

VOLUME III

VICTORIAN MATERIAL CULTURE IN MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE:
THE MALLORY-NEELY HOUSE INTERIORS AS ARTIFACT

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CHAPTER X

THE MALLORY-NEELY INTERIORS: AN INTERPRETATION

Aesthetic material culture establishes boundaries, defines our particular situation, and separates us from others.¹

The Mallory-Neely House is much more than bricks, wood, ceramics, fibers, glass, and metal. The Kirtlands, Babbs, Neelys, and Mallorys built, decorated, and furnished a home, the architecture and contents of which are loaded with symbolism about their economic and cultural status in the Memphis community. Within this house a large percentage of the space was devoted to ceremonial areas as a setting for the symbolic rituals so important to nineteenth century elite society; further significant amounts of money and effort were expended toward this end. The visual symbols used in these areas are especially charged with meaning.

Victorian Ritual and Symbolism

Symbolism, ritual, and ceremony are key words in this particular interpretation of the Mallory-Neely house interiors. Because of their importance, these terms have been subject to a variety of definitions in a host of different academic disciplines ranging from

¹Simon J. Bronner, "Manner Books & Suburban Houses," Winterthur Portfolio, 18, No. 1 (January 1983), 68.

art history to sociology. Every culture is permeated with symbolism. It is an important universal form of human communication. A seemingly meaningless object or action can be used by an individual or a whole society to symbolize a perception. A symbolic object or event can recall or direct special attention. Ritual is a form of elaborated behavior while ceremony is one of social or cultural intercourse, both of these can range from simple ceremonies to those occasions that are ritualistically elaborated. Symbolism plays a major role in both ritual and ceremony.

Victorians were so drawn to ritual that it is now recognized as one of the period's most characteristic features.² This emphasis was the result of modernization. American society evolved from a predominantly rural-agrarian orientation to one that became increasingly urban, industrial, and sociologically complex. Because of these changes, American cultural and value systems were dramatically transformed. The Victorian emphasis on the home, family, and related rituals, ceremonies, and symbols is expressive of a need for psychological order or stability amidst the rapid changes occurring during the century.³ Symbolism and ritual especially aided in maintaining social control and order during the transition to modernization.⁴

Orrin E. Klapp in the introduction to Collective Search for Identity states that man is a symbolic animal, that he hungers for

²In order to explore the importance of ritual to the Victorians, the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, for example, hosted a seminar on April 21, 1984 entitled: "Ritual in Nineteenth Century America, an Interdisciplinary View."

³Howe, "Victorian Culture in America," 19.

⁴Ibid., 20.

symbolic balance, and that his very identity is a symbolic matter.⁵ He also says that cultural values and symbols, such as status and style symbols, become reliable reference points for humans.⁶ Klapp further states that the Industrial Revolution and its technological changes wiped away or disturbed the symbolic base of society, creating an imbalance.⁷ Thus, this break with the past coupled with excessive mobility created a feeling of traditionlessness and rootlessness. The resultant identity despair, with symbolic security in a flux, caused society to search for new symbols in order to restore symbolic balance and equilibrium.⁸

Symbolism of the Mallory-Neely House (c. 1852)

Because its architecture, interior decor, and contents are stylistically accumulative, the Mallory-Neely House represents a variety of changing symbolic attitudes in nineteenth century America. The first of these, chronologically, is revealed through an analysis of the symbolic architectural order of the house. In keeping with nineteenth century symbolism representing an ideology of spatial organization, as advocated by Downing and others, the visual divisions of the Mallory-Neely House, including its plan, facade and side

⁵Orrin E. Klapp, Collective Search for Identity (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1966), vii.

⁶Ibid., vii.

⁷Ibid., viii.

⁸Ibid., 21.

elevations, and garden setting, are separated into distinct public ceremonial, private, and service or productive areas.

In the houses promoted and illustrated by Downing and his followers, domestic spaces or apartments were created so that each was a separate sphere of activity having special characteristics according to their functions.⁹ This represented a radical change from the rigid formal plan of the eighteenth century house.¹⁰ Rooms in this new system were scaled and grouped by function such as social or domestic usage.¹¹ The author of The Cottage Builder's Manual stated that one of the most important steps in designing a house was "the division of the space enclosed into the various rooms or compartments so that each part can be allotted to its use and not conflict with that of another."¹²

To Downing this functional division of the house should also be expressed symbolically in the elevation. The entire domestic structure would therefore be expressive of the purpose for which it was intended.¹³ Pierson described this as the "elevated order and system of the whole plan."¹⁴ As late as 1883 Alexander Oakey

⁹Susan Williams, Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts: Dining in Victorian America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 52.

¹⁰Early, 67.

¹¹Maass, The Victorian Home in America, 62.

¹²Baker, 211.

¹³Downing, Cottage Residences, 20.

¹⁴Pierson, 353.

in Building a Home was still following Downing's example when he stated that a home should be designed so that "from a distance one could recognize its use."¹⁵

At this time of increasing social instability when the home and family were evolving as symbols of moral order and stability, Downing and his followers felt that this easily read functional divisional system in the architectural elevation of a house was symbolic of the inner domestic life. It became even more so as the nineteenth century progressed due to the fact that emphasis was increasingly placed on the rigid hierarchial order within the Victorian home with father as the head of the household; in descending order ranked below him were mother, children, and servants.¹⁶ (Figure 327)

Visual perusal of the front facade of the Mallory-Neely House symbolically reveals the hierarchy within. The first floor containing the ceremonial public areas is much taller and visually more elaborate with its boldly projecting porch. Emphasis on this floor is aided by the elaborate front doors with stained glass framed by a large rusticated arch cut through the tower block. As the eye moves upward to the next two floors containing the private apartments of the family,

¹⁵Oakey, 72.

¹⁶Ames, "Sitting in (Neo-Grec) style," 53; visual hierarchial symbolism in one form or another has existed in Western cultures through most of the great historical eras. But the visual symbolism associated with family, home, and status became even more dramatically pronounced during the Victorian era in America. This is now generally recognized as a distinguishing characteristic of that period. See, for example: David P. Handlin, The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815-1915 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), Chapter 1, pp. 3-88.

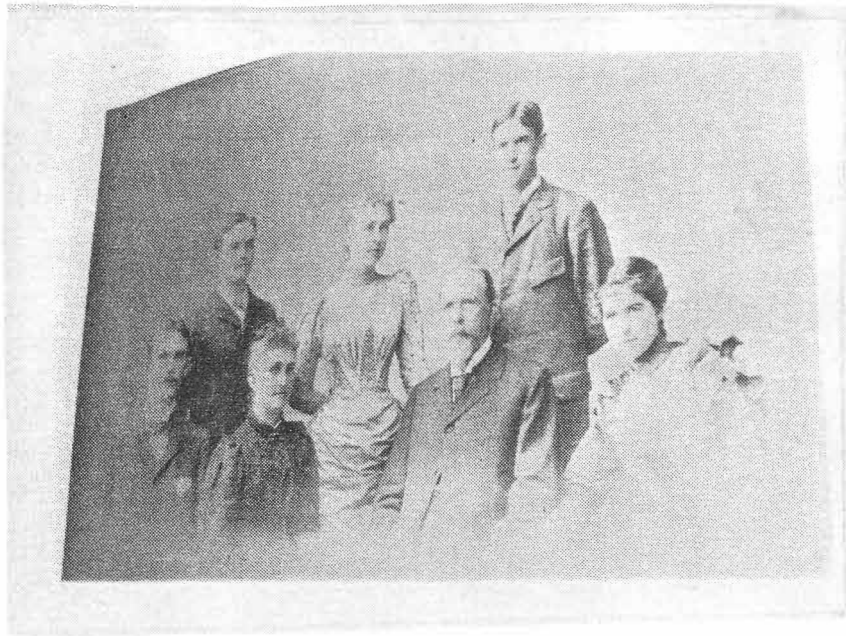


Figure 327. The large framed photograph of the Neely family displayed on the second floor hallway of the Mallory-Neely House symbolically reflects the hierarchial status in the Victorian family with James Columbus Neely as the central seated figure.

it is apparent that they diminish in scale and are less heavily ornamented.

