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Kenneth L. Ames

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## Meaning in Artifacts:

**Hall Furnishings in Victorian America** Most people agree that Independence Hall, the statue of Liberty, and the Brooklyn Bridge are important. Unique and heroic artifacts known to millions, they can be viewed as material culture counterparts of great individuals like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Edison. There is probably less agreement about the significance of Victorian hall stands, hall chairs, and card receivers. Yet the commonplace artifacts of everyday life mirror a society's values as accurately as its great monuments.<sup>1</sup> This article extends our understanding of Victorian America by analyzing hall furnishings typical of that era. By examining artifacts such as these one can gain insights into the past not readily accessible by conventional verbal approaches.

Hall furnishings have usually been outside the scope of historical inquiry. So have the majority of their users. Today, however, many historians are looking at ordinary people rather than traditional heroes and asking new sets of questions. By concentrating less on the unique and more on the typical they hope to compile an account of the past which is more responsive to contemporary needs. Reflecting both this changing orientation of history and the growing intellectual prestige of the social sciences, material culture studies are becoming more varied, rigorous, and suggestive.<sup>2</sup> Once dominated by historians of art and technology, the field is being invaded by scholars from many different disci-

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The author gratefully acknowledges two grants from the American Philosophical Society for study of Victorian furnishings in the Midwest. Many of the observations and generalizations here stem from those studies. Thanks are also due to Susan Prince and Mildred E. Kaliski for bringing several points to my attention.

1 Among America's best known artifacts, Independence Hall is widely illustrated, especially in studies of colonial architecture and history; the Brooklyn Bridge and the Statue of Liberty are the subjects of recent monographs: Alan Trachtenberg, *Brooklyn Bridge, Fact and Symbol* (New York, 1965); Marvin Trachtenberg, *The Statue of Liberty* (New York, 1975). For a defense of monuments, see Theo Crosby, *The Necessary Monument; Its Future in the Civilized City* (Greenwich, Conn., 1970).

2 For succinct comments on elitism in history and the need to use artifacts, see Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (Knoxville, 1975), 8-12. Comments on the impact of sociology appear in Dwight Macdonald, *Against the American Grain* (New York, 1962).

plines. Students of folk and popular material culture are beginning to explore categories of objects usually ignored in their search for fuller understanding of the culture and values of people who lived apart from elite society. Anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, educators, and philosophers are studying material culture for what it reveals about the social and psychological realities of the past and present and for insights into the processes of cognition and communication. The diversity of questions being asked and the variety of disciplines generating them indicate that material culture is currently perceived as a new frontier for scholarship likely to yield particularly rich data about what Gardner calls man's systems for making, perceiving, and feeling.<sup>3</sup>

The student of material culture requires some basis for isolating groups of artifacts closely enough related to be discussed intelligibly yet limited enough in number to be encompassed mentally. For reducing artifacts to manageable groups, classifications based on form, function, material, date, school or maker, or style are frequently employed. More subtle models may incorporate several of these factors. Kubler suggests dividing the pool of artifacts into formal sequences composed of prime objects and their replications. Some archaeologists employ the polar concepts of tradition and horizon. Because both models involve form, function, style, and duration they may be synthesized. One can, then, designate as traditional objects those that belong to long

3 Most art historians still seem constrained to work only with those artifacts defined as art. Their unwillingness to go beyond this artificial barrier makes it unlikely that art history, among the earliest disciplines to develop and refine tools for the study of material culture, will make further significant contribution to artifact study. For appraisals of art history practices and paradigms, see James S. Ackerman and Rhys Carpenter, *Art and Archaeology* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), 196–229; W. Eugene Kleinbauer, *Modern Perspectives in Western Art History* (New York, 1971), 1–105; Michael Owen Jones, *The Hand Made Object and Its Maker* (Berkeley, 1975), esp. chs. 1 and 7. For observations on the usefulness of art to historians, see Theodore K. Rabb, "The Historian and the Art Historian," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, IV (1973), 107–117. On folk material culture see Kenneth L. Ames, *Beyond Necessity: Art in The Folk Tradition* (Winterthur, Del., 1977); Glassie, *Folk Housing*; *idem*, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* (Philadelphia, 1969); Jones, *Hand Made Object*; Robert F. Trent, *Hearts & Crowns* (New Haven, 1977). Works suggesting avenues to understanding artifacts from social or psychological perspectives include Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (Garden City, 1969); *idem*, *The Silent Language* (Garden City, 1973); Albert F. Schefflen, *How Behavior Means* (New York, 1974); Robert Sommer, *Personal Space* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1969). Cognition and communication are discussed in Howard Gardner, *The Arts and Human Development* (New York, 1973), see esp. 37; D. E. Berlyne, *Aesthetics and Psychobiology* (New York, 1971); David Perkins and Barbara Leonard (eds.), *The Arts and Cognition* (Baltimore, 1977).

formal sequences and are produced with minimal change over considerable time. Horizontal objects belong to short formal sequences and are produced for only a brief while before being eliminated or substantially altered. One can also speak of horizontal constellations or clusters of objects in interlocking sequences. As with celestial constellations, artifact constellations yield a larger picture when read as a whole. Horizontal constellations serve as indices of attitudes, values, and patterns of behavior of relatively limited duration.<sup>4</sup>

Hall furnishings in Victorian America form a horizontal constellation. Hall stands, hall chairs, and card receivers became popular around the middle of the nineteenth century, declined by the early years of this century and are largely obsolete today. Although they survive in museums and in private hands across the country, the culture that produced them, the people who first used them, and the meanings they once had have faded, died, or been forgotten. By studying these objects, one can locate and analyze certain features of the Victorian age. Because these furnishings were commonplace they can be useful for working toward a definition of Victorian culture and for documenting subdivisions within that culture.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it is appropriate to investigate objects that were prominent parts of Victorian everyday life precisely because the Victorians themselves were fascinated with material culture. By studying the things that surrounded them we can not only better comprehend their physical environment but come closer to understanding their mentality as well.<sup>6</sup>

4 George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (New Haven, 1962). In archaeological use tradition refers to phenomena of relatively long temporal duration but narrow geographic range. Horizon is the opposite: broad geographic range but limited temporal duration. See Gordon R. Willey and Philip Phillips, *Method and Theory in American Archaeology* (Chicago, 1958), 11-43.

5 By plotting the life spans of objects like hall furnishings and many others as well, and then looking for correlations in functions, design elements, materials, and other measurable phenomena, we may be able to see (literally, perhaps) the extent of Victorianism. One way to extract elements that might be quantified and seriated is through structuralism. For some general comments on its application to objects, see James Deetz, *Invitation to Archaeology* (Garden City, 1967), 83-101. For an example, see Glassie, *Folk Housing*.

6 The Victorian fascination with the material world can be noted first and most impressively in the rich physical remains of that era. This fascination was institutionalized with the world fairs held from 1851 onward. Some of the period's most perceptive authors, among them Marx, Veblen, and Twain, wrote in response to contemporary enthusiasm for what Mumford called "the goods life": Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York, 1934), 105.

The emphasis of this article is on artifacts used by the upper middle class in urban and urban-oriented areas of the North in the second half of the nineteenth century. The objects are factory-made, mass-produced examples of Victorian popular culture of the sort found in the more expensive homes in cities and in houses of the villa class in towns and suburbs. The North was selected because of its relative homogeneity; it was dominated and unified by a Yankee culture formulated on the east coast and carried westward to the Mississippi River and beyond. The geographical configuration of this Yankee culture can be seen with remarkable clarity on maps recording urban growth, industrialization, and rail transportation. These maps indicate that the South was, as it remains, a distinctive subculture; for that reason it is not dealt with here. Lastly, the time span treated was dictated by the objects themselves. The discussion that follows includes observations on the nature and availability of materials for research on household artifacts, and hall furnishings in particular, analysis of three major types of hall furnishings, and suggestions for their interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

It may seem like putting the cart before the horse to discuss research materials before the objects themselves but the nature of the resources has a significant bearing on how one approaches the objects and also explains some of the difficulties encountered in trying to interpret them.

