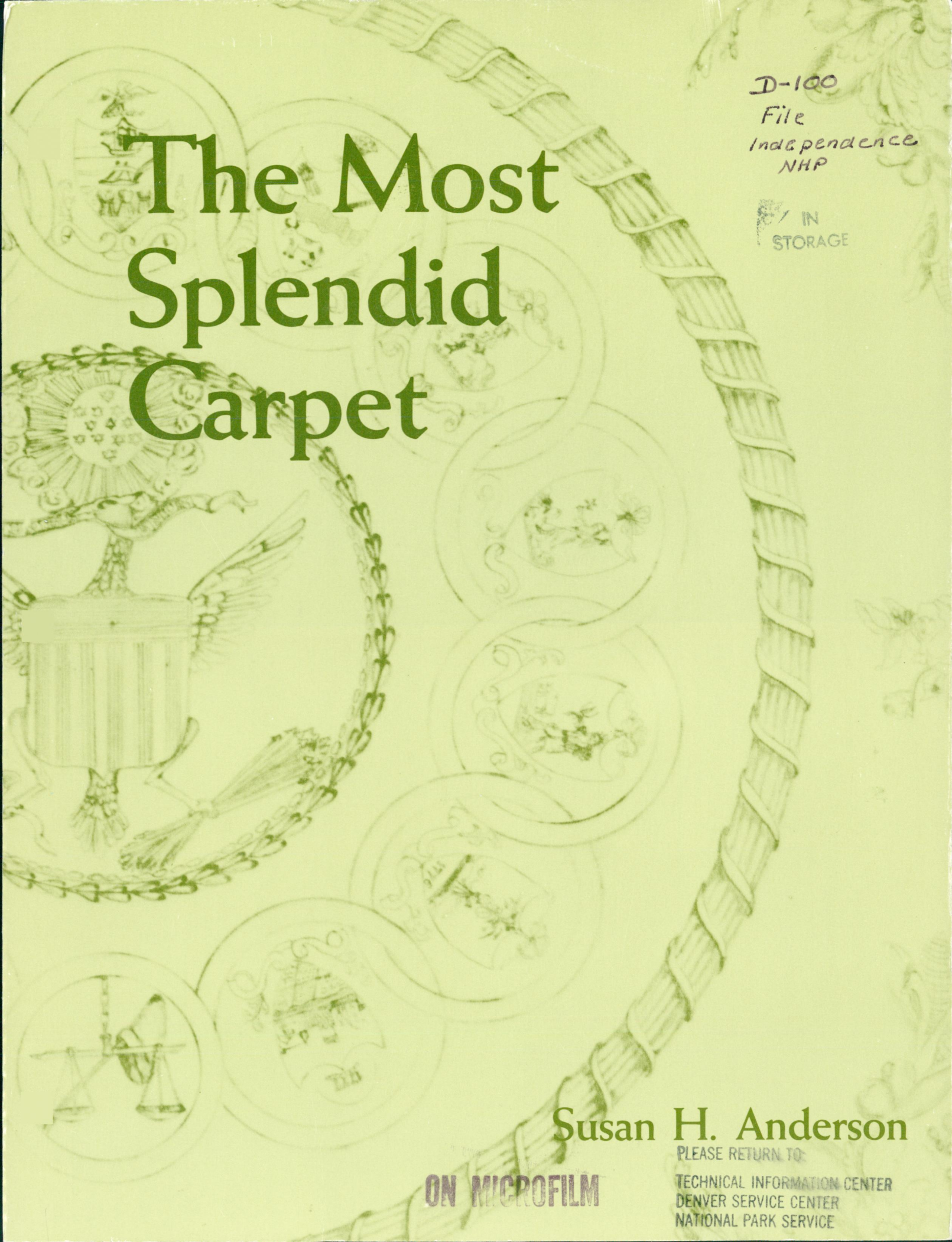


The Most Splendid Carpet

Susan H. Anderson

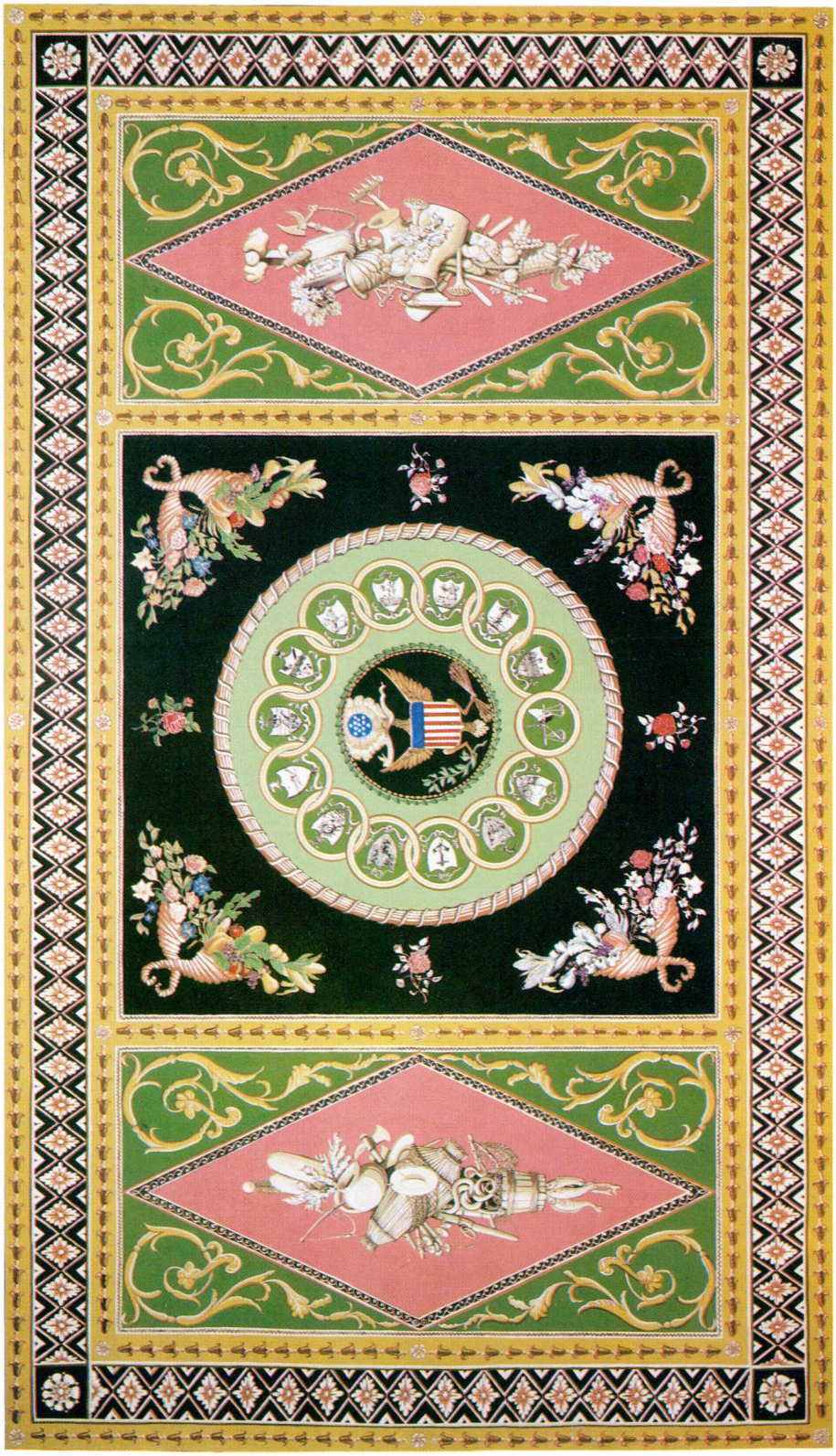
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THE MOST SPLENDID CARPET



The Most Splendid Carpet

Susan H. Anderson

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Philadelphia 1978

Funds for the research, the production of a reconstructed carpet, and a portion of the publication costs were made available to Independence National Historical Park through a generous grant from The Pew Memorial Trust of which The Glenmede Trust Company is the trustee.

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PLATE I: Color rendering for the reconstruction of the Senate Chamber Carpet. Independence National Historical Park Collection.

Preface

When one intensely researches, studies, contemplates and worries about a subject for a long period of time, as Susan Anderson has done with the problems related to the reconstruction and interpretation of the Senate Chamber carpet, then the inanimate object becomes almost a living thing. That sense of aliveness was conveyed to me in her handling of this text, which is both, expository and interpretive at one and the same time.

I cannot help but believe that it was so for the Senators who comprised the upper house of the first six Congresses of the United States, which convened in Congress Hall in Philadelphia from 1790 to 1800. The carpet's message was implicit in its design elements; it spoke of America's promise, her abundance of natural resources, and the power vested in Congress to govern the country with wisdom and justice. To the men who debated the ratification of Jay's Treaty, or deliberated upon the admission of new states into the Union, the implications of a linked chain in the carpet's design was a message that could not be ignored.

Neither could its message have been lost upon either John Adams or Thomas Jefferson as they took their respective turns presiding over the Senate as Vice President; nor upon George Washington as he stood to take his oath of office for a second term as President of the United States. In point of fact, the carpet is such an important key to our understanding of the way the Senate as a body considered itself and its responsibilities that without it our interpretation of the restored room was severely handicapped for many years.

The carpet had to be reproduced. That sounds like a simple enough project, but since the original carpet had long since disappeared and the information related to its actual appearance was scanty or not easily had, the project became one of long duration and staggering complexity. Serious work was begun in 1962 by the present Chief of Museum Operations for the Park, John C. Milley. However, because of other priorities, inadequate staffing and funding, and the Park's Bicentennial development programs, his work culminated with a research report embodied in the Furnishings Plan for the Second Floor of Congress Hall. Then, in 1976, the research was resumed and brought to completion by Susan H. Anderson, a graduate of Cornell University and a student of Mr. Milley's in the American Studies Department at Temple University.

As the research drew near to completion, it became increasingly apparent that it might be several more years before monies might be made available for the carpet's reproduction through normal programming channels. As has happened before, when the Park was in need of assistance, we turned to the Friends of Independence National Historical Park. It was through their good offices that a grant

was obtained from The Pew Memorial Trust of which The Glenmede Trust Company is the trustee, not only to reproduce the carpet, but also to bring its meaning in book form to the interested public.

The carpet was manufactured in Spain under contract with Connoisseur Collections of Denver, Colorado. Robert T. Johnson, president of that firm, gave his personal attentions to the effort by close supervision of every phase of production. Edward O'Brien, Instructor at the Philadelphia College of Art, contributed his time and talents to the creation of a preliminary colored rendering for the manufacturer. Volunteer assistance was also received from Alice B. Lonsdorf, the immediate past chairman of the Friends of Independence National Historical Park, who compiled the footnote and bibliographical references for this publication.

The completion of this project makes me very proud, because in it I have realized a National Park Service objective of cooperating with charitable organizations, private industry, individual persons, and our own employees, to the benefit of the future millions of visitors to the restored Senate Chamber. To turn a phrase that appeared in a 1791 newspaper description of the carpet, its reproduction is also "a masterpiece of its kind."

Hobart G. Cawood
Superintendent
Independence National Historical Park

Acknowledgements

To list all the scholars, curators, librarians, and friends who have given generously of their time and expertise to assist me in resolving the plethora of problems related to the design of the Senate Chamber carpet, and its interpretation as presented in this book, would require a second manuscript of some length. The fact that I mention only a few of them here does not belie the warm thanks I extend to all of them.

Without the extensive preliminary research undertaken from 1962 to 1965 by John C. Milley, Chief of Museum Operations, Independence National Historical Park, this project could not have been completed within the time frame allocated to me. My heartfelt thanks are due him for allowing me to use his notes and ideas fully. I also acknowledge gratefully his excellent advice and many helpful suggestions made during my research and his editorial work on the manuscript.

I am greatly indebted to many librarians in this country and in England who helped me locate and gave me permission to use research materials, including Miriam Lesley and her efficient staff at the Free Library of Philadelphia; Barbara Sevy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; Frank H. Sommer, III, Betty Hill, and Beatrice Taylor of the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum Libraries; Lillian Tonkin of the Library Company of Philadelphia; Eric and Yvonne Mansfield of Saltram House, Devonshire, England; and Sondra Gutkind of Independence National Historical Park.

A number of curators gave freely of their time to show me carpets in their collections, including agents for all the English country houses mentioned in the text. Special thanks must go to Wendy Hefford of the Victoria and Albert Museum, who allowed me to study and photograph rugs in the collection under her charge, and for important information given in a most friendly spirit of cooperation.

In this country, Margaret Fikioris of the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum was extremely generous, allowing me free access to carpets in the textile collection and helping with technical analysis. Suzanne Wells of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and James Parker of the Metropolitan Museum of Art were also especially helpful.

Sarah B. Sherrill, of *Antiques Magazine*, lent her technical expertise in rug analysis and suggested many fruitful avenues for research. Bertram Jacobs, author of *Axminster Carpets*, contributed much useful information and generously sent me some excellent photographs. My thanks are due also to John Platt of the National Park Service, for sharing with me his expertise on Congress Hall and the late eighteenth century Philadelphia community.

Editorially speaking, Martin I. Yoelson and Lynne A. Leopold, Independence National Historical Park, contributed important suggestions. Jane Kolter deserves special thanks for her assistance with every phase of this work, from research, to editing, to the mechanics of publication; as does Gloria McLean, who handled the monumental task of typing draft and final versions of the manuscript with faultless accuracy and conscientiousness.

Finally, to Alice Lonsdorf, past Chairman of the Friends of Independence National Historical Park, I owe a particular debt of gratitude. In compiling the bibliography which accompanies this book and in editing and checking the footnote references, not usually a fascinating business, she applied great intelligence and much enthusiasm.

Susan Anderson
April 3, 1978

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Introduction

The following discussion of the history, design, significance, and stylistic composition of the Senate carpet begins with certainties, only to end in the complexities of imagination and hypothesis. From the secure documentation of the presence in the Senate Chamber of an Axminster carpet, through recognition of the easily identified United States seal in its center, to a declaration that its neoclassical design and symbolism were easily read by those who walked upon it, is a progression both orderly and logical. But some particulars of composition are unclear, and many details of design are totally undocumented.

In view of these problems, some obvious questions arise: If not a shred of physical evidence of the Senate carpet remains, if only two newspaper accounts and a few bills exist to show what this carpet was like, why has Independence National Historical Park chosen to reproduce it? What was so important about this one object to require its reconstruction on the basis of conjecture, when others, perhaps equally interesting, are left unattempted?

Although the design of the Senate carpet is imprecisely known and many details of composition are lacking, it is in the meaning of the details which are known that the importance of the Senate carpet becomes obvious. The carpet which covered the plain board floor of the upper chamber in Congress Hall was a furnishing so overwhelmingly important that without a suggestion of its imposing presence and symbolic warmth, the room in which some of the earliest business of the United States government was discussed was a mere shadow of its original self. It is a function of objects that they illuminate and fill out written evidence of the minds of the persons who looked at and used them. If there had been, along with the political revolutions of 1776 and 1789, a stylistic revolution so important that Jules Prown has called it "the most complete and dramatic stylistic change in the entire history of American art," the Senate carpet exemplified that revolution.[1] Indeed it was one of those objects, taken for granted by those who used it, which, like the stained-glass windows of Chartres, seems to sum up in itself an entire moment in cultural history.

Although relatively unnoticed by the Senators whose room it graced, it was, nevertheless, all the things they themselves believed in: neoclassical to a fault, an expression of controlled and therefore acceptable luxury, luxury which in half-remembered Puritan fashion, was a sign of God's approval, symbolic of pride in republican virtue, peace, and prosperity which these men took so seriously. That these Senators did not pay more literal attention to it, recording it in their memoirs or drawing versions of it to illustrate their letters to granddaughters, shows not indifference, but natural acceptance:

how suitable a carpet it was, and how well it fit their intellectual state and aesthetic mood.

As Prown has summarized so well, in the book *American Art 1750–1800*, "the exuberance of rococo objects increasingly disturbed the post-Revolutionary sensibility, suggesting reliance upon feelings, instability, possible irrationality, whereas the intellectually controlled aloofness of neoclassical objects represented the dominion of the mind. They embodied the premise that as in furniture or silver or architecture man could apply his rational powers to solve problems of design, so too could he use his mind to create an ideal society."[2] Thus the fact that many details of the Senate carpet reproduction are based wholly on conjecture becomes largely irrelevant. The larger meaning of the carpet as symbolism and as art takes precedence over exact form.

THE MOST SPLENDID CARPET

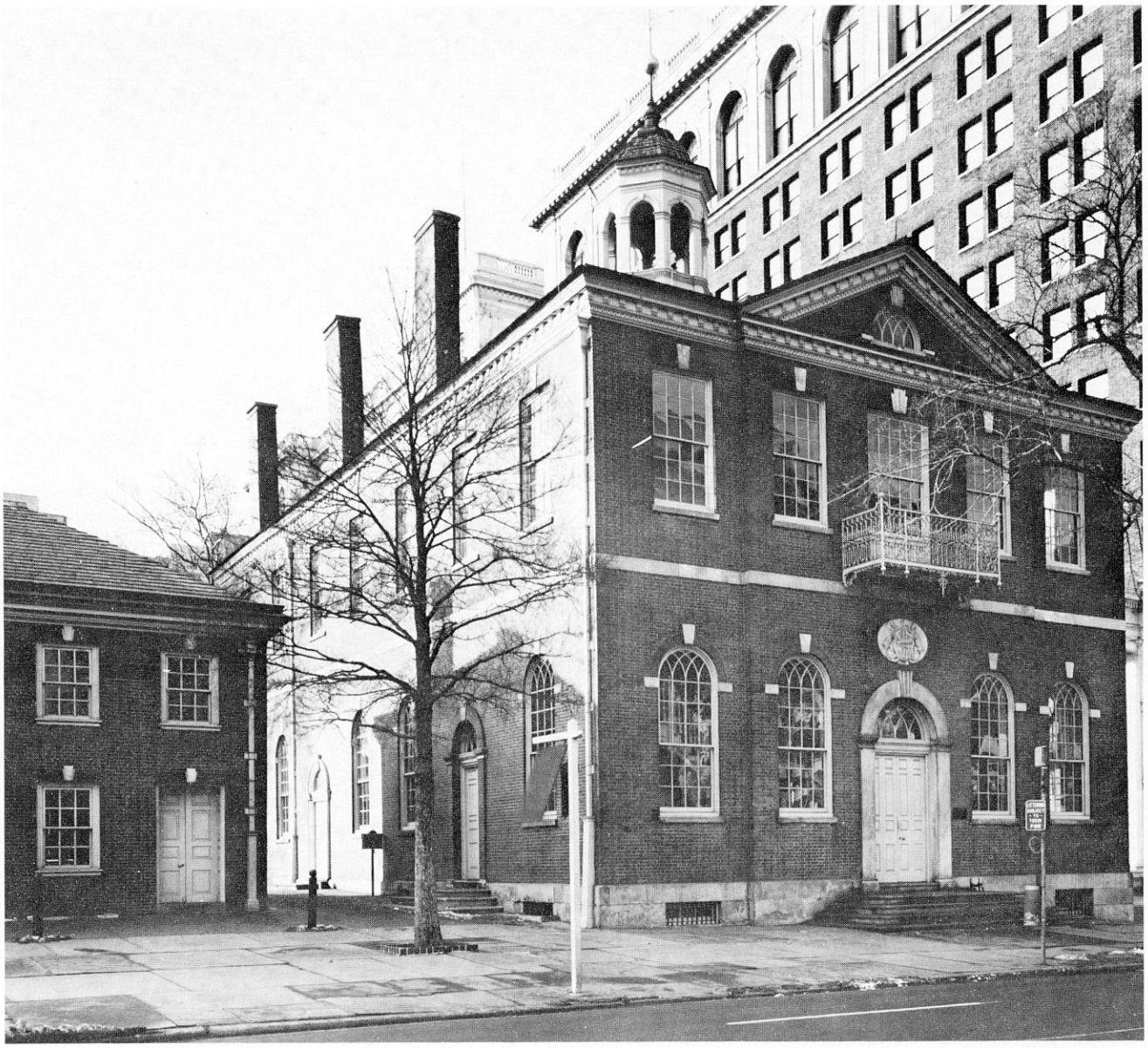


FIGURE 1: Exterior view of Congress Hall looking southwest from Chestnut Street. *Photo by James L. Dillon & Co., 1969.*

A Masterpiece for the Senate

On September 21, 1789, Robert Morris of Pennsylvania rose before the Senate of the United States, meeting in New York, to offer to Congress "the use of any or all the public buildings in Philadelphia, the property of the State, in case Congress should, at any time, incline to make use of that city for the temporary residence of the Federal Government."[1] So began a year-long debate, which elicited cries of anguish from New Yorkers who wanted their Federal Hall to remain the seat of government, and determined lobbying from Robert Morris, who insisted on Philadelphia. Rufus King of New York thought the effect of moving to Philadelphia would be to "convulse the union," and Thomas Fitzsimons, a Pennsylvanian himself, feared stones would be thrown at him in the streets if he were there.[2] Even George Washington had second thoughts, finding that indications of "a spirit too imperious" had appeared there.[3]

But Robert Morris prevailed, and on December 6, 1790, Congress met for the first time in Philadelphia, which would, by compromise, remain the temporary seat of government until the permanent Capitol in Washington, D.C., was made ready. Philadelphia did not accept lightly the task of making the Senators and Representatives comfortable in the city. After some consideration, the City and County Commissioners settled on the County Courthouse, (now known as Congress Hall), one of the newest public buildings in Philadelphia. Constructed between 1787 and 1789 in the Georgian style, it was balanced in 1790-91 by the building of a new City Hall at Fifth and Chestnut Streets, with the Pennsylvania State House (Independence Hall) situated between them. Thus all levels of government were located in one city block, fulfilling Andrew Hamilton's ideas for a unified government center.

There was no question that the new Capitol would have tasteful furnishings, in simple classical form, as current fashion prescribed. The rooms themselves were rather plain, with white walls, pine floors, and fireplaces faced with marble. In the House of Representatives, a platform was erected for the Speaker's chair, following Parliamentary tradition, and the Representatives' chairs were placed in three tiers, each elevated above the preceding row for easy visibility. Mahogany desks, and chairs covered in black morocco leather were ordered from one of Philadelphia's finest cabinet-makers, Thomas Affleck, and Venetian blinds and colorful ingrain carpeting were installed.[4]

The Senate Chamber was even more elegant with individual desks, red leather upholstered chairs, crimson silk damask canopies

and window draperies, pilaster decorations, and a dentilled cornice. Jacob Hilzheimer was not alone in considering the furnishings of the Senate Chamber "unnecessarily fine," when the Senators held their first full session there in December 1790.[5] But it was not until June 1791, that the Senate Chamber received its most elegant and impressive element of furnishing, a carpet of the "Axminster kind," "executed in a capital stile with rich bright colors" giving "a very fine effect," according to a contemporary account.

In the latest neoclassical fashion, it had three compartments. The central, nearly square section was of black pile, while the two rectangular side sections were rendered in green. Instead of having an overall design of flowers as in earlier eighteenth century carpets, it was geometric in composition and strictly symmetrical, with the United States Seal as the central motif, surrounded by a chain of the thirteen state shields. Cornucopias decorated the corners, displaying an abundance of corn, wheat, melons, and flowers, symbolizing the peace and prosperity which was now settling over the nation. In the side panels were trophies, assemblages of farming tools and fishing implements, to proclaim the abundance of natural resources.

Hand-knotted on a monumental scale of 22 by 40 feet, the Senate carpet was an impressive production, one of the most ambitious carpet-making projects ever undertaken in the United States, and one of the earliest. It came from the Philadelphia Carpet Manufactory at 458 North Second Street, the first full-fledged commercial carpet factory in America, where William Peter Sprague, an Englishman from Axminster, Devonshire, had established a promising business. Sprague had been trained in the Axminster technique of hand-knotting, probably at the factory of Thomas Whitty in Devonshire, England, and after establishing his own manufactory in Philadelphia in 1790 he used the technique for everything from small bedside carpets to at least two famous large carpets, one for Washington's residence at 190 High Street, and one for the Senate Chamber.

The technological marvel of such an impressive and stylish carpet was not lost on Americans. One observer wondered why the factory had received so little notice. It was just the sort of infant manufacture that Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton hoped could help the United States escape dependence on foreign imports, bring money to the treasury, and employ American workers.

As a work of art, the carpet took on an even deeper meaning. Its patriotic symbols and its neoclassical design reflected a developing American culture, with its optimism and its yearning for peace and order based on classical ideals. It brought to mind the Senate of ancient Rome, with which the United States Senate liked to compare itself, and it exemplified the American predilection for selecting those classical ideas and motifs which would best express American desires, and transposing them to suit the American context.

The carpet received its first public notice on March 5, 1791, in a satirical article in the *Philadelphia Independent Gazeteer* describing the furnishings of the room. A slightly irreverent tone marks the author of these words as one of those who thought of the Senators as perhaps a little too aristocratic and of the Chamber as a little too elaborately done up.

"Morgan: . . . Have you seen Federal-Hall, Uncle Gwynn?

Uncle Gwynn: Yes I have. . . . I have seen the stuffed seats; I have examined the curtains; I looked at the writing desks of the most shining mahogany; the superb drawers, for every Member to lock his brains, memory, and other documents in—and pray, Cousin Morgan, why would not windsor chairs have answered as well as those stuffed with hair?

Uncle Gwynn: Pray Cousin, where is the Bald Eagle and the 13 stars to be placed?

Morgan: On the floor, on the most splendid carpet that ever was made, our own manufactory too. . . .

Morgan: Why Uncle, if a fine large Eagle and Thirteen Stars, had been painted on any Visible part of Federal-Hall, nobody in the Gallery would have looked at a single Member of Congress."

On June 6, 1791, a more complimentary article appeared in Dunlap's *American Daily Advertiser* describing at length the new carpet.

"Amongst the many accounts of the flourishing state of the infant manufactures of America, it seems strange that the Carpet Manufactory has been hitherto so little noticed. A correspondent who has lately visited that establishment in the Northern Liberties, informs us, that he has seen some of the carpets manufactured there by William Peter Sprague, of those durable kind called Turkey and Axminster, which sell at 20 per cent cheaper than those imported, and nearly as low as Wilton carpeting, but of double its durability.

The Carpet made for the President, and others for various persons, are masterpieces of their kind, particularly that for the Senate Chamber of the United States. The device wove in the last mentioned is the Crest and Armoreal Atchievements appertaining to the United States. Thirteen Stars, forming a constellation, diverging from a cloud, occupy the space under the chair of the Vice-President. The AMERICAN EAGLE is displayed in the centre, holding in his dexter talon an olive branch, in his sinister a bundle of thirteen arrows, and in his beak, a scroll inscribed with the motto E PLURIBUS UNUM. The whole surrounded by a chain formed of thirteen shields, emblematic of each state.

The sides are ornamented with marine and land trophies, and the corners exhibit very beautiful Cornu Copias, some filled with olive branches and flowers expressive of peace, whilst others bear fruit and grain, the emblems of plenty.

Under the arms, on the Pole which supports the Cap of Liberty, is hung the Balance of Justice.

The whole being executed in a capital stile, with rich bright colours, has a very fine effect, notwithstanding the raw materials employed, are of the refuse and coarser kind; so that this manufactory is an advantage to others by allowing a price for those articles which could not be used in the common branches of woollen and tow business.

Manufactures of all kinds will generally meet with the support of the friends of the country, and this in particular, which already gives

employment to a number of poor women and children, will no doubt be encouraged. The article of carpeting is now imported in considerable quantities, for which, large sums are annually exported to Europe; but if due encouragement be afforded, there is every reason to believe that it may become an object of exportation."

* * *

Work to ready the Philadelphia Court House for Congress had begun even before a final decision was reached on removal from New York. A three-member committee, Miers Fisher, William Colliday, and Matthew Clarkson, took on the job of planning for the reception of Congress, ordering materials and supervising work in progress in the House and Senate Chambers. Structural and architectural work was begun concurrently with the planning and ordering of furniture. Vouchers for 1790 include payments for carpentry work, installation of Franklin stoves, plastering and whitewashing, and the purchase of mahogany for tables and chairs and goatskins and finished morocco leather for upholstery. It is probable that the Senate carpet was designed and ordered from William Peter Sprague about the same time. That the carpet was not installed until sometime between March and June of 1791 is not surprising, since several months were required for the preparation of a design and for the painstaking work of hand-knotting. In one of the last bills on the list of disbursements for the renovations of what had now begun to be called Congress Hall, William Peter Sprague was paid £156.12.6 for the 132½ yards of carpeting he had made.

Slightly more than a pound per yard was expensive. By contrast, one nearly new ingrain carpet owned by John Todd, Jr., in Philadelphia was valued at 5 shillings 6 pence per yard in 1793; while in 1799 Josiah Lusby was selling ingrain carpeting at 9 shillings per yard in his store in Third Street. A new Wilton carpet in the inventory of Joseph Reed in 1785 was valued at 15 pounds for a 5½ yard piece, or about 9 shillings per running yard.

The carpet itself was probably made in strips twenty-seven inches wide, and sewn together lengthwise. This was an unusual method for making a hand-knotted carpet, although it was customary for the less luxurious Brussels, Wiltons, and ingrains. An Axminster carpet was generally made in one piece on a loom the width of the intended rug. But 132½ *square* yards of carpet would have been too large for the Senate Chamber floor, while eight 27 inch strips and two narrower ones for the border, measuring 132½ *running yards*, fit the floor exactly. Corroborative evidence to support this hypothesis comes from a payment recorded in the City and County Commissioners' disbursements list for 1791 to William Bankson, an upholsterer, for "making a large Carpet," the eighteenth century term for sewing a carpet together; he also delivered 50 yards of green cord, which he may have used as binding.

