Painted Ambitions:
The Masonic Murals in the Elisha Gilbert House

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Abstract

This article investigates the masonic murals in the Elisha Gilbert House in New Lebanon, NY, looking into the circumstances of their creation, and their relationship to the role that freemasonry played in the region. The murals are found to be similar to those in the Calvin Hall Tavern in Cheshire, MA, and posits dating and a potential artist for both cycles, and investigates their relationship to the standardization of early American printed masonic iconography.

Keywords: Freemasonry, American folk art, Daniel Bartling, masonic iconography, masonic symbolism, Early American masonic print culture, masonic murals

In the post-Revolutionary period, Masonry expanded exponentially within New England and the Mid-Atlantic States, especially in the areas around the Connecticut and the Hudson rivers.² The freemasons established hundreds lodges throughout this region during this period, some of which were ornamented with artwork and murals, resulting

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2. This project was begun as a research paper I wrote while a graduate student at Williams College in 1989, at which time I took photographs of the houses under study. A travel grant from New Mexico State University enabled me to travel back to revisit and update this research in 2013. I would like to thank the following people and institutions for their generous aid: Jeff Croteau and The Scottish Rite Masonic Library and Museum; the current owners of the Gilbert House and Hall’s Tavern, Walter Wedlock for his suggestions regarding some of the more enigmatic images, Anne Margreet As-Vijvers, Ann Eckert Brown; Michael Slattery, Master of Unity Lodge No. 9; and especially, Walter Gibson, whose hospitality and insightful observations were crucial in developing my work.
in a particularly rich compendium of early masonic painting. Among the most interesting and complex are those found in the Elisha Gilbert House outside of New Lebanon, in Columbia County, New York (fig. 1).

While some short notices have been published, as yet there has been no extended study of these fascinating images. The murals consist of an arch and seven large roundels containing dozens of emblems that are painted on the East and West walls. Additional emblems are painted on the flues of the two chimneys in the centre of the room, and there are ornamental and decorative motifs throughout the entire space. There is evidence to suggest that an itinerant craftsman named Daniel Bartling – heretofore associated only with decorative painting and the making of varnishes – did these murals. If this hypothesis is correct, then these paintings constitute the work of a previously unknown, yet significant early American painter who may have played a central role in the progressive standardization of masonic imagery. While the eclectic nature of the iconography of the murals in the Gilbert House relates to the more ad hoc nature of masonic symbolism of the late 18th century,

3. Additional homes in this region with Masonic artwork include: the Clark-Young House in Williamstown, MA, home to the Friendship Lodge, which met in a purpose-built room that still contains fragments of hand-painted wallpaper with Masonic symbols that dates between 1771 and 1826; the Fuller Tavern in Berlin, CT, which has a masonic chart painted on a wall of the original ball-room that dates after 1814; and the Hubbard House in Cromwell, CT with stenciled masonic symbols (see Ann Eckert Brown, American Wall Stenciling, 1790–1840 (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2003), 51). Additionally, the mill built by the Gilbert family that still stands in New Lebanon is also said to have masonic emblems painted on its interior walls. Farther afield are the Joshua Eaton house in Bradford, NH, with well-known landscape murals by Rufus Porter that also include masonic insignia (see Janet Waring, Early American Stencils on Walls and Furniture [New York: Dover, 1968], 65–66); the Salem Towne House, originally built in Charlton, MA in 1796 that is now part of Old Sturbridge Village; the Amos Bristol Tavern in Treadwell, NY (Brown, American Wall Stenciling, 227–28); and Smith Hall in Manlius, NY (Onondaga County), which was home to the Manlius Lodge between 1824 and 1830. Such artwork is particularly vulnerable to the vagaries of time. The murals in Hall’s Tavern in Cheshire, MA, discussed at length in this study, have been covered over. In a private communication to this author in 1989, former town historian, Ina Mansur, mentioned that there were emblems surrounding a door in the Kiddler-Fitch Tavern in Bedford, MA; unfortunately, neither the current town historian, Kara Kerwin, nor the current owners of the house know about these emblems. Finally, the now-destroyed Gridley House in Candor, NY (Tioga County), had masonic emblems painted in its upper rooms as early as 1804, which were documented in an article published in The Post-Standard (Syracuse), Sunday, 21 June 1925.

the magnitude and complexity of the cycle reflects the new sense of importance and influence that village communities had in the first decade of the 19th century. Indeed, the brethren who met at the Gilbert House would play crucial roles at the state level, which would have a significant impact on Freemasonry in New York, and the murals they commissioned for their lodge reflect this sense of status and standing within the brotherhood.

The Enlightenment values that freemasons espoused were particularly attractive to Americans in the decades after the Revolutionary War. Central to speculative freemasonry was the belief that the individual could be improved through education so as to function as part of an ethical and moral community that works towards the betterment of society as a whole. Indeed, masons saw this central task as being divinely inspired labour. At the same time, rural areas of the interior, such as upstate New York and western Massachusetts – heretofore relatively isolated from the politics of the urban centres where power had primarily been concentrated before the Revolution – now had a new influence with the rise of the electoral system.5 This required new patterns of


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thinking beyond strictly local needs, and offered new opportunities for village inhabitants. Not only did the masonic values of honesty, labour, integrity, brotherhood and moderation parallel the civic values of the early years of the young Republic, these were seen as essential to the success of the new nation. By espousing Freemasonry, and becoming living embodiments of such values, village leaders could augment their social and political positions, and many brethren were members of the village elite.6

The community responsible for the murals in the Gilbert House was no different in this respect. The house itself, an elegant three-story Federal-style clapboard structure, was owned by one of the most prominent families in the area. Located on Route 20 just west of New Lebanon in Columbia County, the Gilbert house was built in 1794, presumably by Elisha Gilbert (1745/46–1823).7 Gilbert’s father, also named Elisha (1717–1796), had moved from Connecticut to the King’s District, as Columbia County was then called, around 1750, where he built a mill and became a prosperous land- and slave-owner.8 Gilbert himself fought in the Revolutionary War from 1776 to 1778, attained the rank of captain and commanded a company at the Battle of Saratoga. He was a freemason who was also active in state politics, representing the county in the state assembly of 1798–99. He was appointed Turnpike Commissioner that year, and was instrumental in helping to establish the Rensselaer and Columbia Turnpike, now incorporated into Route 20, still the main route by which New Lebanon accesses Albany.9 Gilbert’s son, yet another Elisha (1768–1857), is known as Elisha Gilbert Jr. in local records, although he was the third generation to hold that


7. Jean Lipman gives a slightly later date of 1799 for the house, based on a dated chimney stone found on the rebuilt fireplace in the meeting room; however, this stone appears to have been added at the time of the house’s restoration in 1906; see Lipman, ‘An Early Masonic Meeting Place’, 355. The National Register of Historic Places (#90NR00240) lists the Gilbert House as having been built in 1794. I have not found any verification of the tradition she mentions that the lodge contributed $800 towards the completion of the meeting rooms.


name. He continued to live in the house until his own death. He was a merchant, quite active in local politics and a dedicated freemason, regularly attending both Grand Lodge meetings in New York City and Grand Chapter meetings in Albany from 1803 until 1851.10

Lebanon’s Unity Lodge No. 9, which was officially chartered on 25 September 1788, used the third floor of the Gilbert House as their meeting room for over half a century.11 At Unity’s first meeting on 2 February 1789, held in Albany, Elisha Gilbert Sr. was one of three candidates to be initiated.12 A few years later, the lodge was meeting at the Gilbert House. As a ‘blue’ lodge, Unity offered the first three degrees of masonry: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. Each degree had its own distinct catechisms, rituals and symbols. While there are various rites and chapters within freemasonry, these three basic degrees are universal, required of all masons before they can be initiated into the higher rites. Unity’s brothers, after having earned the status of Master Mason, could earn additional degrees through Lebanon Royal Arch Chapter No. 13, which also met at the house. It is not clear when Lebanon was first warranted in Royal Arch masonry because the early records of the lodge are missing; moreover the annual proceedings of the Grand Chapter of New York do not indicate when this warrant was first granted.13 However, it seems to have been founded around the same time as Unity No. 9 because Elisha Gilbert Sr. is recorded as having

10. He was appointed County Coroner in 1813 (Northern Whig [Hudson, NY], 20 March 1813, 13); and Assistant Justice in 1814 (Northern Whig, 19 April 1914, 3). He was also a member of the Washington Benevolent Society and chaired the committee that organized a celebration of Washington’s birthday in 1813 (Northern Whig, 2 February 1813, 3). In regards to his mercantile activities, the Ulster Plebian (Kingston, NY) published a notice on 23 August 1817 of the arrival of a cargo of oil on a ship from Chile.

