances of that would-be Philadelphia aristocrat, S. Weir Mitchell, that did not boast "Antique furniture of Chippendale patterns" or "a small, round Chippendale table of dark mahogany." It graced the visual arts with similar implications. Mitchell, an avid collector, lent Eakins the chair used in *William Rush*.[13] The Chippendale revival table at the center of William McGregor Paxton's personal favorite, *A Girl Sweeping* (1911; fig. 4), and many of Paxton's other paintings, indicates a way of life kept tidy and genteel with the help of servants.

Old Dutch New York had an equally solid appeal. Novelists from Harriet Beecher Stowe to Edith Wharton and Henry James were readily understood when they created high-class characters with "Van" as part of their names.[14] A defeated South sought to recover its certainties and

[12] William H. Lippincott, *Punch and Judy Show*, Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.; Christopher Monkhouse, "The Spinning Wheel as Artifact, Symbol, and Source of Design," in *Victorian Furniture: Essays from a Victorian Society Autumn Symposium*, ed. Kenneth L. Ames (Philadelphia: Victorian Society in America, 1982), p. 155; Harriet Prescott Spofford, *Art Decoration Applied to Furniture* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1878), p. 157. For comments on the meaning of the Elizabethan style in furniture, see Spofford, *Art Decoration*, p. 107.

[13] S. Weir Mitchell, *Roland Blake* (1886; reprint ed., New York: Century Co., 1909), p. 59; S. Weir Mitchell, *Characteristics* (1891; reprint ed., New York: Century Co., 1909), p. 92; Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933), p. 61.

[14] Harriet Beecher Stowe's *My Wife and I* (1871) featured the Van Arsdel family; Edith



Fig. 4. William McGregor Paxton, *A Girl Sweeping*. Boston, 1911; copyrighted 1912. Oil on canvas; H. 40¼", W. 30¼". (Courtesy Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.)

serenities in images of colonial plantation life and drawling chivalry, which were commemorated in countless historical novels and in many paintings of tranquil interiors.

After the Civil War, however, a desire to reconcile and forget boosted the popularity of colonial New England over all other regions and styles.

Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905), the Van Osburghs and the Van Alstynes; and Henry James created aristocratic heroines descended from old New York Dutch families in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and *The Wings of the Dove* (1902).

Puritanism was touted as the cradle of all that was best about colonial America. New England's descendants were automatically endowed by novelists with an admirable sense of "right and wrong" or with "high intentions." Life in Puritan New England stood for unity and morality. It stood for the kind of stern and just religiosity and "inconceivable austerity and solemnity with which Puritanism invested this moral life," for courage and structure, and for an Anglo-Saxon covenant with God.[15]

It offered a welcome contrast, in other words, to the sense of displacement, doubt, loss of faith, and crises of confidence Americans felt "in a world without traditions, without reverence, without stability," as Edith Wharton characterized the modern wasteland beyond a sequestered New England college town in her tale of love and loss, "The Pretext" (1908). Urban crowding, class conflicts, and intrusive foreign elements were declared among the further ills of the age. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, heroically atypical as a radical feminist and socialist, was sounding a very typical note when, in her autobiography, she described moving back to the Connecticut of her forebears: "it is true that two-thirds of the population are aliens, but they are not so overwhelmingly in evidence as in the great city. The people we meet . . . are of native stock."[16]

New England and its heritage became the heart and soul of the nation into which novelists delved ever deeper, both psychologically and geographically. Howells's "Pursuit of the Piano" (1900) takes the protagonist into increasingly remote reaches of the old Northeast and into increasingly refined old homes where he finds the wife of his dreams. From the folksy locales of Eastman Johnson's Nantucket (fig. 5) to Edmund Tarbell's turn-of-the-century Boston (fig. 6), artists illustrated the inward journey with what were often simply entitled "New England interiors." To "see New Englandly," as poet Emily Dickinson had so beautifully phrased it, was the essence of the colonial revival vision.[17]

[15] William Dean Howells, *Dr. Breen's Practice* (Boston: Ticknor, 1881), p. 25; William Dean Howells, *Annie Kilburn* (1888; reprint ed., New York: Harper & Bros., 1919), p. 6; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Chimney-Corner* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1868), p. 261.

[16] Edith Wharton, *The Collected Short Stories*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 636; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (1935; reprint ed., New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 324.

[17] William Dean Howells, "The Pursuit of the Piano," in *A Pair of Patient Lovers* (1900; reprint ed., Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970); Frederick W. Coburn, "Edmund C. Tarbell," *International Studio* 32, no. 127 (September 1907): 82; Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), p. 132.



Fig. 5. Eastman Johnson, *The New Bonnet*. Nantucket, 1876. Oil on cardboard; H. 20¾", W. 27". (Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

Through these historical interiors the American past was domesticated and history personalized.[18] The writing of history ran increasingly to the anecdotal. Historical fiction was built on a human, domestic, and often sentimental scale. History painting became a form of genre, with Johnson's homey and earnest *Boyhood of Lincoln* (1868) leading the way. Genre and enlarged still life, in a sense, illustrated history. As Cook announced to his readers, *Old Colony Days* in *The House Beautiful* had originally been drawn by Frank Lathrop as an illustration for Bryant and Gay's *History of the United States*, and the engraving *Why*,

[18] For examples of this, see Alice Morse Earle, *Home Life in Colonial Days* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1898); Alice Morse Earle, *Colonial Dames and Good Wives* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1895); and Esther Singleton, *Social New York under the Georges, 1714–1776* (1902; reprint ed., Port Washington, N.Y.: Ira J. Friedman, 1969).



Fig. 6. Edmund C. Tarbell, *A Rehearsal in the Studio.* Boston, ca. 1904. Oil on canvas; H. 25", W. 30". (Worcester Art Museum.)

This is Spode! was actually from E. L. Henry's *Lover of Old China* (1889; fig. 7).[19]

Attics—than which there was "no nobler forage-ground for a romantic, venturesome, mischievous boy"—were found to contain forgotten treasures, and lessons galore. "Old garrets are really factories of History, Poetry, and the Drama," Sherwood told the readers of *Home Amusements* (1881). "The taste for old furniture has rather emptied the garret of its time-honored chairs and old clocks, but still in its ghost-haunted corners there is quite enough goblin-tapestry for the fancy of a growing

[19]Cook, *House Beautiful*, p. 256.