Even before Congress arrived in Philadelphia, its members may have realized that Congress Hall would soon need to be enlarged, since the census they were planning for 1790 "to enumerate the

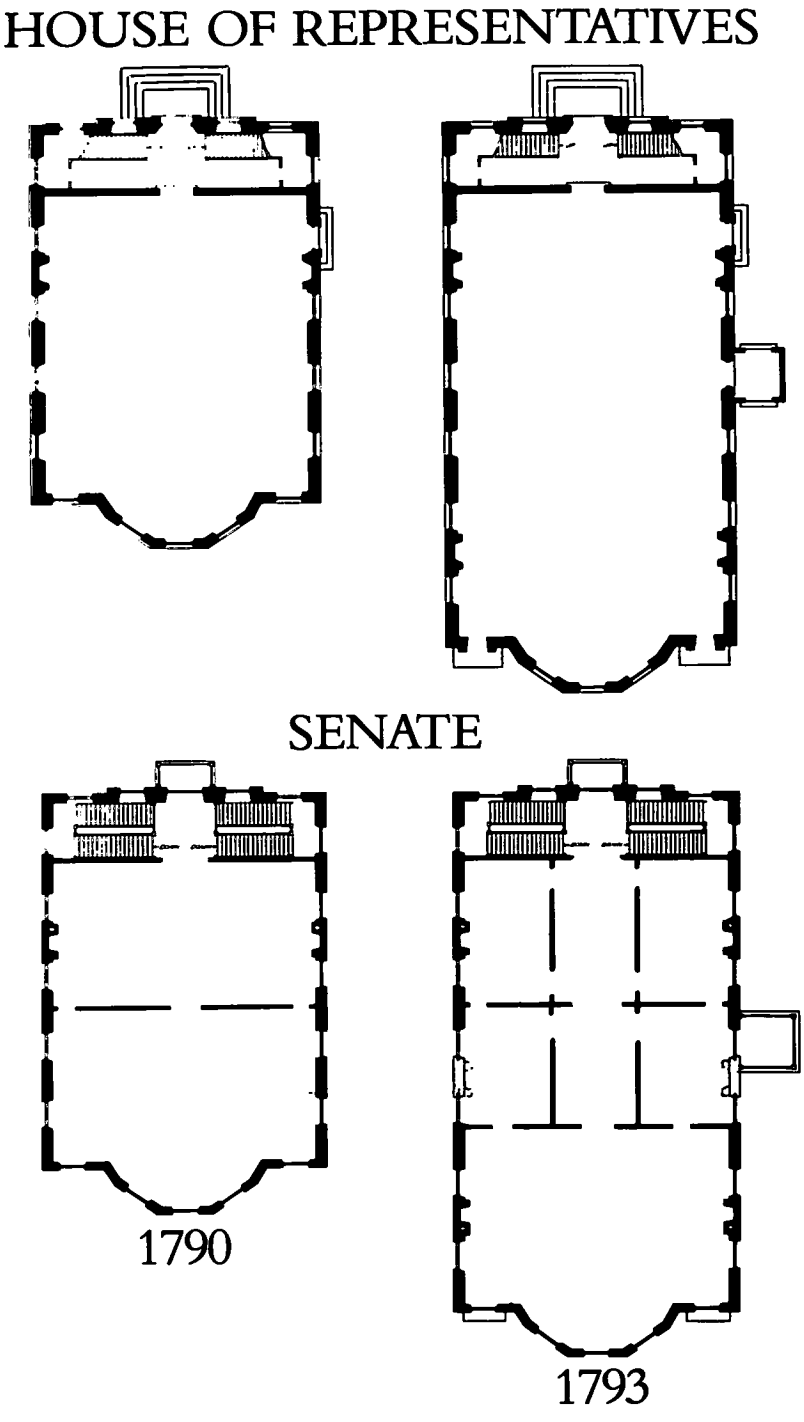


FIGURE 2: Floor plans of Congress Hall, 1790 and 1793.

citizens of the United States" would certainly increase representation in the House. By 1793, following reapportionment and with the addition of Vermont and Kentucky to the Union, there were 105 instead of 68 members of the House, and four additional Senators. The space problem became acute, and in April 1793, work began to

extend the building 28 feet at the south end. Carried on throughout the terrible Yellow Fever epidemic of the summer, construction was completed by December, and Congress returned to a much larger Representatives Chamber and a rearranged second floor. Two committee rooms now stood between the old offices facing north and the Senate Chamber on the south end, and the Chamber itself was increased in size to 47 by 31 feet.

With the six foot increase in width, some 282 square feet in total area, the Senate carpet lost some of its impact. It was too small for the space, leaving too much bare floor around the edges, and must have looked out of proportion, for William Peter Sprague came in to make repairs.

On December 2, 1793, Sprague submitted his invoice for £49.9.6 for "attending the cleaning carpets of the Senate room," and "fixing and repairing the same." Not only was the carpet repaired, but because of the greater floor area, Sprague added "a Black ground carpet 21½ yds," and "a Green ditto 20 yds," and "two small Carpets for each of the Corners." Interestingly, the carpet was not rolled up and taken away for these adjustments, but Sprague himself and two boys spent a total of five days working in the "Senate room," as they called it, sweeping, washing, and mending some areas of the carpet.[6]

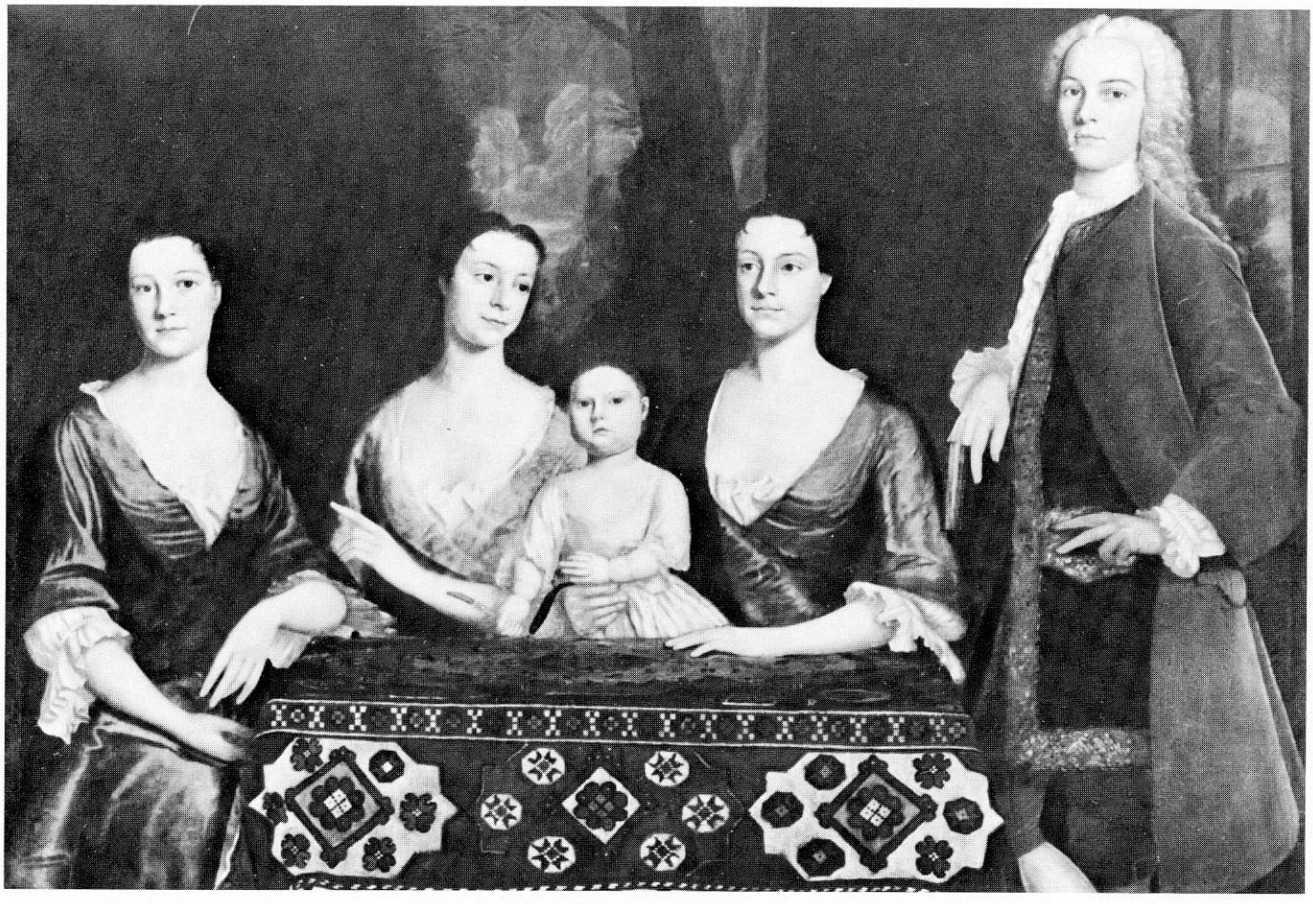
All the known facts about the Senate carpet are derived from the preceding four documents, the two newspaper articles and records of Sprague's bills. After 1793 it is not mentioned again. In 1795, after much debate, a public gallery was added to the north end of the room. The supporting pillars for this gallery intruded eight feet into the floor space, necessitating more changes in the carpet, either requiring that it be cut down, or that holes be cut in it for the columns. Although Congressman Theophilus Bradbury of Massachusetts noted in 1795 that there was indeed a woolen carpet in both Senate and House Chambers, he did not describe either of them, even as he remarked that the Senate Chamber was much more elegant than the House. None of the existing vouchers refers to carpeting at all at this date, nor is there any mention of it in contemporary newspapers. Likewise, no mention of carpeting appears in vouchers for work done in 1796, when the Senate Chamber floor, so hastily built in 1793, threatened to collapse and was entirely removed and relaid.

On May 14, 1800, Congress sat for the last time in Philadelphia. In June its effects were shipped to Washington, packed into coastal sailing ships which landed at Baltimore and at Alexandria. The Senate carpet was not listed among the crates and boxes which finally arrived in the muddy streets surrounding the permanent Capitol, and no indication of its fate has been found.

Since it belonged to the State of Pennsylvania, which had reimbursed the County and City Commissioners for their expenditures in 1791, it is not surprising that it was missing from Congressional packing lists. On the other hand, there is no word of it in Pennsylvania state accounts, where it might be expected to appear. Some of the Thomas Affleck chairs and desks were taken to Lancaster for the

Pennsylvania state legislature in 1802, when the state capital was moved, but some were sold along with other furnishings from both House and Senate Chambers. It is entirely possible that the carpet had simply worn out after years of hard use, or it may have been cut up and sold, something which frequently happened to carpets when parts became worn and unsightly.[7]

FIGURE 3: "Isaac Royall and Family," oil on canvas by Robert Feke, 1741. Courtesy of the Harvard University Portrait Collection.



Floorcoverings in America to 1800

"The President wishes to get a Carpet of the best Kind, for a Room 32 feet by 22 . . . We can get no Carpet in New York to suit the Room—Carpeting of the best kind—Scotch Carpeting is almost the only kind to be found here. If you will be so good as to inform me if anything of the above description can be found in Philadelphia you will oblige me."[1]

When Tobias Lear wrote this letter in February 1790, on behalf of George Washington, carpets of quality were neither abundant nor easily acquired. Although more numerous than they were in 1758, when the only carpets mentioned among seventy-five inventories in Boston were two Turkey carpets belonging to the Jackson family, floor coverings "of the best kind" were still the province of the wealthy few. Research in American inventories reveals a basic pattern: by the last quarter of the eighteenth century, a majority of middle-class houses had inexpensive Scotch carpeting, floorcloths, or straw mats; only the wealthier possessed more elegant and serviceable British-made Brussels or Wilton carpets, and only the very well-off had Turkey carpets or imported British hand-knotted carpets from Axminster or Moorfields.

Turkey carpets were especially prized possessions of a small number of settlers in the seventeenth century, and more were imported in the eighteenth century before the Revolution. A few merchants and aristocratic landholders wishing to make a permanent record of their progress in the world ordered portraits of themselves in which Oriental carpets spoke for the wealth and importance of their owners. A colorful Anatolian carpet of the so-called Transylvanian type in the Robert Feke portrait of Isaac Royall and his family illustrates a customary use of these carpets as a table-covering and suggests that they were considered far too valuable to be put underfoot. Somewhat later Oriental carpets might be purchased in cities like Boston or Williamsburg, but such luminaries as Benjamin Franklin still went to England to find carpets through London dealers.

Early in the eighteenth century, a householder had little choice; either he was wealthy enough to buy a Turkey carpet, or his wife was accomplished enough to hand-stitch a needlework carpet or to weave a "list" rug out of wool or linen rags. Barring these alternatives, the floor might be covered with straw mats, or simply strewn with straw and herbs in medieval fashion. Reportedly, some Americans even used sand on their floors, swept into herringbone or swirl patterns.[2]

Towards mid-century painted canvas floorcloths became popular, particularly for entrance halls, but also in parlors, and later on in dining rooms. Often embellished with bold geometric designs or small repeating flower designs, complete with border, they added color and pattern to a room, but not warmth or quiet.

When Brussels and Wilton carpeting became available in America in the 1750's it was truly a luxurious improvement; these carpets, which could be laid wall-to-wall, cut off drafts, softened the footfalls of a busy family, and lent an air of bright attractiveness to a hitherto bare floor. Woven in strips on a twenty-seven inch loom, Brussels carpeting had a looped pile of wool and was sturdy and serviceable. Above all, it could be cut and sewn to fit a room exactly. Wilton carpeting was an offshoot of the Brussels technique made on the same narrow looms, but its loops were cut to give a smooth, velvety pile. Americans seemed to prefer Wilton to Brussels, judging from the evidence in inventories and auction advertisements. From the 1750's onward Wilton carpets appeared in the most fashionable homes. Joseph Pemberton, Samuel Neave, and Thomas Penn, to mention but three influential Philadelphians, had Wilton carpets in the years before and just after the Revolution. Brussels carpets are more difficult to identify in inventories. Although any of the "old carpets" common in Philadelphia and Boston records might have been Brussels, mention of them specifically does not occur with any frequency until the 1790's.

With the importation of Scotch or ingrain carpeting beginning about mid-century, a less expensive choice became available. Scotch carpeting, however, was not a highly regarded alternative. Tobias

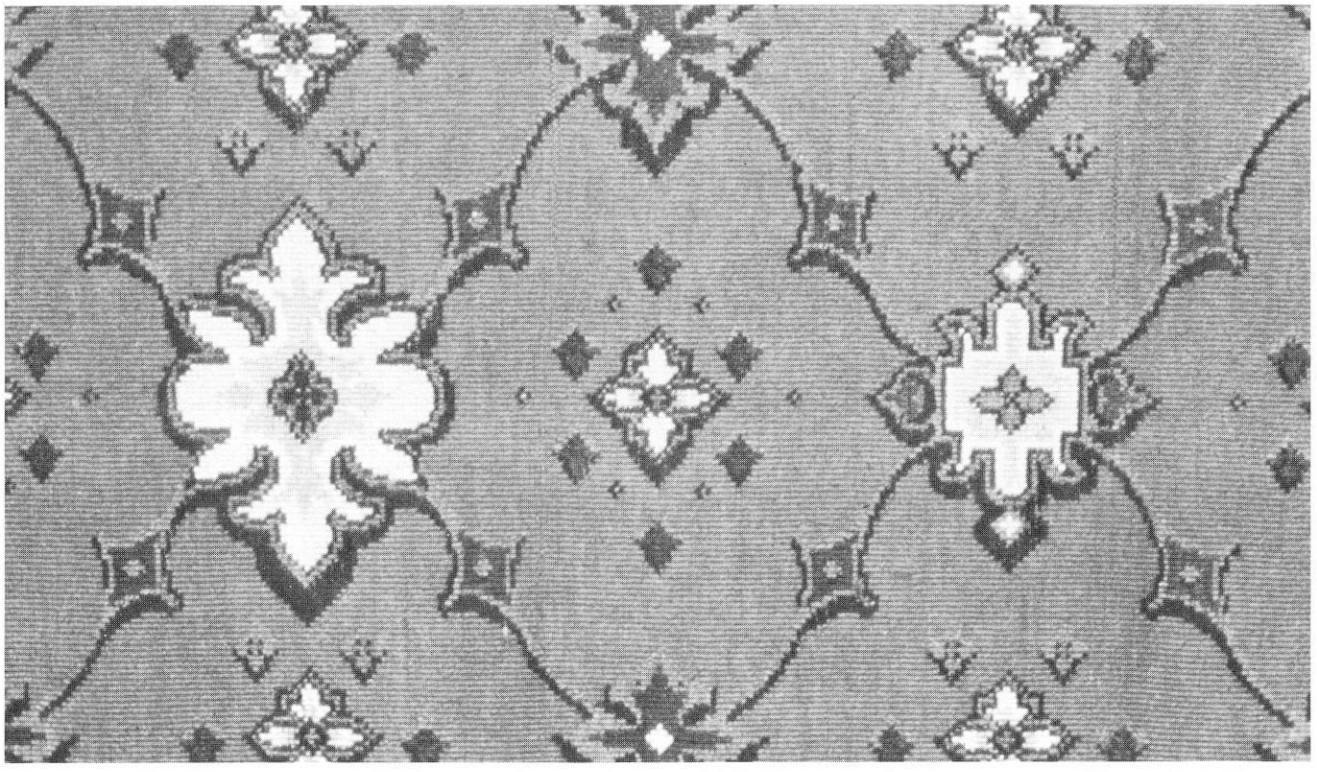


FIGURE 4: Detail of Brussels carpet, *c.* 1860, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. *Author's photograph.*

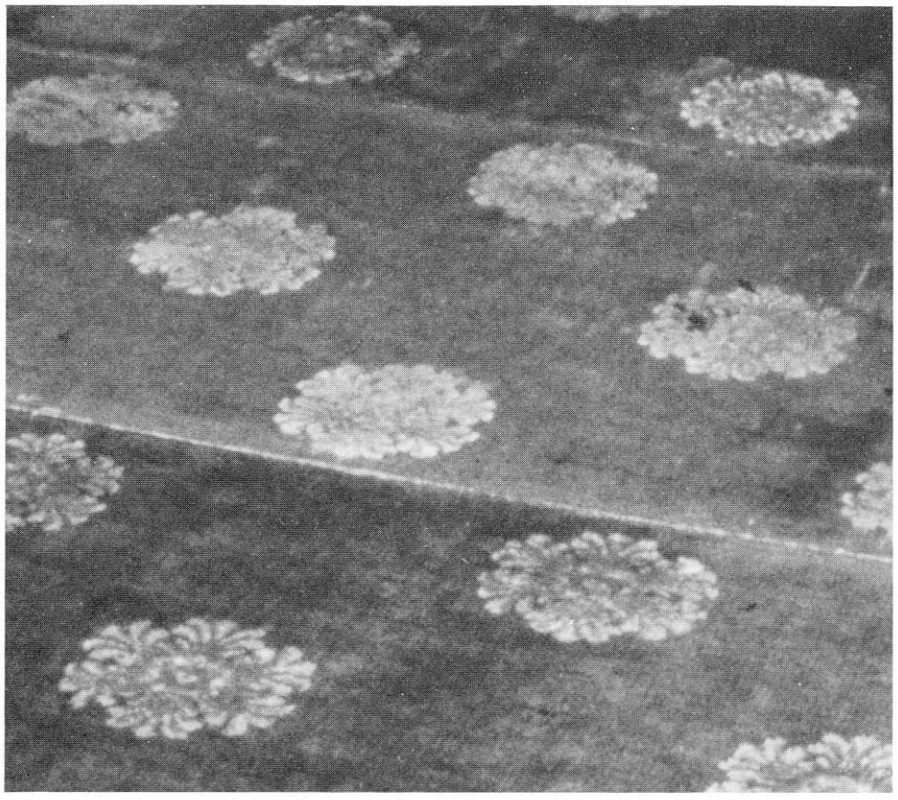


FIGURE 5: Detail of Wilton carpet, *c.* 1830, Attingham Park, Shropshire, England. Carpet composed of strips 27 inches wide, sewn together. By courtesy of the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty, London, England. *Author's photograph.*

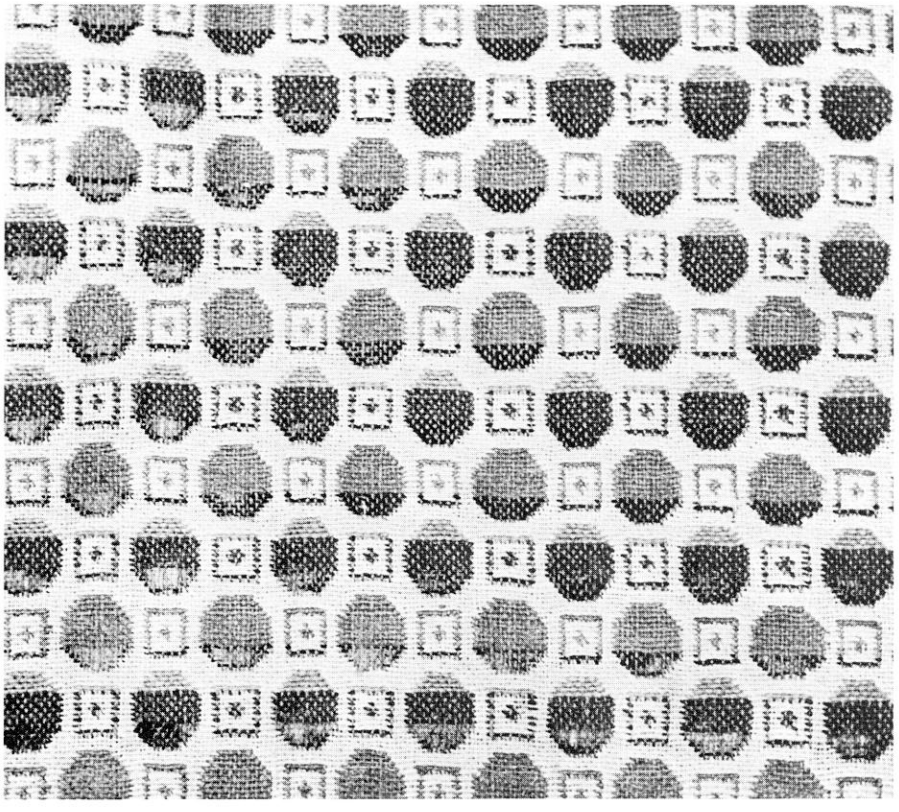


FIGURE 6: Detail of Ingrain carpet, probably 18th century. *Colonial Williamsburg Photograph.*

Lear turned up his nose at it for Washington's large room, and Thomas Sheraton in his *Cabinet Dictionary* of 1794 disdained it as "the most inferior kind." Despite these scornful comments, Americans could not get along without this soft, narrow, double-woven carpeting. Pileless and reversible, Scotch carpeting appeared everywhere, from nurseries and attics in grand mansions to the front parlors of the middle class. Cost, not serviceability seems to have dictated its use in the House of Representatives Chamber, the committee rooms, and the hallways of Congress Hall in Philadelphia, but the Senate Chamber was another matter: there something more luxurious was required.

Hand-knotted Axminster carpets like the Senate carpet were the most expensive of British-made carpets, and began to appear in newspaper advertisements just before the Revolution, some twenty years after their first manufacture in England. No Axminsters have been discovered in American inventories, and auction advertisements reveal that only a few were in this country in the 1770's.

When Oriental carpets were costly and hard to obtain in sixteenth century Europe, there were copyists at work both in England and France who imitated the "Turkey" carpets imported at such great expense from Anatolia. In the seventeenth century, the popularity of these copies led to the establishment of the famous Savonnerie carpet works in an old soap factory in Paris, where carpets, seat covers, tapestries, and screen panels were carefully hand-knotted in patterns imitating the Oriental imports. Almost immediately, however, the design vocabulary expanded from simple Oriental copies to the elaborate florals favored in seventeenth century decoration, and Savonnerie designs became famous in their own right. This reputation was enhanced by the fact that Savonnerie carpets were made exclusively for the King of France, for his palaces at Versailles and Fontainebleau, or as gifts to foreign sovereigns.

In 1750 two workmen from the Savonnerie factory became embroiled in a feud with the company and emigrated in some disgust to London. As recent research by Wendy Hefford of the Victoria and Albert Museum has shown, they raised enough money by subscription to begin a carpet for the Prince of Wales, but had to be rescued from debt by Thomas Moore, an enterprising hosier and tapestry maker.[3]

When this association did not last, another French refugee, Peter Parisot, hired the two men and set up a factory at Fulham, claiming immediately that he had introduced the hand-knotting technique which later came to be called "Axminster" to England. Thomas Moore disputed this claim, and when Parisot fired the two men for their "extravagant demands," Moore at once rehired them. There they remained from 1752 onwards, weaving carpets for the man who became famous as Thomas Moore of Moorfields, maker of carpets for the architect Robert Adam, and competitor of Thomas Whitty of Axminster, Devonshire.

For a few years Parisot continued his factory in Fulham, but because his carpets were so expensive he was forced to the edge of bankruptcy. In 1755 he sold the business to Claude Passavent, who moved the looms to Exeter, Devonshire, a county famous for its fine worsted. Here business flourished for six years, during which some

PLATE II: Exeter carpet, 1758, Petworth House, Sussex, England. Note dark colored counting warp threads and multicolored wefts. By courtesy of the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty, London, England. *Author's photograph.*


32 NDS
16 THS
FAIRGATE
105-6
MADE IN U.S.A.

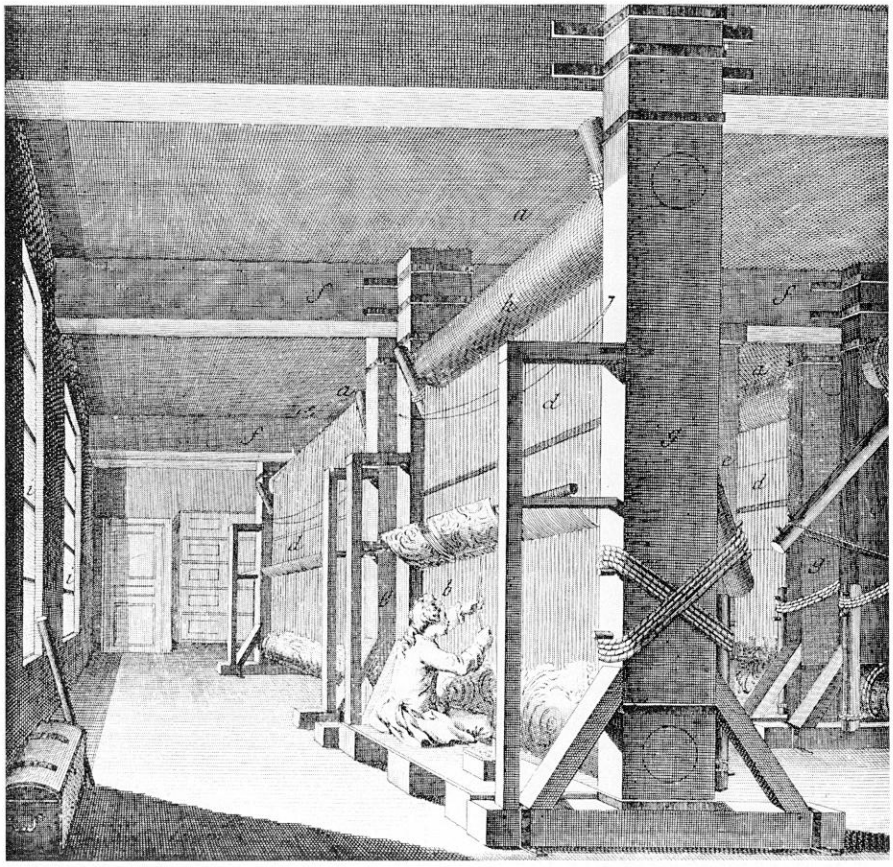


FIGURE 7: The process of handknotting a carpet on an upright loom as illustrated in Diderot's *Encyclopedia . . .* , (Vol. IX, Pl. 1). Note the cartoon of the design attached to the warp above the weaver's head.

very beautiful hand-knotted carpets with designs reminiscent of French sources were manufactured. Many of these "Exeter" carpets survive today in England, and can be easily distinguished from others of the same knotting technique by their tightly pulled multicolor wefts, their "counting warps" (a colored thread twisted in among the natural wool warps every 20 threads, so that the ruled cartoon could be followed more easily), and by the signature, "Oxon," woven into the border with the date beside it.

One piece actually signed by Parisot himself still exists, a colorful and very closely knotted chair-back now framed on the wall at Clandon Park. It is an excellent example of the fine materials and meticulous craftsmanship which made the works of the Parisot factory desirable. After the Exeter factory dwindled and went bankrupt in 1761—Passavent seems to have been a singularly inept manager —the two British competitors remained.

Thomas Whitty was a weaver of woolen cloth in Axminster, Devonshire, who was convinced he could make carpets as fine as those of Parisot, if only he could discover the secret of the technique. While Parisot was still in London Whitty managed to visit the shop in Fulham, where he "obtained a view of everything I wanted, by which every remaining difficulty was removed from my mind, and I was thoroughly satisfied I could go on with the manufacture."[4] Upon his return to Devonshire, Whitty duplicated the simple vertical loom used by Parisot, and with his borrowed technique began to weave carpets.

The upright loom which Parisot used could be built to great width, although it had to be attached to the ceiling for support. Warp of any desired size was threaded on the loom, and cartoons of the design were pinned to the warp at eye level. Several weavers sat in a row beneath it. Each weaver worked a comfortable width of 27 inches, first weaving a few rows of wool warp, then, as if making a Turkey carpet, putting in a row of Turkish knots using ready-cut wool in any choice of colors. This type of carpeting was superior in three ways to woven looped carpeting: it was hand knotted and therefore stronger, it could be made to any width, and a greater variety of colors could be used to make the pattern.

Realizing that the Parisot operation was in difficulty because of the expense of these carpets, Whitty applied a businessman's mind to the problem of producing affordable carpets for the English market. To reduce the price and undercut Parisot, and later Passavent at Exeter, he used bast or "tow" fibers, mainly coarse linen, in the weft of his carpets, where the others had used wool. Instead of hiring men at a high wage to do his weaving, he was able to cut labor costs by employing women and children at very low rates, even going so far as to seek out and hire pauper children from Axminster and the neighboring rural parishes. At first his own wife and daughters sat at the looms, making costs so low that he could undersell the competition greatly. The year after he began work he had, in his own words, "orders for as many carpets as I could procure hands to make."

In 1757 he shared a prize with Thomas Moore of Moorfields from the Society for Promoting Arts and Sciences, for "making Carpets in England on the principle of Turkey carpets." Whitty recounted in his memoir of the Axminster manufactory that although Thomas Moore's carpet "was made of the finest materials" and was valued at 40 guineas, his own of about the same size was priced at only £26.5.0, while Claude Passavent's came to the "exorbitantly high" price of 80 guineas. It is obvious who reaped the benefits of this publicity. Price, however, was not the only distinguishing feature between the carpets of Whitty and Moore. Since Thomas Moore employed the same French weavers who began the Fulham-Exeter manufacture, his carpets had many of the same features. His carpets were wool throughout and sometimes used multicolor weft threads. He did not always sign his carpets, however, and the wefts were never pulled as tightly as those of Exeter. He also used the method of "counting warps" for ease in reading cartoons, sometimes a multicolored thread every 20 warps, sometimes a simple knotting together of every nineteenth and twentieth warp thread.[5]

Thomas Whitty did not adopt all of these peculiarities. He never signed his carpets, nor did he use counting warps or multicolor wefts, and of course, the weft threads of his carpets were usually of rough bast and tow fibers instead of wool.[6]

Whitty, Moore, and Passavent continued as rivals until the Exeter bankruptcy of 1761, when the English market was left to Moore and Whitty. Each had his own following among the wealthy classes in England, and both were employed by Robert Adam. Thomas Moore signed one of his Adam-designed carpets for the Duke of Northumberland and made one for Sir Edward Knatchbull at Mersham-le-Hatch, Kent, through the agency of Chippendale. For



FIGURE 8: Detail of Moorfields carpet at Kedleston, Derbyshire, England. With the kind permission of The Viscount Scarsdale. *Author's photograph.*

Osterley Park he made three carpets from Adam's drawings to match the newly applied neoclassical ceiling decorations.