11. Unfortunately Unity’s records dating before 1 January 1801 are lost so it is not clear when the brothers began to meet at the Gilbert House. According to a pamphlet that was published on the occasion of the lodge’s 150th anniversary, the lodge began meeting at Gilbert’s house in 1790. If this is true, then presumably it refers to an earlier house in which the family lived; see Morris Gidley Bowman, ‘History of Unity Lodge 1788 to 1938 printed on the occasion of the 150th Anniversary of Unity Lodge No. 9’ (New Lebanon, 1938), 2.


13. The minutes for Lebanon Royal Arch No. 13 only include 2 July 1816 until the end of 1877, and the minutes between 9 December 1829 and 30 March 1852 are missing. According to the Masonic Standard (Saturday, 3 February 1900, 3), Lebanon No. 13 was one of the 12 chapters at the first convocation of the Grand Chapter of New York in 1798; therefore, it is likely Lebanon received its warrant from a more established lodge prior to that date, reflecting the ad hoc basis by which early lodges were founded in New York.
represented the chapter at the annual meeting in 1801 as well as in 1802 when *Unity* petitioned for a Royal Arch warrant, explaining that theirs ‘had expired’.  

The years during which *Unity* met at the Gilbert House were a crucial transitional moment for American Freemasonry, as the organization of lodges came under progressively centralized control at the state level. In New York, this transition was particularly volatile, due in part to the on-going contest between the ‘Ancients’ and the ‘Moderns,’ as well as to the efforts of rural lodges to increase their status and standing within the brotherhood. The brothers who met at the Gilbert House would play crucial roles in this transition from a relatively haphazard and *ad hoc* system under competing jurisdictions to a more regularized system under the exclusive jurisdiction of a single Grand Lodge headquartered in New York City. Among the more notable brethren of this lodge were Joseph Enos, Ebenezer Wadsworth, and Elisha Gilbert Jr.

The competition between lodges in New York, besides being partially rooted in the on-going debate between the ‘Ancients’ and the ‘Moderns,’ was also linked to the periodic divisions that erupted between the lodges of New York City and those upstate. The ‘Moderns’ refer to those lodges that follow the rites of the first Grand Lodge of England, founded in 1717, whereas the ‘Ancients’ follow the rites of the second Grand Lodge of England, founded in 1751, which was called ‘Most Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons’. In New York, the ‘Moderns’, exemplified by the Provincial Grand Lodge of New York under Sir John Johnson, became associated with Loyalists, although it briefly became warranted as an ancient lodge in the 1780s under the Athol Charter. Ultimately though, the Ancients won out and the Grand Lodge of New York was established as an independent body in 1787.

Schisms would continue to plague the New York lodges until the mid-19th century. Brethren associated with *Unity* No. 13 would play


15. As Bullock has noted, the ‘Ancients’ tended to be more democratic and egalitarian in their membership, in contrast to the more elite ‘Moderns’; see Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, chapter 3. For a history of the ‘Ancient’ Provincial Lodge of New York, see Peter Ross, *A Standard History of Freemasonry in the State of New York* (New York & Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co, 1899), Book II.

16. In an apparent effort to break the hegemony of New York City masons, many rural, provincial lodges petitioned in 1801 for the formation of a new Grand Lodge, an argument that would not fully become resolved until 1850; see Ross, *A Standard History of Freemasonry in New York*, 196.
prominent roles in the next major schism in 1823. At this time, a group of rebel lodges from New York City created a competing Grand Lodge in reaction to what they perceived to be the growing influence of upstate lodges as represented by the election of Joseph Enos as Grand Master.\textsuperscript{17} Tensions had already been high prior to this event, in the wake of attempts to better regulate provincial lodges through a short-lived system whereby the lodges of New York were divided into three visitation jurisdictions as a means to ensure orthodoxy and collection of dues. Two of these Grand Visitors were none other than Joseph Enos and Ebenezer Wadsworth, former Masters of \textit{Unity No. 13}. Unfortunately, the reimbursement that these men received for their travels ended up costing almost as much as the dues that they brought in, resulting in the decision to abolish the system. Enos and Wadsworth, having lost their lucrative salaries, seem to have played some significant part in the ensuing arguments concerning the influence that upstate lodges would have within the Grand Lodge. Upon electing Enos as Grand Master, there was, as masonic historian Ossian Lang reported, a ‘concerted effort … made to elect a complete board of officers from the up-State members’.\textsuperscript{18} The dissenters, which were primarily down-state lodges, left the meeting of the Grand Lodge and reorganized at St. John’s Hall, electing their own Grand Officers for the following year.\textsuperscript{19} This argument would not be resolved until 1827, although subsequent schisms would emerge that were rooted in these debates.\textsuperscript{20}

While not as divisive as Wadsworth or Enos, Elisha Gilbert Jr., was to play an equally prominent role at the state level. In addition to

\textsuperscript{17} Ross, \textit{A Standard History of Freemasonry}, 238–40, 260.


\textsuperscript{19} Both institutions called themselves the Grand Lodge of New York; see Lang, \textit{Freemasonry in New York}, 96–107. \textit{Unity No. 13} voted to maintain its allegiance to the original Grand Lodge in 1824.

\textsuperscript{20} Subsequent schisms would emerge out of the debates that originated at this time, including the schism of 1837, whereby several New York City lodges attempted to stage a celebration of St. John’s Day, but because they had not received the proper authorization for this event from the Grand Lodge, an edict was issued the night before the celebration forbidding it. The lodges went ahead and celebrated anyway, and the leaders were expelled. In response, they created St John’s Grand Lodge. This schism was not repaired until 27 December 1850. At about this same time, yet another schism emerged over a proposed amendment to the constitution revoking the privilege that Past Masters had enjoyed as permanent voting members of the Grand Lodge. This amendment proposed to make the Past Masters honorary (non-voting) members instead, and was made in reaction to the perceived hegemony of New York City lodges at the Grand Lodge to the expense of upstate lodges. This division would not finally be healed until 1857; see Lang, \textit{History of Freemasonry in New York}, 133–39.
representing Lebanon at the Grand Chapter meetings in Albany, he was occasionally elected to serve in various high offices, including Grand Marshal in 1803, Grand King in 1805, Grand Secretary in 1826 and finally, the highest office of Grand High Priest in 1846. He was equally consistent in attending the Grand Lodge meetings in New York City, and similarly was elected to official positions several times, including Senior Grand Warden in 1844, Junior Warden in 1845 as well as Grand Master sometime around 1837. The prominence of Enos, Gilbert and others show that the brethren of New Lebanon had an impact on New York masonry that far outweighed the seeming insignificance that such a small, rural village community might otherwise suggest.

The Emblems and their Symbolism

The sheer size and scope of the cycle at the Gilbert House reflects the new sense of importance that village communities such as New Lebanon felt in the early 19th century, an importance that was well justified given the leading roles that Unity’s brethren played at the state level. While fixed wall paintings are not uncommon in masonic meeting spaces at this time, they tended to consist of isolated motifs, most commonly, the square and compass. They were rarely as complex and detailed as those found in the Gilbert House. At the same time, the arbitrary grouping of the emblems and their occasional iconographic idiosyncrasies reveals vestiges of the more ad hoc practices that characterized 18th-century Freemasonry, prior to its standardization in the 19th century. This standardization was propelled not only by the new sense of ambition concerning the potential scope of American freemasonry, but also by the publications of Thomas Webb, Jeremy Cross, and others who were concerned by the errors that occurred in contemporary masonic practice.

