

# “Northampton Mass” by Enoch Wood & Sons: A Design Source Discovery

by Dan Sousa

In 2021, Historic Deerfield—a museum located in Deerfield, Massachusetts—was the recipient of a generous gift of English transfer printed earthenware with American views from the estate of Joseph Peter Spang III. As a member of Historic Deerfield’s curatorial staff, I had the opportunity to examine many of these transfer printed wares, but one piece in particular caught my attention: a blue-printed platter from Enoch Wood and Son’s four medallion-floral border series with a print of the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C. on the front, but mismarked “Northampton Mass” on the reverse.<sup>1</sup> The mark on the back of the platter intrigued me more so than the view on the front due to its local relevance. “Northampton Mass,” an abbreviation for Northampton, Massachusetts, is located just south of Deerfield in New England’s Connecticut River Valley. Unaware that Wood produced a pattern with a view of Northampton, I immediately began to wonder what it might depict. Could it be a simple townscape, a street view, or a view of a local building? I had to find out!

American views on English transfer printed earthenware are, generally speaking, very well documented, and I turned first to several standard reference books for answers to my questions. The third edition of Ellouise Baker Larsen’s *American Historical Views on Staffordshire China* lists eight patterns from Enoch Wood and Sons four medallion-floral border series, but the list does not include “Northampton Mass.”<sup>2</sup> Instead, the only view titled “Northampton Mass” listed in Larsen’s book was produced by Charles Meigh of Hanley, not Enoch Wood. Meigh’s view, according to Larsen, is based on a drawing by W.H. Bartlett (1809-1854), which may depict Northampton’s Main Street.<sup>3</sup> David and Linda Arman’s *Historical Staffordshire: An Illustrated Check List* does include Wood’s “Northampton Mass” pattern, but it does not



**Figure 1 - “Northampton Mass” by Enoch Wood and Sons. Courtesy of the collection of Richard Crouch.**

provides images, nor does it describe or identify the view.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the *TCC Database* and a dozen other reference books and periodicals on American Historical Staffordshire provided no references to or images of Wood’s “Northampton Mass” pattern. What exactly the pattern depicted and the pattern’s design source, it seemed, had not yet been identified, or at the very least, documented in print.

Eventually, after reaching out to TCC members and searching online, I was able to obtain an image of a blue printed platter with the “Northampton Mass” pattern<sup>5</sup> (Figures 1 and 2). This particular pattern appears to be quite rare, as I was able to find only one additional example, a platter, in the collection of Historic Northampton (Northampton, Massachusetts).<sup>6</sup> As it turned out, the view was not of a townscape, but of a Greek Revival style building. My next question immediately became, what was the building depicted on the front of the



**Figure 2 - The pattern mark or title on the reverse of the platter in figure 1. Courtesy of the collection of Richard Crouch.**

platter? Was it a public building or a private home? A book on Greek Revival architecture in America ultimately provided me with the answer: the Bowers House of Northampton, Massachusetts.<sup>7</sup> Enoch Wood copied the design from an engraving by Fenner, Sears & Co. titled “Residence of Jos. Bowers, Northampton, Mass.,” which was based on a drawing by Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892) (Figure 3). It was published in London by I.T. Hinton & Simpkin & Marshall on November 1, 1830, and in-

cluded in John Howard Hinton's *The History and Topography of the United States* (1832).<sup>8</sup> Several other views from Enoch Wood's four medallion-floral border series were also copied from engravings by Fenner, Sears & Co. after drawings by Alexander Jackson Davis, including "Harvard University," "New Haven, State House," and "Residence of S. Russell."<sup>9</sup>

Designed by architect Ithiel Town (1784-1844) and completed in 1827 for Henry G. Bowers (1790-1845), the Bowers House was a masterpiece of Greek Revival architecture.<sup>10</sup> Its location, atop an elevated piece of land in the area of Northampton's Round Hill, only added to its magnificence.<sup>11</sup> The home's interior, as described by one 20th-century author, proved to be equally impressive as well:

"The walls were brick, surfaced with smooth plaster. The curved stair that soared up from the wide hall was a "magic stair," a delight of the time, its means of support an utter mystery. High-ceilinged rooms were crowned with moulded cornices and the door and window finish heavily wrought, with plaster-of-Paris rosettes in the paneled corner-blocks. No one ever again built so elegant a residence in this region."<sup>12</sup>

