



PLASTER BITS

A PUBLICATION OF THE CENTER FOR PAINTED WALL PRESERVATION

A HOUSE THAT HAS IT ALL!



Over the years, the function and location of a dwelling can change. Roads move, towns relocate, leaving a structure in its original setting often without its original purpose. The Hersey Whitten House was built as a dance hall and Inn in Center Tuftonboro, NH. The upstairs walls are partitions that hinge up so they can change the configuration of the rooms, allowing for a dance, or separate lodging. It was one of four houses built for the Copp family in the area.

The center of Tuftonboro has long since moved. The house was purchased by the Hersey family around 1860. Additional barns were built, indicating that it was a working farm. There is anecdotal information that the upstairs rooms were used as dormitories for the farm workers who tended the crops. Over the years the house has undergone both structural and cosmetic changes, so it is with utter amazement that some 175 years later we find the painted murals and floors that adorned the front entry hall, stairwell and front parlor still intact.



These phenomenal painted surfaces are attributed to the School of John Avery, although no signature has been found to date. Many of the motifs resemble those found on other walls in New Hampshire that have been attributed to Avery- like the thumbprint grapes, fanciful black curlicues and puzzle piece background. At the Hersey House there is still wallpaper to be removed, so we have not given up hope that the artist may be identified by a signature.



The front entry hall and stairwell along with a front parlor have beautiful murals with delicate birds and grape vines amongst bold village scenes filled with people and animals. The entry hall walls are in fair condition with remnants of wallpaper still attached. The uncovered motifs show the exuberance of detail and fine brushwork particularly around the doorway to the parlor.





Below the chair rail in the parlor are wonderful vignettes cartouched in flourishes that resemble the traveling circus broadsides from the mid 1840-50s. The palette of colors is delicate and more varied than many of the documented Avery School murals. Pastel sky tones along with the introduction of a reddish-brown color in the foliage differentiates the walls from many of the other identified murals attributed to the Avery School.



Another interesting decorative element is the marbled floor of the parlor and entryway with a Payne's Gray veining on a gray background. The stairway also has a fanciful faux runner that covers the center portion of each of the hall stairs, each step slightly different than the one before, indicating that it was free hand painted, not stenciled...the fact that the painters were designers that incorporated their many skills makes the Hersey Whitten House one of the finest examples of attributed Avery School work that has been left intact.

The Center for Painted Wall Preservation is dedicated to documentation and preservation of the painted past of these buildings with decorated painted plaster from 1800-1860. We will be at the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance Old House and Barn Expo March 24-25 in Manchester, NH. Come visit us and share your interests and decorated walls.

We are a not-for-profit 501c (3) organization. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to help us continue our work, either by check or on our website.