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THE ACANTHUS LEAF IN CLASSICAL PHASES OF AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE, 1800-1900

by

Gerald Francis Gates
B.F.A., Syracuse University, 1943

This Thesis for the M.F.A. degree, by
Gerald Francis Gates
has been approved for the
Department of
Fine Arts
by

Clemon Lindstrom

Dorothy L. Eisenbach

Date Aug. 12 1949

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Colorado in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts
in Art Education
Department of Fine Arts
1949

This Thesis for the M.F.A. degree, by

Gerald Francis Gates

has been approved for the

Department of

Fine Arts

by

Eleanor Lindstrom

Dorothy L Eisenbach

Date Aug. 12, 1949

Gates, Gerald Francis (M.F.A., Art - Education)

The Acanthus Leaf in Classical Phases of American Architecture 1800-1900

Thesis directed by professors Elliot Evans, Francis Geck, Clarence Lindstrom

The purpose of this investigation is to show the extensive use and persistence of the acanthus motif in American exterior and interior architecture during the period of 1800 to 1900. This study is based upon the predominance of the leaf motif as it occurred in domestic, civic, commercial, and ecclesiastical building of New England, the Middle Atlantic states, the South, and the Midwest.

Data for this study has been compiled from available literature concerning the occurrence of the acanthus leaf in American architecture, including Nineteenth-Century architectural handbooks and iconographic collections. Information regarding regional adaptations of the leaf motif has been obtained from a form letter survey sent to thirty historical societies. Photographs have been used to aid in illustrating the prominence of the acanthus leaf in decoration.

Through the ages the acanthus leaf has been a prominent decoration in the field of architecture. In its decorative forms, the acanthus motif imitated its thistle-like

leaf but with subsequent use and development its design became more symbolic and abstract.

The acanthus motif attained its height as ornamentation in American architecture during the Greek Revival. Throughout the entire period, 1800-1900, the acanthus motif expressed its classical origins; however, during the middle of the Nineteenth Century this leaf ornament assumed abstraction in both domestic and ecclesiastical decorations. During the last two decades of the century, the acanthus motif has occurred less frequently in architectural ornamentation than at any other time from 1800 to 1900.

This abstract of about two hundred and fifty words is approved as to form and content. I recommend its publication.

Signed Eleanor Lindstrom

Instructor in charge of dissertation

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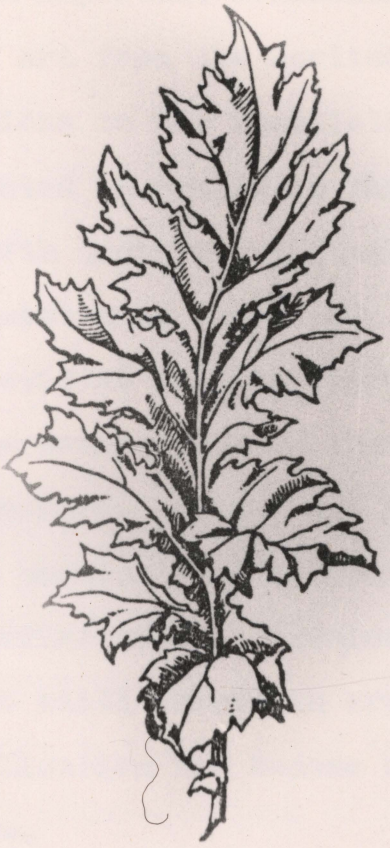
Plate I



The Acanthus Leaf



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Through the ages the acanthus leaf in the decorative arts has remained an important ornamental motif, appearing in various forms of art from the earliest periods of Oriental and Greek civilizations to the Twentieth Century. The leaf pattern was represented in realistic form on the Corinthian capitals of late Fifth Century architecture, and a continuation of the motif existed in Roman art. Variations of the acanthus leaf were evident in later periods of European art, particularily in the Renaissance and the Neo-Classical Revival of the Eighteenth Century. During the Nineteenth Century the acanthus leaf, very popular as a decorative motif in American architecture, reflected its classical origins. In the Twentieth Century it still exists in architectural ornamentation, but its application has become subordinated by a functional point of view.

The persistence and popularity of this decorative motif is due to its intrinsic beauty and adaptability to rhythmic design. Its long sharp cleft leaves closely resemble common plants such as the roadside thistle, parsley, and celery characteristics of which have given the acanthus motif a simple graceful movement of line and flexibility of shape that has been an aesthetically exciting and satisfying

theme for the designer.

In early stages of development and application, the acanthus motif closely resembled the native plant form. As the designers learned its potentialities as decoration, the motif became more symbolic and abstract in pattern.

This investigation will demonstrate the extensive use and persistence of the acanthus motif in American architecture during the period of 1800 to 1900.

Its leaf form was used more extensively for ornamentation than were other motifs in that century, remaining a prominent ornamental device in New England, the Middle Atlantic states, the South and the Midwest during the entire period.

Since the classical and renaissance origins are reflected in American design at that time, the chronological development of the acanthus motif will be traced through the periods of art terminating in the Nineteenth Century.

Examples of the acanthus motif in exterior and interior architectural ornamentations of the Nineteenth Century will be chosen to illustrate the character of the leaf form employed in both public and private buildings in New England, the Middle Atlantic states, the South and the Midwest. These examples will be partially represented with photographs.

A form letter survey has been used to collect specific information concerning the variations of the acanthus

motif in American architectural ornamentation during the period.

The bibliography for this investigation has been compiled from available literature on the acanthus motif in American exterior and interior architectural ornamentation in the Nineteenth Century. These sources were found chiefly in the University of Colorado library and in the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C..

In addition many examples of this leaf form were studied from photographic and monographic collections.

The term "acanthus" is defined by a general reference and a dictionary of architectural terminology as follows:

> Acanthus, the name given to a group of thistle-like plants, native chiefly to the Mediterranean region, several of which are grown as ornamentals. They are handsome plants, with stems about 3 feet high; large much-divided, usually spin-toothed leaves, and showy clusters of red, purple, or white flowers.[1]

Russell Sturgis explains "acanthus" thus:

> A. A plant growing freely in the lands of the Mediterranean, having large leaves, deeply cleft; the sharp pointed leaves of some species strongly resembling those of the familiar field and roadside thistles, Carduus, (or Cnicus, Gray) Lanceolatus, Virginianus, and others. The two species commonly described and figured, acanthus mollis and A. spinosus, are very different in character of the leaves.
>
> B. In Greek, Greco-Roman, Byzantine, Romanesque, and neoclassic architecture, a kind of decorative leafage, assumed to be studied, or to have

---

1 Suzzallo, Henry, The National Encyclopedia (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1932), p. 24.

been studied originally from the plant, A. A statement in Vitruvius (IV. Ch. I) as to the origin of the Corinthian capitals gave rise to the common belief as to this origin. Other leaves, as those of parsley, celery, ranunculus, and many root leaves of herbaceous plants, seem well fitted to have been the origin of one or another variety of this common motive of ornament; but it is customary to speak of the leafage of the Corinthian capital and its variants, of that in S. Sophia and the Syrian Greek churches, of the similar leafage of twelfth-century work in France, and of the modern imitations of these types, as acanthus leaves.[2]

---

2 Sturgis, Russell, A Dictionary of Architecture and Building, Vol. I (New York) The Macmillan Company, 1901) p. 8.

CHAPTER II

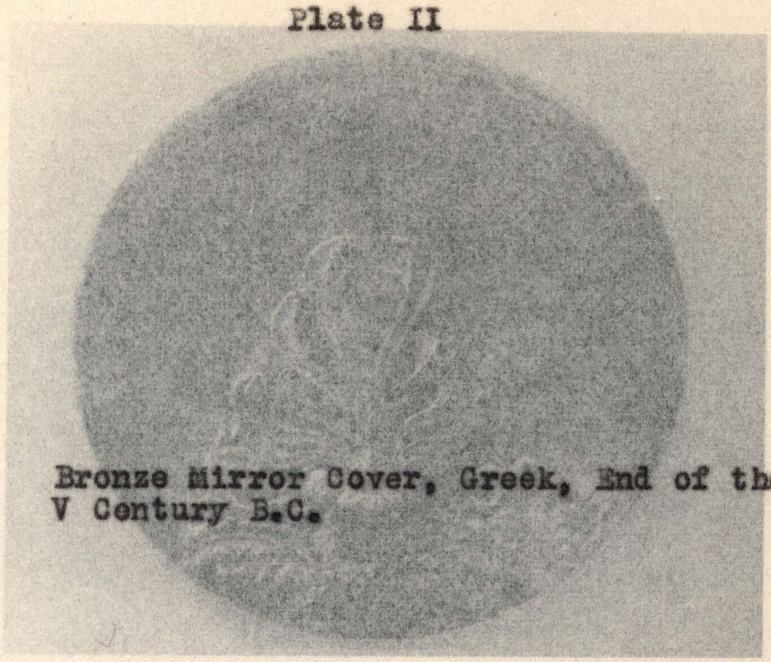
HISTORICAL RESUME OF THE ACANTHUS MOTIF

In all centuries and countries the designers of architecture and of the various arts have promoted the extensive use of the acanthus leaf as a decorative motif.

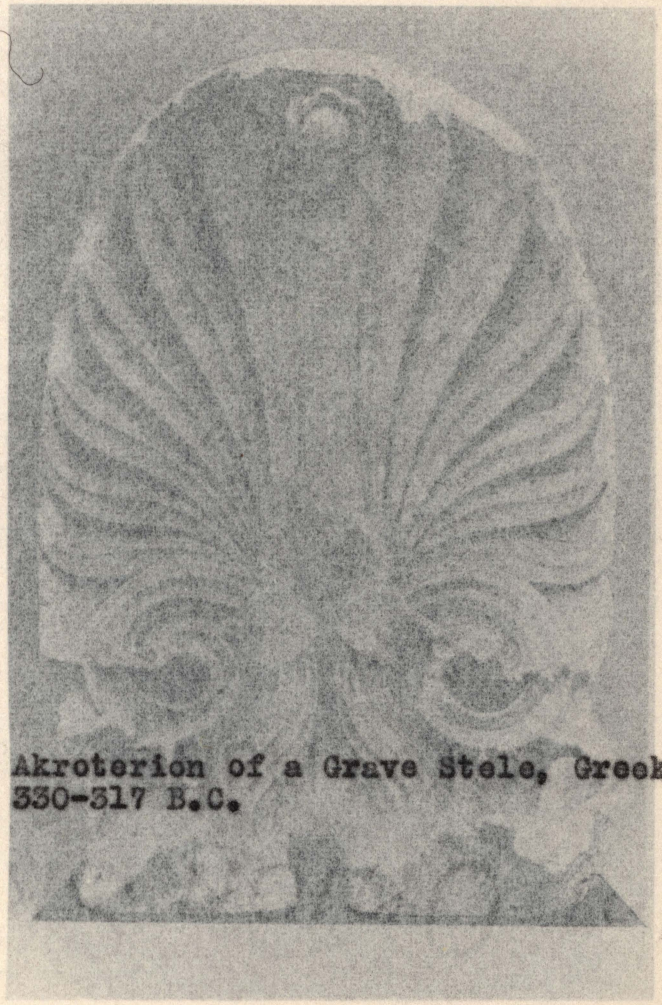
From the earliest periods of Greek civilization; through the interim of the Roman empire; through the stages of change that characterized the eras of Byzantine, Romanesque, and Gothic; through the transitional periods of the Renaissance, Baroque, and Rococo; to the times of the Neo-Classical Revival in Eighteenth Century Europe, the acanthus leaf has represented beauty in artistic expression. Since its first appearance in America this leaf motif has been a popular ornamental device in architecture and has remained so to the present time.

The acanthus leaf in Greek ornament. In the early development of Greek art, ornament was subject to Oriental influences. Egypt and Asia Minor had influenced these early art forms in Greece principally by exchange of ideas through trade and commerce. Egyptian and Assyrian motifs brought to light in the excavations of Troy and Mycenae indicate their origin. Though Greek civilization must honor its Eastern heritage, the cultivation and attainments of its own culture has so profoundly influenced the development of

Plate II



Bronze Mirror Cover, Greek, End of the V Century B.C.



Akroterion of a Grave Stele, Greek, about 330-317 B.C.





European progress that Greece must be regarded as the veritable source of literary and artistic inspiration.[3]

An interesting feature of the Erechtheum decoration is the acanthus ornament, used here perhaps for the first time in important architecture, with the possible exception of the acroteria of the Parthenon. This decorative element, appearing in the latter part of the Fifth Century had far-reaching effects: its presence here is a foretaste of the Corinthian capital.[4] The foliage from which these symmetrical patterns were derived grows wild in southern Europe and is found in two varieties of plant species, one of which is applied to Greek ornament.

> The "acanthus spinosus," preferred by the Greeks, has pointed, narrow lobes, V-shaped in section with deeply drilled eyes giving a sharp, crisp shadow.[5]

Early representations of the acanthus leaf were accompanied by native flowers and Egyptian lotus leaves. These were intermingled with stems of the acanthus which gracefully reached the height of the capital itself.

In Greek architecture, the Doric must be described as an order of clarity and simplicity which became partly

---

3 Garbett, Edward Lacy, Principles of Design in Architecture (London: Virtue and Company, 1867), p. 83.

4 Robertson, D. S., A Handbook of Greek and Roman Architecture (Cambridge: University Press, 1929), p. 135.

5 Fletcher, Sir Banister, A History of Architecture (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 131.

superseded by the more complex variations of the Ionic and the flamboyant Corinthian arrangements of the acanthus leaf. The leaf forms of the Corinthian style displayed freedom and beauty of rich ornamentation, typified in the acanthus leaf arrangements on the capitals of the Tower of the Winds and the Monument of Lysicrates in Athens.[6]

The acanthus leaf in Roman ornament. The Romans made no attempt to utilize the quality and spirit involved in the creative works of the Greeks. Instead, they merely copied the Corinthian order and many acanthus ornamentations from Greek sources. Roman classical styles and ornamentations are by no means original in the true sense of the word but rather "mere amalgamation of borrowed orders and independent creations."[7]

In Greece, the temple was the nucleus around which were concentrated all the manifestations of the fine arts; in Rome, the emphasis was political and practical with ornamentation that was more superficial than integral.

The acanthus leaf as employed by the Romans in the Corinthian order was very ornate, and the leaves surrounding the capital were usually naturalistic displaying the technical perfection of the sculptor rather than harmony as decoration.

---

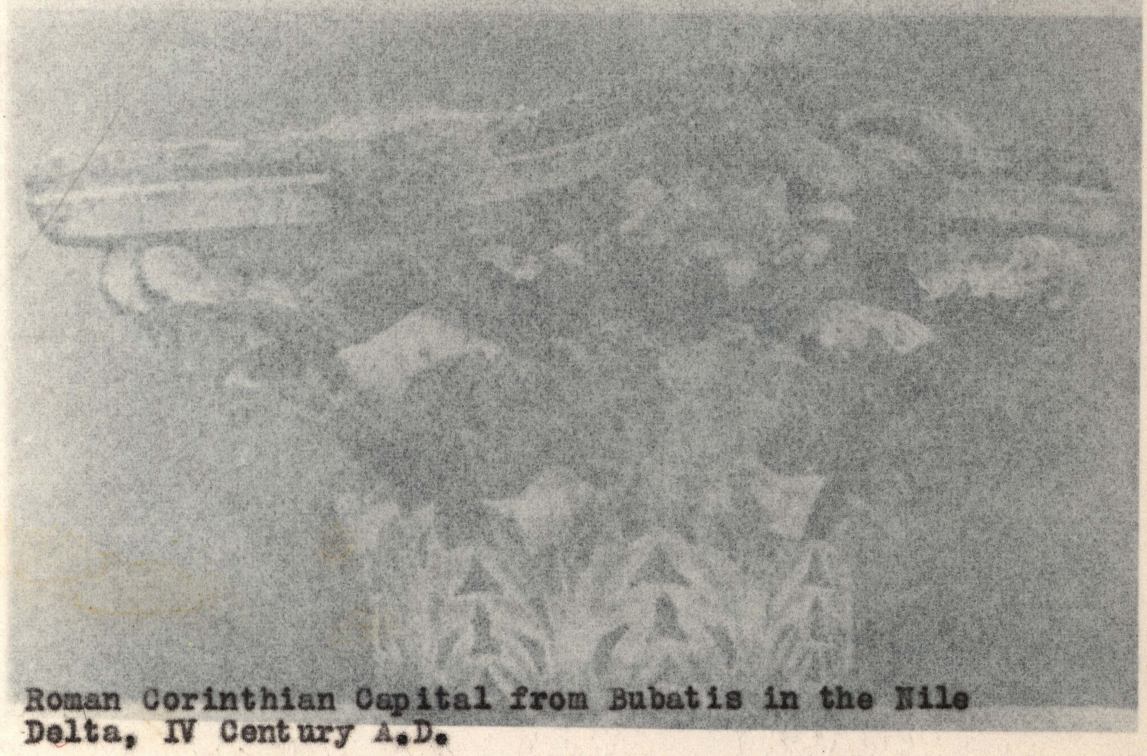
6 Speltz, Alexander, Styles of Ornament (New York: E. Weyhe, 1910), p. 57.

7 Garbett, op. cit., p. 6.

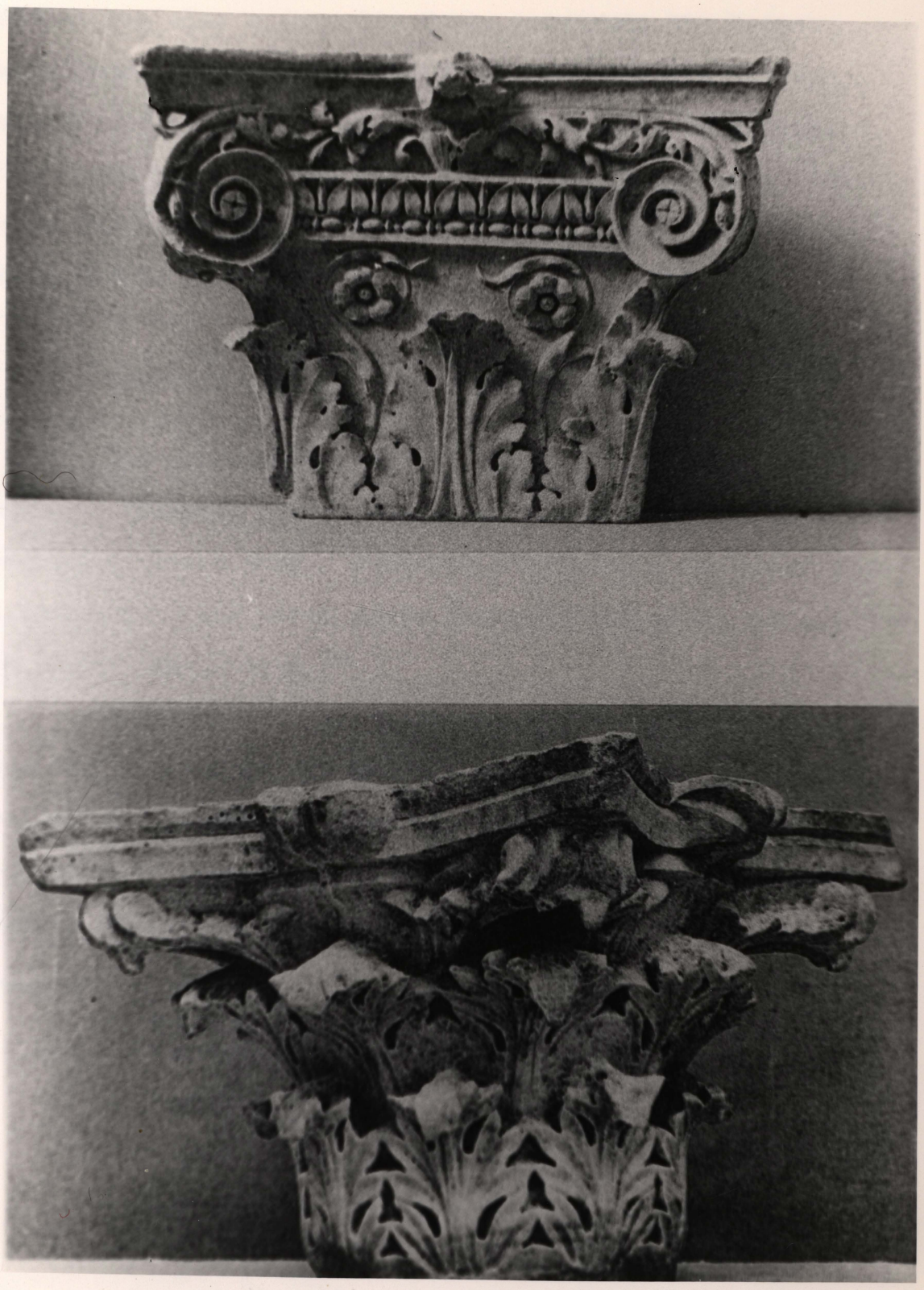
Plate III



Composite Anta Capital, Roman, Imperial Period



Roman Corinthian Capital from Bubatis in the Nile Delta, IV Century A.D.



The acanthus rinceau, or scroll, as a continuous design was also a favorite Roman ornament; the leaves were used to mark the successive branchings much more elaborately than they had been in Greek presentations. The Roman acanthus was usually heavier, less crisp, and more drooping than the Greek, being derived from the acanthus mollis specie.[8]

> The "acanthus mollis", preferred by the Romans, has broad, blunt tips, flat in section.[9]

The combination of the acanthus with other motifs such as flowers, vines, rosettes, and figures was also common in Roman work. Features utilized in the Roman modification of the Greek style are exemplified in the Temples of Castor and Pollux.[10]

A variant of the Greek Corinthian order emphasizing the refinement and precision of acanthus detail was called the "Composite Order."[11] This Roman order combines the angular Ionic volutes with the acanthus-circled bell-shaped capital of the Corinthian style. This is typically

---

8 "The Acanthus Motif in Decoration" (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1934), p. 2.

9 Fletcher, op. cit., p. 131.

10 Speltz, op. cit., p. 76.

11 Smith, A. T. Roger, and Slater, John, Architecture Classic and Early Christian (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle, and Rigington Ltd., 1888), p. 194.

exemplified in the arch of Septimus Severus in Rome.[12]

Also, the leaf motif, presumably the acanthus, was characteristic of the hand-tooled jewelry of the late Roman period.[13]

The acanthus leaf in Byzantine ornament. Byzantine may be regarded as a conglomerate style of art which developed in the Eastern Roman Empire from all the varied styles which were in existence during the Sixth Century.[14] Thus the Byzantine style represents a fusion of decorative principles; the Celtic arts, the Hellenistic and the Syrian, and the purely ornamental and non-representional art of central Asia.[15] During this transition, ornamentation was extremely elaborate, particularily in the early Byzantine decoration with its use of intertwining tendrils of acanthuses derived from the classical Greek details. "The convenient motifs of Hellenistic ornament--the egg-and-dart, Vitruvian scroll, acanthus frieze, garlands, etc.--persist to the last, but with modifications that made their way westward in later times, along with other and novel decorative features of which the Antioch mossaics have

---

12 Speltz, op. cit., p. 78.

13 Dennison, Walter, and Morey, Charles R., Studies in East Christian and Roman Art (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), p. 27.

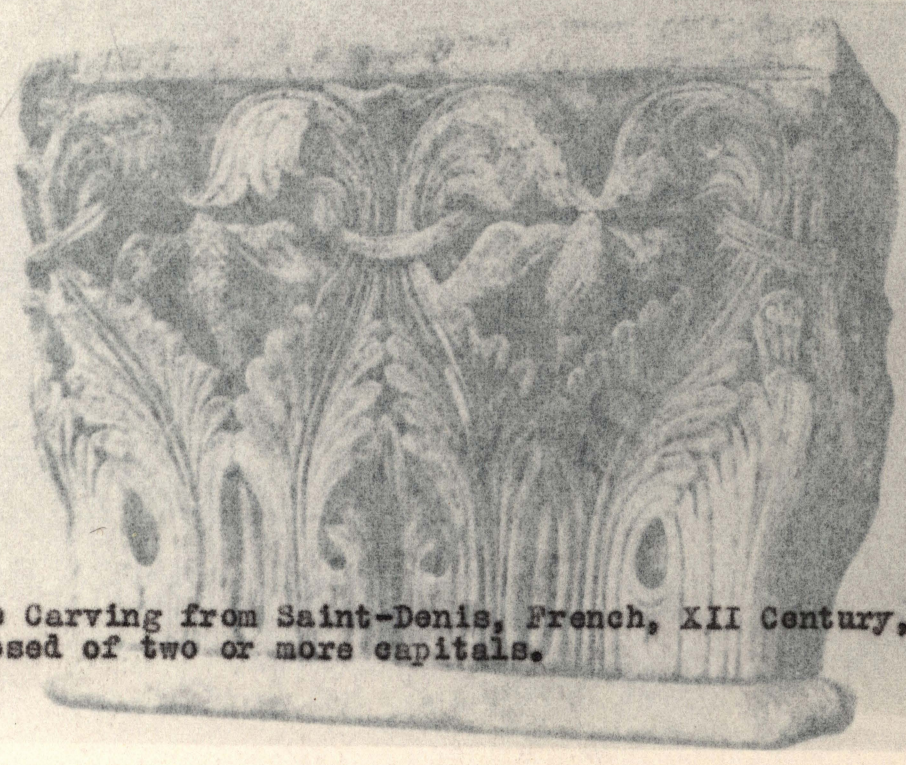
14 Speltz, op. cit., p. 125.

15 Hamilton, J. Arnott, Byzantine Architecture and Decoration, London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1933), p. 11.

Plate IV



Byzantine Corinthian Capital from Egypt, V-VI Century A.D.



Stone Carving from Saint-Denis, French, XII Century, Composed of two or more capitals.





produced the earliest examples."[16]

The acanthus leaf was not modeled as artifically as the Roman and other classical representations. In Byzantine decoration, stone was undercut to provide a darkened background for the profiled, flat pattern, by using shallow lines, sharply cut perforations, and an extensive drilling.[17] This flat, sharp-edged acanthus, characteristic of the Eastern Empire became a surface decoration that followed the shape of the block which forms the capital.

The acanthus leaf was generally arranged alternately in two tiers as in the earlier classical examples, but it was often carved in elaborate twisted, wind-blown, and swaying foliage. Vases, animals, and grotesque beings were frequently interwoven in a leaf pattern which closely resembled the native leaf form.

Acanthus ornamentations made their appearance "in the churches of S. Demetrius at Salonica, where the leaves in the two tiers are blowin in opposite directions, and of S. Sophia in the same city, where they are both blown the same way, and at S. Appollinare in Classe at Ravenna, where they are blown flat open."[18]

---

16 Morey, Charles Rufus, Early Christian Art (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1942), p. 36.

17 Jackson, Sir Thomas Graham, Byzantine and Romanesque Architecture (Cambridge: University Press, 1920), p. 53.

18 Ibid., p. 53.

The acanthus leaf in Romanesque ornament. Out of the chaos in western Europe and under the strong domination of the Christian Church, the Romanesque style rose to prominence during the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries. The development of the Romanesque style was based upon the Greco-Roman classical architecture, being very strongly influenced by the Byzantine art of the Near East and the infusion of individual characteristics of northern Europe.

In its early stages of development, Romanesque ornament tended to be coarse and heavy. The acanthus and other foliated motifs, derived from variations of native plant forms, were rudely carved into effective conventional representations. However, in the later Romanesque period, the elegance and refinement of the acanthus forms were reminiscent of the classical detail of Greece and Rome.

Throughout western Europe the acanthus, both as a separate leaf and as a rinceau or scroll, was a popular form of ornamentation during the late Romanesque period and early Gothic period, being employed most prevalently in localities which had strong tradition of Roman art. Figures, flowers, birds, and grotesque animals were often combined with the acanthus motif. Especially characteristic of Romanesque leaf decoration was

Plate V



Pilaster from Saint-Guilhem-le-Desert, French, Late XII-Early XIII Century, The Cloisters Collection



Carved and Gilded Candelabrum, Italian, XV Century



the acanthus whorl, a variant of the Roman rinceau. Capitals were carved with copies of acanthus leaves from classical prototypes and a variety of leaf creations from northern Europe.[19]

The Romanesque was primarily a religious art, manifesting itself differently within various countries in accordance with the character of the people of those countries. Since most foliated decoration was patterned from local native plant interpretations, few classic acanthus motifs were evidenced in the late Romanesque ornamentations.

However, the acanthus motif shows itself in the Romanesque capitals of a classical acanthus character on the Bapistery of Pisa begun in 1153[20], and many of the acanthus leaf surface carvings of S. Ambrogio in Milan were composed with animals, rams, and eagles. In this same church the jambs and lintel of the doorway are carved with interlacing leaf patterns.[21] The acanthus leaf appeared in realistic form upon the composite capitals, the

---

19 Metropolitan, op. cit., p. 2.

20 Clapham, A. W., Romanesque Architecture in Western Europe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 44.

21 Jackson, op. cit., p. 259.

panels and cornices of acanthus scrolls, and acanthus foliated metalwork upon the doors of Saint-Gilles, Gard.[22]

The acanthus leaf in Gothic ornament. "The Gothic system was immediately evolved out of the Romanesque of Northern France, which began to assume its characteristics forms in the eleventh century and reached its completest type . . . .by 1110 in the nave of the Church of St. Etienne of Beauvais. But the principles and elements of this Romanesque in turn were partly derived from more ancient sources, and from various distant localities. In fact, this evolution of the architecture of the Middle Ages begins with the earliest departures from the principles and constructive forms of the art of imperial Rome and culminates in the Gothic art of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries."[23] This new style which spread over Spain, Italy, Germany, and England owed its origin to that desire of a fresh creative impulse in the fine arts.

Ornamentation was relatively plain and simple in treatment during the infancy of the Gothic movement. This simplicity soon disappeared, however, with the advent of the highly decorative work that characterized the latter

---

22 Evans, Joan, The Romanesque Architecture of the Order of Cluny (Cambridge: University Press, 1938), fig. 179.

23 Moore, Charles Herbert, Development and Character of Gothic Architecture (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899, p. 29.

part of the Gothic era. The principal ornament of the Gothic style was leaf moulding.[24] Acanthus foliage and its variants were exceedingly popular, and though the leaf representations became somewhat over-emphasized and excessive, the interplay of line and richness of light and shade displayed a design of great lightness and rhythmic expression. Freedom permitted the designers resulted in innumerable variations on the acanthus leaf motif.

"Gothic is in no sense an independent, though it is a distinct, style."[25] The acanthus motif in early Gothic ornament was rich in conventional leaf scroll-work, fore-shadowing the use of the natural leaf form. Occasionally the tradition of the Corinthian volute made itself felt in ornamentation. Many of the capitals were still Byzantine in character with foliage intertwining birds, flowers, and animals. In the late Gothic era, the acanthus motif approached more realistic tendencies with twisting, wavy, flame-like patterns, ultimately becoming

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24 Warren, Herbert Langford, The Foundations of Classic Architecture (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), p. 145.

25 Moore, op. cit., p. 9

flamboyant in character. Such practice led to comparative disuse in favor of the local foliage.[26]

The Cathedral of Senlis, France, shows modifications of the acanthus leaf in early Gothic taste of coarse heavy leaf sculptured capitals.[27] Of a somewhat more advanced and richer adaptation of the acanthus motif is the employment on the capitals and mouldings of the Canterbury Cathedral, England, about 1174. The leaf motif was abstract and severe in pattern, and had foliage of the Byzantine style mixed with animals. Acanthus rosettes and sprigs of the crisp leaf were on the angular knots that support the corners of the square abacus.[28]

The acanthus leaf in Renaissance ornament. The classical Renaissance in architecture and ornamentation was Italian in its origin and, for over a century, had little or no effect on the varied national styles of northern Europe. In the early Sixteenth Century traces of the classic Italian influences were slowly accepted for the abandoned Gothic forms. ". . . . whereas in the Twelfth Century the Romanesque style was in use everywhere the Gothic being but a slight modification of the Romanesque commended itself at once. In the Sixteenth Century

---

26 Metropolitan, op. cit., p. 3.

27 Moore, op. cit., p. 309.

28 Jackson, Sir Thomas Graham, Gothic Architecture in France, England, and Italy, Vol. I (Cambridge: University Press, 1915), p. 197.

the Gothic style was in use everywhere except Italy, and the revived classic methods were a complete denial and reversal of it. While from about 1510, the Italian influence was always present in the building of northern and western Europe, it was not predominant until much later, and never being accepted without question until the reign of Louis XIV."[29] Consequently the revival of classic formalism broadened the more complex Roman forms, wherein ornamentation found a renewed richness and a variety of conceptions in detail design.

This revival of classicm in the Renaissance brought the acanthus again into widespread popularity, emphasizing exuberant Roman forms such as the repeated rinceau and the foliated termination of figures. The leaf motif was also adapted to a wider variety of materials such as woods, metals, fabrics, and ceramics. Chiefly an architectural and sculptural ornament even when used in metal work for the decoration of furniture, the acanthus motif became common in various forms of the decorative arts--wood-carving, ceramics, and ceremonial armor. "Prints, too, were a fruitful field for the development and spread of the acanthus leaf as an ornament, many of them having

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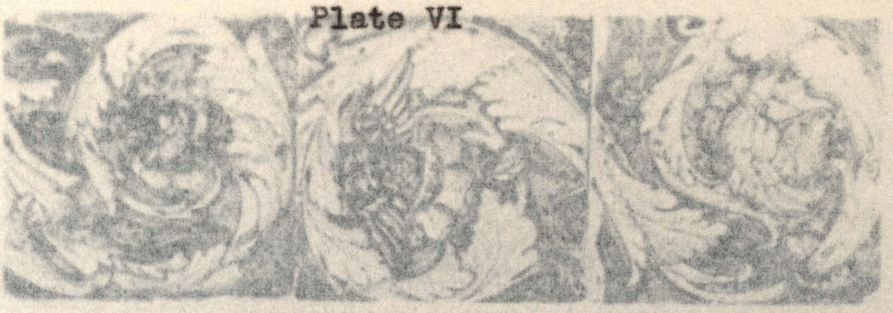
29 Sturgis, Russell, European Architecture (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1896), p. 390.

Plate VI



Panels of Sculptured Acanthus Leaf Forms, French, about 1560.



Etched Panel of Horse Armor, North Italian, XVI Century





been made originally as patterns to be worked in various mediums."[30] Widespread use of brocades, velvets, and damasks promoted the acanthus leaf motif to a leading position among popular designs.

The Ministere de la Marine[31] and the Corinthian adaptations of the acanthus leaf on the eastern front of the Louvre[32] are fine examples of the rich architectural ornamentation of the Renaissance era. The acanthus leaf motif was popularly employed in realistic form on the capitals, window arches, cornices, and mouldings on the exterior ornamentation of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome.[33] Variations of the acanthus leaf ranging from naturalistic to semi-naturalistic were used on the "S" shaped corbels in the cortile of the Palazzo Fava at Bologna. The motif appeared in a number of single ornaments on the profile of the corbel. An enlarged leaf rosette was applied on the top of the scroll and a stem of realistic acanthus was presented to be growing out of a vase into a graceful foliated scroll in relief on the side of the corbel.[34]

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30 Metropolitan, op. cit., p. 3.

31 Sturgis, op. cit., p. 486.

32 Ward, W.H., The Architecture of the Renaissance in France, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), p. 229.

