

Age Of Optimism: Ohio Builds A Statehouse

Introduction

The late 1830s was a time of great possibilities. The United States, having defeated England for a second time, in the War of 1812, was firmly established as one of the world's important nations. The Jacksonian period of the Common Man had just ended and there was a basic faith in each individual's ability to make his way in the world and to determine his own future. The United States was committed to the ideal of democracy as the appropriate political means for achieving individual fulfillment.

The great American West was opening up, and it was rapidly dawning on the young nation that beyond the Appalachian mountains were untold riches in land and resources. In the phrase of the times, it was America's Manifest Destiny that the West be opened to settlement and its riches accrue to the nation's citizens.

Perhaps most importantly, successive and overlapping revolutions in transportation technology made movement to and exploitation of the West possible. Roads, canals and railroads were beginning to bind the Eastern states to those west of the mountains, and a true national transportation network was developing.

Despite increasing tensions over major issues—slavery, states' rights, agrarian versus industrial interests—that eventually would lead to civil war, the period from the late 1830s to 1861 was a time of optimism in the United States, the opportunities for personal growth and prosperity seemingly unlimited.

In Ohio, the period between the late 1830s and the start of the Civil War echoed the national optimism. After achieving statehood in 1803, Ohio grew rapidly as immigrants from the east and abroad streamed across the Appalachians. Continuous improvements in transportation, from the National Road in the 1830s to development of a 1,000-mile canal system in the 1830s and 1840s, to a 3,000-mile railroad network by 1860, helped Ohio emerge quickly from its frontier status at the start of the 19th century.

In the two decades preceding the Civil War, Ohio became firmly bound to the established eastern states and to the developing states to the west, and it entered the top rank of states in population, industry and commercial activity. The State of Ohio that built the first statehouse shortly after Columbus became the capital in 1812 was very different from the one that built the Statehouse we celebrate today. Ohio had undergone a dramatic change, from a rough and isolated frontier territory to a settled and prosperous state, in a remarkably short period of time.

This exhibit is a snapshot of that time, a taste of what Ohio was like in the exciting period between 1838 and 1861 when the Statehouse was built. As a symbol of Ohio, the Statehouse tells us much about the people who built it and about their attitude toward the future. None but an optimistic people would hold a national design competition to build a

state capitol larger than any in the country. Even more can be learned by studying the art and artifacts of the time. They make up the cultural context in which the Statehouse was created. This exhibit's examples of art, decorative art, architecture and costume enable us to understand better the tastes, the aspirations, the beliefs and the sensibilities of Ohioans in the first half of the 19th century. They also help us understand better how those people could have created so grand a structure as the Ohio Statehouse.

Architecture

Greek Revival architecture, which held sway in the United States between 1825 and 1855, made a political statement. The style was not native to this country but was appropriate as a symbol of a new nation in the early stages of national consciousness.

The appeal of Greek Revival style came from its association with classical Greece and Greek ideals of democracy. Political sentiment popularized Greek models as Americans responded favorably to the war of Greek independence from 1821 to 1832. Rise of the style also coincided with Ohio's struggle to become a state; there was tremendous growth in all aspects of Ohio politics, industry, transportation and culture during the first half of the 19th century. It was time of constant change, and the solid, enduring, timeless quality of Greek Revival lent a sense of stability and permanence where the frontier had recently been pushed back.

Hallmarks of the style, drawn directly from the forms and details of classical Greece, included bilateral symmetry, although houses often could have L-shaped plans. There was common use of columns or colonnades, along with simple rectangular forms, low-pitched or flat roofs without dormers or other projections, common use of the temple form in which the roof ridge ran from front to back, and lack of an arched opening. The arch was used in Roman architecture but never appeared in classical Greece. Often a distinct triangular pediment in the roof gable accentuated the Greek character of a building, while round or square columns frequently defined a front porch.