The Earl of Shaftesbury, Thomas Whitty's first customer at Axminster, became one of his best, ordering carpets for his house in Wiltshire well into the 1790's. Robert Adam ordered Whitty carpets for Saltram House, and many other carpets in mansions such as Rockbeare Manor, Powderham Castle and Uppark have been attributed to Whitty. At least one carpet made by him for Harewood House to match the ceiling designed by Robert Adam was seen on the loom in 1791 by the Reverend P. J. Clarke in his travels through England.[7] Whitty also had a London distributor, William Crompton, and it is probably from this dealer that Axminster carpets were shipped to America.

In the 1770's and 80's there were at least three Axminster carpets in America. One, sold at auction on July 6, 1772, belonged to Richard Vassall of Wall Street, New York, "lately embarked with his family for Jamaica." Another "elegant Axminster carpet" was sold in 1777 for the estate of Richard Colden, Esq., of New York, and in 1788 one appeared in the list of goods sold in Philadelphia by Governor John Penn.[8]

Interestingly enough, there was a Moorfields carpet in Philadelphia as well, in the Spruce Street house of William Bingham. English traveler Henry Wansey saw it in 1794 when he visited the "rulers of the Republican Court" in their fashionable and elaborate house modeled on the Duke of Manchester's estate in the West End of London. To furnish their house Mr. and Mrs. Bingham had brought

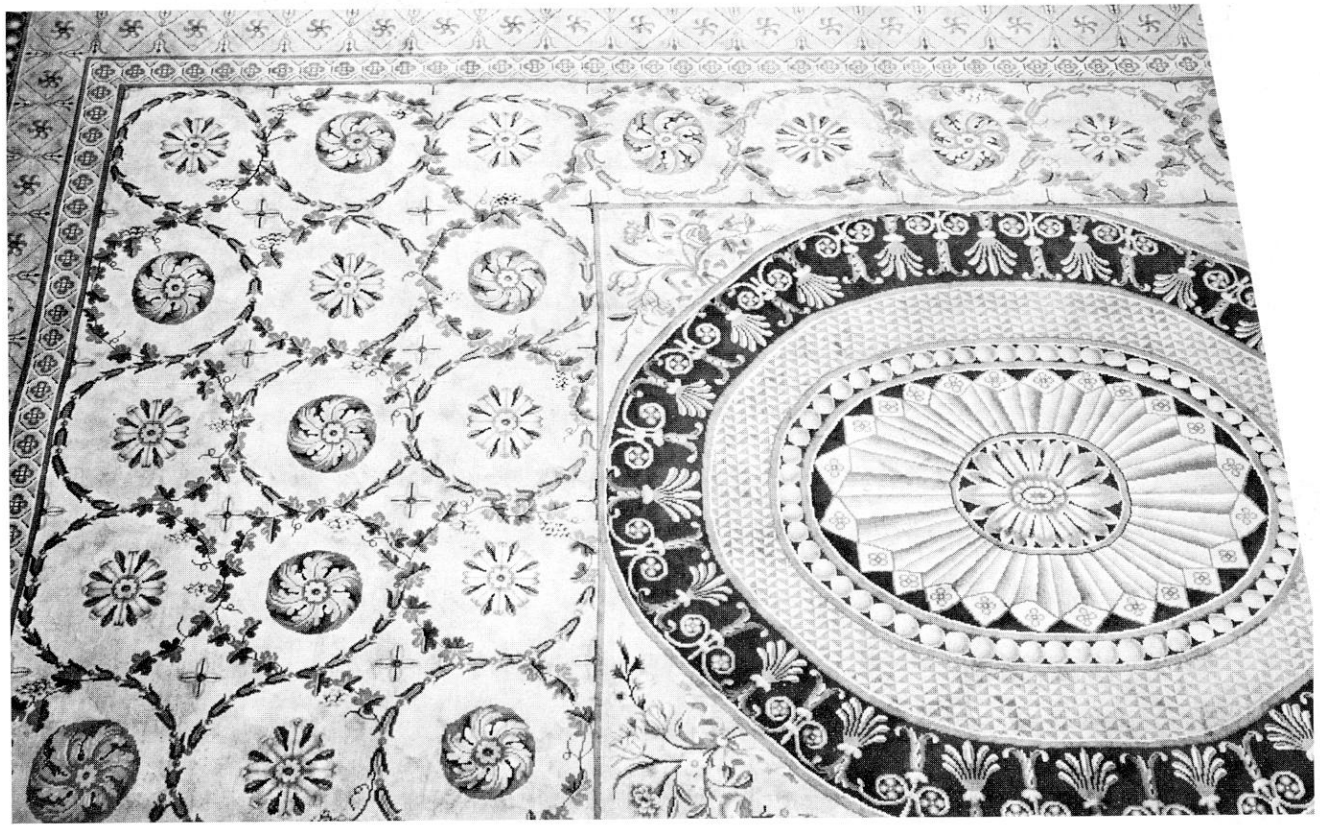


FIGURE 9: Detail of Moorfields carpet at Osterley Park, London. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



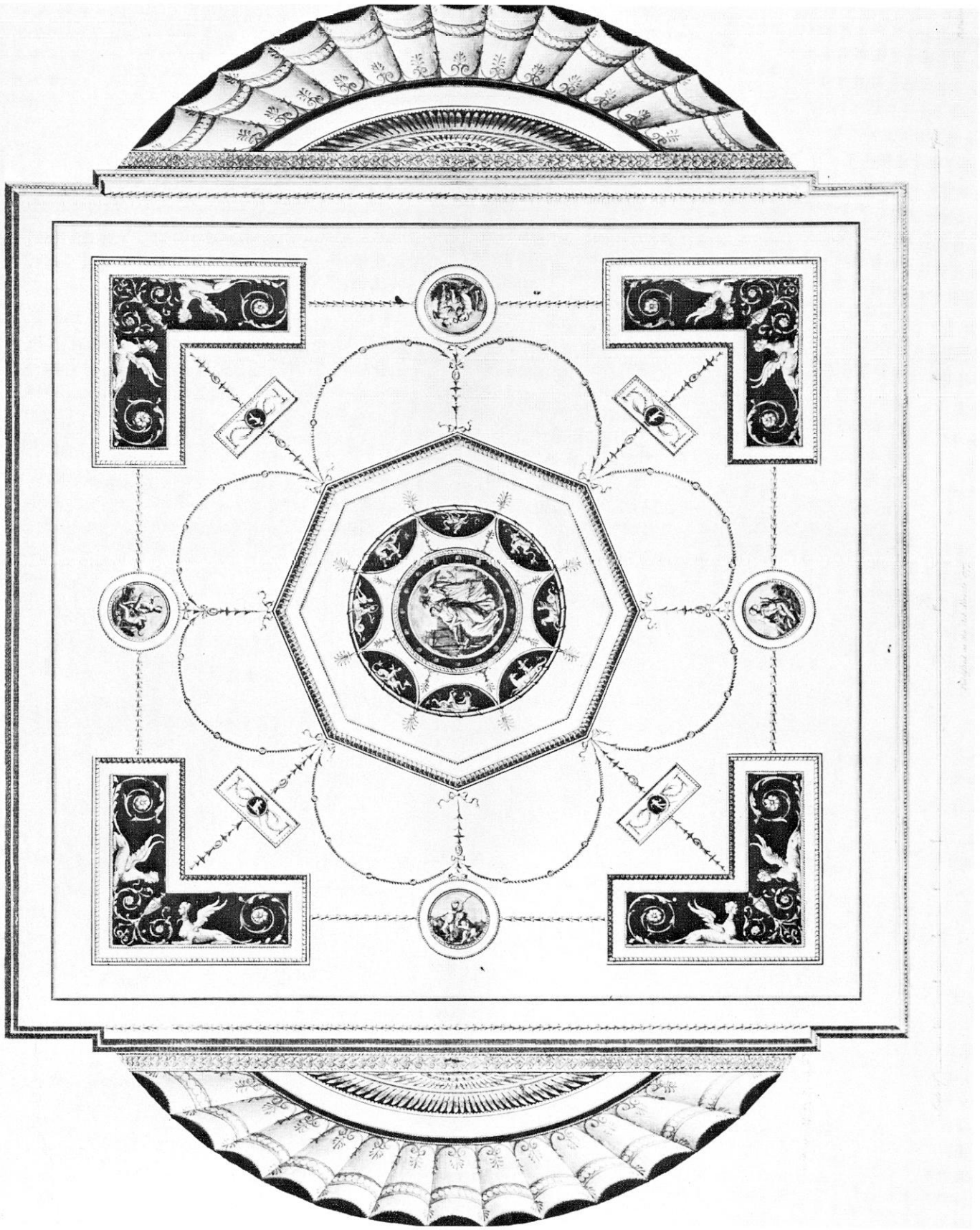
back from their 1787 European tour "everything for the house and table which the taste and luxury of the time had invented," as their cousin Margaret Brown later remembered.[9] Henry Wansey described in his *Journal* the elegance of the drawing room:

"The chairs of the drawing room were from Seddon's in London, of the newest taste; the back in the form of a lyre, with festoons of crimson and yellow silk. The curtains of the room a festoon of the same. The carpet one of Moore's most expensive patterns."[10]

As for carpets in American public buildings, even less evidence exists. There was a "Turkey work" carpet, certainly of Oriental design, on the table in the Virginia House of Burgesses' Council Chamber in 1703 according to contemporary records. No other carpets have been identified by type prior to that for Congress Hall, although we know that Federal Hall in New York possessed, during Congressional occupancy in 1789-90, an unspecified "handsome carpet." That there developed a tradition for carpeting at least the most important rooms in public buildings is shown by the Senate carpet itself, the green carpet ordered by Thomas Bulfinch for the Boston Statehouse in 1798, and the fine Brussels carpet of star-studded crimson ordered for the Senate Chamber in Washington in 1823.

Not one British-made pile carpet from eighteenth century American public buildings is known to survive today, so to see what the "Axminster" carpet in the Senate Chamber might have been like we must turn to the great houses of eighteenth century England. All of the Axminster and Moorfields carpets for which we have definite documented histories were made not for public buildings, but for English country houses. Fortunately, some of these carpets are still in the rooms for which they were made, and can be studied for design, color, and technique.

PLATE III: Detail of Axminster carpet in the Saloon of Saltram House, Devonshire, England. By courtesy of the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty, London, England. *Author's photograph.*



English Influences in Design

The year 1760 is generally taken as a convenient dividing line between the late baroque and neoclassical styles in English architecture and the decorative arts, and the time when English design turned to the work of the Scottish-born architect Robert Adam for inspiration. In the early years of the eighteenth century, English taste still ran to the imposing but rather austere Palladian exterior, derived through Inigo Jones from publications of Palladio's sixteenth century designs of villas at Vicenza and Venice. Symmetrically columned and pedimented, with balancing outbuildings at either side, these houses on the inside were dedicated to the social "parade" prescribed by wealth and position. A series of rectangular grand apartments marched one after another through the interior, with elaborately columned entrance halls and galleries, enormous trompe l'oeil ceiling paintings in which figures emerged as if from heaven, and Italianate carvings of dark wood and gilt. Furnishings were frequently imported from Italy or France, heavily gilt pieces with sculptural quality which complemented a taste for swirling, busy patterns and high relief.

The revolution wrought by Robert Adam when he returned to England from Rome in 1758 reflected his passion for the discoveries of archeologists at Rome, Herculaneum, Pompeii, and other classical sites, and effected a complete transformation in the appearance of interiors in England's great houses. In contrast to Palladian and baroque classicism, which drew its themes from books by sixteenth century Italian interpreters of Vitruvius and other architects of classical times, the neoclassicism of Robert Adam was based on actual classical buildings, carefully observed and drawn by Adam himself. Although he continued to design Palladian houses for his noble clients, many of whom he had encountered while he was abroad, his interior and exterior ornamentation of the houses embodied a new lightness and grace drawn from these classical sources.

"The massive entablature, the ponderous compartment ceiling, the tabernacle frame, almost the only form of ornament formerly known in this country, are now universally exploded, and in their place we have adopted a beautiful variety of light mouldings, gracefully formed, delicately enriched, and arranged with propriety and skill," Adam explained in his *Works in Architecture*.[1] He smoothed and flattened the high relief of the baroque: a sculptured column became a shallowly fluted pilaster barely emerging from the wall; extravagant stucco decorations became flat, delicate panels; thick festoons of foliage became light, airy arabesques. Adam used complex geometric, but flattened ceiling designs inspired by the ancient buildings he had sketched in Italy, and introduced elements of Roman wall decoration such as painted pedestals, urns, cameos,

FIGURE 10: "Design for a ceiling in the Etruscan taste executed in the Countess of Derby's Dressing Room," by Robert Adam, 1777. Courtesy of The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum Libraries.

anthemions, grotesques, and griffins drawn from the wall paintings, especially from those at Herculaneum.

The grand apartments, too, Adam redesigned and reshaped for what Clifford Musgrave has called "scenic variety."[2] The monotonous rectangular progression of rooms of parade became a series of spaces planned for "the rise and fall, the advance and recess within the diversity of form in different parts of the building."[3] A columned great hall now led up a series of steps into a chamber paneled with flat gilded trophies, as at Syon, and then into a series of rooms more intimate in feeling, or, as at Kedleston, into an oval saloon and thence through rooms of varied shape and size with now a coffered ceiling, then a curving bay.

It was an entirely new outlook. Part and parcel of it was Adam's attitude towards the whole of his houses; he retained control himself of every design element in these houses, be it stucco moldings carried into form by Joseph Rose or wood moldings and chimney pieces sculpted by Sefferin Alker. Even the doorknobs were Adam's own design.

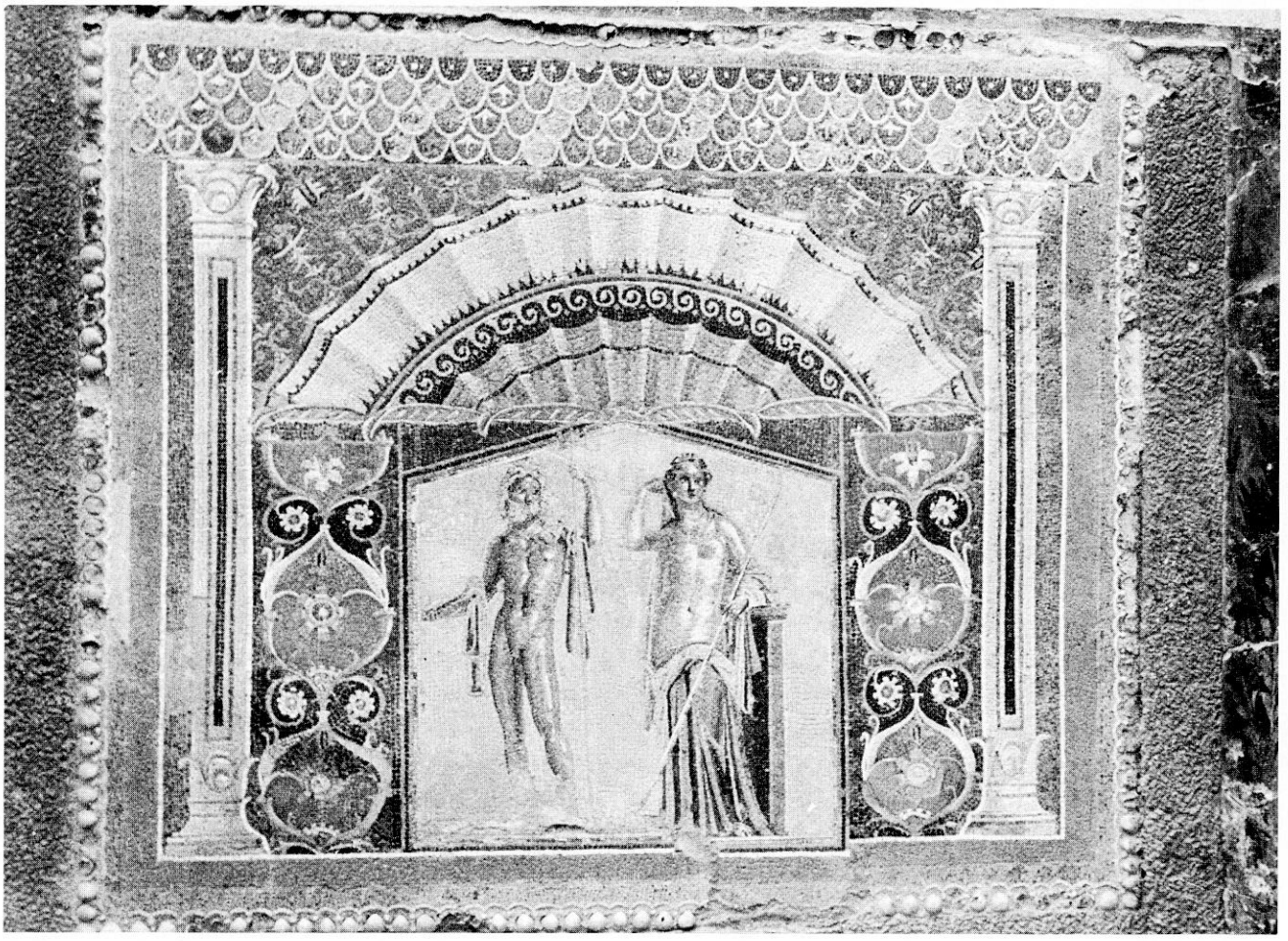


FIGURE 11: Mosaic: "Neptune and his wife Amphitrite" from the House of the Mosaic of Neptune and Amphitrite, Herculaneum. Mosaic incorporating the motifs of sunburst, Vitruvian scroll, rinceau, and anthemion, all favorites of Robert Adam. *Fototeca Unione, Presso Accademia Americana, Rome.*

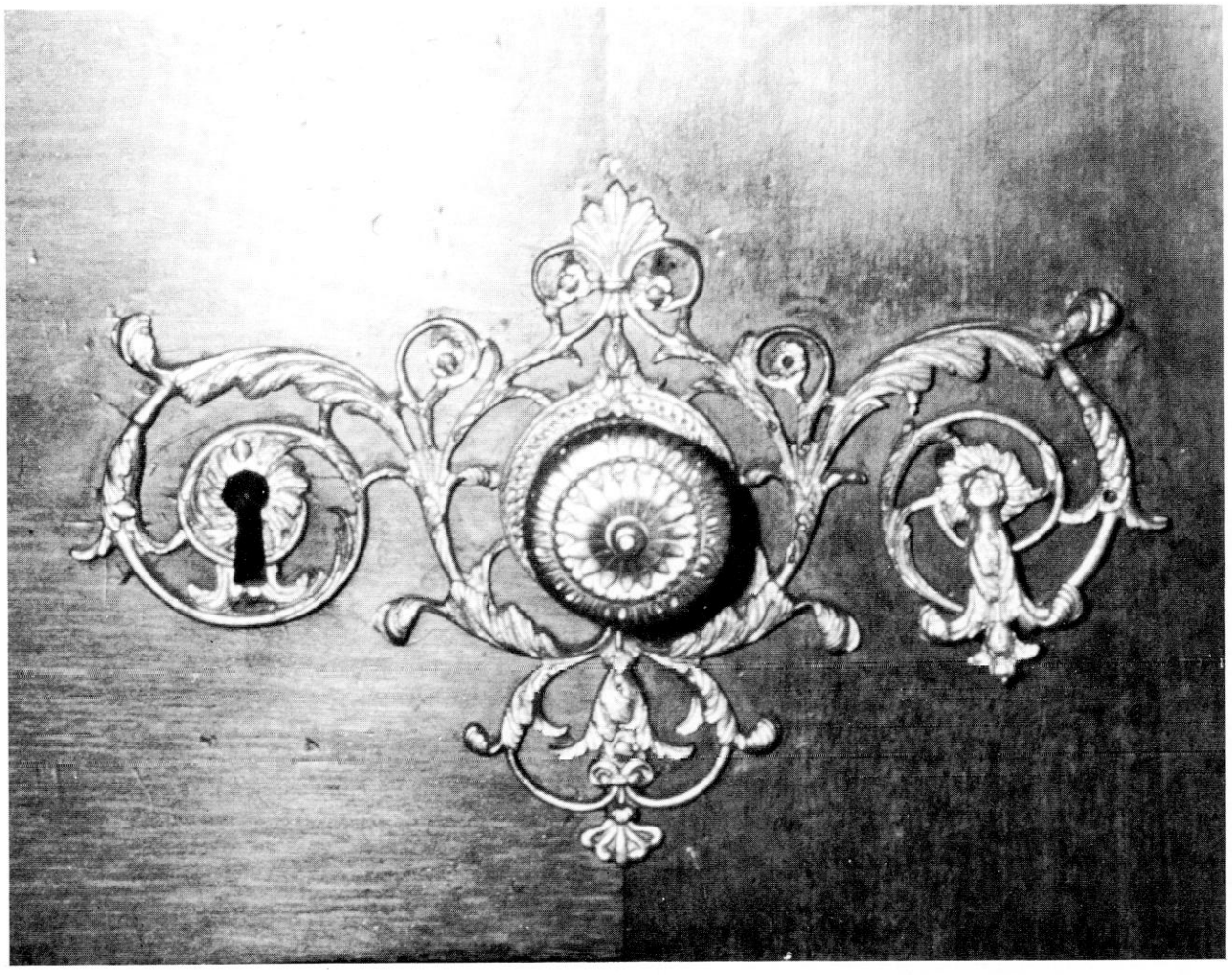


FIGURE 12: Doorknob and escutcheon designed by Robert Adam; Kedleston, Derbyshire, England. With the kind permission of The Viscount Scarsdale. *Author's photograph.*

When this sort of unity was asked, when every element in every house had to be embodied into a coherent ensemble in which no element conflicted with neoclassical elegance and proportion, the carpet in a room had an extremely important role to play. It became a focal point, a reflection of the ceiling design in feeling if not in exact detail; it served to tie the room together into a unified composition. It had to function as part of the complete design plan, and could not be indiscriminately assigned to be made by a French carpet maker who had no familiarity with the rest of the house, and indeed might misunderstand the uniqueness of the Adam stylistic approach, which became known in France only as the French Revolution neared.

Other architects such as Thomas Leverton and John Crunden quickly adopted the Adam manner. Leverton's Woodhall Park, Riddlesworth Hall, and Woodford Hall as well as his London mansions in Bedford Square showed a command of the light, delicate plaster moldings and vivacious ornamentation of the Adam revolution. Leverton also designed every element in his houses including carpets. One carpet attributed to Leverton, formerly at Woodhall Park, is thought to have been made by Thomas Whitty at Axminster. The young James Wyatt was also a follower of Adam, but only

reluctantly, since he felt public taste had been "corrupted" by Adam's formula, but, as he himself complained to no less a person than George III, he "was obliged to comply with it."[4] This demonstrates how irresistible was the Adam tide, even as late as 1796 when Wyatt was named Surveyor General of the Kingdom.

The impetus of this new found demand for English carpets nourished the Axminster factory of Thomas Whitty and the London workrooms of Thomas Moore. The carpets made by these craftsmen for Adam-designed houses and to fit into rooms designed by others following the Adam inspiration were invariably themselves of neoclassical design.[5] At Harewood House, for example, where Thomas Whitty made carpets for rooms remodeled by Robert Adam in the 1790's, the neoclassical ideal of the whole becomes magnificently apparent. In the Music Room a flat plaster ceiling decorated with low-relief arabesques and geometric motifs incorporates small round classical paintings by Angelica Kauffmann; these medallions are exactly reflected in the Axminster carpet below, and the lines of the carpet mirror the lines of the light, airy plasterwork. Even the other furnishings incorporate elements of the same motifs: the Chippendale tables repeat the bellflower swags of ceiling and carpet,

PLATE IV: Detail of Axminster carpet, *c.* 1791. Possibly made for the Library at Harewood House. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

FIGURE 13: Detail of ceiling designed by Robert Adam, Library at Harewood House, Yorkshire, England. Photograph courtesy of The Earl of Harewood.





and the geometric curved inlay echoes the circles and lines of the plaster moldings.

In the library of Harewood House the Thomas Whitty carpet also reflected the ceiling with its profusion of lacy decorations. This room, however, was redesigned in 1845 by the architect Charles Barry, who ordered the old carpet sold and a new one made to his ornate Victorian design. Recently, the Metropolitan Museum bought a "Moorfields" carpet, whose unmistakable resemblance to the Harewood House library ceiling suggests its identity as the 1791 library carpet and its maker as Thomas Whitty of Axminster.

The Senate carpet made by William Peter Sprague in the same year as the Harewood House carpets had a similar relationship to the architecture of the room. The sequence of design events may have been reversed here, however. The Senate Chamber did not acquire its oval plaster ceiling medallion until 1793, two years after the Senate carpet was woven, and it may be that the medallion itself was meant to complement the carpet, and that the frieze of hand-carved husk swags and bows was also designed to repeat the bellflower motif in the border of the carpet.

PLATE V: Detail of Axminster carpet, *c.* 1791, in the Music Room, Harewood House, Yorkshire, England. With the kind permission of The Earl of Harewood. *Author's photograph.*



FIGURE 14: Photograph of the Senate Chamber carpet being reproduced in Spain, in a manner that must be similar to that employed in the 18th century. Courtesy of Connoisseur Collections.

William Peter Sprague, Carpet Manufacturer

William Peter Sprague, who wove the Senate carpet in the neo-classical style in 1791, was a transplanted Englishman, born around 1750, probably in Kidderminster, Herefordshire, or in Axminster itself. The chronology of his early life is unknown; the Sprague or Sprake family, as it was sometimes spelled, was almost certainly dissenters from the official Church of England, and as such their births and deaths were not recorded in the official registers kept in each Church of England in Axminster and the surrounding rural parishes.

More than one researcher has suspected that William Peter Sprague must have been an apprentice of Thomas Whitty in his Axminster carpet factory opposite the official church, in South Street, in the crowded, gray little hilltop town.[1] The conclusion is not unwarranted. Not only did Sprague advertise, much later on his arrival in America, that he made "Axminster" carpets, but he also married Mary Whitty, the oldest daughter of Samuel Whitty, Thomas Whitty's first cousin, probably in 1772. The coincidence of this seems overwhelming; it shows that Sprague was at least an acquaintance of Thomas Whitty, and probably means that he met Mary through an apprenticeship at Whitty's factory.

The Sprague's first son, William, was born in Devonshire, probably the following year, but when Mary Whitty Sprague, the second child, was born in 1774 the Sprague family was living in Church Street, Bloomsbury, London. Of Sprague's purpose in going up to London there is no indication, but much later this daughter, Mary Whitty Sprague, remembered that her father had served in the British Navy against the American forces during the Revolution, leaving the family behind in London.[2]

Sprague, however, was not a man of uncompromising loyalty to the British crown. Liking what he saw in his American landings, he "espoused the cause of Washington," returned to England, packed the family belongings, engaged passage on a transatlantic ship, and moved the family to New Jersey sometime before the war was over.[3] The exact date of the Spragues' arrival is not known, but Burlington,

New Jersey, records show that William Peter Sprague bought property there in 1783. Family tradition has it that he became an Alderman in 1787, a not insubstantial position for a carpet maker recently arrived from England. Possibly he had begun at once to weave carpets.

On September 19, 1787, he was advertising in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in Philadelphia:

> "Orders received by Peter William Sprague [sic.], of Burlington, for any figure, size, shape, of American made floor and bedside carpets, wove after the Axminster mode, which for softness, warmth and duration, exceed anything of the kind ever attempted in this country. A few of both floor and bedside carpets are now for sale in Third-street, at the store of Richard Wills, and Son, where Jersey Paper money will be taken for them."

By 1790, Sprague had himself moved to Philadelphia, probably attracted by the chance to be closer to his principal market. The census of 1790 found him living to the north of the city, in the "Northern Liberties Twp., Philadelphia," in a household also containing "four free white males under 16, and three white females." The three females certainly included his wife and at least one daughter, and family history has it that another son, Nathaniel, was born a year after the Spragues settled in Burlington. It is not clear who the others were. It is possible that some were poor children, taken in by Sprague as apprentices or weavers, as was the custom at Axminster.

The *Philadelphia City Directory* for 1791 records that "William Peter Sprague, carpet maker," lived at 458 North Second Street, in the Northern Liberties, where he must have been engaged in making the Senate carpet and one for President Washington's residence. In June of 1791 the Senate carpet was on the floor of Congress Hall, and the detailed description of its design appeared in the *American Daily Advertiser*. By this time Sprague had hired "poor women and children" to do the work at a low rate of pay, so that his projects were "20 per cent cheaper, and nearly as low as Wilton carpeting" but "of double its durability." His carpets were made more cheaply by using materials "of the refuse and coarser kind," indicating that he probably used coarse linen and wool fibers in the weft and warp of his carpets, just as Thomas Whitty had done at Axminster.

On December 24, 1792, Sprague placed an advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Packet*, respectfully informing the public that, "the Philadelphia Carpet Manufactory is removed to Third Street, Northern Liberties, near Cootes' [sic.] burying ground. An assortment of Carpets, of the Turkey quality, are for sale, of various dimensions, grounds and patterns, superior and cheaper than the imported." This new address was "the first brick house above Brown Street," or 422 North Third Street, according to the *Philadelphia City Directory* for 1793. Coates' burial ground was on Third Street at the southeast corner of Brown Street, some seven long blocks north of High Street (present day Market Street). In the nineties this area, although separated from the most populous sections of Philadelphia by Peggs Run, stretched westward from the Delaware towards the Ridge Road and was nearly as heavily popu-

lated as the streets around the High Street Market. The area had a schoolhouse, and market sheds in Second Street below Brown. Its population included numbers of Ulster-Scot and English dissenters, who, having fled religious conflict in the old country, enjoyed "mission and revival services" conducted for them in an ordinary house at the corner of Second and Coates' Street by ministers of the Second Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia. To this "Campington Church" William Peter Sprague and his family belonged, sitting in pew number three and paying £1.13.1 ½ rent for half the space in the row, which they shared with the Widow Deborah Newman.[4]

The neighborhood was not a fashionable one. Wealthier and more influential Philadelphia families chose to live south of High Street, closer to the State House and other public buildings. Rather it was a center for artisans and small businessmen, who lived along the unpaved muddy streets in small crowded houses and in little "courts" and alleys behind the numbered streets between Third Street and the Delaware River.