21. It is not clear when he was elected Grand Master; in 1838, Gilbert is listed as being Past Grand Master, but the records for 1837 do not mention that he was in attendance nor that he was elected; see Proceedings of the Right Worshipful Grand Lodge of the State of New York…From the 12th of July, A. L. 5837 to the 6th of September, A.L. 5837 (New York: J.M. Marsh, 1837); Abstract of the Proceedings of St. John’s Grand Lodge of the Most Ancient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of New York; from November 1st, A.L. 5837, to the present date inclusive (New York: Theodore C. Baldwin, 1839); and Extracts from the Proceedings of the Right Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons in the State of New York from the 7th of March to the 8th of June, A.L. 5838… (New York: J. M. Marsh, 1838), 15.

22. As seen, for example, in the Clark-Young House (Williamstown, MA), the Hubbard House (Cromwell, CT), and the Joshua Eaton House (Bradford, NH).

23. Thomas Smith Webb, Freemason’s Monitor or Illustrations of Freemasonry (Boston, MA: n.p. 1797); Jeremy Cross, True Masonic Chart or Hieroglyphic Monitor (New Haven, CT: Flagg & Gray, 1819).
As an initiate is inducted into the brotherhood and as he earns subsequent degrees, various symbols are introduced and their meanings are explained as part of the lessons. One such lesson can be seen in Jeremy Cross’s explanation of the tools of the Fellow Craft:

The *plumb* is an instrument made use of by operative masons, to raise perpendiculars; the *square*, to square the work; and the *level*, to lay horizontals; but we, as free and accepted masons, are taught to make use of them for more noble and glorious purposes: the *plumb* admonishes us to walk uprightly in our several stations before God and man, *squaring* our actions by the square of virtue, and remembering that we are travelling upon the *level* of time, to ‘that undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveller returns’.24

Although these lessons were primarily oral in nature, over time visual aids were developed to help in transmitting the knowledge. The murals in the Gilbert House are particularly elaborate examples of the kind of visual imagery that has traditionally played a central role within Freemasonry.25 Masonic art for the lodge usually took the form of movable objects that aided in the communication of important concepts as well as in the organization of the lodge’s ritual spaces. These objects could include furniture, such as thrones and tables, often liberally ornamented with emblems; props (such as rope, candles, a staircase and columns); ritual garments (especially the masonic apron); insignia in the form of jewels that designate either an office or a specific degree; and finally, diagrammatic carpets, charts and tracing boards.

Rather than having fixed meaning, masonic imagery is at once emblematic, didactic, and mnemonic, and therefore has the capacity to have multivalent significance. The richness and syncretism of masonic emblems, as well as the values that they address – moral rectitude, moderation, self-sufficiency, honesty, brotherhood, industry, etc. – made them useful well beyond the confines of the lodge. Indeed, given how closely the values of Freemasonry paralleled Republican values, it is not surprising that masonic iconography would play a crucial role in the expression of American national identity during the early years of the Republic.26

The emblems in the Gilbert House occupy a space that – like all masonic meeting rooms – is symbolic, structured by both image and performance. Lodge meetings would have opened with a procession into the room, during which the officers moved into precise and symbolic positions. Other rituals such as initiation ceremonies or re-enactments of events from the Old Testament as interpreted through masonic mythology and moral precepts also required the brethren to occupy proscribed places within the meeting room. Such rituals were often aided by the use of props and furniture. For example, according to the anti-masonic exposé by Avery Allyn, an initiate would be led blindfolded into the room with his breast exposed and a rope or ‘cable tow’ around his neck. After a ritual progression around the room, he would be brought to kneel before an altar. Such performances would become even more prominent and theatrical within masonic ritual by the end of the 19th century. It is not known if Lebanon’s early brothers used moveable furnishings and props, or if they instead relied primarily on the painted murals.

Despite the wealth of information concerning the meaning and usage of masonic iconography, its symbolism can be difficult to analyse. First of all, such imagery was designed to be cryptic as befitting an elite secret society. Second, in their capacity as mnemonic devices and didactic tools, the meanings of masonic signs are often contingent on their function within a specific ritual or degree, sometimes accruing richer meaning in the higher degrees. Finally, as has already been mentioned, Freemasonry was in a period of transition during the period that the Gilbert murals were painted, as interest in higher degrees spread. Because of the lack of general oversight to masonic practice – as witnessed by Thomas Webb’s concern at the ‘delay in the recitals...irregularities in their distribution...and important omissions’ that sometimes occurred in contemporary masonic lectures, which led him to write his monitor – the result was that spurious degrees sometimes emerged, or, even if the degree was authentic, could be accompanied by bizarre rituals. These practices would quickly disappear as American freemasons standardized practices and enforced increasingly centralized control. Masonic iconography

29. Thomas Smith Webb, The Freemason’s Monitor; or Illustrations of Masonry: in Two Parts (Salem, MA: Cushing & Appleton, 1818), vi. For more on early concerns about regularity, see Bullock, A Revolutionary Brotherhood, chapter 9.
30. Particularly in New York, where a schism developed between lodges that followed the Grand Lodge in New York City and St. John’s Lodge in Albany, as
therefore is a dense and complicated topic not only due to its continuing evolution within the brotherhood, but also because an emblem’s meaning is contingent in part on the degree to which it is associated. Although much of the symbolism was standardized by the 1820s, as evidenced by a certain amount of continuity between such contemporary sources as Jeremy Cross, James Hardie and the anti-masonic tract by David Bernard, there were still some idiosyncrasies. Moreover, because freemasonry would radically change after the mid-19th century, the wealth of later literature, including the writings of the inestimable Albert Mackey, is of limited use for the purposes of understanding the images in the Gilbert House. Therefore, I will be relying on a deep reading of archival documents, contemporary masonic texts and printed imagery.

The meeting room at the Gilbert House conforms to the general ideal of the masonic lodge, having a longitudinal North-South axis that roughly corresponds to the proportions of the Temple of Solomon as recounted in 1 Kings 6:3 (Fig. 1). The orientation of the room is significant. The East is the most important, and it is where the Most Worshipful Grand Master sits at the opening of a lodge along with the subordinate officers: the Secretary, the Treasurer, the Senior Deacon and the Junior Deacon. The Senior Warden, responsible for opening and closing the lodge, is positioned at the West, which is also the direction associated with the death and burial of Hiram Abiff, the architect of Solomon’s Temple. This is also the direction from which, ideally, one should enter the lodge, as is indeed the case at the Gilbert House. The Junior Warden, who is responsible for making sure all the brethren are appropriately fed, stands in the South, which represents the meridian. The North, symbolically in darkness, remains empty.


33. Besides Webb, Cross and Hardie, additional masonic texts roughly contemporary to our murals are: *Jachin and Boaz; or, An Authentic Key to the Door of Free-Masonry, Ancient and Modern* (Lancaster, PA: Joseph Ehrenfried, 1812) and (Albany, NY: Charles R. & George 1797); and Allyn, *A Ritual of Freemasonry,* however, the latter is a polemical Anti-Masonic publication that must be treated with caution.

34. The story of Hiram Abiff is a masonic myth, although it is rooted in verses relating to a craftsman who worked on Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 7:13–14; 2 Chron. 2:13–14).
Appropriate to its elevated status within the sacred geography of a masonic meeting room, the East wall in the Gilbert House is painted with an elaborate twin-columned edifice on stairs surmounted by an arch, a symbol associated with Royal Arch masonry (fig. 2).