33 Anderson, William J., and Stratton, Arthur, The Architecture of the Renaissance in Italy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), p. 156.

34 Ibid., p. 107

The acanthus leaf in Baroque ornament. "At the period of the Renaissance, general culture, and even life itself, was based upon antiquity; simultaneously, art returned to that ideal of calm and correct beauty which we call classical."[35] For nearly a century, during the late 1600's, there was an ornamental style of extremely modified and mis-applied classical forms. Because of a consuming temptation to copy, intellectual advance during the Baroque art dropped to the lowest ebb of decorative spirit and produced little but ugly and tortured extravagance. "The creation of a wholly distinct category of ornament swept over the continent full of new-fangled classic combinations of acanthus ornamental motives."[36]

Baroque ornamentation displayed an exaggeration of the acanthus leaf design. Its leaf form was purely imitative of the antique forms of the late Italian Renaissance. This characteristic was shown in the acanthus sculpture on such exterior and facade features as capitals, pilasters, arches resting on ornamented columns, and cornices. Interiors of woodcarvings, plaster reliefs, and metal fittings of acanthus foliated designs expressed freedom of personal taste. The furniture was elaborately veneered

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35 Kimball and Edgell, A History of Architecture (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1918) p. 401.

36 Rathbun, A Background to Architecture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), p. 310.

with fine grain woods and decorated with shell, medallions, and variations of the acanthus leaf, worked in metal ornament.

"The Baroque is withal a masculine style, virile, and blustering and bold. Its feminine counterpart, the Rococo, came in the 18th century, substituting prettiness and charm for Baroque magnificence."[37] The acanthus remained in use as an ornamental motif through the Seventeenth Century, although it was modified and even eclipsed at times by the heavier and more elaborate motifs of the baroque style.

On the exteriors of such Baroque buildings as the Barbantine Monastery, Lucca, and the Palace in the Piazza Arringo, Ascoli-Piceno, about the turn of the Seventeenth Century, wrought-iron, door-gratings were elaborately detailed with naturalistic acanthus stems and leaves intermingled with rose buds and crowns.[38] The Altar of the Annunciation in S. Ignazio, Rome, and the vestment cupboard of gilded metal in S. Valentino, Terni, are choice examples of the delicate acanthus on capitals of the antique Corinthian style.[39]

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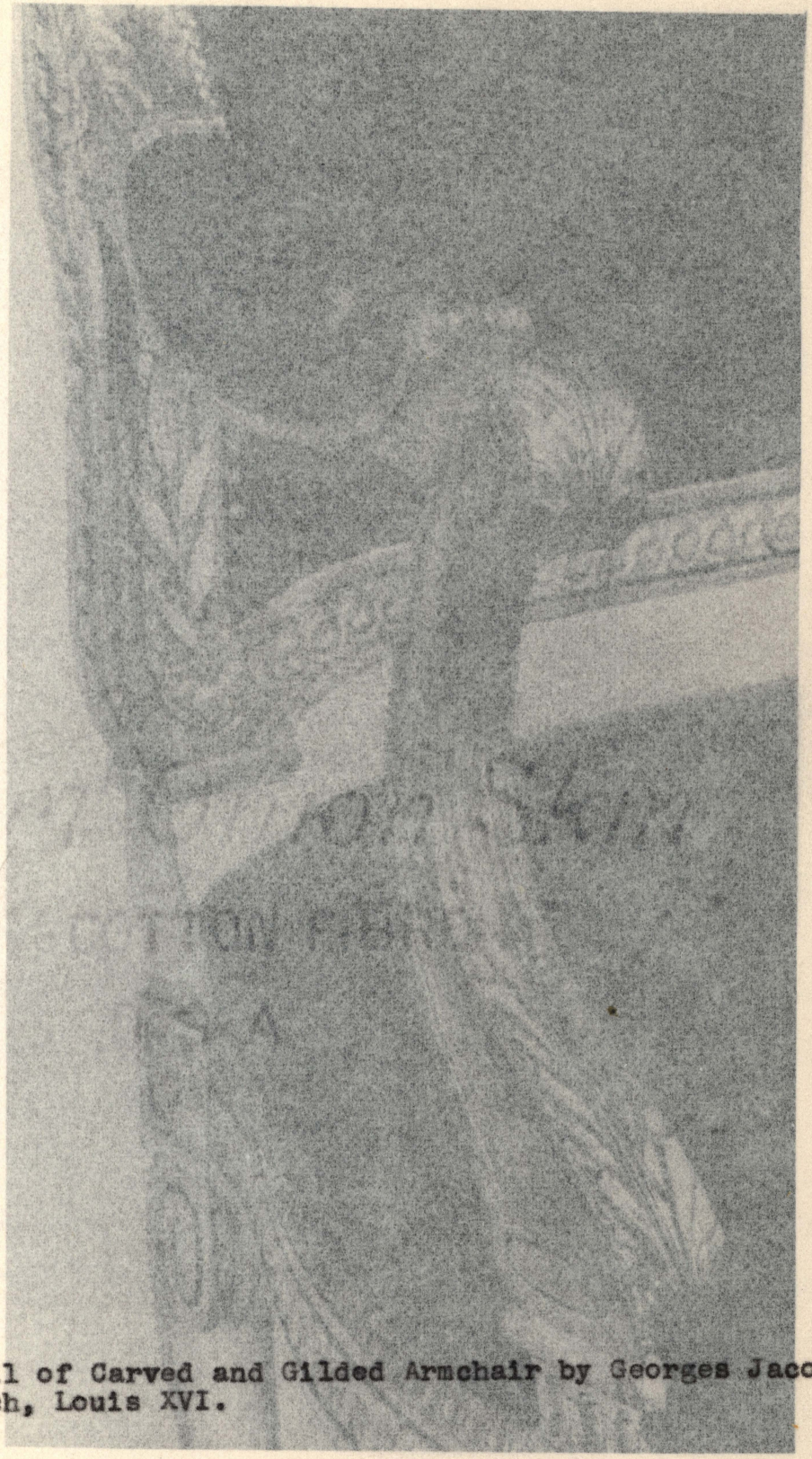
37 Aronson, Joseph, The Encyclopedia of Furniture (New York: Crown Publishers, 1938), p. 14.

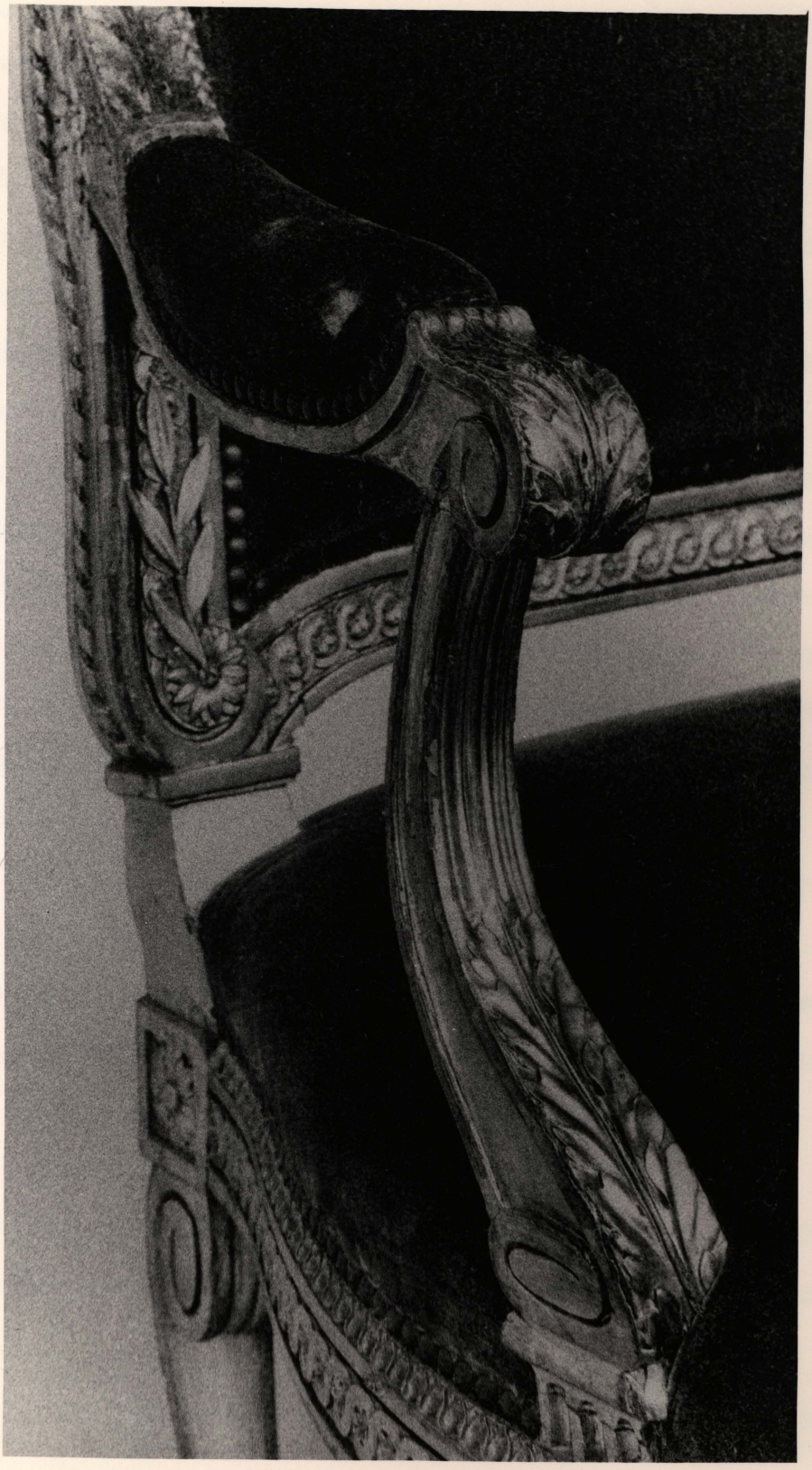
38 Ricci, Corrado, Baroque Architecture and Sculpture in Italy (London: William Heinemann, 1912), p. 98.

39 Ibid., p. 86.

Plate VII



Detail of Carved and Gilded Armchair by Georges Jacobs, French, Louis XVI.



The acanthus leaf in Rococo ornament. As the classical influence of the Baroque ornament became less obvious and effective, ornamentation assumed an elegance which was factitious and mannered. "The art of the rococo, one of the freshest artistic creations since the Gothic, was, like the Gothic, a product of French creative genius. The background for the development of the rococo was furnished by French architecture and decoration of the reign of Louis XIV to the end of the seventeenth century."[40]

The extravagance of this movement appeared in every conceivable form of decoration in presenting a more elegant and radiant style, whether exterior or interior, with an over-abundance of applied acanthus ornamentation. In interior decoration the motifs assumed an extraordinary degree of elaboration, unconscious of their disproportion, extravagance, and exaggeration in relation to interior plans and elevations. Furniture was harmoniously decorated with delicate acanthus ornament, based on the patterns and forms of this general curvilinear movement. The acanthus spray approached the garland in many instances; and, although it became artificial foliage, it retained the character of its acanthus derivation.

In the early Eighteenth Century the shell and other motifs supplanted the acanthus leaf to a considerable extent

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40 Kimball, Fiske, The Creation of the Rococo (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1943), p. 225.

Though somewhat modified from the classical tradition, the "rock-and-shell" and the acanthus leaf were important ornaments of the Rococo period.

"In the architecture of interiors, the plastic baroque forms were subordinated to a Teutonic treatment of paneling, almost purely geometric and with multiplied superposition of elements. In painted surface ornament, a few development, purely French, was going forward, evidenced above all in the arabesque, which abandoned both the mannerist type of Vouet and the Raphaelesque adaptations of Errand. Bandwork, mingled with acanthus foliage in the patterns of embroiderers and of parterres en broderie by gardeners like Mollet and Boyceau, was taken into painted arabesque by Le Brun, in the characteristic form of C-scrolls connected by short straight bars, with palmettes radiating from the junction of opposite scrolls."[41]

"The real spirit of the Rococo, a freed naturalism in decorative expression, became distracting, frivolous, and too superficial to effect any permanent great architectural manifestations."[42]

The interior details of the Chambre du Roi,

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41 Ibid., p. 223.

42 Metropolitan, op. cit., p. 4.

Versailles, was notable for variations of the acanthus motif on cornices, pilasters, over-door treatment, fireplaces, and candelabras.[43] The acanthus leaf was again realistically represented in the Corinthian style on the capitals and ornamental accessories of the Altar of Notre Dame.[44]

The acanthus leaf in 18th Century Classical Revival European ornament. By the beginning of the Eighteenth Century the continued interest in classicism together with the excavations of Pompeii and Imperial Rome led to a renewed attraction to classic art especially in the countries of northern Europe. "The ferment of democracy and the disquiet of far-reaching political changes had begun to preoccupy the minds of men to the detriment of all artistic reaction, in absence of which, taste tended to swing back towards the safe standards of classic models."[45] The encouragement of imitating and copying antique ornamental affectations promoted a strong revival of classic tendencies in Eighteenth Century Europe.

This recurrence of classicism in the second half of the century lead to a fresh revival and adaptation of the acanthus motif in the forms of leaves, sprays, and scrolls. It is characteristic that the acanthus motif

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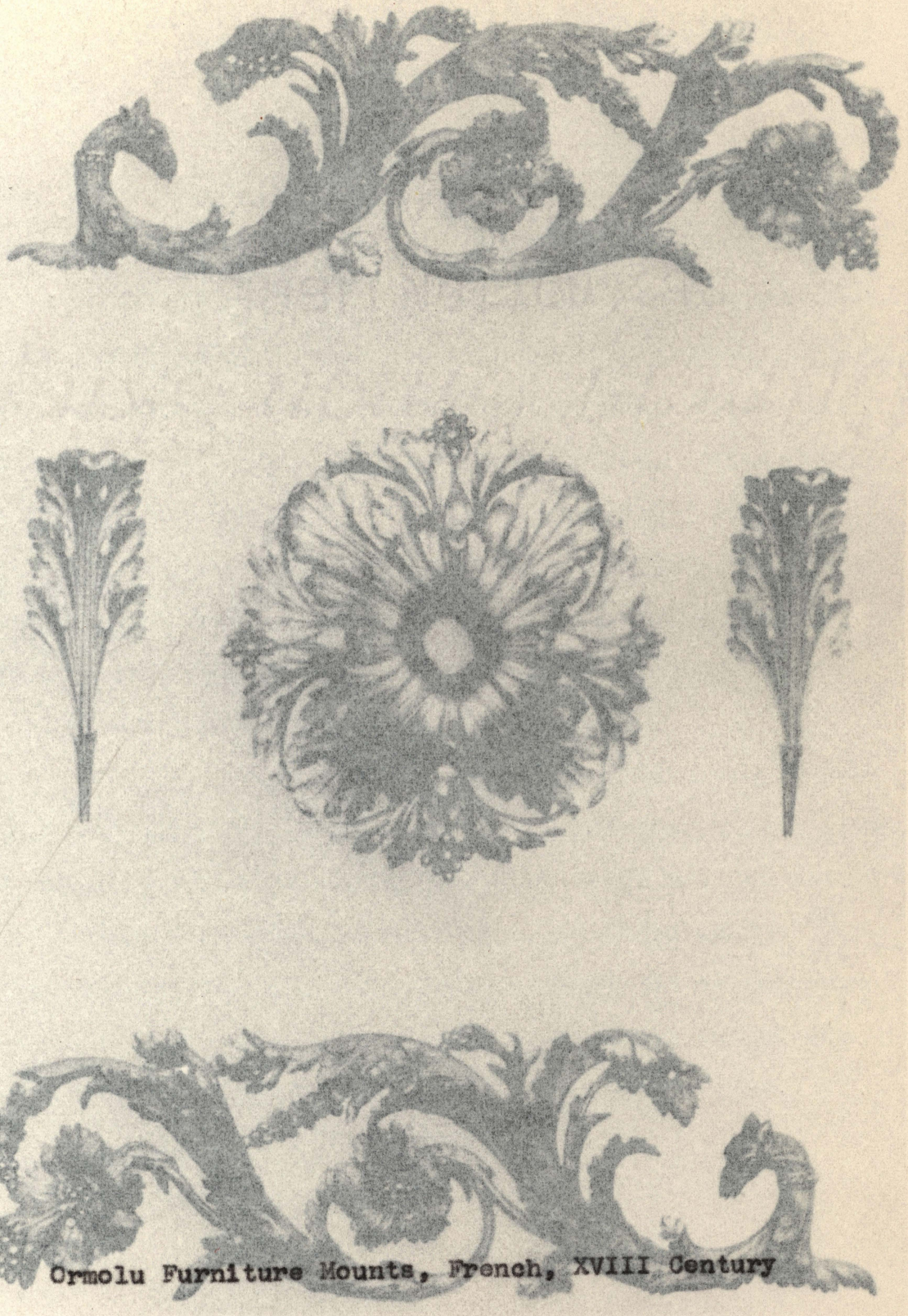
43 Kimball, op. cit., fig. 62.

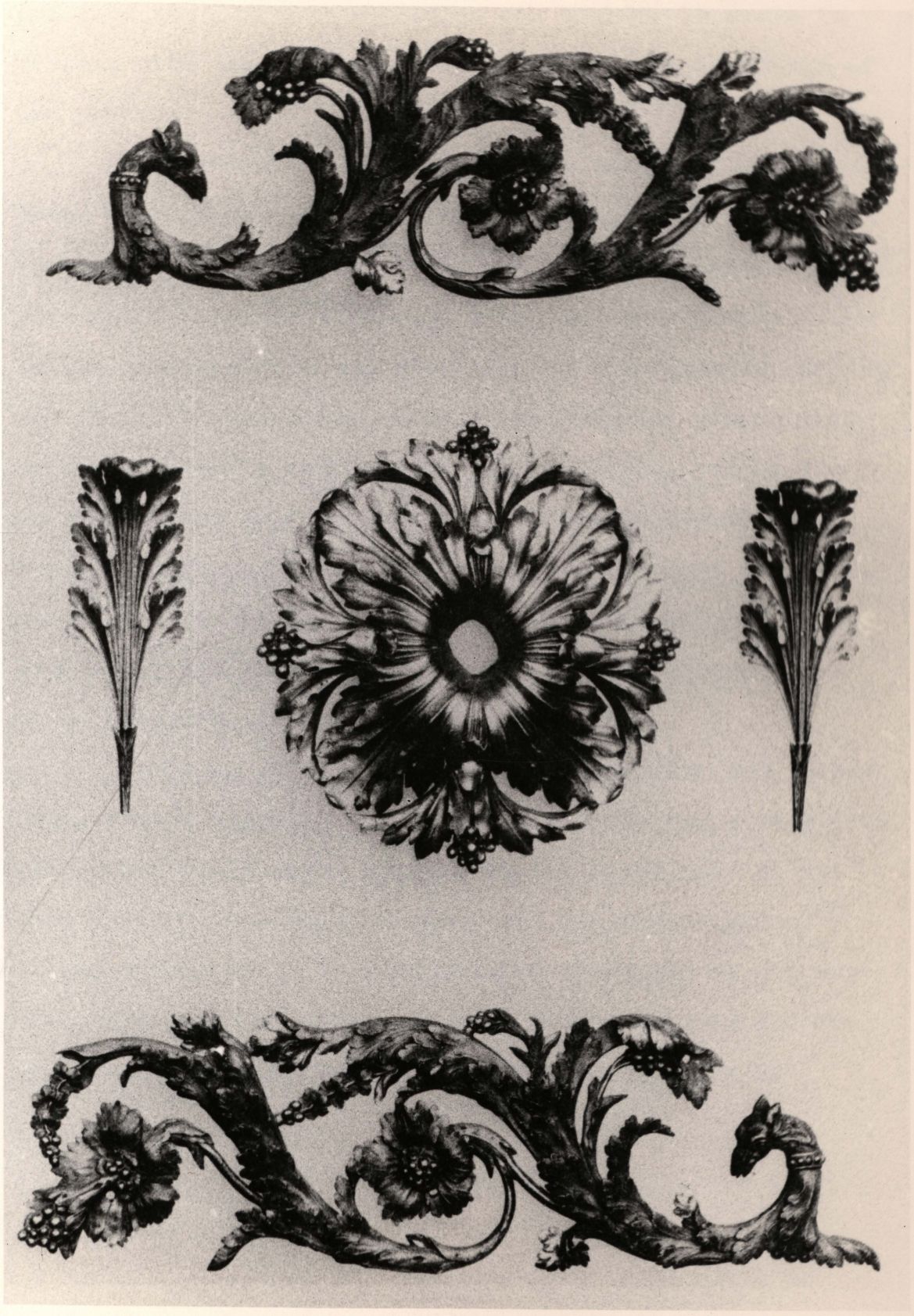
44 Ibid., fig. 75.

45 Hamlin, A. D. F., A Textbook of the History of Architecture (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1925), p. 371.

Plate VIII



Ormolu Furniture Mounts, French, XVIII Century



was only a subordinate part of the whole decorative scheme and that the leaf ornamentation was lighter in scale in keeping with the delicate and fanciful taste in design of the period.

Variations of the conventional acanthus leaf patterns with some Rococo influences may be noted in the architectural ornamentation of detailed monumental and commercial facades, over-door trim, and door crests. Interior ornamentation was supplemented with plaster ceiling and pilaster decoration, carved wall panels, fabrics and rugs, and heavily designed furniture detail. Among the minor arts the acanthus motif was lavishly displayed on a variety of household fixtures such as console brackets, clocks, candelabras, and fire screens. Occasionally the leaf motif was used in painted and carved ornamentation on ceramicware, glassware, and metalware.

"Of this style the examples of Freising and Schonbrunn show a return to classic forms differing widely from the Rococo style which existed in the first half of the 18th century throughout Germany and the Netherlands."[46] In accordance with the conservative character of the English, the acanthus motif was well represented in the ornamentation of Sion House and Luton House. This is

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46 Speltz, op. cit., p. 544.

particularly true of the Luton House with its Corinthian styled capitals and the acanthus leaf moldings designed by Robert Adams.[47] The acanthus leaf ornament which flourished in the decoration of the French interiors, and in furniture, appears in scrolls, swags, garlands, and rosettes on the door and frame in wrought steel from the Palais de Justice, Paris.[48] Also, the motif is illustrated in the acanthus leaf scrolled bands and moldings, and the miniature Corinthian capitals flanking the mantelpiece of a country house in Blanquefort, Gironde.[49]

The acanthus leaf in early American ornament. Because of their convictions concerning religious intolerance and political uprisings, our predecessors separated from the fixed traditions of the Old World. Their manners, customs, and mode of living also made a departure from the European tradition. Hence, the early domestic architecture and ornamentation of the American colonies differed from the accepted styles of art and decoration which predominated in their varied mother countries.

During the middle of the Eighteenth Century variations of the acanthus leaf and other classical motifs

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47 Ibid., p. 570, pl. 359, fig. 1-3.

48 Ibid., p. 553, pl. 346, fig. 3.

49 Ibid., p. 552, pl. 345, fig. 1.

Plate IX



Pilaster of Acanthus Leaf Scroll, Venice, Italy,
XVIII Century



became known as an ornamental device in architecture and decoration. Different styles of ornamentation were developed as a result of the growing prominence of American architectural designers and an increase in American travelers on the Continent, who stimulated a classical revival here.

In the colonial arts acanthus ornamentation first appeared in furniture decoration such as the carvings upon the knees of the Philadelphia Chippendale chairs.[50] Later on, through the Georgian style handsome and imposing decorations of leaf carvings in rhythmic abstract designs were introduced in early American interior decoration. During this period carvings and similar appliques typified the classic interpretations of acanthus stems of the Renaissance era. The acanthus leaf was a prominent motif in plaster reliefs of ceiling decoration and was popularly employed in frieze ornamentation of over-door treatment. Variations of the leaf motif were richly carved in relief forms on the mantelpieces and fire screens. In the colonial interior, the fireplace developed from a simple hearth into the elaborate features of classic acanthus formalism. Many Southern mansions employed painted decorations of leaf-draped urns and leafage scrolls,

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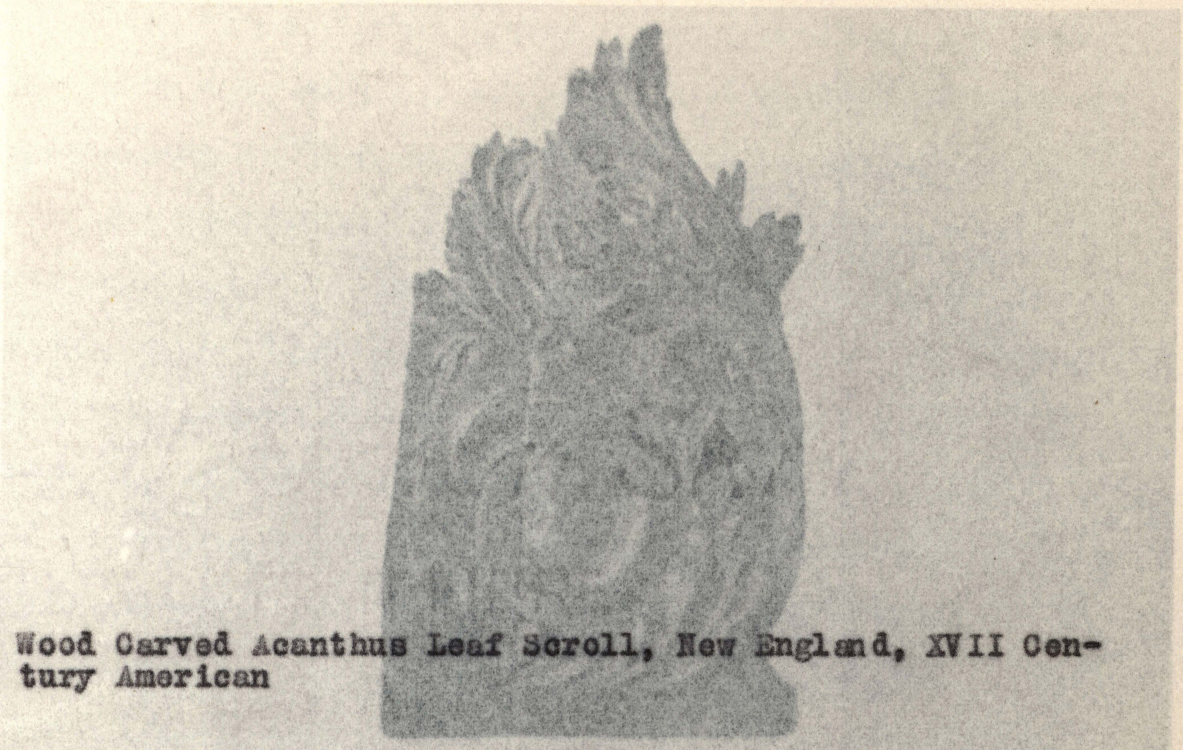
50 Bond, Harold Lewis, An Encyclopedia of Antiques (Boston: Hale, Cushman, and Flint, 1937), p. 1

Plate X



Wood Carved Acanthus Leaf Scroll, New England, XVII Century American



Detail of Acanthus Motif from Supper Room, Governor's Palace, Williamsburg, Virginia, XVIII Century



undoubtedly classic acanthus forms imported from Europe.

During the late years of the Eighteenth Century acanthus ornamentation became heavier and bolder until the end of the Revolutionary movement, when ornament was produced with more delicacy and reduced in scale. Between the Independence of 1776 and the War of 1812 architecture became more monumental in character, and the ornamentation more reserved under the new conditions of self-government. In the early 1800's the refinement and delicacy of Georgian detail gave place to the severe classicism of the Greek Revival in America.

Ornamentation in Eighteenth Century America had many national traits of design, although it consistently resembled European classicism. Adaptations of the natural acanthus plant form were evidenced in the capital and cornice decorations of many late Seventeenth Century Philadelphia and Germantown houses.[51] In the late Eighteenth Century the acanthus motif was also applied to interior architectural features of stairways, ceilings, and fireplaces in many houses, among them which were Corn House and Brewton House of Charleston.[52] The acanthus motif was simplified and variations of the European classic leaf form were conventionalized in pattern for furniture

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51 Speltz, op. cit., p. 535, pl. 334, fig. 1-8.

52 Ibid., p. 540, pl. 338, fig. 1-4.

and interior applications of American colonial style ornament.

CHAPTER III

THE ACANTHUS LEAF IN EXTERIOR ORNAMENTATION OF NEW ENGLAND 1800-1900

From the time of the log cabin to that of the fashionable mansions of the Eighteenth Century, the carved acanthus was seldom found in exterior ornamentation. Many of the buildings constructed after American independence were infrequently touched by any contemporary innovation. In New England the houses were subject to local climatic elements, available building materials, and social traditions in such a way that distinguished local types of architecture and ornamentation developed.

In England wood was a traditional building material, and the colonists brought that tradition to America. Wood is a versatile material that lends itself to a variety of uses and treatments, and harmonizes well with other materials such as brick and stone. Pine was the favorite structural and ornamental material but oak and black ash were also used.[53]

Stone was widely used in construction but within limited distance of the quarry. Massachusetts had its

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53 Robinson, L. Eugene, Domestic Architecture (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), p. 152.

granite quarries and Vermont supplied the marble for most of New England's civic building. Few carved details, however, were executed in stone for skillful stone-cutters were scarce.

Cast iron was produced in most parts of the country at a cost within reach of all. The facility with which it could be wrought helped to promote the use of the flexible acanthus motif. Cast-iron fences, railings, and balconies were composed of well-designed decorations of acanthus and the closely related anthemion.

In many towns such as Salem, Boston, Newport, Nantucket, and Portsmouth there were prominent examples of transitional houses which introduced a simple and plain exterior ornamentation of classical origin. Popular among these details were variations of the acanthus leaf.

The exterior ornamentation of the New England homestead was usually concentrated on the main doorway and the decorations of pilasters and the capitals of the entranceway. Later, when porches became a fashionable addition to the front facade elaborate acanthus leaves were heavily carved on its single row capitals. During the beginning of the transitional movement in architecture and ornamentation, this leaf motif was conventional in pattern and sparse in application.[54] When European travel became more

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[54] Chandler, Joseph Everett, The Colonial House (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1916), p. 64.

common, variations of the acanthus motif with an excessive exaggeration of detail became more popular. Doorways and porches began to be enriched with an elegance and refinement of acanthus detail, and capital decoration became more flamboyant with its multi-rowed leaf forms. These forms were semi-naturalistic to abstract in leaf pattern.[55]

At this time leaded glass of intricate designs on the transoms and side lights were characteristic of the d door-way. The forms were developed into rhythmical abstract leaf patterns, imitating a spiny leaf with successive branchings; very often these spiny leaf forms, interpretations of the classical acanthus, were repeated in carved wood bands on the cornices, over-door treatment, and exterior trim.

One of the most attractive features of the New England homestead was the classical portico. The earliest approaches to porticos are found in the balconies over the entranceway as those on the John Hancock House of Boston. Later supports of simple acanthus detailed capitals were added and the appearance of the portico became apparent. Strong bold lines were used on the earlier porticos and became more and more refined until quite delicate proportions were attained from about 1800 to the 1830's. The

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55 Mixer, Knowlton, Old Houses of New England (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 33.

portico then appeared with a grand style of the acanthus leaf application, its capitals being richly carved with conventional acanthus stems in triple tiers of semi-naturalistic leaf carvings.[56]

Under the influence of European importations such as the Adam Brothers style of England, the acanthus ornamentations followed more closely their Greek and Roman origin with the result that the whole embodied delicacy without consequent loss of strength or vitality.

It was the custom of the designers sometimes to focus minor interest on the main cornice and moldings by using simple carved details.

In the Nineteenth Century as strict adherance to classical details decreased, considerable freedom was established in the use of ornament. Mutules, the projecting blocks on the underside of the cornice, were often hand-carved in single acanthus leaf-scrolled brackets. These leaf-scrolled brackets became very popular and were generously applied to the exterior trim and facing on dormers, bay windows, and other architectural projections.[57] Window valances, under-sill decoration, and exposed beams were also given the added dignity of acanthus form, usually in

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56 Salomansky, Verna Cook, "An Exemplar of Old and New Colonial Details", House Beautiful, 1927, p. 817.

57 Ibid., p. 485.

a semi-naturalistic pattern that often approached abstraction in design. There were numerable examples of molded design in rhythmic bands of swirly "S" curved acanthus leaf patterns.

The cast-iron store fronts of the Nineteenth Century often displayed acanthus foliated ornamentation, similiar to console scrolls, in narrow horizontal panels over the windows and entranceway.