Fig. 7. Edward Lamson Henry, *A Lover of Old China*. New York, 1889. Oil on academy board; H. 14″, W. 12″. (Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vt.)

child." Frequently describing themselves as digging through such attics or as braving the homes of poor folk where old objects had long been lying neglected (Clarence Cook divulged that he had found a precious old sideboard being used as a chicken coop), Americans dusted off the facts and artifacts of their history and overlaid them with a new coat of fantasy. They proudly displayed the objects in their homes, and placed the inner qualities ascribed to people of the past in the foreground of their emotional and moral value systems. They depended on the past to initiate them into the mysteries of what one critic, remarking on the

"current craze for antiquities," called a "cult of beauty."[20]

Since much creation of fantasy from facts was the work of artists and writers, a great deal of antiques collecting began in artists' studios and writers' homes. Inspiration was felt to come from the homes of writers like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, conservators of culture who had helped spark the colonial revival and who lived in old houses that had been in their families for centuries and thus were "haunted by recollections." When *Scribner's* editor Richard Watson Gilder (his column in the magazine was "The Old Cabinet") and his friends summered in Marion on Cape Cod, they gathered the accessories of the past around them as a matter of course (fig. 8), and one friend, Henry James, used the place for its historical trappings in his novel *The Bostonians* (1886). Poet Celia Thaxter had some good colonial pieces in the study that painter Childe Hassam's fulsome Impressionism transformed into *The Room of Flowers* (1894). Even Howells, for all his political progressivism, posed proudly for a photograph next to the clock he liked to believe his great-great-grandfather had made in the eighteenth century.[21]

Artists' studios were among the earliest interiors to reflect the presence of the past consciously. Such popular artistic summer haunts as East Hampton, on Long Island, offered up "associations and legends, old manuscripts and romances for the antiquary, with Chippendale sideboards, blue china, and colonial spinning-wheels for the collector. Here are costumes of the last century and fascinating faces for the figure-painter." Revivalist inspiration did not always come so easily, however. E. L. Henry, attempting to build a studio near Ellenville, New York, where he helped found an artists' colony, met with "great difficulty in impressing his ideas of architecture on the local carpenters. 'If

[20] Ik Marvel, "Glimpses of Dream-Life," *Monthly Illustrator* 4 (May 1895): 193; Mrs. M. E. W. Sherwood, *Home Amusements* (New York: D. Appleton, 1881), p. 7; Cook, *House Beautiful*, p. 162; Royal Cortissoz, *American Artists* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), p. 300. Cortissoz was commenting here on the influential work of Stanford White.

[21] Alice Wellington Rollins, "Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes," *Critic* 6 (January 3 and 10, 1885): 2 (part of Authors at Home series); Rosamond Gilder, ed., *The Letters of Richard Watson Gilder* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916), pp. 62, 140; Kenneth S. Lynn, *William Dean Howells: An American Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970), following p. 182.



Fig. 8. Interior of studio at Marion, 1880s. From *Letters of Richard Watson Gilder*, ed. Rosamond Gilder (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961). (New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.)

you have the rafters show like that,' they complained, 'and stick the roof all over with little gables, you'll make your studio look like one of them old Dutch manor-houses at Kingston.' "[22]

On Nantucket, Eastman Johnson, who was often credited with salvaging vanishing aspects of the American past, worked in what visitors described as a Hawthornesque "house of seven gables" filled with the old Americana that shows up in his paintings (fig. 5). Frank Millet posed his models not only in the colonial kitchen he reconstructed at his home in East Bridgewater, Massachusetts, but also in a high-windowed Elizabethan room he recreated in his elaborate New York studio. Percy Moran's eighteenth-century damsels sprang to life in a New York studio crammed with an assortment of picturesque props (fig. 9).

[22] Lizzie W. Champney, "The Summer Haunts of American Artists," *Century* 30 (September 1885): 849, 847.

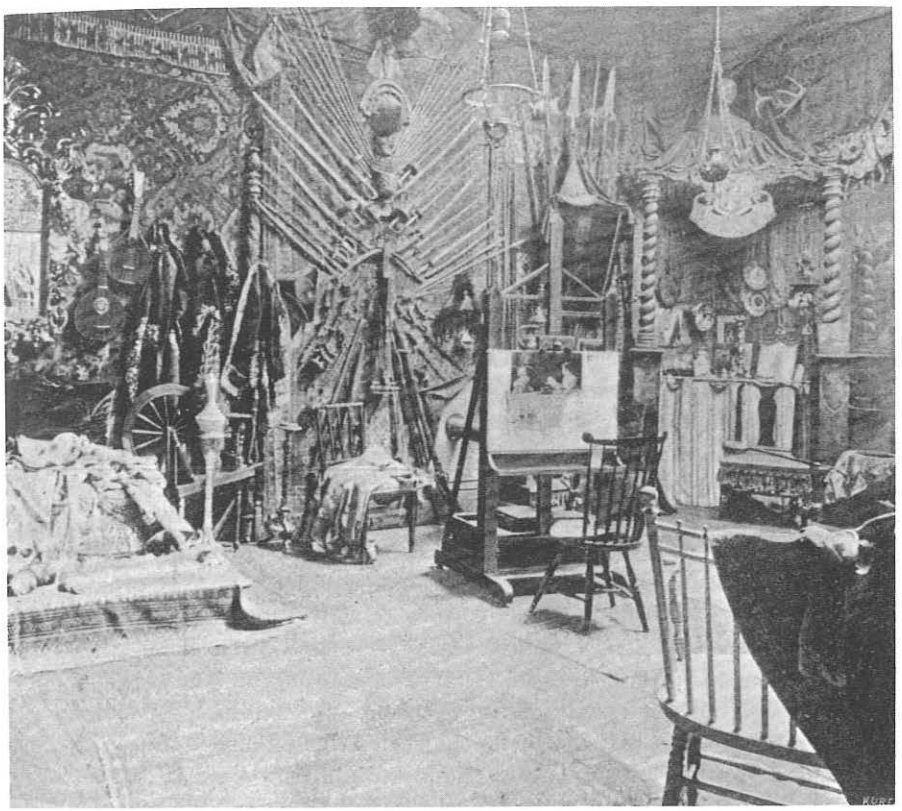


Fig. 9. Studio of Percy Moran. From Elizabeth Bisland, "The Studios of New York," *Cosmopolitan* 7, no. 1 (May 1889): 18. (New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.)