This image is emblematic of the lodge itself, which consists of not only the physical building, but also the community of brothers that gather within. The columns that support the arch are differentiated, probably in reference to the columns at the Temple of Solomon, named Jachin and Boaz, as described in 1 Kings 7: 13–21. These columns are again represented on the two chimney flues in the centre of the room, this time topped with celestial and terrestrial spheres, the symbolism of which is explained in the second degree, that of Fellow Craft (fig. 3).35

Furthering the connection to the temple, the letter ‘G’, signifying God, is suspended underneath the Arch. Below this is a Bible on which is superimposed the square and the compass. Separately, these emblems have distinct meanings, but when placed together these images comprise the Three Great Lights by which the mason is guided in his duty to himself, his neighbours and his lodge.36 For Freemasons, the manner in which

35. The paintings on the flues may not have been part of the original campaign, and indeed may have been added long after the room continued to function as the meeting place for the lodge; see below.
36. Cross, True Masonic Chart (1824), 16; see also Jachin and Boaz (1797), 23.
Fig. 3. Chimney flues, Elisha Gilbert House (photo: Margaret Goehring)
the arms of the compass are superimposed over the square also have distinct meanings, indicating specific degrees. In this case, both arms of the compass overlap the square, which is in reference to the third degree, that of Master Mason.\textsuperscript{37} The three candles surrounding the book represent the Three Lesser Lights, that is, the Sun, the Moon and the Worshipful Master, although these can also represent the three principle masters of the lodge: the Worshipful Master, the Senior Warden and the Junior Warden.\textsuperscript{38} At the base of the arch are three steps leading to a black-and-white checkered or mosaic pavement that recalls the original pavement of the Temple, as well as having additional symbolic associations.\textsuperscript{39}

On either side of this Arch and along the opposite long wall are large roundels containing additional masonic emblems. Starting in the northeast corner of the room is a single roundel of crossed swords balanced on scales over a beehive (fig. 4). The beehive is a commonly used masonic symbol, representing industry as explained in the lessons for the Mark Master.\textsuperscript{40} However, the motif of crossed swords on a scale is found only rarely, related to the Scottish rite where it is an emblem of the 17th degree, the Knight of the East and West, in the Chapter of the Rose Croix.\textsuperscript{41} It is possible that some of Lebanon’s early brothers might also have been members of the Ineffable Lodge of Perfection in Albany (active from 1767 to 1774), the first Scottish rite lodge in North America, or at least knew about the potential to earn further degrees through this rite.\textsuperscript{42} The emblem’s appearance here may not necessarily indicate that Lebanon’s brothers practised this specific degree, rather it may be symptomatic of the ambiguity that characterized the practice of American Freemasonry at the end of the Revolutionary War, particularly

\textsuperscript{37} Bernard, \textit{Light on Masonry}, 64; When the square overlaps the compass, this is a reference to the Entered Apprentice; when one arm of the compass overlaps the square, this refers to the Fellow Craft.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Jachin & Boaz} (1797), 26.

\textsuperscript{39} According to Cross, the steps symbolize the three ages of man: youth, manhood and age (\textit{True Masonic Chart} [1824], 38), and while the pavement recalls that of Solomon’s temple, its checkered pattern representative of the good and evil of human life (\textit{True Masonic Chart} [1824], 16). In the ritual and lesson for the Fellow Craft, the candidate surmounts a staircase with three, five, seven or more stairs. Three stairs, in this context, refers to wisdom, strength and beauty, according to Bernard, \textit{Light on Masonry}, 57.

\textsuperscript{40} Cross, \textit{True Masonic Chart} (1820), 43; Bernard, \textit{Light on Masonry}, 82–83, however, the beehive could have even richer connotations and associations within Masonic thinking; see George W. Bullamore, ‘The Beehive’ in \textit{Ars Quatuor Coronatorum}, ed. W. J. Songhurst, vol. 36 (1923), 219–33. Reproduced at \url{http://www.freemasonry.bcy.ca/aqc/beehive.html} (accessed 28 May 2014).

\textsuperscript{41} This chapter consists of the 15th through the 18th degrees.

\textsuperscript{42} While the minutes for the Valley of Albany go back to 1767, the records are missing for the years 1775–1821.
when it came to the higher degrees. Alternatively, it is possible that this emblem may refer to a now obscure and defunct degree.

Immediately to the left of the Royal Arch, is a roundel that contains various *memento mori*: a scythe, a coffin with a sprig of acacia, an hourglass and a skull and cross bones (fig. 5). These are associated with the third degree of the Master Mason and refer to the murder of Hiram Abiff as well as the symbolic death and rebirth of the individual into the brotherhood. Also in the roundel are the crossed keys of the Treasurer and a hand wielding a wavy green object. This last motif shows signs of over-painting, and appears to have originally been painted gold. It is

44. See fn. 33.
not clear whether this was meant to be the flaming sword of the Tyler, or a sheaf of grain (either wheat or corn), which has multiple symbolic associations, including being the wages of the Master Masons who built Solomon’s Temple.\textsuperscript{45} Grain seems more likely given the emphasis on Master Mason iconography as exemplified by the \textit{memento mori}, but given the fact that none of the roundels show consistency in the degrees that are being referenced, even this must remain conjecture.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{45} Corn or grain is also symbolically specifically associated with the 5th degree of Most Excellent Master, and it is used in masonic ceremonies associated with the laying of foundation stones, where it (along with oil and wine) are poured onto the stone by the Deputy Grand Master as a gesture of blessing; see Cross, \textit{True Masonic Chart} (1824), 75–76. Bernard links corn to the password of the Fellow Craft: shibboleth, used to distinguish friend from foe; see Bernard, \textit{Light on Masonry}, 57–58.

\textsuperscript{46} I would like to thank Walter Wedlock for his suggestions about this enigmatic symbol.
Fig. 6. East Wall: Ten Commandments emblem, Elisha Gilbert House (photo: Margaret Goehring)

On the other side of the Royal Arch is a roundel with the tablets of the Ten Commandments under crossed quill pens interspersed with Three Crowns (fig. 6). The crossed quill-pens are the Secretary’s Jewel, but it is not clear if this emblem has a distinct meaning when combined with the crowns.  

The final roundel on the East wall depicts the Ark, the Dove and the Rainbow (fig. 7). The ark was an important emblem associated with the Master Mason’s degree; however, the combination of these images might also reference a now somewhat obscure degree called the Ark and the Dove that was associated with Royal Arch masonry.

47. The crowns might be a reference to the three ‘kings’ who built the temple: King Solomon, King Hiram of Tyre and Hiram the Architect (Hiram Abiff). Alternatively, they might be a reference to an obscure side degree known as the Knights of the Three Kings that appears to have only existed before 1830 but it is not clear if it was ever actually practised (I would like to thank S. Brent Morris for this suggestion); see Allyn, A Ritual of Freemasonry, 178–81; and the notebook of Moses Holbrook (1783–1844), excerpt reprinted in Collectanea 7.1 (1958): 45–48. Finally, crowns are part of the ritual associated with the Royal Arch degree, which is supposed to be conducted with three candidates; Bernard, Light on Masonry, 139.

48. On the ark, see Cross, True Masonic Chart (1820), 44 and Hardie, The New Free-Mason’s Monitor (1818), 148; on the Ark and the Dove degree, see Allyn, A Ritual and Illustrations of Freemasonry, 164.
Three roundels are painted on the Western wall, the southern-most of which contains hands clasped in brotherhood, the working tools of the Fellow Craft (a plumb, square and level), an urn, a heart, and what appears to be two crossed feathers with a series of ovoid objects on top (fig. 8). The urn – probably a pot of incense – is associated with the Master Mason as is the naked heart, which is usually paired with a sword that points to it.\(^49\) The crossed feathers with the ovoid shapes is an odd motif and seems to be a misunderstanding of the Secretary’s Jewel, which consists of two crossed quill pens, often depicted with a loop at the centre to aid in suspending the jewel when worn.\(^50\)

\(^49\) The urn could also conceivably be a pot of manna, which is an emblem associated with Royal Arch masonry. The motif of the heart and sword is found in Cross, *True Masonic Chart* (1824), 39.