The home's imposing design appears not to have gone unnoticed, and, as noted by one architectural historian, "seems to have been the archetype for numerous impressive dwellings with central porticoes and side wings built thereafter and probably helped create or inspire the many other Greek Revival house types that quickly developed in New England at this time."<sup>13</sup> The house continued to stand throughout the 19th century, but was demolished in 1915. An apartment complex currently sits where the house once stood on Northampton's Prospect Street.<sup>14</sup>

Despite having identified the pattern and the pattern's design source, one question remained: why did Fenner, Sears & Co. title their engraving "Residence of Jos. Bowers, Northampton, Mass.," when, in fact, the house was commissioned by and belonged to Henry G. Bowers? "Jos." is an abbreviation for Joseph, but Henry G. Bowers does not appear to have had a son by that name; neither was I able to locate another family



**Figure 3 - The design source for Enoch Wood's "Northampton Mass" pattern: an engraving by Fenner, Sears & Co. after a drawing by Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892). Courtesy of the collection of Historic Northampton, Northampton, Massachusetts.**

member named Joseph who could have occupied the house around the time the engraving was made. My searches of subsequent owners of the house also did not yield anyone by the name of Joseph. All things considered, it seems quite likely—as noted in one history of the Bowers House—that the title of the engrav-

ing by Fenner, Sears & Co. is a mistake.<sup>15</sup>

Acknowledgements: The author thanks Marie Panik, Margaret Jesup, Amanda Lange, David Kurau, Nick Routson, Richard Crouch, David Hoexter, and Richard Halliday for their generous help and assistance preparing this article.

#### (Endnotes)

1. Mismarked English transferware from the early 19th century is not uncommon, especially among surviving examples with American views such as this platter. There are several possible explanations for how a mistake like this may have occurred. First, it could have been an error on the part of the engraver. Engraved copper plates used in the transfer printing process typically included both the pattern and the pattern title, which appeared together on the same side of the copper plate. It is possible that the engraver added the incorrect title to the copper plate from the very outset. Second, and perhaps more likely, it could have been an error on the part of the transferer, the individual responsible for applying the print to the pottery. After the engraved design was printed onto a tissue paper-like transfer medium, the tissue print was cut up into different sections by the transferer to facilitate the application of the print to the pottery. Cutting up the tissue print would have caused the title of the pattern to become separated from the pattern itself. This disassociation may have caused the pattern title to become mixed up with other titles, especially if the transferer was working with different patterns at the same time. The speed at which these wares were produced, along with the ability

of the transferer to read and their familiarity with the scene depicted in the pattern, may have also contributed to the mismarking of these wares. The author thanks Amanda Lange and Dr. Richard Halliday for these important insights.

2. Ellouise Baker Larsen, *American Historical Views on Staffordshire China*, 3rd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1975), 39-41.

3. *Ibid.*, 175.

4. David and Linda Arman, *Historical Staffordshire: An Illustrated Check List* (Danville, VA: Arman Enterprises, Inc., 1974), p. 93, no. 231.

5. To date, the "Northampton Mass" pattern has been found only on 9 1/2 in. platters. See Arman, *Historical Staffordshire*, p. 93, no. 231.

6. Accession number: 2014.14.1

7. Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1964), plate XLIII.

8. John Howard Hinton, *The History and Topography of the United States* (London: Published by Simpkin & Marshall & Thomas Wardle Philadelphia,

1832), 2:474-475.

9. Larsen, *American Historical Views on Staffordshire China*, 39-40.

10. Karl S. Putnam, "Northampton Architecture: A Sequence," in *The Northampton Book: Chapters from 300 Years in the Life of a New England Town, 1654-1954* (Northampton, MA: The Tercentenary Committee, 1954), 148.

11. Henry S. Gere, *Reminiscences of Old Northampton* (Northampton, MA: Gazette Printing Company, 1902), 14-15.

12. Putnam, "Northampton Architecture," 148.

13. Daniel D. Reiff, *Houses from Books: Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950: A History and Guide* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 45.

14. Juliette Tomlinson, *The Bowers House Northampton, Massachusetts: Two Views by Alexander Jackson Davis* (Springfield, MA: Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, 1954).

15. *Ibid.*