The ideal situation for a scholar interested in the nature and meaning of the hall and its furnishings in Victorian America would be to discover a large number of halls distributed over time, space, and social class, with all original artifacts wholly intact, fully documented, and accompanied by extensive written records of conscious as well as subconscious responses to the space and its objects. In fact, resources are scattered and of varying value. Written documents are among the least useful, at least at the outset, because considerable prior knowledge of the artifacts is necessary to make sense of them. Conventional records like wills, inventories, bills, and receipts list furnishings and place a dollar value on individual pieces but, until large numbers of such documents are tabulated and the results correlated, few conclusions can be drawn.<sup>8</sup>

7 The generalizations about Victorian culture are from Daniel Walker Howe, "American Victorianism as a Culture," *American Quarterly*, XXVII (1975), 507-532. For the geographical aspect see David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants* (New York, 1971), 11-49.

8 Quantitative studies of earlier periods include Barbara and Cary Carson, "Styles and

Literature constitutes an exceptionally rich resource for the study of cultural history. However, it may be rather more fruitfully seen as a manifestation parallel to material culture, responding to or recording related cultural tendencies in a different medium, than as a direct path to the interpretation of the material world. Most of the occasional specific references to objects which appear in novels—"on one occasion, when my brother was visiting me, his overcoat was taken from the hatstand in the hall," or, "'Then I must wait til she returns,' and Ben quietly placed his hat on the hatstand"—do little more than confirm the existence of the objects and describe their most obvious functions. Sometimes authors go further and record the mood of a space in some detail, as Hay did.<sup>9</sup> Although occasional passages may be illuminating, finding them is not easy; investigating literature is an inefficient way to learn about artifacts of the past. Even when lucid verbal accounts are uncovered, they must always be weighed against other forms of evidence.<sup>10</sup>

Combinations of verbal and pictorial materials occur in architectural and home furnishing books but these, too, are of limited value. Even Downing's *Architecture of Country Houses* (1850), notable in so many ways, is of little use for studying hall furnishings. It contains nearly 150 illustrations of furniture appropriate for mid-nineteenth-century homes but only six are of hall pieces and the discussion of them is minimal. Sloan's *Homestead Architecture* (1861 and 1867), another major volume of this genre, illustrates no hall furniture and contains only one deprecating reference.<sup>11</sup>

Beginning in the late 1870s, a flurry of books appeared expressing design reform sentiments formulated in England a decade

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Standards of Living in Southern Maryland, 1670-1752," a paper delivered to the Southern Historical Association (1976); Susan Prendergast, "Fabric Furnishings Used in Philadelphia Homes, 1700-1775," unpub. M.A. thesis (University of Delaware, 1977).

9 Horatio Alger, *The Store Boy or the Fortunes of Ben Barclay*, in *Strive and Succeed* (New York, 1967), 114, 155. John Hay, *The Bread-Winners; A Social Study* (New York, 1884).

10 Nor do artifacts normally provide a useful approach to literature. The two realms are distinct and often very different aspects of human creativity. Older attempts at synthesis include two books by Wylie Sypher, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style* (Garden City, 1955); *idem, Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature* (New York, 1960). A more recent attempt to find correspondences in the arts is David Burrows, "Style in Culture: Vivaldi, Zeno, and Ricci," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, IV (1973), 1-24. A somewhat different approach is used by Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, 1969).

11 Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (New York, 1968), 441-442, 459-460; Samuel Sloan, *Homestead Architecture* (Philadelphia, 1867), 328.

earlier. These works illustrated and discussed halls and their furnishings but the views that they set forth belonged to a vocal if growing minority with new attitudes toward style, the home, and furnishings. These publications are related to a distinct phase in the history of Victorian furnishings of which more will be said later. Here it is sufficient to note that this phase was characterized by a degree of verbal activity absent in the previous phase. Although the latter made its primary appeal through the artifacts themselves, the reform phase relied heavily on rhetoric. As a result, the written testimony is strongly biased in favor of the reform movement and against its immediate antecedents.<sup>12</sup> A typical book, *A Domestic Cyclopaedia of Practical Information* (1877), demonstrates the strong Anglophile stance of this reform phase and its manner of proselytizing for furniture still relatively unknown. Another work from the same year, Cook's *The House Beautiful*, disparages most mass-produced furnishings in favor of antiques and pieces in the English reform style sensitively combined. Books such as these are valuable as long as their crusading purpose is understood. American historians of the decorative arts, however, have often accepted these polemics at face value without attempting to view the arguments in their original social context. They have also failed to acknowledge that reform sentiments and artifacts belonged only to a small segment of a larger American society which, although unified in a general sense, was nevertheless highly pluralistic in object preference, as it remains today.<sup>13</sup>

12 In art historical parlance, this phenomenon is usually referred to as the Arts and Crafts movement and seen as the beginning of modern design. See Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design* (Harmondsworth, 1966); Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971). Succinct analyses of the social aspects of this movement appear in Robert W. Winter, "The Arts and Crafts Movement as a Social Movement," and Carl E. Schorske, "Observations on Style and Society in the Arts and Crafts Movement," in Robert Judson Clark (ed.), *Aspects of the Arts and Crafts Movement in America, Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University*, 34 (1975), 36-40, 41-42.

13 Todd S. Goodholme (ed.), *A Domestic Cyclopaedia of Practical Information* (New York, 1877); Clarence Cook, *The House Beautiful* (New York, 1877); Robert Judson Clark (ed.), *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1876-1916* (Princeton, 1972); Mary Jean Smith Madigan, "The Influence of Charles Locke Eastlake on American Furniture Manufacture, 1870-1890, Ian M. G. Quimby (ed.), *Winterthur Portfolio*, 10 (Charlottesville, 1975), 1-22. The difficulty of sorting ideology from reality is constantly faced by historians who deal with verbal, especially literary, sources. Compare, for example, the interpretation of the nineteenth-century home in Kirk Jeffrey, "The Family as Utopian Retreat from the City," *Soundings*, LV (1972), 21-41, with that in Thorsten Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, 1912).

The reformers represented neither the only point of view nor, in the 1870s, the dominant one. In a rough analogy we could say that their publications reflect conventional Victorian hall furnishings about as accurately as today's professional architectural journals do suburban tract housing.

From these verbal and published sources we still have little idea of the appearance or placement of the most typical objects in Victorian halls, especially for the period before 1880. Here more strictly pictorial materials, paintings, prints, photographs, and trade catalogs, can be helpful. Painted or printed views of American interiors survive in considerable number but many are nostalgic, mythologizing images of rural life rather than reliable records of the real appearance of middle- or upper-middle-class interiors in the cities and suburbs. Within the class of presumably reliable interior views, paintings or prints showing the hall are scarce. The long, narrow, dark space was difficult to delineate and beyond the recording capabilities of the early camera. Photographs of halls grow more common in the last two decades of the century when the performance of the camera and the space of the hall were both altered, the latter under the impact of the English reform movement mentioned before.<sup>14</sup>

For pictorial records of individual objects, trade catalogs are the most valuable resource. They survive in great numbers from the late 1860s. Hall furniture, lighting, card receivers, cards, wall and floor materials, hardware, and nearly every other element of furnishing needed for the hall or any other room in the house can be found lithographed or sometimes photographed. Trade catalogs are important for providing incontrovertible evidence of objects in production or available on order. They can be used by

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The question of cultural heterogeneity or homogeneity is related to the ideology of the melting pot, debunked in recent years. See Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963); Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago, 1966).