In the area of William Peter Sprague's residences were laborers, coopers, tanners, ferrymen and mariners, clothweavers and stockingweavers, painters, and wheelwrights. There were two "doctors of physic" on Second Street; a midwife and a "druggist" lived nearby. Two schoolteachers lived cheek by jowl with boatbuilders, starchmakers, and a seamstress, and there was even a sugar refiner on Coates' Street near Third. When the Sprague family was living on Second Street in 1790 there were two taverns within sight, and an inn directly next door, to add to the busy neighborhood.

It was in reality a complete small community, a microcosm of industriousness separated and rather isolated from the rest of Philadelphia. To the north side of Peggs Run was a broad, tidewater marsh where sportsmen hunted birds. It flooded frequently, and a boat was sometimes required to get across to the business establishments of "Camptown" or "Campington," as it was sometimes called from the barracks built by the British on North Third Street before the Revolution.

But isolation was never a bar to commerce. Throughout the 1790's, William Peter Sprague continued to live in the neighborhood, although he moved his carpet establishment several times. In 1794, Sprague's address appeared as 431 North Third, a few doors away from his earlier manufactory. It is not clear whether he still held on to the old property at 422 North Third, for he sold a property on North Third in 1795, but in 1796 "William Peter Sprague, Gentleman," still lived on North Third near Brown. By 1797 he had moved once more, to Brown Street between Front and Second, where he was again manufacturing carpets.

Here there is a hiatus in the documentary record, and the name of William Peter Sprague is not seen again until his death in about 1808, when his will was registered in the City of Philadelphia, with no clue as to his whereabouts between 1797 and that date. It is likely, however, that he continued to live in the Northern Liberties, and that he was still associated with the Campington Church he had attended in 1793, in view of the fact that his daughter, Mary Sprague, occupied pew number three as late as 1799. Abraham Dubois, probably the son of the famous silversmith, who also belonged to the

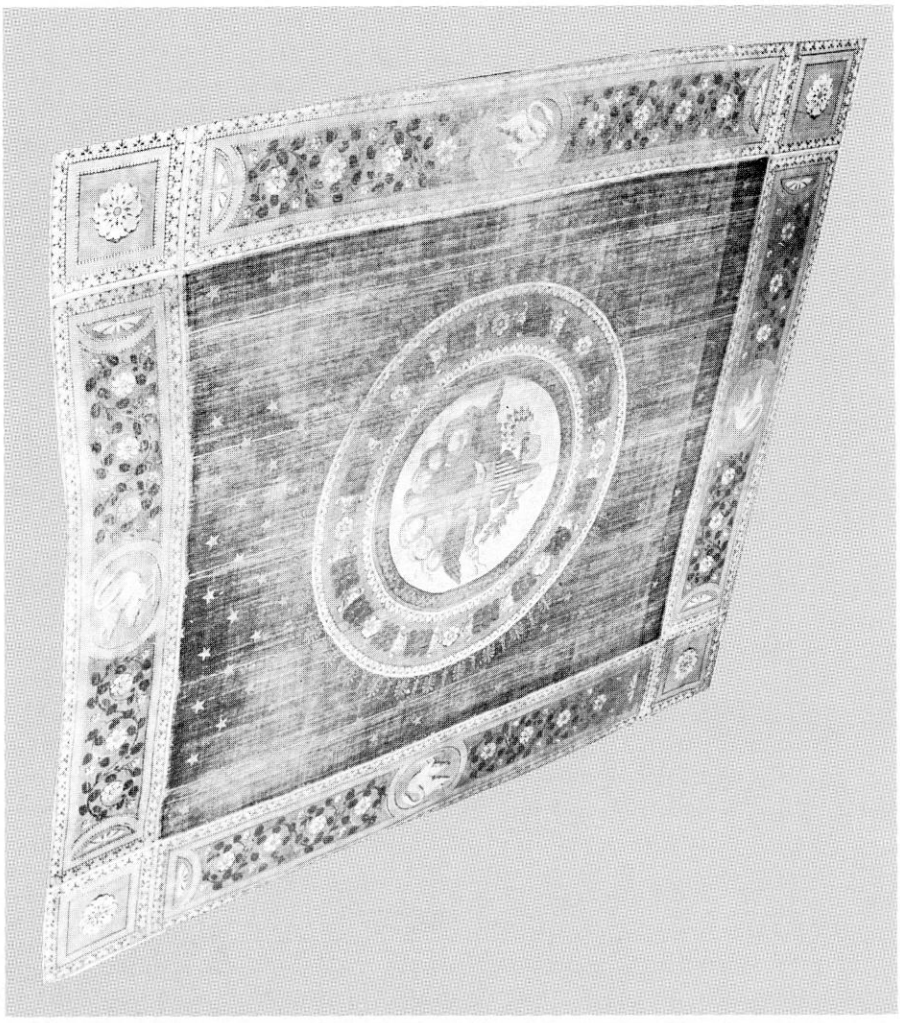


FIGURE 15: Carpet formerly attributed to William Peter Sprague, possibly French *c.* 1804–1812. Photograph courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.

Campington Church, became the administrator of Sprague's estate in 1808.[5] After Sprague's death, his widow, Mary Whitty Sprague, moved to Pittsburgh to be with her eldest daughter, Mary, who had married William Strickland in 1803 and followed him to the West. Thus the craft of hand-knotting Axminster carpets passed forever from the Philadelphia scene.[6]

William Peter Sprague left behind him two famous carpets, one in the Senate Chamber of Congress Hall, and another ordered by George Washington for "the large dining room" of his house at 190 High Street, which he had rented from Robert Morris. Little is known about President Washington's carpet except that it must have measured nearly thirty feet square with "an alteration conformable to the bow" built into the large dining room in 1790. George Washington's account book shows two payments to "Wm. Sprague" in April 1791, for a total of $215.25, for "the Carpet in the large dining room."

At one time it was believed that the so-called "Mount Vernon carpet" now on display in the First Ladies Hall of the Smithsonian Institution, a loan from the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, was the carpet Sprague had made for the Presidential dining room. It was

given to the Mount Vernon Ladies Association in 1897 by Mrs. Townsend Whelen, a descendant of Judge Jasper Yeates, a Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and a member of the Pennsylvania Convention of 1787 to ratify the Constitution. Mrs. Whelen quoted a family tradition to the effect that it had been given to President Washington by Louis XVI of France, but that Washington, leery of accepting such a gift from the King of France, had given it to his friend Jasper Yeates.

John C. Milley studied this carpet for Independence National Historical Park in 1963, when first steps were taken towards the reproduction of the Sprague carpet for the Senate Chamber.[7] He wrote in his 1965 report:

> "In the February 1947 issue of *Antiques Magazine*, Mrs. Marion Sadtler Carson challenged the traditional story with some justification. She noted that the Mount Vernon carpet had a medallion center, with a rendering of the United States Seal, similar to that described for the Senate carpet, and immediately concluded that the Mount Vernon carpet was the one made by Sprague for the large dining room of the Philadelphia house. She also speculated that Yeates had purchased the carpet at public auction when Washington sold his Philadelphia furnishings in 1797, or received it as a gift from the President at that time."

However, wrote Mr. Milley, "technological, historical, and stylistic evidence make the attribution to Sprague exceedingly tenuous." At the request of Mr. Milley, curators at the Smithsonian Institution and the Textile Museum made a technological investigation of the carpet. Their inspection revealed that the Mount Vernon carpet was not a hand-*knotted* Axminster type, but a hand-*woven* cut pile carpet. In a short report, they explained: "Although most of the pile is worn, as far as can be determined, this rug has a Wilton construction. Its cut pile is formed by different colored warp yarns which are brought to the rug's surface to form a design. In sections where certain colors of warp do not form the design, they are carried along in the ground web."[8] As we have seen in his advertisements, the only documentary evidence we have, William Peter Sprague made Axminster, not Wilton carpets, suggesting that the carpet was most probably not made by Sprague. Historical analysis supports this conclusion.

It will be remembered that Washington ordered his carpet from Sprague for "the large dining room," which was located on the second floor of 190 High Street. In readying the house for his occupancy, Washington had this room and the large drawing room below extended to 34 feet by the addition of bow windows. It seems improbable that a carpet measuring 15 by 17 feet, the size of the Mount Vernon carpet, would have been ordered for this room. Secondly, the Mount Vernon carpet shows no evidence of having been cut down, or ever having been made "conformable to the bow." Moreover, because the entrance to this room was from the stairhall, a visitor would not have been able to view correctly the U.S. Seal found on the Mount Vernon carpet, since it is deployed across the breadth of the carpet.

What, then, is the Mount Vernon carpet? We know it is a carpet of Wilton construction, but whether it is English or French cannot be shown by the technical analysis done on the carpet to date. Stylistically speaking, the problem of attribution is almost as great. The only point of similarity between the Mount Vernon carpet and the description of the Senate carpet was that both had the United States seal as a central medallion. Using this motif alone, the carpet might be French, because the Savonnerie carpet factory manufactured a carpet with a central eagle medallion; but it could also be attributed to some manufactory in Scotland or England, where the motif occurs in other textiles. At first glance, then, Mrs. Whelen's story of the carpet's origin in Louis XVI's France might be a splendid bit of true romance. On further consideration, however, the design of the Seal itself dates the carpet to the early nineteenth century, many years after both Louis XVI and George Washington were dead.

A comparison of the eagle medallion in the Mount Vernon carpet with representations of the United States seal varying in date from 1782 to 1812 shows its late date stylistically. The eagle in the Senate carpet was "displayed," and held in its sinister talon a bundle of "thirteen arrows," a concept faithful to the official United States seal of 1782. The Mount Vernon carpet eagle is caught in the moment of taking flight, and holds it its sinister talon seventeen arrows. These discrepancies might be regarded as irrelevant were it not for



FIGURE 16: Wafer impression from obverse of first die of the Great Seal of the United States, 1782. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

the fact that "displayed," meaning "standing with wings outspread," was a common heraldic term well understood by a generation whose English forebears still recognized each other by their family coats of arms; and that the shield of the Mount Vernon seal repeats in its stripes the number seventeen of the arrows, strongly suggesting a specific meaning. Other examples of the use of the United States seal in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries help to illuminate the meaning of these differences.

The United States seal went through three revisions, at least, before its adoption in 1782. As Dr. Frank H. Sommer points out, the committee of 1782 settled upon a design that was purposely enigmatic, in keeping with rules for the formulation of a device; each element of its design, although symbolic, was fixed with respect to placement and meaning.[9] It is true, also, that the seal was almost immediately vulgarized for decorative purposes, thereby losing its original official meaning. This vulgarization, however, was not one of revolutionary style change, but one in keeping with artistic style, and the need for correctness of meaning.



FIGURE 17: "A Display of the United States of America," engraving by Amos Doolittle, second state, 1791. Independence National Historical Park Collection.

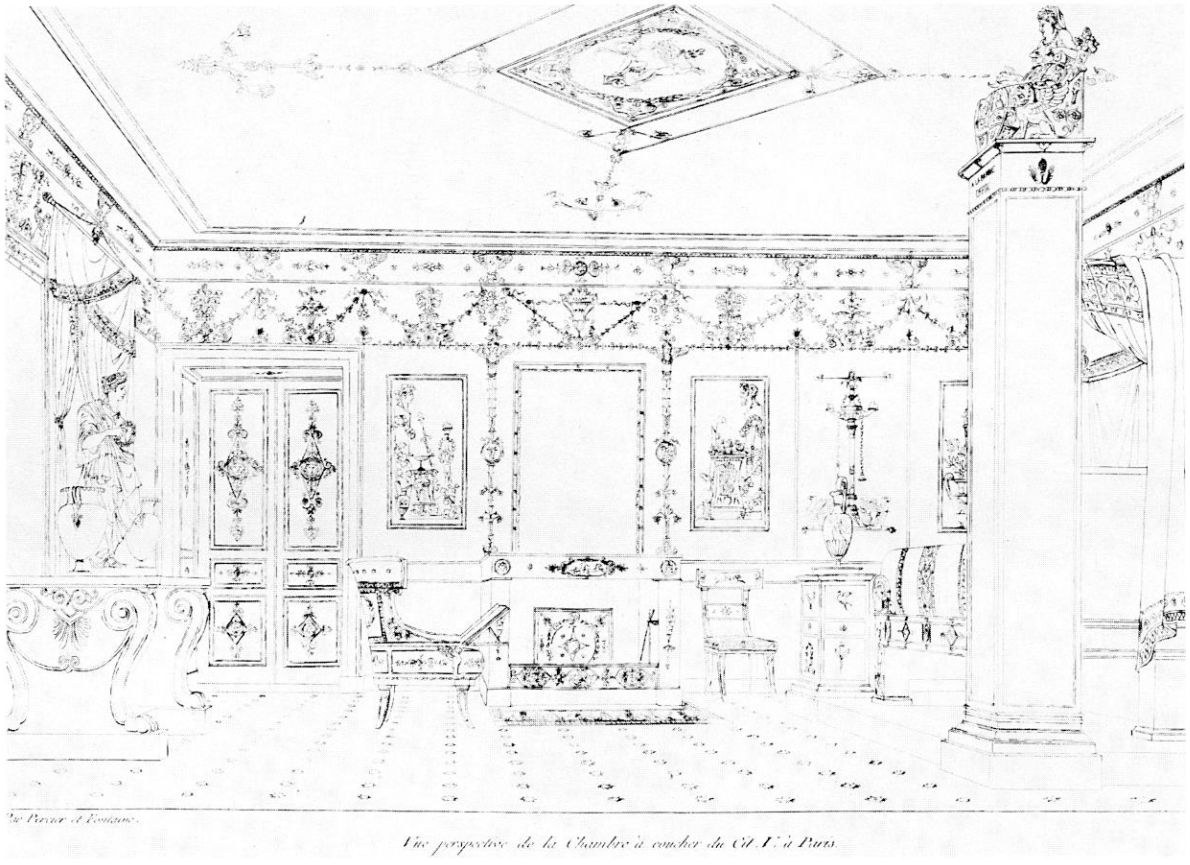
Prior to 1791, when Vermont entered the Union, there was little need to alter the original design, except in superficial ways. One of the earliest datable examples of this freedom is found in Amos Doolittle's print of 1787, "A Display of the United States of America." Mr. Doolittle spread the cluster of clouds, he arched the top of the shield, and he dropped the wings somewhat—but the eagle is still "displayed," and it has the correct number of stars and stripes, and it is absolutely symmetrical.

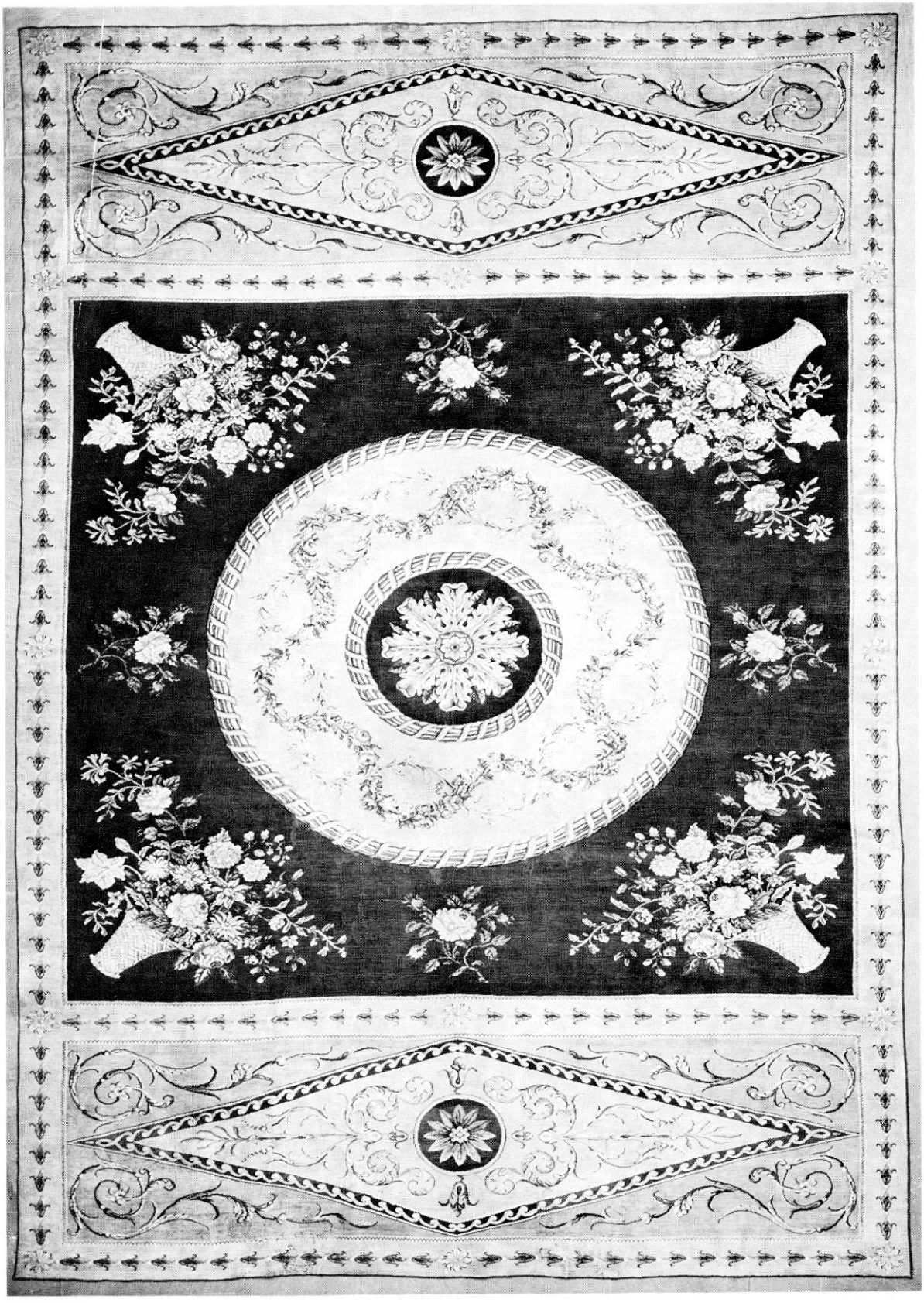
In 1792, the fifteenth state, Kentucky, was admitted to the Union. It is significant that between that year and 1796, when Tennessee entered, we find innumerable examples of the seal now boasting *fifteen* stars and stripes. Exceedingly important stylistically, is that the eagle has become a bit more flamboyant—a bit more decorative—but it has not moved from its appointed transfixion. Examples from the period following Tennessee's entry into the Union have sixteen stars in the constellation. It is at this point, at century's end, that the device witnesses romantic changes. In the 1798 Massachusetts $10 gold piece the arrows are switched to the right talon; in the 1797 tympanum of the First Bank of the United States in Philadelphia, the eagle assumes an altogether asymmetrical pose. Between 1802, when Ohio entered as the seventeenth state, and 1812 when Louisiana became the eighteenth, we find a host of asymmetrically designed seals giving testimony to the union of seventeen. On Samuel McIntire's carved wooden pediment of 1805, for the Salem Custom House, is an asymmetrical eagle which bears but little resemblance to the original seal, and it has seventeen stripes in its shield. According to this chronological sequence, then, the eagle found on the Mount Vernon carpet must date between 1802 and 1812.

Bearing in mind that new combinations of design motifs can be defined as a new style, other aspects of the carpet's design can be used to substantiate this dating. Prototypes can be found for the swan, the butterfly, the anthemion, and so forth, in classical engravings and in eighteenth century design; but it is only in the nineteenth century, with the popularity of the French Empire style, that the star-studded field itself is found in abundance, alone, or combined with the main motifs of the Mount Vernon carpet. It appeared alone in the Brussels carpet ordered for the Senate Chamber in the Capitol in Washington in 1823, and in textiles and draperies of the same period. But its most striking use, in combination with other motifs, occurred in France in the designs of Percier and Fontaine for Napoleon, the Empress Josephine and their admirers. The fact that in these designs all the motifs of the Mount Vernon carpet appear in various combinations, and above all that the swan itself was the personal emblem of the Empress Josephine, suggests strongly that the Mount Vernon carpet is French, and dates specifically from the period of the first French Empire, 1804-1815.

In any case, the Mount Vernon carpet cannot be related in any way except by inspiration to the Senate carpet, nor can it be attributed to William Peter Sprague.[10]

FIGURE 18: *"Vue perspective de la Chambre a coucher du Cit. V. a Paris,"* Pl. 13, Percier and Fontaine's *Recueil de Decorations Interieurs . . .*, 1813. Note combination of star-studded field, anthemion and swan motifs. Photograph courtesy of The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum Libraries.





Elements of Design in the Senate's Carpet

In the absence of any carpets definitively attributable to William Peter Sprague, and with the dearth of information about his design sources, how then was reconstruction of the Senate carpet to proceed? A logical beginning was the recognition of an unmistakable affinity in design between certain Axminster carpets and the written description of the Senate carpet in Dunlap's *American Daily Advertiser*.

In the Lansdowne Room of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is a carpet attributed to Axminster with the characteristic "tow" (now usually called "bast") fiber wefts. It is, however, undated, and could only be assumed to have been made while Sprague was in Axminster. Fortunately for the purposes of establishing a tentative date, five other versions of this same design survive in England and in America, one of which, at Rockbeare Manor, Devonshire, can be assigned a putative date; the owner remembers that records destroyed in the blitz of Exeter in 1941 included payments for this carpet to Thomas Whitty at Axminster, only a few short miles from Rockbeare, in the 1770's.[1]

The parallels in design between these carpets and the description of Sprague's consist of the overall compartmented layout with a transposition or substitution of one motif for another: in place of a rosette as the center medallion we find the Great Seal of the United States. The center rosette of the Axminster examples is surrounded by a chain of foliage, corresponding to the "chain formed of thirteen shields" of the Senate carpet. The baskets of flowers in the corners of the Lansdowne carpet were a popular eighteenth century motif, which in English design was interchangeable with cornucopias filled with fruit and flowers, "expressive of peace [and] plenty," as in the corners of the Senate carpet. Each Lansdowne carpet version has side compartments filled with neoclassical arabesques, corresponding to the "marine and land trophies" on the sides of the Senate carpet. The correspondence is so close one is tempted to think that William Peter Sprague had a drawing of this Axminster design to

FIGURE 19: Axminster carpet, *c.* 1775–1780. Called the "Lansdowne type" from its placement in a room from Lansdowne House now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This pattern appears to have been one of the most common of those used by Thomas Whitty at Axminster, and probably served as the inspiration for the Senate Chamber carpet. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

refer to; if not it is certainly an overall layout with which he must have been familiar.

In the eighteenth century it was standard procedure for designers in all crafts, from sculpture to textiles, to take designs and motifs from sources in other media. English ceramics craftsmen, for example, are known to have leaned heavily on French engravings for designs of Rockingham porcelain figurines, while silver craftsmen found sources in Italian and French engravings of classical antiquity. Early wallpapers often followed textile patterns, and some patterns have even been traced to the original designs taken from ingrain carpeting. It would not have been out of the question, then, for William Peter Sprague to "borrow" a design from an Axminster carpet, especially if the maker had been his former employer. Nor would it have been unusual for the designer of the Senate carpet to lean heavily on engravings for the assortment of patriotic motifs to be combined in the finished product.

Probably William Peter Sprague was not responsible for the selection of the symbolic motifs to go into the carpet, although he almost certainly worked with the designer to develop the overall neoclassical layout. Who did select the patriotic elements in the carpet is still unknown. That this individual or individuals were close to official Senate policymakers is certain, for each motif has a meaning particular to the Senate and the situation of the emerging nation after 1789.

The committee responsible for purchasing furnishings and working out other details of the interior of Congress Hall must have engaged a designer for the "most splendid carpet," or at least have consulted those associated with the Senate for ideas. Thomas Jefferson certainly cannot be ruled out as an influence, especially since he was an enthusiastic patron of the arts and had been concerned with appropriate symbolism for the new nation since 1776 when he was part of the first committee to design the United States seal.

Another possibility is the architect Pierre Charles l'Enfant, although specific documentary evidence is lacking. L'Enfant had already remodeled Federal Hall in New York for occupation by the Congress in 1789, and George Washington's first inauguration took place under a pediment carved with l'Enfant's version of the eagle of the United States seal. L'Enfant was a friend of Thomas Fitzsimons, who in turn was a friend of Miers Fisher of the City Council committee working on Congress Hall. On July 16, 1790, Fitzsimons wrote to Fisher from Philadelphia that "Major l'Enfant who projected the building of the Present Hall of Congress [in New York] is here and would be very glad to give plans or Superintend the Improvements with you."[2] But there were apparently some questions about l'Enfant's behavior while in New York; arrogant and tending towards conceit, he already showed the traits of highhandedness and self-righteousness which caused him to lose in 1793 the commission for laying out the city of Washington.

Fitzsimons recognized these problems. "I know that some delicacy may arise in employing him; but however good our builders are (and I am sure there are none better anywhere) they are not so well Acquainted with the present taste in Europe as this person is. He is a man of mild unassuming manners which would prevent disagree-

ment with the Workmen and would be satisfied with a very moderate compensation."[3] This in spite of the fact that neither assertion had been true in l'Enfant's past work in New York.

Whatever the case may be, l'Enfant's name does not recur in the Congress Hall records, and no documentation has been located to corroborate reports of l'Enfant's hand in the Congress Hall refurbishing. Only one circumstance suggests his influence on the Senate carpet, the presence in the design of "land and marine trophies." The sources for this motif were undeniably in the French tradition practiced by l'Enfant. Moreover, l'Enfant had used trophies in wall plasterwork in the Senate Chamber in New York. L'Enfant was working in both New York and Philadelphia in 1790 on private commissions, but no evidence has yet come to light of any arrangement between l'Enfant and the Philadelphia City Council. It must remain a tantalizing conjecture that he had anything to do with the Senate Chamber carpet.

Whoever the carpet's author, it is certain that contemporary engravings were utilized as source material for specific motifs. As described by Charles Avery, the situation in Europe was this: "[Engravings] were the vehicle by which the most advanced designs of major contemporary artists ... were promptly disseminated all over Europe. Engravings could be purchased inexpensively as loose sheets or bound into picture books. They were popular with laymen for their informative or decorative value, while they were eagerly seized on by artists and craftsmen in every medium for aesthetic suggestions and stylistic innovations. Even so, they were normally employed with considerable selectivity and ingenuity in adapting motifs to new ends."[4]

Philadelphia libraries to which an artist might turn for design inspiration contained many of these picture books and engravings, bought directly from European sources or given by interested American patrons, and private collections must have contained many more. In 1789 The Library Company of Philadelphia, for example, owned the *Works* of Robert and James Adam, Colin Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus*, William Salmon's *Palladio Londinensis*, and various architectural books by William Halfpenny, Abraham Swann, James Gibbs and Isaac Ware, illustrating the best of British architecture and interior ornament.

French design was represented in the University of Pennsylvania Library by Charles le Brun's designs for the Grande Gallerie at Versailles, and elsewhere, as in Thomas Jefferson's own collection, by numerous architectural books and important neoclassical works such as Clerisseau's *Monuments de Nismes*. In 1785 the Chevalier de la Luzerne, Minister of France and Consul General in Philadelphia, advertised for sale "a large Book of Prints relative to Architecture and Ornaments," which may have been any of a number of French works on the subject.[5]

Engravings of classical monuments were especially popular in a neoclassical age. William Hamilton's *Etruscan, Greek, and Roman Antiquities* could be perused at the Library Company along with Bernard de Montfaucon's famous *Antiquities of Italy*, a goldmine of classical motifs and symbols. The great work of James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, the *Antiquities of Athens*, so important in its in-

fluence on neoclassical interior design, was also available at the Library Company in 1789.

Other sources, particularly for American patriotic motifs, were to be found in political cartoons of Europe and America, and in contemporary American prints and paintings. English cartoons supporting the American cause appeared in Philadelphia print shops, and contemporary publications such as Boston's *Royal American Magazine* contained satirical prints by Paul Revere. A reader of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* would discover that one could obtain from Robert Bell, engraver, "The Plea of the Colonies, in answer to charges brought against them by Lord Mansfield," with an "elegant frontispiece representing the present state of Europe and America, or the man in the moon viewing the English Armada (Price Half a Dollar)," or that the printseller Wilkinson had copies of Paul Revere's "A View of the Year 1765" for eightpence each.[6] Patriotic motifs also appeared in portraits of officers of the Revolution and other important figures of the Colonial and Federal periods.

An evaluation of these pictorial sources yields a long list of suitable patriotic symbols for the carpet destined for the United States Senate. Problems of selection of the most credible of these for the reconstructed design of the carpet seemed at first glance to be multitudinous, but in comparing the description of the Senate carpet from Dunlap's *American Daily Advertiser* with those available in 1790, the alternatives were narrowed considerably.

The United States Seal

Perhaps the most obvious symbol was the carpet's central medallion, the Great Seal of the United States, adopted by Congress in 1782. This striking seal with its stiff, unrealistic eagle was the official coat of arms of this country until it was replaced by a new and more naturalistic design in 1841.

The seal was conceived by the Continental Congress in 1776, the first item of business after the Declaration of Independence had been adopted. Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson were named to the committee to take care of this very important detail. It was assumed that the committee would select a device for the coat of arms which would represent the United States as an independent nation, like the seals of Great Britain and France. This meant that the seal would need to be true to an armorial model recognizable to all.

In an age when one's family crest was an important aspect of identity, the vocabulary of heraldry was second nature to most educated Americans. In the Library Company of Philadelphia could be found the "Armourers bible," Joseph Edmondson's *A Complete Body of Heraldry*, published in London in 1780, which listed every acceptable heraldic element, prescribed its use, and pictured every crest ever used in England and Ireland.