The visual symbolism of the side elevation of the house reveals yet more significance. The main house is characterized by a monumentality of scale and an ornateness of decorative detail around windows, doors, on cornices, and elsewhere. This is in great contrast to the once separate kitchen-servants' wing. (Figure 328) This multi-storied block used for the practical aspects of the daily life of the household is visually plain and without ornamentation. Its function as the productive-service wing of the house would have been even more pronounced when it was totally separated from the main house.

A study of the interiors within reveal much the same symbolism. The main ceremonial floor of the house is grander in scale and no efforts were spared to give it a highly ornamented and rich appearance. On this floor, though, a strong visual difference exists between the public rooms and the one private family room, the morning room, which was kept relatively plain and understated in its decor. For the second and third floor private family apartments, the scale diminishes as does the richness of decorative finish. Within the private floor the size and decoration of the parents' chamber versus that of the children is also noticeable. (Figure 329)

The contrast between the main block of the house and the interior of the kitchen and servants' wing is even more pronounced. The interiors of this work area are bare and functional. Ceilings are low and the rooms are basically simple cubes or rectangles without architectural embellishment such as moldings or ornamental door-window



Figure 328. Rear view of the Mallory-Neely House.

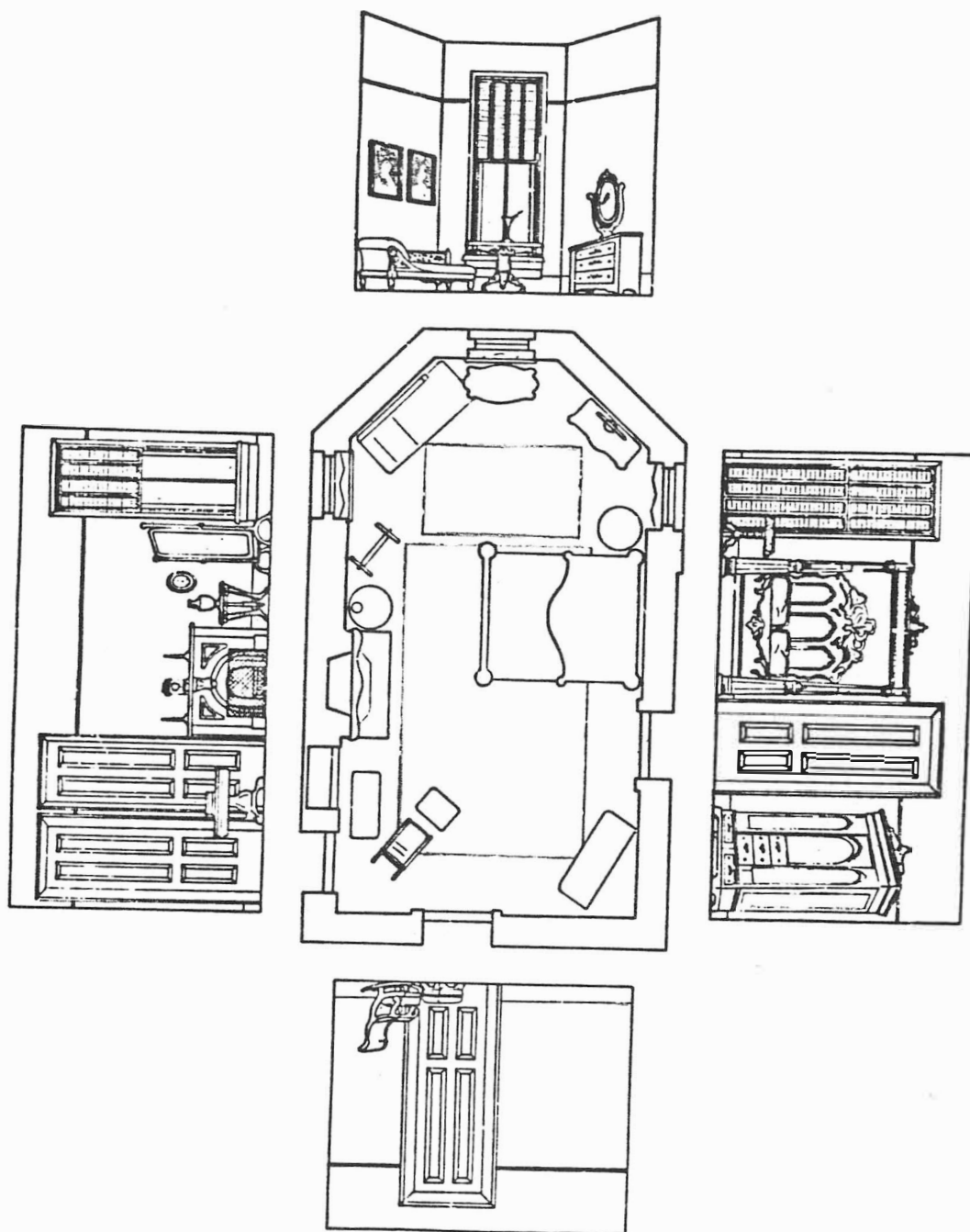


Figure 329. Plan and elevations of the Mallory-Neely master bedroom. Hierarchical symbolism is expressed in the scale of this room and the richness of its furnishings which is in marked contrast to the other bedrooms in the house.

surrounds. Even the numerous fireplaces are just simple holes cut into the chimneys.

As noted, the grounds surrounding the house were also divided into a public ornamental front lawn adjoining the main house and a service area surrounding the servants' building with its kitchen garden, carriage house, and pasture. Fences and other screening elements separated the two.

The exterior architectural style was also encumbered with associative symbolic meaning. During much of the nineteenth century the Classical style of Greece and Rome was linked by Americans with democracy and related moral virtues. Though based on Italian farm architecture, the Italianate was seen as a domestic variant of the Classical. The Italianate style of Kirtland's suburban villa expressed not only the central importance of family life to society but also of the young egalitarian American democracy built through the hard toil of its citizenry and of the sound moral principles and virtues cherished by them.

Symbolism of the Mallory-Neely House (c. 1890)

The post-1883 alterations to the house by J. C. Neely were totally in keeping with new symbols representing dramatic changes that were evolving by late century in the American social system. By this time the United States was experiencing flourishing economic growth as it developed into a major industrial power. Many of its citizens were enjoying unprecedented wealth and prosperity.

Solid republican virtues and a rigid, Evangelical Protestant work ethic gave way to the pursuit of money, ostentation, and

conspicuous consumption.¹⁷ Theological adjustment among many Americans ensued as revolutionary changes occurred in their attitude about success. Earlier generations equated material prosperity with morality, but after 1870 material progress came to be seen as a sign of God's grace.¹⁸

Though a transplanted European system existed during the Colonial era, American democratic egalitarianism had dominated since the revolution. The last three evolutionary decades of the nineteenth century witnessed what was probably the nearest that the United States has ever come to having a structured class system.¹⁹ Daniel W. Rossides pointed out in The American Class System that class consciousness and class struggle are associated with societies undergoing modernization but not with those having mature industrial systems.²⁰

Mark Twain's use of "The Gilded Era" as a title for this period aptly applies. Income from America's rapid industrialization and flourishing economy created an aristocracy of wealth. With no national precedent to follow, the new commercial elite took the European class structure as its role model.²¹ Early xenophobic insularity gave

¹⁷Lynes, The Domesticated Americans, 13; and Howe, "Victorian Culture in America," 19.

