

# ARTS AND CRAFTS COLLECTOR

## A&C Wallpapers: An Unexplored Collecting Niche?

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One could argue that no element of the early 20th-century Arts & Crafts home was originally so ubiquitous, and yet today so frequently overlooked, as wallpaper. Despite the fact that William Morris – godfather of the Arts & Crafts movement – made some of his most lasting contributions to the decorative arts through his justly famous paper design, few of us (if any) consider wallpaper as a collecting category.



Copyright, 1906, by M. H. Birge & Sons Co.



Copyright, 1910, by M. H. Birge & Sons Co.

—For Barker Bros., Los Angeles, Cal.

*M.H. Birge & Sons promoted annual new releases with meticulously detailed vignettes furnished with high-end Arts & Crafts details.*

So, why is that?

Well, this is probably for two reasons.

The first is that wallpapers, while produced literally by the millions of rolls, were remarkably ephemeral. Even though the vast majority of rooms decorated between 1900 and 1915 – whether in humble Craftsman bungalows or great English mansions – were papered, very few intact interiors or remnant rolls survive to reveal how stunning these rooms truly were.



*Introduced in England around the turn of the century, William Shand-Kydd's Peacock in Brambles frieze was 39" high by 60" long.*

The second reason is more a dirty little secret...

Many of us carry a strong ambivalence about wallpaper. Fueled by a mixture of Modernist moral suspicion, Apple-marketed minimalism, and deep-seated doubt about those cheap pink flamingoes on the walls in our grandmother's bathroom, we just aren't sure there is real beauty and value in wallpapers.



*The finest papers of the Arts & Crafts era were block printed, embossed, and stained by hand in studios like this one at M.H. Birge & Sons in Buffalo, N.Y.*

My hope at this year's Grove Park Inn Arts & Crafts Conference is to break through these challenges of perception, scarcity, and presentation to unlock interest in a whole new area of Arts & Crafts collecting – antique wallpapers.

For example, W. B. Brown of Bluffton, Indiana, was famous for his all-wood light fixtures, but he produced furniture, art glass windows, and even complete store fronts and interiors in the Craftsman style. And decorated his 1912 home in Arts and Crafts wallpapers. At this year's Arts and Crafts Conference, I'll be presenting rare examples of original wallpapers from American companies like M. H. Birge & Sons, the Robert Graves Co., and Janeway & Carpender.



W. B. Brown's Library

*The home of W.B. Brown of Bluffton, Ind. in 1912. Brown was famous for his all-wood light fixtures, but he produced furniture, art glass windows, and even complete store fronts and interiors in the Craftsman style.*

They range from embossed and stained imitations of tooled leather and hand block-printed landscapes, to the charming surface-printed and gilt-accented friezes and sidewalls that provided a backdrop to the Arts and Crafts furniture, art pottery, and hammered copper we all appreciate.

Some will be offered as framed artwork, others built into folding screens, or sold loose and unmounted for your own collection — or creative use.

Regardless, I hope you'll stop by and take a closer look at something we've all taken for granted.

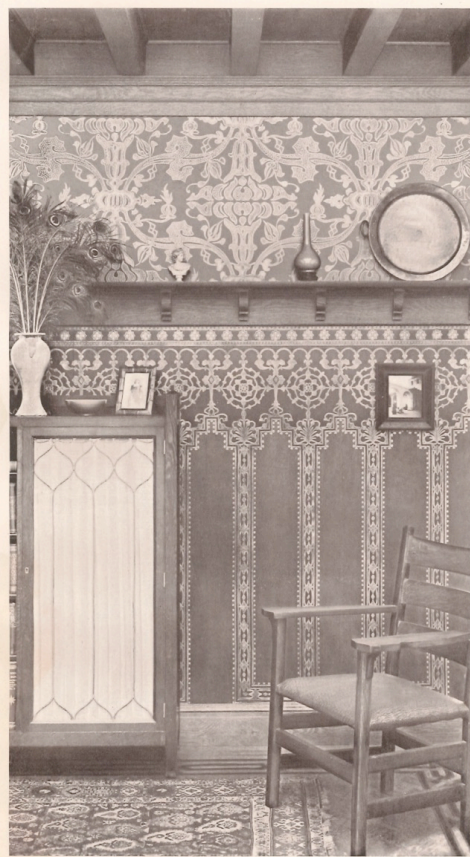
I look forward to meeting you.



*All too often, wallpapers are experienced as pattern from a distance, but their stunning beauty is best seen up close where the character of the paper, metallic gilding, surface texture, and oil or distemper paint surfaces are richly evident.*



*A fine network of lines and mottling of colors printed over a gold metallic ground create the feel of tapestry in this c1910 frieze of rose hips on the vine by The Robert Graves Company of New York, N.Y.*



7586 UPPER HANGING  
8268 CROWN HANGING

Interior, No. 18; Copyrighted, 1904, by M. H. Birge & Sons Co.



*Even the most beautiful period photographs fail to convey the incredible texture and beauty of Birge's tooled leather papers like these crown and ornament panel hangings from 1904 and 1909.*