In this period there were many minor applications of the acanthus motif in architectural ornamentation, including the New England garden summerhouse. These fanciful laticed structures usually had attractive ornamental bargeboards on the roof and scrolled appliques of twisting acanthuses such as were displayed on the balustrades of Neo-Greek buildings.[58]

The Governor Langdon House, Portsmouth, New Hampshire. During the late Eighteenth Century, amid the revival movement, the effects of late colonial architecture remained evident. A fine example constructed before the turn of the century in Portsmouth is the mansion of New Hampshire's first governor, Governor Langdon, built in 1784. Here the acanthus ornamentation is concentrated on the exquisite multi-rowed Corinthian capitals of the

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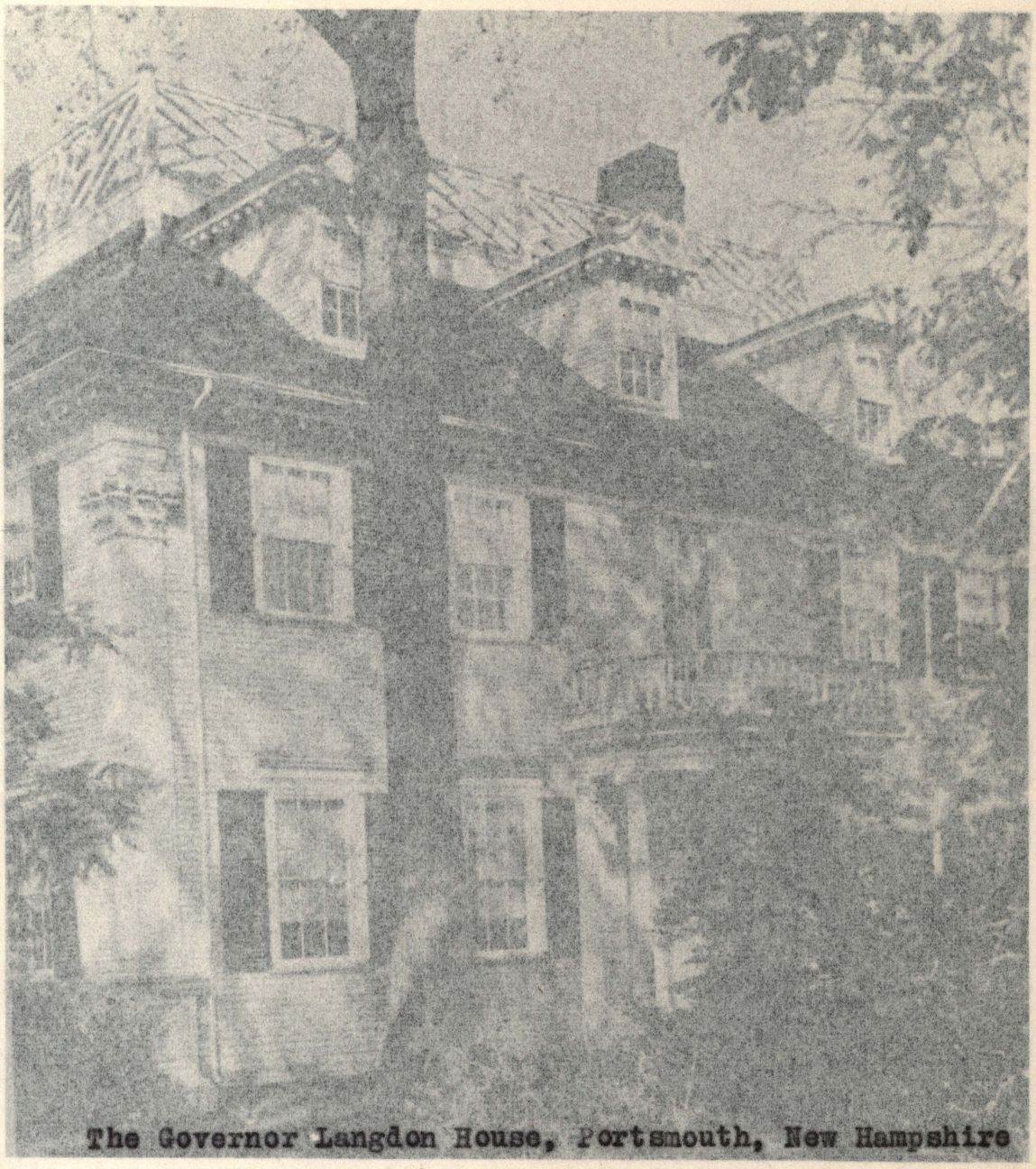
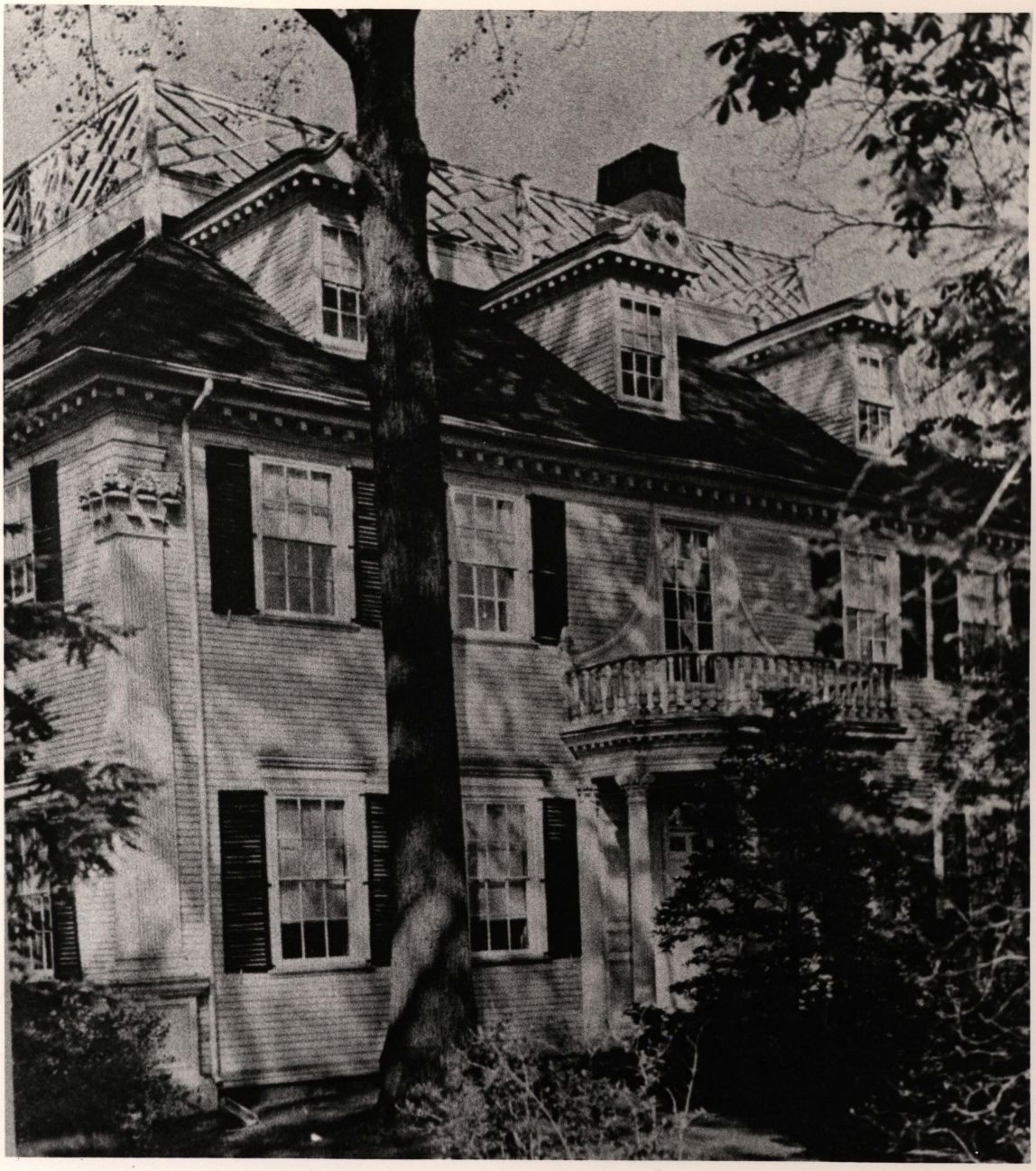
58 Bicknell, Amos J., Detail, Cottage and Constructive Architecture (New York: Amos J. Bicknell Company, 1875), pl. 74-75.

Plate XI



The Governor Langdon House, Portsmouth, New Hampshire



porticoed entranceway. Also, at either end of the building there is a Corinthian capped pilaster reaching the full height of the front facade. These architectural features seem to express an emphasis of structural security as well as decorative charm.[59]

The Pickman-Shreve-Little House, Salem, Massachusetts. Erected in 1816, this building is one of New England's finest examples of McIntire's designs. The portico has been termed the best hand-carved wood Corinthian portico in the country; the cornice is heavily ornamented with acanthus leaf carved scrolled brackets on the mutules; and the wrought-iron railings and fences have the leaf motif mounted on each rail.

This building is rich in classical detail and unusually harmonious in ornamentation.[60]

The Dean Tucker House, Salem, Massachusetts. The portico of this house, built in 1804, shows a splendid development of the acanthus motif in its capitals. The tall slender leaf applications are crispand realistic in form.[61]

The Derby-Crowninshield-Rogers House, Salem, Massachussets. This house, built in Salem in 1800, reflects

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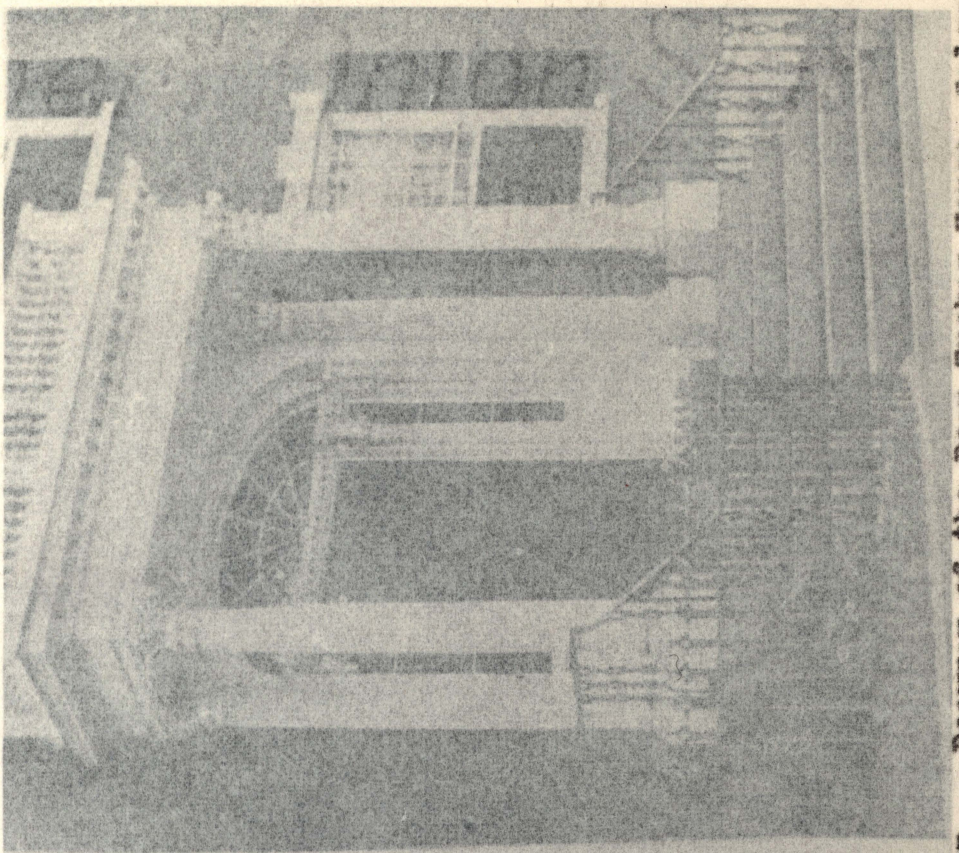
59 Pratt, Richard, "Portsmouth, New Hampshire", Ladies Home Journal, 1948, p. 47.

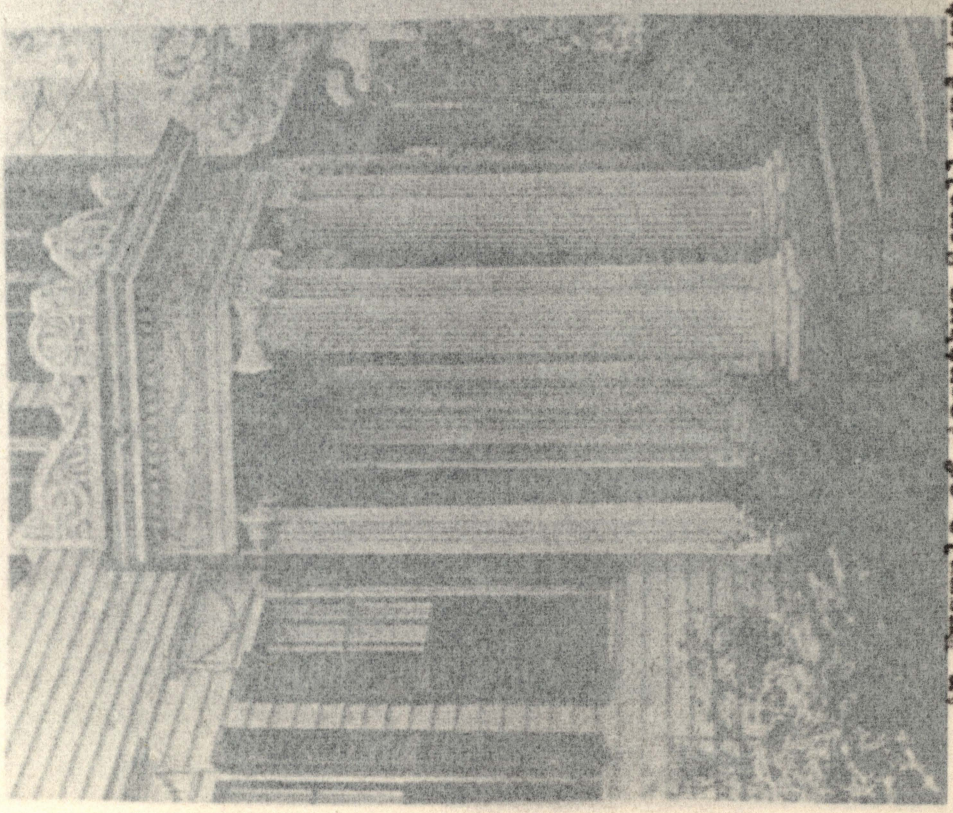
60 Mixer, op. cit., p. 80.

61 Salem Historical Society, Salem, Massachusetts.

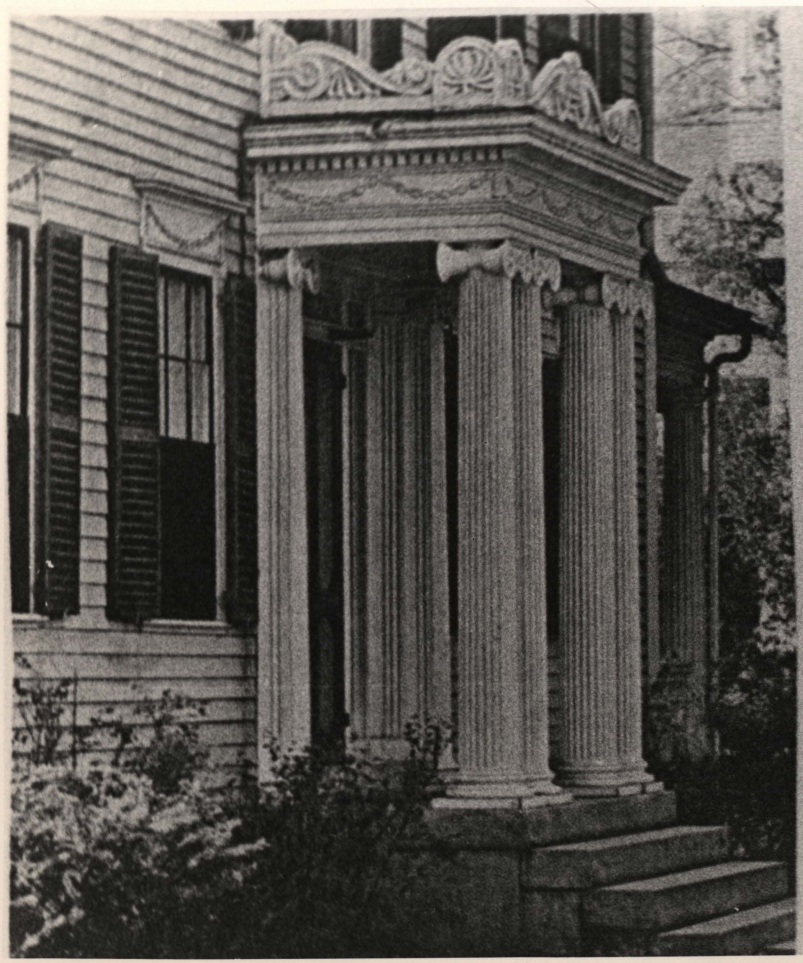
Plate XII



Doorway of the Dean Tucker House, Salem Massachusetts



An Example of Acanthus Scroll and Anthemion Bargeboards on a Columnated Porch, Woodstock, Vermont





the mastery McIntire had achieved in architecture. The house demonstrates dignity and grace; the ornamentation retains simplicity and classical restraint. The acanthus motif was employed on the monumental facade in the form of large leafed rosettes between each arched window casement on the ground floor, and in the single row of drooping acanthus leaves reaching the scrolled volutes capping the pilasters.[62]

The Howard Coonley House, Milton, Massachusetts. The Howard Coonley House is an excellent example of provincial refinement with classic subjects. The architecture denotes a fresh American character; the decoration closely resembles semi-abstract treatment of Romanesque ornament. Panels of incised wood-carved acanthus leaf and stems appear in rhythmic conventional designs on various structural projections. Also, variations of the acanthus leaf are carved on brackets and scrolled bands ranging from the realistic to the semi-abstract. Similar ornaments was applied to window valances, cornices, chimneys, and exterior moldings.[63]

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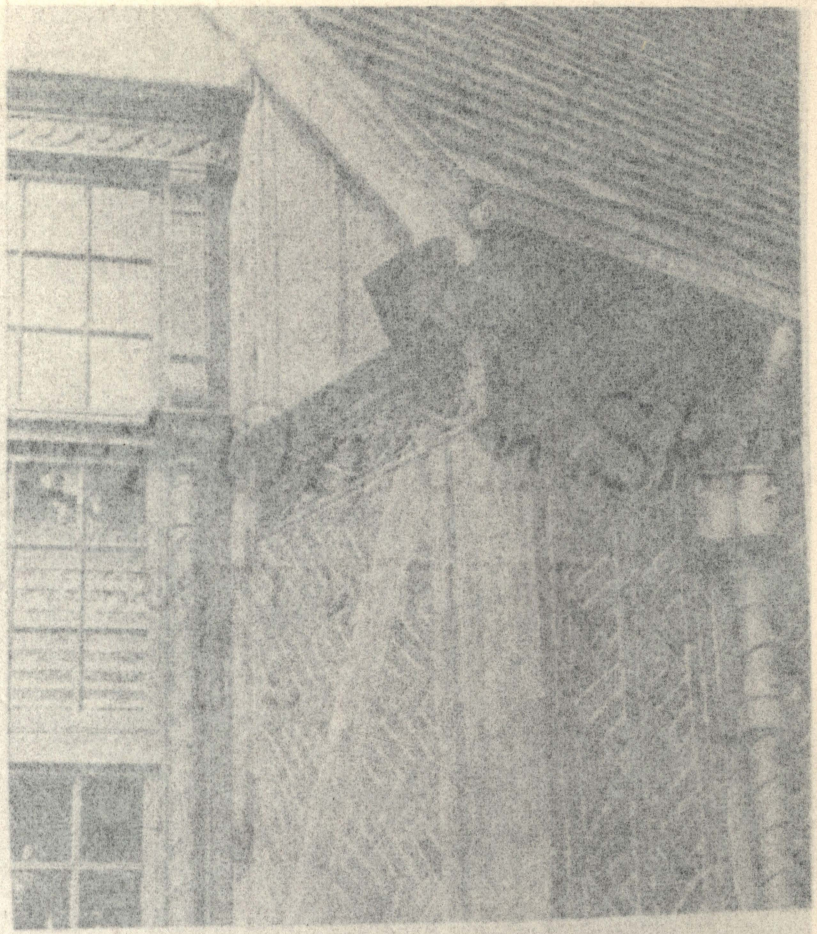
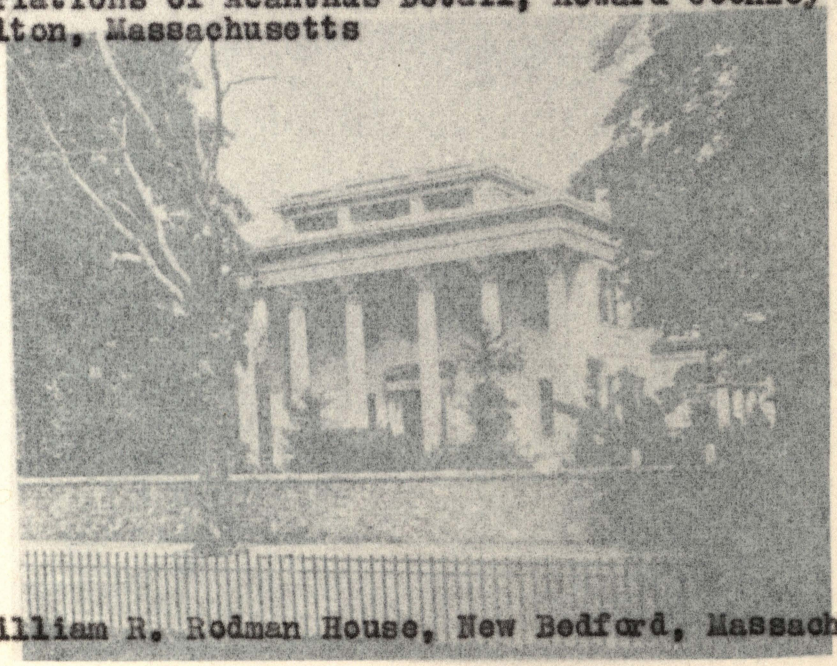
62 Hamlin, Talbot Faulkner, The American Spirit in Architecture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), p. 95.

63 The American Architect, 1926, p. 217.

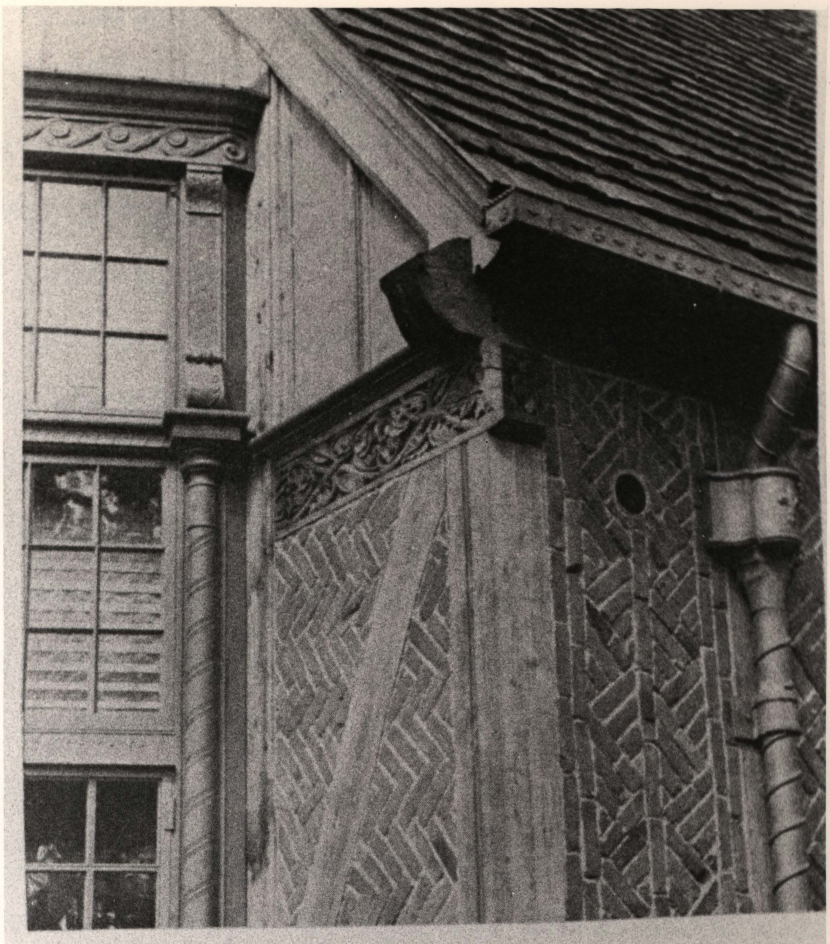
Plate XIII

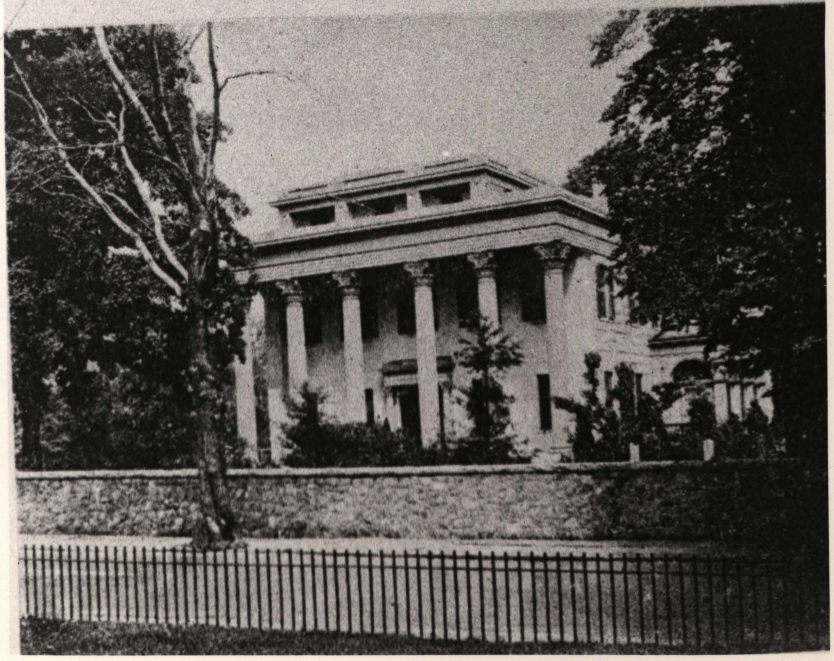


Variations of Acanthus Detail, Howard Coonley House
Milton, Massachusetts



The William R. Rodman House, New Bedford, Massachusetts





The William R. Rodman House, New Bedford, Massachusetts. An architect of the early Nineteenth Century, Russell Warren of Providence, Rhode Island, has left many notable specimens of temple-like buildings in New England. Among them is the classical mansion of William R. Rodman of New Bedford, 1833.

This building is one of the most expensive and pretentious in southern Massachusetts. It is constructed of native quarried stone, and the ornamental finishing material is American white pine. The building is severe and bold in architectural classicism, and there is little display of ornament save for the complex leaf carved capitals of the portico and the scrolled brackets and pilasters flanking the main doorway.[64]

Ithiel Town's Center Church, New Haven, Connecticut. In this church the classic tradition is also dominant. There is little of the elegance and refinement characteristic of the English Adam brothers' influence. The architecture is monumental, and there is little thought of ornamentation except for the awkward sprawling acanthus scroll on the pediment. This ornament is several hundred times its original plant size with its successive leaf branchings flamboyantly designed into swirling "S" scrolled

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[64] Mixer, op. cit., p. 170.

patterns. Other acanthus leaf applications appear on the Corinthian capitals and pilasters, and on the border decorations of the church tower.[65]

The Frank A. Sullivan House, Westerly, Rhode Island. The doorway of this renovated mansion seems much too sophisticated and elaborate in classical acanthus detail for the rural architecture of Rhode Island. The acanthus representations are simple and direct in their dignified modifications of the classic Corinthian order. It was found that the original doorway and the acanthus triple-tiered capitals were designed by Dwight James Baum in the middle of the Nineteenth Century.[66]

Other applications. In Boston, the house of Thomas Wigglesworth has four wood carved capitals of single-rowed acanthuses which ornament the enclosed piazza of the front facade. The King Hooper House of Danvers, Massachusetts, exemplified an early application of the classic Corinthian order which flanks the central facade two-stories high.[67] The Boston State House designed by the eminent Charles

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65 Hamlin, op. cit., p. 99.

66 Downing, Antonette F., Early Homes of Rhode Island (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1937), p. 78.

67 Robinson, Ethel May, and Robinson, Thomas P., Houses in America (New York: The Viking Press, 1936), p. 31.

Bulfinch also demonstrates the use of flamboyant Corinthian capitals in civic architecture.[68]

Many architectural features were rich in native ornamental treatments of the Corinthian capitals and leaf scrolls which were never found on the pages of Nineteenth Century architectural handbooks. In New England the people in various localities became connoisseurs of a more free American vernacular in design. The Meeting House at No. 27 Church Street, Newport, Rhode Island, is an example of spontaneous development using acanthus patterns surrounding drum-shaped capitals. Also, an enlarged single acanthus leaf motif is mounted on the keystone of the palladium window.

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[68] Hamlin, Talbot Faulkner, Greek Revival Architecture in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), pl. 22.

CHAPTER IV

THE ACANTHUS LEAF IN INTERIOR ORNAMENTATION OF NEW ENGLAND 1800-1900

During the early Nineteenth Century Colonial simplicity and directness were replaced by the classical phases of contemporary European trends; consequently, the American interior developed revival ornamentations. American designers of this period, while following foreign prototypes, modified the interior features to comply with the simpler tastes and the limitations of their own technical ability. The designers and builders applied individual touches but retained the basic forms of the foreign models. Their ornamentation had a sincerity and charm that became typically American.

Greek frets, anthemion, and classical acanthus leaves were among the common motifs employed in Nineteenth Century New England interiors. The acanthus motif was concentrated on such interior architectural features as mantelpieces, doorways, stairways, and interior moldings.[69]

The fireplace in New England was the center of family life and a necessary feature. In time, it evolved

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[69] Kimball, Fiske, Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), p. 17.

into a sentimental pure decorative interest and was generally constructed of stone or marble. Later in the century, particularly during the Victorian Gothic era, some houses used metal firebacks and firebox coverings which were embellished with elaborate acanthus scrolls and various other motifs. Generally the theme of the New England interior reflected the simplicity and dignity of its exterior. However, with changing modes of decoration, many wealthy homesteads incorporated more elaborate details.[70]

Paneling frequently enriched the Nineteenth Century interiors and the degree of embellishment depended upon the importance of the room. During the early decades of the 1800's paneling emphasized simplicity and its decoration depended on the classical lines of molding. The acanthus motif was frequently found in leaf rosettes and leaf forms on the molding. About the 1840's with the introduction of new styles of paneling, over-mantel decoration became more elaborate. These changes afforded new opportunities to apply variations of the acanthus design which appeared in swags, garlands, rosettes, wreaths, spirals, and occasionally in painted designs. Wood was a predominant material for the mantelpieces and corresponding trim throughout the Nineteenth Century New England homestead.[71]

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70 Rogers, Meyric R., American Interior Design (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1947), p.142, pl. 130.

71 Salomansky, op. cit., p. 401.

Acanthus leaf carved pilasters were often used as a wall decoration, appearing on either side of the fireplace, and rising from the floor to the cornice, or occasionally from the dado. These acanthus leaves were squatty and the "S" of the profiles was much more exaggerated than well detailed Greek examples.

Stairways of the New England homestead became a distinctive interior feature for acanthus ornamentation. Although they were angular and prim during the early 1800's, by the middle of the century these features became more ornate and more delicately carved. The acanthus stem was used with freedom and flexibility in the scrolled brackets which ornamented the stair-ends beneath the molded nosings of the treads and were frequently jig-sawed appliques. These ornamentations ranged from the realistic to the abstract in design. In later decades applications of the classical acanthus motif were employed on stairways to emphasize rhythmic beauty of balustrades and newel posts. Often a pine-apple with an acanthus leaf base served as the finial of the newel post. These features were made in mahogany, and in the country districts, maple, cherry, and other fruit woods were used.[73]

Interior door and window trim was generally simple

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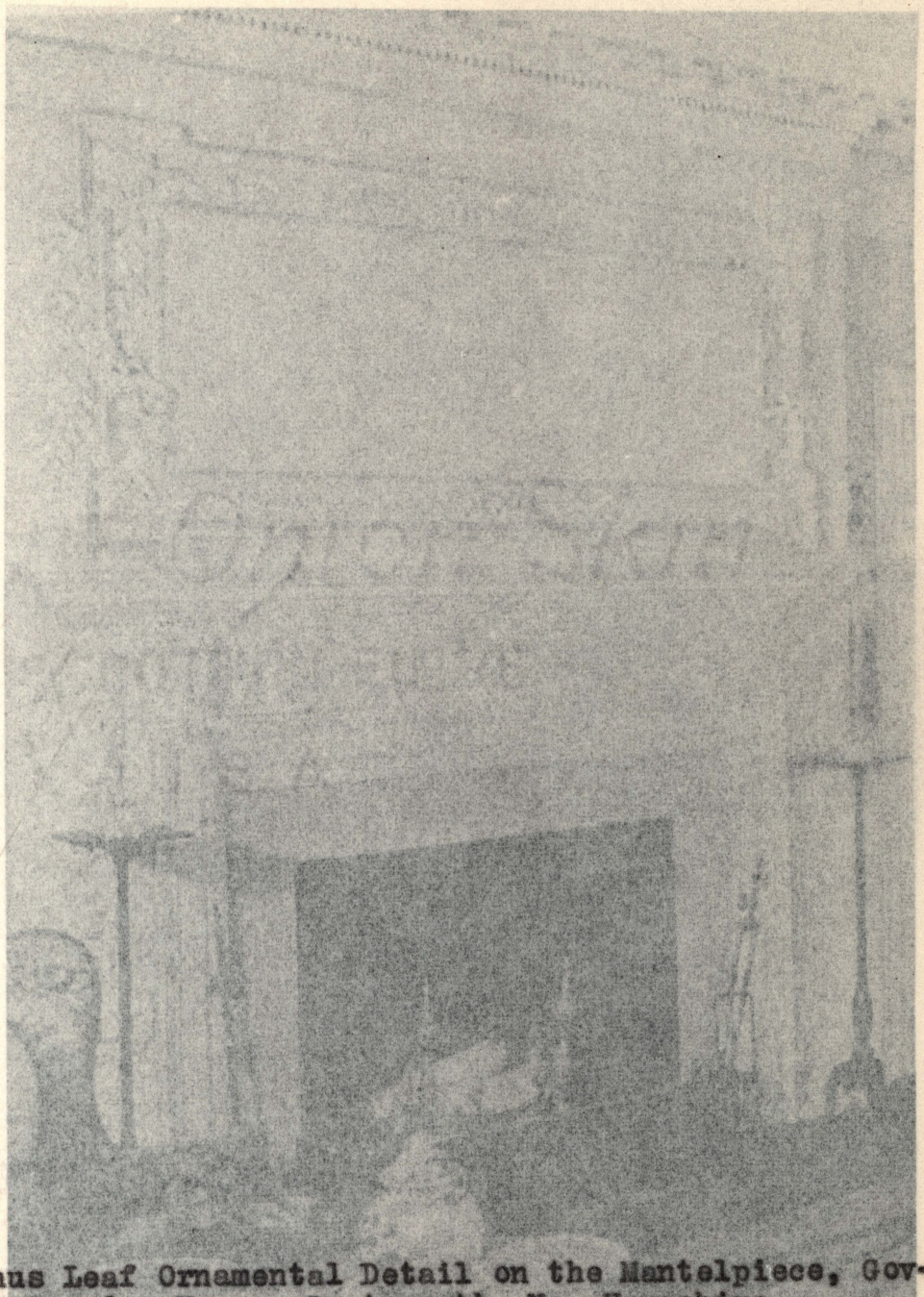
73 Storey, Walter Rendell, Period Influences in Interior Decoration (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers 1937), p. 153.

with an emphasis on line and form. Frequently an acanthus leaf colsole scroll is used in window decoration and flanking in the door trim. Abstract foliated ornaments such as rosettes and scrolls were often employed on the door and window trim. The acanthus motif was also found in small leaf forms on door moldings and band decoration.

Interior cornices with applied or painted acanthus decoration became popular in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century.

The Governor Langdon House, Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The interior treatment of this mansion has the simplicity of line and classical detail characteristic of the early Nineteenth Century interiors. The acanthus leaf ornamentations are focalized on the parlor mantelpiece Although there is an abundance of acanthus detail in relief applications of this interior feature, the exaggerated arrangements of this leaf motif appear to be a delightful contrast to the interior simplicity. The fireplace is constructed of white Vermont marble with paneling of native wood. An over-elaboration of naturalistic acanthus leaf relief patterns surrounds the fireplace. Large leaf consoles and spirals of acanthus leaves and stems are intermingled with fruits and ribbons in a sweeping graceful formal balance. The over-mantel decoration has a rectangular panel bordered with crisp, deeply cleft acanthus leaves with flowers and ribbons in high relief patterns. The drawing room mantelpiece displays an array of acanthus foliage with a Greek

Plate XIV



Acanthus Leaf Ornamental Detail on the Mantelpiece, Governor Langdon House, Portsmouth, New Hampshire



fret. In the dining room there are fluted pilasters with bands of single acanthus leaves on a miniature capital; and in the hallway the leaf motif appears on small leaf scrolls of the interior cornice, and in pierced relief carvings on the stair-ends of the grand staircase.[74]

The Waterman House, Warren, Rhode Island. In conservative sections of the country Colonial simplicity lingered well into the Nineteenth Century. Examples of acanthus leaf detail are found on the mantelpiece and the keystones of the interior archways in conventional carved leaf-scrolled brackets. The exact quality of the incised leaf scrolls of over-door decoration is difficult to determine; however, the scroll and twisting leaf patterns are characteristic of the acanthus.[75]

Oak Hill, Peabody, Massachusetts. Oak Hill was designed by Samuel McIntire, a capable architectural designer and wood carver of the early Nineteenth Century. The acanthus leaf motif was employed on the mantelpiece in rosettes and leaf moldings. Delicate arrangements of this leaf form are found on the interior cornice and door with miniature leafed scrolls. This motif is especially characteristic on the parlor mantelpiece in leaf borders and

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[74] Mixer, op. cit., p. 41

[75] Rogers, op. cit., p. 258.

tall leaf console forms flanking the fireplace in naturalistic representation.[76]

The Harrison-Otis House, Boston, Massachusetts. At the turn of the century this building was designed for a wealthy Boston merchant by Charles Bulfinch. An acanthus and bead ceiling centerpiece is the primary decorative interest of the main parlor is the gilded mirror and candle scones flanking the mantelpiece are of acanthus derivation.[77]

The Moffat-Ladd House, Portsmouth, New Hampshire. One of the finest examples of acanthus application on interior architectural features is found in the Wentworth-Gardner House. Although it was constructed in the late Eighteenth Century, interior additions were completed in 1792 by Major William Gardner. In the dining room, two fluted pilasters with double-tiered acanthus capitals flank the plain paneled fireplace. The main foyer has two sculptured keystones of simple carved acanthus leaves on the archways. The mantelpieces throughout the mansion are flanked by pilasters of composite capitals with many variations of the leaf form which are squatty and drooping in realistic form.[79]

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[76] Ibid., p. 232.