\(^50\) Another possibility is that these represent eggs (in a nest?). There are occasional references to eggs in later masonic texts; for example, Mackey references
The central roundel contains two columns, a double-pointed arrow, a sword looped with a rope, and a trowel, the working tool of the Master Mason (fig. 9). Additionally there appears a smooth stone in the shape of a keystone, and an ambiguous motif that is probably the rough ashlar. The former motif is associated with the Mark Master degree (the fourth degree of masonry and the first degree in Royal Arch masonry), although the rough and the smooth ashlar are also symbols discussed in the lower degrees in Masonry, especially at the Entered Apprentice, where they refer to the individual before becoming a Mason and the perfection that can be achieved through the order.

the ‘Mundane Egg’ (Mackey, *A Lexicon of Freemasonry*, 111; but nowhere have I found a reference to a nest. It seems likely that the form of this emblem as we see it today does not reflect its original appearance, and is probably the result of over-painting done in the early twentieth century (see below).

51. The sword and rope motifs are paired in early American editions of *Jachin and Boaz* (Lancaster, 1812; New York, 1814; Poughkeepsie, 1811), although they are distinct emblems related to the first degree. The rope – or cable-tow – is put around the neck of every new mason to symbolize his connection to the brotherhood.

52. Although mentioned by Avery Allyn, earlier masonic texts do not mention the chalk, charcoal and clay, which represent the Entered Apprentice’s qualifications – freedom, fervency and zeal; see Mackey, *Lexicon of Freemasonry*, 69; Allyn, *A Ritual of Freemasonry*, 50–51.

53. The ashlar are also linked to the ‘rejected stone’ as referenced in Ps. 118:22,
The final roundel seems to especially stress the Master Mason, Mark Master and Past Master degrees, with the appearance of the mallet, the anchor and a geometric figure representing the 47th Problem of Euclid (fig. 10). The sun, moon, stars and three-candle candelabra relate to the Greater and Lesser Lights of the lodge, as mentioned earlier, but the first three emblems are also recalled again at the Master Mason degree in reference to the All-Seeing Eye. Additionally, the roundel contains a compass with one arm superimposed over a square (a reference to the Fellow Craft), a three-rung ladder and a key.


54. The mallet, which represents moderation and humility at the Mark Mason degree (see Cross, *True Masonic Chart* [1824], 46) may also represent the common gavel of the Entered Apprentice; For the 47th Problem of Euclid, which is both the jewel of the Past Master and associated with the Master Mason, see Cross, *True Masonic Chart* (1824), 40, and Hardie, *The New Free-Mason’s Monitor* (1818), 152. The anchor, which is associated with the Ark in the Master Mason degree, safely moors the mason ‘in a peaceful harbor, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary shall find rest’ (Cross, *True Masonic Chart* [1824], 40).


56. The ladder, which is a reference to Jacob’s Ladder (Gen. 28:10–19), traditionally has 7 or 8 rungs, but at the Entered Apprentice degree is mentioned as having three rungs, which are ‘denominated Faith, Hope, and Charity; and which admonish us
Overall, there seems to be a particular stress on the Master Mason’s degree, as seen in the appearance of the beehive, the sheaf of grain (?), the pot of incense/manna (?), the anchor, the ark, the scythe, the trowel, the Euclidean diagram, and the hourglass. There is also emphasis on Royal Arch masonry, as seen in the Arch, the Ark and Dove, the pot of incense/manna (?), the keystone, and the Ten Commandments. However, like the more traditional carpets or charts, the combination of emblems do not seem to be categorized consistently, suggesting that their significance and function changed depending on the degree in which the lodge was opened or what lessons were being learned. Nonetheless, there does seem to be stress on the higher degrees that

to have faith in God, hope in immortality, and charity to all mankind’ (Cross, True Masonic Chart [1824], 15).

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New Lebanon’s brothers could earn, providing glimpses to the moral lessons that awaited the industrious mason.

**Dating**

The murals underwent rather heavy-handed repainting by a local painter, Joseph Kohlhofer (sometimes spelled Koelhoffer), in the early 20th century at the behest of Charles S. Haight who then owned the house. A prominent businessman from New York City whose ancestors had helped settle Columbia County, Haight purchased the house in 1898, using it primarily as a summer home. While he became quite active in the area, helping to restore the buildings at the nearby Shaker Village in Mount Lebanon, and being instrumental in the founding of its Boy’s Academy, there is no evidence that he was ever connected with the freemasons. His interest seems to have been entirely antiquarian in nature. A newspaper account from 1906 announced the completion of the restoration of the murals:

> The old Masonic Lodge room in what is known as the ‘Gilbert’ house, and now owned by Chas. Haight, has been undergoing repairs under the skillful hands of Jos. Kohlhofer and Samuel and Herbert Shumway. The townspeople will be pleased to learn that the old emblems on the wall have been reproduced in a very artistic manner as Mr. Kohlhofer is quite capable of doing.  

Joseph Kohlhofer was a painter and decorator from Lebanon, who would later restore the local library after a fire in 1914. His hand is readily apparent throughout much of the room, in the broadly painted, large, rustic brown and tan swags along the ceiling line and drapery surrounding each roundel. A similar aesthetic appears in another documented work by Kohlhofer, the *trompe-l’œil* murals for the Congregational Church of New Lebanon, today known only through an early photograph (fig. 11).

These broadly painted, monochromatic additions stand in stark contrast to the remnants of more detailed and refined polychromatic borders that seem more consistent with Federal-era taste. These earlier borders can be seen painted just above the chair rails as well as around many of the roundel frames. Kohlhofer also appears to have painted the flues after Haight had at least one of the chimneys entirely rebuilt, complete with built-in benches and a small platform. Some of the motifs

57. *Chatham Courier* (Chatham Four Corners, NY), 18 April 1906.
59. I wish to thank Peter Watson for sharing this image with me.
within the roundels also betray this similar monochromatic palette and broad brushwork, and in several instances, the repainting is clearly visible.\(^{60}\)

Like Haight, Kohlhofer was also not associated with the fraternity, and indeed, did not seem to entirely understand its emblematic iconography. This is immediately apparent upon seeing the columns on the two chimneys in the centre of the room, where the artist did not know to distinguish the celestial globe from the terrestrial one. Such a mistake is entirely possible if either the original images had been badly worn, or he had been consulting a poorly printed masonic chart, such as the 1814 edition of *Jachin and Boaz* published in Lancaster, or something similar (fig. 12).

Because of the over-painting, and the dearth of documentation, the murals are challenging to date; however, the history of *Unity Lodge* may offer some clues as to when the murals could have been painted. *Unity* went into a period of decline, as so many lodges did, in the face of the anti-masonic sentiment that surged in the wake of the Morgan Affair of

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60. Cf. discussion of the hand with the sheaf of grain, above.
1826. By 1827, the lodge was only meeting once a year, and would induct no new members until 1845. After that year, it began to revive and meet on a more regular basis. In 1846, the lodge’s master, Elisha Gilbert Jr., was elected Grand High Priest at the annual Chapter in Albany and Junior

61. William Morgan, of Batavia, New York, had threatened to expose masonic secrets, but disappeared and was presumed murdered by the freemasons in 1826. This scandal led to waves of anti-masonic sentiment across the nation over the course of the following decade, resulting in dramatic declines in membership and the shutting down of hundreds of lodges.
Grand Warden at the Annual Meeting in New York City. However, by 1850 dissension seems to have erupted between Gilbert and Unity’s other brothers. On 31 January 1850, Unity voted unanimously to permanently move to another location, and on 27 July 1852, Gilbert was expelled from the Masons after numerous attempts to reconcile with him. It is not known what caused this rift between Gilbert and the other brothers, but there seem to have been several points of contention. Whether Gilbert supported the reconciliation of 1851 between the Grand Lodge of New York and St. John’s Grand Lodge is not known, nor is it known what the opinions of the other brothers were, although this could have been a source of disagreement. Another issue might have been a proposed constitutional amendment to the Grand Lodge limiting the rights of Past Masters, an amendment that Gilbert might have been against, as a Past Master. Another point of contention seems to have been monies that Gilbert attempted to collect from the lodge’s brothers in 1848 to reimburse him for the expenses that he had incurred ‘on behalf of the Lodge’. These expenses seem to have gone back some years in time, for brothers voted not to allow any such claims that pre-dated 1844.

