

GIRANDOLES by H. Karl Scharold

Girandoles, sometimes also referred to as garnitures, were popular in the mid-1800's and have begun to strike the fancy of many people today. According to the dictionary, the word girandole means "circle of fire" and is derived from the French, Italian, Latin, and, originally, Greek languages. The term is also associated with a convex mirror having branches holding candles extending from its frame; this giltwood frame mirror was used during the Federal Period as an elegant wall decoration, usually over fire surrounds. By the mid-1800's the term also included candelabra devices with the incorporation of prisms hanging from the ornaments underneath the candle cups. Most girandoles came in a set comprised of either a three-arm or a five-arm center with the addition of two single units flanking the center unit; occasionally double three arm units were used. They were set upon a single or a stepped marble base separated by a spacer. There were many different patterns most often based on historical events, themes from literature, and fauna and floral designs. Girandoles were cast either from brass or from bronze, then gilded in the French manner or silver washed. They were generally cast with a finished side and a rough back; some were cast in molds that were finished all around. How they were cast dictated their use -- the one-sided on mantels, pier mirrors, or tables against the wall, the completely finished as decorative items on center tables, dining tables, or other areas where they could be viewed in their entirety. Although most were used in sets of three, it was not uncommon to use them as two triples, two singles, or any combination that one desired. The use of prisms added to the girandole's unique beauty. One sees many different types of prisms; the most common is a triangular shaped prism, sometimes referred to as a colonial prism, with a single square faceted button at the top. Other types of prisms occasionally seen are three-sided coffin prisms either with stars, wings, c-scrolls, or stars and snowflakes. Generally, one would not see spear point triangular prisms, sometimes referred to as Prince Albert style, or teardrop prisms on period girandoles. Spear point or later varieties of prisms are incorrect replacements.

During the first quarter of the 1900's there was a resurgence of interest in girandoles, and many reproductions of the early patterns were recast. Like most reproductions, they are not quite like the authentic girandoles in that the fabricators of the reproductions took shortcuts and did not reproduce the quality of casting found in the originals. The material most often used was brass without the gilded finish found in the originals; the process of gilding was too much of an added expense for the reproducers; also, the technique had become unpopular due to the toxic nature of the process. When reproductions are viewed next to originals, the comparison is obvious. One can see that the original has crisp, clear detail, whereas the reproduction is washed out and grainy. Often the reproducers would plate or antique the brass by chemical means, sometimes referred to as patinating. In addition, the marble bases on the reproductions were not as thick and do not show the wear and staining of the originals.

Many manufacturers and assemblers put girandoles into the marketplace in the mid-1800's, however, of note are Cornelius-Baker and Archer-Warner, both of Philadelphia, R. E. Dietz and Starr-Fellows, both of New York, and Henry Hooper and W. F. Shaw, both of Boston. These companies produced most of the girandoles and girandole parts at that time in the United States. Sometimes the component parts would have the name of the company either stamped or impressed in the mold, usually on items that they had patented. Not all girandoles made by these companies were signed; in fact, most were not, as they sold their castings to other companies who would assemble the parts and sell them. This lack of signature often makes it difficult to attribute a particular girandole to a particular maker. Furthermore, since many of the companies

borrowed other companies' patterns, the process of attribution becomes even more difficult. Consequently, girandoles that have signatures and are clearly identifiable as to maker are more valuable than those that do not. The exception to this former premise are those produced by Henry Hooper and Company, whose girandoles are clearly identifiable in his company's 1858 trade catalog, even though signatures are not present on its wares.

Although it is difficult to ascertain the maker of a given girandole, some help is available. There are resource books available, such as *Nineteenth Century Lighting, Candle-Powered Devices: 1783-1883*, by H. Parrott Bacot, still in print from Schiffer Publishing. This is an excellent and comprehensive reference with a plethora of photographs of representative girandole patterns. There are other books available, many out-of-print, but a search in a library may yield helpful results. One other source, which may not be available to everyone, is illustrated trade catalogs of companies that produced lighting devices. One example is the Starr-Fellows catalog of 1858, which depicts three patterns of girandole, "Capture of Andre", "Stag", and "Robinson Crusoe", all single hung with star and snowflake triangular prisms; it also mentions that they manufacture some twenty other patterns, among them "Paul and Virginia", "Bear and Beehive", "Spirit of '76", "Bouquet", "Girl, Dog, and Deer", "Fisher Boy and Girl", and "Girl and Boy", mounted either on single or double bases. Another catalog by Dietz and Company of 1860, reprinted by Ulysses G. Dietz, a descendant of R. E. Dietz, shows eleven patterns captioned "Birds", "Vase Pattern", "Boy and Dog", "Squirrels", "Wood Nymph", "Highland Mary", "St. John", "Uncle Tom and Eva", "Boy and Girl", "Paul and Virginia", and "Jenny Lind". From the 1858 Henry Hooper and Company catalog we find many elegant floral examples in the typical Rococo manner; he was known particularly for his remarkable and original castings, including his unique grape and leaf pattern and floral candle cups, with waterleaf or grape and leaf prism holders. Unnamed patterns include a Centurion, a reclining lady, a knight, an Elizabethan man and woman, a hunter, a pair of reclining dogs, and a pair of lying deer. There are many other authentic patterns such as "Sultana", "Sultan", "Warrior with Spear", "Rip van Winkle", and "Ivanhoe", many of which are depicted in Bacot's book. A catalog of Cornelius and Company with girandoles has not to date been discovered.