14 Important collections of photographs of nineteenth-century interiors have been assembled in William Seale, *The Tasteful Interlude* (New York, 1975); George Talbot, *At Home, Domestic Life in the Post-Centennial Era, 1876-1920* (Madison, 1977). Halls of the wealthy, usually bearing the impress of the English reform taste, appear frequently in *Artistic Houses* (New York, 1971). The photograph has recently come into its own as a collectible artifact, as art, and as a tool for historians. Two recent controversial but compelling historical studies emphasizing photographs are by Michael Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip* (New York, 1973); *Real Life: Louisville in the Twenties* (New York, 1976).



scholars seeking answers to a variety of questions: How long were certain articles made? Were they manufactured in one location, a few places, or nationwide? How did design and cost change over time? How and to what extent were certain styles reflected in given classes of objects? How was price reflected in the design and construction of the object? How were production and marketing organized within a given industry? Trade catalogs can also be of great help in identifying and dating extant artifacts. Perhaps most significant of all, they can provide a scholar with more images of thoroughly documented artifacts of certain kinds than he could hope to gather in years of scouring museums, historical societies, and private collections.<sup>15</sup>

The drawback of trade catalogs is that the images are only reminders of the objects. To appreciate scale, volume, color, and surface, one must turn to the objects themselves, which is where all artifact study should begin. Working directly with objects is a difficult task, however, and the historian should be willing to utilize all the conventional tools of his trade, including intuition and his own subjective feelings. But, as Demos noted in *A Little Commonwealth*, it is not easy to judge the meanings of objects in people's lives or how they felt about a certain artifact. Not only did those meanings and feelings go unrecorded but they often existed below the level of consciousness. This article, then, can serve to point out to scholars the nature of and problems attached to the various kinds of documents relevant to the study of artifacts. And if it is not an account which resolves major historical problems or contradictions, it may at least be useful, to paraphrase Rose's goal for *A Documentary History of Slavery in North America*, in helping historians to think about ways hall furnishings or other categories of artifacts may profitably be introduced into their own studies.<sup>16</sup>

15 Extensive collections of nineteenth-century trade catalogs of household furnishings can be found at the following institutions: Chicago Historical Society; Eleutherian Mills Historical Library (Greenville, Del.); Henry Ford Museum (Dearborn, Mich.); Metropolitan Museum of Art; National Museum of History and Technology; Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum (Rochester, N.Y.); Winterthur Museum (Winterthur, Del.). Most state libraries and larger historical societies also have holdings in this area. Although out of date, the best introduction to trade catalog holdings in America is Lawrence B. Romaine, *A Guide to American Trade Catalogs, 1744-1900* (New York, 1969).

16 For comments on subjective history and scientific measurement, see Glassie, *Folk Housing*, 41-42; Peter L. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (Garden City, 1963), 141. John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth* (New York, 1970), 20-23. Willie Lee Rose (ed.), *A Documentary History of Slavery in North America* (New York, 1976), 3.

To understand hall furniture one needs to know something about the hall, for this space and its relationship to other spaces in the home had an influence on the objects placed within it. Domestic building in America is more notable for continuity than lack of it. A few basic ideas, altered occasionally by ideological, economic, or other factors, underlie the spatial organization of most homes. Thus it is possible to separate middle- and upper-middle-class homes of the nineteenth century into two types on the basis of the form of hall employed. The first chronologically was a relatively narrow passage leading from the outside of the house to its interior spaces. Up to about 1880 this was the dominant mode. It was based on late Renaissance ideas introduced to this country in the eighteenth century with the Georgian style. Although the fact is frequently obscured by an overlay of complicated ornament or a degree of asymmetry, Georgian concepts of spatial organization were perpetuated in Victorian houses; some nineteenth-century plans are nearly identical to eighteenth-century examples. A characteristic feature of these houses of the Georgian-Victorian continuum was the use of a hall as a passage.<sup>17</sup>

The other type of hall was a passage expanded into a large living space. It derived from medieval great halls and the multi-function rooms of pre-Georgian dwellings in colonial America. This type was associated with the reform movement, was widely published and illustrated in the last quarter of the century, and became a prominent feature of many architect-designed homes. These two hall alternatives can be related to two very different models for the domestic structure in the nineteenth century. The first is the home as palace; the second the home as hereditary estate or old homestead. The emphasis here is on the pre-reform model of the home as a palace and the hall as a passage.<sup>18</sup>

17 On eighteenth-century house plans, see George B. Tatum, *Philadelphia Georgian* (Middletown, 1976), 55-61.

18 Vincent J. Scully, Jr., *The Shingle Style and the Stick Style* (New Haven, 1971), 3-7. Hundreds of house plans can be found in the many nineteenth-century architectural manuals aimed at the lay public. For an extensive listing of these, see Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *American Architectural Books* (Minneapolis, 1962). A brief bibliography of twentieth-century titles on domestic architecture is in Clifford E. Clark, Jr., "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America, 1840-1870," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, VII (1976), 34. Clark's article might be read in conjunction with this one, for it presents the ideology behind the architecture, its style and its form. A more cynical view might be that the elaborate religious and moral arguments Clark records disguised middle-class emulation of the upper class, as compellingly described by Veblen in *Theory of the Leisure Class*. One might

A typical upper-middle-class house plan illustrates the characteristics of this concept of hall (Fig. 1). The space was usually six to eight feet wide and twelve to twenty feet long, or considerably longer if it ran all the way from the front of the house to the back, as it does here. Its chief architectural embellishments were the framed doorways to parlor, drawing room, library, or dining room and the stair and its ornamented newel post. No communal activity took place in the hall; its shape, dimensions, and placement emphasized its function as both a connector and separator of rooms. In most homes of this class, one did not enter directly from the outside into one of the formal rooms but into the hall instead. Although it was possible to move from some rooms to others without entering the hall, it was also possible to enter each room from the hall without passing through any other, thus preserving privacy and the specialized function of each space. By this arrangement social peers of the homeowner could visit in the formal spaces of the home, while social inferiors remained in the hall or were directed elsewhere and kept from intruding upon the family or its guests.<sup>19</sup>