[77] Ibid., p. 228.

[78] Pratt, Richard, "Portsmouth, New Hampshire", Ladies Home Journal, 1948, p. 47.

[79] "The Historical Houses of Portsmouth, New Hampshire", Portsmouth Historical Society, Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Other applications. The Blaine House, Augusta, Maine, the residence of Maine governors, employs the acanthus motif in Corinthian fashioned capitals of the main reception room; the acanthus motif in rosettes and leaf moldings has been used in the door enframement of the Pingree House, Salem, Massachusetts, 1804, designed by Samuel McIntire; and minature acanthus-tiered Corinthian capitals support the mantelpiece in the main parlor of the Pickman-Shreve-Little House, Salem, Massachusetts.[80]

80 Mixer, op. cit., p. 80

CHAPTER V

THE ACANTHUS LEAF IN EXTERIOR ORNAMENTATION OF THE MIDDLE ATLANTIC STATES, 1800-1900

In the early decades of the Nineteenth Century the desire for Greek art swept the country and Greek Revival ornamentations prevailed everywhere until eventually classical details were used with more freedom here than in Europe. Nearly every building had full Greek cornices, pillars, cast-iron grilles, balconies and balustrades. The Greek classical motifs, including the acanthus leaf, were prominent in ornamentation of domestic, civic, and church architecture in the middle Atlantic states.

In northern New York the use of wood for structural and ornamental purposes closely followed that of the New England homestead. In Pennsylvania and Maryland wood ornamentation was incorporated with field stone and brick construction. Although much of the local architecture was devoid of decoration, some wooden ornamentations of Greek theme were used. Among these scrolled bargeboards and cornice supports were predominant during the Victorian Gothic era.[81] Carved and molded wooden details persisted in the

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[81] Bicknell, op. cit., pl. 10. 35, 37.

architecture of Maryland and Virginia. Varieties of native woods used were shellbark hickory, white oak, hard maple, and often poplar for the smallest ornaments.[82]

The exterior ornamentation of Northern mansions was concentrated on the capitals of the main porch and minor features of the doorway. These doorway features included the miniature acanthus-tiered Corinthian capitals and pilasters, and small leaf-scrolled brackets. Realistic acanthus forms appeared in wood carvings on the balustrades and stair way applications; variations of this leaf form were used in formal bands and borders on window cornicing and porch ceiling decoration. In the later periods of the Victorian Gothic and Romanesque, jig-sawed appliques of abstract foliated patterns in lace-like appearance were found on metal grilles, fences, and gate posts.

In many towns such as Rochester, Albany, and Utica, there are prominent examples of Greek temple architecture upon which the acanthus motif retained much of its classical identity. The Greek Revival buildings of the Syracuse area show uses of the acanthus leaf in various forms. Some capitals were obviously based on an adaptation of the "Tower of the Winds" capitals.[83] Their acanthus leaves are

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82 Robinson, op. cit., p. 150.

83 Historic American Buildings Survey (Project 5-8-1) Sheet 8.

rather squatty, and the "S" of their profiles is much more exaggerated than are those in well detailed Greek examples. Another use of the leaf form was the roof balustrades in panels featuring an "X" pattern of four leaves with a rosette in the center. "Greek Revival doorways, and occasionally windows, sometimes use a leaf console at each side to support a cornice."[84] At various periods, both early and late in the Nineteenth Century, the acanthus leaf was sometimes used in place of a capital on door-posts.

The acanthus leaf persisted in the Syracuse area, as in many other northern towns of Rochester and Ithaca, after the end of the Greek Revival. Victorian architecture, which took its inspiration from the Renaissance, made lavish use of the panels filled with foliated carvings, and the Neo-Romanesque building of the 1880's offer uses of the acanthus leaf. One use of this motif was in part of a s string-course molding in commercial ornamentation.

In Pennsylvania and Maryland the people were slow to adopt the revival architecture and ornamentations, preferring their simple provincial arts. In commercial ornamentation the acanthus motif took various forms of leaf design during the Gothic and Romanesque periods. The leaf form was popularly employed on cast-iron store fronts;

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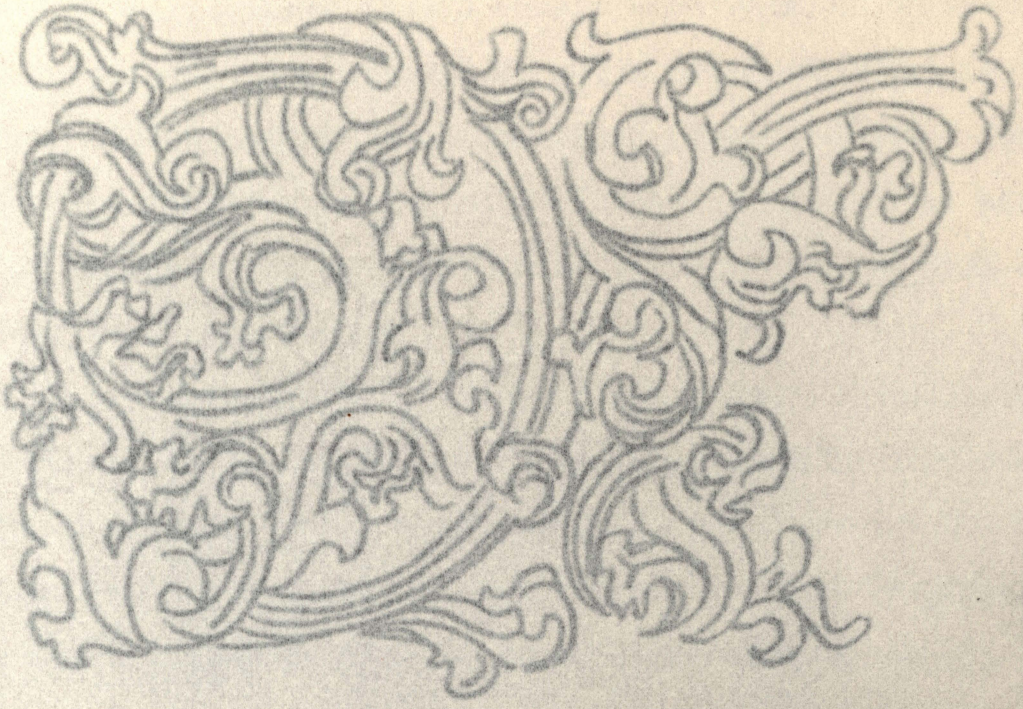
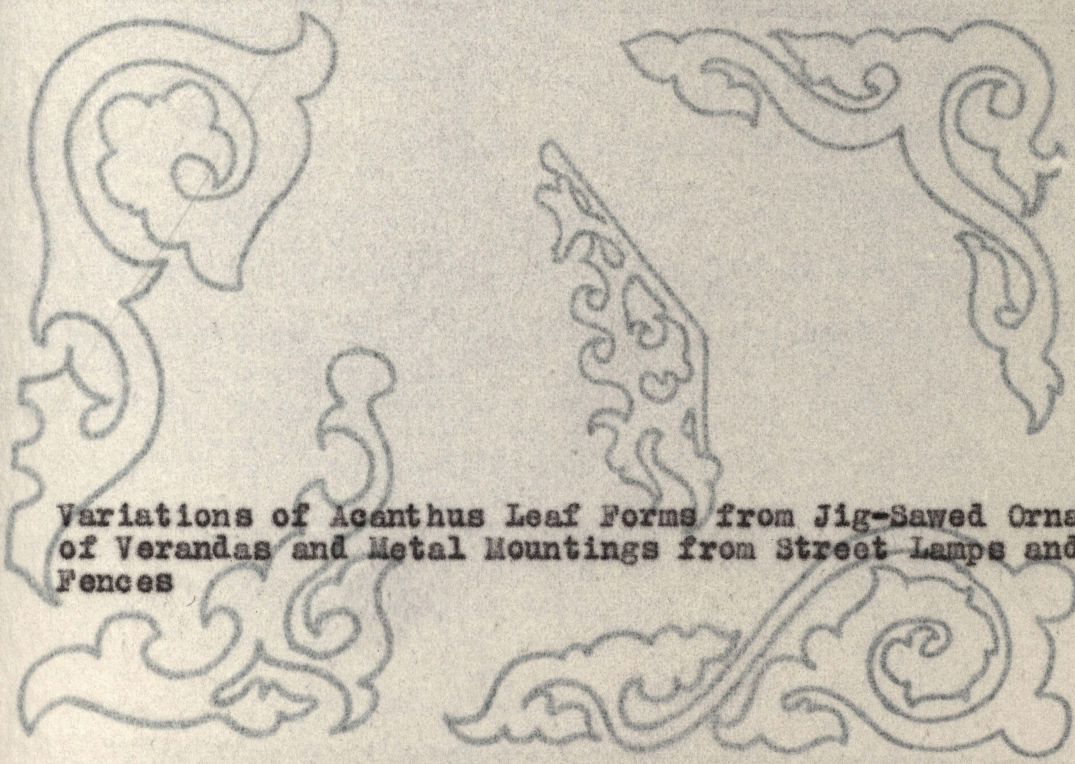
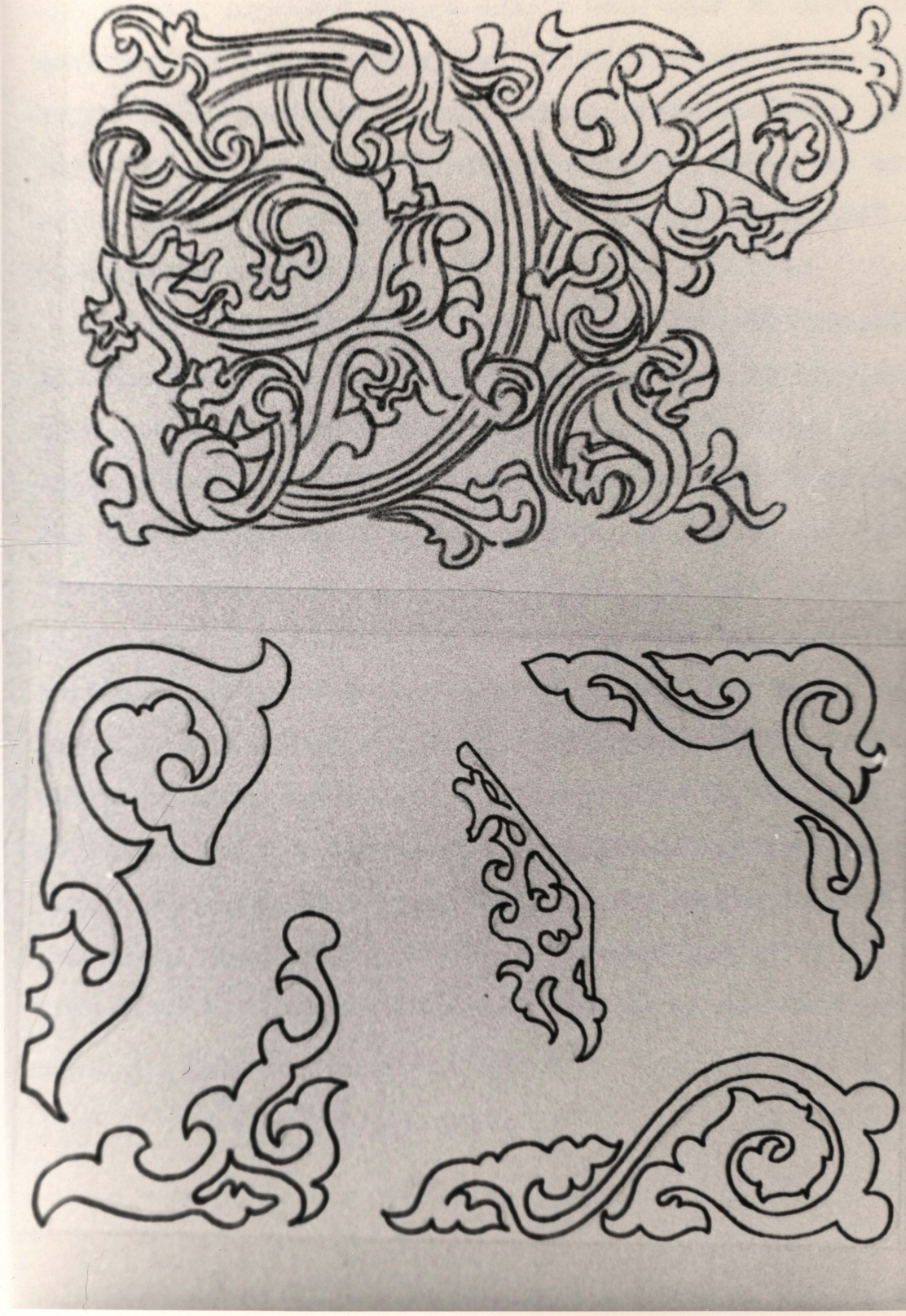
[84] Onondaga Historical Association, Syracuse, New York.

Plate XV





Variations of Acanthus Leaf Forms from Jig-Sawed Ornaments of Verandas and Metal Mountings from Street Lamps and Fences



metal leaf mountings were applied on street lamps, railings, and fences; acanthus carved panels were used in civic decoration; and the acanthus leaf was a prominent feature of Gothic and Romanesque ecclesiastical ornamentation. Acanthus decoration was sometimes attempted in stone but more often in wood. These patterns were simple and limited as to exterior placement.

In the early 1800's Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Latrobe first introduced strict interpretations of classicism in America, which were primarily developed in the architecture and ornamentation of Maryland and Virginia.[85] The use of acanthus decoration added refinement to the restraint of the pure classical form. The most prevalent of the exterior acanthus applications were the Corinthian capitals and leaf-scrolled brackets. The leaf motif was found in semi-naturalistic representations on fan-lights, entrance-ways, and window cornicing; exterior casings, railings, porch balustrades, and fashionable newel posts were also embellished with abstract and realistic leaf patterns. Many of the Tidewater estates had metal gateways with luxuriantly displayed spirals of acanthus

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85 Tallmadge, op. cit., p. 92.

twisted into fanciful foliated designs.[86] Gateposts were often surmounted with elaborate miniature acanthus leaves and a carved pineapple. This ornamental feature, a symbol of hospitality, also surmounts the crest of the roof of the Brandon-on-the-James estate in Virginia.[87]

The acanthus motif was extensively used in civic and monumental ornamentation. This leaf motif became more individualistic and creative in the decorative forms of manor architecture; whereas those ornamental features to be fixed on the civic and monumental edifices were in strict character with classical Greek and Roman forms.[88]

The First Presbyterian Church, Utica, New York. This building represents the influence of the Greek Revival movement upon ecclesiastical architecture and ornamentation. The acanthus motif is sparingly used on such architectural features as capitals, pilasters, and window trim. The leaf motif is flamboyantly displayed on the capitals of the portico; leaf-scrolled brackets are found on the window valance decorations; and miniature Corinthian pilasters flank the main doorway. This motif is also represented on such interior architectural features as capitals, window scrolls, the pulpit, and interior furniture.[89]

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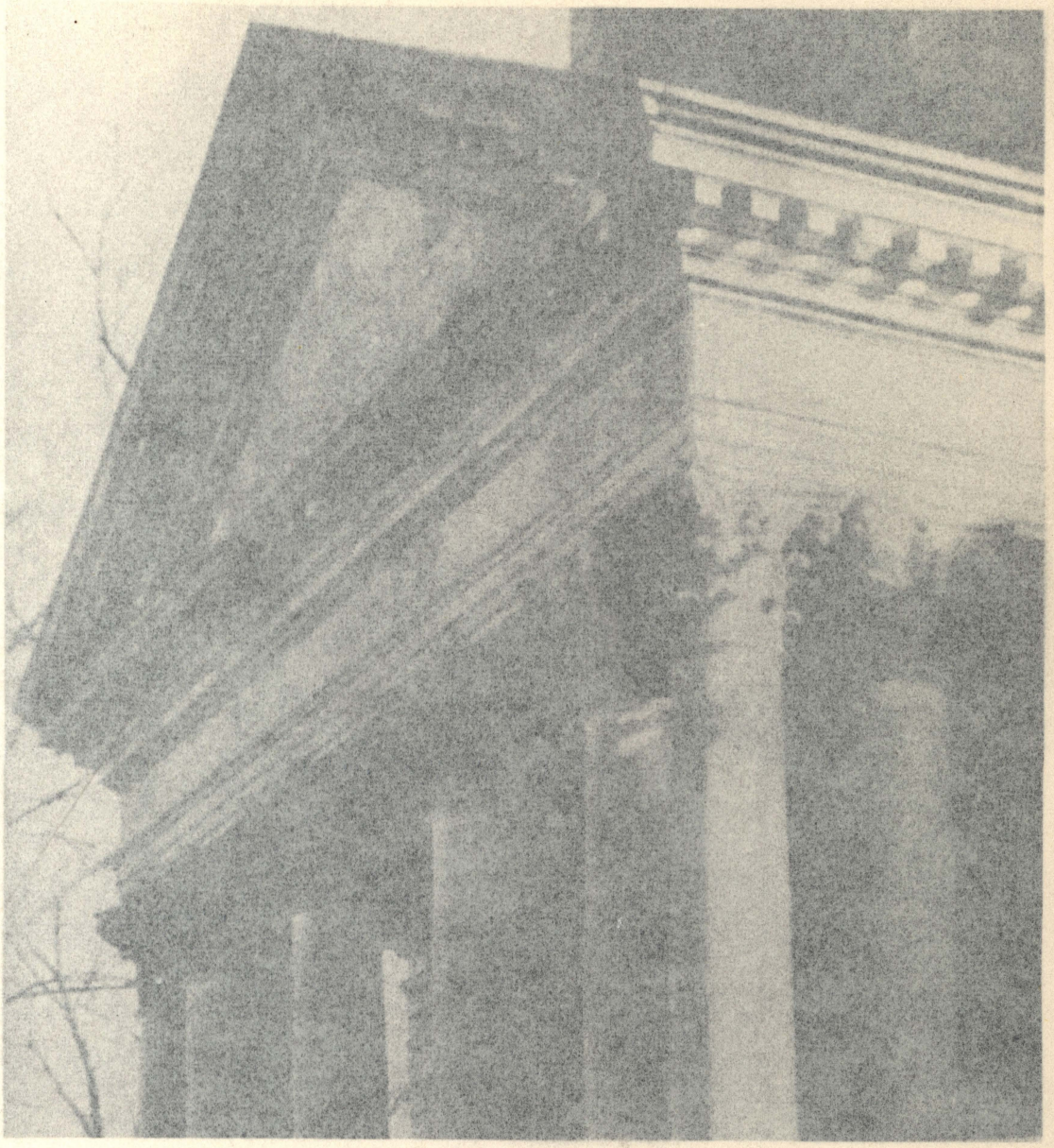
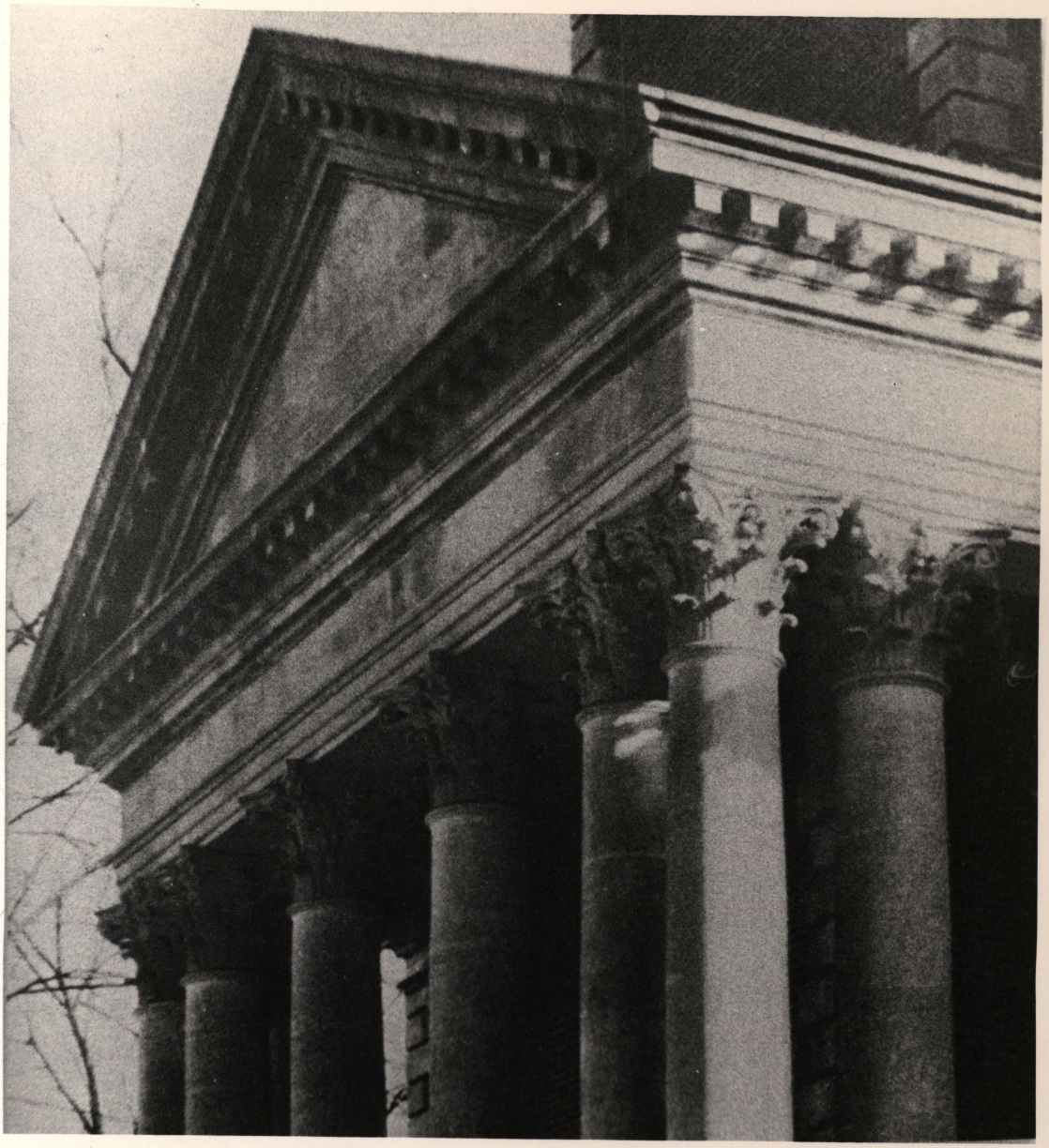
[88] Chandler, op. cit., pl. 19, 21.

[89] Historical Building Society, Utica, New York.

Plate XVI



Corinthian Capitals of the First Presbyterian Church
Utica, New York



The LeRay-Chaumont Mansion, Chaumont, New York. Although this building is not entirely designed in Greek Revival architecture, ornamentation of the Greek theme is evident. Decoration is simple and limited to general exterior applications on this northern New York mansion, using the acanthus as an ornamental device. Among the leaf details employed are small well-proportioned Corinthian capitals on the main porch; acanthus leaf scrolls on the window balcony balustrades; and jig-sawed appliques of abstract leaf designs are employed on over-door and stairway application. There are minor appearances of this form on the transom of the main doorway and on the gateposts to the estate.

The John C. Stevens House, New York, New York. The Stevens House shows a different and more elaborate treatment of the Greek Revival. The details here are of the purest Greek type. Many unusual applications of the acanthus motif appear on cornices, chimneys, and exterior trim such as a band of equally spaced large leaved rosettes, which span the main cornice, and chimneys which are decorated with scrolls of incised "S" leaf-shaped designs. Harmonizing with these designs are intermediate bands of acanthus leaves and stems separating the larger foliated areas.[90]

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[90] Hamlin, op. cit., p. 129.

The Public Library, New York, New York. The New York Library is an example of Nineteenth Century monumental building. Tremendous acanth-tiered Corinthian capitals and pilasters extend the height of the front facade; a series of leaved brackets is naturalistically carved on the cornice; and in window valancing, branches of acanthus have been developed into formalized patterns on large self-scrolled keystones. This leaf is also used in minor decorations on lamposts, balustrades, and exterior metalwork.[91]

Girard College, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Built by Thomas U. Walter in 1833-1847, Girard College is a master-piece of adapted Greek Corinthian temple architecture. "When the institutions of learning were rich, there was no such molding and modifying; the details and the forms, though perhaps recombined, were themselves line for line."[92] The result, such as the main building of Girard College may be richer and more elegant but it sometimes lacks the vitality of the simpler, more native work. One of its most distinctive features is its leaved capitals executed in the true Corinthian style.

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91 Edgell, George Harold, The American Architecture of Today (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), p. 264., fig. 250, 251.

92 Hamlin, op. cit., p. 133.

Pennsylvania Hospital, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania Hospital, built at the turn of the Nineteenth Century, shows ornamentation that is simple but refined. The acanthus leaf motif is evident on its slim monumental Corinthian pilasters, characteristic of Bulfinch's architectural ornamentation.[93]

The First Bank of the United States, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Designed by Samuel Blodget, this public building has a dignity of scale and a monumental grandeur. The acanthus motif is represented on the front elevation in pure classical form. Corinthian leaves adorn the huge capitals and pilasters of the main tow-story portico and similar leaf sculptures are employed in window and doorway decoration.[94]

The Courthouse, Petersburg, Virginia. This civic building is of simple Greek form constructed in 1835 by C. Pallard, architect. There are four acanthus-tiered capitals on the main facade. The acanthus leaves are realistic in pattern and differ from the conventional Corinthian order in that only two tiers are presented. One tier reaches half the capital-body in a border ornamentation

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93 Ibid., p. 105.

94 Ibid., p. 114.

while the other reaches the full height of the capital-body in support of the abacus. These acanthus details are repeated in the wooden bell tower.[95]

The Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia. This educational building of the Roman order was built in 1818 by Thomas Jefferson, architect. The structure, in its direct simplicity of monumental form, excludes all ornamentation except the six Roman Composite capitals on the main facade. The acanthus leaves are flat and drooping, and arranged in Corinthian fashion, "Dignified, simple, graceful, strong, it endured as a tribute to the important influence Thomas Jefferson had upon the development of architecture in the United States."[96]

Other applications. Many civic and commercial buildings exemplify variations of the acanthus leaf in architectural ornamentation. Among them is the Pennsylvania Railroad Station of New York where the acanthus is represented on the towering Corinthian capitals, minor details on railings and lamposts, and exterior metalwork. Scores of Corinthian capitals and pilasters are found on the classical leaf ornamentations on the Greek Revival apartment houses of Washington Square. This leaf motif may also

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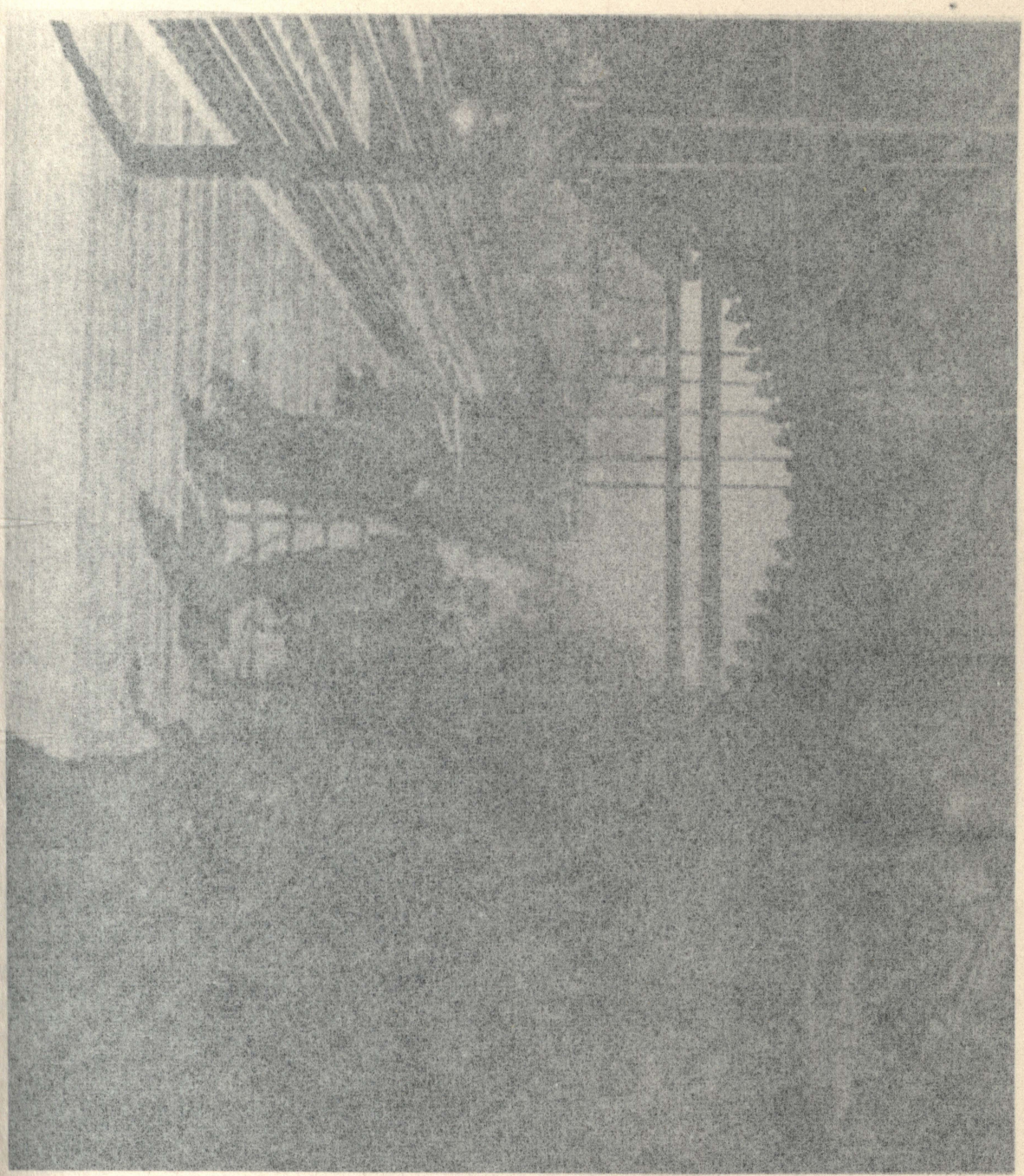
[96] The Virginia Historical Society of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia.

