

DiGiovanni & Co.

Personal Property Appraisal

539 Flume Street, Suite 200

Chico, California 95928

530-624-5125

Report of Research

on

The Martin Hotel Pressed Tin Wall Covering with Arabesque Design Motif, c. 1890



Client: Mr. John Arant

Report Written by: Carol DiGiovanni

Date of Report: November 30, 2012

Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Title Page	1
Table of Contents	2
Transmittal Letter	3
Body of Report	4
Photographs & Illustrations	7
Bibliography & Sources Consulted	10
Credentials	12

DiGiovanni & Co.
Appraisal of Antiques & Decorative Arts
539 Flume Street, Suite 200
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November 30, 2012

Mr. John Arant
94 West Railroad Street
The Martin Hotel
Winnemucca, NV 89445

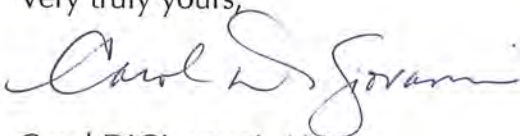
Subject Property: Pressed Tin Wall Panels with Arabesque design motif, c. 1890

Dear John,

At your request, I have researched your Pressed Tin Wall Panels with Arabesque design motif which are affixed to the walls of the Martin Hotel in Winnemucca, NV. You provided digital photographs of the subject property for my use. I did not inspect the wall panels in person.

As I stated in my email of October 9, 2012, the scope of work for this assignment included conducting research to establish an approximate date of manufacture for the pressed tin wall panels, and to gather any other information that would add context to the seemingly erotic nature of the arabesque design in general, and more specifically as it relates to the history of the Martin Hotel building. This assignment did not include a conclusion of value for the subject property. We agreed to a "not to exceed" sum of \$500 (five hundred dollars) for time spent conducting research and reporting the findings to you.

Very truly yours,



Carol DiGiovanni, AM

Pressed Tin Wall & Ceiling Coverings

During the mid nineteenth-century, mass produced sheets of thin rolled tinplate became readily available in America, and pressed tin wall and ceiling coverings reached the height of their popularity by the 1890s. Once installed and painted, pressed tin was thought to resemble the more expensive and delicate decorative plasterwork in vogue among wealthy European and American homeowners. The pressed tin proved to be affordable, durable, and practical for American businesses and households.

Pressed tin ceiling and wall panels were produced in myriad patterns by stamping thin gauge tin using a die and drop hammer. During the late nineteenth-century, dozens of companies shipped panels all over the United States via the railroad. Additionally, according to Brian Greer's Tin Ceilings website (<http://www.tinceiling.com/company/historytin.php>), embossed tin plate panels used on ceilings and walls are almost uniquely North American. Though pressed tin panels were exported during the late nineteenth-century to South Africa and Australia, they are virtually unknown in the rest of the world.

The Arabesque Design Motif

The arabesque design motif is found across various forms and materials in the decorative arts, and generally refers to intricate floral, geometrical, animal, fruit, or figural design. While the motif has its roots in ancient Rome, it was particularly popular among the aristocracy in France during the eighteenth century. The arabesque motif became widely popular during the late nineteenth-century when mechanization made the manufacture of richly decorated wallpapers, textiles, and furniture affordable for a broader segment of the population.

Dating the Martin Hotel Pressed Tin Wall Panel with Arabesque Design

The date of the subject property pressed tin wall panels is c. 1890. This date can be established based on several factors which narrow the time period for which the panels were manufactured:

- the arabesque design was a popular motif in 1890;
- the popularity of pressed tin, its production and distribution throughout the United States was at its zenith in 1890;
- it corresponds with the time period in which the Martin Hotel was built (c. 1885);
- and pressed tin fell out of favor during the early twentieth century when manufacturers retooled for the needs of the war effort during World War I.

The Eye of the Beholder

The pressed tin wall covering at the Martin Hotel hints at much more than just late-nineteenth-century American decorating trends. The detail of the arabesque design with its seemingly erotic rendering of flower-and-vase may be a tantalizing clue to the broader history of Winnemucca and the Martin Hotel building. Was the building identified as a "dwelling" on the 1885 Sanborn fire insurance map at the corner of Railroad and Melarkey streets actually a brothel?