Settlement west of the Appalachians after the 1820s brought Greek Revival style with it. Well executed buildings, the equal of anything in the East, could be found as far west as settlement occurred—along the National Road, in the Western Reserve, on the Lake Erie shore and along the Ohio River in cities such as Cincinnati and Marietta. Banks, courthouses, commercial structures, churches, schools and houses employed the Greek Revival style. It flourished in the Western Reserve in northeast Ohio, where the tastes and influences from New England were strong.

The early flowering of Greek Revival style in Ohio attested to the importance of builders' guides, how-to manuals intended to help untrained builders execute successful designs. Among the best-known were *Beauties of Modern Architecture* by Minard Lefever, dating from 1839, and *The Architect*, published in 1851 by Asher Benjamin. These books were widely available and were instrumental in spreading the style to communities in the Midwest and the South, away from the large eastern cities.

This exhibition includes important examples of the Greek Revival style, such as the Joseph Swift House in Vermilion, the Norwalk Female Seminary in Norwalk and Evergreen Place in Rocky River, the home of Reuben Wood, an Ohio governor. Only the Norwalk Female Seminary still stands, in use as a private home.

The influence of architecture was apparent in other art forms. In painting, homes and other buildings often appeared as major elements of composition. Today such works often provide valuable information about architectural design. In portraiture, inclusion of the subject's home was a measure of social and economic status. The portrait of the Runyan family of Richland County, which accurately depicts the family members and prominently features its handsome Greek Revival home, is an example. In quilting, the *Plume* quilt, made about 1850 in Hancock County, employed the anthemion, a floral design element commonly used in Greek Revival style buildings.

Costume

Examples of period costume in this exhibition represent high fashion from the 1830s to about 1860. Although only a few wealthy Ohio women could travel to New York or Paris to buy their wardrobes, the latest Paris fashions were widely available to Ohio women through publications such as *Godey's Ladies' Book*, the premier American women's magazine at the time, and *Peterson's Magazine*. They were available by subscription, and women often formed clubs that shared each issue. These magazines had articles on literature, art and the latest in fashion. Illustrations were handsomely rendered and frequently were in color for maximum impact. With the wide availability of fabrics and with guidance from popular magazines, Ohio women with even modest sewing skills could have the most up-to-date fashions.

There were distinct differences in style in the decades covered by this exhibition. The change in silhouette was obvious in the change of sleeve shape. Leg-of-mutton sleeves of the late 1820s and early 1830s were replaced by still large but draped sleeves in the late 1830s. The 1840s were characterized by long, closely-fitted sleeves, while by 1850 the sleeve had once again become full, a one-piece sleeve that flared from the shoulder to the mid-forearm known as the pagoda style.

Changes in neckline shapes, the cut and fit of bodices, pleating, gathering and fullness of skirts, and the use of other design techniques such as bias cut fabrics, ruffles and contrasting trims, made it mandatory that fashionable women keep updating their wardrobes. Choice of fabrics was extensive, varying greatly in fiber, color, pattern and texture. Introduction of aniline dyes in the mid-19th century to supplement and replace natural ones increased the palette of vibrant and long-lasting colors.

Decorative Arts

Introduction

The decorative arts commonly used in the home, such as furniture, textiles, glass, ceramics, silver and other metal objects, served both utilitarian and artistic functions. They were a means of expression for those who created them, they were useful and provided ornamentation and a sense of style.

Ohio decorative arts extend to the state's earliest days. Settlers from the East and South brought with them the customs and traditions in decorative arts that they learned elsewhere; some traditions continued unchanged after arrival in Ohio, others were influenced by new materials and traditions their practitioners discovered after settling here.

Ohio's geographic location on transportation and immigration routes facilitated the absorption of many decorative arts traditions. A rich body of surviving work attests to the diverse backgrounds and skills of the state's 19th and early 20th century artisans.

This exhibition contains examples of Ohio furniture and textiles from the first half of the 19th century that represent what could be found in the home of any middle class Ohio citizen of the time. They give us a sense of how people lived and what objects were important in their daily lives.