In John Ferguson Weir's painting of his father's studio, it is possible to locate both a study for Robert Weir's *Embarkation of the Pilgrims* and his *Saint Nicholas*, a picture of Dutch New York. Edmund Tarbell's gate-leg studio table appeared in even his most contemporary compositions (fig. 6), and Thomas Eakins searched for the intangibles of history in a studio noteworthy for his very tangible Queen Anne and neo-Jacobean chairs (fig. 13). An artist's studio took on even more significance

when his own ghost haunted it along with those he had conjured up from a more distant past. Visiting George Fuller's studio after his death, Lizzie Champney concluded that no picture by this frequent painter of colonial subjects was "more touching than this same empty studio, so instinct with the personality of the man. . . . It is not surprising that Mr. Fuller should be acknowledged to occupy a place in art analogous to that of Hawthorne in literature."[23]

The studio interior was furthermore encouraged as a model for home decoration. Visitors admired William Merritt Chase's "colonial" studio home at Shinnecock, while the Elizabethan revival chair he used in a portrait of his pupil, *Miss Dora Wheeler* (1883), who is seated in her studio, could well be a reference to the colonial motifs explored by the all-female design firm Dora helped establish with Candace Wheeler, her mother. Candace Wheeler's own pride in her Puritan background came out in the influential decorating books she wrote. Thomas Dewing advised his patron Charles Lang Freer to add colonial touches to a new home; his own studio boasted such a rich repertoire of American antiques that Cook used it to illustrate an 1895 article on studio suggestions for the home. (Dewing's summer studio in the rustic town of Cornish, New Hampshire, was designed by Stanford White.) To make the circle complete, his wife, Maria Oakey Dewing, was one of the artists who had provided pictures for Cook's *House Beautiful*. The Dewings' marriage was occasionally stormy (Dewing was very much the ladies' man), but the couple apparently convinced their daughter, Elizabeth Bartol Dewing, that American antiques could help alleviate strained relations. In her 1909 novel, *Other People's Houses*, she furnished a newlywed young couple with a colonial-style dining room as insurance for marital bliss.[24]

[23] H. Barbara Weinberg, "The Career of Francis Davis Millet," *Archives of American Art Journal* 17, no. 1 (1977); Champney, "Summer Haunts," p. 854; John Wilmerding, Linda Ayres, and Earl A. Powell, *An American Perspective: 19th-Century Art from the Collection of Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr.* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1981), pp. 58–59; Champney, "Summer Haunts," p. 857. Rhoda Holmes Nicholls, whose painting *The Scarlet Letter* was awarded a gold medal at the Chicago World's Columbian Exhibition, gave her address as Colonial Studio, 39 W. 67th St., New York. See also Sarah Burns, "George Fuller: The Hawthorne of Our Art," *Winterthur Portfolio* 18, nos. 2 / 3 (Summer / Autumn 1983): 123–45.

[24] John Gilmer Speed, "An Artist's Summer Vacation," *Harper's New Monthly* 87 (June 1893): 5; Karal Ann Marling, "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: Dora Wheeler," *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 65 (February 1978): 47–57; Candace

Artists and writers were led to comment both favorably and disapprovingly on colonial revival collecting and design, which were, it was felt, important indications of morality and taste. E. L. Henry, himself an energetic antiquarian, suffused his canvases with happy connoisseurship, taking pride in his relationship to *A Lover of Old China* (fig. 7), in which his aunt, Mrs. Livingston Murray, is pictured. He was apparently so pleased by his friendship with William Loring Andrews, an antiquarian and bibliophile who wrote books on American history, that he put himself into an 1875 portrait of Andrews's famous library, dressed as an eighteenth-century gentleman. Art critics liked to point out that Childe Hassam's pictures benefited from his father's having collected domestic Americana, and one critic declared Eastman Johnson's "unmistakable New England interior[s],—the bare white walls, the old-fashioned mirror and sideboard, the chest of flasks, the Chinese porcelains on top of the corner closet, telling of former days of prosperity in the East India trade . . . sufficient to turn to livid green the envious visage of the bric-a-brac hunter" (fig. 5).[25]

It was this very envy that got people into trouble and served, according to many, as an all too revealing reflection of character. Echoing the social critics and interior design writers of the day, novelists scolded their characters for the incongruity of putting old pieces in new houses, for buying sham antiques, or for organizing extravagant scavenger hunts through the countryside. They used such behavior in their fiction to expose falseness and immorality. Mrs. Farrell, an unthinking flirt who is the title character of an 1875 Howells novel, uses old objects as theatrical props to ensnare a man she does not love; they are objects she has "wheedled" out of local country residents. Annie Kilburn, an aristocratic and highly moral American heiress in Howell's eponymous 1888

Wheeler, *Yesterdays in a Busy Life* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1918), pp. 39–48; see also Wheeler, Home Decoration. Dewing to Freer, February 15, 1892, Freer Correspondence, AAA. See Clarence Cook, "Casts and Tapestry in Room-Decoration," *Monthly Illustrator* 4 (June 1895): 327; Dewing to Freer, May 28, 1892, Freer Correspondence, AAA; Cook, *House Beautiful*, p. 260; Elizabeth Bartol Dewing, *Other People's Houses* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1909).

[25] Elizabeth McClausand, "The Life and Work of Edward Lamson Henry, N.A., 1841–1919," *New York State Museum Bulletin* 339 (1945); *The Library of William Loring Andrews* (New York: Century Association, 1875); Adeline Adams, *Childe Hassam* (New York: Academy of Arts and Letters, 1938), p. 10; S. R. Koehler, *American Art* (New York: Cassell, 1886), p. 55.

novel, most fully realizes the discriminatory pretentiousness and mendacious snobbery of a bourgeois lady by the name of Mrs. Brandreth when she enters the Brandreth home—a mixture of "imitation" medieval pieces, Oriental knickknacks, newly acquired colonial furnishings, and a recreated New England kitchen. The only kind of new wealth that passed novelistic muster belonged to those who managed to remain true to their humble roots. In Harriet Beecher Stowe's *My Wife and I* (1871), a self-made millionaire maintains, in the midst of his lavish New York mansion, a room out of the "old New England farmhouse" of his impoverished youth.[26]

Literary social arbiters could do little more than criticize, however. Colonial antiques and reproductions—"travesties," Edith Wharton called them—became a part of everyday life and the most casual observations of it. Playing a game of metaphor with the profession of writing itself, Howells had a canny businesswoman in his parable "The Critical Bookstore" (1913) furnish an establishment with colonial reproductions in order to attract customers. In painting, the resuscitated old and the mass-manufactured "antique" mirrored moods and created an "atmosphere" for the lowliest housemaid sweeping around a Chippendale revival table (fig. 4) or artistic spirits engaged in a rehearsal in the studio (fig. 6). They could, in fact, act as the saving grace, the one redeemable feature of a canvas—Henry James commended the Hepplewhite "buffet" in Eastman Johnson's *Earring* (1873), a picture he otherwise cordially despised.[27] Such critical indictments were no small matter in the larger scheme of late nineteenth-century aesthetics. The moral nature of old-time subjects was taken into account when passing judgment on the character and creative abilities of those who painted them.