Artist Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), well-known for what most consider erotically charged imagery of flowers, insisted that they were just flowers. It seems that a portion of the viewing public agree with her, while others do not. The same may be said for the Martin Hotel pressed tin wall covering. In the course of my research I found that where some see an obviously erotic intent to the arabesque design (myself included), others see nothing but a standard 1890s arabesque design motif. My inquiry at the W.F. Norman Company (an original producer of pressed tin ceiling panels still in business today) yielded no evidence of a secret line of brothel-decor patterns. Elizabeth Broman, a reference librarian at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum sent along a few journal articles and other references on nineteenth-century brothels, but opined that she saw nothing at all erotic in the Martin Hotel pressed tin wall panels, "I personally don't see why this design would be used for a brothel--it looks like it could have been used in any room." Hence, the eye of the beholder denies us a definitive answer to our question, was the Martin Hotel building home to a nineteenth-century Western brothel? It could have been, but the design of the pressed tin wall panels do not provide us with a definitive answer to that question.

Western Brothels

That there were brothels in nineteenth-century Western towns like Winnemucca, Nevada is no surprise. At that time, even small western crossroads towns were able to support multiple houses of prostitution. But then as now, there was a hierarchy to the profession. At the top were big city luxury brothels elaborately decorated, serving caviar and the best champagne...for a price. "Diamond Jessie" Hayman, who began her career as a prostitute in the Sierra Nevadas during the 1880s, used her substantial earnings to establish herself as one of the most successful madams in San Francisco. Diamond Jessie owned and operated a sumptuously decorated three-story brothel in the Tenderloin of San Francisco where she outfitted her prostitutes in fine clothes, shoes, and even furs. When she died in 1926 the value of her estate was estimated at \$116,000.

Mining and crossroads towns had their own versions of luxury brothels in what were known as "Parlor Houses." A parlor house would have appeared to the outside world as a pleasant dwelling, and its madam may have described herself as the landlady of a boarding establishment, or perhaps as a seamstress or even laundress. While it would have been well known by town folk and easily discovered by visitors that the highest class prostitutes in the area were to be found there, the Sanborn fire insurance maps would most likely have identified a parlor house as a "dwelling."

According to an article entitled *Painted Ladies of the Old West*, "The most successful landladies maintained, at least on the ground floor, a strict air of respectability and a charming home life...First-class places set a good table and prided themselves on their cellars, offering choice cigars, bonded bourbon, and the finest liquors and wines." The madam would have employed a bouncer to ensure patrons paid for services rendered, and to protect her girls from rough treatment. Notably, in addition to wages far higher than a woman could find in any other form of employment, the madam also provided benefits in the form of free birth control, health care, legal assistance, housing, and meals.

Saloons were clearly marked on the Sanborn maps, though saloon and dance hall girls were generally not prostitutes. (from *Legends of America: Painted Ladies of the Old West*) In the American West at a time when there were far more men than women on the frontier, female companionship was a powerful draw. It was the job of a saloon girl to sing, dance, and talk with men to entice them to stay in the bar longer and buy more drinks, but not necessarily to sleep with them. At the bottom of the pecking order were prostitutes who worked out of "cribs"--small rooms often with only a single window--followed by streetwalkers, who carried a sheet to lay on the ground. Nevada state census data for 1870 reveals that there were numerous Chinese women in Winnemucca whose profession was officially listed as "prostitute," and it is likely these women were at this lowest level of the trade.

The description of the Martin Hotel building in the National Register of Historic Places reports that the house was converted to a bar named the "Roman Tavern" in 1908. The discovery of Herculaneum and Pompeii during the 18th century brought knowledge of the unfettered sexual activities of the ancients, as revealed in explicit mosaics and frescoes. Roman taverns were an important element in a sexually unbound society where prostitution was neither illegal nor frowned upon. Alfonso Pasquale, the Italian-born proprietor of the Roman Tavern on Railroad Street, must have understood the significance of the name he chose for his business. According to Thomas McGinn in his book, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World*, "...generally speaking, inns, lodging houses, taverns, and restaurants of all kinds were associated with the practice of prostitution, often, though not exclusively, by the staff." (pp 15-16) Was Alfonso Pasquale winking at the public? If so, the pressed tin wall panels may have been installed during this period of the Martin Hotel's history. Though the design of the panels dates to c. 1890, the pattern itself might easily have remained in the manufacturer's or retailer's inventory during this time period.