Furniture

Much of Ohio was covered by dense hardwood forests when settlement began in the late 18th century, so it is not surprising that the state had a long tradition of furniture-making. Cincinnati, with the advantage of its location on the Ohio River, became an early furniture center, and by mid-century was the largest furniture manufacturing location in the country. By the 1830s, furniture makers could be found throughout the state. Road and canal transportation, soon to be followed by railroads, led to a general increase in business and prosperity, and facilitated the shipment of furniture throughout Ohio. Coupled with constant increases in population, that encouraged the growth of large and small furniture makers.

The pieces in this exhibition are Ohio-made and represent what could be found in the home of a moderately prosperous Ohio family in the decades before the Civil War.

The clock is one of three tall case clocks known to have been made by Timothy Sturgeon, a silversmith and clockmaker in Fairfield County. It represents the most sophisticated and complex type of furniture produced. The stenciled and gilt chair, made by William Coles of Springfield, and the settee, attributed to a Zanesville furniture maker, are of Grecian design and reflect the influence of current architectural tastes on the decorative arts.

These pieces carried the classical motifs of the widely popular Greek Revival style into the interior of the home.

The octagonal table also reflects architectural trends; it was made when octagonal designs for houses were being promoted by Orson Squire Fowler, who published *The Octagon House: A Home for All* in 1853. The painted blanket chest, of around 1850 and attributed to Valentine Yoder of Sugarcreek in northeastern Ohio, is an example of a common, functional piece of furniture that could be found in most households at the time. Often such furniture was painted and handsomely stenciled and decorated.

Rocking chairs were very popular during the 19th century; a number of reproduction rocking chairs have been placed throughout the restored Statehouse. Two Ohio-made examples in this exhibition are the painted, grained and decorated writing chair made in Crawford County and the red painted lyre-back rocking chair produced by an unknown furniture maker. The most elaborate piece of furniture here is the Empire style sideboard made in Ross County by Jacob Ware.

Jacquard Coverlets

Hand-woven coverlets enjoyed relatively brief popularity in the period before the Civil War. Itinerant weavers traveled from town to town making coverlets that were colored with natural dyes and typically woven in two halves, then sewn together. The Jacquard process, which used punched cards or panels to control the weaving, permitted rapid production of complex designs on hand looms. Introduction of power looms and the industrialization of textiles after the Civil War had a dramatic impact; in a short time production of hand-woven coverlets almost stopped.

Motifs in coverlet designs can tell us much about the traditions and values of the weavers and their patrons. The four coverlets displayed here have architecture or transportation themes that reflect wide awareness of the developments that were transforming Ohio from a frontier to a state of national importance in the pre-Civil war period. These coverlets can be seen as a celebration of and an expression of pride in what Ohio was accomplishing.

The coverlet woven for D. Kell in Jackson County is noteworthy for its architectural border design, while the 1844 Benjamin Lichty coverlet from Wayne County illustrates steamboat transportation that was important along the Ohio River. The two pieces by an unknown weaver introduce the railroad as a decorative theme and reflect the railroad fever that gripped many states at that time.

Quilts

Quilts were perhaps the most utilitarian of Ohio art forms. No matter how elaborate or beautiful, they were made to be used. The diversity of quilts is astounding. The Ohio

Quilt Research Project, completed in 1991, documented almost 7,000 Ohio-made quilts dating from the early 19th century to the present.

Design and production of early Ohio quilts were influenced by advances in transportation and technology. Machine-made textiles became more common after 1840, their spread facilitated by improvements in transportation, especially railroads. All this had an impact on the output of traditional hand-sewn quilts. Most documented older Ohio quilts were made from printed cotton or silk, which were brought to Ohio from the east coast or Europe.

In addition to being appreciated for their design and aesthetic qualities, the quilts displayed here can be read as documents of their time, recording matters of style, taste, current events and personal history.