Such attitudes were encouraged, too, as more and more painters of the interior illustrated scenes and figures from the nostalgic and often moralizing literature that had first stimulated the colonial revival. E. L.

[26] Spofford, *Art Decoration*, 158; William Dean Howells, *Mrs. Farrell* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1921), pp. 77, 186. Originally published serially in *Atlantic Monthly* under the title "Private Theatricals," this story did not appear as the novel *Mrs. Farrell* until 1921, after Howells's death. Howells, *Annie Kilburn*, pp. 107–8; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *My Wife and I* (1871; reprint ed., New York: J. B. Ford, 1871), p. 194.

[27] Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses* (1897; reprint ed., New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 26; William Dean Howells, "The Critical Bookstore," in *The Daughter of the Storage and Other Things in Prose and Verse* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1916), pp. 185–224; Henry James, "On Some Pictures Lately Exhibited," *Galaxy* 20, no. 1 (July 1875): 93.

Henry's *Old Clock on the Stairs* (1869; fig. 3), for instance, set in the house of Philadelphia collector and preservationist William Kulp, was based on one of Longfellow's best-known poems, as was a painting by Thomas Eakins's wife, Susan Macdowell Eakins. The authors of decorating guides and social and political historians used the work of these same older poets and novelists to embellish their texts. The centennial exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia—where Henry's *Old Clock*, Millet's *Portrait of a Lady in a Costume of 1740*, and Eakins's *William Rush* were on display—showcased perhaps the most popular literary subject adopted by the colonial revival, the love affair between John Alden and Priscilla Mullins from Longfellow's *Courtship of Miles Standish*. Both lovers were commemorated by objects placed in the New England kitchen at the fair, itself an appropriate symbol of a poem which, its author wrote, "aims to reconstruct the interior household life, as well as to record the more public events, of New England."[28]

Sanctified by her colonial context, her sweet intelligence, and her natural goodness, Longfellow's Priscilla made her way into innumerable paintings and engravings. The text accompanying a photogravure of Elizabeth Gardner's *Priscilla* (ca. 1888; fig. 10) announced that the expatriate artist had been the only American woman to win a medal at the Paris Salon. Priscilla charmed Thomas Dewing into an early attempt at narrative painting, furnished the copy for an advertisement selling a whimsy called "Old Flax Spinning Wheel Chair" (recommended as a wedding gift), and was updated in Thomas Eakins's *Courtship* (1878), as well as in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *The Minister's Wooing* (1859). If Childe Hassam could claim kin to the ancient Hawthorne clan, contemporaries were even more impressed that Frank Millet had John Alden and Priscilla up his family tree.[29]

[28] Stillinger, *Antiquers*, p. 37; Seymour Adelman, *Susan Macdowell Eakins* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1973), p. 21; United States Centennial Commission, *International Exhibition: 1876, Official Catalogue* (Philadelphia: John R. Nagle, 1876); Monkhouse, "Spinning Wheel," n.p.; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Courtship of Miles Standish and Other Poems* (1858; reprint ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1896), p. 7. See Earle, *Home Life*, for the reference to older American poets and novelists.

[29] Sheldon, *Recent Ideals*, p. 131; Thomas Dewing, *Portrait of Priscilla at the Spinning Wheel* (1880), Art Gallery, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; Edgar deN. Mayhew and Minor Myers, Jr., *A Documentary History of American Interiors: From the Colonial Era to 1915* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), p. 262; Thomas Eakins, *Courtship*, M. H. De Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco; Harriet Beecher Stowe,



Fig. 10. Elizabeth Gardner, *Priscilla*. Paris, ca. 1888. Oil on canvas; H. 32¼", W. 25". (Private collection: Photo, Mastercraft Gallery, Fort Worth, Tex.)

An apotheosis of sorts for the colonial revival interior, the figure and story of Priscilla emphasize the inner space that dominated the inward movement of revived history—the home. The term *homespun*—as in the cloth Priscilla manufactured—acquired a patriotic ring, and as Americans made retrospection a national habit, they endowed certain elements of the home with symbolic dimensions. Many household advice

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The Minister's Wooing (New York: Hurst, [1859]), p. 27; Adams, *Childe Hassam*, p. 10; Bryant, "Home Life," p. 16.

books featured elderly females who acted as mentors to the younger generation and proved their wisdom by instilling the customs of old-time housekeeping. Their base of operations was the kitchen, the "throne-room" and "pride" of the New England matron, "the most cheerful, homelike, and picturesque room in the house," the memory of which was enough to make any modern soul "homesick" for the past.[30]

In the age of the despised furnace, the old-fashioned hearth, especially the great kitchen fire, was worshipped as the "warm and glowing heart" and ritual center of homelife and domesticity. To even the most scientifically modern medical writers it represented hospitality, familial bonding, and human warmth, teaching the lesson, as a popular painting by Thomas Hicks would have it, that *There's No Place Like Home.* It told histories and fairy tales by the dozen, sometimes by way of old pictorial tiles, such as those in Enoch Wood Perry's *Fireside Stories* (ca. 1889), a vignette of a mother interpreting the fireside decorations for her inquisitive little son, or in the Lawrence house in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1869), with its "Sleepy Hollow chairs, queer tables and . . . best of all, a great open fireplace with quaint tiles all around it."[31] In Johnson's *New Bonnet* (1876; fig. 5), the hearth acts as a display shelf for the past while offering a welcome distraction from the present.

Next to the hearth, literally and figuratively, were handicrafts. Quilting recorded "secret memories, and incidents and stories and associations"; sewing and knitting were synonymous with female virtue. Scenes like Johnson's *Corn Shelling* (1864) showed an elderly man in front of a blocked-off hearth hoping to teach young hands old skills. Above all, there was spinning, Priscilla's characteristic activity. According to late nineteenth-century history books, it had also been turned into a patriotic act by Revolutionary ladies who made home products in protest against British rule. Viewed as the most old-fashioned or timeless of objects,

[30] Stowe, *Wooing*, p. 18; Earle, *Home Life*, p. 52; Fanny Fern, *Folly as It Flies, Hit at by Fanny Fern* (New York: Carleton, 1868), p. 167.