¹⁸Green, The Light of the Home, 7.

¹⁹See, for example, Joseph Alan Kahl, The American Class Structure (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1957).

²⁰Daniel W. Rossides, The American Class System (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Company, 1976), 447.

²¹This Fabulous Century: 1870-1900, Prelude, ed. Jerry Kern (New York: Time-Life Books, 1970), 180.

way to a greater cosmopolitanism among Americans as their nation took an active international role in world economic and political affairs. Earlier in the century Americans, proud of their democratic experiment, looked upon the European class structure and its culture as decadent.²² Suddenly symbols of a European hereditary leisured class, so long disdained, were "IN" among the nation's ruling elite.²³

New York at this time became the financial and social center of the nation. Its business aristocracy gave the social cues for similar elite in cities across the nation to follow. Almost all larger American cities developed a social elite molded in the manner of New York City. All, regardless of region, emulated the architecture, interior design, clothing fashion, and social ceremony.²⁴

Mass media periodicals, but especially the daily newspaper society section or column, aided in widely publicizing the concept of a leisured, aristocratic class following that of New York. The society column "spread tales of frivolity, social jockeying for position and the conspicuous waste of the social elite."²⁵ Photography was used by the various media to illustrate elite fashions, interiors,

²²Harvey Green, "The Victorian Way of Life," Paper presented at the 38th Annual Seminar on American Culture, 1 July 1985, New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, New York.

²³Arthur M. Schlesinger, Learning How to Behave: A Study of American Etiquette Books (New York: Macmillan Company, 1941), 27-29.

²⁴Ross, 245-265.

²⁵Gerald Carson, The Polite Americans (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1966), 162.

and many other visual symbols of wealth and power. In a land without royalty, society became a substitute for many average Americans.

Charles Dudley Warner in Studies in the South and Southwest (1889) was keenly aware of the social homogenization that was taking place throughout the United States. As Warner traveled he observed that old sectional barriers were being destroyed through intercommunication and social assimilation. In the South he noted that the old civilization and traditions of the region were broken. Warner stated that the "social aristocracy of the planter class based on Colonial English prototypes was dead." Power was no longer held by the old families with inherited wealth, but, as elsewhere in the United States, money, now more than ever, equalled political and social clout.²⁶ E. Digby Baltzell in An American Business Aristocracy stated that after 1880 the local gentry throughout America in a nationalization of the upper classes gave way to a centralized business aristocracy.²⁷

Memphis, like other American cities, had its own local "gilded era" ruled over by a commercial aristocracy. Memphis papers of the time talk of "merchant princes" and their "palatial" homes located in the "aristocratic sections" of the city. Several decades earlier in Memphis these inflated appellations would have seemed pretentious and downright undemocratic. Now apparently opulent wealth and the power and prestige it brought were a source of admiration, envy, and emulation.

²⁶Warner, 34-38.

²⁷E. Digby Baltzell, An American Business Aristocracy (New York: Free Press, 1962), 157.

To feed the obvious public interest, numerous articles in late nineteenth century Memphis newspapers gave accounts of the social happenings and the daily life which included details about homes, interiors, and collections of New York based Gilded Era tycoons such as the Astors, Goulds, Vanderbilts, and Rockefellers. These newspapers, of course, gave even more graphic detail about their own local elite.

The Neely and Mallory families were very much members of this "gilded era" aristocracy. Both of these families had a distinguished heritage having been members of the pre-war landed planter class. They were certainly not nouveau riche; this refutes the impression often given that all Gilded Era aristocrats were newly rich and therefore tasteless. Both families' late century financial, political, and social power was due to the fact that they had the foresight to leave the land, move into the city, and enter the American business world just at the right time. They used their earlier land-based economic capital to build even greater fortunes.

Both the Neely and Mallory families were in close contact with fellow financial elites in New York City as well as those in other cities like Chicago and St. Louis. The two Neely daughters, for example, attended an exclusive girls' school in New York City during the height of the Gilded Era. Memphis newspapers record annual visits of family members to New York and other important social centers. Members of the Neely, Mallory, and Grant families intermarried with the elite of other cities like New York, Boston, and Knoxville.

The Mallory family had a direct linkage with major American Gilded Era personalities through Mary Mallory Harrahan, Mrs. Daisy Mallory's sister-in-law. In 1899 Mary married James T. Harrahan, son of Edward Harrahan, a director for twenty-six years and President of the Illinois Central Railroad at its peak of greatness. John Jacob Astor, William Waldorf Astor, Cornelius Vanderbilt, John Auchincloss, and Charles A. Peabody served on his board of directors. Edward Harrahan owned the major share of IC Railroad stock and large holdings in the Union Pacific and South Pacific Railroads, "giving him primary control of U.S. railroad affairs."²⁸ His son James served as president of the ICRR from 1906 to 1911 and was responsible for making Memphis a major hub of the Illinois Central Line.

The Neelys' post-1883 alterations were very much symbolic of the family's position on the top rung of Memphis' business and cultural strata. The stylistic symbolism of Kirtland's Italianate villa was now outdated. Dianne Pilgrim in a lecture entitled "Decorative Arts and the American Renaissance" stated that between 1876 and 1917 the house became the most obvious and visible sign of an individual's station and standing in the community. The type of house and its interior decoration very much reflected the personality and desires of the owner. She further stated that by this time the

²⁸H. S. Cheap and John F. Stover, History of the Illinois Central Railroad (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1975), 207-208, 226.

home had become, in a sense, a means of self-advertisement.²⁹
(Figure 330)

The Neelys enlargement of the house into a baronial castle was in keeping with what fellow members of the financial elite in New York and across the nation were doing. Influenced by or directly copied after castles, chateaux, and palaces, the newly fashionable styles of architecture communicated associative symbolic references to Old World Europe and its aristocratic traditions. The sheer mass and size of the Neelys' vertically enlarged home spoke of grandeur and power.

The Neelys' interior alterations and furnishings relayed the same symbolic messages in keeping with the Victorians' "social ideology of display and presentation."³⁰ The scale and size of the rooms; the richly ornamented surfaces; the splendid materials of crystal, marble, and costly woods; the excessive use of gilding; the grand and expensive furnishings; the sumptuous textiles and carpeting; and the sheer, density of the contents conveyed a collective message of prosperity and conspicuous consumption.

Throughout are symbols associated with hereditary European monarchy and aristocracy. These include plaster heraldic crests ornamenting the arch of the parlor alcove, royal fleur-de-lis used in the stair-hallway stenciling and as the main motif of the sitting

²⁹Dianne Pilgrim, "The Decorative Arts and the American Renaissance," Paper presented at the McFaddin-Ward House Museum Conference: "American Home in Transition, 1890-1930," Beaumont, Texas, 30 October 1987.

³⁰Green, The Light of the Home, 44.