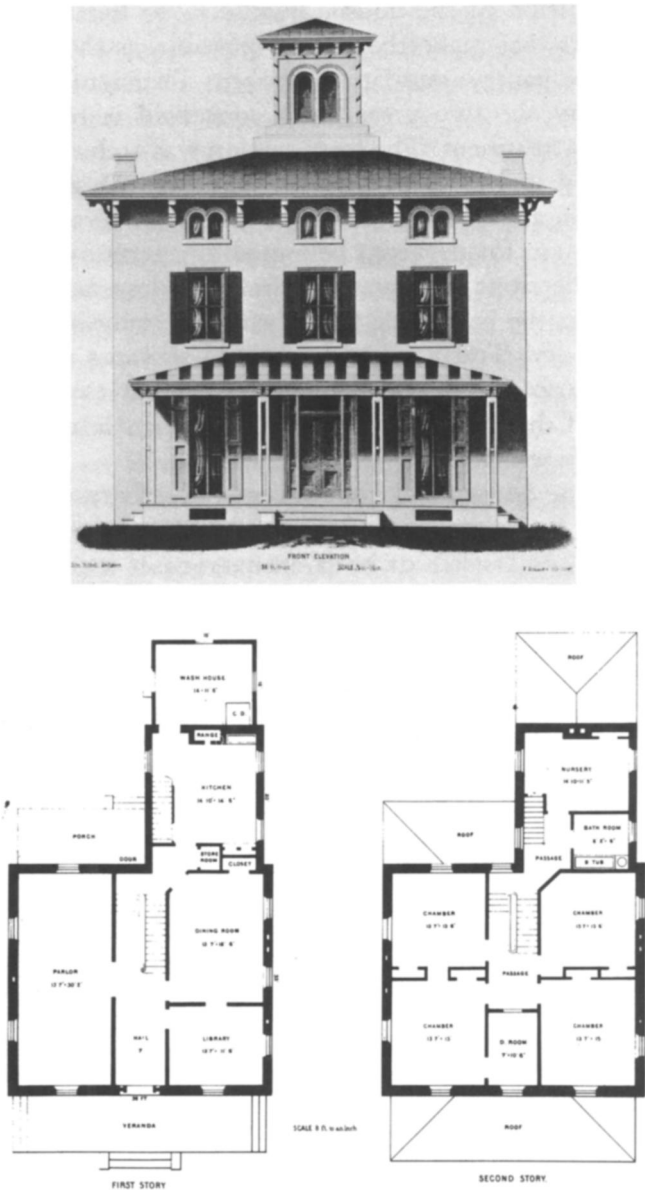
The hall just described might be identified more accurately as a front hall. Many homes also had a back hall, which was sometimes an extension of the front hall, sometimes another smaller corridor adjacent to it. It was not necessarily a discrete space; in some cases its function was incorporated within another room, as it is in the kitchen here. To divide the front hall from the back and formal space from functional there was usually some real or symbolic barrier—a door, lower ceiling, narrower passage, or change in wall or floor materials or finish. There was also a rear stair, usually narrower and steeper than the front stair and free of architectural pretense. This creation of separate and unequal halls and stairs reflects the segregation of ceremonial and utilitarian functions within the home and the division of nineteenth-century society into the two nations described by Disraeli.

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add to Clark's comments on specialization of household spaces that such division was already typical in the homes of the wealthy in the eighteenth century, where the services were often located in outbuildings symmetrically deployed around the main block of the house.

19 In some more costly homes the hall was preceded by a vestibule which can be considered as an insulating area. The vestibule also heightened the sense of drama of moving into the house by adding another stage to the process.

Fig. 1 Elevation and plan of a conventional Victorian house, similar to thousands built in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.



SOURCE: John Riddell, *Architectural Designs for Model Country Residences* (Philadelphia, 1864).

This same inclination toward stratification is seen in the way the plans of upper-middle-class homes are conceptually divisible into two units. The first, larger than the other, is the formal or ceremonial portion of the house. Behind it, to fulfill the vulgar requirements that make the former possible, is the service section of kitchen, pantry, and laundry room. The significant difference in the way the two areas were conceived is reflected in their decorative treatment. The front section was architecture as Ruskin understood it; the rear was only building. Designs for facades appeared in architectural books in great numbers but backs were rarely shown, for the front belonged to ceremony and the rear to utility. The front stair was for dramatic descent to meet family and guests; the back stair for servants carrying slop buckets and dirty laundry. Today when household servants are unknown to most Americans living in the North, it is easy to forget the social realities of the nineteenth century. Victorian homes document a way of life which has largely disappeared.<sup>20</sup>

In these homes, the front hall was usually too small for much furniture. It sometimes contained a table, stand, or pedestal, and two chairs or a settee or both. In most cases it contained at least a hallstand. The hallstand is a nineteenth-century invention. Unlike most furniture of that age, it has no clearly discernible antecedents. The hallstand appeared around the time of Victoria's accession and its life cycle parallels the course of the Victorian way of life in America. After the middle of the century it grew more popular and became the focus of considerable design attention. The form reached its greatest prominence in the 1870s, then declined in scale and importance, undergoing significant alteration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and largely passing out of production by 1920.<sup>21</sup>

20 A discussion of front and back zones is skillfully developed in Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, 1959). Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil; or The Two Nations* (London, 1850). Evidence of stratification in types of domestic structures is found in Downing, *Architecture of Country Houses*, 257, where he argues that a cottage is appropriate for a family with no more than two servants, but three or more servants entitle one to a villa. Much of Downing's approach can be traced to John Claudius Loudon, *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture* (London, 1833). Comments on Downing's debt to Loudon appear in J. Stewart Johnson's introduction to the Dover edition of *Architecture of Country Houses* (New York, 1969), ix-x. John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (New York, 1909), 13-16.

21 Comments about hallstands appear in Christopher Gilbert, *Loudon Furniture Designs* (East Ardsley, 1970), 56-57; Thomas Webster, *An Encyclopaedia of Domestic Economy* (New

The appearance of the hallstand in the late 1870s can be seen in the examples illustrated here (Fig. 2). One was manufactured in Grand Rapids, Michigan, noted for producing quality furniture for the middle- and upper-middle class markets.<sup>22</sup> The others were made in New York City at about the same time. Taken together, all four indicate that although there was considerable diversity in the details of design, a high degree of consistency prevailed in the overall concept of the object. Four functional components were generally repeated: 1) provisions for umbrellas; 2) hooks or pegs for hats and coats; 3) a looking glass; and 4) a small table, often with a drawer and a marble top. Each of these is conceptually separable from the others but the synthesis of the four (or sometimes only the first three) into an architecturally conceived whole is what constitutes a hallstand: the nineteenth-century innovation consists of combining these elements in precisely this manner.

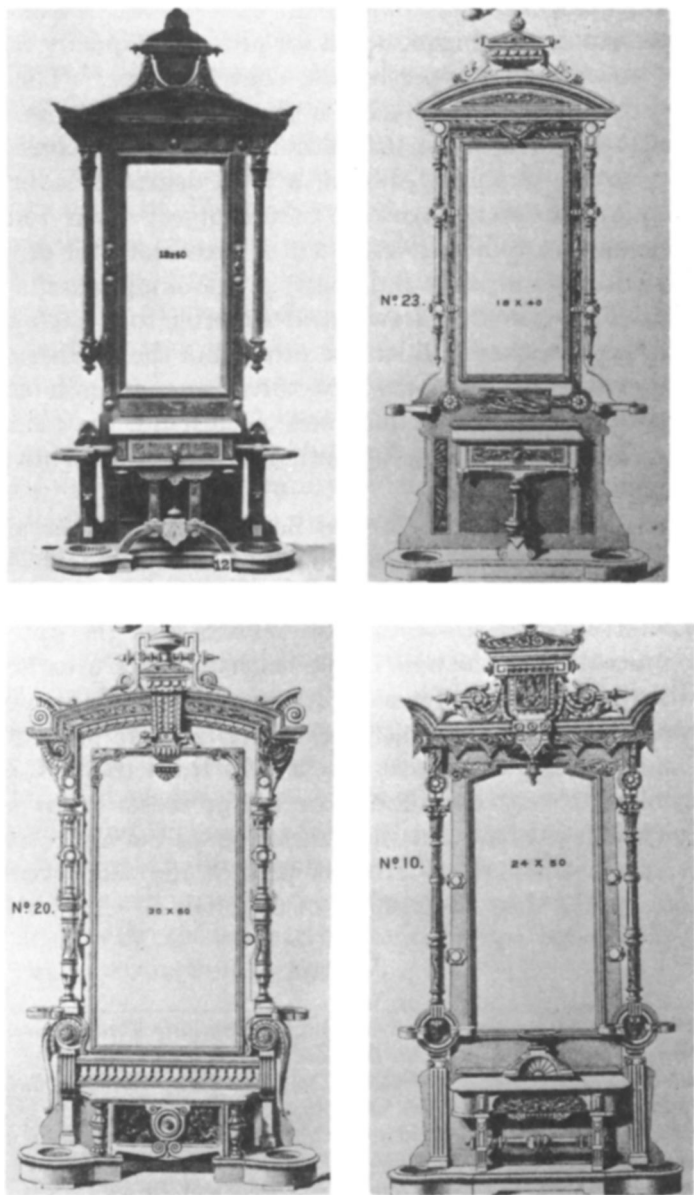
The provisions for umbrellas normally follow the arrangement shown here. Crook-shaped or arm-like devices were mounted on each side of the stand at a height of about twenty-five to thirty inches above the floor. These held the upper ends of the umbrellas. In the base of the hallstand were usually one or two dished receptacles. Their function was twofold: to terminate the implied cylinders in which the umbrellas were placed, and to catch and contain water that might drip from them. Cast iron pans were the most common material for these. Some less expensive hallstands had thin sheet metal boxes but expensive hallstands, particularly those built as part of the woodwork, had concave marble slabs. Regardless of material, all served the same