[31] Earle, *Home Life*, p. 52; Edward B. Foote, *Plain Home Talk—About the Human System* (New York: Murray Hill Publishing Co., 1896), p. 109; Thomas Hicks, *There's No Place Like Home* (1877), Schweitzer Gallery, New York (this painting was also widely engraved); "Fireside Stories, from an Engraving by E. Wood Perry," in *American Art and American Art Collections*, ed. Walter Montgomery, vol. 2 (Boston: E. W. Walker, 1889), p. 571; Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1869; reprint ed., New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1962), p. 65.

the spinning wheel became a symbol of domestic romance and even—as implied by the "electrical thrills" John Alden feels when he holds a skein for Priscilla—of sexuality.[32]

On a more elevated—or at least aesthetic—plane, spinning was an integral part of the arts and crafts movement that flourished at the time, with nostalgic emphasis on handwork and usefulness and its penchant for the concept of sincerity. *Sincere* was a key term for the colonial revival, whether appearing frequently in decorating guides or in a critic's valiant attempts to explain Thomas Eakins's disturbing realism to his contemporaries. It was taken so seriously that it provoked parody; looking back on the 1860s, an 1882 *Harper's* article recalled: "It was about this time that the word 'sincere' came into the furnishing world. The old mahogany square and straight-legged tables of our grandfathers, finely finished old bureaus with their 'sincere' brass handles, plain papers, plain carpets began to crowd out our floriated patterns. The classification of pottery became a study. Not every cracked tea-pot from the kitchen shelf was a treasure, only every other tea-pot."[33] In the aesthetic terminology of the arts and crafts movement, sincerity meant a lack of ornament; it meant honesty, strength, and integrity, and the functionalism it promoted took the nineteenth century well on its way to modernism. More generally, the idea of sincerity helped supplement the Puritan doctrine of good works with an invigorated belief in hard work, handwork, and holy domesticity, in material and moral authenticity.

Thus the colonial revival interior helped turn the American past into

[32]Croly, *Juneiana*, p. 53. See also Lois Dinnerstein, "The Industrious Housewife: Some Images of Labor in American Art," *Arts* 55, no. 8 (1981): 109–19; Eastman Johnson, *Corn Shelling*, Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio; Earle, *Home Life*, pp. 183–84; Earle, *Colonial Dames*; and Longfellow, *Courtship*, p. 120. There is a similar scene in Howells's *Mrs. Farrell*. Johnson's *Winding Yarn* (Cleveland Museum of Art) also depicts a rustic flirtation.

[33]See Anthea Callen, *Women Artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement, 1870–1914* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979); Johathan L. Fairbanks and Elizabeth Bidwell Bates, *American Furniture: 1620 to the Present* (New York: Richard Marek, 1981); David M. Cathers, *Furniture of the American Arts and Crafts Movement* (New York: New American Library, 1981); and Robert Judson Clark, ed., *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972). For examples of the term *sincerity*, see Ella Rodman Church, *How to Furnish a Home* (New York: D. Appleton, 1881). Like Mrs. Sherwood's books, this was a volume in Appleton's Home Books series. See Cortissoz, *American Artists*, p. 81, for the comments on Eakins. "Certain New York Houses," *Harper's New Monthly* 65 (October 1882): 681.

an ideal. *Puritan* came to stand for pureness, for social, moral, and sexual purity. Paradoxically reversing—even rebelling against—modern theories of progress, novelists, medical writers, social commentators, and household advisors insisted that physical, mental, and moral health had been superior in old colony times. S. Weir Mitchell, both a historical novelist and a psychiatrist, compared his unhealthy and neurasthenic patients unfavorably to the strapping colonial dames encountered in Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter.* Millet's *Grandpa's Visit* (1885), in which a healthy-looking old man comes to pay a sick call on a young lady invalid languishing in a quaint rural interior, may have been making a similar point. The most ordinary social customs were sentimentalized and idealized. The friendliness of teatime or the ready companionship provided by an eighteenth-century village inn contrasted (as one critic wrote of Millet's *At the Inn* [1884]) with the snobbish French restaurants and rude lunch counters of modern times.[34]

The most powerful idealism of all, religion, was transformed into a nostaglic act as well, with Priscilla reading her prayer book at her spinning wheel, threadbare old folks perusing the Bible, or families sharing Sunday morning devotions in a pious atmosphere that made the humblest home a chapel.[35] By making scenes of domestic poverty religious allegories through a historical context, nineteenth-century American culture softened harsh realities and placed social inequities at a safe historical and psychological distance.

The art of Lilian Westcott Hale, too, it was suggested over the years, owed its refined quality to the generations of clergymen from whom she was descended, and her interior scenes, such as *L'Edition de Luxe* (1910), were considered blessed by the transcendent atmosphere of the "two century old New England house" she had inherited from those divines.[36] The tone of such comments also hints at something very different from religious idealism, however. Increasingly prevalent from the late 1880s

[34] S. Weir Mitchell, *Wear and Tear; or, Hints for the Overworked,* 1871 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1887), p. 34; Francis Davis Millet, *Grandpa's Visit* (sold April 1, 1981, at William Doyle Galleries, New York, N.Y.; this painting was reproduced in the *Woman's Home Companion* in December 1912); Trumble, *Representative Works,* n.p.

[35] A typical example is J. G. Brown's *Consolation* (ca. 1905), Maurice Sternberg Galleries, Chicago. Johnson's family picture *Sunday Morning* (New-York Historical Society) was often the subject of such pious critiques.

[36] *L'Edition de Luxe,* Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Rose V. S. Berry, "Lilian Westcott Hale—Her Art," *American Magazine of Art* 18, no. 2 (February 1927): 60. Another Hale relative was Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

onward were evocations of the colonial revival interior as an enclave of social aspirations, as a symbol of elitist sentiments. Puritan? By the end of the century the term mostly meant pure stock. Conservationism snuggled up to conservatism. The colonial revival interior came to represent physical and social exclusivity.

In perceptions of the past, the shift was from the spinning wheel to the spinet, as it were, from a focus on the more democratic connotations of colonial life to emblems of wealth and aristocracy. The spinet was a favorite subject in the high-toned art of Thomas Dewing, for example. If the New England kitchen had been the artifactual metaphor for the American past at the 1876 Philadelphia exhibition, at the 1893 Chicago exposition genteel reception rooms in historical private houses took over that role. When Esther Singleton published her book *Social New York under the Georges, 1714–1776* in 1905, she was quick to point out that the "picture so often drawn of the goodwife spinning in the kitchen" needed to be supplemented—if not replaced—by that of the "high-heeled aristocratic and wealthy woman" who was "accustomed to pedal the harpsichord, but had slight acquaintance with the spinning-wheel."[37]

The new religion was "ancestor worship." The domestic interior was supposed to house genealogical prestige. The colonial revival had been primarily an upper-middle-class phenomenon all along, a glorification of past simplicities, as Thorstein Veblen noted, by people who could "conspicuously" afford to downplay their wealth.[38] But with the proliferation of a "shabby genteel" caste of Americans, birth increasingly gained cachet over money among those whose dwindling wealth made the idea of old families more valuable than economic and material status. The issue of colonial survival as opposed to colonial revival became a more and more pressing one. An inherited lineage was deemed superior to freshly made millions. Family background was an heirloom that no recently purchased antiques could surpass. A kind of nobility of native origins evolved as the fear of foreign immigration grew.