Of the above-mentioned companies, perhaps Cornelius and Company was the largest maker and produced some of the best quality girandoles of the time. The only other comparable maker in outstanding quality was Hooper. It is interesting to see the difference in color between the two companies, Cornelius being brighter and lighter gilt and Hooper somewhat more subdued and darker gilt. Of the other named makers, it is unclear as to whether trade catalogs are in existence; hopefully, they will surface, giving us another tool for attribution. Another available tool is patent records, which often have sketches of the patterns being patented. Issac Baker, a partner in the Cornelius firm, in 1848-49 patented a girandole set which he labeled "Last of the Mohicans". This particular pattern is sometimes also incorrectly referred to as "Leather Stockings". The theme of this set is drawn from James Fenimore Cooper's novel published in 1826. The characters depicted are "Cora Munro", and "Major Heyward", as flanking single garnitures, with "Chingachgook", chief of the Mohican tribe, seated on a log with "Natty Bumppo", also known as "Hawkeye"; directly behind both is "Uncas", the last of the Mohicans and son of "Chingachgook", on either a three or five-arm centerpiece. All three pieces should bear the signature Cornelius & Co., patented April 10, 1849, on the backside of the casting. This particular set can sometimes be seen as three pieces of "Cora Munro" or of "Major Heyward". In addition, some come with a silver wash on top of the gold Dore wash.

Archer-Warner of Philadelphia, who later also opened an outlet in New York, placed his signature on the inside of the prism holder or coronet in raised block letters. He, like the others,

made the familiar patterns. William F. Shaw of Boston, known for his “Bigelow Chapel” model, signed this girandole on the back of the chapel in raised block letters with the patent date of “Dec 18 1848”. As far as I know, there are no signed examples of Starr-Fellows girandoles; however, it is believed that the “Capture of Andre” girandole with the “Patent Applied For” impression on the back is Starr-Fellows. Thus far, no signed example of Henry Hooper has surfaced; however, his work is absolutely unique among American manufacturers. Robert Dietz usually placed his name, ‘Dietz Bro. & Co., NY’ or “Dietz, Brother & CO” on the backside of the girandole on the stem; he was the only known producer of stamped sheet brass coronets.

Perhaps one of the most commonly produced girandole sets is that of “Paul and Virginia”, made by practically every manufacturer of the time, and often unsigned. The theme comes from Bernardine de Saint-Pierre’s 1787 “Etude de la Nature”, a story of two ill-fated fatherless children, an extremely popular reading of its time.

The romance with girandoles can be all consuming. Consequently, the demand for girandoles over the past years has increased, as have their prices. Just as in the mid-1800’s when most stylish homes would have such garnitures, because of their unique beauty and durability, they are finding their way again into the well-appointed homes of today. The girandoles pictured in this article are from the extensive selection at H. Karl Scharold Antiques located in Fredericksburg, Texas and H. Karl Scharold’s personal collection.

Picture 1. "Last of the Mohicans", 5-arm w/2-singles, three piece set, signed Cornelius



Picture 2. "Ivanhoe", 3-arm w/2-singles, unsigned, Philadelphia or Boston



Picture 3. "Paul and Virginia", 2-singles, signed Archer-Warner



Picture 4. "Uncle Tom and Eva", 3-arm w/2-singles, signed Dietz



Picture 5. "Cora Munro", 3-arm w/2-singles, signed Cornelius



Picture 6. "Capture of Andre", 3-arm, Starr-Fellows, signed "Patent Applied For"



Picture 7. Girandole Set, pair 3-arm, Henry Hooper



Picture 8. "Spirit of '76", 3-arm w/2-singles, unsigned, New York or Philadelphia



Picture 9. "Elizabethan Man & Woman", 3-arm w/2-singles, unsigned, NY or Philadelphia



Picture 10. "Bear and Beehive", 3-arm w/2-singles, unsigned, New York or Philadelphia



Picture 11. "Rip Van Winkle", 2-singles, New York or Philadelphia



Picture 12. "Sultana", 3-arm w/2-singles, New York or Philadelphia



Picture 13. "Mother and Daughter", 3-arm, New York or Philadelphia



Picture 14. "Basket of Flowers", 2-singles, New York or Philadelphia



Picture 15. "Warrior", 3-arm w/2-singles, New York or Philadelphia



Picture 16. "Two Girls, and Deer", 3-arm, New York or Philadelphia