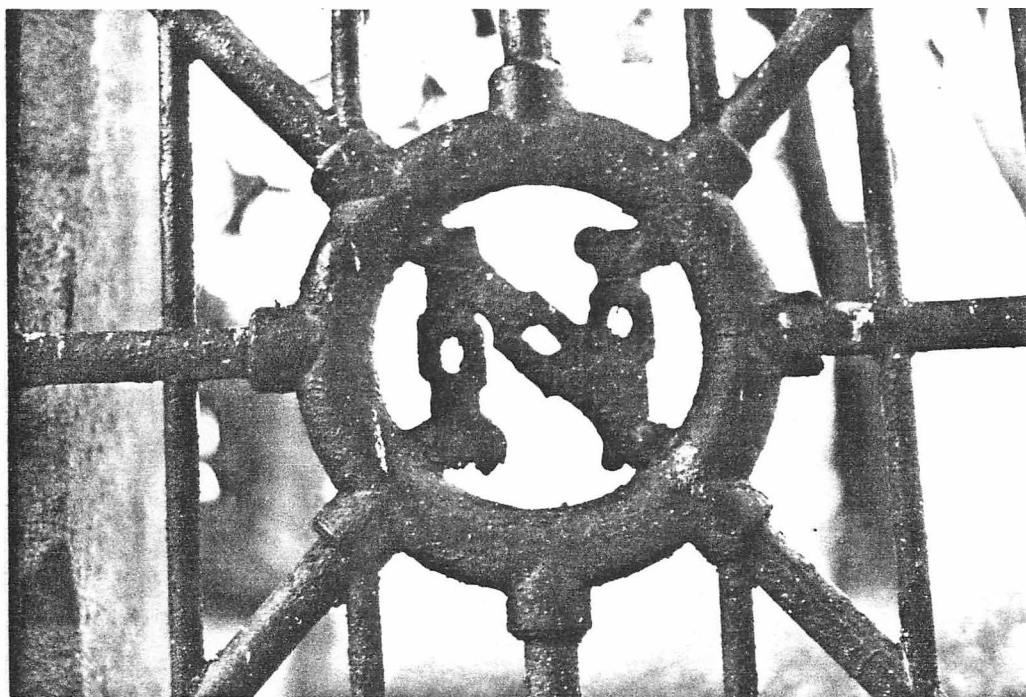


Figure 330. Neely initial on the front gate of the Mallory-Neely House.

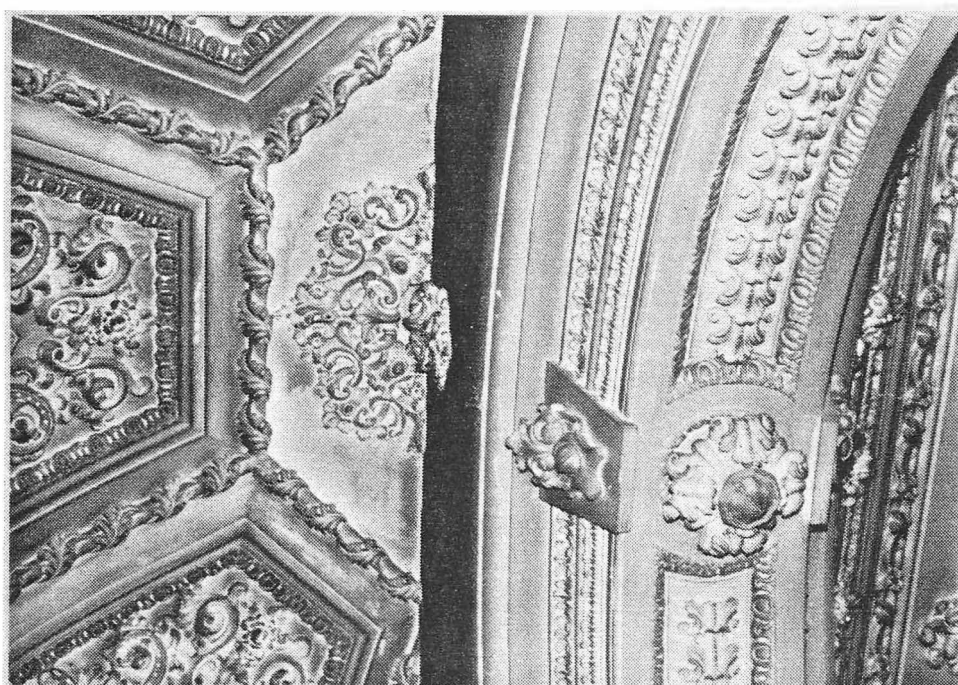
room wallpaper, and painted portraits of famous European royalty, each centering small plates. (Figures 331, 332, and 333) Because of their richness many of the individual pieces of furniture communicate regality and elitism, especially the reproduction French commode in the manner of Jean-Henri Riesener, favorite cabinetmaker of Marie Antoinette. (Figure 334) A gift from the super-wealthy Harrahans to the Mallorys, its scale and the materials used for its decoration, such as the elaborate marquetry and applied ormolu, exude opulence. (Figure 334 and 335)

Antiques and family portraits gave the image of "old family," while international collectables relaid that of a cosmopolitan, well-traveled family. Art works including oils, prints, watercolors, and sculptures suggested that a cultured family resided here. Constituting what Veblen labeled the recognized "standards of wealth," all these artifacts symbolically transmitted through nonverbal commentary the message that this was an aristocratic family in the grandest European tradition who had the power, money, education, taste, and leisure to travel, collect and enjoy the finest that life had to offer!³¹

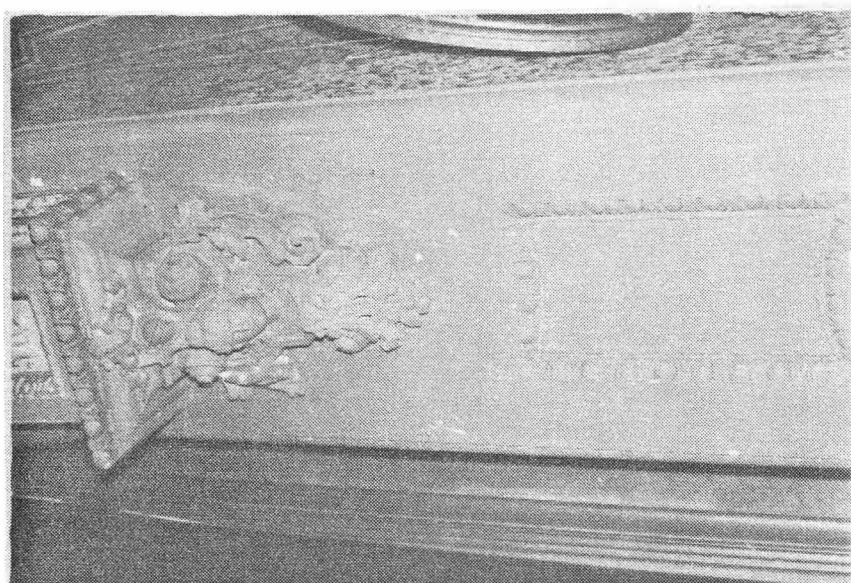
The aristocratic symbolism of the Neelys' grandly remodeled house is made more poignant when one compares it to the homes of the middle and poorer classes at that time who constituted by far the largest portion of the city's population.³² These houses or

³¹Veblen, 66.

³²Miller, 19.