Plate XVII



Pierced Leaf Scrolls in Structrual Supports of the New York Elevated Stations

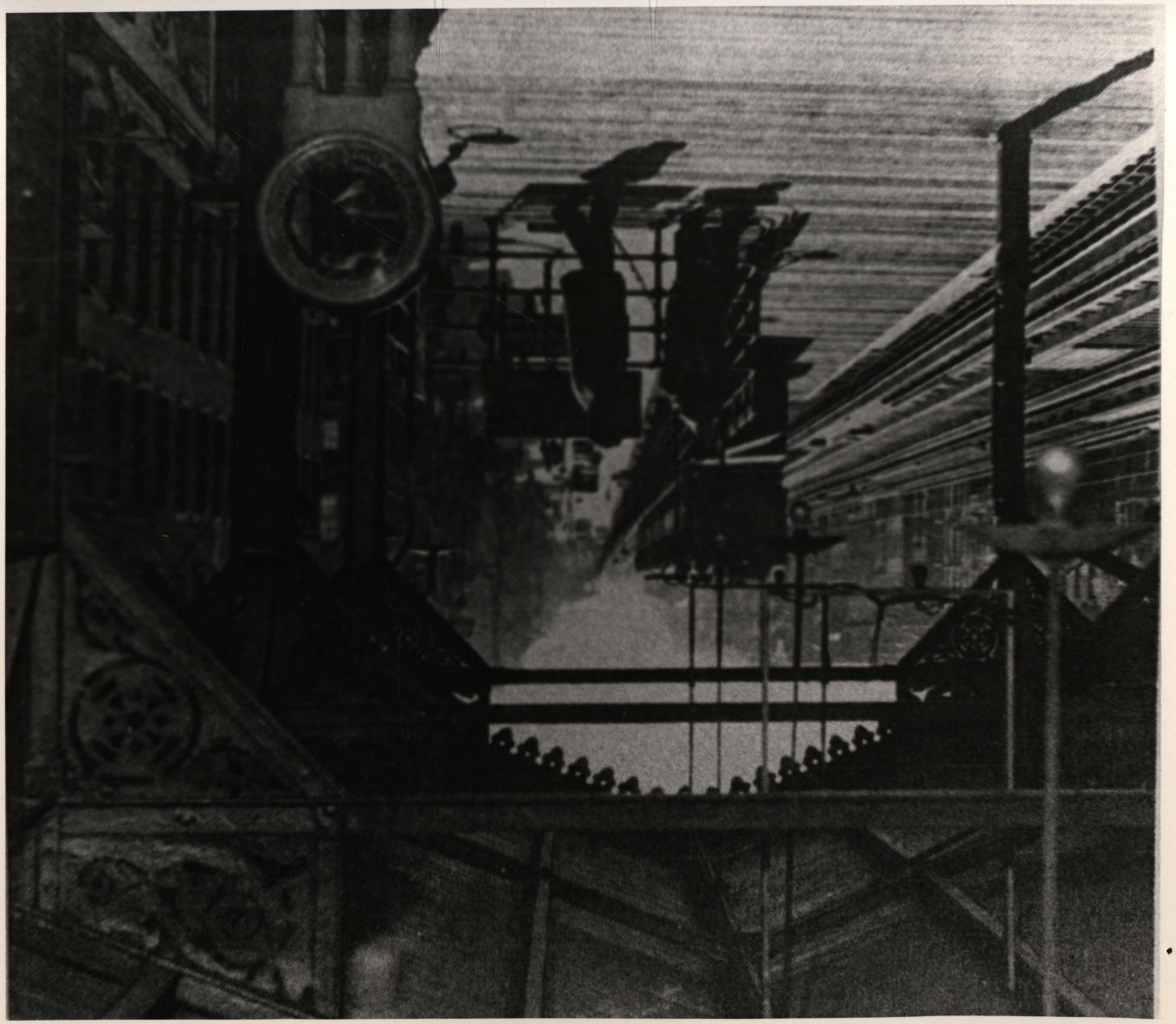
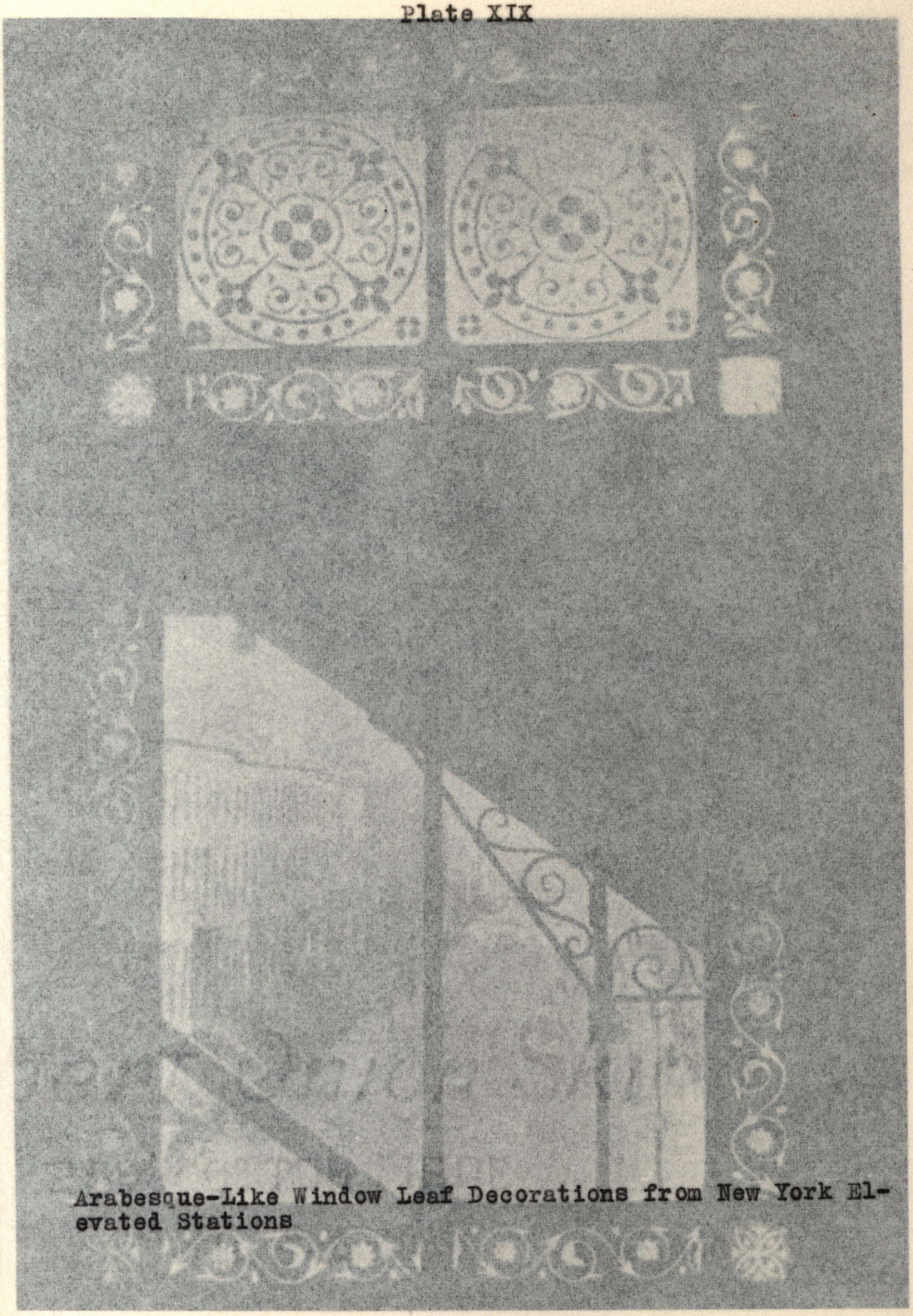


Plate XIX



Arabesque-Like Window Leaf Decorations from New York Elevated Stations



be seen in a network of public elevated railway stations constructed in New York about 1860. The leaf form appears in metalwork, arabesque-like window patterns, and in pierced and jig-sawed roof supports ranging from the realistic to the abstract.

Acanthus reliefs are employed on the window cornicing of the White House, Washington, D.C., 1792-1829. Also, long scrolled brackets and clusters of acanthus leaves are realistically carved below the window sill.[97]

Other government and civic buildings in Washington, D. C., show the acanthus motif in their ornamentation. For example, Corinthian capitals and pilasters have been used extensively on the central pavilion of the west facade of the National Capitol.

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97 "Notes on the White House", Department of the Interior, Office of National Parks, Washington, D. C., January 1934.

CHAPTER VI

THE ACANTHUS LEAF IN INTERIOR ORNAMENTATION OF THE MIDDLE ATLANTIC STATES, 1800-1900

Coastal mansions of the Middle Atlantic states were influenced by New England's ornamental traditions. Gradually such revival architectures as the Greek Revival, Gothic, and Romanesque became more prominent than New England simplicity. The employment of classical motifs in interior design became widespread, and variations of the acanthus leaf remained popular throughout this region.

Mantelpieces remained the principal feature of New York and Pennsylvania interior ornamentations. These were usually constructed of wood and marble. In this section, where the Greek Revival lingered longest, the acanthus motif was generally represented on the keystones, scrolled brackets, and rosettes. Acanthus leaf consoles, naturalistic in detail, were extensively employed on fireplace and overmantel decoration, which in the city mansions, became more flamboyant in keeping with revival modes. The acanthus leaf motif was generously applied to mid-century overmantel mirrors and paneling. These were sometimes simply decorated with rosettes and leaf scrolled mountings, and in other instances, the leaf motif was presented in

a European treatment of extreme elaboration and gilded application better known as "second Rococo" style.[98] Variations of the acanthus leaf were dominant on interior architectural features of these mansions although other motifs such as the fleur-de-lis, shells, and grapes were popularly employed.

Acanthus designed metal fireplace grilles became increasingly popular during the latter half of the Nineteenth Century. These fixtures were sculptured with foundry patterns of acanthusss intermingled with other classical forms in band or border decoration.[99]

Here, in the Nineteenth Century, as in New England, stairway ornamentation remained angular and prim with a rising interest for variations of the acanthus scroll. These variations ranged from the naturalistic to abstract foliated patterns of the classical leaf form. In later decades, the use of the acanthus ornament in stairway elaboration was increased by the revival modes of the 1870's to th the 1890's.[100] The coastal mansions became known the country over for excessive decorative treatment of stairways in

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98 Elliott, Charles Wyllys, The Book of American Interiors (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1876), p. 41.

99 Rogers, op. cit., p. 97.

100 Tallmadge, op. cit., p. 140.

the Nineteenth Century interior. Up to the 1860's, the stair-ends were the only portion of the stairway that received any decorative attention. Succeeding styles focused acanthus leaf application on the balustrades. Later, the newel post became an accentuated interior feature with the use of highly carved acanthus leaves. During the Victorian 1870's, pierced and jig-sawed appliques became prominent in acanthus ornamentation on the stairways.[101] Excessive stairway detail came to be particularly fashionable in New York and New Jersey coastal mansions of the Late Nineteenth Century.

Interior trim such as moldings and cornices remained rather simple and plain except for tracery reminiscent of the Victorian Gothic period and an occasional unidentified leaf form in the molding, presumably of acanthus parentage. In many instances, acanthus rosettes adorned the window trim, and the acanthus motif was duplicated in Corinthian capitals, pilasters, and over-door paneling of the interior entranceway. Spirals, scrolls, festoons, and gilded ornamentations were popular. Enlarged realistically presented acanthus leaf medallions, rosetts, borders, and a general over-all pattern work were representative of ceiling ornamentation. In the latter part of the Nineteenth Century

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[101] Bicknell, op. cit., pl. 10, 35, 37.

the growth of ornamental elaboration stimulated the adoption of additional acanthus trimmed metal accessories such as light sconces and "artistic" bric-a-brac.

In Virginia and Maryland, mantelpieces followed the general forms of ornamentation as in New York and Pennsylvania. At first the acanthus was sparingly used on keystones and fireplace panel decorations, and occasionally small leaf-scrolled brackets were employed on the mantel cornice. About 1820 Jefferson's importations of classical Greek and Roman ornament influenced the treatment of interior architectural features, and the acanthus leaf was greatly popularized in console form, rosettes, spirals, and leaf borders in mantel paneling. Often mantel decoration became over-elaborate and heavy with leaf ornament. Acanthus tiered Corinthian capitals and pilasters were not found frequently in Southern mantel decoration although many refined examples of the acanthus employment were executed in Maryland and Virginian mansions. Variations of the motif appear in French Empire style featuring slender single acanthus stems in band decoration of the capitals.[102] In a majority of instances, the fireplace was framed in marble and the mantelpiece was made of wood with carved details. Later the mantelpieces were constructed of molded plaster.

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102 Rogers, op. cit., p. 252.

Decoratively, an equally important interior architectural feature of the Maryland and Virginian mansions was the grand stairway. The stairways were conservative in design and simple in ornamentation. Much of the decoration was in jig-sawed appliques and simple carved relief ornament, located on the stair-ends and usually painted to harmonize with the interior scheme. In later years, stairway decoration became more excessive in acanthus pattern but seldom approaching even a semi-naturalistic presentation. During the 1840's, acanthus designed carvings and mountings became more frequent in balustrade decoration. Stairways of the main entranceway in most Southern mansions were circular, a style which allowed excellent termination of pattern and form in featuring newelpost decoration.[103] These acanthus patterns were effective in simple line carvings and quite often exaggerated in height reaching upward half the height of the post-body.

The interior trim of moldings and cornices was generally simple and traditionally true to classic form. Dado boards, door and window trim, and wall paneling were commonly treated in the Georgian theme at the beginning of the century. However, in some cases, Southern interiors showed excessive acanthus ornamentation in the over-door

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[103] Ibid., p. 254.

treatment and window valancing, wall paneling, and even ornate acanthus leaf appliques of consoles and rosettes.[104]

In the Southern mansions of Baltimore, Fredericksburg, and Washington, D. C., where Victorian ornamentation was expressed very vividly, the acanthus motif constantly appears in jig-saw appliques. Acanthus centerpieces, rosettes, and borders of single leaf foliage were popular in ceiling decoration. These were often presented in stock patterns of plaster ornaments. Wallpaper imported from France and picturing historic scenes or using all-over floral patterns was occasionally substituted for wood and plaster panels. Corinthian capitals are evident in the historic scenes while acanthus scrolls, rosettes, and spirals were common in all-over patterns.

The General Leavenworth House, Syracuse, New York. This fashionable mansion was built during the late Greek Revival movement in 1839 by General Leavenworth. The acanthus motif appears as a major decorative motif on the interior wall decoration, capitals, and ceiling ornamentation. Interior pilasters have capitals which are based on an adaptation of the "Tower of the Winds" capitals. "This Corinthian capital, which is of the simplest kind, has been

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[104] Ibid., p. 252.

found with very slight changes all over Greece."[105] Some drawings of this feature were made by the Historic American Buildings Survey (Project 5-8-1) see Sheet 8 of the measured drawings. The Leavenworth House also exemplifies the use of the acanthus leaf on a large wreath in the ceiling ornamentation executed in plaster, from the middle of which hangs a crystal chandelier. Delicate classical leaf designs are carved on the main stairway and door enfrasement.[106]

The John D. Norton House, Syracuse, New York. This dignified mansion, built in 1842, is one of Syracuse's finest temple buildings, employing an acanthus carved console at each side of interior doorways and windows to support the cornice.[107]

The John Pineley House, Syracuse, New York. The acanthus leaf persisted in the Syracuse area even after the end of the Greek Revival. The variety of Victorian architecture which took its inspiration from the Renaissance made lavish use of panels filled with the leaf and floral carvings, of which appear in this Syracuse house. Interior cornices with acanthus leaf patterns were common applications during the latter part of the century.[108]

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105 Speltz, op. cit., p. 56.

106 Onondaga Historical Association, Syracuse, New York

107 Ibid.,

108 Ibid.

The Nathan Roberts House, Canasota, New York. At various periods, both early and late in the Nineteenth Century, the acanthus leaf was employed in place of a capital on the door-posts. A modification of this practice was to place an acanthus leaf carving in the freize immediately over the door-post. An example of this modification may be seen in the early Nineteenth Century dwelling of Nathan Roberts in Canasota, New York. The acanthus leaf in this example closely resembles an oak leaf. This feature has been recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey (Project 5-8-4) and there is a detail on Sheet 6 of the measured drawings. An acanthus rosette appears on the corner blocks of the interior window trim. The leaves of this application might be considered acanthus; however, their character is not too strongly marked.[109]

The D. S. Kennedy House, New York, New York. This household is representative of many periods of interior architectural ornamentation. The library is of the Gothic Revival style, designed by Alexander J. Davis. The mantelpiece remains the accentuated feature of this room with its over-elaboration of ornament noted by severe lines and geometric patterns. The wood work of the overmantel piece is ornately crested with naturalistic formal-balanced

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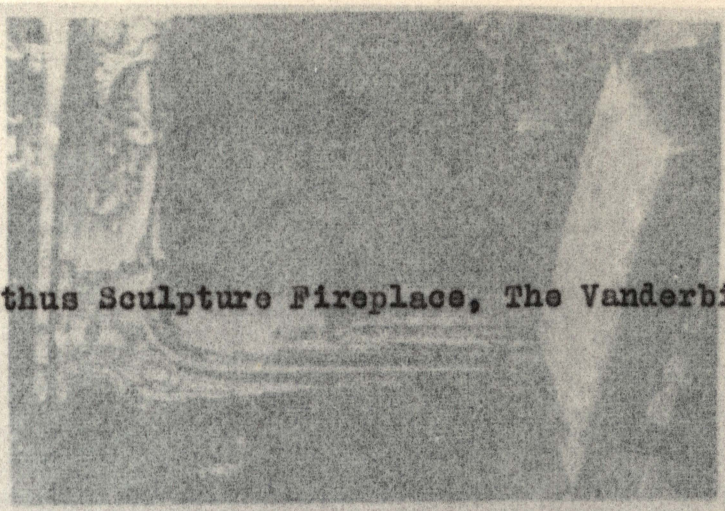
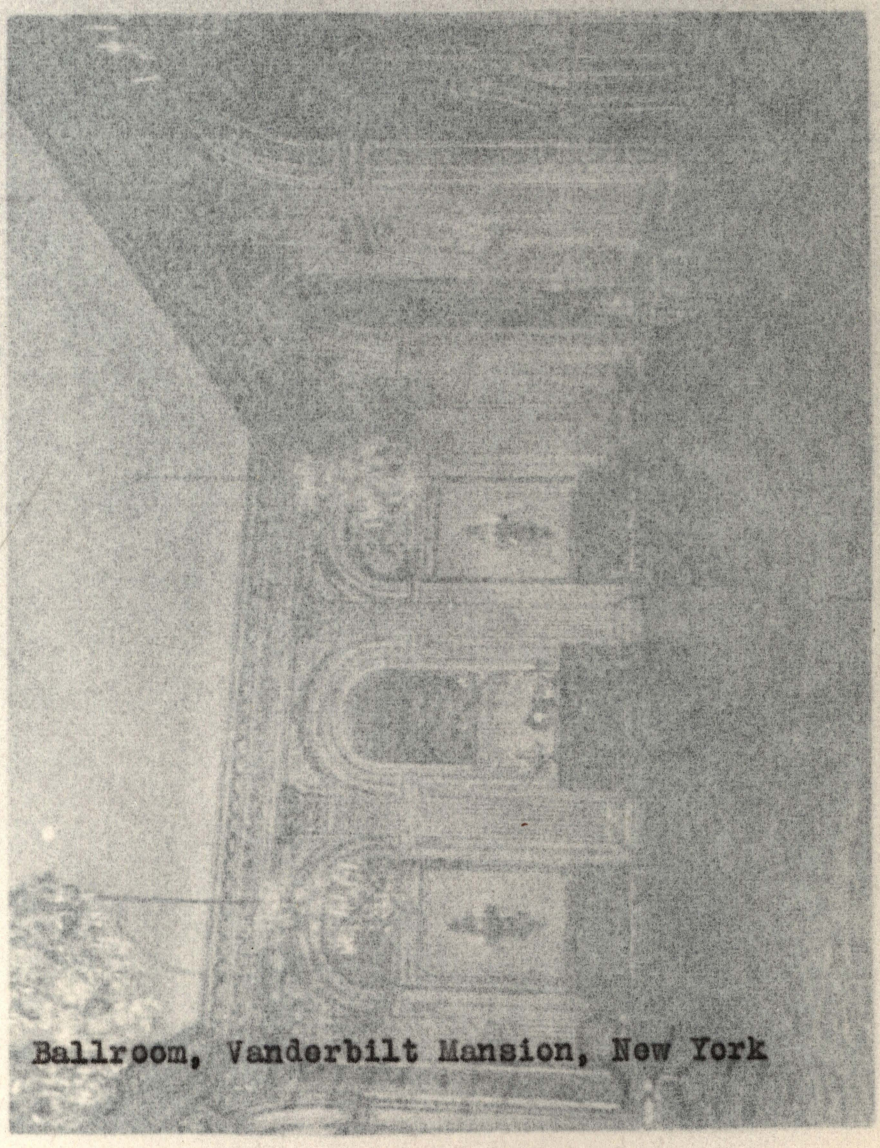
[109] Ibid.

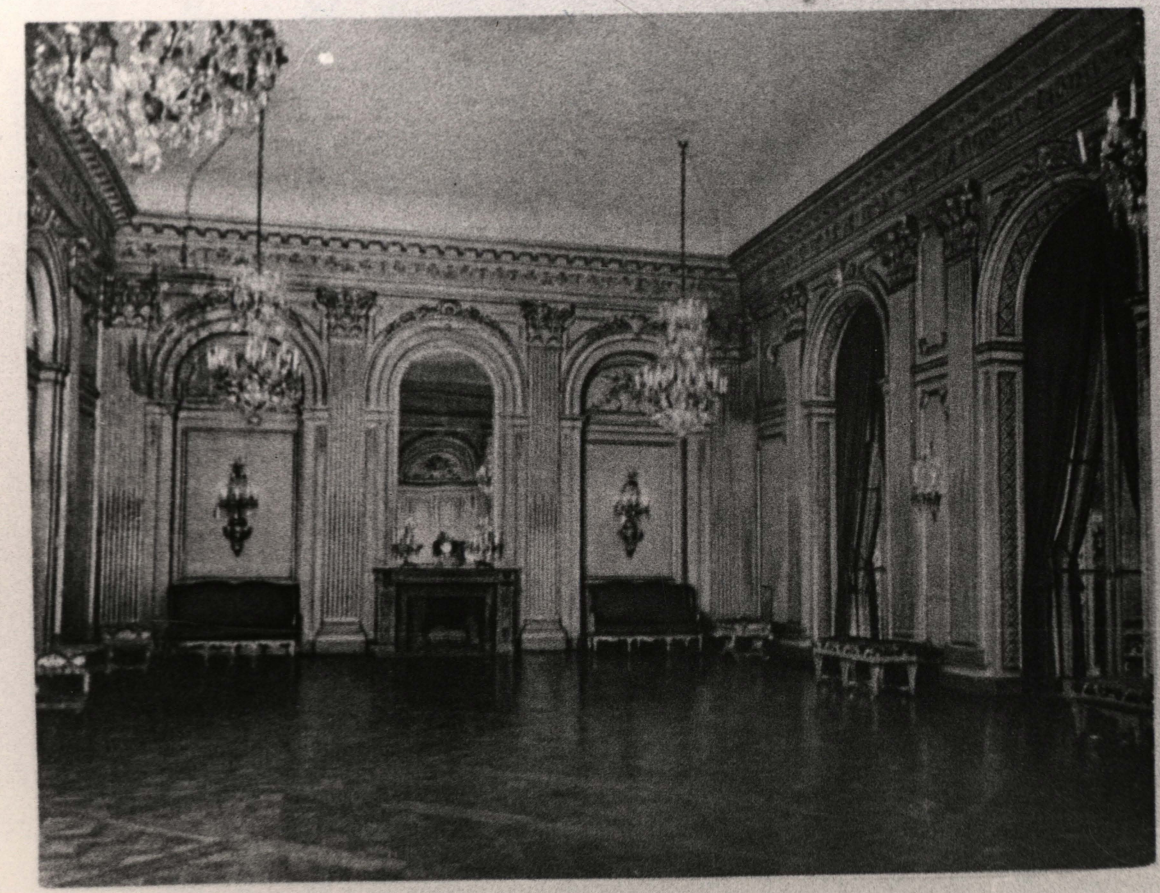
Plate XX

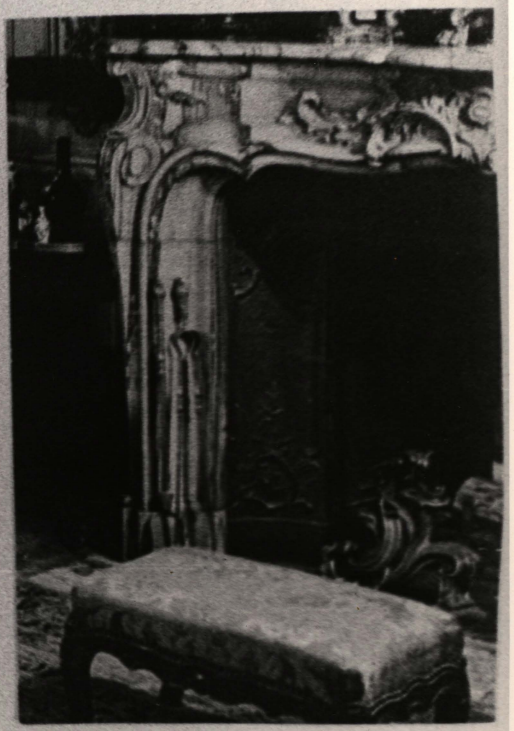


Marble Acanthus Sculpture Fireplace, The Vanderbilt Mansion New York



Ballroom, Vanderbilt Mansion, New York





acanthus forms. Acanthus leaf ornamentations are carved on the marble facings of the fireplace, and acanthus scrolled bric-a-brac in metalwork is also to be found in this room. The drawing room interior, however, presents a very different style, for it is an unusual example of the Rococo. The fireplace and over-mantel piece are elaborated with acanthus leaves in scroll patterns and curved leaf forms, and are presented in realistic pattern. The painted wall decorations are typical of mid-century New York mansions with designs painted to represent paneling which is crested and ornamented with large acanthus "S" scrolls and single foliated motifs. The massive cornice has intermingled acanthus forms of wood carvings and large formalized painted leaf decorations of the acanthus leaf.[110]

The Roosevelt House, New York, New York. Built about 1850, this house was the residence of President Theodore Roosevelt. The cornice board of the parlor is incised with acanthus leaves and the window valances are gilded pierced frames with spirals of leaves. Other variations of the acanthus appears on the overmantel piece, the fireplace, and the metalwork of the lighting fixtures.[111]

The Vanderbilt Mansion, New York, New York. "This habitat of the richest man in the world which, for twenty five years remained the last strong hold of ceremonial

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110 Rogers, op. cit., p. 142, pl. 130.
111 Ibid., p. 268.

society in America, was built by William H. Vanderbilt in 1881." This mansion hardly represents a true cross-section of American adaptations of the acanthus motif in interior architectural ornamentation for it seems to be a noble collection of Louis XVI architecture and decoration. Acanthus motifs prevail everywhere in the architecture of the mansion. In the main salon, gilded acanthus appliques decorated the slender pilasters which supported the composite styled acanthus capitals. In the great hall, primarily used for formal receptions, the acanthus appears in single naturalistic motifs below the scrolled bracket of the over-door treatment. In the ballroom, handsome and dignified in the tradition of Versailles, are fluted pilasters of the Corinthian order and arches crested with wavy crisp acanthus stems. The mantelpieces, paneling, fabrics, tapestries, and furniture are also represented with the acanthus leaf motif.[112]

The J. P. Morgan House, Brooklyn, New York. This house was built about 1870. The interior architectural ornamentation of the parlor is rather plain except for the acanthus detail on the fireplace and the leaf detail on the cornice board. In the center of the ceiling a

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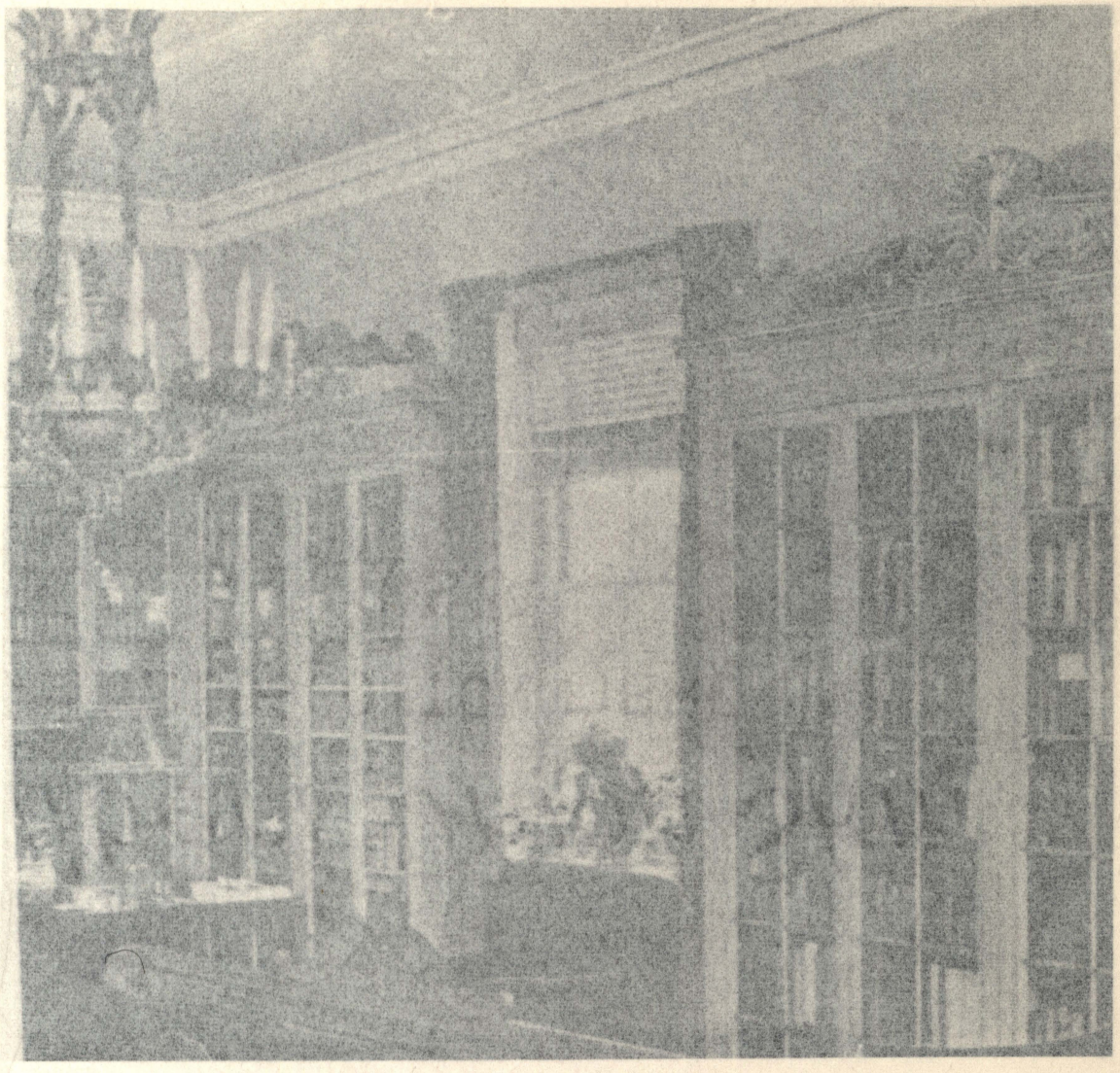
112 "The Vanderbilt Mansion," House Beautiful, January 1934, p. 46.

Plate XXI



Wood Carved Acanthus Ornaments on Furniture and Metal Chandelier Trimmings of Andalusia, Bensalem Township, Pennsylvania



large acanthus medallion and minor foliated features are displayed. In the 1890's, this mansion was completely redecorated after European travels, and excessive ornamentation appears throughout the entire interior.[113]

The A. T. Stewart Mansion, New York, New York. An excellent example of the high style of the Seventies under European influence based on the Louis XVI style is the A. T. Stewart mansion. The heavy cornices of this mansion are rich with acanthus leaf forms. Moldings, ceiling decorations, and small scrolled brackets are trimmed with acanthus leaves. Composite capitals of acanthuses and other classical motifs, and leaf carved window valances are among the major acanthus detailed interior features.[114]

Andalusia, Bensalem Township, Pennsylvania. In the remodeling of this mansion, about 1834, Nicholas Biddle employed every phase of the Greek Revival. The interior decoration follows Greek line and form, and little ornamentation is evident. These forms are popular in acanthus detail. Semi-naturalistic acanthus leaves in plaster work are applied in single band decoration on the capitals and ceiling medallions.[115]

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113 Rogers, op. cit., p. 142, pl. 133.

114 Ibid., p. 152, pl. 138.

115 Ibid., p. 256.

The Brice House, Annapolis, Maryland. In the drawing room of this house an exquisite detail of an acanthus console appears resting on the baseboard adjacent to the fireplace. Also, the acanthus motif appears on the fireplace and ceiling decoration in small realistic leaf carved brackets. There are leaf rosettes in miniature ornament on the mantelpiece and occasionally on the hand-carved moldings.[116] Acanthus ornamentation is displayed in similar patterns on a panel enclosing an antique Chinese wallpaper in the Supper Room of the Governor's Palace, Colonial Williamsburg.[117]

The Chase House, Annapolis, Maryland. In the dining room of this Annapolis dwelling, the main interior door has over-door reliefs of naturalistic acanthus in spiral brackets of large leaves. The moldings which flank this doorway are ornamented with turned acanthuses in vertical bands and, at the baseboard, this band of leaf decoration forms a large circular acanthus rosette. Bands of the leaf form are also displayed on the pediment of the doorway.[118]

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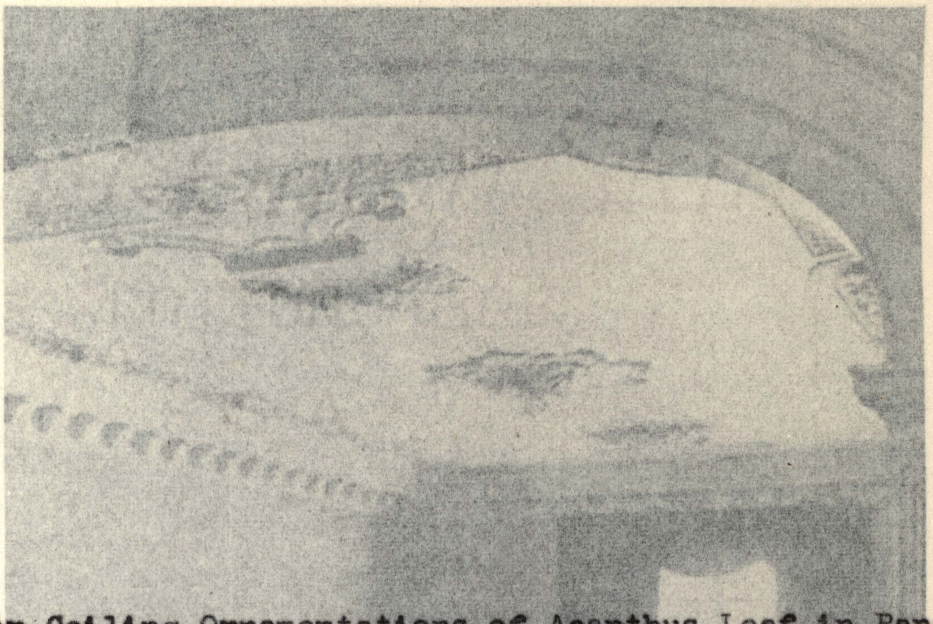
116 Chandler, Everett, The Colonial Architecture of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia (Boston: Bates, Kimball, and Guild, 1892), pl. 41.

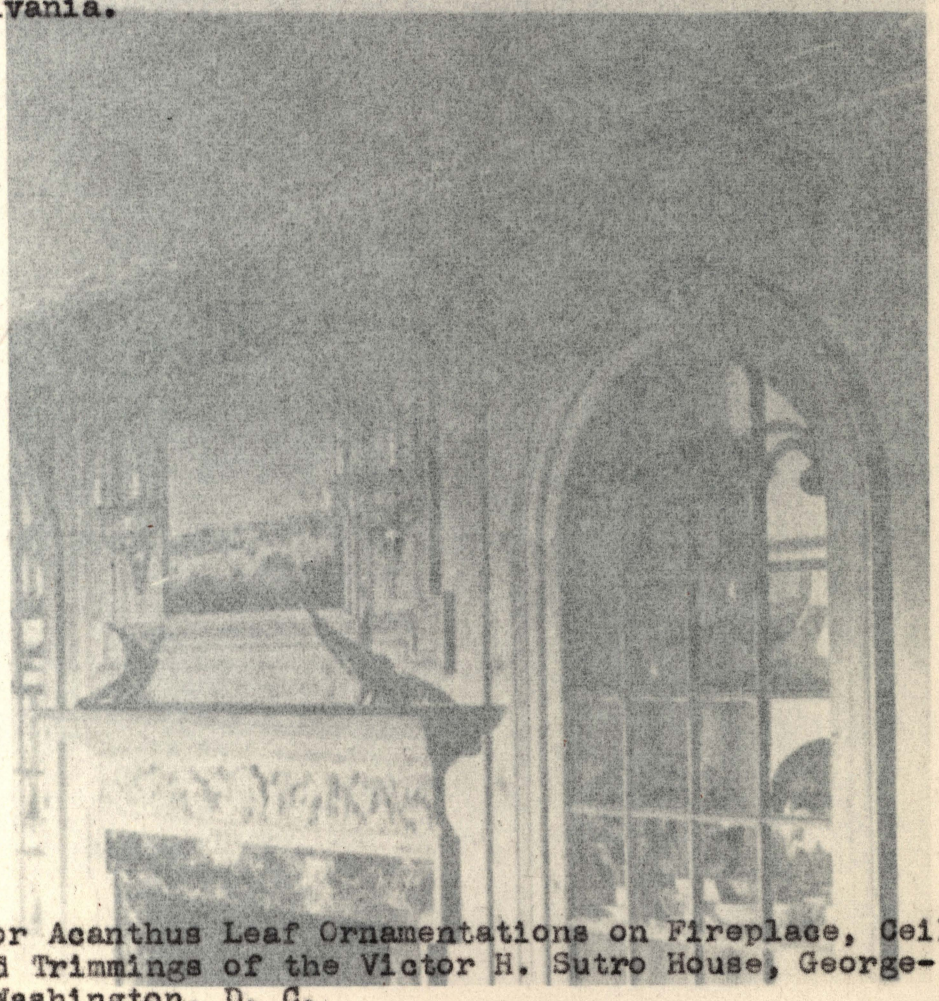
117 Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Virginia.