Novels and paintings now moved into ancestral mansions in droves,

[37] See, for example, Thomas Dewing's *The Spinet* (1902), National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C. Stillinger, *Antiquers*, p. 55; Singleton, *Social New York*, pp. 55, 336.

[38] Gilman, *Living*, p. 325; Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; reprint ed., New York: New American Library, 1953), p. 100.

while authors and painters disparaged revival interiors that could only pretend to be genuinely hallowed halls. Fabricated patricians were held up to ridicule and moral contempt. In the Brandreth house that Annie Kilburn visits, "everything, nearly . . . was an heirloom, although Annie could not remember afterwards any object that had been an heirloom in the . . . family." Critical writing began to use terms such as *good taste*, *pedigree*, and *breeding*.[39] Genealogy seemed to become the new form of aesthetics.

While Thomas Dewing painted aristocratic versions of the American past, his wife, Maria, a Boston blueblood whose mother had written books on Boston society, named their country house Doveridge after her family's ancestral home in England.[40] Art critics discussed Frank Weston Benson's distinguished background in terms of the old houses in his native Salem, and the women in his portraits and interiors were likened to the Puritan and eighteenth-century mistresses of these stately mansions (fig. 11). Such women were "like ancestral mahogany, not to be found in every fashionable drawing-room. Their breeding and simplicity [were] . . . patent." According to articles illustrated with such works as Childe Hassam's *In the Old House* (1914; fig. 12), Hassam structured his interiors with an eye for clarity and rationality inherited from his Puritan forebears. His own social geography was an exclusive one: writing about the role of art, he decided that "As the artist practices his peaceful profession he can hold himself aloof from the rabble without the least danger of damage to his work."[41] J. Alden Weir's art appeared to critics to "fix the survival of the older American, Anglo-Saxon American founders of our old families"; in *The Miniature* (1888) he portrayed his wife holding the kind of eighteenth-century miniature that had been kept in hers. Even pieces of ancient orientalia were pounced on as signs

[39] Howells, *Annie Kilburn*, p. 108; for examples of critical vocabulary, see Minna C. Smith, "The Work of Frank W. Benson," *International Studio* 35, no. 140 (October 1908): 100.

[40] Thomas Wilmer Dewing Papers, AAA. See also Jennifer A. Martin, "The Rediscovery of Maria Oakey Dewing," *Feminist Art Journal* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 24–44; and Susan Hobbs, "Thomas Wilmer Dewing: The Early Years, 1851–1885," *American Art Journal* 13 (Spring 1981): 4–35. I am grateful to both Jennifer Martin Bienenstock and Susan Hobbs for providing me with valuable information about the Dewings.

[41] Smith, "Work of Benson," p. 100; Israel L. White, "Childe Hassam—A Puritan," *International Studio* 45, no. 178 (December 1911): 29–33. Hassam quotation on a scrap of paper included with the Childe Hassam Papers and Correspondence, American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York.



Fig. 11. Frank W. Benson, *Girl Playing Solitaire.* Boston, 1909. Oil on canvas; H. 50″, W. 40″. (Worcester Art Museum.)

of a family history in the China trade and the "romance of the old India trade." About 1909 one reviewer of a painting by William McGregor Paxton interpreted a blue jar in the composition as "a symbol of euthenics" and the young woman in the painting as a symbol of "eugenics."[42]

[42] Duncan Phillips, "Julian Alden Weir," in *Julian Alden Weir: An Appreciation of His Life and Works* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1922), p. 6; William Dean Howells, *A Woman's Reason* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1882), p. 45; Henry James, *The Europeans* (1878; reprint ed., Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1975); clipping from William McGregor Paxton file, Fine Arts Division, Boston Public Library, Boston. I would like to thank Doreen Bolger Burke for telling me about the miniatures handed down in Anna Baker Weir's family, which are still in possession of the Weir descendants.



Fig. 12. Childe Hassam, *In the Old House*. East Hampton, 1914. Oil on linen support; H. 31⅜", W. 48⅜". (IBM Corporation, Armonk, N.Y.)

With growing frequency, the ancestor portrait came to oversee these intentional and unintentional snobberies. In fiction John Singleton Copley, Charles Willson Peale, and Gilbert Stuart were invariably invoked as the household gods of familial longevity. Visual references made similar claims in such paintings as E. L. Henry's *Lover of Old China* (fig. 7) or Childe Hassam's genteel portrayal of a woman playing piano in *Improvisation* (1899). Judgment is passed from another angle in Eastman Johnson's *Not at Home* (1872–80), in which a stern ancestral figure and other inherited furnishings seem to express displeasure at a woman's bid for freedom from timeworn social obligations.[43]

It would seem, however, that at its more sensitive moments this tra-

[43] Portraits by Copley, Peale, and Stuart appear frequently in both S. Weir Mitchell's historical novels and his more contemporary society romances; three Stuarts also hang in a Boston parlor in Howells's *Woman's Reason*. Childe Hassam, *Improvisation*, National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.; Eastman Johnson, *Not at Home*, Brooklyn Museum, New York.

ditionalizing of gentility came out of the genteel tradition, which had at its ethereal core a worship of the intellect, a theology of intelligence. Americans were discovering that, in the words of Santayana, "by the mind only do we exist." Maria Oakey Dewing, who taught her husband to love Emerson and other philosophers, felt that "the artist who has the most mind will go farthest." The indwelling spirit of the colonial revival stemmed ultimately from the cult of the mind, which profoundly occupied the period. "Because the old Puritan days were not the childhood of our race but the first episode in our history," Van Wyck Brooks theorized in 1908, "we are the most purely intelligent people in the world."[44] The colonial revival as ideal could claim as its root the word *idea*. Its interiors were lit by the glow of cerebral pastimes, its quaint rooms were conducive to such labels as *Meditation*. Its subjects suggested a contemplative atmosphere that was, according to the title of a Thomas Anshutz painting of a woman reading, *A Bit of the Last Century*, and the importance it gave to pure idea filled the empty inner spaces dreamed up by Thomas Dewing, an artist who said that all he wanted were models with "brains."[45]