A

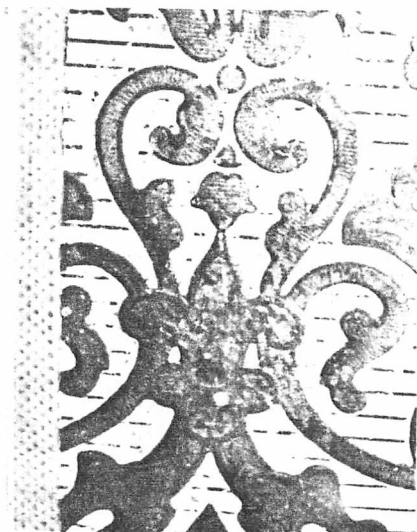


B

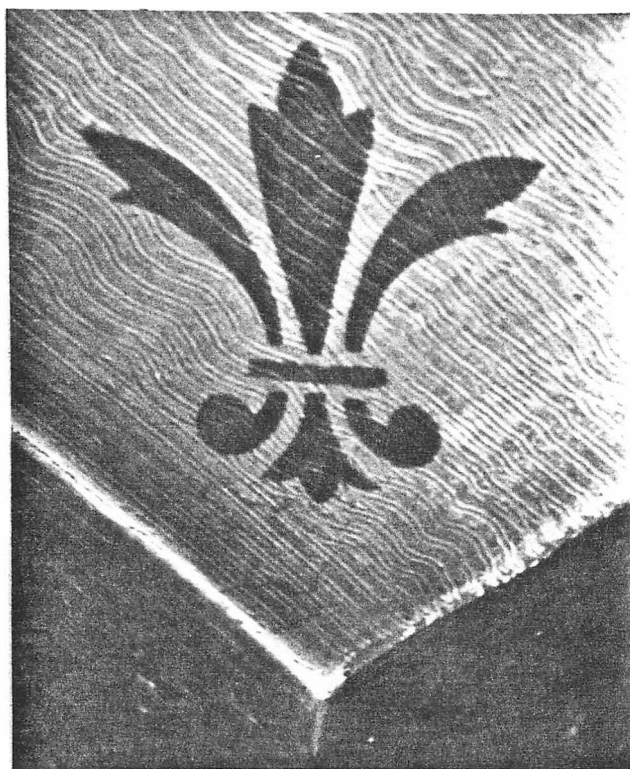
Figure 331. Stylized heraldic crests.

A. A stylized heraldic crest adorns the keystone of the Mallory-Neely parlor alcove arch.

B. Others are placed above the grotesque heads centering the consoles supporting the arch.



A



B

Figure 332. Royal fleur-de-lis patterns.

- A. The central motif of the Mallory-Neely sitting room paper.
- B. The central motif of the Mallory-Neely hallway stenciling.

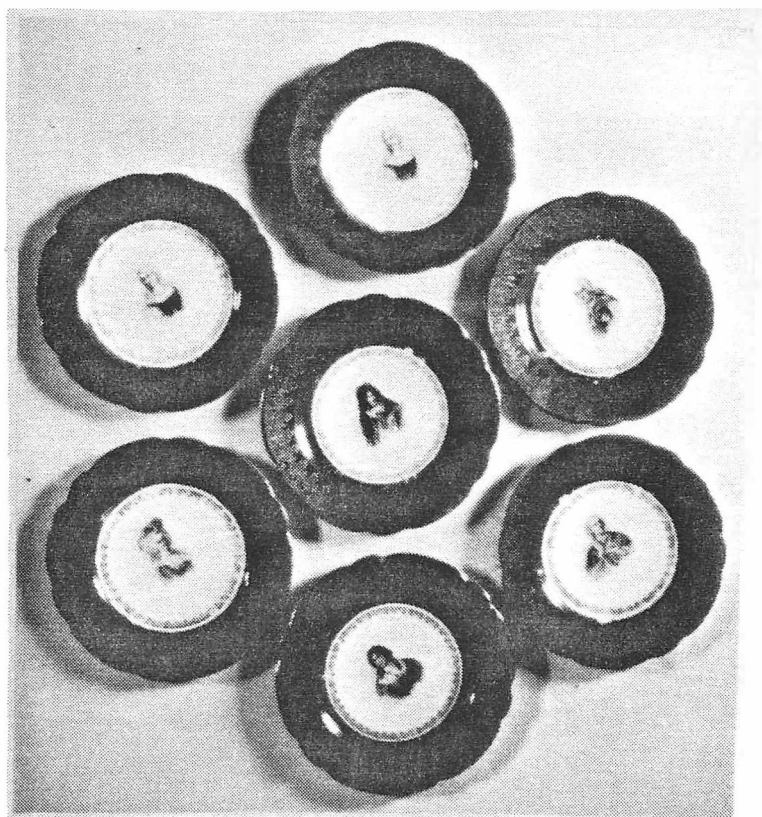
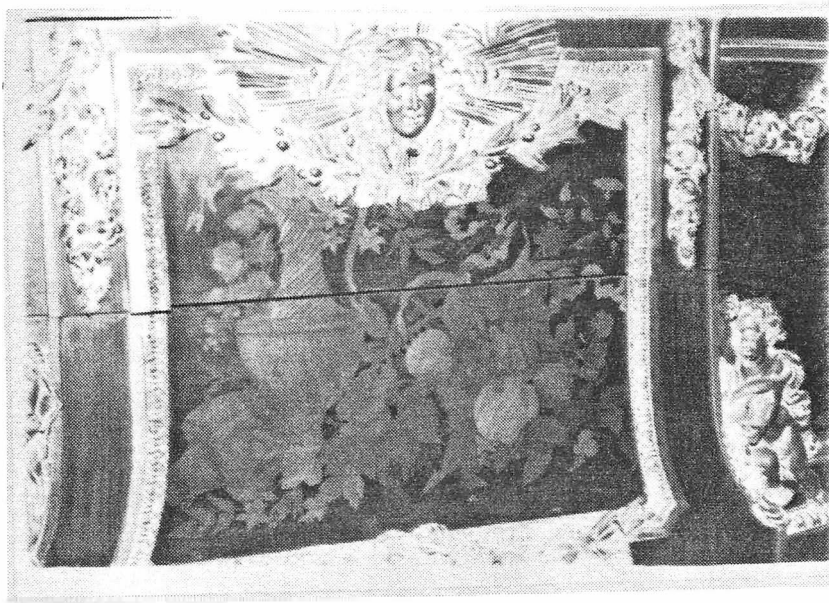


Figure 333. Part of the Mallory-Neely china collection. These porcelain plates have a wide maroon colored border overlaid with a gold filigree design. In the center of each is a handpainted portrait of a noted European monarch. Louis XIV, for example, is in the center.



A



B

Figure 334. Nineteenth century reproduction of an eighteenth century French commode located in the Mallory-Neely parlor. It was a wedding present to his brother-in-law from the railroad magnate, James T. Harrahan.
A. French commode.
B. Close-up showing detail.



A



B

Figure 335. Details of the bronze mounts of the Mallory-Neely French commode.
A. Cupid.
B. Hercules.

photographs of them remain as material culture documents of an increasingly stratified class system.

A lot of middle class housing from this time period survives in Memphis. Particularly good examples exist in the Greenlaw-Chelsea area, the city's earliest suburb, begun in 1856 and populated by mercantile and artisan families; in the same category is the Annesdale neighborhood.³³ In comparison to the Mallory-Neely House, they sit on much smaller lots and contrast dramatically in scale. All types of materials were used for their construction, but wood was especially common. Stylistically, most are simplified or vernacular versions of high style Victorian architecture.³⁴ (Figure 336)

The city's lowest class was made up of assorted immigrants, poor whites, and blacks who constituted 49% of the city's population by 1900.³⁵ Most of these blacks and whites moved into Memphis from the vast rural hinterland surrounding the city. They formed a laboring class that lived on the very fringe of society with no economic power whatsoever.³⁶ Little is known about the housing of the poor

³³See Peggy Boyce Jemison, Virginia Dunaway, and Ray Ann Kremer, Greenlaw Rediscovered, A History (Memphis: Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association, 1979).

³⁴See Alan Gowans, The Comfortable House: North American Suburban Architecture, 1890-1930 (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1987).

³⁵Harkins, Metropolis of the American Nile, 105.

³⁶Ibid., 109-11.