118 Chandler, op. cit., pl. 21.

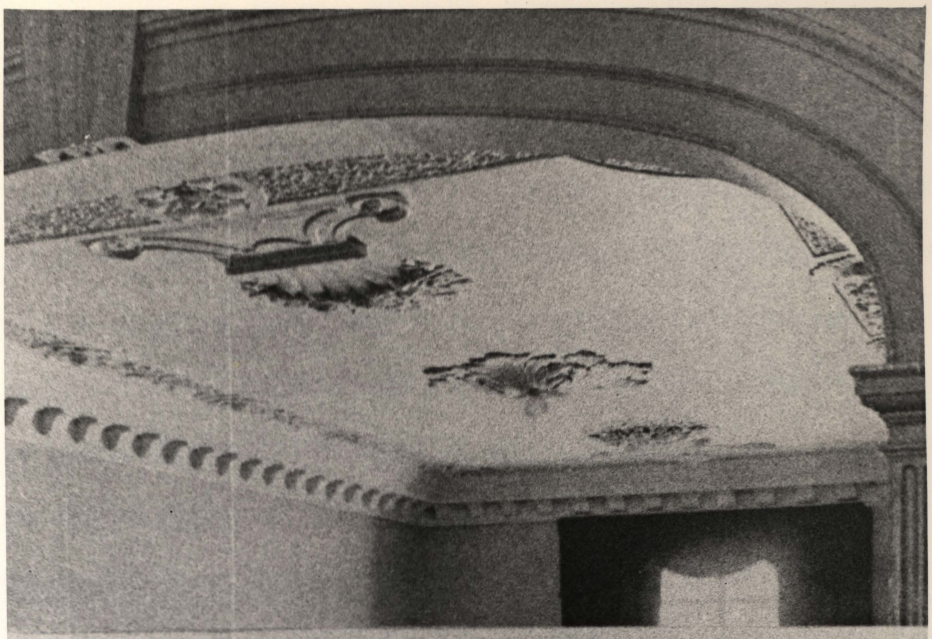
Plate XXII



Interior Ceiling Ornamentations of Acanthus Leaf in Panels, Rosettes, and Centerpieces, Mt. Pleasant, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Interior Acanthus Leaf Ornamentations on Fireplace, Ceiling and Trimmings of the Victor H. Sutro House, Georgetown, Washington, D. C.





The Victor H. Sutro House, Georgetown, Washington, D. C.. In this early house, erected in 1826, the decoration accents the beauty of Georgian classical simplicity. In the dining room the ceiling is decorated with a classical acanthus plaster border. Elaborate scrolls and spirals of acanthus forms in realistically carved reliefs adorn the mantelpiece. The doorway of the entrance hall is flanked by flat fluted pilasters supporting classical capitals with two tiers of single acanthus leaves.[119]

Kenmore, Fredericksburg, Virginia. This building remodled in the late Eighteenth Century, is representative of the acanthus motif in interior architectural features. In the dining room, the mantelpiece and ceiling are prominent in acanthus ornamentation. The mantelpiece has large realistic relief scrollwork of acanthus spirals and scrolls; the overmantel has a projected panel bordered by sprigs of crisp acanthus leaves and bead ornament; and the over-all ceiling design is predominantly of leaf pattern and acanthus rosettes. The acanthus motif is concentrated on the ceiling ornamentation by the use of wreaths, medallions, rosettes, garlands, spirals, and border treatments.[120]

Other applications. The present Hayden Hotel, Syracuse, New York, built in 1804, has Corinthian capitals

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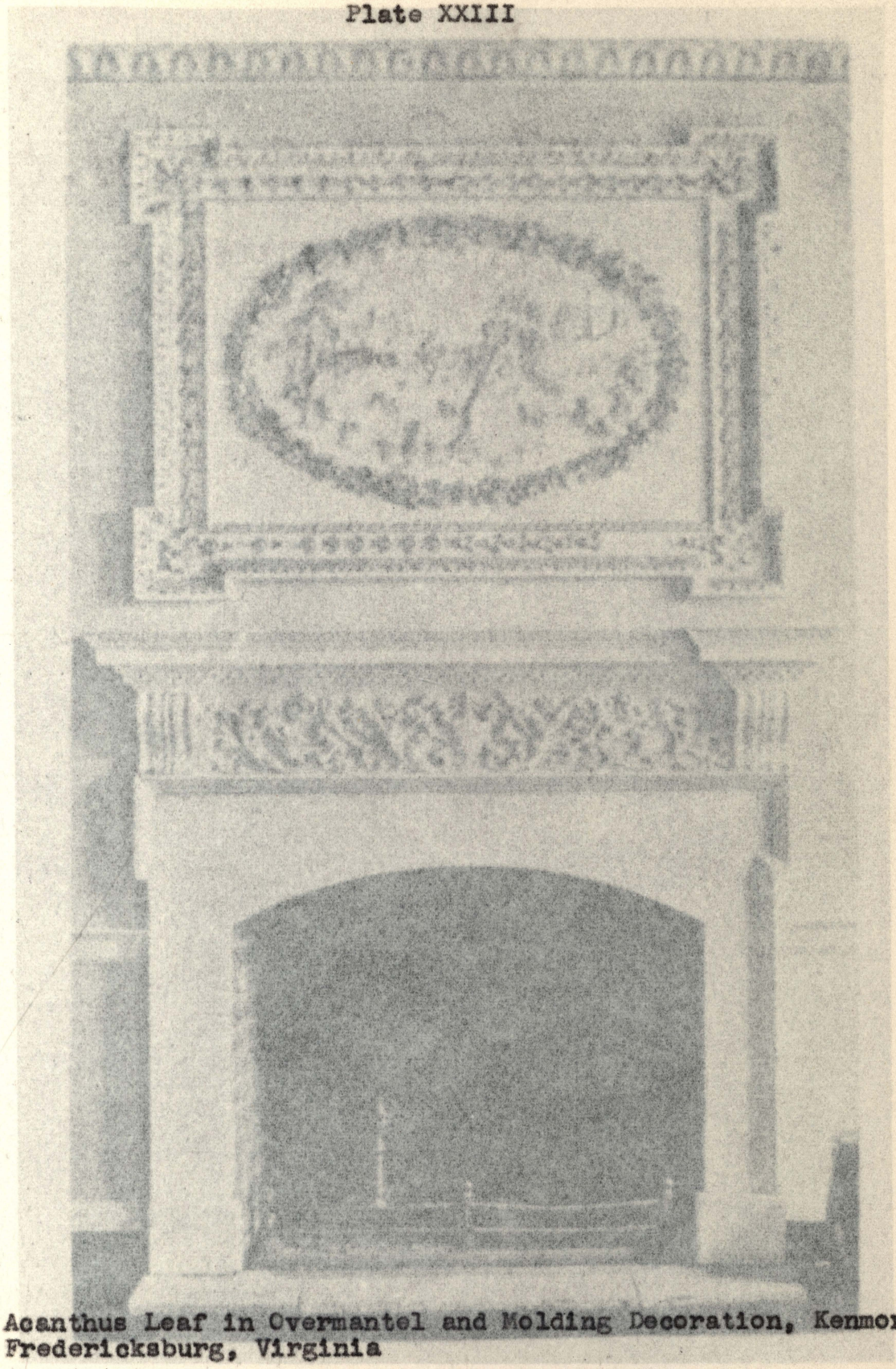
119 Ibid., p. 23.

120 The Kenmore Association, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Plate XXIII



Acanthus Leaf in Overmantel and Molding Decoration, Kenmore, Fredericksburg, Virginia

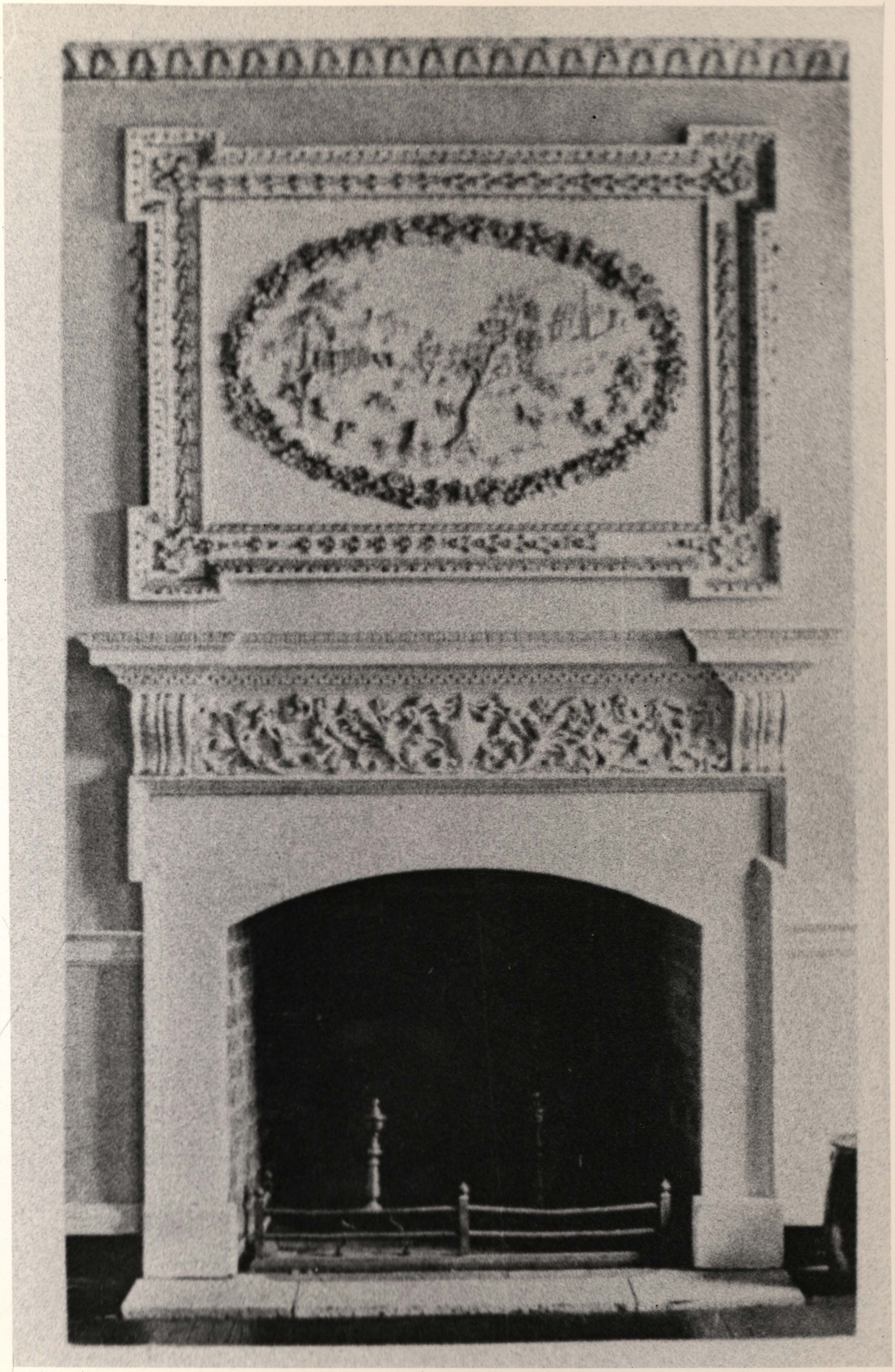
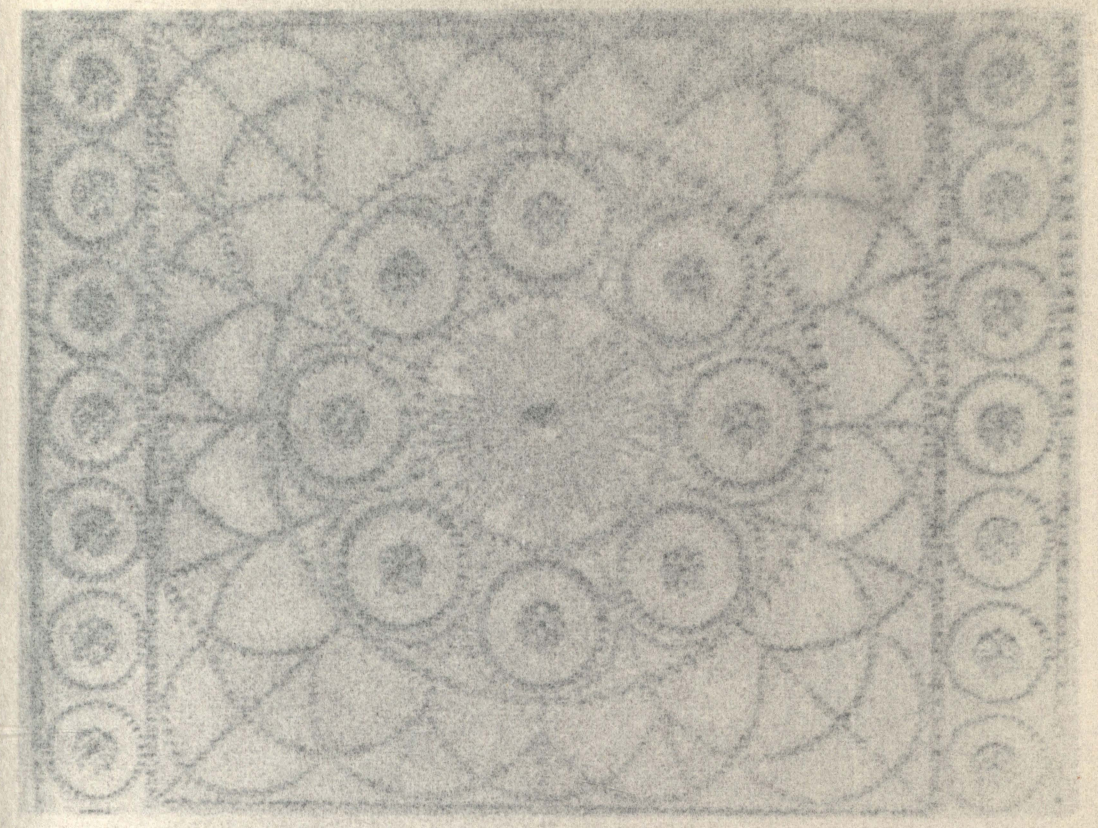
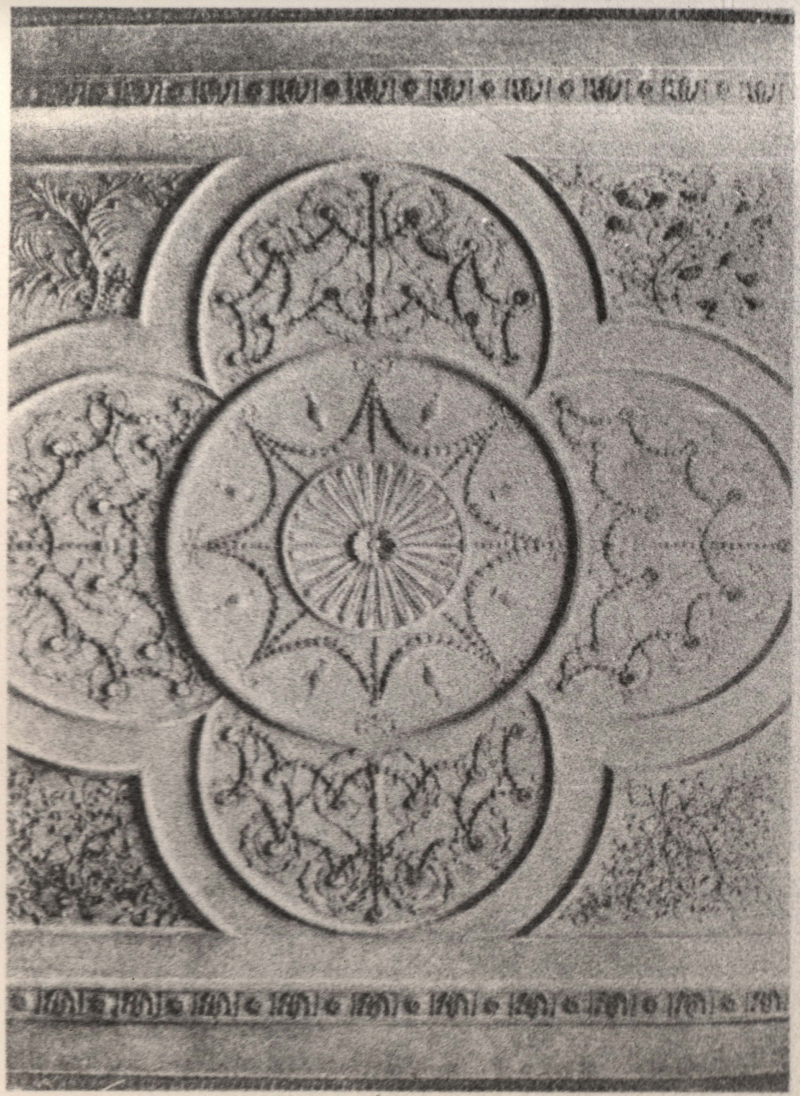


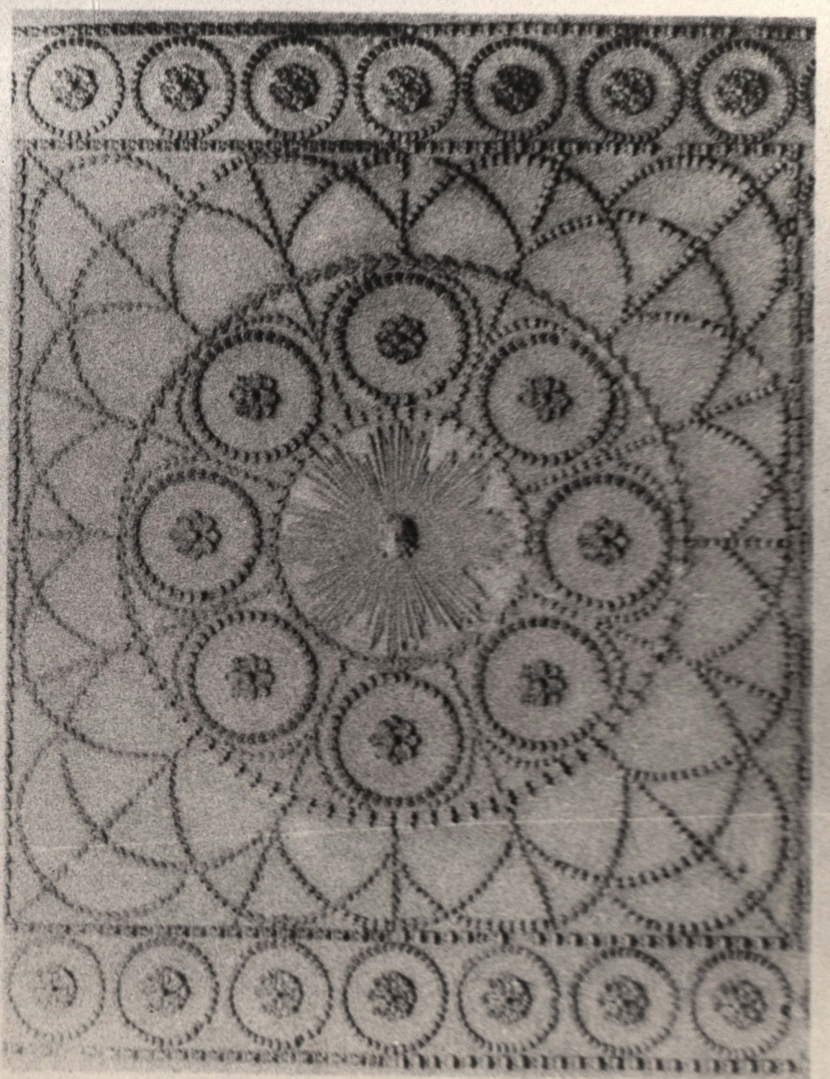
Plate XXIV





Acanthus Leaf Motif in Ceiling Ornamentations of Parlor and Dining Room, Kenmore, Fredericksburg, Virginia.





flanking the interior of the main doorway.[121] An elaborate newel post of a stairway in a Rochester house is elaborately carved with large acanthus leaves.[122] In the Homewood mansion, Baltimore County, Maryland, the parlor mantelpiece displays an acanthus application on metal fireplace grilles.[123] An interior doorway of White Hall, Anne Arundel County, Maryland, is extremely ornate and almost entirely in acanthus leaf carving.[124]

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121 Onondaga Historical Association, Syracuse, New York.

122 Schmidt, Carl F., Greek Revival Architecture in the Rochester Area (Scottsville: Schmidt, 1946), p. 129.

123 Chandler, op. cit., pl. 10.

124 Ibid., pl. 17.

CHAPTER VII

THE ACANTHUS LEAF IN EXTERIOR ORNAMENTATION OF THE SOUTH, 1800-1900

Sparing use of ornamentation was one of the prime virtues of Southern architecture during the first quarter of the Nineteenth Century. The South was the first to use direct classicism and the temple architecture of the Greek Revival. Greek patterns revised by Nineteenth Century designers stressed simplicity and reflected the slow-moving, luxuriant life of the region.

In suburban and plantation architecture the acanthus motif established a sense of dignity and substantial repose; in other localities where the French and Spanish elements were predominant the acanthus leaf became artificial and quaint. Public buildings and churches were few and no more elaborate than necessary.

In the South, native woods such as bur oak, slash pine, and loblolly pine were most widely used as decorative materials, while black cypress was widely employed both structurally and decoratively in plantation architecture.[124]

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[124] Robinson, op. cit., p. 156

Little brick ornamentation was employed in the South. Stone was sometime used but was not common in decoration for the supply had to be imported from New England and often from Europe.

The versatility of wrought-iron, well-displayed in Southern architectural ornamentation, was a leading feature of suburban ornamentation of Charleston and New Orleans. Elaborately detailed wrought-iron banisters, trellises, and balconies of honeysuckel, grape-vine, and patterns of intertwining acanthuses were customary on the Southern facade.[125]

The acanthus motif was extensively employed in urban architecture, Corinthian styled and single-rowed acanthus leaf variations were carved on the capitals of the entranceways, and the leaf motif became a supporting decoration to the fanciful gateposts of the courtyard. It was used also on window valances and cornice scrolls and was often featured in wrought-iron banisters and railings. The leaves and stems were usually naturalistically modeled in metalwork of trellises, second-story balconies, and street-front grilles.[126] Graceful exterior stairways of

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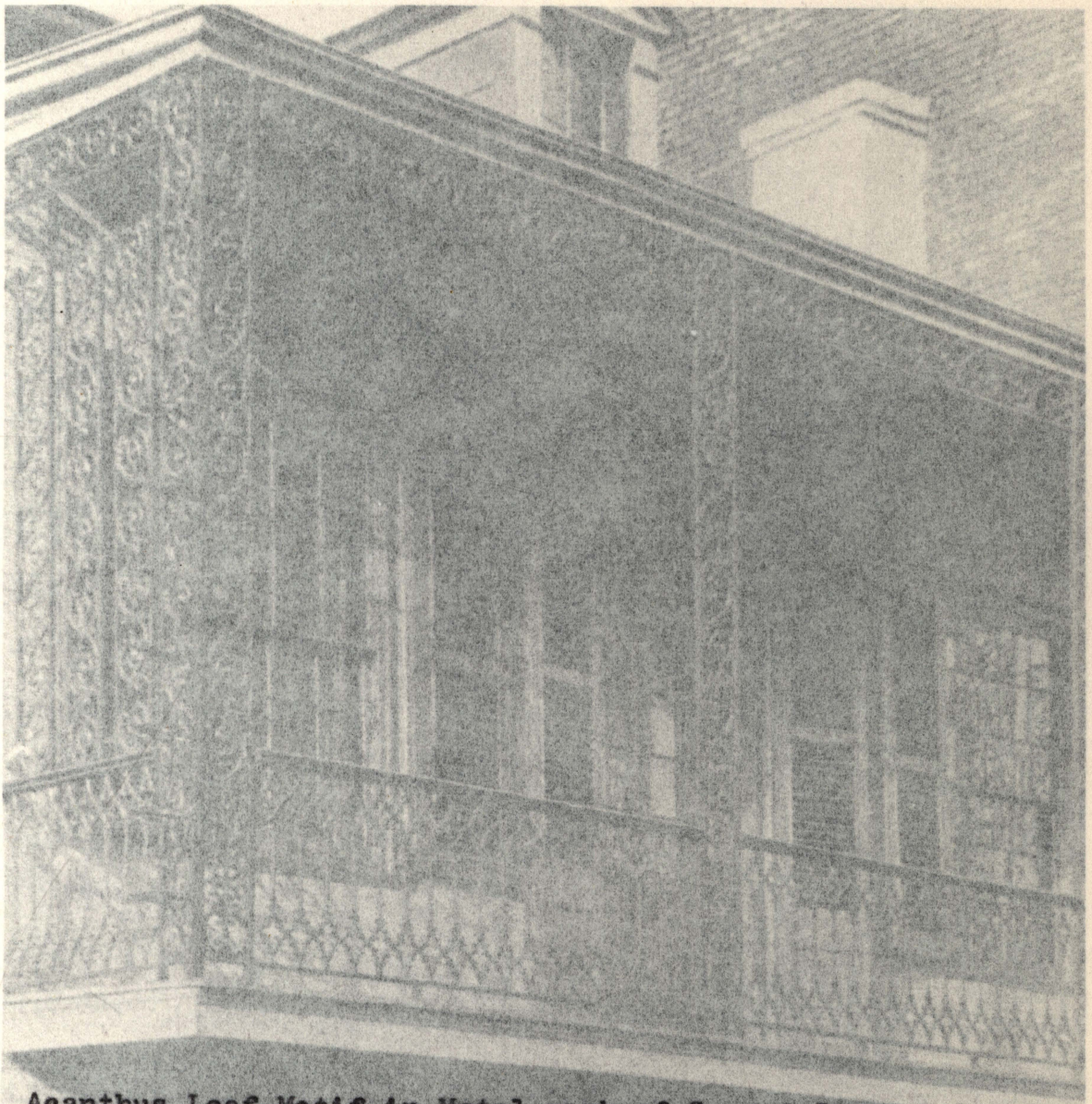
125 Geerlings, Gerald K., Wrought-Iron in Architecture (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 146.

126 Curtis, Elizabeth Gibbon, Gateways and Doorways of Charleston, South Carolina in the 18th and 19th Century (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Company, 1926), p. 124.

Plate XXV



Acanthus Leaf Motif in Metal work of Second-Story Balconies of New Orleans.



such elaborately designed wrought-iron banisters and railings were particularly characteristic of Charleston's town houses.[127]

The plantation was symbolic of an economic structure of wealth, power, and leisure. Its ornamentation was grandiose yet dignified and stately, combining vastness with delicacy.

The Corinthian order was characteristic of most plantation manors with acanthus leaf motifs centralized on the capitals and pilasters of the grand portico. Illustrative of the classical Corinthian application is the manor of the Belle Grove Plantation in Louisiana, 1856.[128] Enormous six foot capitals carved of cypress wood were applied in four sections around the brick core of the column. A narrow band of stiff uniformly designed stems of acanthus extended around the base of the capital-body. On the second tier, the feathery drooping acanthus was carved many times its original size and reached half the capital-body to support the classical scrolls. Spirals of twisting flame-like acanthus leaves were arranged in a flamboyant manner on these scrolls.[129] Pilasters of the Corinthian

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127 Ibid., p. 125.

128 Laughlin, Clarence J., Ghosts Along the Mississippi (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 84

129 Ibid., p. 87.

leaf pattern were also employed in support of the colossal portico.

In minor appearances of manor ornamentation, the acanthus leaf motif was adapted in a variety of forms on scrolls, brackets, window trim, doorways, and second-story structural projections. These were generally realistic in carved form but individualistic in their exterior placement.

Wealth and the stimulus to build proved invaluable in the ornamental development of the Bayou and New Orleans regions. The peoples of the Bayou and New Orleans concentrated their decorative efforts on the metal balconies, cast-iron fronts, and minor ornamentations suggestive of their subtropical living. The character of the ornament was neither French nor Spanish but truly an independent style based on factors of social customs, local materials, climate, and the cultural tastes of the time.[130]

The acanthus motif was foremost in popularity among native and classical foliated patterns. Long balconies, often referred to as "galleries," were elaborately designed with geometric, floral, and acanthus leaf designs. About

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130 Mumford, Lewis, The South in Architecture (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1941), p. 66.

1840 the galleries gained such popularity in Southern architecture that they were commonly referred to as "cast-iron facades" in commercial ornamentation. These metal facades were excessively decorated with conventional acanthus leaf castings and often incorporated with the anthemion, grape-vine, and native foliage.

The acanthus motif also appeared in leaf-designed roof balustrades called "widow's walks." These wrought-iron balconies were constructed for the women who watched for their husbands to come in from sea.[131] Although the leaf motif was sparingly employed on the main facade, variations were found in rosettes, scrolls, cornice brackets, and carved over-door details.

The Timothy Ford House, Charleston, South Carolina. This town house was built in 1800; and although it is dated from the high Adam period of Charleston's architecture, the ornamentation is not in character with the fanciful details of that time. Little decoration is found on the street elevation but classical ornaments were applied on the features of the entranceway. The acanthus motif is used on the capitals flanking the main doorway and on carved scroll appliques on the over-door treatment. The acanthus motif also appears in the Corinthian style on

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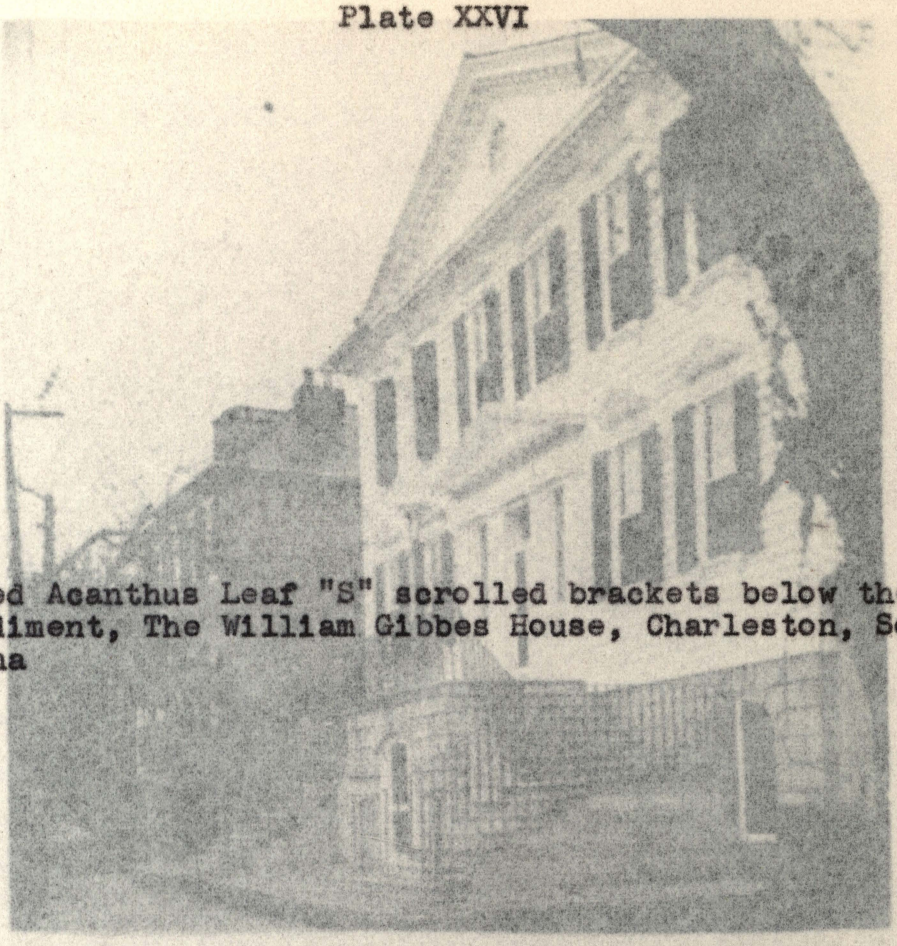
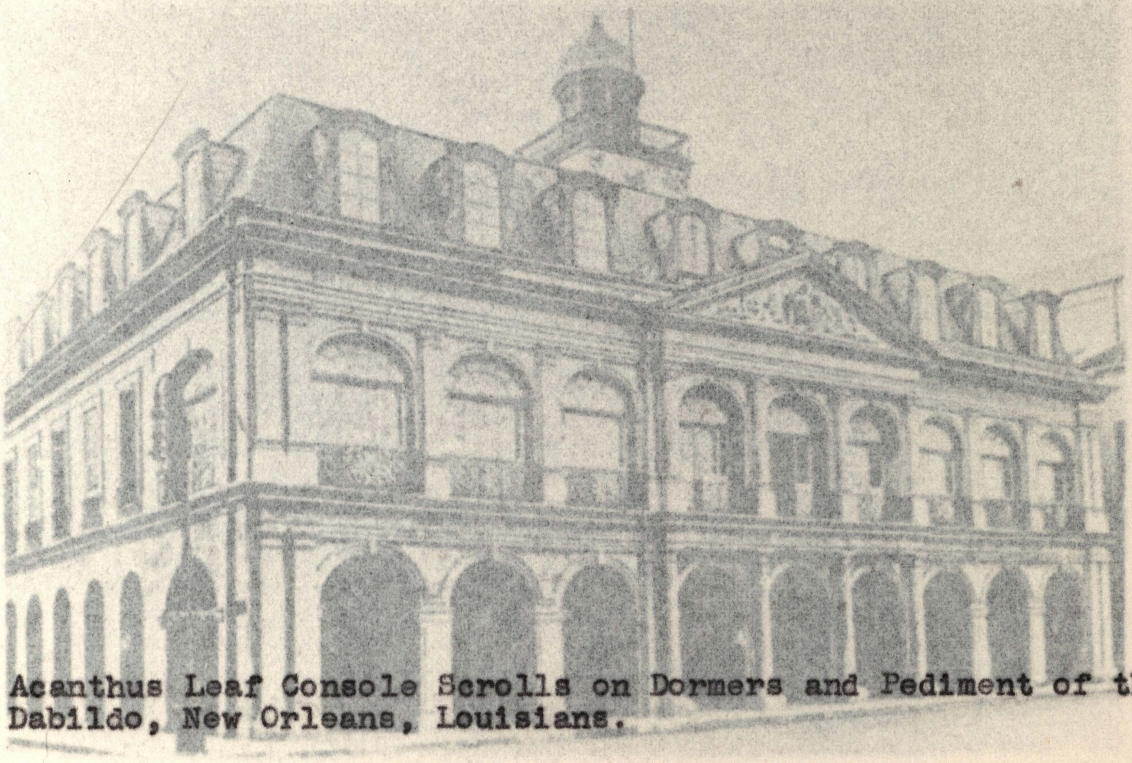
131 Evans, Elliott, "Southern Architecture," History of American Architecture, 1947.

