



September 2, 2023  
Baldwin-Buss House Update

Documenting the historic interior paint colors and decorative finishes that once graced the Baldwin-Buss House was made a priority by the Baldwin-Buss House Foundation in early August. One of the most exciting discoveries was revealed by chance. Almost 200 years of paint had been compromised by moisture infiltration from a now obsolete second floor bathroom. This caused the paint to flake off revealing fragments of original stenciling and paint colors in the center hall. Careful scraping of the remaining paint exposed enough of the stencil to document the repeat, the colors, and the design.

The border at the top of the wall displayed a bell and swag design that was documented in Janet Waring's book *Early American Stencils on Walls and Furniture* and was part of a parlor overmantel at the Sage House in South Sandisfield, Massachusetts. According to Christie Borkan, whose master's thesis focused on wall stenciling in the Western Reserve, a similar swag design is found at the Warren Little House in Aurora and the vertical vine is found in both Palmyra and Aurora.



A frieze containing a swag flanked by tassels with a center bell and pin-wheel was revealed at the Baldwin-Buss House recently. Shades of green and red dominate the design.



A similar swag (left) was documented at the Sage House in South Sandisfield, Massachusetts.

As roughhewn surfaces shifted to plaster walls and life provided more opportunities other than work and toil, early settlers sought color, ornament, and decoration to grace their homes. Stenciling provided an economical alternative to expensive wallpapers and was more accessible.

Stencil designs emulated the patterns found in wallpaper with respect to borders, the division of wall spaces into panels, and the grouping of designs. Many of the components were symbolic icons. For example, the pinwheel or swastika signifies spring, the sun and growth; a continuous vine is a reference to God and his people, resurrection, safety, and happiness; and a vase full of flowers symbolizes fertility, while the urn usually signifies death.



**L to R: Stenciled vertical vine pattern discovered at the Baldwin-Buss House, recreated and documented vine pattern found in a home in Aurora, Christie Borkan using tracing paper to document the design found at the Baldwin-Buss House.**

Stenciling did not require any outstanding skill level to paint, and supplies needed consisted only of dry pigments, brushes, a supply of stencils cut from thick paper, a builder's cord, and a piece of chalk. With these simple tools a wall could be transformed with colors of ochre, red and green. Itinerant painters and journeyman artists carried the craft of stenciling from New England to Ohio and beyond, often working only for room and board. Stenciling reached its zenith by 1840 but continued to be popular through the Victorian era.

Along with the documentation of the stenciling, BBHF, under the guidance of Frank Welsh of Welsh Color and Conservation, collected samples of paint and plaster in the main block of the Baldwin-Buss House. These samples will undergo laboratory analysis to identify the original colors and composition, finishes, and any additional decorative painting that may have been used. Recording this type of adds to the cultural significance of the building and contributes to its historical legacy. In the future, the information could be used to reinstate the original color palette and decorative finishes. More information can be obtained about historic paint analysis by clicking [here](#). Results will be shared with you once the final report is received.



**Using an X-acto knife, samples were taken from select areas of the woodwork and plaster in the main block of the house. The samples were cataloged and sent out for laboratory analysis.**