The *LeMoynes Star* quilt, made in the early 19th century, is shown here because it contains small-patterned dress fabric and larger-scale furnishing chintz and is an indicator of how readily fabrics could be found in Ohio at the time. This quilt was made between 1800 and 1806 by Mary Higgins of Higginsport in Brown County.

The *Plume* quilt was made about 1850 by Catherine Custer Spacht, a resident of Hancock County. She used an image of the anthemion, a classical floral motif commonly used in Greek Revival architecture. While the bold use of color draws viewers to this quilt, closer inspection reveals the careful stitching that forms the background.

Pine Burr, made by Mary Duncan Kelly of St. Clairsville in eastern Ohio, dates from 1858. It is an example of a pieced quilt stuffed with cotton. This quilt was made for Mrs. Kelly's daughter's wedding, as noted by the names and date in the center. A number of documented Ohio-made quilts were wedding quilts made by the bride or her relatives.

The *Ohio* quilt is interesting for its use of the state's name as a prominent design feature. The red and green appliqué on a white background was commonly used in early Ohio quilts.

Painting

When the Ohio Statehouse was built landscape painting was extremely popular. Perhaps the best known landscape painters of the time belonged to what was known as the Hudson River School, which had a strong Ohio connection. Thomas Cole, considered the school's father, lived briefly with his family in Steubenville and worked in Eastern Ohio as an itinerant portrait painter before moving to New York to further his career.

Cole collaborated with William Henry Bayless, his Steubenville-born nephew, to submit a design in the 1838 Ohio Statehouse competition. At the time Bayless was working in the New York City office of architects Town & Davis. Though their design won third place, it turned out to be the one most closely followed when the Statehouse was built. The exterior form and the interior room arrangement were closer to the Cole/Bayless design than to either the first- or second-place entry. Ultimately, Cole became much better known as a painter.

Landscape painting of the time celebrated not only the beauties of nature, but also man's impact on it. More often than not, landscapes featuring the man-made environment showed it in a favorable light, with man and nature co-existing harmoniously. That may have grown out of the Jacksonian idea of the Common Man's essential dignity and goodness.

In March 1839 Thomas Cole received a commission from Ithiel Town, one of the partners in Town & Davis, for a landscape worth \$500. Cole's painting, *The Architect's Dream*, was rejected by Town, who apparently was expecting one of Cole's more traditional landscapes rather than one embodying the history of western architecture. The painting shows grandly-scaled classical buildings, including some bearing strong similarities to portions of the Ohio Statehouse. Though some critics found it too delicate and esoteric for people to appreciate, it was widely praised by others, and has become one of Cole's best known paintings.

Among Hudson River School painters were Asher Durand and Thomas Doughty. Typical of their work, which featured vistas of the Hudson River Valley and the mountains of New York and New England, were the three Doughty works in this exhibition. *Sea View*, 1835, *Stenton Hall, Orange County, New Jersey*, around 1840, and *Denning's Point, Hudson River*, around 1839, are early paintings in the genre. Other Hudson River School paintings in this exhibition are George Inness's *The Pasture*, 1864, and John F. Kensett's *Gooseberry Island*, around 1860. In contrast to the soft, lush eastern landscapes often found in Hudson River School paintings, Albert Bierstadt's *Landscape on the Platte River* exemplifies the fascination of many artists with the vast, dry lands in the newly-opened West.

The Hudson River painters influenced a group of Ohio artists working in Cincinnati. The city, which proclaimed itself The Queen City of the West with good justification, was Ohio's commercial and cultural center at the time.

Robert S. Duncanson was one of those Cincinnati painters. A free Black, he interpreted the Hudson River ideals with an African American perspective. For example, his *View of Cincinnati, Ohio, from Covington, Kentucky*, which dates from about 1851, has African American figures in the foreground. This painting was very similar to an engraving published around the same time in *Graham's* magazine. Duncanson's patron was Nicholas Longworth, a well known Cincinnati businessman, abolitionist and arts patron. Longworth commissioned Duncanson to paint murals for his home, Belmont, today the Taft Museum in Cincinnati, which he purchased in 1829. This exhibition has images of two Belmont murals, which were covered with wallpaper in the 1860s and have recently been restored.