By 1913, after a short stint as an annex to the Lafayette Hotel, the Martin Hotel building became a boarding house for Basque shepherders. It seems unlikely that its proprietors, Augustine and Ellsee Martin, with their young son in tow would have been operating a brothel in their hotel. It may be good luck for posterity that the Martin's were among those who do not see erotically charged images on the pressed tin wall panels, or they might have removed them nearly 100 years ago. Instead, the panels remain intact as a sort of Freudian test of the psyche of modern viewers. Now who's winking?

PHOTOS & ILLUSTRATIONS



Subject Property: *Pressed Tin Wall Panel - Arabesque Design Motif c. 1890*
Martin Hotel, Winnemucca, Nevada



Wallpaper by J.Z. Zuber & Cie, c. 1890
In the collection of the Brooklyn Museum

http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/157238/Wallpaper_Sample



Paris Working Girl with Art Nouveau Arabesque Panel, c. 1890
(from Huffington Post article by Tony Perrottet, January 5, 2012)



A Montana Parlor House Interior c. 1890
from *Distinctly Montana Magazine* article, Summer 2006



Wall painting from the Lupanar (brothel) of Pompeii
<http://members.virtualtourist.com/m/1c048/23921/4/>



Roman Prostitution Tokens

<http://collective-history.tumblr.com/post/26164762860/erotic-roman-coins-used-as-tokens-for-entrance-in>

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- Lynn, Catherine. *Wallpaper in America*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980)
- McGinn, Thomas. *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel*. (University of Michigan Press, 2004)

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Other Sources:

National Register of Historic Places, Martin Hotel, Winnemucca, Humboldt County, Nevada, National Register #03001067.

Nevada State Historic Preservation Office, Nevada Census Database, nvshpo.org

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. University of Nevada, Reno: Nevada in Maps Collection.
<http://www.delamare.unr.edu/maps/digitalcollections/nvmaps/>

Experts:

Elizabeth Broman
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Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum Library
Smithsonian Institution
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Carol DiGiovanni, AM

Carol DiGiovanni is an Accredited Member of the American Society of Appraisers (ASA), accredited in Antiques & Decorative Arts. ASA is the oldest and only major appraisal organization representing all of the disciplines of appraisal specialists and maintains stringent mandatory continuing education and recertification requirements for its members.

EXPERIENCE

Appraiser, DiGiovanni & Co.; Chico, California — 2009-Present

Specializing in the appraisal of antiques and decorative arts; providing appraisal and advisory expertise to individuals, institutions, estates and collectors.

Merchandising Manager, New Urban Builders; Chico, California — 2001-2007

Founding member of building company dedicated to planning and building neighborhoods according to the principles of New Urbanism. Collaborated with principal planner to create new homes built in the craftsman style and tradition. Designed furnishing plans, selected, purchased and installed furnishings for model homes in multiple projects.

Partner, Durham House Preservation Partnership; Chico, California — 1990-1996

Researched and wrote National Register Application for the W.W. Durham House, home of the town founder of Durham, California. The W.W. Durham House was placed on The National Register of Historic Places in February 1992.

Supervised work plans for the restoration of W.W. Durham House in accordance with Secretary of the Interior Guidelines. After serious decline and more than a decade without inhabitants, the partnership restored the Durham House to its original appearance. It is now a single family residence.

Assistant to Mr. Durenberger; G.R. Durenberger Antiquarian; San Juan Capistrano, CA — 1986-1987

Joined staff of noted antiques dealer Gep Durenberger as first job after college. The experience afforded a singular opportunity to learn about French and English antiques in a non-academic setting. Gained valuable experience in sales, merchandising, and public relations. Helped plan several "Durenberger Series"--lectures on topics relating to the decorative arts presented by individuals with expertise in various fields.

EDUCATION

University of California, Irvine; Irvine, California

In association with the American Society of Appraisers

— Appraisal Studies in Fine & Decorative Arts Certificate - 2009

— Connoisseurship Studies in Fine & Decorative Arts Certificate - 2011

Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice & exam -- 2009

Winterthur Fall Institute, Winterthur Delaware -- 2005

Object Study: "Berlin Wool Work Pictures, or Thunder & Lightning in Crewel"

Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts -- B.A., American Studies -- 1986

Historic Deerfield Summer Fellowship, Deerfield, Massachusetts -- 1985

Research Topic: "Wallpaper in Deerfield, Massachusetts 1792-1838"

MEMBERSHIPS

American Society of Appraisers, Accredited Member; Historic Deerfield Fellow Member; Winterthur Museum Member; North State Symphony Board Member; Museum of Northern California Art Member