Plate XXVI

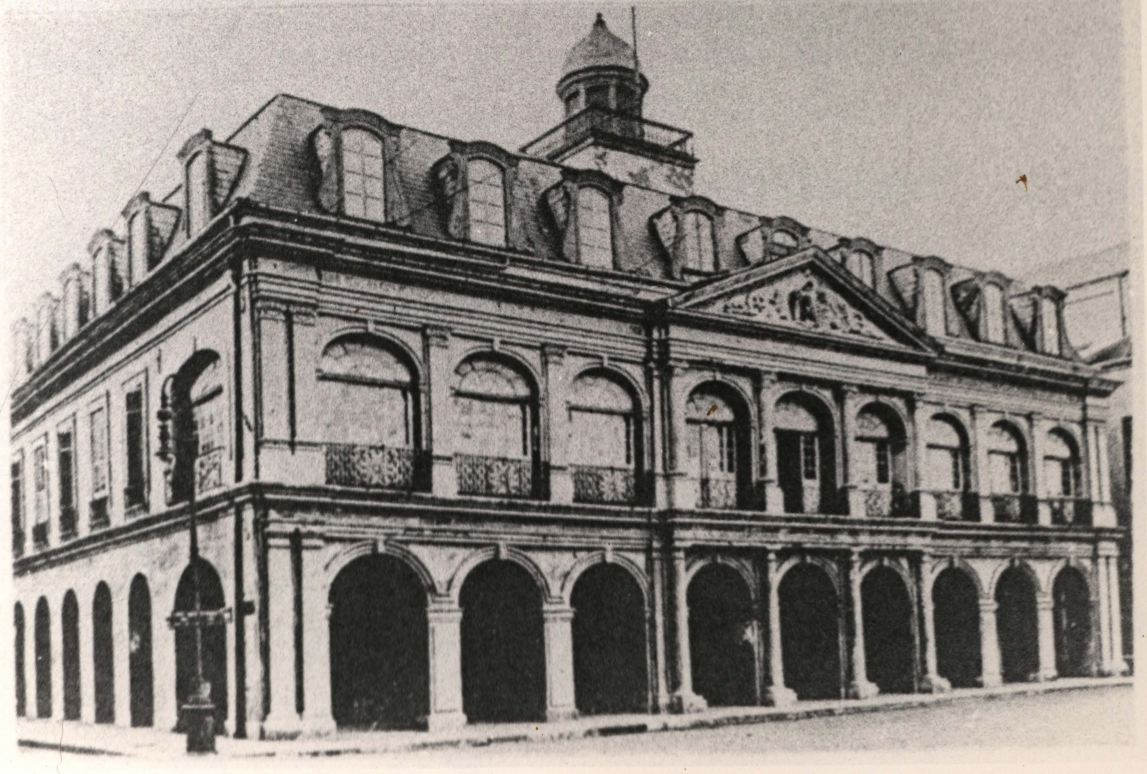


Enlarged Acanthus Leaf "S" scrolled brackets below the Classical Pediment, The William Gibbes House, Charleston, South Carolina



Acanthus Leaf Console Scrolls on Dormers and Pediment of the Dabildo, New Orleans, Louisiana.





the miniature capitals and window valancing of the second-story porch which faces the courtyard. This leaf form is used on the metalworks in the courtyard on iron foundry stock pattern fences, fountain decoration, and metal garden furniture.[132]

The William Gibbes House, Charleston, South Carolina. Built by William Gibbes, this mansion is one of Charleston's earliest and most handsome examples of late Georgian architecture and ornamentation. Erected at the turn of the Nineteenth Century, it exhibits a main facade that is simple and direct in classical lines, and almost devoid of ornamentation save for extraordinarily ornate acanthus leaf forms on the peidment and windows. These applications are in the form of enlarged scrolls of crisp relistic acantus leaf patterns placed beneath each end of the classical pediment. The leaf motif is also repeated in miniature forms on the scrolled brackets in window sill decoration.[133]

The Dock Street Theater, Charleston, South Carolina. One of the earliest playhouses in America, this theater was built before the Civil War within the Planter's Hotel, a famous hostelry. The main facade has little ornamentation except for the tremendous wrought-iron gallery built the width of the theater. This elaborate metalwork feature is

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132 "Charleston's Historic Houses," Historical Charleston Foundation, Charleston, South Carolina, p. 45.

133 Ibid., p. 34.

Plate XXVII



Acanthus Motif Featured in Cast-Iron Facades of the Governor Rutledge House, Charleston, South Carolina.



composed of circular patterns of twisting and scrolled acanthus stems and leaves in vertical frames. Between each frame is an arch and a blaustrade of acanthus metal work of similar foliated patterns. These intricate features of the "cast-iron facades" give the building an air of comfort and regional charm.[134]

The Governor Rutledge House, Charleston, South Carolina. Built across from famous St. Michael's Church, this house was one of the earliest domestic buildings to apply metalwork ornamentation in Southern architecture. The graceful wistaria hung halconies display some of the most delicate acanthus leaf ironwork in Charleston. The acanthus leaf motif appears on many adaptations of exterior architectural ornamentation. The supporting brackets and balcony posts are realistically represented with acanthus scrolls in detailed metalwork. These also appear on minor structural supports. The "S" scrolled acanthus leaf motif is extremely used on the metal castings of the bases of heavy columns, window grilles, wood carved door-way details metal stairways, and fences of the courtyard.[135]

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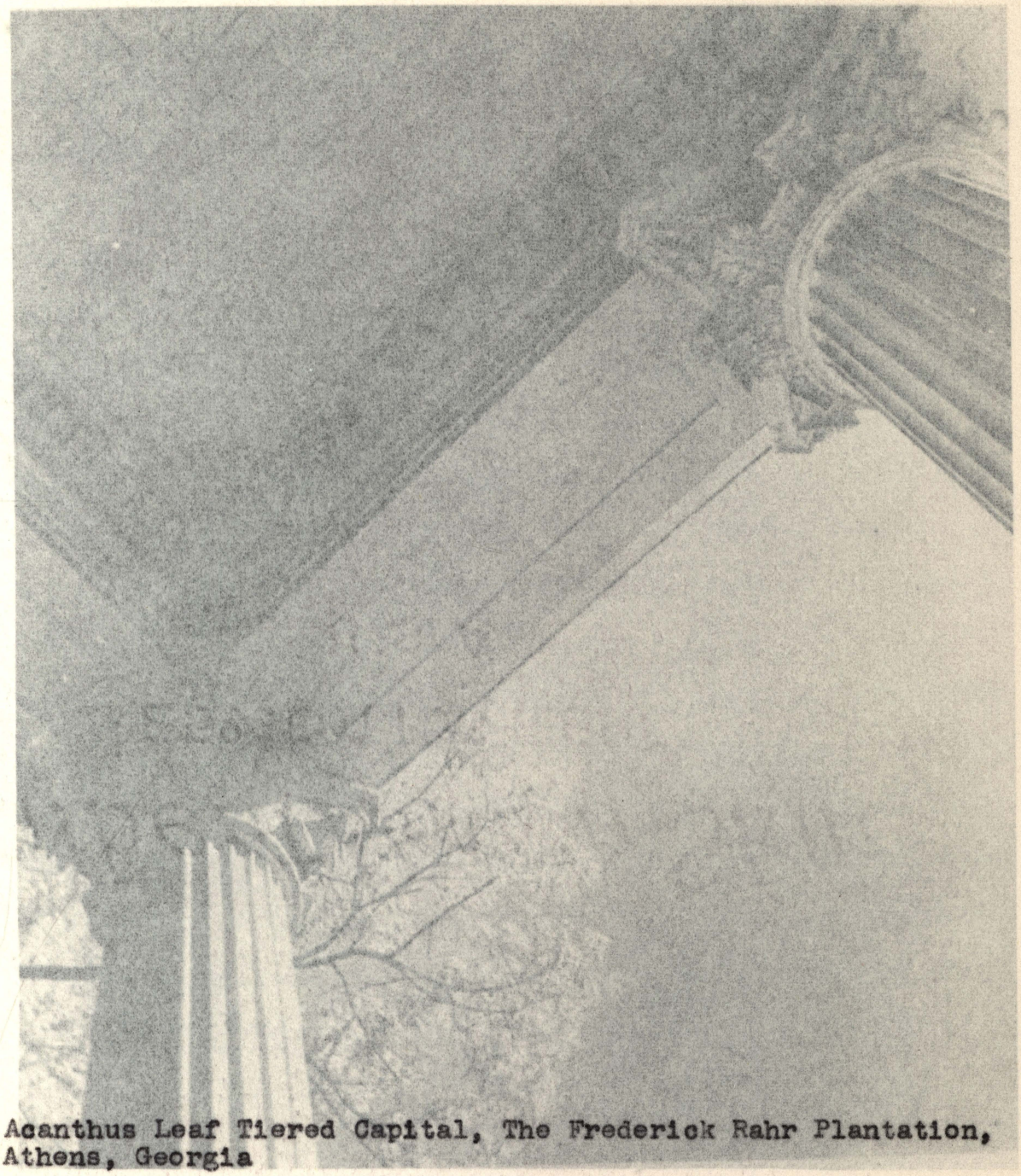
134 Wright, Richardson, "Charleston," House and Garden, 1940, p. 40.

135 Ibid., p. 46.

Plate XXVII



Acanthus Leaf Tiered Capital, The Frederick Rahr Plantation, Athens, Georgia



The Hermitage Plantation, South Carolina. One of the largest plantation manors in the Carolinas is the "Hermitage." It was built of bricks, made on the plantation and according to plans drawn in the classical Greek Revival style by Henry McAlpin about 1830. Its frank uncompromising Greek lines are softened by the refinement and delicacy of sparingly used classical ornamentation. The acanthus leaf motif is also found on architectural features such as the stairway, capitals, pilasters, and window decorations. The capitals and pilasters of the main portico are single-leaf capitals of the acanthus motif incorporated with the Egyptian lotus leaf. The acanthus motif appear again on the wrought-iron balusters of the double stairway and on "S" profiled scrolls in window sill decoration.[136]

The Frederick Rahr Plantation, Athens, Georgia. The acanthus motif was concentrated on the Corinthian capitals and pilasters of the main portico, and on the doorway and window ornamentation. The employement of the acanthus leaf ornamentations gives a sense of decorative balance and relief from the monotony of pure classic architecture. Applications here are typical of the classical forms of

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135 Ibid., p. 46.

136 Rogers, op. cit., p. 260.

Greek and Roman revival architecture in the South.[137]

The Belle Grove Plantation, Louisiana. Exterior applications of the acanthus leaf are focused on the large capitals and pilasters of the colossal portico, and there are minor appearances of the leaf motif on window cornicing and balconies. A detailed description of the acanthus motif in exterior ornamentation of the Belle Grove Plantation, 1856, has been previously presented on page 65.

Stripped of almost all its ornamental value, the Belle Grove now lies a great hollow hulk unbelievably ruined under the onslaughts of Louisiana heat and rain.[138]

The Belle Alliance Plantation, Louisiana. On the banks of the Bayou Lafourche, one of the richest regions of Louisiana, stands the classic manor of Belle Alliance built by Charles Kock about 1846. This manor combines the massiveness of plantation architecture with the delicacy characteristic of the wrought-iron ornamentation of New Orleans. The main floor gallery is extended along the sides of the manor and is partly inclosed with metal railings and canopies of delicate acanthus designs. These leaf applications are the only acanthus ornamentations on the building and

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137 Pratt, Richard, "Georgia," Ladies Home Journal, March 1949, p. 40.

138 Laughlin, op. cit., pl. 88.

are more abstract in form than the common foliated metal decorations typical of Southern architecture.[139]

The Cabildo, New Orleans, Louisiana. This famous New Orleans public building possesses the antiquity and magnificence of Spanish and French regional decoration. The wrought-iron balconies built in the late 1790's show a resemblance in leaf design to those of classical Greek acanthus forms. The front and side dormer windows, composed of wooden scroll-shaped consoles reaching the height of the dormer, were constructed in 1851. The consoles were designed with realistic full foliage of the acanthus plant. Variations of the motif also appear on the pediment.[140]

The Fred Ogden House, New Orleans, Louisiana. The ornament on this mansion is representative of the intricate metalwork of the aristocratic mansions of New Orleans' Garden District. The acanthus motif, with other popular native and classical ornamentations, is concentrated on the main doorway and on the balconies of the courtyard. The capitals of the main doorway are ornamented with single leaf acanthus variations as well as the classical Corinthinn order. The acanthus motif is seen on "S" shaped leaf-scrolls supporting small balconies in over-door decoration, and is used on the wrought-iron two-story porch,

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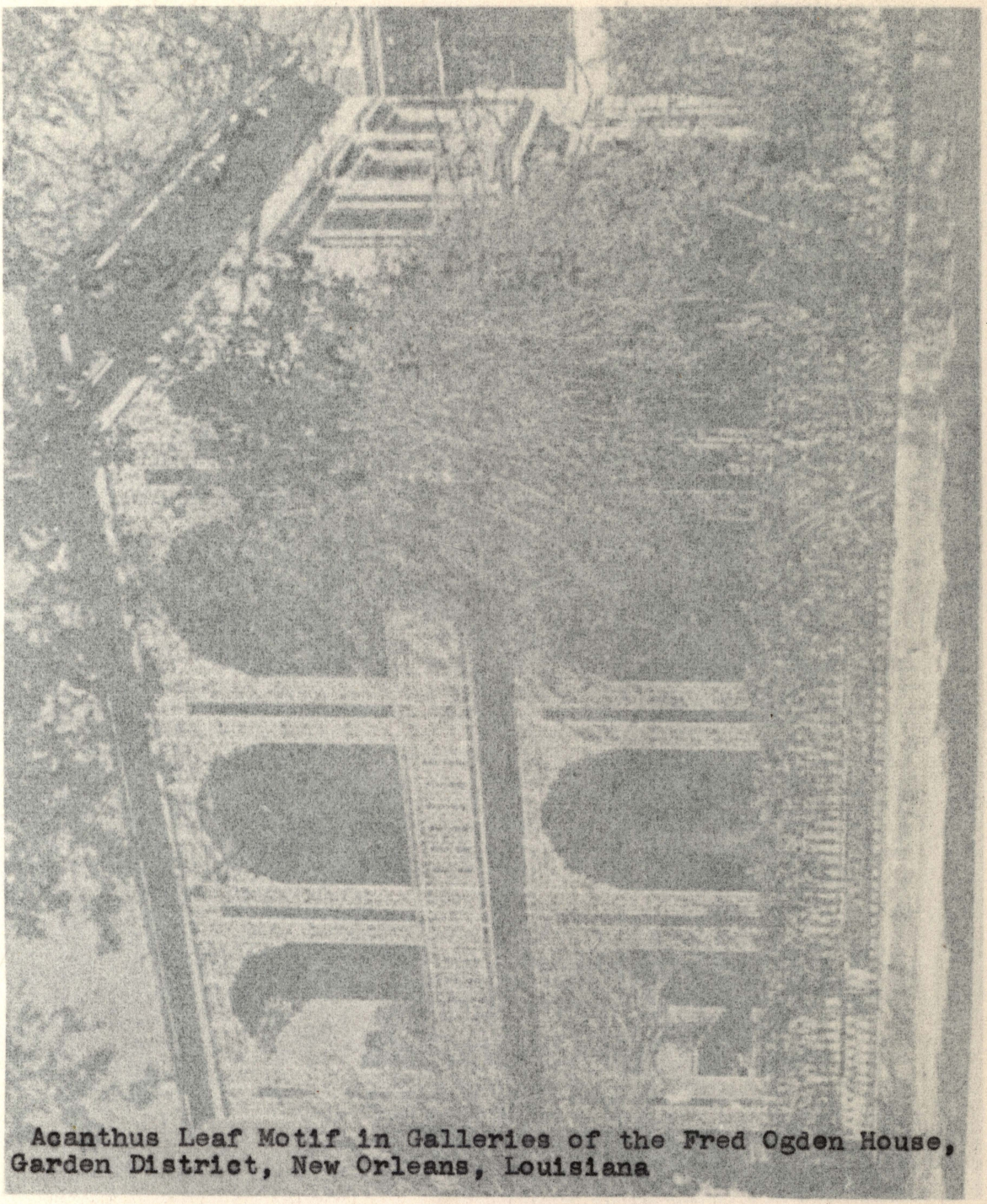
139 Ibid., Pl. 64.

140 Hamlin, op. cit., p. .

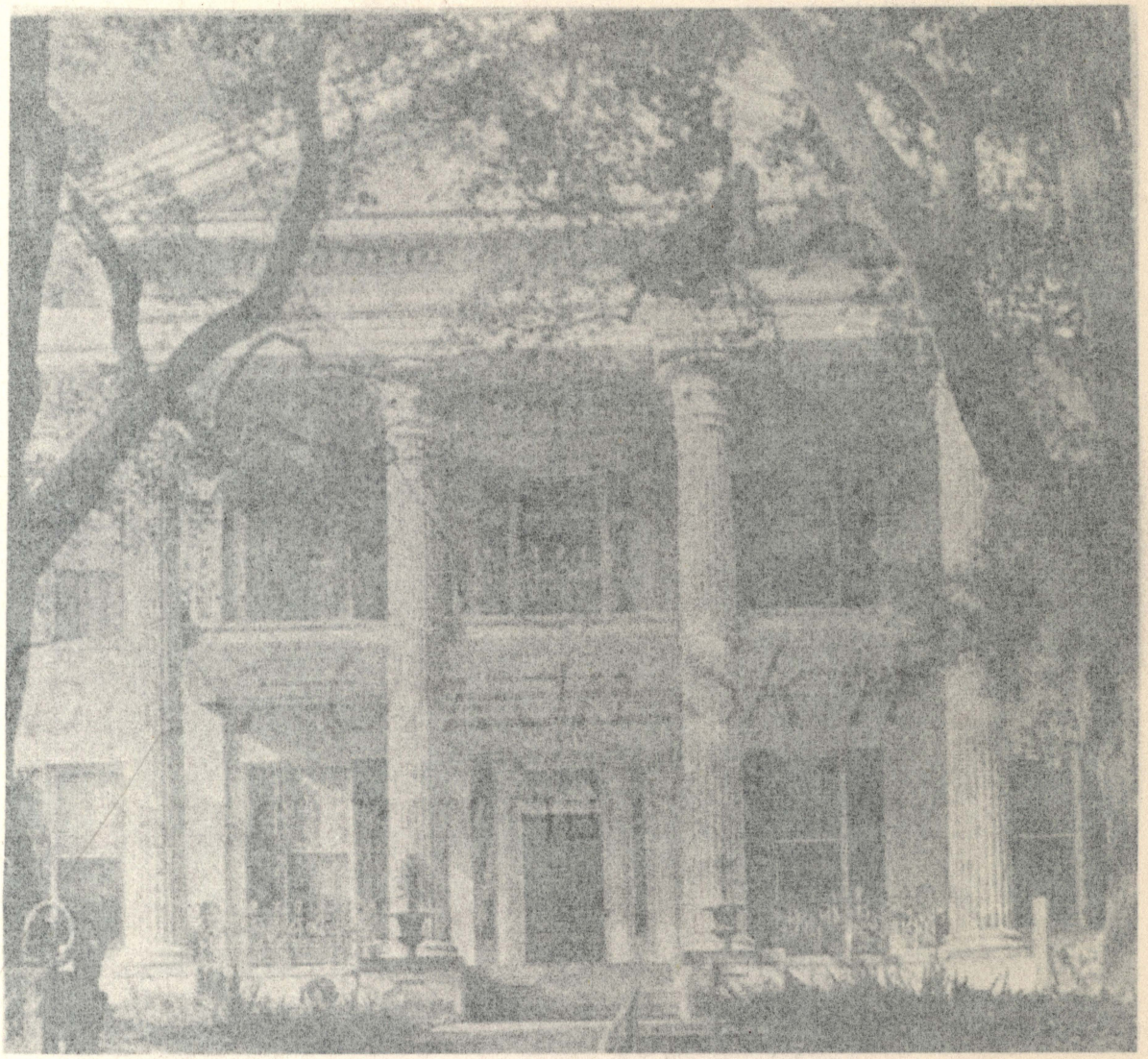
Plate XXIX



Acanthus Leaf Motif in Galleries of the Fred Ogden House, Garden District, New Orleans, Louisiana



Plate XXX



Acanthus Leaf Motif on Capitals, Balustrades, and Exterior Trimmings on a Plantation Manor, Natchez, Mississippi.



trellises, and on elaborate lace-like fences and gateposts. An abstract leaf scroll is incorporated with the grape detail on the garden furniture and appears in the fountain decoration. It may also be observed on the cornice brackets, on cornice panels, and on the foliated metal trim of the roof.[141]

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[141] Basso, Hamilton, "Boomtown," "Dreamtown,", Holiday, February, 1948. p. 38.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ACANTHUS LEAF IN INTERIOR ORNAMENTATION IN THE SOUTH 1800-1900

Ornamentation in the interior of the Southern mansions was of a grand scale and usually characteristic of the Greek Revival decoration. This interest in revival Greek form and ornament existed as the primary decorative style throughout the South in the Nineteenth Century. Three outstanding architectural features, of the Southern interior, were given decorative preference in the use of acanthus ornament; the staircase, the double parlor, and the carved mantelpiece.

Mantelpieces were the chief interior ornamentative interest of the plantation manors and town houses. These were usually constructed of marble, local and imported woods, and metal-work. They were decorated with delicately incised and relief ancathus patterns and leaf scrolled forms but sometimes, "the fireplaces are not elaborate--usually of simple marble slabs with a shelf above."[142]

Although the mantelpieces retained to some extent an over-all simplicity, enlarged semi-naturalistic carved

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[142] Tallmadge, op. cit., p. 138.

forms of acanthus consoles and foliated "S" scrolls were often used to relieve the monotony of classical rigidity. Small acanthuses, intermingled with bead ornament, were added to narrow decorative panels flanking the fireplace and placed underneath the mantelpiece. Keystones, a decorative fixture usually applied to arched fire openings, were ornamented with single acanthus leaf carvings or moldings in wood and marble. Brass mountings of acanthus leaf design from metal work was very prominent in mantel decoration of the Southern interior. As in other parts of the country, the decorative fire box became exceedingly popular. These fireplace fixtures, often elaborately sculptured in realistic acanthus patterns with acanthus scrolled or capped legs, were commonly in relief or pierced stock patterns. In many instances, individualistic creations of leaves with a central acanthus rosette.[143]

Among the transitional trends of ornamental application in the South, the acanthus leaf motif used for mantels existed in a variety of European forms. Since Rococo and Victorian Gothic elements were omnipresent, some mantelpieces developed new types of ornamentation including scrolled brackets trimmed with enlarged acanthus leaves,

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[143] Rogers, op. cit., p. 264.

acanthus console scrolls and leaf rosettes, and heavy gilt mirrors and paneled overmantel decoration of the Louis XV and Victorian styles.

The main stairway was an important architectural and ornamental feature of the Southern interior. Its treatment of ornament was similar to those of regions previously discussed. The decorative patterns, imitative of the classical acanthus plant, were simple conventional jig-sawed appliques on the stair-ends. There were many instances of the realistic over-elaborate relief carvings of the acanthus leaf motif during the mid-century transitional trends of the Rococo modes.[144] In the late 1800's classical phases of metal elaboration aided the charm of the stairway especially in the interiors of New Orleans and the Bijou manors.[145] Newel posts were commonly employed in the termination of the interior stairway; however, these features were not as decorative as those of the Northern coastal mansions.

The acanthus motif was extensively used in interior details on ceiling ornamentation, wall treatments, and general decorative trim. The center of the ceilings of the important rooms were invariably enriched by acanthus design in plaster work.[146] These plaster molded cornices, leaf

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144 Wright, Richardson, "Inside Charleston Houses." House and Garden, 1940, p. 34.

145 Laughlin, op. cit., pl. 81.

146 Ibid., pl. 75.

shaped medallions, and rosettes were generally of Greek derivation. With the advent of the machine age, much of the interior ornament in both the plantation manors and the urban town houses assumed a repititious character from limited stock patterns.

Acanthus leaves were widely adapted in realistic patterns of heavy gilt acanthus carved valances. Frequently the interior door and window enframement were carved with delicately designed bands and moldings of single acanthus leaves on pilaster and capital wall treatment. These forms were realistic in appearance and quite often plant-size in presentation. Also, acanthus-foliated wall sconces gave their richness to the interior setting. Cornice decoration was greatly emphasized with the use of florid applications of intertwining acanthus spirals and leaf rosettes in border decoration. These ornamental borders were repeated as a whole or in individual units on the ceiling. Characteristic of the double -parlor ceiling decorations were the variations of artistic plaster works of large acanthus centerpieces from which hung lavish crystal chandeliers.[147] The ornaments ranged from the naturalistic to the abstract forms.

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[147] Wright, op. cit., p. 34.

The Chretien Point Plantation, Louisiana. An excellent example in interior ornamentation is the superb plaster work of this manor. The classical acthus leaf is popular in plaster work principally on the ceilings of the double parlors, dining room, and main hallway. A fanciful ceiling medallion of the upper salon, decorated about 1831 is composed of crisp delicately molded acanthus leaves. These acanthuses were of enlarged realistic leaf patterns executed in pierced plaster form. This medallion is approximately five feet in diameter with a central lotus blossom motif. Around this unit, individual stems of crisp acanthus leaves are displayed in circular form. These leaf forms are scroll shaped in profile. Surrounding this array of leaves is a simple Greek molding of miniature acanthus leaves placed end to end with interspaced acanthus rosettes. Small scaled ornaments identical of this design are repeated in the ornamentation of the hallway and library. To carry out this ornamental model other harmonious acanthus decorations are incorporated in the stairway and mantelpieces.[148]

Afton Villa, Louisiana. This French villa shows a marked distinction of Victorian character with pseudo-Gothic embellishments popular in the 1840's. The acanthus motif appears on such architectural features as the pierced plaster work cornices and ceiling medallions, moldings and

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148 Laughlin, op. cit., pl. 37.

scrolled brackets, and leaf-carved banisters in the neo-Gothic style. The acanthus motif is incorporated with the popular grape cluster on cornice panels. These panels have been so intricately designed that the open space behind them can scarcely be seen. They represent outstanding Southern craftsmanship. The acanthus leaf motif appears in decorative appearance in realistic acanthus forms but sometimes in abstract design.[149]

The Belle Grove Plantation, Louisiana. This plantation manor, built in 1856, is typical of Southern manor interior treatments from the Carolinas to Louisiana. Though this manor is now a shamble of Southern ornamental expression popular a century ago, there are, nevertheless, many remnants of beauty and craftsmanship of the acanthus motif in its interior decoration. A number of well-proportioned exquisitely-carved Corinthian capitals and single foliated pilaster caps may be seen here. These interior architectural features are carved of native woods, in many cases cypress; however, many of these features display ornamental plaster work. Here the acanthus motif, a popular classical ornament, is executed in intricate, active, realistic form. This leaf motif is represented on ceiling medallions, cornices, and small foliated ornaments on the

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[149] Ibid., pl. 74.

fireplace and overmantel decoration. Here as was often done, the plaster work has been painted; first blue, then pink, and a final wash of lavender.[150]

The Bradish-Johnson House, New Orleans, Louisiana. The acanthus motif in this 1870 town house is outstanding in illustrating acanthus leaf embellishment on the stairway. Acanthus leaves are represented in leaf-scrolled brackets on plaster molding repeats. Between the main hallway and the staircasing is an enormous wooden archway of plain moldings, but an enlarged full-length acanthus leaf is displayed on the keystone. In harmony with this feature an acanthus motif in conventional form is carved on the large scrolled projections at either end of the archway. These are imitative of the interior pilasters in composite style.[151]

The Forsyth Residence, Garden District, New Orleans, Louisiana. The double parlors of this mid-century mansion are graciously represented with an acanthus ceiling ornamentation. This massive centerpiece flamboyantly displays flouncing broad-leaved acanthuses, the chief decorative form in the parlors. These are realistically represented in leaf form. In these rooms there also appear Rococo adaptations of acanthus carvings framing the overmantel mirror

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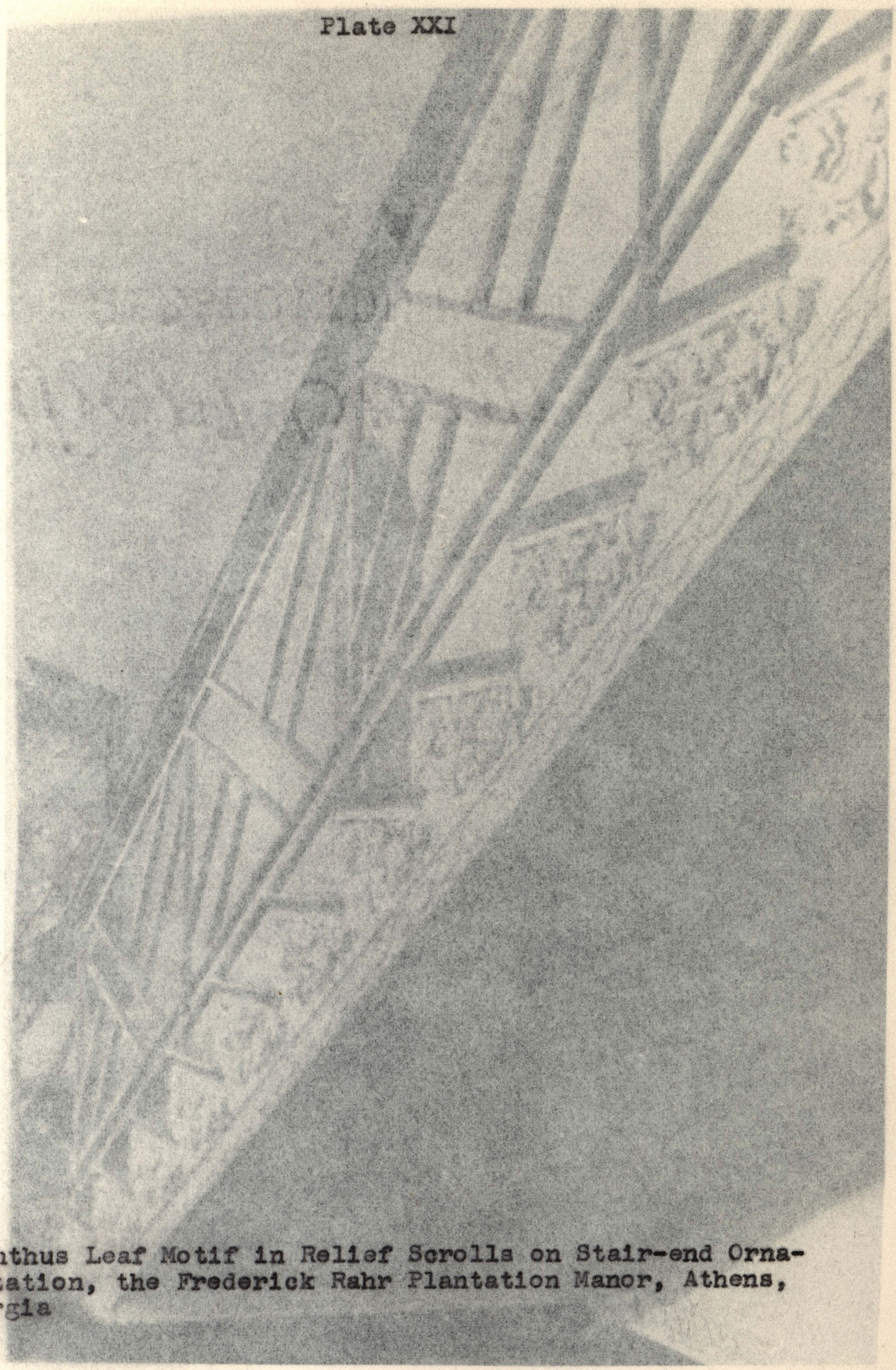
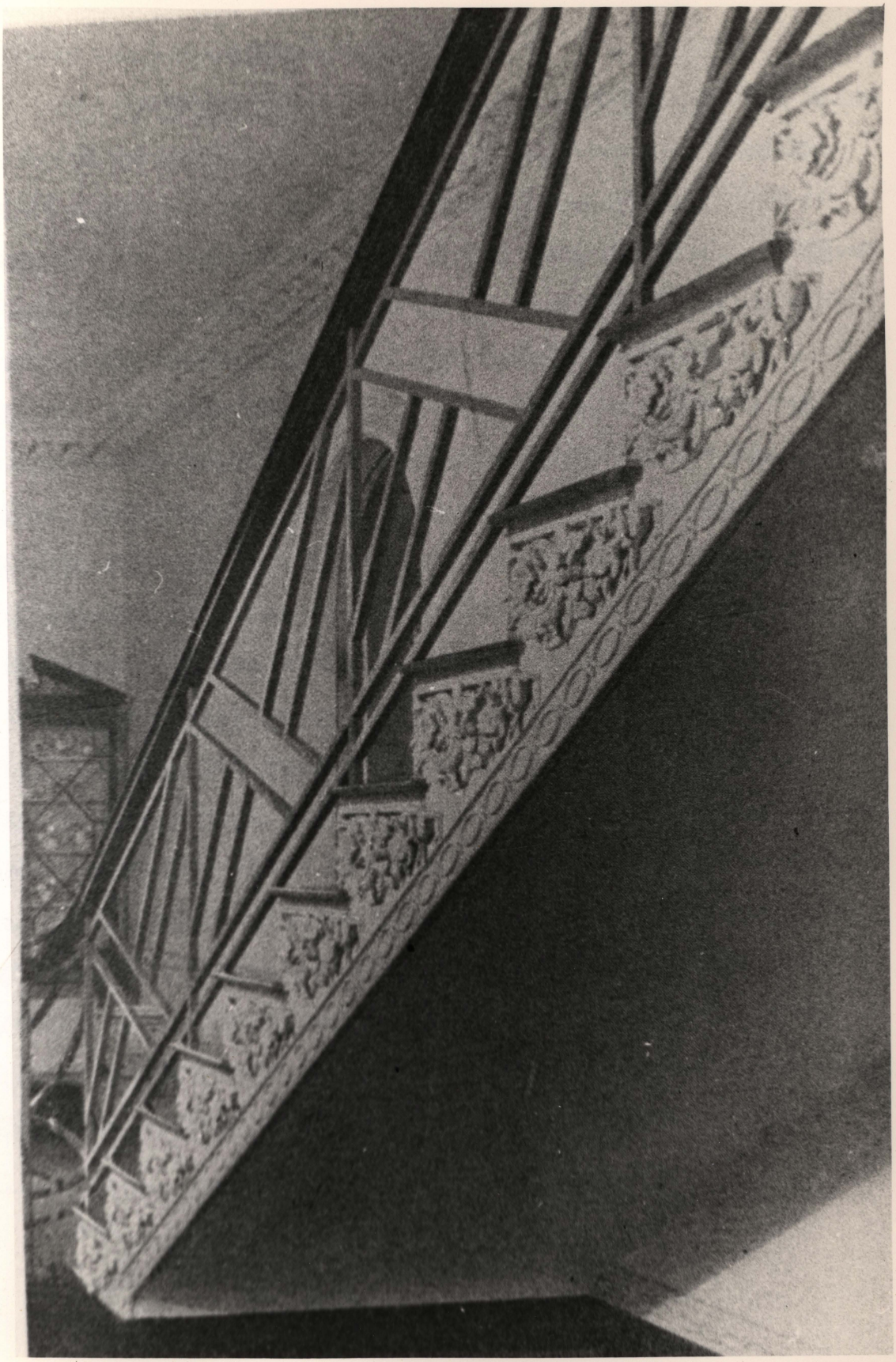
150 Ibid., pl. 90.