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York, 1845), 287–288; Rudolph Ackermann (ed.), *The Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufacture, Fashions, and Politics* (London, 1822); Charles Montgomery, *American Furniture: The Federal Period* (New York, 1966), 435; Henry Havard, *Dictionnaire de l'Ameublement et de la Décoration* (Paris, 1887–1890), IV, 515–518. Despite its prominence and extensive production, the hallstand has not held much appeal for enthusiasts of elegant furniture: “As a piece of furniture it was seldom designed; it merely occurred” (John Gloag, *A Short Dictionary of Furniture* [New York, 1965], 282). On the 1870s as the visual high point of Victorian style, see the provocative concept of picturesque eclecticism in C. L. V. Meeks, *The Railroad Station* (New Haven, 1964), 1–25.

22 For more on Grand Rapids furniture on the 1870s, see Kenneth L. Ames, “Grand Rapids Furniture at the Time of the Centennial,” in Ian M. G. Quimby (ed.), *Winterthur Portfolio* 10 (Charlottesville, 1975), 23–50.

Fig. 2 Hallstands produced in the 1870s



SOURCE: The photograph is from a sales catalog issued c. 1878 by Nelson, Matter, and Co. of Grand Rapids and preserved in the Grand Rapids Library. The lithographs show the products of Conrad Eckhardt of New York City as illustrated in J. Wayland Kimball, *Book of Designs, Furniture and Drapery* (Boston, 1876), plate 22.

utilitarian functions of protecting the floor and carpet and keeping the umbrellas accessible.

That such an impressive piece of furniture should be designed for umbrellas indicates something about the status of the latter which, from the vantage point of the twentieth century, might be called the insignia of the Victorian age. The umbrella has a long, eventful history which has been recorded by several artifact historians. It was well known in antiquity in both the Orient and the Occident but its modern history stems from contacts between the East and West during the Renaissance. It came by sea to Portugal and by land to Italy, spreading from there to other areas. At the outset the umbrella was associated with high status; servants held them over their masters when they walked in public. By the eighteenth century the umbrella and a related form, the parasol, had become relatively common; they were depicted frequently in paintings and prints of that period and mentioned in written documents. The parasol served largely a cosmetic function by protecting female skin from the harsh rays of the sun; although its use spread through many levels of society, it remained the mark of a woman of leisure. The umbrella performed a more utilitarian function and was carried by men only after the middle of the eighteenth century. Perhaps because the very wealthy owned carriages to protect them from the weather, carrying one's own umbrella came to be associated with lesser affluence and republican sentiments. In the nineteenth century it became a bourgeois attribute, a portable emblem of respectability, and its prominence reflects a culture dominated by middle-class values.<sup>23</sup>

The second set of functional components of the hallstand, the provisions for hat and coats, reiterates the nineteenth-century emphasis on attire and appearance. The peak of popularity for the hallstand coincides with that of the top hat, which in its most extreme form became the "stove-pipe" hat of Lincoln and his generation. Laver has argued that the top hat was what we would

23 On umbrellas, see Louis Octave Uzanne, *Les Ornaments de la Femme* (Paris, 1892); A. Varron, "The Umbrella," *Ciba Review*, 42 (1942), 1510-1548; T. S. Crawford, *A History of the Umbrella* (Newton Abbot, 1970). Canes were also placed on hall stands. For a classic analysis of this object in nineteenth-century society, see Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, 265. There is a notable distinction between the connotations of the umbrella and the cane or walking stick. In nineteenth-century imagery the umbrella was often associated with the country parson, the cane with the dandy or rake.



call *macho* today, an assertion of masculinity most extreme at the time of greatest role differentiation between the sexes. Its gradual decline he associated with that of male-dominated society.<sup>24</sup>

Hats and coats were usually hung on turned wooden pegs on less expensive hallstands and on small bronzed or gilt metal hooks on more costly pieces. These rarely projected more than six or eight inches from the surface of the hallstand and were generally only six or eight in number and were arranged symmetrically around the mirror. The relatively few attachments for hats, coats, cloaks, or other outer garments, make it clear that the hallstand was not intended as open storage. Only a limited number of objects could be placed on it; examination of old photographs may help in determining the rules governing the selection. Some homes had storage closets near the hall; some had closets behind the stair, easily accessible from the hall, yet they still had a hallstand in the front hall.<sup>25</sup> When large numbers of people came, to a party, for instance, coats were placed on the beds in the chambers, as they are today. Therefore, there were reasons other than storage for placing these garments on the hallstand. We will suggest what these reasons might be after discussing the two other functional components.

The third element, the mirror, emphasizes again the Victorian fixation with personal appearance but has other ramifications as well. Mirrors were a Victorian convention. They appeared where they still do in twentieth-century interiors, on walls in bedrooms and dressing rooms, on chests of drawers, dressing tables, and wardrobes, and adjacent to facilities for washing and shaving. They also appeared, however, on hallstands, *étagères*, cabinets, and sideboards, over mantels, and extending from floor to ceiling between pairs of windows in formal rooms. The functions of glass were not limited to the obvious utilitarian goal of reflecting an image. Behind the glass in parlors and halls of the 1870s lay the example of the *Galerie des Glaces* at Versailles of two centuries earlier. Plate glass was still expensive in the nineteenth century and its prominent display was a sign of wealth and, as Veblen argued, high social standing. Glass was significant, too, for its ability to reflect forms and light and so expand and illu-

24 James Laver, *Modesty in Dress* (Boston, 1969), 121–123.

25 Closets were known in eighteenth-century halls, often also under the stair.

minate a space. Large glasses were normally on axis with lighting fixtures so that illumination was increased. The mirror also caused certain visual effects which people enjoyed. When a glass is viewed from an angle, it reflects segments of the interior which change as the viewer moves, a kinetic phenomenon exploited as a novelty a few years ago on the art scene but once commonplace in Victorian interiors.<sup>26</sup> The glass in the hallstand was also a mirror in the ordinary sense, a dressing glass in front of which to adjust clothing or hair, brush off dust, or otherwise prepare either to leave the house or to enter one of the formal rooms.