Figure 336. George C. Love House (1889) in the Greenlaw suburb. It is probably the most noted example of a wooden, vernacular style, middle class Victorian dwelling in Memphis.

who, because of their poverty, left "few marks of cultural or material respectability."³⁷ The following description characterizes black housing in the entire South:

They lived in one or two room shacks . . . located alongside and near railroads, near dumpheaps, in back yards, in back alleys, always unsightly, often extremely dirty and unsanitary. Usually their streets were muddy and poorly lighted or not lighted at all. One water spigot outside in a yard would have to suffice for one or more houses. Sewerage systems had not yet been extended to them, drainage was poor, filth was everywhere . . . the worst type of landlordism was developed. . . . Houses were built in the flimsiest manner at the lowest possible cost and rented at the highest possible cost.³⁸

In Memphis the poorer classes crowded into slum areas north and south of the major business district of the city. These ghettos expanded at the turn of the century into blighted areas abandoned by the white elite as they moved into newer, more fashionable areas. The Memphis poor lived mainly, as many still do, in shanties of one room or more, in rental housing, and in dilapidated homes abandoned by the middle or upper classes.

Fortunately, a collection of turn-of-the-century photographs in the Memphis-Shelby County Public Library's Susan Coulan Scruggs' Papers survives as the material culture antithesis to the Mallory-Neely House.³⁹ Together they visually represent the extremes of the late Victorian class structure in Memphis. Mrs. Thomas Scruggs

³⁷Ibid., 19.

³⁸Culture in the South, ed. W. T. Couch (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 454.

³⁹Susan Coulan Scruggs Papers, Special Collections, Memphis-Shelby County Public Library.

was a remarkable lady who moved from her native Boston in 1899 after her marriage to a prominent local judge. In the fullest spirit of the Progressive Movement, she devoted the remainder of her life to benevolent works on behalf of the children of the city's poor. Her numerous worthy causes ranged from children's health care to the creation of neighborhood playgrounds.

Her numerous papers well document these activities, but much rarer and far more valuable are the photographs that she made, visually recording the plight of the Memphis poor and indigent. Fortunately, she sometimes identified the subjects of these photographs with short notations on the reverse side. Collectively, these rare photographs give insight into the lives of a segment of the population who, because of the lack of written or visual documentation, have usually been forgotten by history. Material culturalists, especially, have emphasized the value of photographs as a primary research tool. The Scruggs' photographic collection provides a sobering view into the lives of both black and white poor during the Victorian Era. Her uncompromisingly candid portraits of crippled, deformed, diseased, and orphaned children are heart-rending. This is made even more so by an occasional clipping she saved from the Memphis papers and tucked among the photos. One relates the story of an entire family found dead from starvation; another tells of children left orphaned by the tubercular death of their only parent.⁴⁰ She also photographed

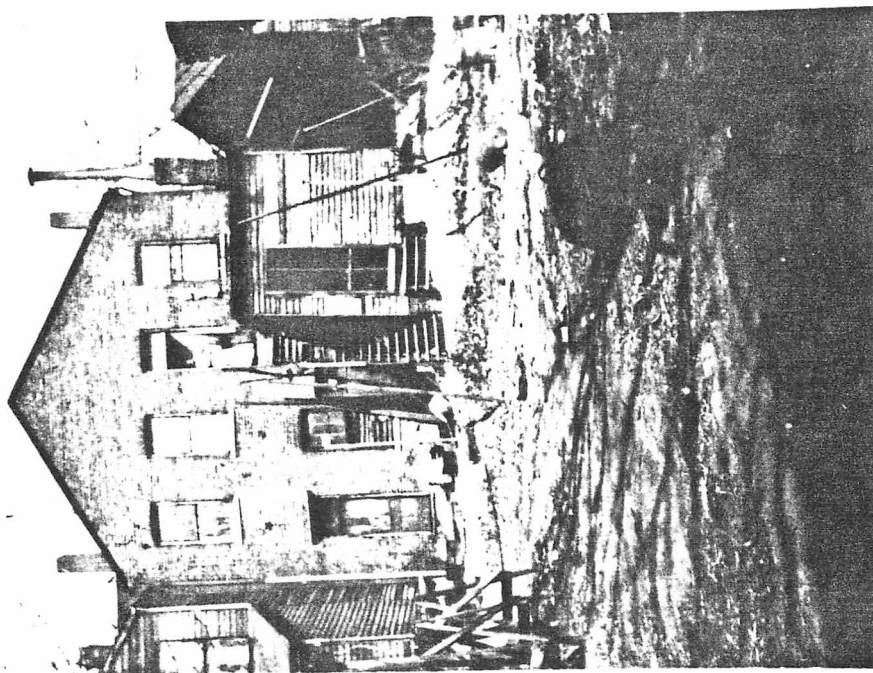
⁴⁰Susan Coulan Scruggs Papers [assorted newspaper clippings], n.d., Photography Folder.

the slum districts and slum housing in which these unfortunate children lived. (Figures 337 and 338)

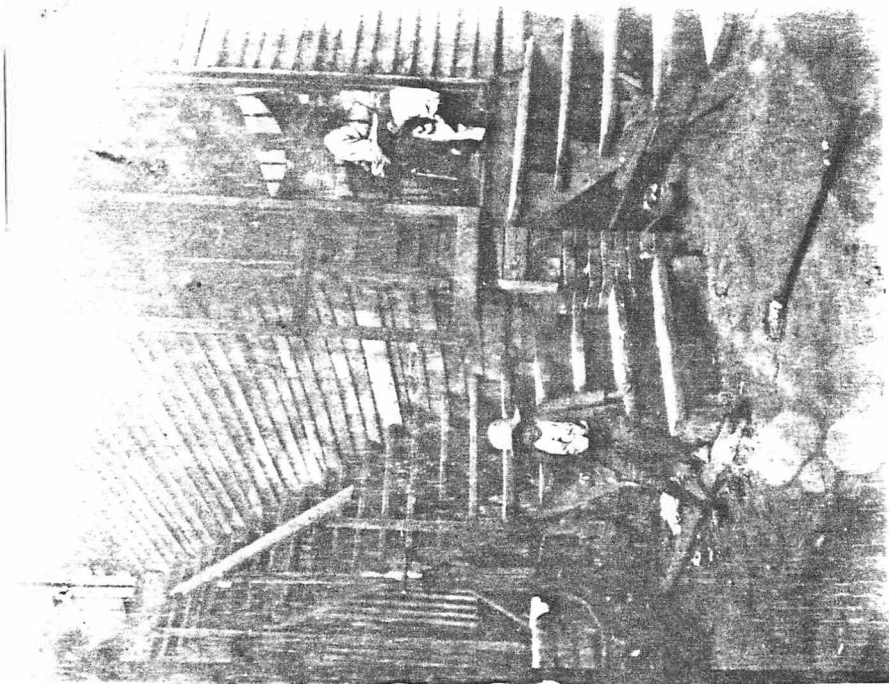
Visual comparison of the interiors and furnishings of the Mallory-Neely House with that of average to poor Memphians during the turn-of-the-century is more difficult, but what remains reveals an even greater gulf between classes. Furniture used by the middle class during this period still abounds in the city's antique and junk shops and in many family homes. Frequent furniture store advertisements in the daily newspapers also illustrate this inexpensive, middle-range furniture. (Figures 339 and 340) Most of it was mass produced at Grand Rapids and other manufacturing centers. (Figure 341) Not all, but much of it, is cheaply constructed. It is difficult to give this furniture a name since in order to make it more economical, it is characterized by stylistic ambiguity. Usually there is a slight reference to a historic style, most often the rococo. Much of this is today popularly labeled the "Golden Oak" style.⁴¹ (Figure 342) Suites of this furniture were popular: parlor, bedroom, and dining room sets abound. The Campbell Furniture Company of Memphis, for example, illustrated a complete bedroom suite in golden oak for \$13.50!⁴² The firm of Rosenbaum & Mendel announced in their 4 November 1900 advertisement that they had searched the furniture marts of the North and East and had purchased the best goods from these for

⁴¹See Oak Furniture: Styles and Prices (Des Moines, Iowa: Wallace Homestead Book Company, 1978).