Even with these resources, the committee of three was unable to come up with an acceptable design, for the "device" they chose was in fact a complicated emblem, esoteric to such a degree as to preclude easy recognition of the seal. Congress tabled the report until 1782, when a new committee engaged William Barton and

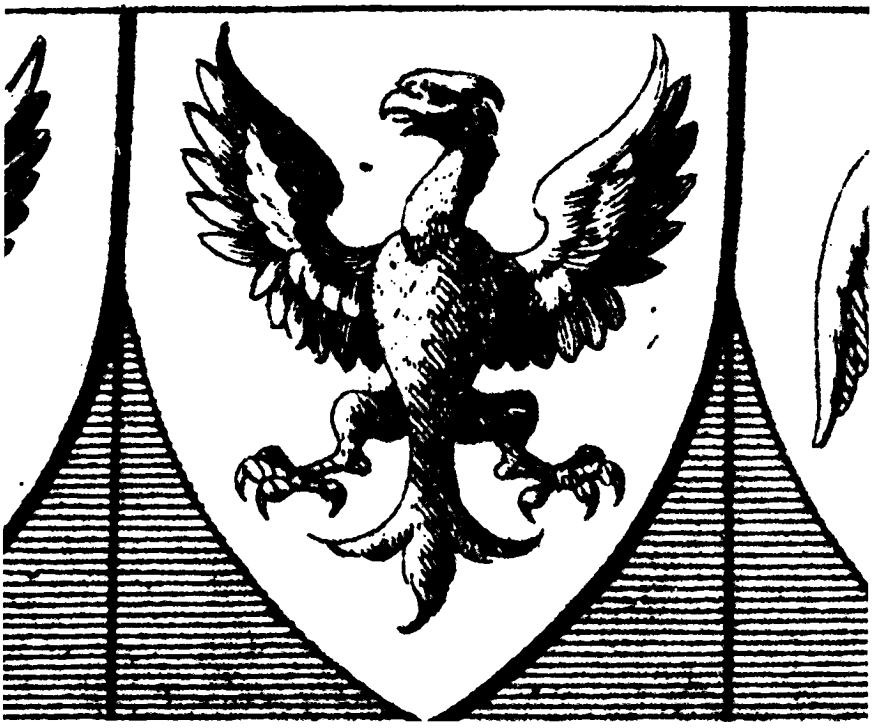


FIGURE 20: Detail of the German Imperial Eagle from Pl. 12 of Guillim's *Heraldrie*. Courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia.

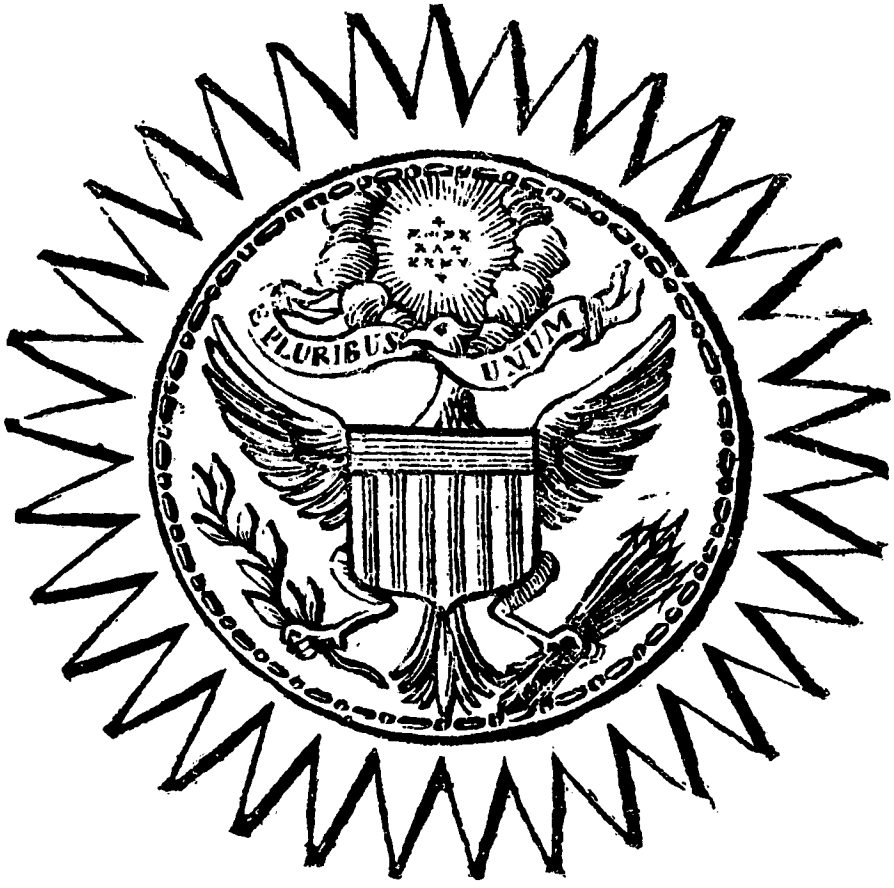


FIGURE 21: Frontispiece of the Great Seal of the United States from *Les Constitutions des Treize États Unis de l'Amérique*, printed by Benjamin Franklin, Paris, 1783. Independence National Historical Park Collection.

Charles Thomson, the Secretary of Congress, to complete the job. After some argument, they agreed on a design which Congress adopted.

That Congress insisted on proper heraldic detail explains many of the features of the seal which may appear incongruous to viewers familiar only with the modern seal adopted in 1904. The central supporter of the crest with its familiar stripes is not the American bald eagle of the later design, but an eagle adopted from the proper form of heraldry, the German imperial eagle. This emaciated eagle, with protruding crest and spread wings, is the "eagle displayed," as we know from William Barton's remarks on the design. His words emphasize the importance he placed on having a readable seal of traditional heraldry: "The Escutcheon being placed on the Breast of the Eagle displayed is a very ancient Mode of bearing, and is truly imperial. The Eagle displayed is an Heraldical Figure; and, being borne in the manner here described, supplies the Place of Supporters and Crest. The American States need no Supporters but their own Virtue, and the Preservation of their Union through Congress."[7]

A concern for heraldic accuracy also explains the other details of the seal. The shield itself was a heraldic composition: the thirteen "pieces of the pale," or stripes, "represent the Several States," while the crosspiece, or "chief," "unites the whole and represents Con-

gress." The whole shield, called the "Escutcheon," denoted "the Confederacy of the United States of America and the preservation of their Union through Congress." As for the olive branch and arrows clutched in the talons of the eagle, these derived from classical symbolism and were used in heraldry to represent peace and war. In the United States seal they denoted "the power of peace and war which is exclusively vested in Congress."[8]

The thirteen stars were arranged in a symmetrical design of a six pointed star to represent a constellation, "a new State taking its place and rank among other sovereign powers." The stars were six-pointed to follow Edmondson's dictum that a star could have no fewer than six points. Frequently in heraldic designs stars had more than six points, sometimes as many as fifteen.[9] The circle of clouds surrounding the constellation also was a meaningful symbol, which signified the perpetuity of the new confederation of states.

The remaining element in the seal is the scroll clasped in the eagle's beak, containing the Latin motto "E pluribus unum," "out of many, one." This enigmatic motto may have been proposed by Benjamin Franklin, for it first appeared on the seal design tabled by Congress in 1776. In any case, it too is a proper heraldic element, used in many eighteenth century crests. It followed the sixteenth century rules for such a motto, an outgrowth of the "device" or symbolic personal insignia of the important families of the Renaissance. Here, according to Dr. Frank H. Sommer of the Winterthur Museum, the motto was required to be enigmatic; therefore it had to be in a language different from that of the maker of the device.[10] For Americans, Latin fit this definition, and appealed to the neoclassical imagination of the leaders of the time as well.

From the moment of its appearance, the seal was adopted for other uses. Although the seal itself was intended to be applied only to commissions of Cabinet and diplomatic officers, ceremonial communications to foreign governments, treaties with foreign powers, Presidential proclamations, and other official documents, the design was quickly adopted for other needs more symbolic than official. Benjamin Franklin used an adaptation of the seal as a title page engraving for a book printed in his house in Passy, France, *Les Constitutions des Treize États-Unis*. Translated by Franklin's friend the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, this book, published in 1783, only a year after the seal was adopted, was its first appearance outside the channels of officialdom.

In 1783, when the officers of the Revolutionary Army formed the Society of the Cincinnati, Pierre Charles l'Enfant persuaded them to adopt the eagle in a drooped wing, bannerless version for their badge, which he had stamped and cut in France. Although l'Enfant was not especially looking to the seal eagle for inspiration (he liked the bald eagle because its white head and tail set it apart from the birds of other nations), the Cincinnati eagle, like the seal eagle, had a crest and did resemble the seal in its pose, holding olive branch and arrows in its talons, and was an example of how, among the country's leaders at least, the eagle was immediately accepted as a suitable symbol.[11]

But neither the medal of the Order of the Cincinnati nor the book with the seal on the title page were widely circulated. It was left to

James Trenchard to make the first truly popular representation of the official seal, in 1786, when he engraved a 9 by 5 inch plate depicting the "Arms of the United States," for the frontispiece of the *Columbian Magazine* of September. Trenchard's engraving differed from the official Seal by substituting one semicircular cloud above the eagle's

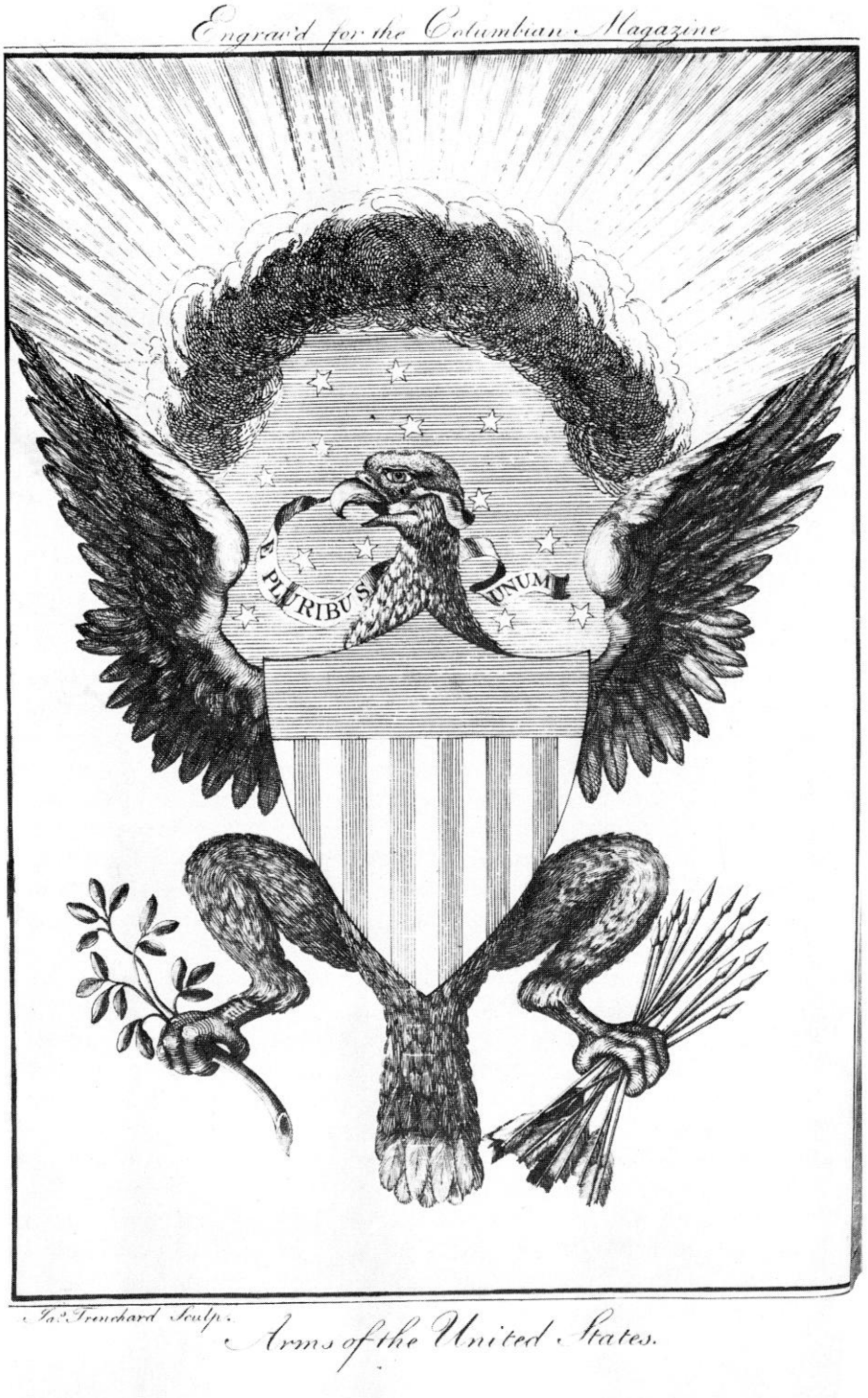


FIGURE 22: "Arms of the United States," by James Trenchard, engraved plate in the *Columbian Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September, 1786. Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.

head for the ring of clouds, with the thirteen stars more widely scattered. It is a much sturdier eagle, with strong, feathered legs, holding arrows and olive branch of a different design. Perhaps most significant, the Columbian eagle lacks a crest. This makes it the first representation of the true American bald eagle, an altogether stronger and more American fellow than the stiffly displayed seal eagle. By 1790, the eagle had become the most popular symbol of America yet devised. According to Phillip Isaacson, it filled the need for "a flexible token of our nationality, one that could be bellicose and contentious when necessary," but still stood for the peaceful strength of the Union.[12]

The seal appeared again in 1788 in print form in Amos Doolittle's famous engraving, "A Display of the United States of America," and burst into sculptured form on the pediment of Federal Hall in New York, newly redesigned for George Washington's first inauguration by Pierre Charles l'Enfant. A commemorative painting for Washington's inauguration was commissioned by Congress for St. Paul's Chapel in New York, where the members of Congress worshipped. It, too, showed a fiercely proud American eagle, with arrows, olive branch, and billowing motto.

These popularizations were followed by coins, belt buckles, patriotic porcelain, buttons, and countless other mementoes for the American public. On an official level came the "Indian peace medals" distributed by President Washington to Indian chiefs in the 1790's, and similar peace medals were given to European statesmen in gratitude for their help during the Revolutionary War.

In placing the seal and the eagle in the center of the Senate carpet, then, the designer chose not only the official device of the United States, but also one which was above all a symbol of Congressional authority, and one which within a decade had become the most persuasive popular symbol of the nation's audacity, optimism, pride, and power. The dignity of the imperial eagle, combined in American minds with the striking appearance and controlled ferocity of the American bald eagle, by 1791 gave the seal an emotional power it had not had in 1782; a fitting symbol indeed for the Senators to regard as they debated and shaped the policy of the new nation.

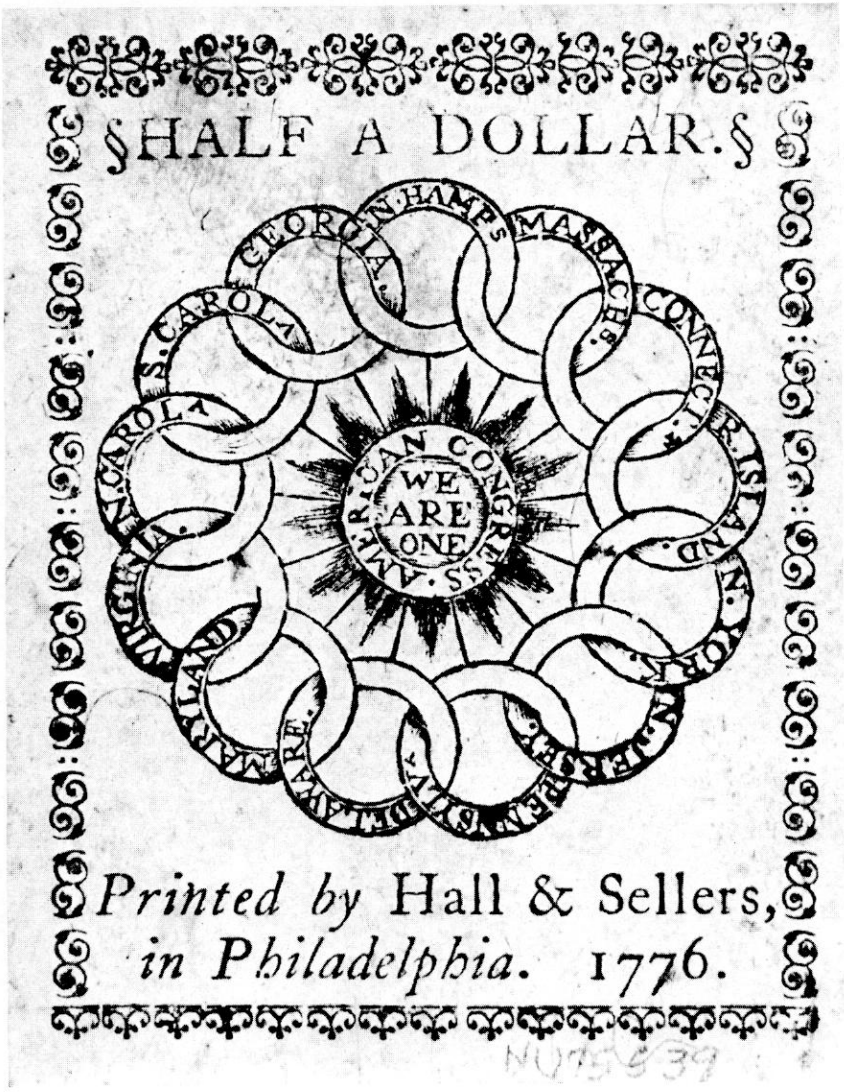


FIGURE 23: "Half a Dollar," paper currency, printed in Philadelphia, 1776. Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Division of Numismatics.

The Chain of States

Surrounding the Great Seal in the middle of the Senate carpet was "a chain formed of thirteen shields emblematic of each state." The source for this patriotic motif symbolizing the strength of the Union was most probably Amos Doolittle's engraving "A Display of the United States of America." This magnificently appropriate motif for the United States was the result of a simple and obvious combination: the circle had symbolized eternity and perfection throughout history, and the chain, bonding and strength. It is hard to imagine anything more meaningfully connotative for thirteen colonies recently joined than a chain of circles, each one representing a particular state, arranged in a circle to represent their union in perpetuity.

American patriots could look to classical times for examples of combined circles used decoratively, sometimes with, but usually without, symbolic meaning. Intricate floor mosaics dating from Roman times frequently include a line of adjacent circles, not, however, interlinked. The guilloche of Greek and Roman architectural decoration is another familiar example which continued in use through the Romanesque period to the classic revival of the Renaissance. The "adjacent circles" motif was a favorite device of Robert Adam, of which innumerable examples survive.[13]

In America, the motif of circles, linked together by a fortuitous leap of some unknown patriot's imagination, suddenly acquired a symbolic meaning. An early example was the seal of the American Union Masonic Lodge of 1775, suggested but not proven to have been designed by Benjamin Franklin who was an enthusiastic supporter of this "traveling" lodge. Here Masonic symbols including the calipers and sun, moon and star were surrounded by a chain of thirteen circles closed at the top by the Masonic clasped hands symbolizing friendship. A perhaps more familiar example was the Newburyport, Massachusetts, flag of 1776, where a continuous chain of thirteen oval links symbolized "in Union there is strength."[14]

The appeal of the chain of states as a patriotic motif was not lost on representatives of American officialdom. The Continental Congress, desperate for funds to finance the army during the beginning years of the Revolutionary War, seized upon the chain of states to embellish its currency; the half dollar denomination has a continuous chain of thirteen linked circles, with, for the first time, the name of each state abbreviated on each link. Inside the chain was a smaller circle, with the words "American Congress" in an outside border, and in the center the motto, "We are one." The chain of states thus for the first time received official recognition as a symbol of the Congress, and of the union of the States.

Jefferson, Adams, and Franklin thought of the states as thirteen links in a chain when they were struggling with their first design for the Great Seal in August of 1776, of which only a verbal description exists. The obverse of their design (a complicated scene involving Pharaoh pursuing the Israelites across the Red Sea) included a

"shield, within a border, gules, entwined of thirteen escutcheons, argent, linked together by a chain, or, each charged with initial sable letters for each of the thirteen independent States of America."[15] This design, of course, was not adopted, and over the years of delay before a seal was finally approved, the formal drawings accompanying the proposal disappeared.

William Barton, designing a preliminary version of what would be the final seal in 1782, was the first to verbalize the symbolism of the circle in this context. Using a motif reminiscent of the chain of states in the circle of clouds issuing from the head of the eagle, and in the thirteen stars within that cloud which he had arranged in a circle, he declared in his report to the Committee that they represented "a new Constellation, which alludes to the new Empire, formed in the World by the Confederation of those States. Their Disposition, in the form of a circle, denotes the Perpetuity of its Continuance, the Ring being the Symbol of Eternity."[16]

After 1776, the by now familiar chain of states appeared many times, on the flag of the 2nd New Hampshire Regiment during the Revolution, as a symbol of the United States in a German almanac, on Wedgwood pottery, and Liverpool jugs, and even on a brass button made for the inauguration of George Washington. Paul Revere used it as part of his design for the masthead of *The Massachusetts Spy*, a Boston newspaper, in 1781.

Its semi-official quality made it supremely suitable for Amos Doolittle's 1788 engraving, designed to spread the news quickly and broadly of the official beginning of the United States of America under the Constitution. Doolittle adopted the linked circles just as they appeared on the Continental currency, and in the same order, but he added population figures and numbers of representatives to the names of the states inscribed on each link. He added one more circle to the chain, containing the Great Seal of the United States, and attached it to the links on each side with tiny padlocks, thus emphasizing the strength and perpetuity of the Union. Inside each of the other links, he engraved the seals of the individual states, once thought of by some as sovereign nations, but now subordinate to the whole.

The Doolittle engraving was popular, patriotic and readily available, a natural source for the designers of the Senate carpet. The quasi-official nature of the chain of states, once used on Continental currency together with the words, "American Congress," made it eminently suitable for inclusion on a carpet designed for the floor of the upper chamber of that Congress.

The Liberty Pole and Cap, and Balance of Justice

The identification of possible sources for the seal and the chain motifs was a comparatively easy problem to resolve. A special problem for the design, however, was the placement of the liberty cap and pole. The 1791 description of the carpet reads: "under the arms, on the Pole which supports the Cap of Liberty, is hung the Balance of Justice," a singularly uninformative phrase, the first few words of which could be translated only as "beneath the seal." Did this mean the motif appeared alone, inside the circle of state seals, or was it perhaps inside one of the links of the chain?

In a critical examination of Doolittle's engraving of the chain of states, the eye is caught by the unifying link, with the United States and the two tiny padlocks attaching it to the rest of the circle. Perhaps the notion of using the United States Seal again in the chain of states seemed redundant, since the Seal already spoke brilliantly for itself in the center of the carpet. Could it be that the seal was removed from this link and replaced by the liberty pole and cap? There is only one problem with this hypothesis: the *Pennsylvania Gazette* correspondent saw the liberty pole and cap and the balance of justice "under the arms." If they had simply been substituted for the seal, they would have appeared above the arms, not below them.

It is tempting to think that this anachronism arose from a simple manipulation of the chain of states in order to show off the two symbols more clearly. Since the orientation of the carpet was most probably towards the door rather than towards the Vice President on his dais, it would be logical to place these two tokens of American liberty and justice at the bottom of the chain where their symbolism could be immediately recognized and appreciated by persons entering the door of the Senate Chamber.

This, then, is the conjecture on which reconstruction of the motif in the reproduced carpet rests. A corollary of this assumption is the arrangement of the state seals, beginning to the left of the unifying link containing the pole, cap, and scales, with New Hampshire, and ending to the right of it with the seal of Georgia, thus preserving the traditional north to south order of the states within the chain.

The combination of these two long-popular symbols of liberty and justice in the Senate carpet was an original contribution to American iconography: liberty and justice for all in pictorial form. Not that it was unknown for separate motifs to be combined into a new symbol; this happened all the time in the development of American symbolism. Another example of the same sort of combination of motifs occurred in the Georgia 1776 four dollar piece, where the liberty pole and cap were combined with the caduceus, symbolizing commerce, and a cornucopia, denoting plenty. In the case of the Senate carpet both symbols traced their origins to classical times, but were not used "crossed" with one another before their appearance in the Senate carpet.

The balance had been a symbol of justice since Roman times. As an attribute of Aequitas, Goddess of Equity, its classical form could be seen in Philadelphia at the Library Company in Montfaucon's *Antiquity Explained*, of 1721, a popular sourcebook for engravings of classical motifs among craftsmen from painters to textile designers. In Joseph Richardson's *Iconology*, printed in London in 1779, a compilation of emblematic figures based on Cesare Ripa's popular seventeenth century emblem books, the scales signified "exactness and rectitude," and were associated with his personifications of "Justice," "Politicks" and "Impartiality." In America the balance appeared as a symbol of justice and equality in many representations, from Masonic engravings to the sixty-five dollar note of the Continental currency, dated January 14, 1779, where it was combined with the motto "fiat Justitia:" "let there be justice."

The liberty pole and Phrygian cap also derived from classical sources. The cap itself had begun its symbolic life as early as 750 BC as a conventional item of clothing, worn in Asia Minor in ancient Phrygia and Troy as a sign of national independence and liberty. In Roman representations, Athena, Goddess of Athens, sometimes wore a Phrygian cap, as did King Midas, the Amazons, Mithras, and other figures associated with the near East.

The cap was joined to the pole as a symbol of freedom when Salturnius conquered Rome in 263 BC; in a burst of inspiration he raised the cap on a pikestaff to show that slaves who joined his fight would be freed, thus encouraging their participation on his side. Later, after Caesar's murder, the conspirators symbolically declared their wish for freedom by hoisting the same cap and pole. In another sphere, the Roman Goddess of Liberty came to be associated with the cap which she held atop a pike as an attribute signifying her alliance with freedom.

In the seventeenth century, with the revival of interest in things classical, Liberty appeared in England. Thomas Hobbes' *Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Civil Society*, of 1651, contained a sole illustration, a frontispiece which included a figure of Liberty carrying the pikestaff crowned not by a Phrygian cap but by a Cavalier's hat, like those worn in contemporary England. Together with the figures "Religion," and "Dominion," this Liberty represented to Hobbes and other thinkers one of the three most important characteristics of British society.

A century later, when Thomas Hollis evolved the notion of a patriotic figure of Britannia in which the ideas "Britain" and "Liberty" would be combined, he had the new figure hold the liberty pole and classical Phrygian cap as a symbol of freedom under parliamentary rule.[17] In 1779 Joseph Richardson borrowed this Britannia for his *Iconology*, adding a verbal explanation of its symbolism: "The cap of liberty by her side is an allusion to the happy constitution of this country, to the equity of the laws and freedom of the subject."[18]

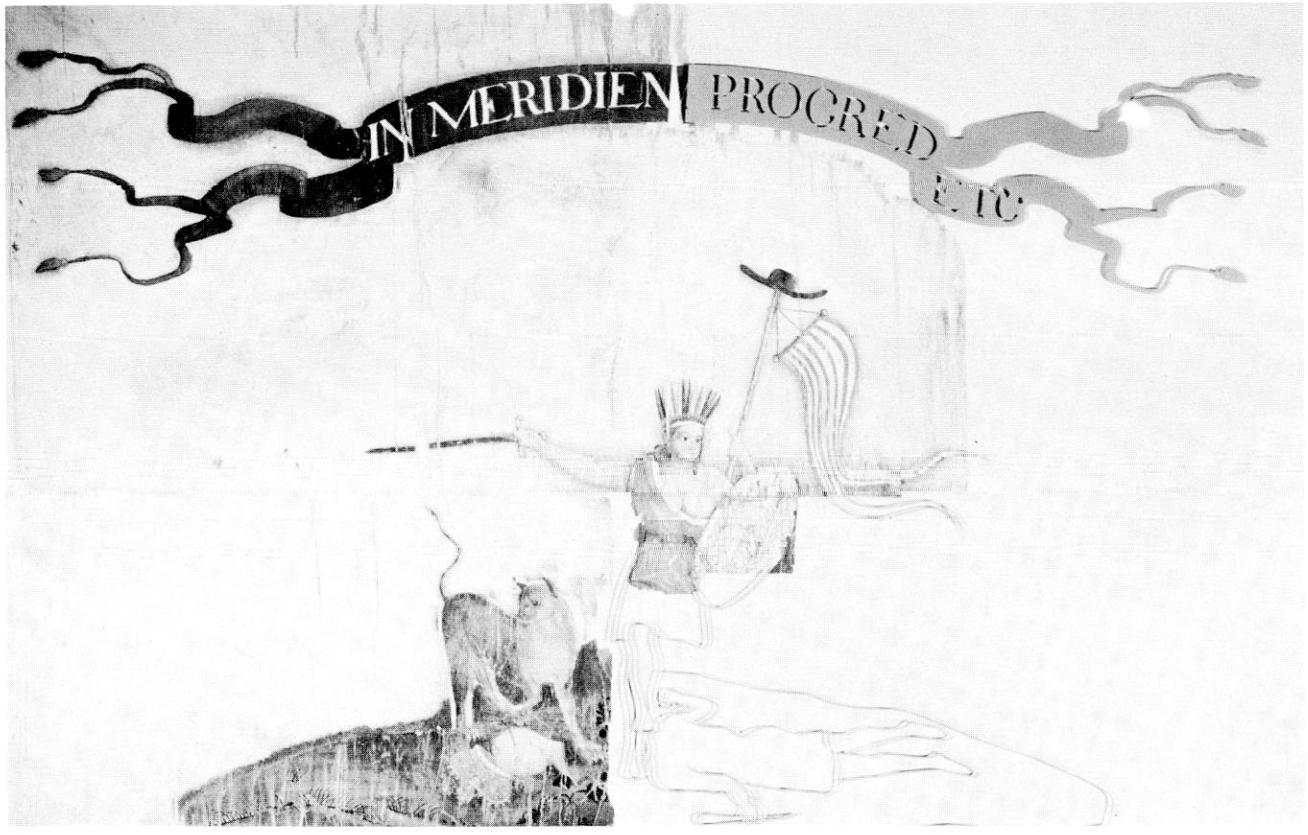
Long before the invention of Britannia, however, the liberty cap and pole appeared in American iconography. The earliest known representation of them appeared on the seal of the Province of North Carolina, adopted in 1730; here the cap is again a Cavalier's hat. The classical cap also occurs as a symbol of Liberty, on the seal of the

Province of Georgia, adopted in 1733. Here, a figure of Liberty wears the cap on her head, holding in her hand a cornucopia symbolic of "plentiful harvests."

Paul Revere used the symbol freely in his engravings and cartoons throughout the 1760's and up to 1776, when it was taken over by Pierre Eugene Du Simitière for the first design of the United States seal, and for the New Jersey State seal. George Wythe of Williamsburg used it in his design for the Virginia seal, while in 1777 Webb's Additional Continental Regiment adopted the Cavalier's hat on pole for its flag carried during the Revolutionary War.

After 1776 the liberty pole and cap appeared in prints by other American artists such as Abraham Godwin and Robert Edge Pine, who used it in his painting "America Lamenting," of 1778. To follow Pine's 1778 painting of "America Lamenting" makes an interesting illustration of the sort of borrowing of ideas from paintings and engravings by other craftsmen which was common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1781 in London, Joseph Strutt published a print, "America Lamenting" taken from Pine's painting, which received wide distribution. Four years later, in 1785, an English printed textile appeared with "America Lamenting," derived directly from Strutt's print, combined with other motifs, in brown on white cotton-linen cloth. Later, the print itself was copied in America by Amos Doolittle and, in the early nineteenth century, the design was borrowed by an anonymous needleworker whose silk embroidery version is now at Winterthur.