The last component of the hallstand, the table, was optional and not included in less expensive examples. It was a convenient resting place for packages, books, gloves, or other small objects. In some instance a decorative object was placed on it; in others it held a card receiver. The drawer was also a place for a variety of small objects, including brushes and whiskbrooms for cleaning garments. The presence of the table can further be explained as providing an occasion for the perpetuation of the "marble-mania" characteristic of the age. The use of marble tops on tables and case pieces is an instance of what Giedion called the devaluation of symbols.<sup>27</sup> Marble tops, used in antiquity, were revived during the Renaissance for use on luxury pieces of furniture. By the nineteenth century what had been confined to the very wealthy became commonplace, as the vast number of surviving examples indicates. Although marble was heavier, more expensive, and more dangerous to fragile objects than wood, it was very popular. It is possible that the marble on hallstands might have helped stabilize the great weight of the mirror but there were other less expensive ways of achieving this end. It is more likely that this marble, like the clearly disfunctional pieces on sideboards, chests of drawers, dressing cases, washstands, cabinets, tables, and stands, was largely a matter of conspicuous consumption.

All four functional components were combined into a single object by people now as forgotten as any of America's minorities.

26 *Glass; History, Manufacture and its Universal Application* (Pittsburgh, 1923), 31; Sloan, *Homestead Architecture*, 321; Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, 33-40. The use of similar visual effects is found most notably in the work of Michelangelo Pistoletto. See Edward Lucie-Smith, *Late Modern, The Visual Arts Since 1945* (New York, 1969), 132; Aldo Pellegrini, *New Tendencies in Art* (New York, 1966), 244, 247.

27 Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command* (New York, 1948), 329-332.

Indeed, there is no need to turn to what is called folk art to find unsung artisans in the American past; they worked for American industry in the nineteenth century. Their charge was not to express themselves in an uninhibited personal manner but to create a saleable product much like others available at the same time. Surviving artifacts and illustrations in trade catalogs show how these unknown people produced scores of varied designs, yet adhered to shared notions about symmetry, placement of the functional components, projection into space, and consumption of wall area. Because of the limited space of the hall, the components were combined in a spatially efficient way. Hallstands rarely project far into the space of the hall, usually only twelve or fifteen inches. But if practical considerations inhibited the consumption of space, there were no such strictures on the use of area. Most hall stands, including those illustrated here, spread expansively along the wall to create a major focal point in the hall and indicate their own significance. In fact, the large size of the hallstand is the most obvious clue that it was intended to represent more than the mere total of its utilitarian functions. The Victorians must have felt that the purposes of the hallstand and the concepts and feelings associated with it were important to their lives, for they enshrined them in grandeur.

People do not make objects large if they wish to hide them and hallstands are usually large. The smallest, usually of cast iron rather than wood, are normally about the height of an adult. The wooden examples are more often between six and a half and eight feet tall and some of the most costly are ten feet. This great size was not inexpensive; the hallstand rarely appeared in lower-class homes. It served, then, as a tool for social differentiation, since its mere possession was a mark of some social standing. The willingness of people to pay significant sums for hallstands, and the obvious expenditure of energy on the design, construction, and finish of the objects, all reaffirm their significance.<sup>28</sup>

The placement of the functional and decorative features of the object is of consequence. The former are placed in a balanced and symmetrical arrangement, augmented and emphasized by the

28 It was possible to purchase the various components of the hallstand individually and in this case the units themselves were small; cast iron umbrella stands and wooden hat and coat racks with mirrors designed to be hung on the wall are the most common. These were less expensive than the combination models discussed here.

latter, which confer importance and elevate the status of the object. The recurring symmetry has already been mentioned and deserves a few words. Symmetry is such a common feature of man-made objects that it may seem inconsequential, yet one also can argue that it is this very persistence that gives it importance. As common as it is, symmetry has nevertheless not been adequately explained. One of the usual arguments is that man makes symmetrical objects because he is himself symmetrical. Others have argued that symmetry is restful and mentally satisfying, fulfilling the search of the mind for equilibrium. Symmetry is also a way creative man can demonstrate control of his tools and material. A form created once may be an accident; its exact duplication is not likely to be.<sup>29</sup>

The ornamentation of the hallstand suggests that the piece met more than utilitarian necessity. Much of the wooden frame and all the veneer panels, paterae, pilasters, and other applied and incised decoration are functionally superficial, the more so in the more expensive examples. The glass is usually larger than needed and the sections above it are in every case beyond physical need. This top part of the hallstand performs an honorific function in direct relationship to the cost of the object. The ornament of the upper section is also honorific in another less direct, more symbolic way. Most of these examples are capped by an architectural element—an arch, a pediment, a cartouche, or some combination of these devices. Each has a long tradition of playing a status-conferring role in architectural contexts and may have retained a residuum of this meaning in the nineteenth century. It is also worth observing that the architectural quality of these pieces of furniture, the more expensive examples especially, calls to mind the facades of temples, churches, and other monumental and meaning-laden architecture, again suggesting that there was more significance in these objects than their utilitarian functions would indicate.<sup>30</sup>

29 Ray Faulkner and Edwin Ziegfield, *Art Today* (New York, 1969), 373–375; Glassie, *Folk Housing*, 170–175; *idem*, “Folk Art,” in Richard Mercer Dorson (ed.), *Folklore and Folklife, an Introduction* (Chicago, 1972), 272–279.

30 An important aspect of meaning in artifacts is style. The social function of style has yet to be suitably analyzed; see Hanna Deinhard, “Reflections on Art History and Sociology of Art,” *Art Journal*, 35 (1975), 30. A summary of some of the theories about the style of the later nineteenth century is in James D. Kornwolf, “High Victorian Gothic; or The Dilemma of Style in Modern Architecture,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, XXXIV (1975), 37–47. Most of the hallstands illustrated here are examples of

A final argument for the importance to the Victorians of the hallstand and the activities associated with it is the critical matter of placement. The hallstand stood prominently in the front hall, immediately visible upon entering the house. If people believed that “the hall determines the first impression on entering the house,” and that in some cases it might be advisable to economize elsewhere in order to create a good effect there, they must have depended heavily on the hallstand to help achieve the effect that they sought.<sup>31</sup> The hallstand was the major piece of furniture in the hall and one of the most important visual elements. Visitors could not avoid seeing it, nor could they avoid seeing the hats, coats, canes, or umbrellas on it. Today we use closets to keep garments out of sight because they violate our sense of propriety. A century ago, halls were furnished with immense, unavoidable wooden objects which loomed prominently in the semidarkness of the hall and were decked out with articles of personal costume. For some, the scale and stern design were awesome and intimidating; for others, there was a more approachable, human quality about the piece. To all, the hallstand conveyed something of the spirit or mood of the household and was useful as well. It helped with details of grooming. It communicated nonverbally about who was or was not at home by the objects on or missing from the hallstand. It ceremonialized the coming and going, the entry and exit of the members of the household and their guests. And it served as a setting, a theatrical backdrop for the ritual of card leaving, which also took place in the hall.

Cook, an Anglophile writer of the 1870s, called hallstands like those illustrated here “ugly things made of tiresome walnut.”<sup>32</sup> Although he rejected its form, he did not reject the hallstand’s function. An illustration from his book (see Fig. 3) shows