Paintings and images in this exhibition were selected to give a sense of the place of Ohio and Ohio-related artists in the larger context of American painting before the Civil War. Some of them were among the best-known painters of the era; others were less widely known but were accomplished and produced excellent work.

Schoolgirl Embroideries

Schoolgirl embroideries, also known as samplers, were hand-stitched pieces of fabric. They usually contained an alphabet, almost always were signed by the maker and are linked with the history of education in Ohio. Developing the ability to sew was considered an integral part of a girl's education, and there are instances of schools advertising the teaching of "plain and ornamental sewing" as part of their curricula. This persisted until after the Civil War, when more formal public school education became widely available.

Schoolgirl embroideries typically were stitched on linen, some of it finely woven, some more coarse to suggest home weaving. Thread for stitching usually was silk, though cotton sometimes was used. Natural dyes were used in the early 19th century. The introduction of aniline dyes shortly after the middle of the 19th century expanded the palette of available colors. Examples of these embroideries have been documented in 51 of Ohio's 88 counties.

Schoolgirl embroideries were not just decorative. In addition to their functional role of teaching girls sewing, reading and spelling, they sometimes documented the history and culture of the state. Nancy Irwin of Butler County made a sampler in 1834, when she was 17 years old, that featured the steamboat, which had just opened the Ohio River to reliable, regular public transportation. Sarah Owens, a resident of Newark, stitched her sampler in 1839. The 1840 sampler by Eliza R. Johnson of Perrysburg commemorated the significance of Fort Meigs and demonstrated her appreciation of Ohio history. Sophia Ann Naftel completed her sampler in 1845 while she was 18 and a student at the Ohio Asylum for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb in Columbus. Her modest work is a reminder that Ohio was one of the earliest states to provide residential training facilities for the handicapped.

Sculpture

Sculpture in the period before the Civil War typically was representational and commemorative. It was very much influenced by classical sculpture, which often depicted the human form nude or only partly clothed. One of the best-known works of the period, Horatio Greenough's sculpture of George Washington, came from that tradition. It depicted Washington in classical form, with a naked chest and draped robes, seated on a throne-like chair. He was not, as many people might have expected, in the military uniform associated with most images of the first president. Greenough's sculpture of Washington was widely criticized after its unveiling, but had an influence on other sculpture of the time.

Thomas Dow Jones, who was born in Granville in Licking County and spent most of his professional life in Cincinnati, was one of the foremost Ohio sculptors of the mid-19th century. Following Abraham Lincoln's election to the presidency in 1860, Jones was commissioned to create a bust of the president-elect. He traveled to Springfield, Illinois, where Lincoln sat for him in numerous sessions. Jones was one of the few artists to model Lincoln from life. The Lincoln bust in this exhibition was made of plaster in 1861 and likely was one of many copies produced by the artist.

Later Jones was commissioned to create a Lincoln memorial that was installed in the Ohio Statehouse rotunda in 1871. The figure of Lincoln was placed on a base commemorating the Battle of Vicksburg. In recent years the sculpture was moved out of the rotunda and the two halves displayed separately. It is being restored and will be returned to its original location.

It was common for politicians and successful businessmen of the period to commission their portraits in sculpture, usually in the form of a bust depicting the head, shoulders and upper chest. In the case of political figures, multiple plaster copies of a bust could be made and sold. In addition to the Lincoln bust, two more plaster busts by Thomas Dow Jones are included in this exhibition, one of Salmon P. Chase, the first Ohio governor to occupy the newly completed Statehouse, the other of Thomas Ewing, an early Lancaster politician. Jones sold more than 200 of the Chase busts.

Though it is not certain that these sculptures were used in the Statehouse, they are typical of busts that were installed in the Senate chamber, where old photos have confirmed that pedestals over each window supported busts of Ohio political leaders.