FIGURE 24: Flag of Webb's Additional Continental Regiment, 1777. Courtesy of the Sons of the Revolution, Philadelphia. *Photograph by Edward W. Richardson.*



One very appealing use of the motif in furniture brings the symbol home to Philadelphia. It appears on the crest rail of the famous "Rising Sun Chair" in the Assembly Room in Independence Hall, where it did not lack for public notice.

Finally, a most interesting use of the liberty pole and cap involves the juxtaposition but not crossing of this motif with the balance of justice, and provides the only precedent for the use of this symbol together with the balance in the Senate carpet. This was the gold pattern coin known as "Immune Columbia." Cast in 1785 by Thomas Wyon, of Birmingham, England, who hoped to make it the new coinage for the United States, it showed America personified as Columbia, holding in one hand the balance of justice, and in the other the furled flag used as a liberty pole, with the Phrygian cap hung from its top.



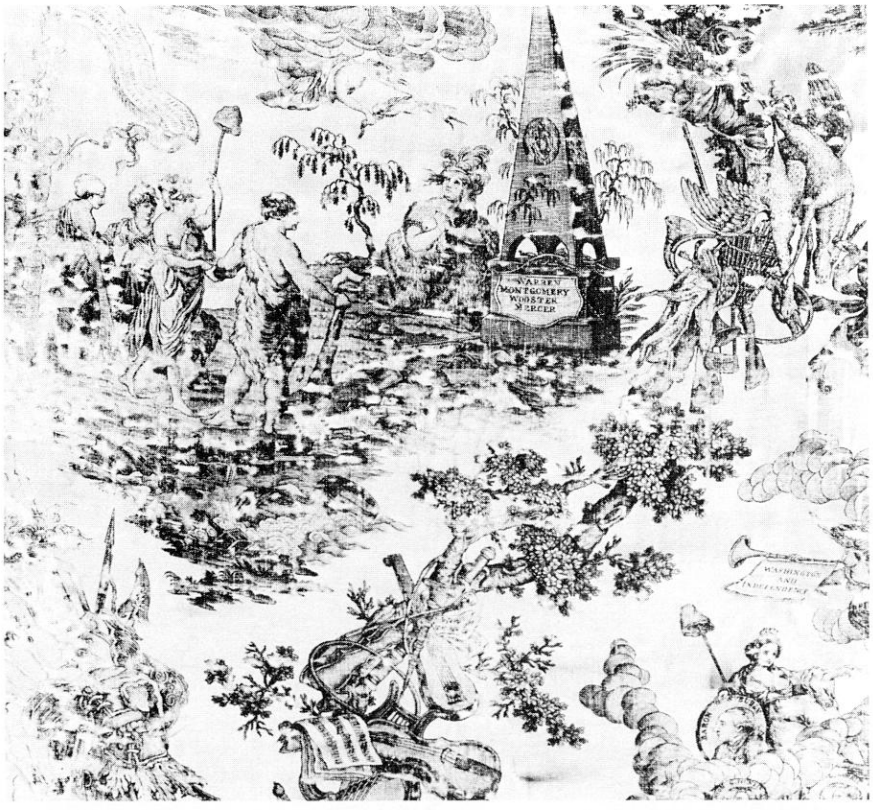
FIGURE 25: "America Lamenting," engraving by Joseph Strutt after Robert Edge Pine, London, 1781. Independence National Historical Park Collection.



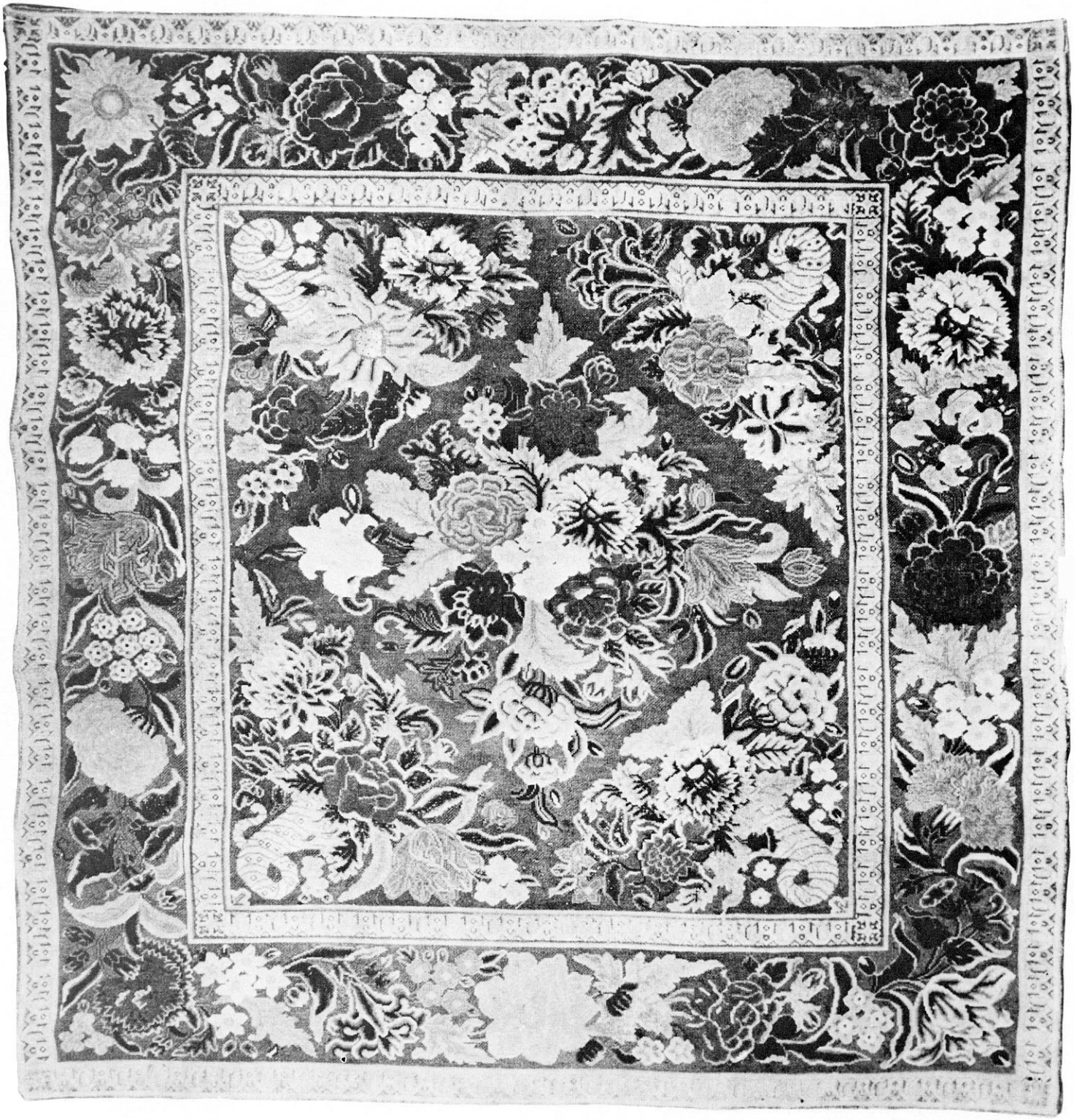
FIGURE 26: "Immune Columbia" pattern coin designed by Thomas Wyon and struck in Birmingham, England, 1785. Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Division of Numismatics.

FIGURE 27: Detail of English printed textile with vignette of "America Lamenting" from the Pine-Strutt engraving, surrounded by foliage and trophies, *c.* 1785. Courtesy of The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum.

FIGURE 28: Needlework picture, watercolor and silk embroidery, New York, *c.* 1815–1830. Courtesy of The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum.







Cornucopias

The newspaper description of the Senate carpet refers to two cornucopias, symbols of peace and plenty. Probably these were in the corners of the central compartment, their stems crossed to agree with the typical appearance of cornucopias in eighteenth century carpet design.

Cornucopias used to symbolize the bounty of the land have been an important part of every western iconographic repertoire since antiquity. Probably this connotation originated in the very ancient primitive drinking horn, which, filled with both grapes and wheat, came to stand for plentiful wine and food. Ceres, goddess of the harvest, is perhaps the most famous Roman figure to carry the cornucopia as a symbol of abundance.

Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance cornucopias continued to serve as symbols of plenty, and, like the liberty pole and cap, were taken over as an attribute for Britannia in 1754. Again, George Richardson explained the symbolic meaning of Britannia's cornucopia in *Iconology*, as "emblematical of the various productions of the country, which is greatly improved by the industry of its inhabitants, and their great skill in cultivation."[19] Richardson also associated the horn of plenty with the drawings personifying Hospitality, Abundance, Fortune, Honour, Liberality, and Happiness, a veritable cornucopia of uses in itself, illustrating how popular and widespread was the symbol.

Like the liberty pole and cap, the cornucopia came early to American iconography. Between 1719 and 1721 William Burgis, a New York engraver, printed a "South Prospect of New York," dedicated to George III, with a bare-breasted goddess obviously symbolizing fertility holding a cornucopia in one hand, and the seal of George III, Rex, in the other. Burgis used the same figure again in the large and impressive cartouche for his map, "Boston in New England," dedicated to Governor William Burnet and issued in 1728. In 1733, the Trustees of the Colony of Georgia used a cornucopia on their seal, in the hands of the "Spirit of the Colony," where it represented plenty and prosperity. In early years the cornucopia was also popular as a printer's ornament, continuing a European usage as old as the printer's device itself.

After independence, the cornucopia became associated with personifications of America in her different forms as Greek goddess and later, as Columbia. It appeared in the series of representations of "America Lamenting," in an engraving of Columbia in the first issue of the *Columbian Magazine* in 1786, and in 1789 the same magazine printed a frontispiece of the "Genius of America," referring to her cornucopia as a symbol of "agriculture and plenty."

Despite these appearances in prints and engravings as a single element, cornucopias frequently appeared in duplicate, with crossed tails, especially in interior decoration, textiles, and carpets. In English and French decoration, crossed cornucopias are frequently found in corners of ceilings in plasterwork ornament.[20]

If crossed cornucopias fit well into ceiling corners, this happy appropriateness of form applied also to carpets. A Louis XV Savon-

FIGURE 29: English Georgian needlework carpet, *c.* 1740. *Colonial Williamsburg Photograph.*

nerie carpet has elaborate basketwork cornucopias with a profusion of flowers, while an English Georgian carpet made about 1735 has smaller, robust baskets to fit into a border about eight inches wide. By the late 1750s when Robert Adam came on the scene, it had become customary for carpets to reflect the ceiling design, copying almost exactly each motif. A drawing of Adam's carpet "for Sir Nash Curzon Baronet" illustrates the point perfectly.

In the Senate carpet, some of the cornucopias were filled not only with flowers, but held olive branches among the blossoms "expressive of peace." Probably these "peace" cornucopias were crossed with the other sort of cornucopia, which bore "fruit and grain, the emblems of plenty." The search for a specifically American cornucopia which could be dated prior to 1790 ended in frustration, but one dating from 1797 on the pediment of the First Bank of the United States in Philadelphia seemed appropriate for the cornucopias in the Senate carpet. This cornucopia, carved in mahogany by Clodius Legrand, contained, in addition to the typical European mélange of apples, pears, and wheat stalks, American flowers and fruits, including ears of corn, melons, pumpkins, and squash. An adaptation of the Legrand cornucopia was decided upon for the Senate carpet, as an especially American "emblem of plenty."

FIGURE 30: Pediment sculpture of the First Bank of the United States, carved and painted mahogany, by Clodius Legrand, 1797. The First Bank of the United States, Philadelphia. *National Park Service photograph by Marti Degan.*



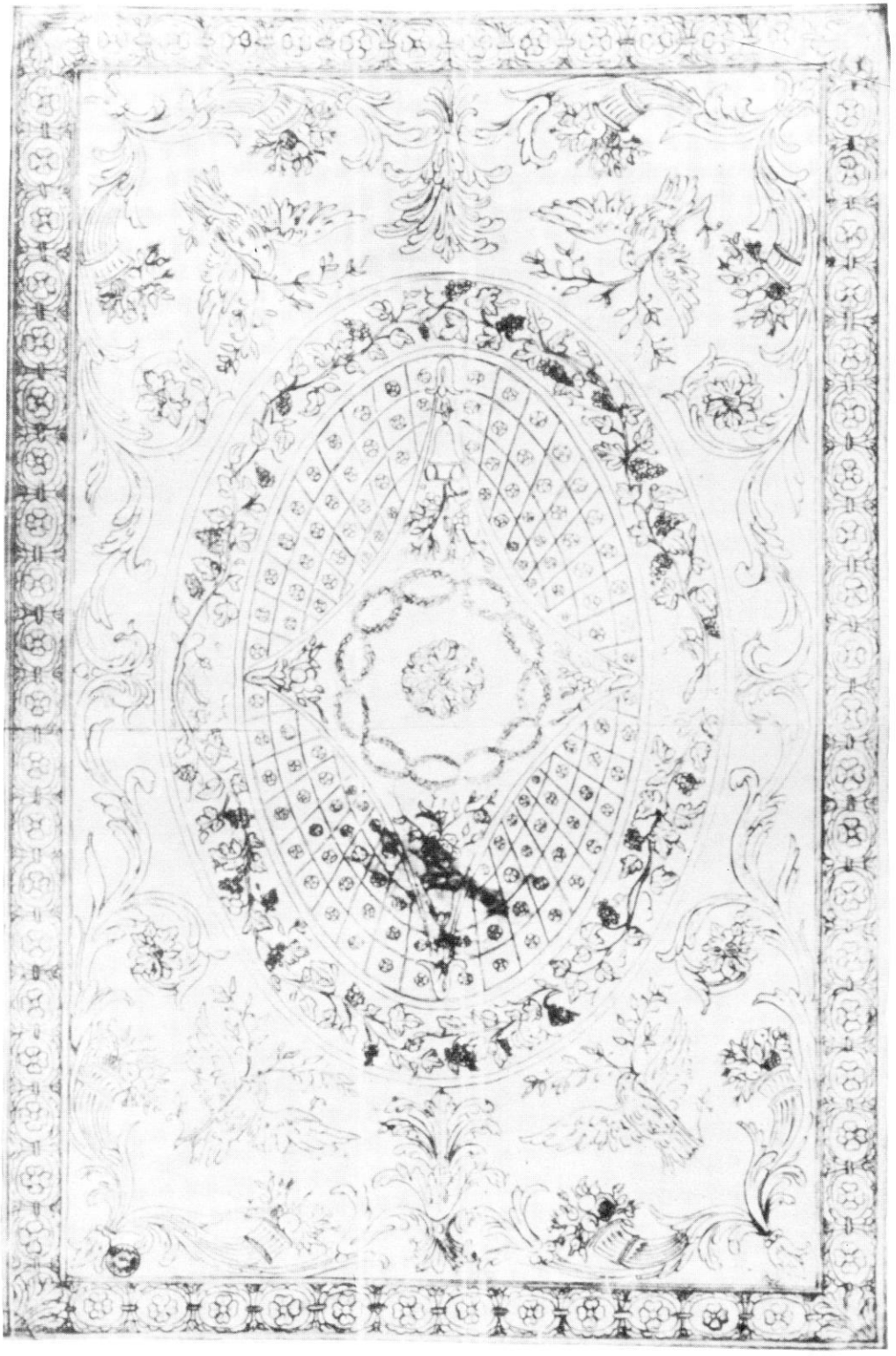


FIGURE 31: Design for a carpet by Robert Adam for Sir Nash Curzon, *c.* 1760. Courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum, London.



TRAJELO DI OTTAVIANO AUGUSTO inalzato per la Vittoria nel Actium, e Conquista dell'Egitto col mezzo della quale l'Vittoria avicurossi il primato dell'Imperio del Mondo. Succome nella Tavola precedente si è veduto un Trofeo in onore della Vittoria che li compagno dalle quale solo trar si ne può con più probabile congettura, con al contrario ominamento aspettar si debbono nel Otta- viano Augusto, grande in ogni particolarità in quello del Trofeo presente. Ecco ammirasi con le sue grandiose imprese. Considerisamo per tante la grande pesante Armatura a squame, con Semitaurea al fianco appresa al medesimo cuoio con le parte inferiori magnificamente abbellita di elmi, teste di medusa, le tore di varietà di teorie, e di aquila coreggiani scolpite. Questa è sostenuta da un grosso tronco d'Antenna di nave piantato nel mezzo, avendo l'umbi e lati scolpiti a trofei di Rami degli Scudi intagliati con tutto il medesimo e Balaustri di maravigliosso lavoro. Dietro a quale appariscono due gran rostre di nave con Sagittari di Bronzo di Rilievo egregie di carne di bra- vo, che sono [illegible] e terminati l'abbondanza quali giovano a rendere il componimento proprio del Trofeo prevalente. Sotto a questa grande Armatura vedesi una Matrona nella metà vista sopra un rostro di nave delle braccia di dietro le [illegible] sollevate col relativamente nude, e sotto coperte all'uso orientale, Questa figura all'intorno di capelli in Imperatrice dalla statua simbolo quale dal tempo ben o nato, forsan surrogato ritratto di qualche nobile Romana. [illegible] della Vita in allusione alla nuova, e florente due Cornucopie, vedesi di nave minore due simboli altresì navali e militari intorno sotto quali il mare che ondeggia. Da un lato e dall'altro della statua si scorgono due Vittorie alate, le quali sembra che [illegible] quelle delle quali si dicono con due prigionieri sculti dietro a quelle alate, cui [illegible] e quelle situate con maravigliosi artificio scolpite. Ora chi non scorge in questo illustre magnifico monumento le spoglie vittoriose riportate da Ottaviano Augusto [illegible] Ma non sarebbe la grande Armatura del vasto predatore del Trofeo? Chi non legge in quella figura il Ritratto della Regina Cleopatra portata in trionfo con turpissimi fini come si legge? Finalmente che può leggersi d'antenna si [illegible] Mausoleum? Chi non ammira la grande Armatura del vasto predatore del Trofeo? Chi non legge in quella figura il Ritratto della Regina Cleopatra portata in trionfo con turpissimi fini come si legge? Finalmente che può leggersi d'antenna si [illegible] di segni indecenti alle navali e militari, quali con studiate composizioni l'eruditi scultori ha seguiti non bene rappresentare. • Donde a quali Marmi attinenti altri pezzi caduti

Piranesi Architetto Inc.

Trophies

To the twentieth century reader, perhaps the most puzzling part of the article in Dunlap's *American Daily Advertiser* of 1791 is its reference to the use of "marine and land trophies." The trophy descended to the 18th century from Greek and Roman antiquity in two forms. The original definition in ancient times was, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "a structure erected (originally on the field of battle) as a memorial of a victory in war, consisting of arms or other spoils taken from the enemy, hung upon a tree, pillar, etc., and dedicated to some divinity."

In the eighteenth century, however, under the influence of French designers such as Pierre Ranson and the engraver Jean Charles Delafosse, the word trophy came to apply to any ornamental or symbolic group of objects, such as musical instruments or carpenter's tools, which suggested a particular idea or mood. Such trophies were used as wall or ceiling decoration in an ornamental, typically symbolic manner; an increased taste for richness of effect allowed musical trophies to show the function of the room in which they occurred and architectural instruments were sometimes used to decorate a fireplace surround or overmantel in the home of a gentleman interested in the art, or who had perhaps himself dabbled in design. If used at all in English exterior architecture, military trophies predominated. In an age of little exterior ornamentation, decorations were often absent altogether or were restricted to geometric elements such as decorative brickwork. In imitation of classical buildings, however, statuary of classical warriors, gods, or emperors sometimes appeared atop the roof line. Here trophies were also used, showing the family arms and crests, symbolic of the importance of the name. From 1723, when the great baroque architect John Vanbrugh used trophies at Grunsthorpe, to the later years of the eighteenth century, when Robert Adam designed the Drury Lane Theatre Royal, the formula was a standard of English Palladianism.

Because interior decoration permitted much freer use of ornament, trophies were more commonly used inside. Military trophies appeared frequently in England in seventeenth and eighteenth century baroque and rococo interiors, an impressive element in a repertoire of numerous decorative motifs. Perhaps the most ornate of English trophy carving was done at Ham House, in 1638, on the staircase paneling. After 1758, Robert Adam used trophies in his designs for interior wall panels. The famous gilded trophies at Syon House are perhaps the most impressive trophy panels ever executed in England, and are very close to the Roman prototype as it appears in the Piranesi engraving.

Military trophies also occurred in furniture, such as Chippendale's rococo picture frames, chimney pieces, and pedestals, familiar to Americans through Chippendale's *Gentleman and Cabinet-maker's Director*. But trophies of any sort were little used in American architecture and decoration. One documented example of American use of military trophies in architecture is the Triumphal Arch which Charles Bullfinch designed for George Washington's post-inaugural

FIGURE 32: *"Trofeo di Ottaviano Augusto,"* engraved plate from Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Trofei Di Ottaviano Augusto Innalati Per La Vittoria . . .*, Pl. 12, 1753. Courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia.

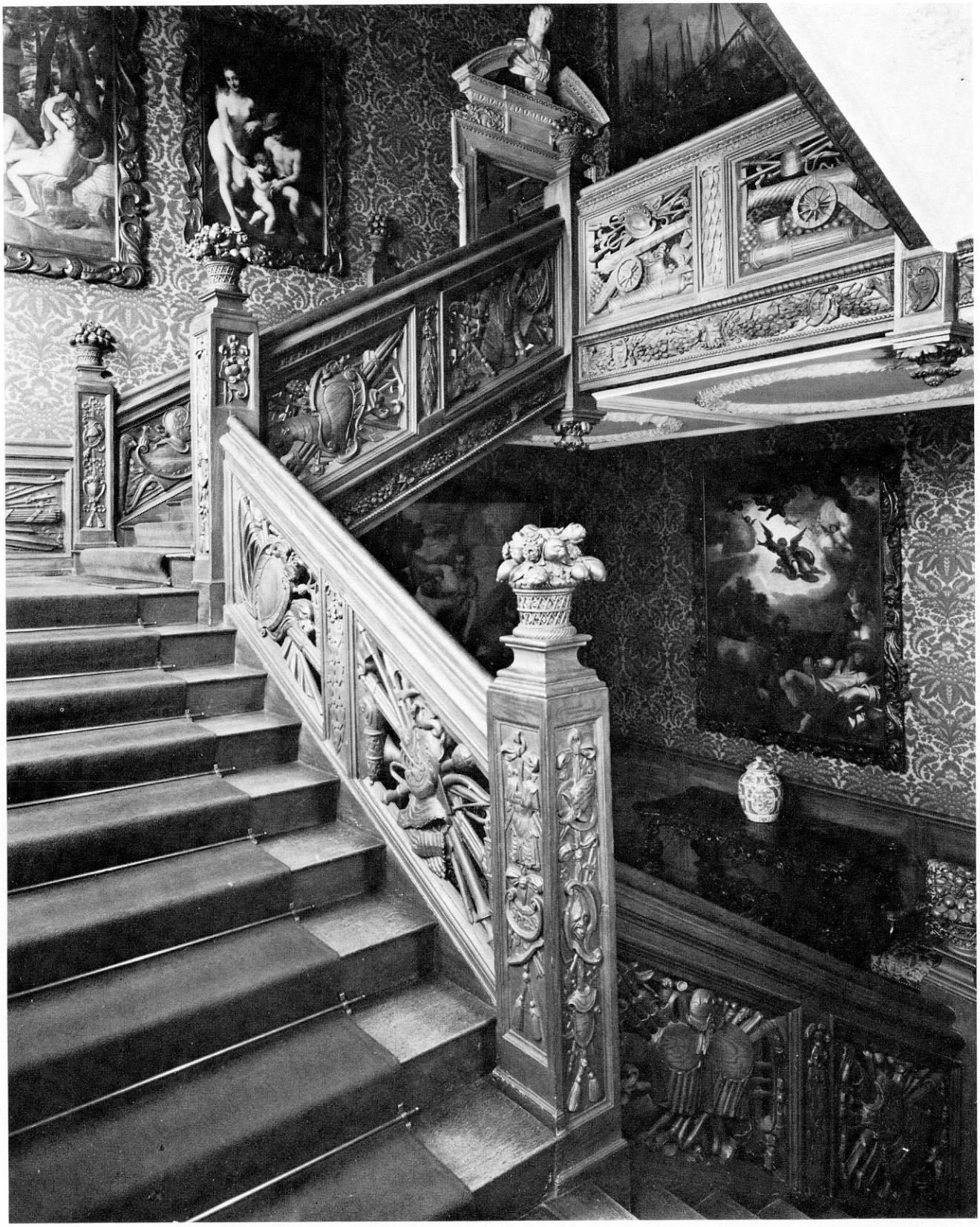
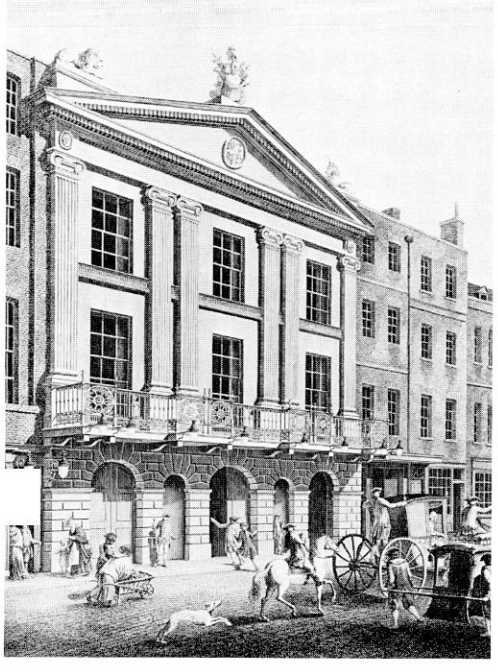




FIGURE 33: Staircase at Ham House, London, *c.* 1640, incorporating carved armorial trophies. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

FIGURE 34: Trophy panel at Osterley Park, London; stucco, designed by Robert Adam, *c.* 1768. This trophy and the gilded ones at Syon House were derived from *"Tropheo di Ottaviano Augusto"* (figure 32). Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

FIGURE 35: Detail of the façade of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, from Pl. VI, Vol. II, No. V of Robert and James Adam, *Works in Architecture*, 1779. Courtesy of The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum Libraries.



tour to Boston in 1790. For this structure, which was torn down after Washington's departure, Bullfinch used, in Washington's own words, "a trophy, composed of the Arms of the United States, of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and our French Allies, crowned with a wreath of Laurel," an engraving of which appeared in the *Massachusetts Magazine* of January 1790.[21]

What, then, was the inspiration for the "marine and land trophies" of the Senate carpet? Military trophies were not commonly used in America, and apparently had little meaning for Americans. Moreover, one could imagine that the Senators would not have reacted kindly to a suggestion of military might, when in 1791 the whole thrust of American thinking was towards progress in the peaceful fields of agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce. A glance at the second type of trophy, the non-military, which came into vogue in the eighteenth century, provides a better answer.

Unknown to ancient designers, the idea of a purely ornamental use for trophies composed of other than warlike objects may have come ultimately from the Palladian classical revival in seventeenth century Italy. Palladio certainly employed hunting trophies, and

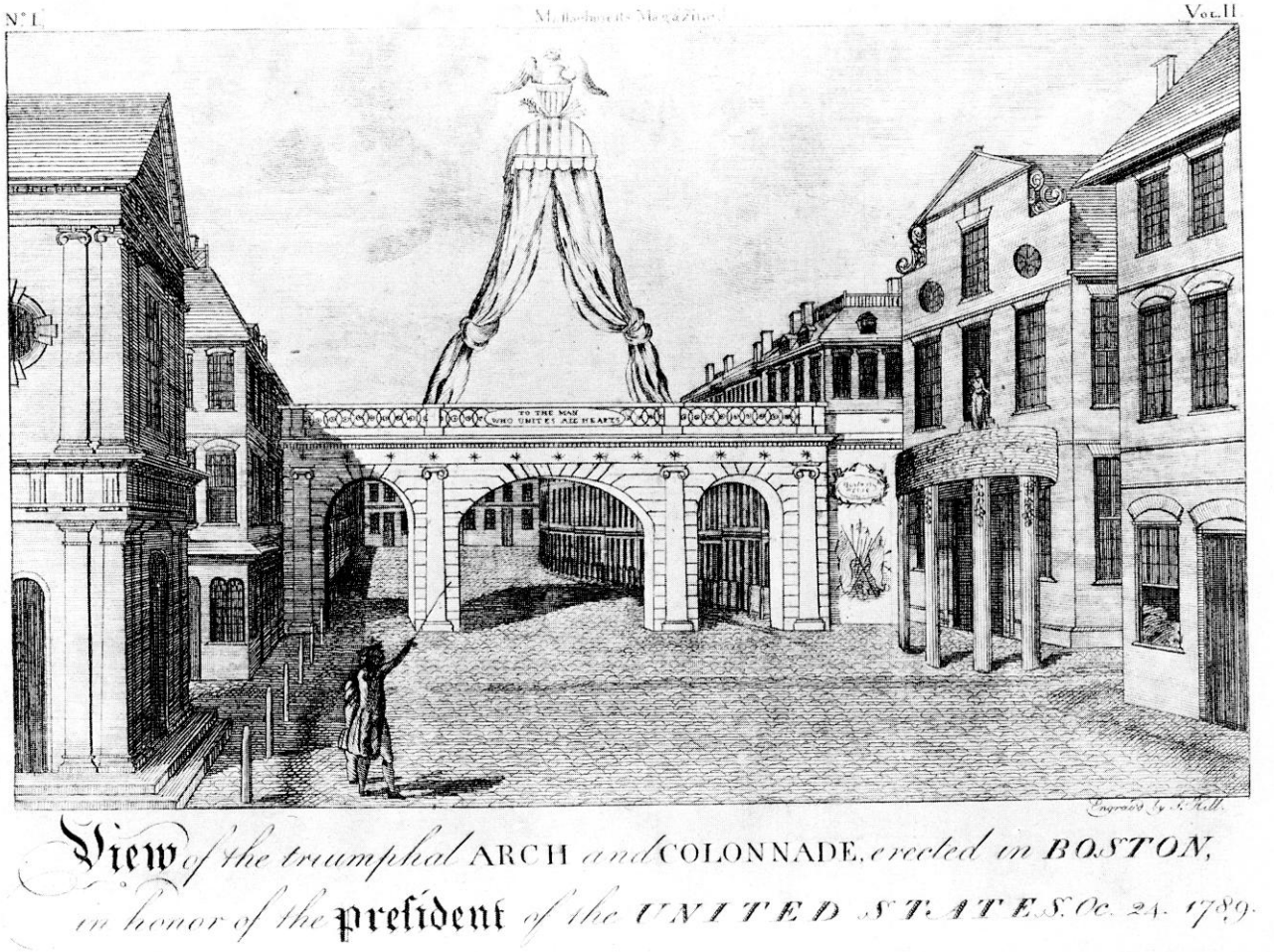


FIGURE 36: "View of the Triumphal Arch and Colonnade, Erected in Boston... 1789," engraved plate from the *Massachusetts Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 1. Courtesy of the Bostonian Society, Old State House, Boston.

trophies of the arts, interwoven with allegorical figures and grotesques in the Villa Emo at Vicenza about 1564. French designers such as Jacques Huquier and Pierre and Jean Lepautre engraved trophies of flowers and fruits along with a profusion of military trophies, for use by sculptors and plaster workers in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and Jean Lepautre's works on ornament were available in England.