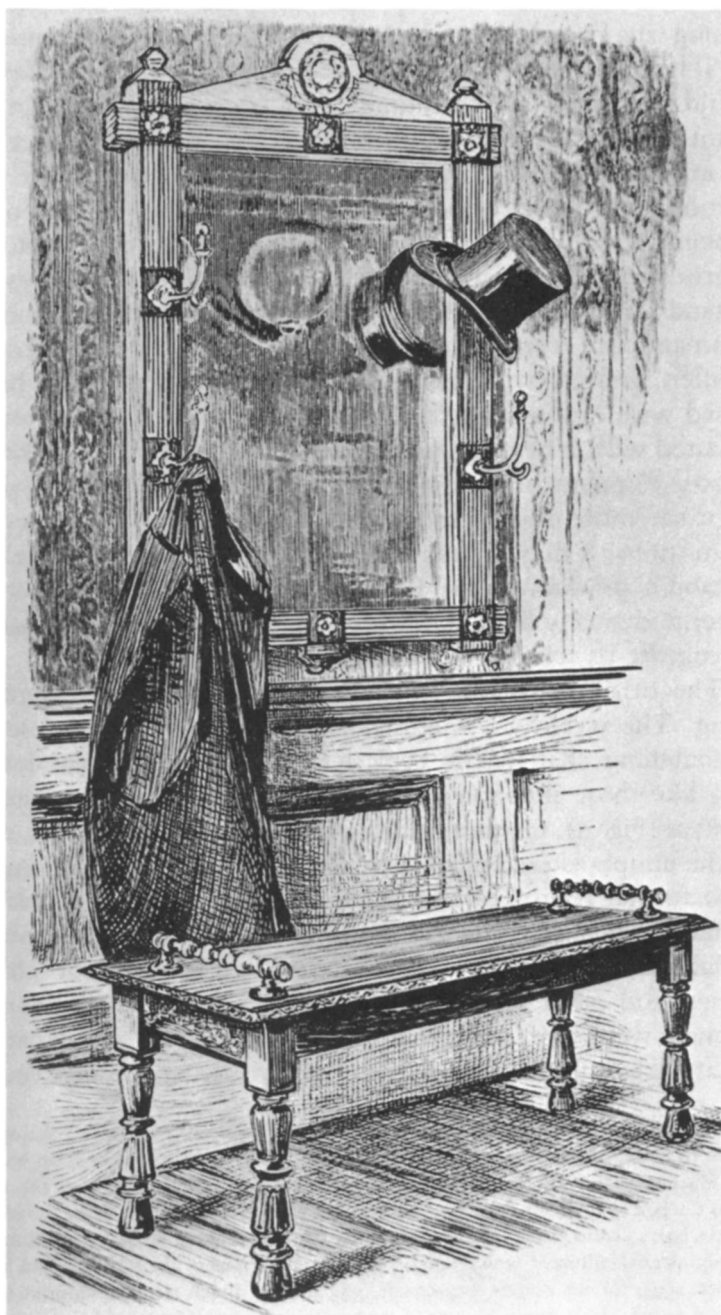
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what was known as the neo-grec style in the 1870s. For comments on this style, see Kenneth L. Ames, “What is the *neo-grec*?” *Nineteenth Century*, 2, (1976), 12–21; *idem*, “Sitting in (*neo-grec*) Style,” *Nineteenth Century*, 2, (1976), 50–58. For hall stands in the Gothic style, see Katherine S. Howe and David B. Warren, *The Gothic Revival Style in America, 1830–1870* (Houston, 1976), 59–60. Studies of the meanings of these architectural elements and related forms include Karl Lehmann, “The Dome of Heaven,” in Kleinbauer (ed.), *Modern Perspectives*, 227–270; Earl Baldwin Smith, *The Dome, a Study in the History of Ideas* (Princeton, 1950); John Summerson, *Heavenly Mansions* (New York, 1963), 1–28.

31 Goodholme, *Domestic Cyclopaedia*, 223.

32 Cook, *House Beautiful*, 31. Goodholme, *Domestic Cyclopaedia*, 223, agrees: “Probably the worst possible step is to buy the stereotyped hat and umbrella rack. No matter how elaborate, they are always the same thing over again, and generally very ugly.”

Fig. 3 View of a hall furnished according to reform ideas of the 1870s.



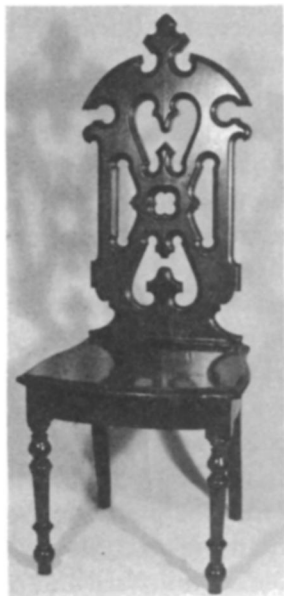
SOURCE: Clarence Cook, *The House Beautiful* (New York, 1877), 27.

the functions discussed previously performed by objects which are nearly devoid of the conspicuous consumption and symbolic meaning suggested above.<sup>33</sup> Yet the image and the caption—"She'll be down in a minute, sir"—are potent reminders of physical and social realities, including, once again, the harsh fact of a servant class. They also indicate how artifacts were deliberately used in the nineteenth century as props for the drama of life. The self-conscious quality evident here and the suggestions of an emotional response to artifacts based on the functions that they perform and the associations connected with them remind us that hallstands are a creation of the age of Romanticism. The concept of Romanticism is employed by historians of the arts and literature but often ignored by others. Like all such broad terms, it has to be used with caution but the attitudes and values conventionally associated with it help us understand the creation of the hallstand, for those elements of the object defined as beyond necessity—and in fact, the entire object itself—worked to appeal to the senses and the emotions. It may seem a superficial job of labelling to call the hallstand a product of the Romantic age, but precisely because that term is usually limited to the so-called fine arts, it is important to recognize its relevance to another class of artifacts.

The other usual objects of furniture in the hall were for seating. The wealthy sometimes had leather upholstered settees and matching chairs. The typical middle-class hall seat looked much like those illustrated here, which were probably made in the 1870s (Fig. 4). Certain features were characteristic. First, there was the unupholstered plank seat, which was otherwise unknown in the formal rooms of the middle-class home. The plank seat was normally hinged, as it is here, so that it could be raised to give access to a shallow compartment underneath for gloves, brushes, and other small items. Front legs were usually turned, stretchers were rare, and the backs were elaborate and expansive so that, like hallstands, they commanded and controlled consid-

33 If the ideology surrounding domestic architecture around the middle of the century deserves to be called a reform movement (Clark, "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History"), it needs to be reconciled with the reform movement of the 1870s. Perhaps the best way to see these two manifestations is as stages of the same movement. Despite Clark's claims, I see little evidence that the mid-century ideology had a marked effect on material culture. I would agree that the publications of the earlier period helped to set the stage for the reform movement, which left a much stronger imprint on the artifactual world. Both stages are part of the transition from palace to old homestead.

*Fig. 4* Walnut Hall Chairs, 1870-1880



SOURCE: Above—from the collection of William J. Wiesand, Sr.  
Below—Stowe-Day Foundation, Hartford, Conn.



erable wall area. The design of the chairs indicates that they were not intended for prolonged sitting, at least not for members of the household or their social peers, for the qualities that they embodied were visual appeal and utility, not comfort. The plank seat was employed in lieu of upholstery because it would not be ruined by contact with wet or soiled outer garments, because it contributed to the stern, somewhat intimidating grandeur of the hall, and possibly because it was uncomfortable. Peers or superiors were shown into one of the formal rooms of the home. The people kept waiting in the hall were socially inferior to the residents of the house, like the “messenger-boys, book-agents, . . . census-man and . . . [the] bereaved lady who offers us soap” condescendingly listed by Cook, who went on to argue that “as visitors of this class are the only ones who will sit in the hall, considerations of comfort may be allowed to yield to picturesqueness. . . .” When hall chairs were used by people of higher status, they served only as perching places for pulling on overshoes or some similar chore. This utilitarian purpose, however, seems to have been secondary to their potential for social and psychological manipulation.<sup>34</sup>

The last important part of this horizontal constellation of hall furnishings was a card receiver. Like the other objects discussed, the card receiver is also an obsolete form, intimately tied to a ritual of card leaving little practiced today. Its early history is obscure but it was much in vogue by the time of the Civil War. On the grandest scale, card receivers were elaborate cast metal stands, often made in France, which rested directly on the floor. More typical was a smaller model, ranging from a few inches to over a foot in height, which was placed on a table or stand. In all cases, the concept of the card receiver was of a dish or tray on a stand which stabilized it and gave it prominence.