Since it is unlikely the murals were painted during Unity’s long period of decline during the 1820s and 1830s, the murals must have been painted

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63. A report was given by Isaac Salls stating that he had attempted to serve a summons on Gilbert, who refused to respond, denying the right of the lodge to try him and pronouncing the Lodge to be meeting clandestinely and working without authority. The Unity then unanimously voted to expel Gilbert; Bowman, ‘History of Unity Lodge’, 6–7; this is also verified in the minutes for Unity Lodge No. 9.

64. See n. 19.

65. At the Grand Chapter held in February of 1850, Gilbert was in attendance and was listed as being Past Grand High Priest (for which he received a salary of $12), however, Lebanon No. 13 was not listed as being under the Grand Chapter jurisdiction at that time, nor is it listed as being under that jurisdiction in 1851, although it does reappear in 1852 when it petitioned the Grand Chapter for the revival of its warrant in February (a meeting at which Gilbert was in attendance, listed again as PGHP). However, by this point, Gilbert had apparently stopped paying his dues to the lodge and his membership was declared forfeit in June of 1851.

66. Bowman, ‘History of Unity Lodge’, 6; this account is substantiated in the lodge’s minutes for October 1848, where it is recounted that the brothers approved reimbursing Gilbert for expenses from 1844 to 1846, and the secretary was ordered to settle Gilbert’s account in full with a payment of $2.50. On 25 December 1849, at a meeting where Gilbert acted as Junior Warden, a committee reported its recommendation to move the lodge to a new meeting location, a recommendation that was officially approved on 31 July 1850.

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before the 1820s or between 1845 and 1850. By 1845, Elisha Gilbert Jr., was the Master of *Unity* and High Priest for *Lebanon*, and had been in these positions for some time. In that year, he was also elected Grand High Priest at the annual Chapter in Albany, an auspicious event that could have generated the interest in such an undertaking. Particularly intriguing, there is a record in the lodge’s minutes of March of 1850 of the brothers voting to ‘repay’ Gilbert $250 for ‘improvements made to the old lodge room’ apparently in an attempt to mollify the elderly brother.

Many of the motifs in the Gilbert House murals have parallels in printed Masonic charts published as late as 1857, which also suggests a later dating. For example, an edition of *Jachin and Boaz* may have informed some of the motifs.67 These include the sword with a rope looped around it, and the chimneys with their terrestrial and celestial spheres.68 Another motif that appears to have its source from a print is the dove with a curiously distended neck in the roundel with Noah’s Ark (fig. 13). This precise composition can be found in a masonic chart that was engraved by Scholes for James Hardie in 1818 (fig. 14).

This same chart may also have provided the models for the crossed quill pens interspersed with crowns, the Royal Arch as well as the level with its elaborate ogee curves. Additional parallels can be seen

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67. This book was first published in London in 1730; the earliest American editions date from the beginning of the 19th century (Boston [1803]; Poughkeepsie [1811]; Lancaster [1812]; New York [1814]), ending with the edition published by William Gowans of New York in 1857.

68. The editions of 1804 (London); 1811 (New York; Poughkeepsie); 1812 (Lancaster), and 1814 (New York) all show these particular motifs. It is possible that the crescent moon and circular arrangement of stars, representing the greater and lesser lights of the lodge came from this chart.
in Amos Doolittle’s engravings for Jeremy Cross’s True Masonic Chart first published in 1819, such as the rope entwined around the anchor, Euclid’s diagram, the ark on water, the clasped hands, the hand holding the line plumb and the beehive (fig. 15).

However, it is nearly impossible to pin down precise sources for the motifs especially since engravers often copied motifs from earlier publications. A case in point is the chart from Jachin and Boaz. While it is possible that the artist of the murals consulted this book – perhaps a locally-published copy, such as the Poughkeepsie edition of 1811 or the
New York edition of 1814 (fig. 12) – the iconography for these charts actually extends back to editions issued as early as 1776 and as late as 1817. A second problem in identifying the precise sources for the iconography is the impact that the restoration that was carried out in the early years of the 20th century might have had. Some of these parallels to the printed sources mentioned above may be the direct result of this campaign, when
such charts might have been used to aid in the restoration. Finally, we should not assume that prints were the source material for the murals. What if this relationship were actually reversed? What if the artist of these murals provided inspiration for later printed sources? There is considerable evidence that supports an earlier dating for the murals, perhaps even as early as the first decade of the 19th century.

**Question of Attribution and the Evidence at the Calvin Hall Tavern (Cheshire, Massachusetts)**

There is another set of masonic murals that are quite similar, and even at times identical, to those in the Gilbert House, which are found in a house that exists less than 25 miles east of Lebanon. Hall’s Tavern (also sometimes referred to as the Cole House after a later owner) was built on Stafford’s Hill in Cheshire, Berkshire County, Massachusetts in 1804 by Calvin Hall (1754–1833) and his son-in-law, John Leland Jr. Members of the Franklin Lodge, founded in 1794, met in the second floor meeting room of the house for six months out of the year. Although instrumental for the spread of masonry throughout the Berkshires, the Franklin Lodge was apparently unable to maintain its membership in Cheshire, and in 1812 it was granted permission to move to Windsor, and a year later, to Adams. Calvin Hall sold the house and he and Leland left Cheshire permanently in 1816 after the failure of a glass works company they had established initially in 1812. The murals at Hall’s Tavern must therefore date between 1804 and 1816, and most likely before 1812.

The murals at Hall’s Tavern are located on the second floor in what was once a large open room oriented along a roughly east-west axis. Unfortunately, false walls were erected over the murals in 1992 when the house’s owner converted the space into bedrooms. This was not the first time the murals had been covered over. At some point in the early 20th century, the room was panelled over and a wall was added to divide the room into two parts. The murals in the eastern half of the room were

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72. Raynor and Petitclerc, 97.
uncovered at some point before 1922 when they were photographed for the Quarterly Communications of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, at which time efforts were undertaken to restore them.\textsuperscript{73} However, these efforts appear to have been short lived, due to lack of funds. The murals in the western half of the lodge room, however, remained hidden under panelling until the 1990s, and thus escaped being over-painted, providing valuable information about their original appearance.

Between two windows on the eastern wall is the Royal Arch, configured very similarly to that found in the Gilbert House (fig. 16).

Moving clockwise to the Southeast, the first roundel shows a trowel, the 47th problem of Euclid, and an anchor entwined with a rope (fig. 17). Additionally, the roundel contains a Jacob’s Ladder (although here with an unusual eight rungs), and an x-cross shape object hung from a

\textsuperscript{73} Quarterly Communications (13 September 1922) remarks by Deputy Grand Master Dudley Hays Ferrell made on the occasion of the visit of the officers of the Grand Lodge to the western part of the Commonwealth); see http://masonicgenealogy.com/MediaWiki/index.php?title=Franklin1\textsuperscript{l} (accessed 30 July 2014).

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ribbon at the top. The photograph of 1922 suggests that this last motif might have been damaged, particularly in the upper left side. It is likely that this originally may have been intended to represent either a gavel and gauge, or a plumb and a square, both of which were sometimes displayed crossed over each other in early masonic charts.\textsuperscript{74}

The other roundel on the south wall shows a sun and a rainbow rising out of a massive bank of clouds (fig. 19). The photograph of 1922, however, indicates that in the bank of clouds was originally an ark, the emblem of the Fellow Craft, just above the left side of the rainbow (fig. 20).

The next roundel shows a compendium of motifs including hands grasped in fraternity, a piece of rough ashlar or coal, a plumb and other references to the Entered Apprentice (fig. 21).\textsuperscript{75}

The final roundel on the South wall – which can only be seen today in a snapshot taken in 1992 from the far corner of the room – appears to be

\textsuperscript{74} See for example, the frontispiece for Cross, \textit{True Masonic Chart} (1820).