It was not until just before mid-eighteenth century, however, with the advent of the rococo style, that the use of non-military trophies became popular. The rococo, with its rockery and grottoes, explicitly rejected symmetry in favor of asymmetrical designs with C and S curves, and the ornamentation by comparison to earlier styles seems bizarre and sometimes incongruous. This change in taste brought the "pastoral" trophy into fashion.

As early as 1698, François Blondel, in his *Cours d' Architecture*, codified the use of trophies according to a book of designs he had found by Albrecht Dürer, of rustic tools and agricultural implements "arranged very artistically." Following Dürer's example, Blondel recommended that architects use not only "trophies of arms or of war, but even trophies of peace: such as the sciences, the arts, amusements, arranging for example several musical instruments, the principal ornaments of balls and of the theater, hunting and fishing equipment and a thousand others, whose beauty consists principally in the choice and disposition of objects, and in the appropriateness of these ornaments to the general design of the building."[22] Resting on this solid source, collections of garden implements or flowers and baskets began to appear on porcelain; by 1770 designers such as Pierre Ranson were publishing engravings of trophies of agricultural implements, fishing nets, and garden tools for use as patterns.

Perhaps the most prolific designer of trophies in France was Jean Charles Delafosse, whose voluminous works include hundreds of purely decorative engravings of hunting and fishing trophies, agricultural implements, flower baskets, and objects symbolic of the visual and performing arts. Delafosse composed a slightly different type of trophy in addition, one with a symbolic purpose, in which a collection of objects would be used to symbolize a city, a nation, the months of the year, or a state of mind such as happiness, much in the same way that Cesare Ripa did in his emblem books with classical figures carrying symbolic "attributes." So popular was the trophy in French decoration that a large number of surviving eighteenth century buildings boast trophy panels today, outstanding examples of which are the beautifully carved panels in Louis XVI's Cabinet de Toilette at Versailles, designed by Ange-Jacques Gabriel.

By 1720, non-military trophies were beginning to appear in English decoration, copied by English craftsmen from the profusion of books and engravings of French ornaments, or executed by French craftsmen brought to England for the purpose. Davenport House, in Shropshire, has a trophy of surveying instruments on the Hall chimney piece, dating from 1726. Mawley Hall acquired in 1730 along with the military trophy in its Entrance Hall, a charming staircase with a stair rail shaped like a sea monster, and hung with an as-



FIGURE 37: Detail of English printed textile, *c.* 1785–95. Courtesy of The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum. *Gilbert Ask Photograph.*

semblage of fishing equipment. Other trophies were carved into the panels on the top landing.

An interesting use of trophies occurs in two English textiles made for the American market between 1785 and 1795. The first is the plate-printed linen-cotton pattern of about 1785 taken from two print sources, "America Lamenting" and "America Presenting at the Altar of Liberty Medallions of Her Illustrious Sons," which has rather robust fishing, hunting and musical trophies wound about the pictorial vignettes. The second English textile was part of a patchwork quilt, and is only a fragment of a scene with vignettes of children playing, surrounded by swags of trophies; one is an assemblage of fishing gear, the other of agricultural implements. These trophies are very close to the designs of Pierre Ranson in inspiration, and an engraving by Ranson of one fishing trophy is nearly close enough to the textile to be called a direct source. The character of these trophies is important for the Senate carpet, because the combination of objects they contain for the first time fits the description of "land and marine." At the left of the patchwork piece appears a detailed and finely drawn fishing trophy which well might be called "marine". In addition there are assemblages of tools for tilling the earth, with wheat and flails for winnowing, a "land" trophy by any standard.

In American design, there were few traditional trophies in the sense of a compact group of symbolic objects like the trophies in the above patchwork piece. No American or English pattern book whose use in America has been confirmed contains this sort of trophy. There was, on the other hand, use of the same types of objects in



FIGURE 38: Detail of cartouche from "A Map of the most Inhabited part of Virginia . . .," drawn by Joshua Fry and Peter Jefferson, 1751. Independence National Historical Park Collection.

pictorial form to represent land and sea in American engravings, particularly state seals, membership certificates, map cartouches, and patriotic prints.

The land and sea juxtaposition too, had its pictorial roots in English tradition. The English royal seal of James II, dated 1687, had "on the one side our Royal effigies on horseback in arms over a landskip of land and sea," a design borrowed by the Governor General of New York for the seal of the province of about the same date.[23] The tradition continued with the 1730 seal of North Carolina, depicting Liberty presenting plenty, in the form of a cornucopia, to George III, while to the right a ship waits off the coast.

That a symbolic meaning for the two elements, land and sea, had been developing may be surmised from the evolution of the Georgia State seal, which first showed them in 1777. Here land is represented by a mansion, fenced, with trees in the yard, above fields and pastures, while to one side a ship under full sail moves up river. The same inspiration led to the 1799 seal, whose obverse bears pasture and trees on one side, with a ship at anchor on the other. Here the Legislature of Georgia put into words the symbolism involved by using the motto "Agriculture and Commerce," around the edge of the seal.

One of the earliest engravings of the land-sea juxtaposition was used by Peter Jefferson and Joshua Fry on their Map of Virginia, published in 1751. Here the finely detailed cartouche giving the title of the map includes a drawing meant to show the various facets of Virginia. On the left appears a negro boy serving wine to several merchants or planters, amid a profusion of casks and a barrel of corn. On the right, showing the importance of Virginia's commerce, is a drawing of a harbor and several ships at anchor.

From 1775 on, many patriotic prints show collections of objects to represent land and sea. Usually the sea (commerce) is represented by ships at anchor, waves, sails, collections of oars and casks, and sometimes the caduceus, which represented commerce in earlier English prints. The land, on the other hand, is shown by scenes of pastures and mountains, or groups of agricultural instruments, sheaves of corn, and overflowing cornucopias. *The Pennsylvania Magazine*, for example, included on the title page of Volume I, 1775 a representation of America surrounded by a landscape at her left hand and a view of a distant ship at sea to her right.

Perhaps the most interesting use of scenes representing land and sea occurs in membership certificates, which generally used the land-sea juxtaposition to represent the American origins of these societies. An early example of this is Abraham Godwin's certificate of the New York Mechanick Society, engraved about 1785, which includes views of land and sea among other vignettes surrounding the copperplate lettering. A very charming example of the use of objects alone to represent land and sea is the much later membership certificate of the Humane Society of Philadelphia, of 1803, whose engraver placed a cornucopia on the left side and a collection of oars and sails on the right side of a framed drawing of three men rescuing a beautiful woman from drowning.

Sometime after 1790, actual trophies began to be used to represent the land-agriculture/sea-commerce concept. The "marine and land trophies" of the Senate carpet almost certainly fell into this category. Designed in America, these trophies must, however, have borrowed heavily from French design in the absence of any American or English pattern books or engravings of this sort of trophy.

This surmise is borne out by the only two documented instances of the use of such trophies in early America known at this writing. The earliest and perhaps better known example is the hand-painted English wallpaper in the Jeremiah Lee Mansion in Marblehead, Massachusetts. These panels contain classical scenes drawn from engravings by Pierre Antoine de Machy, with trompe l'oeil painted surrounds imitating stucco frames. One panel in the entry hall of this house, decorated in the 1760's, contains pastoral trophies based on engravings from the *Works* of Jean Charles Delafosse, assemblages of agricultural implements used, not to symbolize an idea, but purely decoratively, as ornaments. Another architectural trophy in the hall derives from an engraving by Gabriel Huquier based on a design by another Frenchman, René Charpentier.[24] That these wallpapers were based on French design books, rather than English works illustrates two points: first, French and European design, at the middle of the century, was still the springboard for English decorative inspiration, and, secondly, English engravers had not adopted wholesale French pastoral imagery, so that there were few, if any, English engravings of trophies as source material for wallpaper or textile design.

A later use of land and sea trophies in America re-emphasizes the dependence of English and American designers on French sources. This is the membership certificate of the United States Military Philosophical Society, founded by Benjamin Franklin's nephew Jonathan Williams in 1803 at West Point. Designed by Louis Simond,



FIGURE 39: Detail of title page, *"Juvat in Silvis Habitare,"* from *The Pennsylvania Magazine,* Vol. I, printed by Robert Aiken, Philadelphia, 1775. Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.

FIGURE 40: New York Mechanick Society Membership Certificate, engraved by Abraham Godwin, 1791. Courtesy of The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum.



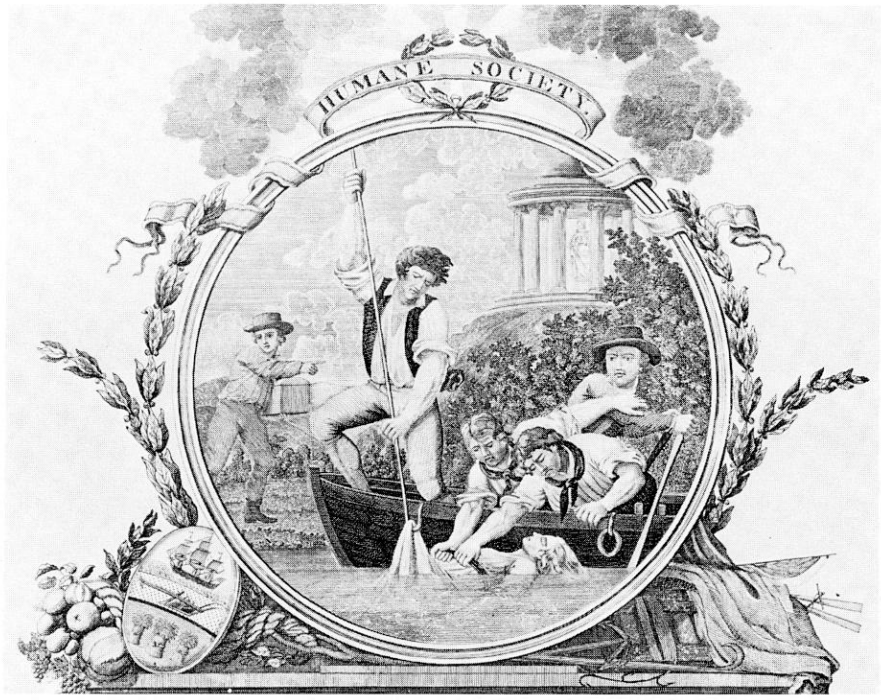


FIGURE 41: Detail from the Humane Society of Philadelphia Membership Certificate, engraving, 1803. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

a French emigré artist, the certificate bears elegant trophies of fishing equipment and agricultural implements, drawn directly from the repertoire of expression used in French design of pastoral trophies and reminiscent of the English patchwork textile shown above, which was also based on French sources. That these trophies represent the same land and sea juxtaposition is underlined by the associated vignette, showing ships on a river on the left side, while a farmer plows his land on the right.

FIGURE 42: English hand-painted wallpaper in the Jeremiah Lee Mansion, Marblehead, Massachusetts. Courtesy of the Marblehead Historical Society. *Photograph by Samuel Chamberlain.*

French ornament books and loose engravings were available in America for reference at the time the Senate carpet was produced. As previously noted, Thomas Jefferson's collection included French engravings. He had left standing orders for many of these when he left Paris in 1789, and they were shipped to him looseleaf as they were published throughout the 1790's. At least one French ornament book was available in Philadelphia, after the Chevalier de la Luzerne sold his "large Book of Prints relative to Architecture and Ornaments" in 1785. Others were presumably available in private collections or for sale in print shops.

Since none of these French sources is identified by name except François Blondel's *Works*, which do not include marine trophies composed of fishing equipment, a problem of choice was involved in those most appropriate to the Senate carpet's reconstruction. Although it was apparent that a French source was the most probable one for the carpet trophies, none could be pinpointed exactly.

The selection narrowed to Pierre Ranson and Charles Delafosse, because they were the most prolific of French trophy designers, and the most popular among English wallpaper and textile manufacturers. Several Aubusson carpets were manufactured in France around



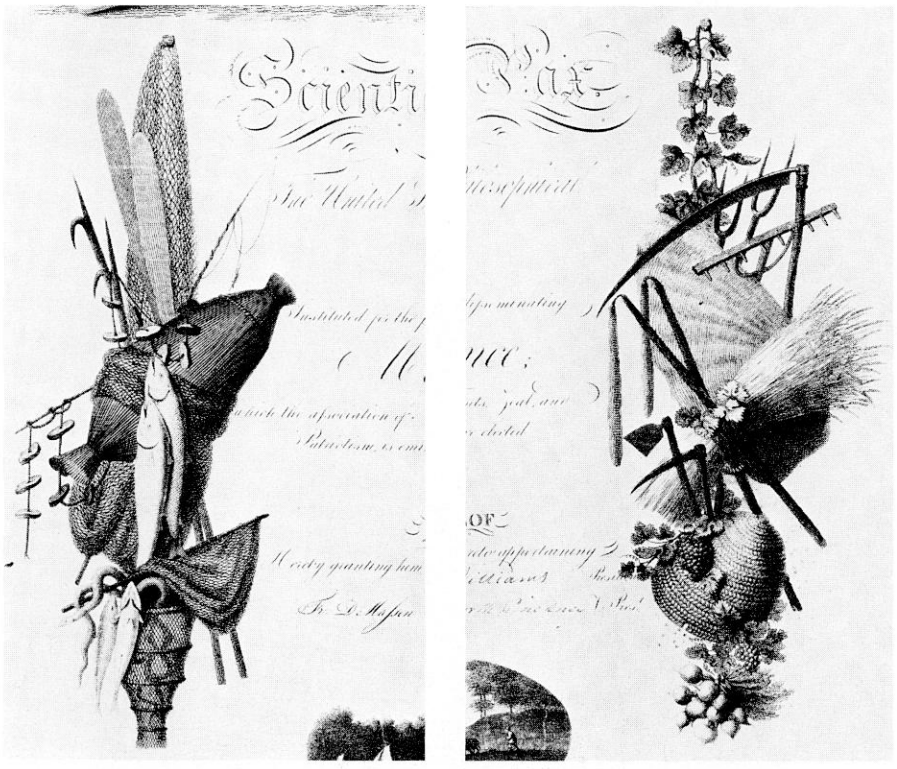


FIGURE 43: Detail of trophies of the United States Military Philosophical Society Membership Certificate, engraved by Louis Simond, *c.* 1803. Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.

1780 with agricultural trophies in the center in the style of Pierre Ranson, but these were purely decorative motifs, with no symbolic meaning intended. The Delafosse trophies, however, seemed close to the description of the Senate carpet trophies, since they are vertically oriented, and are labeled "agriculture," or "pastoral," according to their intended usage. Moreover, his *Works* included trophies designed for architectural use as well as for porcelain and textile designs, and one of these volumes may well have been the architecture and ornament book sold by the Chevalier de la Luzerne.

The selection of trophies by Jean Charles Delafosse for the Senate carpet is hypothetical at best, for all the "ifs," and "whethers" cannot hide the fact that the source for the carpet trophies is, ultimately, unknown. But Delafosse was the primary popularizer of trophies, and the one to label them "l'Agriculture" and "le Pesche"; we know his trophies appeared in wallpaper used in America and thus that his designs were appreciated here. For these reasons, they seemed appropriate for adaptation and use in the Senate carpet, where they appear in the side compartments prescribed by the Lansdowne carpet design prototype.

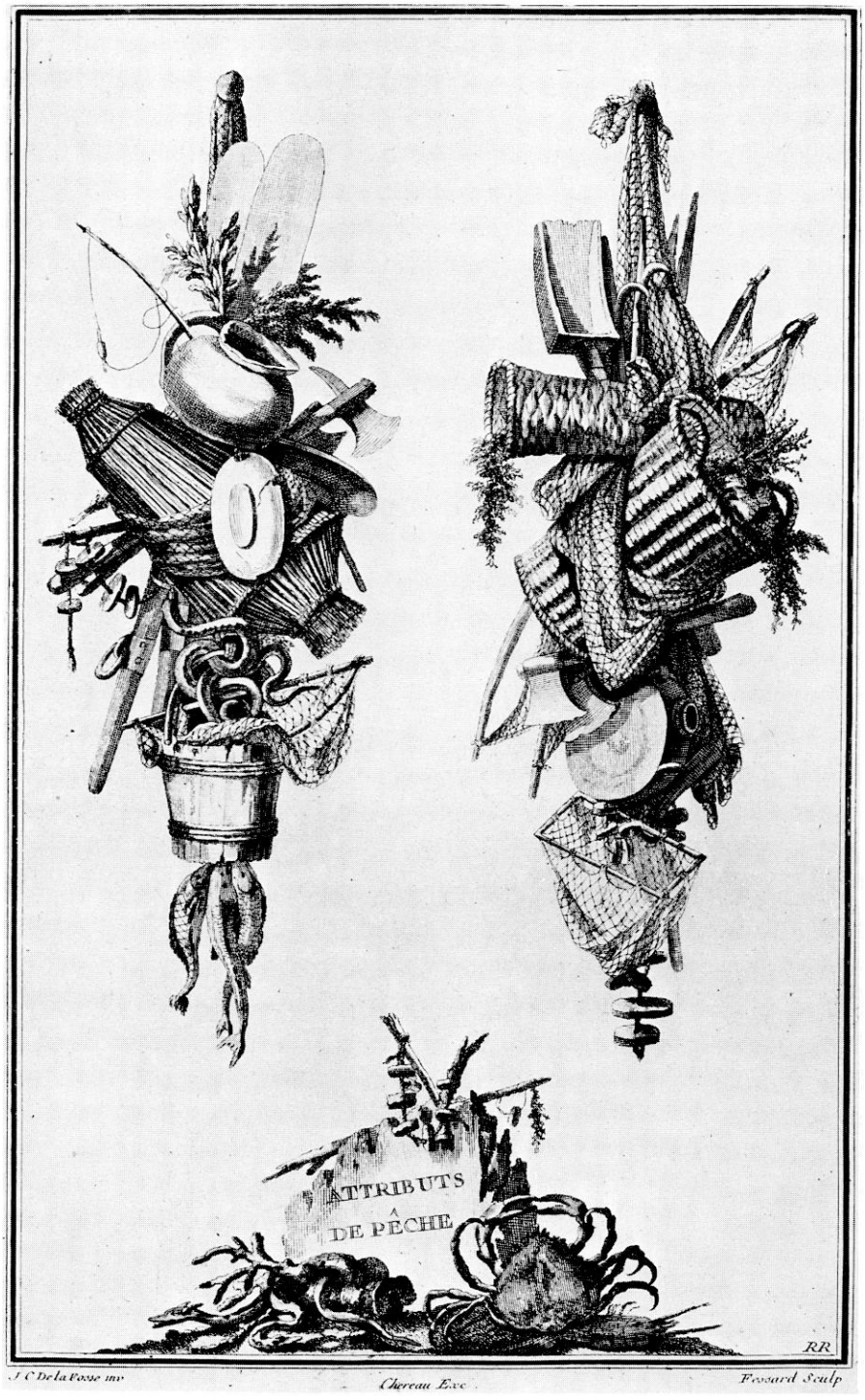


FIGURE 44: *"Attributs de Peche,"* engraved plate from Jean Charles Delafosse, *Nouvelle Iconologie Historique, Sec. RR: "Cinquieme Livre,"* Pl. 5, Paris, 1771—. Reproduced from the collection of the Library of Congress.

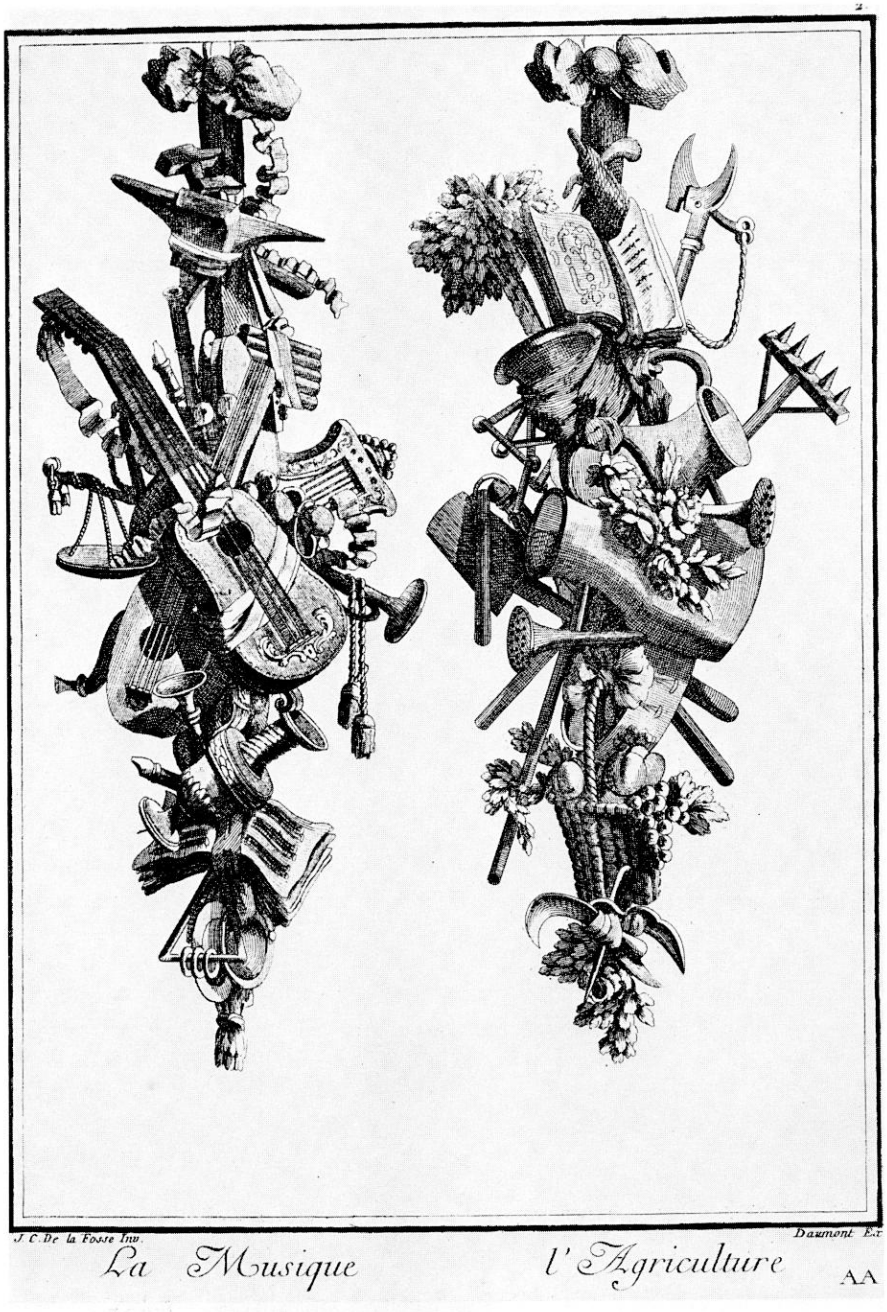


FIGURE 45: *"La Musique l'Agriculture,"* engraved plate from Jean Charles Delafosse, *Troisieme Partie de Livre Relative a l'Ameublement, Sec. AA,* Pl. 2, *c.* 1770. (Reproduction by Heliogravure by C. Foulard, Paris, 1907.) Reproduced from the collection of the Library of Congress.

Borders

With the "land and marine" trophies, documentary information in the written description of the Senate carpet ends, leaving many details to the imagination. What the borders of the original Senate carpet may have been like, or whether it had other ornamentation within these borders, the eighteenth century correspondent does not divulge. What is certain is that the borders and additional ornamentation of the Lansdowne family of Axminster carpets were eminently neoclassical, appeared in other carpets of the period, and that their choice for the hypothetical reconstruction of the Senate carpet is in keeping with the rest of the design.

The layout of the Lansdowne type carpets, in geometrical sections with strong verticals as well as a horizontal sweep, is characteristic of other carpets of the period, from the carpet at Syon House dating from 1758 to those at Harewood House, made some thirty years later at the beginning of the 1790's. The principal compartments are separated into rectangular, circular, and diamond shapes by clean lines, uncluttered by projecting forms or busy naturalistic representations, as austere and unemotional in their own way as the columns, pediments, and architraves of Palladian architecture. Thus these separating lines, the borders of the compartments, take on great importance as delineators, defining and emphasizing the orderly symmetry of the overall design. How right and proper that they should find their origins in classical architecture, and particularly in the wall paintings studied by the neoclassicists in Rome and Herculaneum, and popularized in England by the prolific Robert Adam.

The outer guard border at the very edge of the Lansdowne carpet is a two-dimensional reflection of the cornice moldings of classical architecture; two stripes, one dark, one lighter, give a firm and solid edge enclosing the decorated space of the carpet, just as these moldings did on ancient buildings. It is also a border which appears frequently in other carpets attributed to the Axminster factory.

The inner guard border, next to the main border, is drawn from those borders at Pompeii and Herculaneum which separated walls and ceilings into harmonious compartments essential to the breaking up of an expanse of space for decoration with small paintings of figures "en vignette." Here the "husk" chain, or string of bellflowers, appeared again and again. Robert Adam borrowed it directly and used it frequently; he festooned the Axminster carpet for the music room at Harewood House with swags of it in the central area, and at Saltram it is once again a guard border like the ones in the Lansdowne carpets. In the Senate Chamber of 1791, the cornice was dentilled and there was no other decoration, but in 1793 when the room was enlarged, a bellflower frieze was added, an indication, perhaps, that it was a repeat motif, so that in typical neoclassical fashion, it would have matched other elements of the room's design.

In Oriental carpets, borders like these can frequently be indicators of place of manufacture, but in the instance of English carpets, borders seem to have been pirated and copied back and forth by various makers. A case in point is the main border of the Lansdowne

carpet, which has been cut off the carpet in the Metropolitan Museum but which remains on several other versions including the carpet in the Victoria and Albert Museum. This border of repeated diamond shapes occurs commonly at Herculaneum, and embellished with rosettes, is found in the Adam-designed Axminster carpets at Saltram, in the Adam-Thomas Moore carpets at Osterley Park, and in a drawing by Adam for a carpet for Shelburne House, London. The design occurs in the Lansdowne type carpets and appears again in precisely the same form in a carpet for Carleton House, now in the Royal Collections. At first, on the basis of this border, the Carleton House carpet was attributed to Axminster, but it has recently been found to be by Thomas Moore, and has his characteristic counting warps.[25]

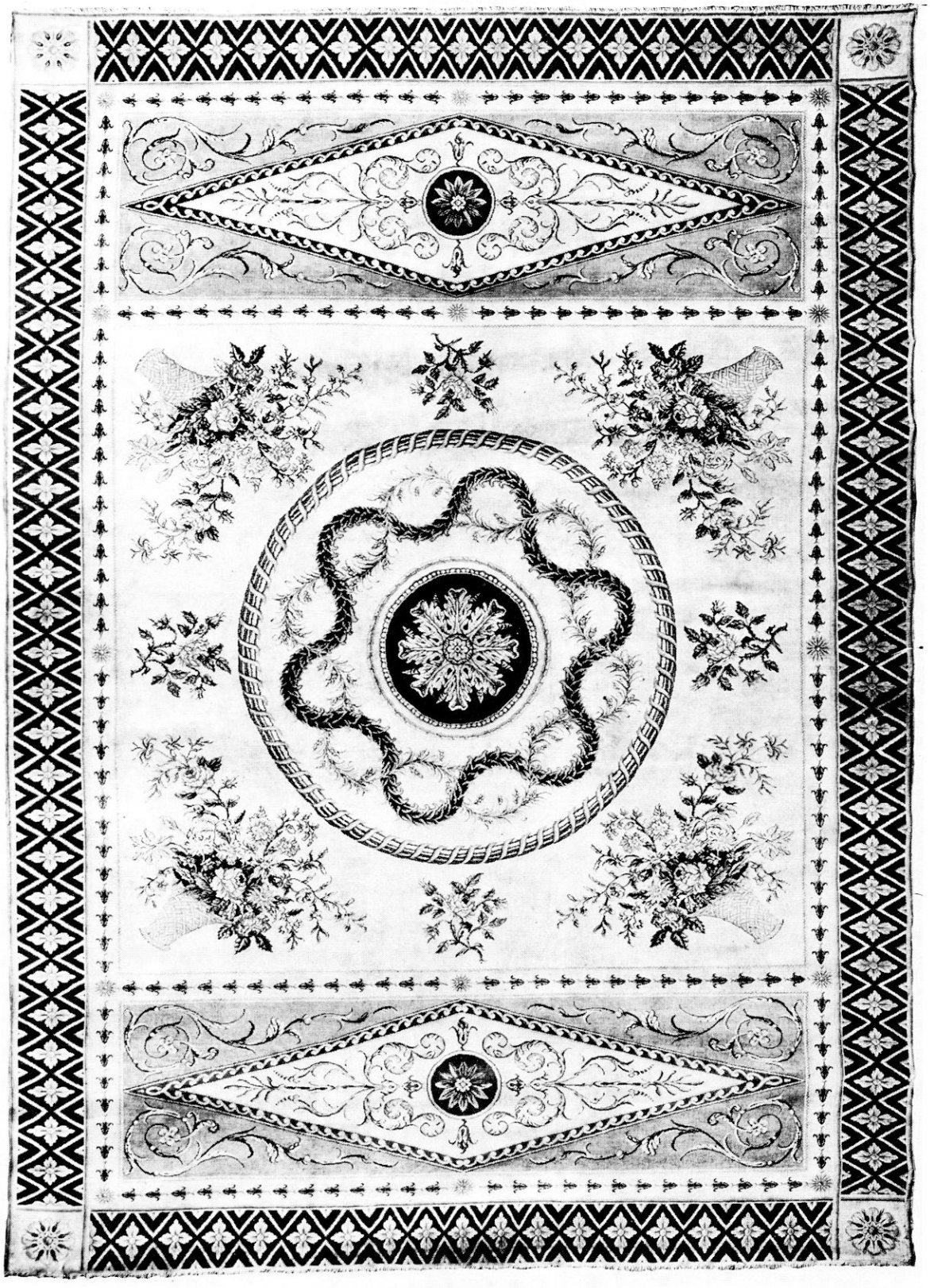
Two other borders were borrowed from the Lansdowne carpet for the Senate carpet reconstruction: the Vitruvian scroll surrounding the trophies, and the fasces around the chain of states in the center. The Vitruvian scroll appears frequently in classical ornament and particularly in mosaics at Herculaneum, where Robert Adam adopted it for his repertoire. It appears in his furniture designs, and is found in his music room carpet at Harewood House, where it also occurs in the ceiling decoration.