⁴²Memphis Daily Appeal [advertisement], 21 October 1900, 9.

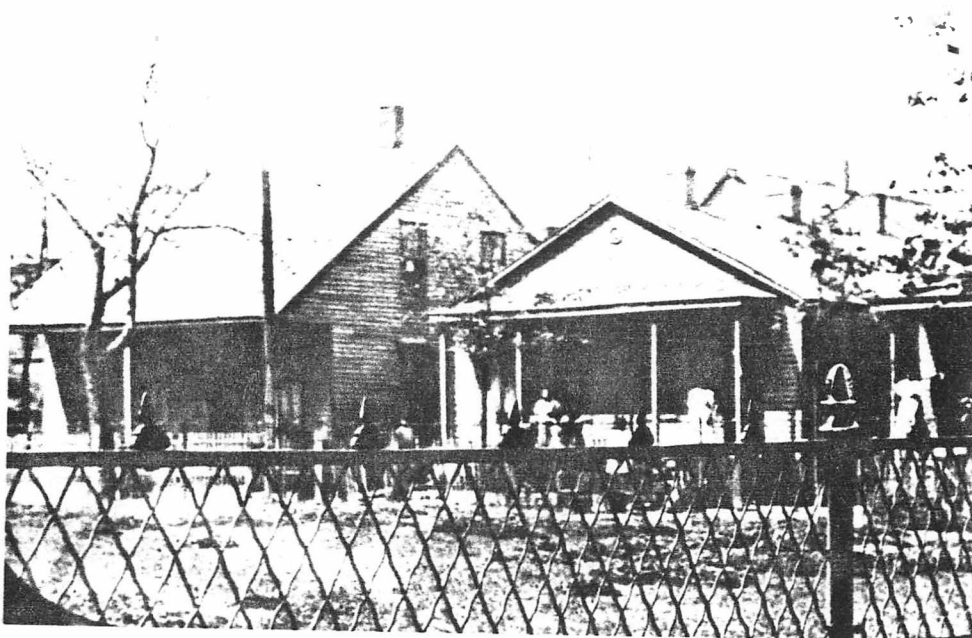


A

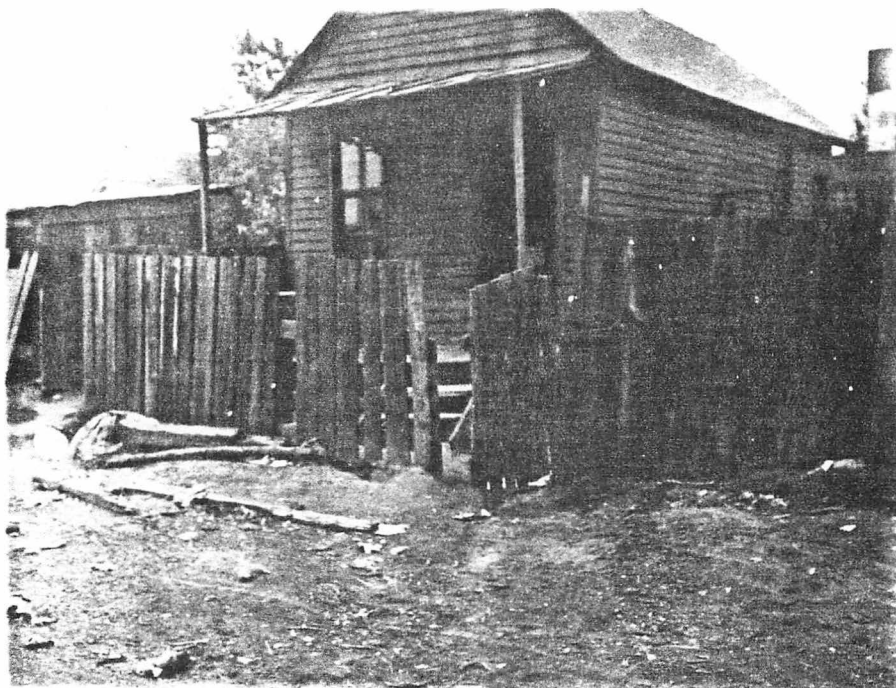


B

Figure 337. Photographs of turn-of-the-century slum housing in Memphis from the Susan Coulan Scruggs Papers. Courtesy Memphis Room, Memphis-Shelby County Public Library and Information Center.
 A. Blighted neighborhood dwelling.
 B. Slum tenement dwelling.



A



B

Figure 338. More photographs of Memphis turn-of-the-century slum housing from the Susan Coulan Scruggs Papers. Courtesy Memphis Room, Memphis-Shelby County Public Library and Information Center.
A. Wood framed rental housing.
B. Tenement dwelling.

DESIGN FINISH LOW PRICES

WINNERS IN THE FURNITURE RACE

Campbell's OF COURSE.

It was a master stroke of a clever buyer that enabled us to sell a

Solid Oak, Braco-Armed Dining Chair, at **75c**



Davenport \$25.00



Neatly made up, upholstered in velvet, all colors, oak and mahogany. We don't blame a dealer to be tempted to charge more than

Dealers not selling as many as we would have to get more for this

CHIFFONIER \$8.75



Golden oak, two top drawers, French Plate glass mirror, finely carved.

..351..
MAIN STREET
MEMPHIS

Campbell Furniture Co.

WHOLESALE
..AND..
..RETAIL..

Figure 339. A 7 October 1900 Memphis newspaper advertisement showing characteristic pieces of turn-of-the-century middle class furniture.

ROSENBAUM & MENDEL

70, 72, 72½ BEALE STREET.

YOUR CREDIT IS GOOD.

MAIL ORDERS SOLICITED

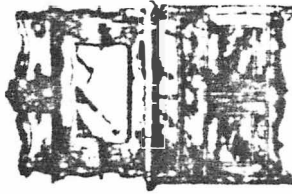
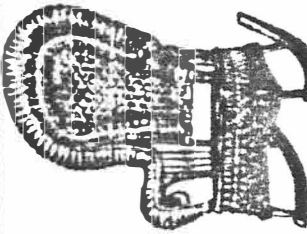
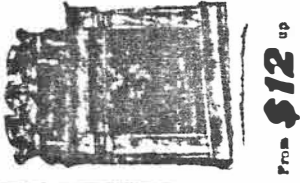
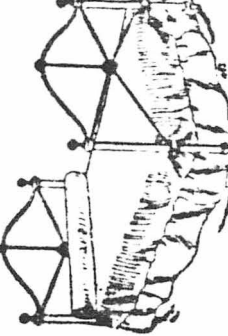
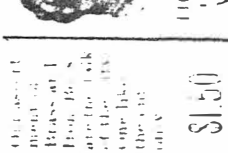
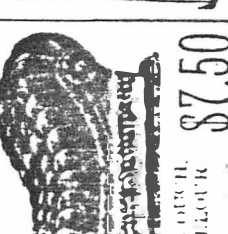
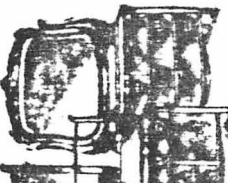
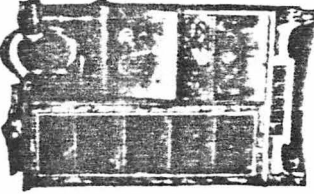
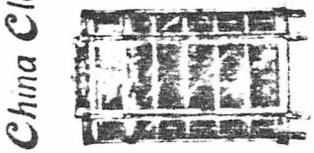
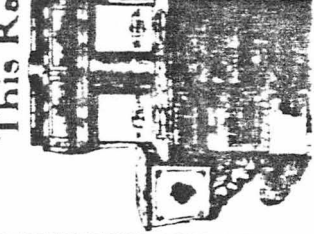
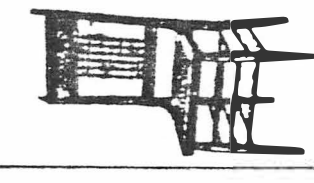
Solid Oak Side-board  \$10	All Kinds of Chiffoniers  \$6	Willow Rockers Like Out  \$3.50	Upright Metal or Iron Folding Beds, All Sizes, Oak or Mahogany.  From \$12 up
China Closet  \$15.00	Double Strength Bedstead  \$7.50	High Back Oak Dining Chairs, Table or Saddle Seat  \$12.35	SOLID OAK Three-Place BED ROOM SUIT, with French plate mirror.  \$12.35
Combination Book Case and Writing Desk Oak or Mahogany  \$8.00	China Closet  \$18.50	This Range  with a complete set of Cooking Vessels. \$25 A 5 year guarantee as complete as the range.	High Back Oak Dining Chairs, Table or Saddle Seat  750