From card receivers one turns logically to the cards themselves and the ritual of calling. Again, it is difficult to fix the point

34 Plank seat chairs were inexpensive but durable forms of seating, normally used by the poor or in utilitarian contexts where upholstery was not appropriate. Unlike hallstands, hall chairs can be traced to the early eighteenth century in England and have Continental cognates and antecedents. They were especially used in the great Palladian houses of the eighteenth century and occasionally were adorned with a family crest. The history of this form may suggest that it was another attribute of the wealthy democratized, but to an undemocratic purpose. The quotation is from Cook, *House Beautiful*, 33.

at which cards or the ceremony first became part of middle-class life in the last century. The phenomenon probably derives from royal examples of earlier times, for the dual purpose of preserving social status and distinctions and ritualizing interactions recalls courtly protocol for audiences or interviews. As with so many other adaptations of earlier conventions, certain alterations were made in the nineteenth century which we now think of as typical of that era.

The entire card system was well codified by the middle of the last century and remained largely intact well into the twentieth. The card ritual fitted neatly into the patterns of conspicuous consumption outlined by Veblen, for the task of leaving cards fell to the woman of the household. If she were at all genteel, she was presumed to have the time to devote to this activity. The card ritual, then, was evidence of conspicuous leisure and an instance of non-productive, if gracious, labor.<sup>35</sup>

It is always difficult to know how much credence to give to the normative arguments of etiquette books. In the case of the ritual of the cards, the existence of the props or tools—hallstand, card receivers, and cards—lends support to the testimony of those books. And since there is general agreement about most aspects of card leaving from the earliest books up to those of only a few years ago, we can assume that many who used cards did so in the same way.<sup>36</sup>

Most of the etiquette books stressed the importance of leaving cards. "Leaving cards is one of the most important of social observances, as it is the groundwork or nucleus in society of all acquaintanceship . . ." Card leaving was a way of entering society, of designating changes in status or address, of issuing invitations and responding to them, of sending sentiments of happiness or condolence, and, in general, of carrying on all the communication associated with social life. Not to participate in

35 Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, 41–60; Abba Goold Woolson, *Woman in American Society* (Boston, 1873), *passim*.

36 The rules for card etiquette can be found in the following volumes, among others: Mrs. E. B. Duffey, *The Ladies' and Gentlemen's Etiquette* (Philadelphia, 1877), 50–62, 174–177; *Decorum; A Practical Treatise on Etiquette and Dress of the Best American Society* (Chicago, 1878), 70–90; George D. Carroll, *Diamonds from Brilliant Minds* (New York, 1881), books V and VI. For a survey of these books, see Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Learning How to Behave* (New York, 1947).

this ritual, with its strict rules, was to risk being considered what was termed ill-bred, a euphemism for lower class.<sup>37</sup>

It was important that cards be left in person. Some books equivocated on this point and indicated that cards could be sent with a messenger or by post. Others took a hard line and maintained that it was a breach of etiquette to do anything but deliver them oneself. Certainly it was in violation of the concept of conspicuous leisure not to deliver them, for to mail them or send them with a servant suggested that one had household responsibilities or an activity one valued higher. Related to emphasis upon leisure was the requirement that cards be left between three and five o'clock in the afternoon. Since these were normal business hours, it is clear that men could not be expected to leave cards. They were at work to support these women of conspicuous leisure.

The card ritual was part of a larger ritual of calling. In this framework, we might speak of primary calling and secondary calling or perhaps human interaction and artifact interaction. When individuals were not present, their cards were their surrogates. Since husbands did not normally accompany their wives when they paid calls, the wife left her husband's card where she visited. If the lady of the house being visited was at home, the guest left two of her husband's cards, one for the lady visited and the other for her husband. She did not leave her own card, for it would be redundant since she had already seen the lady of the house.

If a woman were paying calls and the woman she intended to visit was not home, she left three cards, one of her own and two of her husband's. The latter were to be distributed as before, but her card would be left for the mistress of the house; "a lady leaves a card for a lady only." This cult of protecting the virtue of matrons extended to that of maidens too, for in some circles it was not considered appropriate for a young lady to have visiting cards of her own. Her name was printed beneath that of her mother on the latter's card. The use of Miss on a card was reserved for older unmarried women.<sup>38</sup> With this situation, we come closer

37 Carroll, *Diamonds from Brilliant Minds*, V, 3. On the social uses of etiquette, see Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*, 140.

38 Carroll, *Diamonds from Brilliant Minds*, V, 7. There is some disagreement in these works about the appropriate use of "Miss."

to the more formalistic aspects of a ritual which was in many ways a social perpetual motion machine which, once set going among equals, could not with propriety be stopped unless one party moved away. In the case of social unequals it could be halted when the superior ignored the inferior. When there was no intention to visit, a woman merely handed three cards to a servant, who presumably placed them in the card receiver, the contents of which were later sorted and evaluated. Whatever the intention of the individual—to pay a visit or only a surrogate visit by way of the card, a kind of social code of Hammurabi obtained—a card for a card, a call for a call, and the person visited or called on was obliged to reciprocate.

Rules were also spelled out about how and when people of different social status might interact. Calling or only leaving a card signified different degrees of intimacy. Among social equals, the law cited before was normally in operation. In cases of obvious social distinction, the situation was different. If a woman of higher social position returned a card with a call, it was considered a compliment. If the opposite took place, it was brash and presumptive.

The use of cards and servants as barriers was extensive in the last century. For example, a man wishing to make the acquaintance of a young woman could arrange to have his card left at her home by a female friend. If the young woman had no interest in meeting him, the solution was simple; his card was not noticed. Similarly, an intended visit could be reduced to the level of a call through the expedient of having the servant announce that one was “not at home.”

Today much of this activity takes place in business rather than private life. Telephone calls are our cards and secretaries the servants who announce that the important person is at a meeting or cannot be reached. Yet even if some aspects of these rituals survive today, contemporary American society no longer cherishes the same values the Victorians did nor expresses itself in the same way. The Victorians believed in the ceremony of daily life as a way of attaining elegance and personal nobility. Their world emphasized social competition and the artifacts that they made were often designed as tools for that activity. Yet there was more behind hall furnishings of the nineteenth century than conspicuous consumption and invidious comparison, for the emphasis on per-

sonal possessions—hats, coats, umbrellas, and cards—suggests a sentimental or emotional attachment to objects of the kind commemorated in well-known songs and poems like “The Old Arm Chair,” “The Old Oaken Bucket,” and most of all, “Home, Sweet Home.”<sup>39</sup>

If the people who owned the objects we have been discussing could vigorously defend social station and privilege, they could also be moved by associations and relationships with their friends and relatives.<sup>40</sup> The objects that they placed in their halls reflected not only these competing facets of the Victorian personality but the very nature of the hall itself. For it was a space which was neither wholly interior nor exterior but a sheltered testing zone which some passed through with ease and others never went beyond.

39 The card ritual may still be practiced in some circles. Sophie C. Hadida, *Manners for Millions* (New York, 1959; orig. pub. 1932), 85–87, begins her section on cards by noting, “When you call at a private home and the door is opened by a maid, ask for the person whom you wish to see. If the home is conducted with style, the maid extends her card tray . . .” She went on to note that “in simple homes where there is no attempt at formality, the maid may have no card receiver.” It is not likely that many of the millions referred to in the title lived in homes with maids in 1959. Howe, “American Victorianism as a Culture,” 522.

40 On what is called segregated consciousness, see Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*, 108.