\textsuperscript{75} There is also a Bible, a square, a cable tow and a common gavel, all of which are introduced to the Entered Apprentice (see Cross, \textit{True Masonic Chart} [1824], 2–21); additionally, there is a dove with an olive branch, an hour-glass, a rooster and what is probably meant to be a naked heart, although a sword is lacking (see footnote n. 75).
Fig. 18. South Wall: Ladder & Euclid diagram, Calvin Hall Tavern, photograph from Quarterly Communications (13 September 1922)

Fig. 19. South Wall: Rainbow and Clouds, Calvin Hall Tavern (photo: Margaret Goehring, 1989)
blank. However, it is possible that there may have been a point located at the exact centre of the roundel, thereby creating a common diagram representing the individual surrounded by the lodge.\textsuperscript{76}

The west wall contains two roundels, one of which refers to the Royal Arch degree of the Ark and the Dove, a somewhat obscure degree largely defunct today that once apparently had some popularity in the region to judge by the almost identical roundel that also exists at the Gilbert House (fig. 22). The second roundel shows a sun partially hidden behind clouds (fig. 23). At the top of the roundel is a circular shape, although it is not clear if this is a stain, or the remnants of an unfinished or damaged motif.

On the North wall, starting at the Western end are two roundels that were partially destroyed at a very early point in the house’s history when doors were inserted into the wall (fig. 24).\textsuperscript{77} The left roundel shows a beehive under crossed quill pens interspersed with three crowns, while the right roundel contains a candelabra and a pair of crossed swords.

\textsuperscript{76} Normally, this diagram would also have two parallel lines on either side of the circle, representing Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist. A variation of this motif also appears on a fragment of hand-painted wallpaper in the old lodge room at the Clark-Young House in Williamstown, Massachusetts.

\textsuperscript{77} The proportions, ornamentation and moldings around the two doors’ frames are consistent with Federal period design, suggesting that these were added not long after Hall sold the house in 1815.
Fig. 21. South Wall: Hands clasped in Brotherhood, Calvin Hall Tavern (photo: Rhonda Adkins, 1992)

Fig. 22. West Wall: Ark and Dove, Calvin Hall Tavern (photo: Rhonda Adkins, 1992)
balanced on a set of scales. These motifs are identical to those found in the Gilbert House, although here they appear in different combinations.

In the eastern half of the room are two more roundels, one of which shows the all-seeing eye of God above an arc of clouds, under which appears a Bible opened to the Book of John with a square and compass in the Fellow Craft configuration superimposed on top, a scroll with the words ‘memento mori’ and a branch of acanthus over a coffin in reference to the Master Mason’s Degree (fig. 25). The post–1922 ‘restorer’ of this roundel appears to have painted over the rays that emanated from the Eye of God (fig. 26).

Given the numerous mistakes and changes made to the original iconography, it is likely that whoever was responsible for repainting the murals after 1922 was not particularly familiar with masonic symbolism.

Although the murals would have been commissioned through the auspices of the Franklin Lodge, it is possible that Calvin Hall, like Elisha Gilbert, was closely involved with the project. During the time when the murals must have been painted, he commissioned a variety of works from itinerant artists, including Massachusetts artist James Brown (active 1806–1808), who painted the portraits of Calvin Hall and his wife, as well as a full-length portrait of their second-eldest daughter, Laura.⁷⁸ The

⁷⁸ The pendent portraits are now in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center

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Fig. 24. North Wall: partially destroyed roundels, Calvin Hall Tavern (photo: Rhonda Adkins, 1992)

Fig. 25. North Wall: Memento Mori, Calvin Hall Tavern (photo: Margaret Goehring, 1989)
luxury and status that such commissions connote is further reflected by
the decorative wall painting and stenciling that used to exist elsewhere in
the house, but which no longer survives today. The current homeowner
discovered faint remnants of stenciling during the 1992 redecorating
campaign in the stairwell on the second floor. In another room that this
author photographed in 1989 that has since been destroyed was once a
scroll motif in black and white on a dusky pink ground in a style that can
be found throughout the Connecticut River region, Long Island Sound,
and along Route 20 going west into New York (fig. 27).^79

Indeed, a very similar style of decoration can be found in a first floor
parlor of the Gilbert House (fig. 28).

This type of decorative painting was tentatively identified by
Margaret Coffin as being by Sylvester Hall, a native of Connecticut born
in 1774, who advertised his services ‘executing directly on the walls of
rooms’ a ‘much admired imitation of stamped paper’ in Hartford in
1804.^80 He died in New Haven in 1822. Calvin Hall was also originally
from Connecticut, so it is possible that he might have been related to
Sylvester Hall. Itinerant artists often earned commissions through such
family connections. However, there is no evidence indicating that the
two men were in any way related. Instead, I would like to suggest that
the decorations at both Hall’s Tavern and the Gilbert House were done

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79. Unfortunately, these seem to have been destroyed shortly after I photographed them, for the current owner has no knowledge of these decorations.
80. Coffin, Borders & Scrolls, 10.

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Fig. 27. First floor scroll painting, Calvin Hall Tavern (photo: Margaret Goehring, 1989)

Fig. 28. First floor scroll painting, Elisha Gilbert House (photo: Margaret Goehring)

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by the associate with whom Sylvester Hall advertised in 1804: Daniel Bartling (act. 1796–1817), a carriage and sign painter from Philadelphia.81

Daniel Bartling of Philadelphia

Historian Ann Eckert Brown has attributed to Bartling a distinctive stencil pattern consisting of swags and roses that appears in houses throughout Rhode Island and the Connecticut River Valley.82 This same pattern was recently revealed in a second floor bedroom of the Gilbert House, along with other stencil patterns that also appear in the houses that Brown has attributed to Bartling (fig. 29, 30).83

Brown, Waring and Coffin seem to have known of only a few advertisements that Bartling issued; however, there are actually over 50 advertisements, various city documents and dozens of letters written by Bartling, which can shed new light on his movements and career.84

Daniel Bartling first appears in Boston advertising his services as a ‘Coach and Sign painter…from Philadelphia’ beginning in December of 1796 until February of 1798.85 The advertisements, which were taken out in a variety of Boston papers, also advertised his ability to ornament all manner of articles, including painting and gilding on glass. He married Rebecca Blake in Boston in 1797, which suggests he was born no later than 1775.86 A few months after her death at the age of 19 a year later, Bartling moved briefly to Salem, where he took out advertisements from August to November. By July 1799 he was in Providence.87

81. The bibliography on this artist is scant; see Brown, American Wall Stenciling, 222; Coffin, Borders & Scrolls, 10, and Waring, Early American Stencils, 48.
82. Brown, American Wall Stenciling, 222.
83. Indeed, Brown was not aware of the existence of these paintings; I wish to thank her for the initial suggestion that they were probably Bartling’s work.
84. The letters are now part of the Tauzin-Young papers at the Abraham Lincoln Library in Springfield, IL.
85. The earliest record of him is a letter that he, along with five other men, published in the Connecticut Gazette on 8 August 1793 complaining about a prank that some boat pilots played on them at Sandy Hook.
87. Bartling took out advertisements in the Salem Gazette (Salem, MA) beginning on 3 August (examples are dated 14 August 1798 and 28 September 1798), and in the Providence Gazette Providence, RI) beginning 26 July 1799 (as noted in the paper on 3 August 1799). Notices of Rebecca Blake Bartling’s death were published in The Rising Sun (Keene, NH) on 17 February 1798, Oracle of the Day (Portsmouth, NH) on 10 February 1798, The Federal Gazette (Boston, MA), on 7 February 1798, and the Boston Price Current (Boston, MA), 29 January 1798.
Fig. 29. Daniel Bartling, attr. Rose-and-swag stenciling, second floor, Elisha Gilbert House (photo: Margaret Goehring)