American culture as a whole, in fact, was regarded as a colony of the Italian Renaissance, of Holland's Golden Age, of Elizabethan, Queen Anne, and Georgian England—all periods, it was stressed, characterized by "thought." These ages had produced great styles of furniture and artifacts—"the best product[s] of a thoughtful time"—even as they planted a mature civilization on the shores of the New World. Dewing's women were readily classified as "the type of the Quattrocento," who manifested "the survival of the intense mysticism of the middle ages, vivified by the keen intellectuality and social freedom of their own day."[46]

[44] George Santayana, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" (1911), in Cleanth Brooks, R. W. B. Lewis, and Robert Penn Warren, *American Literature: The Makers and the Making*, Book C (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), p. 1551; Abbott Handerson Thayer to Maria Oakey Dewing, April 22, 1906, Abbott H. Thayer Papers, AAA; Van Wyck Brooks, *The Wine of the Puritans: A Study of Present-Day Americans* (New York: M. Kennerley, 1908), p. 19.

[45] A charming example of this common subject is George Newell Bowers, *Meditation* (1889), Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Mass. Although the owner of the Anshutz painting, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, calls it *A Studio Study* (1891), it appears in a contemporary source under the title *A Bit of the Last Century*. Dewing Papers, AAA.

[46] Spofford, *Art Decoration*, p. 89; Wheeler, *Home Decoration*, p. 169; Charles H. Caffin, "The Art of Thomas Dewing," *Harper's Monthly* 116, no. 695 (April 1908): 723. See also Richard Guy Wilson, "The Great Civilization," in *The American Renaissance, 1876–1917* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 9–55.

A further influence on Dewing and others was Vermeer, rediscovered during this period as the great and mysterious genius of the Dutch seventeenth century, an epoch known for its triumphs in art, science, philosophy, and exploration.

Animated—made animate—by such assumptions about the American past, the colonial revival interior often fervently expressed the antimaterialistic, "suggestive" mood that marked much avant-garde art and literature.[47] In doing so, it was able to colonize the spirit and forms of ancient Japan and China. The analogies between Puritan asceticism and Oriental metaphysics were not hard to draw. Nor were the Chinese origins of the ball-and-claw foot and the cabriole leg of the Queen Anne style forgotten, along with other connections fully exploited in the colonial revival interior, where heirloom Oriental ceramics seemed to grow more valuable by the minute. In paintings, the shapes of Eastern fans and porcelains were picked up by those of Windsor chairs and spinning wheels, ornate screens enfolded a sheltered existence, and every act was a study in reflection.

Such acts of introversion seemed reflections on time itself, the colonial revival as intellectual process stating more and more clearly that it was an exercise in memory. Its interiors epitomized both personal remembrance (Emily Dickinson compared memory to a house) and national nostalgia, with the very old and very young playing the roles of internal commemoration or the lost innocence of youth.[48] As Enoch Wood Perry's old clock doctor (fig. 13) might have been explaining to the young companion seated across from him in a rustic rural interior, the symbol for time in the literary and artistic prop rooms of the colonial revival was the clock. It was perhaps first popularized by Longfellow's poetic musings on time, history, and evanescence, "The Old Clock on the Stairs" (fig. 3). Expatriate painter Walter Gay remembered his own New England youth and that of his country with a picture of the ancient grandfather clock in New Hampshire's Wentworth house, for instance,

[47] *Suggestive* and *decorative* were both used to describe what were essentially abstract formal qualities in the work of a painter like Dewing and that of Tonalist artists in general.

[48] W. L. Kimberly, *How to Know Period Styles in Furniture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Periodical Publishing Co., 1912), p. 83; Dickinson, *Complete Poems*, p. 524. For an enlightening discussion of the intentional juxtaposition of Oriental and Western objects in the colonial revival interior, see Monkhouse, "Spinning Wheel." See also Siegfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western Art in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Harmony Books, 1981).



Fig. 13. Enoch Wood Perry, *The Clock Doctor*. New York, 1871. Oil on canvas; H. 21¾", W. 26⅛". (Courtesy Richard York Gallery, New York.)

and Jefferson Chalfant portrayed the dying art of the old clockmaker.[49]

Timepieces were a favorite device in fiction as well. Henry James, whose American stories were usually set well in the past, rewarded a Boston lady in "A New England Winter" (1884) for sticking to old ways by having her inherit all the clocks from her family's fine collection of antiques. Alongside the ticking of an old tall clock, in S. Weir Mitchell's novel *Roland Blake* (1886) is the "clock-like" clicking of knitting

[49]Walter Gay, *Grandfathers Clock, Wentworth House, New Hampshire* (n.d.), private collection; Jefferson Chalfant, *The Old Clockmaker* (1899), Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

needles wielded by a grandmother whose "eighty-five years of accumulated memories appeared to have supplied her with sufficient food for thought." This was the kind of temporal music colonial revivalists liked to hear; knitting, sewing, and spinning not only recalled the past, they made time audible and as visible as Thomas Waterman Wood's portrait of old Miss Mary Caldwell at work in "the interior of . . . one of the most spacious of Montpelier's Colonial homes," which he called *A Stitch in Time* (1894). In the cultured backwaters of Salem and Concord, Henry James discovered New England and its spirit personified as "Some grave, refined New England matron of 'the old school.' . . . From her position, her high-backed chair by the window . . . she looks up intelligently, over her knitting . . . with . . . a hint of that loss of temporal perspective in which we recognize the mental effect of a great weight of years."[50]

Such metaphorical scenes and settings were surpassed in import only by images of unadulterated retrospection itself. Along with "Memory" or "Memories," "Retrospection" became the title of many paintings, including Worthington Whittredge's depiction of an old man seated by the window in an interior, surrounded by objects even older than himself, gazing inward to what contemporaries were fond of calling "the chambers of memory." Retrospection was the historically minded interior stripped to its essence, distilled to Dewing's figures dressed in antique gowns meditating on the past's survival into the present, or to Thomas Eakins's *Retrospection* (1880), in which a pensive young woman in an old-fashioned dress is seated in an old chair, becoming both the subject and the object of memory. It was also Eastman Johnson's old Nantucketeers stationed by the fireside in *Embers* (ca. 1880) and *The New Bonnet* (fig. 5), reliving their lives while awaiting their deaths.[51]

In letters written to his old friend Jervis McEntee in 1879 and 1881, Johnson described his sojourns on Nantucket and the scenes he painted

[50] Henry James, "A New England Winter," in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel, vol. 6 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1963), p. 93; Mitchell, *Roland Blake*, p. 59; *A Stitch in Time*, reproduced in *Catalogue of the Pictures in the Art Gallery in Montpelier—The Thomas W. Wood Collection* (Montpelier, Vt.: Capital City Press, 1913), n.p.; James, *American Scene*, p. 259.