151 Riccuiti, Italo William, New Orleans and Its Environs, 1727-1870 (New York: William Hellburn, 1938), pl. 62.

Plate XXI



Acanthus Leaf Motif in Relief Scrolls on Stair-end Ornamentation, the Frederick Rahr Plantation Manor, Athens, Georgia



and heavy elaborate window cornices.[152]

The Robinson House, New Orleans, Louisiana. The acanthus motif is noted in this late century mansion. Its intrinsic leaf pattern is represented on the mantelpieces throughout the household. The fireplaces, generally of black and white marble and occasionally of imported interior woods of mahogany, cherry, and even rare tropical varieties, have a central acanthus leafed keystone. Minor appearances of the ornamental motif are characteristic of the "S" scrolled brackets flanking the fireplace. In the main hallway of this Louisiana mansion, the acanthus motif occurs in individualistic form of rosettes on the cornice. These are undoubtedly stock patterns of molded plaster appliques.[153]

The Ben Hill House, Athens, Georgia. In the mid-century mansion the acanthus leaf motif is displayed in singular elaboration on the central ceiling medallion of the double parlors. These are simple expressed in a circular array of enlarged acanthus leaves terminated by a realistic leaf rosette. These leaf medallions are bordered by conventional moldings in geometric paneling. The cornice is deep and plain except for a narrow border of active acanthus spirals in semi-naturalistic forms. Variations of the

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152 Ibid., p.100.

153 Ibid., pl. 103.

acanthus ornament in baroque development are evidenced in gilt crested overmantel fixtures and in extravagantly designed window valances in the Victorian style. The popularity of the acanthus motif on furniture and fabrics increased the employment of the leaf motif in Southern ornamentation.[154]

Other applications. In numerous instances the classic acanthus leaf motif has been employed in a variety of decorative forms. These decorations may be insignificant in their manner of appearance but are of relative importance in noting the ornamental value of the acanthus motif in Southern adaptation. Among these is the leaf motif which prominently appears in foliated ribbon ornamentation on window enframement of the Hurst Plantation, Louisiana, and in Vieux Carre, the old city of New Orleans. The Labatut-Puig House graciously displays realistic acanthus rosettes in plaster appliques on the molding and overmantel decoration. In the Madam Chaffraix House of the famous Garden District, New Orleans, built in the late 1860's, the acanthus motif is represented on the leaf-tiered capitals and pilasters of the main interior doorway. The acanthus leaf

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[154] Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

application in metalwork on the mantelpiece accessories and on the popular firebox in reliefs and pierced foundry designs may be seen in the Casa Miro, New Orleans.[155]

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[155] Riccuiti, op. cit., pl. 95.

CHAPTER IX

THE ACANTHUS LEAF IN EXTERIOR ORNAMENTATION OF THE MIDWEST, 1800-1900

As the westward movement grew with the rise of towns and the construction of canals and railroads, the buildings of the early settlers were gradually replaced by frame construction. These frame buildings had no particular architectural distinction until the Greek Revival. The architecture was simple and direct in classical form, and its ornamentation had a spirit of antiquity and charm. Decoration was simple and plain because of the limited facilities for manufacturing elaborate materials and because of the necessity for economy.

Native and manufactured materials were numerous and varied. In the Greek Revival building, marble columns were frequently substituted for plaster ones but wood was used more often. Ornamentation was hand-manufactured by expert carpenters from a supposedly inexhaustible supply of American white pine, Norwegian pine, black locust and American elm.[156] Wooden appliques were incised or jig-sawed in imitation of Greek leaf patterns, particularly the

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156 Robinson, op. cit., p. 152.

flamboyant acanthus leaves of the Corinthian order. Moldings and trimmings were cut by mechanically operated planes to insure proper classical profiles.

An influx of new materials gave scope to sculptural ornamentation, and in many metropolitan areas masonry supplanted wood carvings. Joliet limestone and Bedford stone were popular in domestic ornamentation; and in commercial application sculptured acanthus motifs were incised in granite, such as Chicago's Grand Pacific Hotel, 1872,[157] and the Tacoma Building, 1887.[158]

Various classical forms of cast-iron ornament were popular on window grilles, balconies, balustrades, and exterior trim. Metal appeared to have been molded from stock patterns of architectural iron works. These foundrys usually produced little but dismal and monotonous commercial ornamentation. At the close of the century a steady current of new processes and uses of art metal prevailed in bronze and iron.[159]

The ornamental interest of the Ohio and Indiana homes was concentrated on the architectural features of the main

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157 Tallmadge, Thomas E., Architecture in Old Chicago (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 198.

158 Ibid., p. 77.

159 Robinson, op. cit., p. 160

doorway. The acanthus leaf, though sparingly applied, was given more freedom of design. The leaf motif was carved on the capitals of the colonnade and variations were often applied on scrolled brackets and carved decorative bands. Also wooden appliques jig-sawed into foliated abstract patterns, derived from the Greek acanthus and anthemion, were found on the pediments. Few applications of the classical acanthus motif were characteristic of church ornamentation of this region.

Classical details were readily transmitted in the Midwest in the 1830's by means of architectural handbooks,[160] iconographic collections, and builder's guides by Asher Benjamin[161] and Minard Lefever.[162] These were accessible to the layman but were followed only when they conveniently served. About this time Chicago adopted the Greek Revival for its first architectural style.[163] The use of the acanthus leaf in Illinois was similar to that in Ohio and Indiana, but was more extensive in commercial architecture.

The acanthus motif was employed, as in other regions, on such architectural features as capitals, cornices, and a variety of exterior trimmings. Acanthus embellishment

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160 The Practical House Carpenter, 1830; and Elements of Architecture, 1843.

161 Hamlin, op. cit., p. 163.

162 Hamlin, op. cit., p. 164.

163 Tallmadge, op. cit., p. 32.

was characteristic of Chicago's commercial "cast-iron facades" of the late Nineteenth Century and also flourished in ecclesiastical ornamentation. Churches after the 1850's were predominately of Victorian Gothic style and thus were richly ornamented with the classical acanthus motif.

About the middle of the Nineteenth Century elaborate foliated scroll-sawed verandas began to replace the Greek columnated porches. The scroll-sawed ornamentations of these verandas, commonly referred to as "bargeboards" were of abstract designs imitative of the antique acanthus rinceau.[164]

Acanthus ornamentation was also introduced in panels of incised Byzantine-like leaf carvings on the archways of domestic and commercial buildings,[165] these panesl and border decorations were incorporated with popular animal and flavor motifs. Pierced acanthus reliefs were used on the stairways, foliated leaf ornaments capped the newel posts, and balustrades were leaf carved. The leaf form was also found on window corneces, over-door decorations, and the Corinthian capitasl of civic and commercial architecture. Similar leaf ornamentations were prominent in domestic architecture.

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164. Bicknell, op. cit., pl. 10.

165. Tallmadge, op. cit., p. 168.

The Dr. John H. Mathews House, Painesville, Ohio. This house represents elegance of ornamentation in early Ohio. The main entranceway is a delightful study of Greek form decoration with the acanthus leaf expressing Grecian simplicity in unaffected designs, applied to the facade. The capitals and pilasters of the main doorway are of the Ionic order with an acanthus leaved rosette placed in the center of the volutes. The transom has three scrolled corbels carved with a single enlarged acanthus leaf. Another variation found on the Stephen Mathews House, Painesville, Ohio, has a single border of acanthus leaves on the capitals and pilasters of the main doorway. Both of these Ohio residences were completed about 1830 by Johnathan Goldsmith.[166]

The Peck House, Portsmouth, Ohio. Woodwork is rarely found as well executed and as rich in carved detail as the over-door decoration on the front entranceway of the Peck House. A deep wooden lintel bridging the entire doorway has a formalized relief pattern of flouncing, spiral in miniature carved forms on the window cornices and window sill decoration.[167]

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166 Hamlin, op. cit., pl. XCIII.

167 Frary, I. T., Early Homes of Ohio (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1936), p. 216.

The Kimball-Wooster-Martin House, Norwalk, Ohio. The fine houses of Norwalk were built during the period when Jeffersonian classicism was replacing the late Colonial and Georgian styles. "These houses date from the '30's and '40's when the architectural publications of Asher Benjamin and Minard Lefaver were spreading broadcast their designs in the Roman and Greek manner."[168] One of Norwalk's finest Greek Revival houses is the Kimball-Wooster-Martin residence, which was built by Moses Kimball in 1831. The acanthus motif is imple and plain, and is used in limited application on such features as the doorway and cornice. Borders of acanthus leaf in molded ornamentations are found on the underside of the cornice and acanthus dentils are also prominent in the decoaration of the cornice. The capitals are decorated with single-row acanthus leaves.[169]

The John J. Glessner House, Chicago, Illinois. Designed by Henry Hobson Richardson, architect in 1885, the Glessner House is a leading example of Romanesque ornamentation in domestic architecture. The acanthus motif is found on the capitals of the main doorway and in the miniature leaf ornaments of the window decoration. These acanthus applications are presented in Byzantine-like carvings, with details of flat darkened patterns in semi-naturalistic form carved from local quarried material, presumably sandstone.[170]

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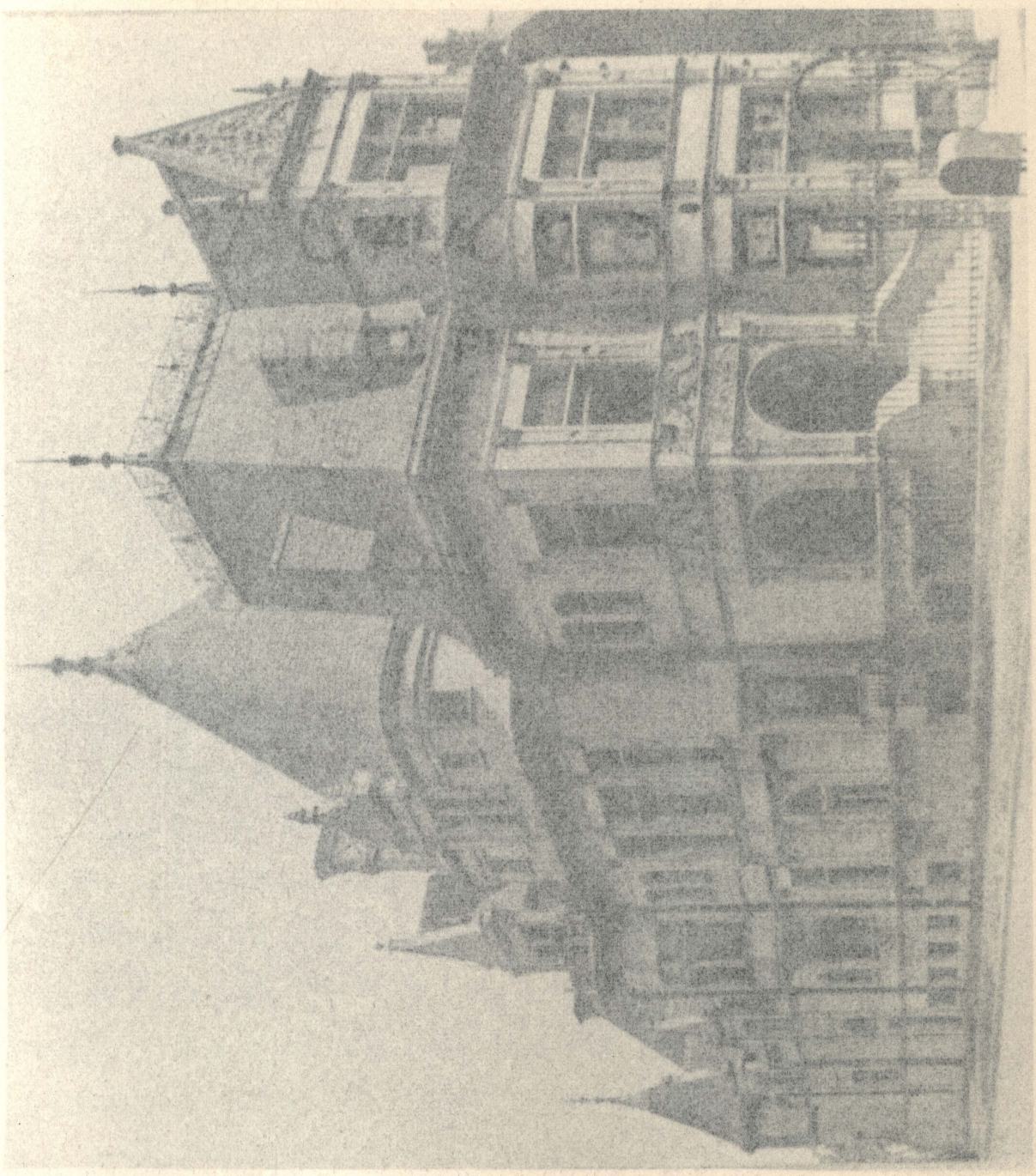
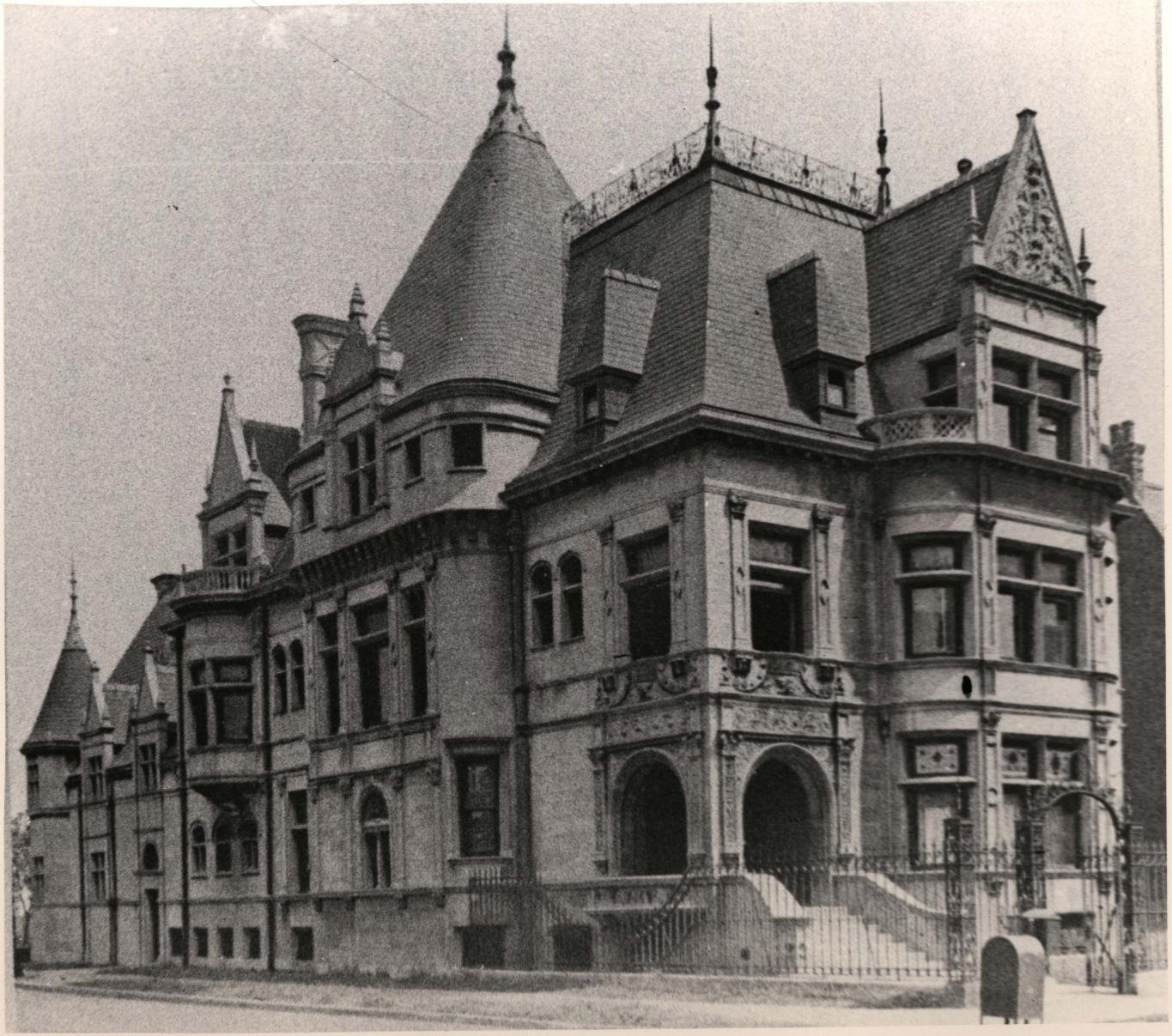
168 Ibid., p. 297.
169 Ibid., p. 295.
170 Drury, John, Old Chicago Houses (Chicago: The Univerisity of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 45.

Plate XXXII



Exterior Acanthus Ornamentation on Archways, Metalwork, and Gables of the Kimball House, Chicago, Illinois



The Kimball House, Chicago, Illinois. Built during the 1880's the Kimball House is a chateau-like mansion. It has many turrets, gables, balconies, and archways, each adorned with relief panels and carved decoration of the classical anthus leaf. Richly detailed ornamentations are displayed on other architectural features realistically molded in leaf forms of border decoration, relief panels, and foliated swags. Variations of the Corinthian capitals are employed; acanthus patterns in pierced stone work appear on the balconies; and acanthus carved scrolled brackets are used on structural projections. Florid acanthus reliefs are also found on the gables and stairways.[171]

The Studebaker Building, Chicago, Illinois. One of the show buildings of Chicago, the Studebaker Building displays more palatial quality than commercial character. Designed by S. S. Beman, a prominent Chicago architect, it was constructed in 1886. From the profusion of decorative detail, it is apparent that the architect featured variations of the acanthus leaf motif on capitals, archways, and metalwork. Flat incised acanthus leaved spirals are used on the archways and window panels, and conventional, carved acanthus leaf capitals appear on the main facade. This leaf motif also appears in minor ornamental metal work on the doorway and ventilation grilles.[172]

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171 Ibid., p. 50

172 Tallmadge, op. cit., p. 153

The Grand Pacific Hotel, Chicago, Illinois. A structure of six stories, was this hotel built in the modern Italian style. Erected in 1871 it was scheduled to open in the year of the great Chicago fire that destroyed its complete interior. Here the acanthus motif is presented on the capitals and pilasters in Corinthian fashion, and appears on leaf scrolled supports on the cornice as well as on minor architectural features of dormer windows, pilasters, and keystones.[173]

Other applications. A number of buildings, both domestic and commercial, show excellent applications of the classic leaf motif in architectural ornamentation. The oval window in the pediment of the Morley House, Painesville, Ohio, has three realistic sprigs of crisp acanthus foliage framing the architectural feature.[174] The overdoor decorations of a church at Zoar, Ohio, has a lintel of conventional acanthus forms spanning lutus leaf capitals; and the fanlight of the old dining hall of Western Reserve College, Hudson, Ohio, has a single realistically detailed acanthus leaf crowning the elliptical feature.[175]

In Chicago, the L. Hamilton McCormick House of Italian Renaissance architecture has an ornamental cast-iron veranda of acanthus capitals and leaf borders on the archway.

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173 Ibid., p. 77.
174 Mrary, op. cit., p. 104.
175 Ibid., p. 225.

The Cyrus McCormick House also bears the acanthus leaf motif incised on capitals, and acanthus medallions and garlands on window cornicing. The acanthus motif also appears on the cornice, capitals, and pilasters of the Mahlon B. Ogden House; the City Hall and County Building, completed in 1885[176]; and the Chamber of Commerce of 1865.[177] Elaborate classical acanthus ornamentations were demonstrated in the architecture of the Columbian Exposition of 1893.[178]

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176 Tallmadge, op. cit., p. 124.

177 Ibid., p. 92.

178 Hamlin, Talbot Faulkner, The American Spirit in Architecture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), p.232.

CHAPTER X

THE ACANTHUS LEAF IN INTERIOR ORNAMENTATION OF THE MIDWEST, 1800-1900

The early forms of interior architectural ornamentation in the homes of Ohio and Indiana are derived from Eastern and Southern sources. "The designers of this period seemed to possess an innate talent for adapting new architectural fashion to the requirements for adapting to the region, preserving traditional usuages, accepting local building materials, and conforming to climatic exigencies. There is consequently a homogeneous expression with numerous regional variations."[179] In the Midwestern home various forms of the acanthus leaf were applied to the interior features. Although in this part of the country ornate forms were usually not employed, classical forms in dwelling architecture prevailed.

In the interior design of Ohio the acanthus leaf was concentrated on the mantelpieces. The early builders commonly designed their mantels in conformity with late Eighteenth Century traditions. The classb order was the usual basis of design. During the middle of the Nineteenth Century cast-iron facings of the fireplace were popular. These were ornamented with acanthus leaves of realistic

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179 Ibid., p. 8.

commonly spiral and twisting, and generally employed in band decoration. The cast-iron facings were produced from iron foundry stock patterns. The mantels of the Ohio buildings were usually constructed of wood but sometimes of marble. When decorative details were applied, they were crudely drawn and executed on the interior features. The earlier and more delicate designs of sunburst, acanthus, and flutings reflect the style of the Adam Brothers of England, and their American followers Bulfinch and McIntire.[180]

The interior doorway was usually plain in provincial design with only a fanciful motif of acanthus or lotsu blossom used. These ornaments were simple in artistic expression and almost abstract in pattern. An example of this application is a square acanthus leaf carved motif on the door enframement in the Bates-Brinkerhoff House, Melmore, Ohio.[181] In this section of the country, doorways were often flanked by plain flat pilasters wiht acanthus-tiered Corinthian capitals. Frequently an acanthus leaved scroll was found mounted on the baseboard adjacent to the door trim.

Stairways of Ohio houses were simple with acanthus spirals and "S" scrolls in pierced or jig-sawed decoration

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180 Drury, John, Historic Midwest Houses (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press,)1947, p. 23.

181 Frary, op. cit., p. 278.

on the stair-ends. An instance of this application is the Adams-Grey House, Adams Mills, Ohio.[182] Craftsmanship is more noticeable in stairways that sweep into a spiral on the bottom step with incised details of the acanthus motif rathern than the fashionable newel post.[183]

Windows were usually plain with a double-hung sash divided into small panes and enclosed with a simple frame. Frequently molding and carved rosettes of the acanthus form were applied to the enframement. Window ornamentation reflected the approach of the Victorian Gothic by the employment of acanthus leaf tracery, foliated scrolls, and other pseudo-Gothic leaf applications.

The acanthus motif appeared as medallions, rosettes, and wreaths on ceiling ornamentation. These motifs were realistic and crisp in leaf form ranging from miniature to those forms many times their original size. Also this leaf motif in carved and jig-sawed appliques was used in bands and border decoration on the ceiling. In some mid-century Ohio houses, all-over patterned wallpapers which featured variations of the acanthus leaf were employed.

In the later decades of the 1800's, interior ornamentation of the Illinois mansions became preoccupied with an emphasis of excessive decoration. Much of the interior

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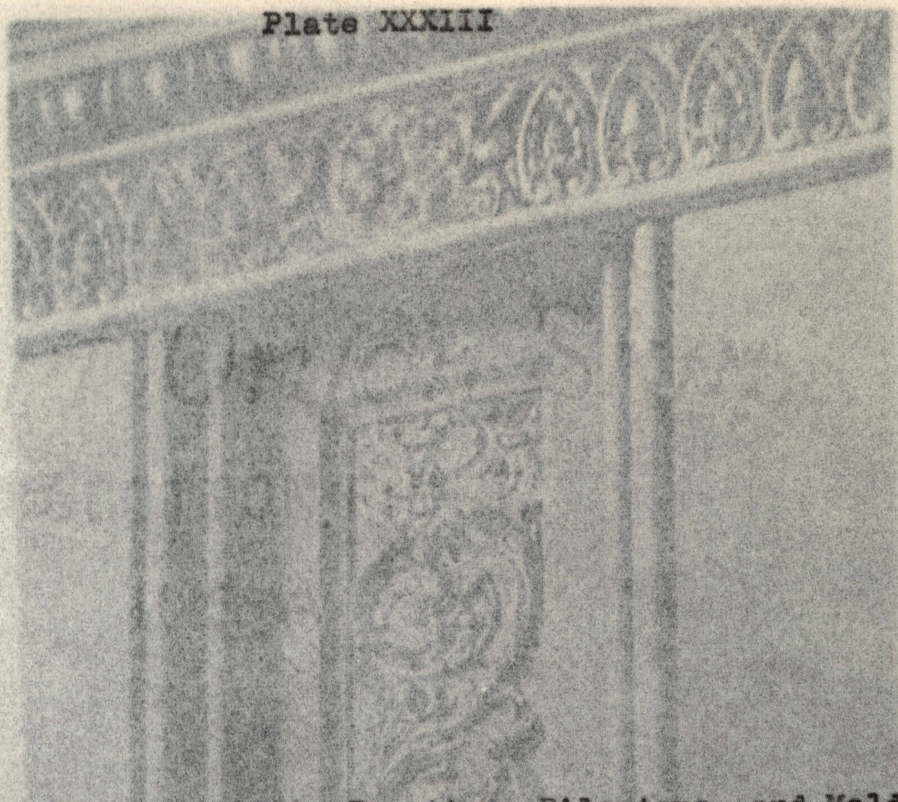
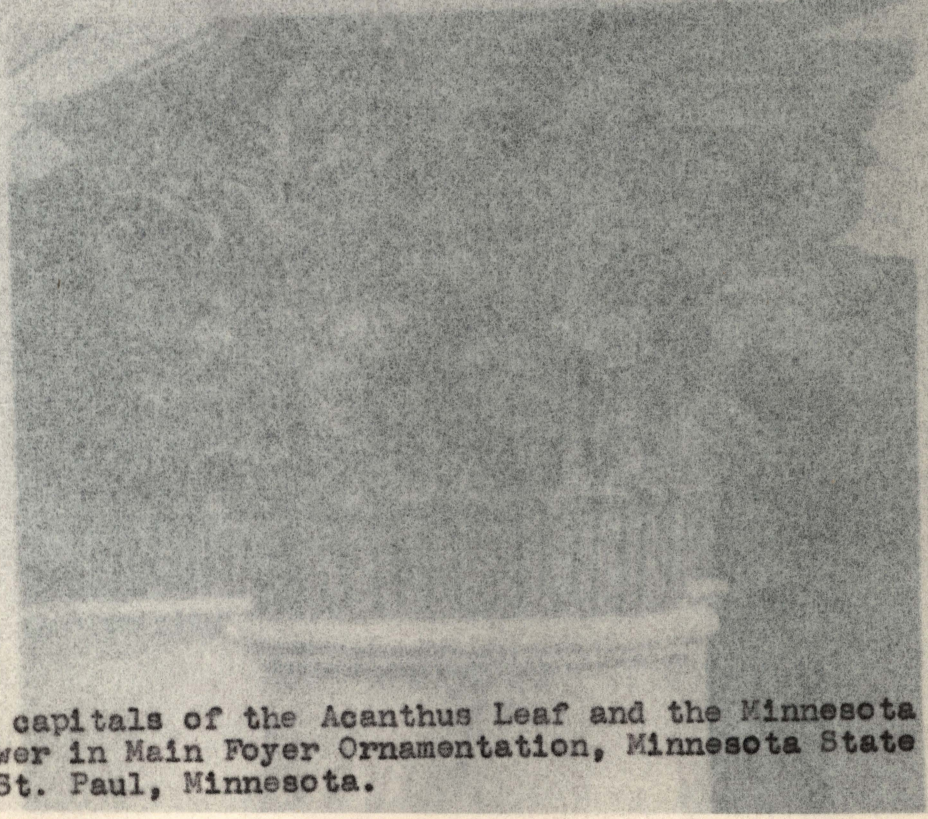
183 Bicknell, op. cit., pl. 43.

Plate XXXIII



The acanthus Leaf Motif in Rosettes, Pilasters, and Moldings Typical of Interior Ornamentation of Commercial Architecture.



Composite capitals of the Acanthus Leaf and the Minnesota State Flower in Main Foyer Ornamentation, Minnesota State Capitol, St. Paul, Minnesota.



detail of trimmings and cornices, formerly of wood, was now executed in plaster. In these Illinois mansions, modifications of the acanthus leaf appeared on such interior features as mantels, stairways, window and door trim.

Mantels remained the principal ornamental feature of the Illinois interior with elaborately carved panels and over-mantel mirrors in richly gilded frames. These mantels were constructed of wood, marble, and onyx imported from Mexico. The overmantel elaboration consisted of plaster and wooden leaf moldings, reeded columns, classical cornices, and an embellishment of acanthus decoration. During the middle of the Nineteenth Century, mantels were commonly decorated with popular acanthus foliated keystones and acanthus leaf bordered cartouche. These leaf details were semi-naturalistic in representation. At this time, metal stock patterns. In the Chicago mansions, excessive ornamentation of the acanthus leaf appeared on frames, vases, fabrics, and furniture usually of European importation.

Throughout the Nineteenth Century door and window trim remained relatively plain except for an occasional use of the acanthus, anthemion, and lotus motifs. There were numerous appearances of heavy acanthus elaboration on over-door panels and window cornicing. In the provincial homes, where ornamentation was handled more simply an occasional leaf motif was carved into the dado board.

In acanthus ornamentation stairways of the Illinds houses were similar to those of Ohio. Acanthus decorations occurred in jig-sawed forms and ornate relief carvings applied to the staircasing. Interior newel posts, although simple in leaf ornamentation were popular decorative features.[184] During the 1880's there appeared frequently newel posts of pierced or incised decoration similar to those executed in the Byzantine and Romanesque character of the Richardsonian period.

The Farwell House, Hudson, Ohio. The interior of this house with its simplicity of detail represents the elegance of early Ohio dwellings. Interior details are almost devoid of ornamentation except for a simple ceiling medallion in the parlor. This centerpiece consists of enlarged realistically designed acanthus leaves diverging from the central acanthus decoration in the circular rim of the medallion there were single acanthus leaves, placed end to end, interspaced with acanthus leaf rosettes. Its presentation was expressed with such simplicity as to harmonize with the remainder of the interior.[185]

Shandy Hall, Unionville, Ohio. One of the oldest buildings in the Western Reserve is Shandy Hall, the

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[184] Ibid., pl. 42.

[185] Frary, op. cit., p. 118.

Harper homestead at Unionville, built by Robert Harper in 1825. The banquet room is particularly exemplary for the application of the classical acanthus motif. A chair rail is carried around the room forming a dado board above which is hung a French scenic wallpaper with many classical Corinthian capitals. Imitating an interior cornice board is a wallpaper border of realistic acanthus leaves in formal balance, separated into small panels by acanthus printed rosettes. This paper was hung in the banquet hall of Shandy Hall about 1830.[186]

The James F. D. Lanier House, Madison, Indiana. Lanier's Greek Revival mansion is a splendid example of the interior architectural ornamentation of the middle of the Nineteenth Century. The overmantel pieces are the keynote of acanthus decoration. The classical leaf elaborately adorns the over-mantel mirrors in sweeping spirals of gilded plaster works in naturalistic pattern. These acanthuses have sometime been modified into abstract leaf-scrolled brackets applied to the base of the mirror resting on the mantel. The acanthus motif is observed in drapery design and acanthus jig-sawed scrolls are mounted on the headboards of the beds. This leaf motif appears, too, in

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[186] Ibid., p. 163.

metalwork on the chandeliers and fireplace grilles.[187]

The James Whitcomb Riley House, Indianapolis, Indiana. This house, built in 1866 by James R. Nickum, reflected, in its interior decoration, a mode of ornamentation that is truly Victorian. Interior furnishings are heavily ornamented with fringes and over-draperies; enormous acanthus detailed gilt framed mirrors hang over the mantels of onyx and marble; and heavy classical acanthus leaved motifs surmount the bedsteads. In Riley's private bedroom an excellent example of acanthus forms expressed in metal fireplace grilles of foundry stock patterns may be seen.[188]

The Marshall Field House, Chicago, Illinois. One of the few surviving landmarks of old Chicago's Victorian residences is this red brick mansion, built in 1873 by Marshall Field. Typical interior features of the Field house are the acanthus decorated keystone-arched fireplaces and the excessive Victorian elaboration of acanthus and other classical decorations on the overmantel paneling. The newel post of the main interior stairway is incised with semi-naturalistic acanthus scrolls and acanthus jig-sawed scrolls are applied to the stair-ends. The acanthus motif appears in

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187 Drury, op. cit., p. 38.

188 Ibid., p. 46.

sparing application on interior trim save for the leaf embellishment found on the window cornice boards of the main salon. Acanthus leaf decorations are employed on the lighting fixtures, picture frames, mirrors, draperies, and furniture.[189]

Other applications. A number of interior architectural features which bear the acanthus leaf motif although not to an excess of application, also occur in Illinois. Among them is the Abraham Lincoln House, Springfield, Illinois, where the interior trim is simple and plain, the acanthus motif is applied in realistic carving to the window cornicing of the dining and sitting room.[190] The mantels of the Ulysses S. Grant House, Galena, Illinois, built in 1857, employs the acanthus leaf on the keystone scroll carvings of the parlor fireplace.[191] In the William O. Anderson House, Lexington, Illinois, a circular walnut stairway is trimmed with acanthus foliated details in realistic carvings on the balustrades and the stair-ends.[192]

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189 Drury, John, Old Chicago Houses (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 57.

190 Ibid., p. 59.

191 Drury, John, Old Illinois Houses (Springfield: Illinois, State Historical Society, 1948), p. 189.

192 Drury, John, Historic Midwest Homes (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1947), p. 95.

CHAPTER XI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The acanthus leaf has been an important ornamental device in all styles of design. It is a motif which gained extensive recognition for its artistic contributions in architectural ornamentation. With its simple graceful movement, crisp spiny-toothed leaves, and elasticity, the acanthus leaf has not always been realistically represented but variations of leaf designs increased with subsequent use and development of the acanthus motif.

Because of an interest in the ornamental aspect of the acanthus leaf in general and its employment in classical phases of American architecture in particular, this investment was attempted to record information regarding the wide spread use of the leaf form in this country during the Nine-teenth Century.

From 1800 to 1900, the acanthus motif was more extensively employed than any other leaf motif and it has remained, even to this time, a popular ornamental device in New England, the middle Atlantic states, the South, and the Midwest. To trace the acanthus motif and to illustrate and explain those qualities which permitted its endurance in American architecture, then, seemed a justifiable project.

In America the acanthus motif has been used in domestic, civic, commercial, and ecclesiastical ornamentation. Its leaf form has appeared on such exterior architectural features as capitals, and pilasters, cornices, doorways and balustrades; and on such exterior architectural features as mantelpieces and stairways, moldings, ceilings and window ornamentations. Modifications of the acanthus leaf form are to be found in design varying from the realistic to the abstract, and it has been used in many techniques. The leaf motif has proved to be adaptable to wood, stone, metal, and sometimes plaster and paper-mache.

The study does not pretend to exhaust the entire field of the acanthus leaf in American architecture; however, it was apparent that this leaf motif reached its utmost degree of ornamental employment in all types of architecture during the Greek Revival period about 1830's to the late 1840's. The effects of this period movement existed primarily in domestic forms to the 1860's but, in some instances throughout the South, northern New York and Ohio, the leaf ornament persisted until the 1900's.

The acanthus motif in Nineteenth Century American architecture was generally related to the classical form but, during the Victorian-Gothic era, the leaf assumed abstraction in design particularly in domestic and ecclesiastical ornamentation.

In architectural ornamentation the acanthus leaf was

more extensively employed in the middle Atlantic states than elsewhere in the United States. This is made evident by the numerable examples found of its widespread employment in that region.

Under the stimulations of swiftly developing science, social democracy, and industry during the last two decades of the Nineteenth Century, the use of the acanthus leaf was less frequent in architectural ornamentation than in any other period. This motif became subordinated in decorative use by the introduction of new ornaments such as the corn and tobacco, the oak leaf, and the acorn motifs.

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