

Old-Time New England Primer of Preservation

W is for WALLPAPER

By DOROTHY S. WATERHOUSE

AS surprising as it may seem, specimens of early wallpapers which were used in this country in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries may still be found in old New England houses. Made of strong rag pulp and painted in distemper, they have withstood the elements of time. Anyone possessing a fine old wallpaper should treat it as a valued heirloom, giving it all the care possible for its preservation.

When an old wallpaper is in reasonably good condition and is to be kept on the original walls, the treatment for its preservation is fairly simple. First, any torn or loosened edges should be re-pasted, using a high-grade wall paste, such as one made of rice or wheat flour. Any necessary cleansing should be undertaken by a professional only. Possibly there may be some worn or bare spots. These may be painted in, in distemper, great accuracy being necessary to match the design and color. Finally, a thin coat of clear lacquer will not only act as a safeguard against damage from dampness, insects, and general wear and tear, but will also enhance the original color and design. It is invisible, and will in no way injure the wallpaper.

Scenic wallpapers, such as those made by Dufour in Paris, are a rarity and worthy of the most skilled workmanship in handling them. If they are to be removed from one room and re-hung in another,

again only a professional should be employed. The process is long and expensive. First the room must be humidified for several days until the paper is loosened sufficiently to remove without tearing. Do not work in cold temperature. Each piece or strip of paper must be marked as to its location in the picture, then spread on a perfectly smooth boarding, and backed with muslin. Never roll or fold.

Before re-hanging the paper, the plaster walls must be in perfect condition. If dampness exists, by all means remove the cause. There is on the market a lining paper with tarred coating on one side, which, I have been told, has been used satisfactorily over plaster walls which seem to be slightly damp in spite of all attempts to remedy the condition. The tarred side is placed next to the plaster.

In case the scenic paper does not sufficiently cover its new location, or there are broken or bare spots in the design, an expert in such restoration can cleverly camouflage the missing portions. This is accomplished by hand painting a continuation of the scenery or sky or foreground. The last step is the application of a thin coat of the clear lacquer.

Fragments of old wallpapers need not necessarily be stored away out of sight, but can be used in many decorative ways, and so be enjoyed. After backing with muslin, a fairly sizable piece can be mounted as a wall panel against a plain

background, the panel being set in a simple architectural molding. A colorful single motif or scene can be treated in like manner as an over-mantel picture. I have seen boxes, books and artistic folding screens which have been re-covered with fascinating fragments of old wall-papers.

Old papers discovered under layers of superimposed papers, or serving as linings in chests and trunks, can best be freed by the use of steam. Sometimes a thin coat

of wallpaper paste brushed on the surface will tend to loosen them also. Never soak with water. Once removed, place the pieces between two layers of white paper, press with a warm iron, and back with muslin. A thin covering of the clear lacquer will help in their preservation. Tiny pieces can be mounted under glass as a picture and any other odds and ends protected in a stiff folder. Every effort should be made to preserve these fragile works of art.