Fig. 30. Daniel Bartling, attr. Stencil around door, second floor, Elisha Gilbert House (photo: Margaret Goehring)
It is not clear how long he remained in Rhode Island, but by 1804, he was in New Haven, working with Sylvester Hall, and requesting that orders be left at the business of Amos Doolittle, who, as has already been mentioned, both published and engraved the illustrations for Jeremy Cross’s *True Masonic Chart* of 1819.\(^\text{88}\) Bartling married Mary Young of Norwich in 1806, and over the course of 1807 and 1808 wrote various letters to her from other locations in and around Connecticut. He also continued to take out advertisements in newspapers there.\(^\text{89}\) By 10 April 1809, he had moved back to Philadelphia, remaining in the Philadelphia/Baltimore region thereafter, fighting with the Maryland militia in the War of 1812 and remaining active as a varnisher and entrepreneur to the end of 1817, after which he disappears entirely.\(^\text{90}\)

Unlike Sylvester Hall for whom no connection to Freemasonry can be found, there is ample documentation connecting Bartling to the fraternity. Besides his known association to Doolittle, in 1797 and 1798 Bartling advertised his ability in painting masonic emblems on glass in various Boston newspapers.\(^\text{91}\) Bartling was also a freemason, listed as a member of Philadelphia’s *Philanthropy Lodge No. 127* (chartered 1 April 1811). Apparently he moved not long after, as he is mentioned as being one of the ‘early members’ of *Warren Lodge No. 51* in Baltimore, which was chartered on 25 September 1811.\(^\text{92}\) Moreover, Bartling issued a subscription for a Masonic Universal in Philadelphia in 1811 (fig. 31):

\(^{88}\) I wish to thank Ann Brown for giving me a copy of this notice. He apparently made a trip to Baltimore around 1801 where it is clear he was intending to set up shop as evidenced by his advertisement for an apprentice in the *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore, MD), 2 December 1801, but this venture appears to have been short-lived as he was back in New Haven by 1804.

\(^{89}\) From 16 September to 30 December 1807, he ran a series of advertisements in the *Norwich Courrier* (Norwich, CT) concerning his ability to paint military standards. An advertisement of 19 July 1808 in the *Connecticut Herald* (New Haven, CT) states he is in the city for four weeks only, and that he is an ornamental painter. He also offers to teach ladies ‘that delicate and beautiful art of enameling on glass’. Inquiries are to be left at ‘Mr. Bacon’s Assembly-Room’. He was apparently back at New Haven for an advertisement in the *Connecticut Herald* of 29 November 1808 (which was taken out on 14 November) states he is a ‘varnish maker from Philadelphia’ and has rediscovered a particular technique of blacking harnesses, shoes and other leather goods.

\(^{90}\) The *Niles Weekly Register* (Baltimore, MD) of 4 January 1817, he announced his discovery of a method of clarifying boiled liquids. As of 16 June 1818 he had not picked up his letters from the Baltimore post office.

\(^{91}\) Bartling advertisement, *The Boston Price Current* (Boston), 7 December 1797, 4; Bartling Advertisement, *Federal Gazette & Daily Advertiser* (Boston), 1 January 1798 (this same advertisement would appear in this paper on January 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, and 26, as well as February 1, 7, 10, and 27 that same year).

\(^{92}\) Edward T. Schultz, *History of Freemasonry in Maryland* (Baltimore, MD: J. H. Mediary & Co, 1885), 169; Bartling’s membership in *Philanthropy No. 127* is stated on
Fig. 31 (a-c). Daniel Bartling subscription for a Masonic Universal (sic), Philadelphia 1811 (photo: Philadelphia Free Library)
Daniel Bartling, proposes supplying Masonic [...] elegant master Masons’ and Royal Arch Masons’ Aprons, with the appropriate emblems; the Perspective by Strickland, the Figures, by Fairman; executed in the best style of the first artists of the United States, and approved of by the worshipful grand master and grand officers of the grand lodge of Pennsylvania.

In this advertisement, Bartling mentions two of the foremost Philadelphian engravers of the period: William Strickland (1788–1854), was also an architect who designed Philadelphia’s Masonic Hall (1808–1811) among other buildings in Philadelphia and elsewhere, and Gideon Fairman (1774–1827), originally of Connecticut who was also active in New York, London and Philadelphia. In the latter location, where he worked from 1810 to 1818, he was part of the firm of Murray, Draper, Fairman & Co, which created the first steel plate engraved banknotes. Unfortunately, no aprons have been located as yet that fit the description in Bartling’s subscription; indeed, it is not clear if any aprons were actually made. In letters over the next year to his mother-in-law, Bartling stated his frustration at ‘Sophia’ (his sister?) for not having finished ‘the aprons’ and about his hope that he would be able

the subscription for the masonic apron. This lodge lost its warrant on 6 September 1824 (see Reprint of the Minutes of the Grand Lodge of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania, vol. 5 (1822–27) (Philadelphia, PA: Grand Lodge, 1900), 261.
to finish them so as to provide for his children, for whom his mother-in-law was caring since his wife’s death in 1809.

As Bartling was in New England between 1796 and 1809 he could have painted the murals and stencil work at Hall’s Tavern in Cheshire and the nearby Gilbert House in New Lebanon. Indeed, this might explain the local legend that the Lebanon murals were done by a ‘carriage painter’. As a survey of Bartling’s advertisements reveals, particularly while he was in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, he often stressed carriage, sign and glass painting. Bartling had numerous connections to masonry, as has been demonstrated. In particular, much of the imagery in both sets of murals has parallels in Doolittle’s 1819 engravings for Jeremy Cross. Bartling likely would also have known Thomas Kensett (1786–1829), an engraver from London who also lived in New Haven from 1806 to around 1812. Although most famous for his maps, Kensett also designed masonic aprons and was himself a freemason in Cheshire, CT at Temple Lodge No. 16. The presence of these men in New Haven at this time leads to intriguing questions about the relationship between Daniel Bartling, Amos Doolittle, and Thomas Kensett and their nearly simultaneous interest in masonic iconography. While the evidence for associating Bartling with the murals at Hall’s Tavern and the Gilbert House is circumstantial, the connection between these murals and early printed sources raises important questions about the development of masonic painting in the United States. At one level, their iconography can be connected to the growing standardization of masonic emblems, as seen in their close association to publications such as the monitors by James Hardie and Jeremy Cross. At the same time, they reveal certain idiosyncrasies, not only in the choice of emblems but in their combinations, which may reveal important evidence about the spread of higher degrees within rural regions at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th. Moreover, the size and scope of both

94. Including the ark upon troubled waters, clasped hands, a hand holding a plumb line, the beehive, the anchor and tow-cable, and Euclid’s 47th diagram.
95. Aprons designed by Kensett include an unfinished apron from Cheshire, CT, c. 1812 (National Heritage Museum collection, Museum Purchase, 2008.058) and an apron designed by Kensett was engraved and produced in 1823 by Samuel D. Bettle (d. 1833) in Wilkes-Barre, PA (National Heritage Museum collection, Special Acquisitions Fund, 77.24).

While Kensett’s dates to coincide with the murals in both the Gilbert House and the Calvin Hall Tavern, an analysis of his extant aprons as well as a painted trestle board that has been attributed to Kensett and was for sale by the dealer, Jeff R. Bridgman (see http://www.jeffbridgman.com/inventory/index.php?page=out&id=1402, accessed 18 September 2014), shows a very different stylistic temperament, therefore it is unlikely that he was involved with their painting.
of these cycles reflects the importance that rural lodges such as Unity No. 9 and Lebanon No. 13 had in the young Republic. Far from being a mere curiosity in the annals of American itinerant folk art, these murals represent a major landmark in the development of masonic painting. Certainly, locating one of Bartling’s aprons, should any survive, would be of tremendous help in better understanding this development and his possible relationship to the murals in the two homes. If the murals were indeed painted by Daniel Bartling, then a new assessment of the development of early American masonic iconography is required.

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