The fasces border around the central medallion was a classical motif as well, a symbol of authority carried before Roman magistrates. At the same time, it was a neoclassical favorite; an example is the luxurious Thomas Moore carpet at Osterley Park designed by Robert Adam, which also has a center fasces border.

Finally, the Senate carpet has one other conjectural element of ornamentation based on the Lansdowne carpet which did not appear in the newspaper description; this is the rinceau scroll design which appears in the corners of the trophy compartments. Again, these motifs derive from wall paintings and mosaics at Herculaneum and Rome, and were a well-established element of neoclassical design. Engraved by Robert Adam and by Giambattista Piranesi from Roman examples, the rinceau was an easy motif to adapt for decorative use, especially to fill in spandrel shaped corners, as in the Lansdowne carpet. If any motif can be called a neoclassical cliché, it is the rinceau. They are everywhere in the designs of Robert Adam and the drawings of designers associated with him such as Michael Angelo Pergolesi.

Any discussion of the Senate carpet cannot be complete without mention of the brilliant and varied colors therein. From the paid bills of 1793, it was obvious that part of the carpet had a black ground, and part a green ground, since these colors were employed in its repair. Some hypothesizing, with the aid of arithmetic using yardage figures, suggested that the central compartment had been black, and the side compartments green. At first, one thought of Robert Adam's color schemes for ceilings, which included many, but subdued, colors. Looking more closely at Axminster carpets, however, the range and depth, in fact nearly garish intensity, of colors (now faded to a surface pastel) suggested that the Senate carpet had been very colorful indeed. A careful inventory of Axminster colors showed that an infinity of shades was proper for a 1790's date, but that several

FIGURE 46: Axminster carpet of the "Lansdowne type," *c.* 1775. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



colors predominated. The Lansdowne family of carpets and the Axminsters at Saltram House and Harewood House were especially important in determining colors used in the conjectural reproduction of the Senate carpet, particularly in the choice of greens for the background of the trophy compartments, and the pinks of the border and the trophy sections themselves. Some twenty-eight colors appear in the reproduction carpet, all of which are based on Axminster colors of the 1770-1790 period.

The Senate and Republican Respectability

"Splendor, when applied to government, brought into my mind, instead of the highest perfection, all the faulty finery, brilliant scenes, and expensive trappings of royal government, and impressed my mind with an ideal quite the reverse of republican respectability which I thought consisted in form and prudent councils, frugality, and economy," wrote William Maclay, Senator from Pennsylvania, in his *Journal* for May 7, 1789.[1]

How, then, when the Senate moved to Philadelphia, could Maclay bring himself to enter a room full of furniture constructed by Philadelphia's most fashionable cabinetmaker, with the sort of carpet heretofore used only by wealthy and highborn English noblemen? How could other Americans, convinced that simplicity best served the people and that luxury led to the downfall of empires, reconcile their elegant chamber hung with aristocratic crimson silk and embellished with court portraits of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, with their frugal republican consciences?

The answer to these questions is complex, and involves American society's attitude towards aristocracy and towards the Senate, and the way the United States approached the questions of art if not luxury in government.

Taking the carpet out of context, one might conclude that the Senate thought of itself as a body of nobles like the House of Lords, which met in a luxuriously furnished chamber in the Palace of Westminster. That this is not altogether true is demonstrated by the caustic comments of William Maclay, and there were others like him. But in many ways, there was an attitude of superiority among the Senators, some of whom, privately at least, thought of themselves as privileged members of an aristocratic class. The seeming contradiction between this attitude and the principles of democracy can be explained by examining what the eighteenth century understood by the word "aristocracy."

In England the "aristocracy" were gentry of noble birth. No one could gain entrance to this feudal hierarchy of nobles except by marrying into it or, rarely, by being knighted. Next to this class was a group composed of lawyers, high civil servants like Prime Minister

Robert Walpole, wealthy merchants, and governors of the Bank of England and the great chartered companies. Educated, cultivated, interested in the arts, they did not enjoy the same privileges of name as the aristocracy, but they had the same habits. They lived grandly, their families enjoyed a leisured existence in great mansions, and they spent as much on food and servants as any Peer of the Realm. Below this "beau monde" were tradesmen, country squires, provincial lawyers, and others with less wealth but high social standing. These were the heads of provincial society.

An unquestioned assumption supported this hierarchy: one's position in life was God-given, a mark of one's natural rank, and not to be tampered with. The beau monde was as proud of its position as the nobility; the middle class, while imitating the manners and life style of the gentry, did not aspire to enter the aristocracy in fact.

In America, however, things were quite different; no matter how natural the class system appeared to Americans, no person in America was an "aristocrat" in the English sense. That hierarchy seemed right and that one's position in it seemed God's will was as true in America as in England, but the harsh reality of an America newly won from the forests meant the demise of the feudal nobility as it was known in England. The constant hard work required of every plantation owner and wealthy landowner or merchant meant that there could be no real leisure class devoted to amusement and frivolity, as in England.

Instead, a new aristocracy of landholders and merchants arose, whose members had their beginnings as younger sons or daughters of English gentry or as penniless small farmers who built their lands through shrewd management into large estates. By the late eighteenth century there were a number of wealthy (by American standards; in England their fortunes would have been small indeed) merchants and farmers with large landholdings, numbers of wealthy families from the ranks of the law and the clergy, and officers of the victorious American army, to make the beginnings of an American upper class. In the South there were plantation owners, somewhat analogous to the noble country squires of England, who indeed thought of themselves as aristocrats and adopted what habits of the noble English families their means allowed.

Members of this upper class, however, of necessity devoted long hours to their work and, unlike many of their English counterparts, had been influenced enough by Enlightenment philosophy to devote themselves to the community at large instead of abandoning themselves completely to the extravagancies of easy living. These Americans studied science and literature, participated in local governments, contributed to education and religion, founded benevolent and humanitarian societies, and carried on other charitable works, lending a solid moral tone to their lives.

A new meaning of "aristocracy" emerged, a meaning congruent with the thinking of Thomas Jefferson and other American intellectuals of the Enlightenment. According to Enlightenment theory, when everyone was educated and equal opportunity reigned, talent would rise to the top. Because it would be a natural process, everyone else would respect this morally and intellectually superior "aristocracy" of talent. Society would be well organized; with

everyone in his natural place there would be no disorder.

Jefferson summarized it this way:

> It is generally true that people will be happiest whose laws are best, and are best administered, and that laws will be wisely formed, and honestly administered, in proportion as those who form and administer them are wise and honest; whence it becomes expedient for promoting the publick happiness that those persons, whom nature hath endowed with genius and virtue, should be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens and that they should be called to that charge without regard to wealth, birth or other accidental condition or circumstance.[2]

To the founding fathers, and indeed to most Americans in 1787, when the Senate took final form, the people of "genius and virtue" were the members of this new aristocracy, who had risen to the top of American society through the exercise of their natural ability and shrewdness. In this vein it is not surprising that many Senators believed themselves to be, in Jefferson's words, "the aristocracy of virtue and talent, which nature has wisely provided for the direction of the interests of society."[3]

This idea was reflected in debates during the Constitutional Convention of 1787, when the make-up of the Senate was decided upon. From the outset, it was agreed that the Senate should "control the democratic branch," give "stability" to the government, and in James Madison's words, "protect the people against the transient impressions in which they themselves might be led."[4] Others felt that rule solely by a popularly elected House of Representatives might be dangerously close to the tyranny of the mob. The Senate should be designed as a check against this dire possibility. Few disagreed with this position with its implicit understanding that it was possible to find persons of sufficient wisdom and authority to carry the day against popular but perhaps unwise expediencies.

Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut proposed that "wisdom" be one of the characteristics of the Senate, and Charles Pinckney added that, "the Senate might be supposed to contain the fittest men." Pinckney even hoped it would become a "school of Public Ministers, a nursery of statesmen."[5] Never far from their minds was classical precedent: the Roman Senate, without which, they believed, Rome would never have flourished, was a patrician body composed of men who had in some way made a great contribution to the state.

After wrangling over the question of proportional representation in the Legislature, the Convention decided in "the Great Compromise" of July 16, 1787, that the states would have equal representation in the Senate, and proportional representation in the House. This alone gave the Senate a certain distinction by defining it as a smaller, more manageable body, less subject to diversions and more able to deliberate slowly, independently and in a dignified manner. To ensure that the "fittest" and "wisest" men would enter the Senate, the Convention voted to adopt Madison's proposals to "refine the appointment [of Senators] by successive filtrations."[6]

They decided to elevate the Senators above the people by requiring them to be chosen by the state legislatures, removing them from what they regarded as the whim of direct election, a procedure which was not abandoned until 1913. In addition, the Convention prescribed a minimum age for Senators of thirty years, five more than for members of the House of Representatives, and a six year term, thus encouraging the wisdom of age, and the freedom to deliberate occasioned by lack of pressure for re-election.

In this way the form of the Senate emerged, carefully designed as a group not of propertied men, but of men of proven virtue and talent, recognizable to all people because they were chosen by state legislators, who were themselves men of distinction. Again and again the idea that the Senate would be an "aristocracy" crept in on both sides of each question debated in the Convention, but the sting of the word was largely removed by its special American connotation of moral strength, wisdom, and experience.

It is interesting to note that the members of the Constitutional Convention were themselves idolized as a kind of Senate of talent and wisdom. On July 4, 1787, James Campbell gave an oration in the German Lutheran Church on Race Street in which he addressed the members of the Convention as "Illustrious Senate!"[7] From France Thomas Jefferson looked upon its members as "an assembly of demigods."[8] The *Pennsylvania Gazette* of August 22, 1787 praised it: "Such a body of enlightened and honest men perhaps never before met for political purposes, in any country upon the face of the earth." Some of this feeling was bound to carry over to the Senate of the First Congress, in which one third of the Senators had been members of the Convention.

There was, however, another current at work in American thinking which kept the Senate from bedecking its chamber with tapestries and gilt as in the House of Lords. This was an almost pathological fear of luxury in government, and it is this which, above all, William Maclay expressed in the statement which opened this discussion. More than anything else, profligate luxury stood in American minds for all the failings of monarchy. Do away with the court and the nobility, the two groups most guilty of misusing luxury in England, and society would be the better in all respects. In America, consciously patterning itself on the best examples of history, luxury could be clearly identified as a major cause of the destruction of Troy and Ninevah, the downfall of the Roman Empire, the excesses of Renaissance Popes, the oppressive actions of George III, and now in 1789 the tottering of the monarchy in France. In view of this, Thomas Jefferson insisted, "I am for a government rigorously frugal and simple."[9] Agreed John Adams, praising the American Constitution, "luxury is less dangerous in a mixed government than any other, has less tendency to prevail; and is much more easily restrained to such persons and objects as will be least detrimental to the public good."[10]

If luxury in government was to be feared and expunged, this did not mean that there could be no decoration, no ornament, no ceremony in its conduct. Indeed, there was a reason why "restrained" luxury could be permitted, even encouraged, in the chambers devoted to the business of State. Although never could a republican

government allow extravagance and frivolity, the United States needed to set an example of "good taste" before the world. Suddenly, as Jefferson noted in his inaugural speech of 1801, America freed from European domination had become, "A rising nation, spread over a wide and fruitful land, traversing all the seas with the rich productions of her industry, engaged in commerce with nations who feel power and forget right, advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eyes."[11]

When, as they always did while evaluating their situation, Americans looked back to classical times, they saw evolutionary cycles of development for each nation and empire of the past, first an optimistic rise to a period of glory, then, slowly, decline and fall. In comparison with these ancient empires America was on the rise, at the beginning of a cycle, a truly young nation. Moreover, because the founding fathers had consciously attempted to choose the best from history on which to model their new American society, changing and adapting to fit the American condition, this Republic would be the finest the world had ever seen, "advancing to destinies beyond mortal eyes."

In all things the United States would set an example for the rest of the world. The carefully selected "mixed" form of government would produce the happiest citizenry, which would produce the most plentiful crops in its fields and most useful inventions for its manufactories. The enterprise of its merchants would spread American commerce around the world.

Neither would the United States take second place in the fine arts. Joseph Hopkinson summed up in 1810 an attitude which had prevailed ever since the country had recovered from the devastation of the Revolutionary War: "The sagacity, ardour, and inventive ingenuity of the American character are all calculated to carry us to a high state of perfection in the arts," he said at the inauguration of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Here again, America could take the best of what Europe had to offer, "the honest industry, the cultivated intellect, the refined taste and improved genius which comes to enrich," and transplant it to American soil to be expanded and improved by American resourcefulness.[12]

Rumors were rife in Europe that the American climate was unsuitable for the development of the fine arts, and that already Americans were barbarians when it came to culture and good taste. To counteract these suspicions, every element in American official conduct needed to show off American good taste and prove that Americans were as capable as anyone else of appreciating the finer points of life.

This is what Jefferson meant when in mid-construction he urged the redesigning of the State Capitol in Virginia, "weighing the loss of what had already been begun" to another design against "the comfort of laying out the public money for something honorable, the satisfaction of seeing an object and proof of national good taste, and the regret and mortification of erecting a monument of our barbarism, which shall be loaded with execrations as long as it shall endure."[13] Jefferson considered himself a man of great good taste in an age when "good taste," like "knowledge," was a universal and eternal truth, a mark of the classical hero which could be approached

and grasped by the truly enlightened and cultivated mind. He did not apologize for his enthusiasm for the fine arts, since "its object is to improve the taste of my countrymen, to increase their reputation, to reconcile to them the respect of the world, and procure them its praise."[14]

To procure the praise of the world, then, as well as to please the aristocratic tastes of the Senators, the chamber on the second floor of Congress Hall acquired simple but elegant chairs and desks of the finest construction and design then available, silk damask curtains; and accepted for its walls the gift of portraits of the King and Queen of France who had come so unhesitatingly to the aid of the country during the Revolution. An elegant green and red silk canopy true to parliamentary tradition was designed to hang over and around the Vice-President's chair, to demonstrate to the world the importance and dignity of his position as second officer of this new and soon-to-be glorious nation. A luxurious neoclassical carpet was designed in America to provide yet another demonstration of good taste and right thinking. That the carpet should be neoclassical in design was almost a foregone conclusion, because Americans of the late eighteenth century looked at the world through eyes dazzled by the glory of the ancients.

They identified themselves with classical heroes, had busts of themselves sculptured wearing classical garb, and even referred to each other as "new Romans." The education of a man of taste, wisdom, and virtue began with the study of the classics. Young men learned to score points at debate by quoting classical precedent. Later, they discovered what they hoped would be the road to the perfect republic in the study of the rise and fall of classical empires. From these studies emerged the American hero: working unselfishly for the public good, the best American possessed the Roman virtues of gravity, integrity, courage, simplicity, and a firm respect for law.[15] Patrick Henry spoke like a classical orator; he reminded Thomas Jefferson of Homer. George Washington's chiseled face, dignified bearing, and direct, cool gaze even gave him the look of a Roman hero. Washington was such a perfect embodiment of the virtues of the classical hero he was sometimes referred to as "the new Cincinnatus."

In every debate throughout the Revolutionary period, the classics were called to witness. John Adams, writing a *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* in 1787, spent a whole volume discussing classical forms of government. The debates in the Constitutional Convention of 1787 referred constantly to ancient precedent. The *Federalist Papers,* written over the pen name "Publius," argued for the adoption of the Constitution by citing examples from Greek and Roman history. Letters opposing *The Federalist* appeared in contemporary newspapers; their authors signed themselves Cato and Caesar.

Every important controversy called forth appeals to the classical past. In the debates on the formation of the Senate, members of the Convention of 1787 looked to the Senates of Rome, Carthage, Athens, and Sparta. James Wilson argued that liberty had been lost in Carthage and Rome when the mob encroached on the authority of the Senate. James Madison wrote in the *Federalist Papers:* "There was

no long-lived republic that did not have a Senate," and described how the Senates of Sparta, Rome, and Carthage served as "an anchor against popular fluctuations."[16] He proposed that the Senate be small, like the Areopagus of Athens. The word "Senate" itself was a classical allusion.

In the end, the Senate was not patterned directly after the Senates of ancient times. Partly this was because members of the Convention never intended to borrow directly from Rome. Instead, as everyone did in the eighteenth century, they read and quoted classical texts for effect, selecting the ideas that suited them. As Richard M. Gummere observed in *The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition*, frequently the same classical passage was used as an illustration for both sides of an argument. "Instead of theorizing, they took from the past whatever was relevant to their own concerns and transmitted the material into their own language .... They were 'amateurs' rather than 'professionals,' and their leaders ... were interested in the spirit rather than the techniques of Greece and Rome."[17]

So it was with art. The neoclassical style suited these men with its clean simplicity and rational proportions. Here again, however, the forms of the past were not copied directly but adapted to fit particular situations. Jefferson based his designs for Monticello not on one specific classical example, but on many, taking versions of the architectural orders from Palladio, James Gibbs, and Robert Morris, books by all of whom he owned. In the interior, he combined various Roman elements taken from Desgodetz *Édifices Antiques de Rome*.

The neoclassic also appealed to American leaders, because, in the words of Neil Harris, "it made up the stylistic negation of luxury. To build in the classic, to stress the simple, to emphasize realism in portraiture and geometry in architecture meant an eschewal of elaborate ornament and an avoidance of the visual richness which, to Americans like Jefferson, hung over the decayed Continent like an evil breath of tyranny."[18] In 1793 the Commissioners of the City of Washington wrote of their building plans for the Federal City, "We wish to exhibit a grandeur of conception, a Republican simplicity, and that true elegance of proportion which correspond to a tempered freedom excluding Frivolity."[19] In search of workers trained in the neoclassical style, the Commissioners went to France. It is clear that the neoclassic represented "Republican simplicity" to them; their words are an echo of William Maclay, in his search for "republican respectability, frugality, and economy."

With this classical background in mind, and with an understanding of the cultural milieu which produced it, the twentieth century observer can find in the Senate carpet a door to the past, to the mind and feelings of the men who gave this country its first impetus toward confidence and stability. As an object, its neoclassical symbols and luxurious modernity (for its day), were revelatory of men whose world view encompassed both respect for the past and optimism for a future where classical ideas of moderation and self control would produce a serene and just republic. It is not too much to take quite seriously the remark, meant humorously, of the anonymous newspaper writer of 1791, who called it "the most splendid carpet that ever was made."



NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Jules David Prown, "Style in American Art 1750–1800," in *American Art, 1750–1800; Towards Independence* (Boston, 1976), p. 32.
2. Ibid., p. 39.

CHAPTER I

A Masterpiece for the Senate

1. *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States* (1789), comp. Joseph Gales (Washington: 1834), p. 85.
2. William Maclay, *Journal of William Maclay, United States Senator from Pennsylvania, 1789–1791*, ed. Edgar S. Maclay (New York: 1890), pp. 293, 311.
3. George Washington to Oliver Wolcott, Sr., July 4, 1790, quoted in Oliver Wolcott, *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams*, ed. George Gibbs (New York: 1846), p. 48.
4. "Amount of Disbursements paid by the Commissioners of the City and County of Philadelphia, for fitting the New County Court House, for the accommodation of Congress (1791)," MS, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, hereinafter cited as PHMC.
5. "Extracts from the Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer, 1768–1798," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, XVI (1892), 414, hereinafter cited as *PMHB*. Entry for Dec. 3, 1790.
6. "Voucher #180, Vouchers, Jan. 1793 #175–#199, Congress Hall, Phila. 1790's," MS, PHMC.
7. Because the iron mordant used to dye wool black was caustic, it is possible, even probable, that the brown-black background of the carpet's central medallion simply disintegrated. The side panels were more likely to survive, since green was a color which did not damage wool fibers.

CHAPTER II

Floorcoverings in America to 1800

1. Tobias Lear to Clement Biddle, Feb. 10, 1790, in *Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Source*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington: 1931–34), Vol. 31, 8–9.
2. John Fanning Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia*, ed. Willis P. Hazard (rev. ed. Philadelphia: 1898), I, 205.
3. Information on Thomas Moore from Wendy Hefford, "Thomas Moore of Moorfields," *Burlington Magazine*, no. 897, CXIX (December, 1977), 840–848.
4. Thomas Whitty, "A retrospective view of the origin and progress of the Axminster Carpet Manufactory, written in the year 1790," quoted in Bertram Jacobs, *Axminster Carpets* (Leigh-on-Sea, England: 1970), pp. 21–29.
5. Hefford, p. 848

.TE VI: Restored Senate Chamber in
ngress Hall, Philadelphia.

oto © Bernie Cleff.

6. "Tow" refers to short, broken and ravelled fibers selected out of the finer, longer threads destined for the manufacture of fine linen. They were used to make rough yarns.
7. Rev. Edward D. Clarke, *A Tour through the South of England, Wales and part of Ireland made during the summer of 1791* (London: 1793), pp. 48–49.
8. New York advertisements quoted in Rita Gottesman, comp., *The Arts and Crafts in New York 1726–1776* (New York: 1970), pp. 125–6, and *The Arts and Crafts in New York 1777–1799* (New York: 1954), p. 132.
9. Margaret L. Brown, "Mr. and Mrs. William Bingham, Rulers of the Republican Court," *PMHB*, LXI (1937), 286–324.
10. Henry Wansey, *Henry Wansey and his American Journal*, ed. David J. Jeremy (Philadelphia: 1970), p. 105, entry for Sunday, June 8, 1794. This passage implies that Moorfields and Axminster carpets could be identified on the basis of design or pattern. Indeed, documents at Uppark, Sussex, show that its Moorfields carpet was a "stock" pattern, and suggests that other patterns may have been produced in numbers as well.

CHAPTER III

English Influences in Design

1. Robert Adam and James Adam, *Works in Architecture* (London: 1773), I, Preface.
2. Clifford Musgrave, "Architecture," in *The Late Georgian Period, 1760–1810* (London: 1961), p. 19.
3. Robert Adam quoted in Musgrave, p. 20.
4. James Wyatt to George III, quoted in Musgrave, p. 26.
5. It is interesting to compare three Axminster products designed for Devonshire House in London, built in the 1730's by William Kent, with the neoclassical carpets of a later fashion. Thoroughly baroque in design, the Devonshire House carpets, now at Chatsworth, are worlds apart from the Adam designed carpets for Saltram House with their geometric compartments, balanced rosettes and precise rinceaux. Nor were they designed to reflect a ceiling or to fit into a closely knit overall scheme; Devonshire House (demolished earlier in this century), had restrained baroque moldings and deep vaulted ceilings with unusually simple medallions. Here the carpets were the most ornate part of the overall scheme.

CHAPTER IV

William Peter Sprague, Carpet Manufacturer

1. Jacobs, p. 35.
2. Clipping of obituary of Mary W. Strickland, April 22, 1848, Pittsburgh, exact source unidentified.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Description of house at 422 North Third, and pew information, from "Campington Pew Acct., (1793–1794)," MS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.
5. No will could be located in Philadelphia records, indicating that he probably died intestate.
6. Pardoe Yates, President of the Wilton Company in England, who had bought the Axminster looms in 1836 and moved the business to Wilton, founded an American branch in Elizabethport, New Jersey in 1891. Hand-knotted carpets were made there for a short time, but the factory lost money and closed after only a few years. Jacobs, p. 65.
7. Much of the following material is taken from John C. Milley, "Furnishings Plan for the Second Floor of Congress Hall," (Part D), Oct. 1965, Report, Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia.

8. A new inspection in 1977 by the present author confirmed this report.
9. See Frank H. Sommer, "Emblem and Device: The Origin of the Great Seal of the United States," *The Art Quarterly*, Vol. 24 (Spring, 1961), 56–76.
10. Neither Mt. Vernon nor the Smithsonian Institution attribute the carpet to Sprague, as stated by Rodris Roth in *Floor Coverings in 18th Century America*, Paper 59, *U.S. National Museum Bulletin*, 250 (Washington: 1967), p. 43.

CHAPTER V

Elements of Design in the Senate's Carpet

1. The locations of the six "Lansdowne design" carpets which survive are: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; Boscobel, Garrison, New York; Rockbeare Manor, Devonshire, England; Stourhead, Wiltshire, England. These carpets will be referred to generally as "the Lansdowne carpets" for the sake of simplicity.
2. Thomas Fitzsimons to Miers Fisher, Esqr. New York, July 16, 1790, Miers Fisher Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Charles Avery, "Antwerp, August 1577," *Connoisseur*, Vol. 195, no. 786 (August, 1977), 252.
5. Cited in Alfred Coxe Prime, *The Arts and Crafts in Philadelphia, Maryland and South Carolina, 1721–1785* (Topsfield, Mass.: 1929), p. 193.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 31.
7. William Barton, "Report, June 19, 1782," quoted in Gaillard Hunt, *The History of the Seal of the United States* (Washington: 1909), p. 37.
8. Charles Thomson, "Report to Congress, June 20, 1782," quoted in Hunt, p. 42.
9. The symbol in heraldry which resembled the five-pointed star familiar to us today was really not a star, but a "mullet." The mullet, although frequently seen in family crests, including that of the Washington family, was inappropriate for the seal envisaged by Thomson and Barton. Instead of indicating the rising star of a new nation, it could be interpreted as a falling star, according to Edmondson, and thus might be charged with a connotation most unfavorable to the United States.
10. Sommer, "Emblem and Device: . . .," pp. 58, 68.
11. Not everyone agreed, however. Benjamin Franklin for one, was horrified:

    "... I wish the bald eagle had not been chosen as the representative of our country; he is a bird of bad moral character; he does not get his living honestly; you may have seen him perched on some dead tree, where, too lazy to fish for himself, he watches the labor of the fishing-hawk; and, when that diligent bird has at length taken a fish, and is bearing it to his nest... the bald eagle pursues him and takes it from him.... Besides, he is a rank coward; the little king-bird, not bigger than a sparrow, attacks him boldly and drives him out of the district.... / I am, on this account, not displeased that the figure is not known as a bald eagle, but looks more like a turkey." Benjamin Franklin, *The Complete Works of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. John Bigelow (New York: 1888), VIII, 444–45.
12. Philip M. Isaacson, *The American Eagle* (Boston: 1975), p. 39.
13. At Osterley Park a whole sequence of rooms is tied together by means of this motif used first in woodwork, then as a plaster decoration for a cornice, in an embroidered fire screen, and finally as the main motif of a luxurious bedside carpet made by Thomas Moore.
14. B. J. Cigrand, *Story of the Great Seal* (Chicago: 1903), p. 156.

15. Hunt, p. 14. On all representations of the chain of states which name or abbreviate the states, they are, in order from top center, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. This was a traditional arrangement based on the north to south order in which the States' representatives had been arranged during the Continental Congress, and the order in which they signed the Declaration of Independence.
16. Barton, as quoted in Hunt, p. 26.
17. For a lengthy discussion of the development of the liberty pole and cap, and of their use with "Britannia," see Bobbye Burke, "The Liberty Cap in America and France" (Master's Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1971), and Frank H. Sommer, "The Metamorphoses of Britannia," in *American Art: 1750–1800, Towards Independence,* Charles F. Montgomery and Patricia E. Kane, general eds. (Boston: 1976), pp. 40–49.
18. Joseph Richardson, *Iconology* (London: 1779), p. 39.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
20. Inigo Jones used crossed cornucopias as early as 1640. Isaac Ware, giving directions in 1767 for designing ceilings, declared that "in the corners there will very properly stand so many cornucopias," which, he thought, "answer very well to this space." Isaac Ware, *A Complete Body of Architecture* (London: 1767), p. 544.
21. George Washington, *Diaries,* ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Boston: 1925), Vol. 4, 34.
22. François Blondel, *Cours d'Architecture* (Paris: 1698, Seconde Partie), p. 175. Translation by Susan Anderson.
23. Edgar A. Werner, *Civil List and Constitutional History of the Colony and State of New York* (Albany: 1884), p. 144.
24. Catherine Lynn Frangiamore, "Landscape Wallpaper in the Jeremiah Lee Mansion," *Antiques,* CXII, 6 (December, 1977), 1175.
25. Hefford, p. 848.

CHAPTER VI

The Senate and Republican Respectability

1. Maclay, p. 22.
2. Thomas Jefferson, "Preamble to the Bill for General Diffusion of Knowledge. Revised Laws of the State of Virginia, 1779," *Writings of Thomas Jefferson,* ed. P. L. Ford (New York: 1892), II, 220.
3. Thomas Jefferson, *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson,* eds. Adrienne Koch and William H. Peden (New York: 1944), p. 39.
4. Quoted in Charles Warren, *The Making of the Constitution* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1947), pp. 194–195.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
6. James Madison, *The Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787,* eds. Gaillard Hunt and James B. Scott (Washington: 1920), p. 33.
7. James Campbell to John Adams, July 4, 1787, quoted in Warren, p. 268.
8. Thomas Jefferson, *Papers,* ed. J. P. Boyd (Princeton: 1950), Vol. 4, 286.
9. Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, January 26, 1799, in *Life and Selected Writings,* p. 545.
10. John Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* (1788), III, in *The Works of John Adams,* ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: 1851), Vol. 6, 104.
11. Thomas Jefferson, "Inaugural Address, March 4, 1801," in *Life and Selected Writings,* p. 321.
12. Joseph Hopkinson, "Annual Discourse, Delivered Before the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 1810," reprinted in Gordon S. Wood, *The Rising Glory of America* (New York: 1971), pp. 318–334, quotations pp. 320, 321.

13. Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, September 20, 1785, in *Life and Selected Writings*, p. 381.
14. *Ibid.*
15. For an explanation of George Washington as an embodiment of classical virtues, see Marcus Cunliffe, *George Washington, Man and Monument* (Boston: 1958), p. 92, from which this list of virtues has been adapted.
16. James Madison, *The Federalist*, ed. Benjamin F. Wright (Cambridge, Mass.: 1961), No. 63, 415-416.
17. Richard M. Gummere, *The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1963), p. ix.
18. Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society* (New York: 1966), pp. 41-42.
19. From the report of the Commissioners of the City of Washington to the Municipality of Bordeaux. Washington, D.C., January 4, 1793, quoted in Harris, p. 42.

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