[51] *Retrospection*, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn.; Sherwood, *Amusements*, p. 8; Eastman Johnson, *Embers*, private collection. See also Kenneth Ames, "Eastman Johnson: The Failure of a Successful Artist," *Art Journal* 29, no. 2 (Winter 1969/70): 174–83.

there as a relief from the urban art world, as an escape from the present into the past. Yet it is evident from *The New Bonnet*, *Embers*, and others that, like so many of his contemporaries in art and letters, Johnson had made his way into the deepest and most somber regions of the colonial revival. Here was no mindless escape.

For, in the end, the colonial revival found in the interior did not represent uncomplicated bliss. Artists and writers realized that the legacies of colonial days were often psychological strains, the enervation of Puritanism, and the bankruptcy of other once-proud relics of the American past. "The old life of Puritan New England was indeed hard upon the young," one author wrote about the youth of Harriet Beecher Stowe, "a time of storm and stress, mainly for mental and religious conflicts." And in his psychological novel, *Dr. North and His Friends* (1900), S. Weir Mitchell created the symbolic figure of the neurotic Sybil Maywood, the offshoot of an ancient line that had come down in the world, a woman with a beautiful head on a deformed body. George Santayana, of course, made intellectual history by symbolizing all that was progressive and alive about American culture as a skyscraper and everything that was retrogressive, hidebound, weak, and hypocritical as a "Colonial mansion."[52]

The physical and psychological interiors of the colonial revival came to be experienced as inhibition and restriction. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's novel about female entrapment and madness, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892 and 1899), used the image of a colonial house as a symbol of blind conservatism and repression. New England, some felt, had left its female descendants in particular with an inherited conscience that crippled their emotions "as the Chinese do . . . their children's feet." The region had instilled in all its descendants a heritage of guilt and a consciousness of sin that had hardened into a modern-day Puritanism of narrow-minded social proprieties. No longer the "great Puritan . . . whip for conscience and nerves," this heritage had turned into a prim "conscientiousness" that was "kept for state occasions, like . . . great-grandmother's Crown Derby." Such psychological heirlooms entailed

[52] Eastman Johnson to Jervis McEntee, November 17, 1879, and September 22, 1881, Letters of Artists, Charles E. Feinberg Collection, AAA; Hattie Tyng Griswold, *Personal Sketches of Recent Authors* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1898), p. 168; S. Weir Mitchell, *Dr. North and His Friends* (New York: Century Co., 1900), p. 35; Santayana, "Genteel Tradition," p. 1545.

prejudice—like some nineteenth-century Hester Prynne, Emily Dickinson was reputed in her village to be a witch—sterility, and a sense of decay. The only vital signs that appeared in the cold New England houses, which observers liked to view as symbols of lonely gloom, were morbidity and the neuroses and sickliness encountered in Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome* (1911). In this short novel, existence in a world and a house of stiff resentments leads to unhealthy acts and cruel insanities.[53]

Having used the interior and interiorization to revive its colonial past, a backward-looking culture ultimately seemed to discover introspective sadness, loneliness, a withdrawal into the self. To be a Puritan was to be not happy. There was a recognition of things that never were what the modern searchers had wanted them to be. The mood expressed in words and paint is a reflection on time passing and passed, an elegiac tone created by the lonesomeness of introversion in such paintings as Frank Benson's *Girl Playing Solitaire* (1909; fig. 11). It is a sense of loss—a loss of faith, of security, of hope. "They must be Puritans to their finger-tips," a foreign visitor says of his American relatives in Henry James's *Europeans* (1878). "They are sober, even severe. They . . . take things hard . . . they have some melancholy memory or some depressing expectation."[54] Contained in these psychic legacies, however, were bequests that seemed to contemporaries to make all the suffering and sadness worthwhile. A fin de siècle culture that put an increasing premium on psychological awareness began to perceive the Puritan trait of introspection as its most significant inheritance, as a welcome means of self-knowledge, and as a tool for getting at the essence of people and things. Frank Benson was viewed as a portraitist of this finely tuned, nervous subjectivity. So was Thomas Dewing, whose women betrayed "an inherited trait of seriousness. . . . They [were] still the daughters of Puritanism. . . . Generations of repressed emotion have made them

[53] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892 and 1899; reprint ed., Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1973); S. Weir Mitchell, *In War Time* (New York: Century Co., 1884), p. 158; James, *American Scene*, p. 232; Howells, "Household-Effect," p. 289; Edith Wharton, "The Mission of Jane" (1904), in *The Descent of Man* (1904; reprint ed., Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), p. 39; Van Wyck Brooks, *New England Indian Summer* (1904; reprint ed., New York: E. P. Dutton, 1965), p. 330; Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome* (1911; reprint ed., New York: Scribner's, 1960). Walter Gay, a friend of Wharton, painted the interior of the old Fairbanks House in Dedham, Mass., a structure Wharton later christened "the Ethan Frome house."

[54] James, *Europeans*, p. 33.



Fig. 14. Thomas Eakins, *The Old-Fashioned Dress—Portrait of Miss Helen Parker.* Philadelphia, 1908. Oil on canvas; H. 60⅜", W. 40¼". (Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Thomas Eakins and Miss Mary A. Williams.)

incapable of passion; strenuousness survives only in their supersensitive nerves." Thomas Eakins aged his sitters—like the young girl in *The Old-Fashioned Dress* (1908; fig. 14)—to get at their emotional centers; his historical subjects formed a bridge between his earlier physical realism and the psychological realism of his later years. Introversion, memory,

psychology itself were hailed as modern forms of Puritan self-examination, and the "sincerity" of old colony days was praised as intensity of feeling, an authenticity of experience. History as interiorization led to the inside as insight. Antimodernism evolved into a modernist sense of self. In the interior not only renovation but innovation took place.[55]

[55]Charles H. Caffin, "The Art of Frank W. Benson," *Harper's Monthly* 119, no. 709 (June 1909): 105–14; Charles H. Caffin, *The Story of American Painting* (New York: Stokes, 1907), p. 189. For psychological awareness, see Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York: Basic Books, 1970); and George M. Beard, *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1881). The theme of psychological awareness is articulated throughout late nineteenth-century American art and literature. For a recent and stimulating discussion of antimodernism, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).