Figure 340. A 7 October 1900 Memphis newspaper advertisement showing characteristic turn-of-the-century middle class furniture.

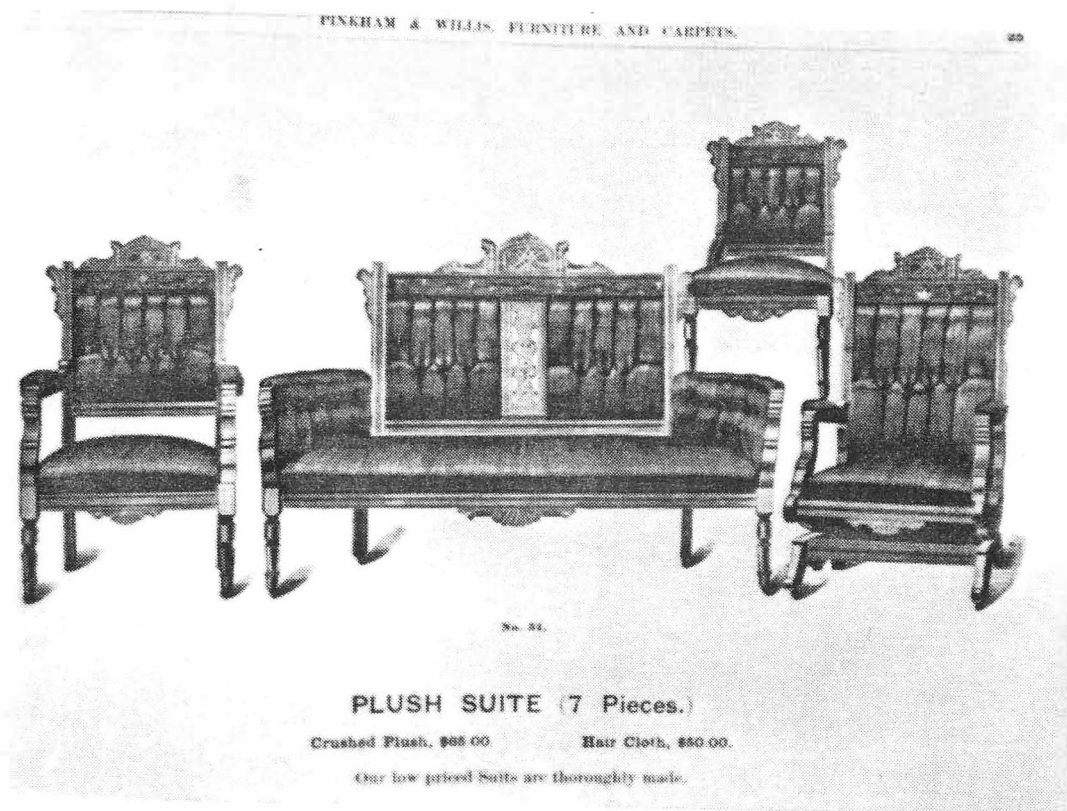


Figure 341. Page from the 1889 catalog of the Pinkham & Willis Company showing a characteristic parlor suite priced moderately for the middle class market. Compare this suite with the more costly Mallory-Neely Renaissance Revival suite shown in Figures 253-255, pages 624-626, respectively.

Bookcases—Continued



hookcase
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of desk is
th pigeon
Weight
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ite \$16

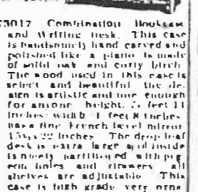


This case and
 well made of
 and "carved"
 Height 6
 3 feet 5
 inch level
 All shelves
 size of desk in
 with pigeon
 This case is
 a good de
 pounds

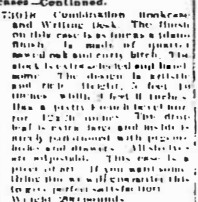
..... \$18.95



3915 Combination Bookcase and Writing Desk. Made of quarter sawed oak, richly carved and polished. Is extra large, height 6 feet 6 inches wide, 3 feet 9 inches, has a fine French bevel mirror, 14x16 inches, shelves are adjustable. Desk is nicely partitioned with pigeon holes and drawers. An extra fine case for little money. Weight, 200 pounds. Price..... \$20.25



3017. Conventional Workbench and Writing Desk. This case is handcut and hand carved and polished like a piano to make of solid oak and curly birch. The wood used in this case is superior and beautiful. The design is simple and functional enough for anyone. Height: 2 feet 11 inches; width 1 foot 4 inches; has fine French level mirror 13 1/2 x 22 inches. The deep leaf desk is extra large and is most beautiful and a thing of beauty. Inlaid and drawers all shelves are adjustable. This case is high grade very ornate.



red ink 29 10



028 Combination
Bookcase
and Writing
Desk, made in
solid oak, neatly



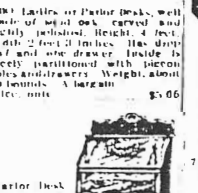
arved and polished
 height 3 feet
 width 3 feet
 of glass in
 doors 14 in-
 ches. Also a
 top leaf desk
 with 2 large
 drawers shelves
 are adjustable
 finished in
 The best
 combination
 oak in the
 Weight,
 73020



11H 2 feet 11 inches. Has a
 under desk, nicely partitioned
 drawers, 13x10 inches. Size of glass
 doors, 13x10 inches. Well made
 cheap. Weight, 175 pounds.
 Price \$20.00

1 Combination Hookcase and
 Writing Desk, made in walnut or
 oak; richly carved and pol-
 ished. height, 7 feet 6 inches;
 length, 3 feet 4 inches; size of glass
 doors, 15x12 inches; has a cy-
 linder lock, under desk, nicely partitioned with
 drawers, 13x10 inches. Size of glass
 doors, 13x10 inches. Well made
 adjustable. Weight, 200 lbs.
 Price \$24.00

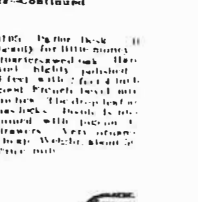
2 Parker Desks



11. **Wardrobe or Parlor Dresser**, well
 made of wood oak, carved and
 highly polished. Height, 4 feet,
 width 2 feet 3 inches. Has draw-
 ers and one drawer inside is
 neatly partitioned with pigeon
 holes and drawers. Weight, about
 150 lbs. A bargain.
 Price, only \$5.00



12. **Wardrobe or Parlor Dresser**, well
 made of wood oak, carved and
 highly polished. Height, 4 feet,
 width 2 feet 3 inches. Has draw-
 ers and one drawer inside is
 neatly partitioned with pigeon
 holes and drawers. Weight, about
 150 lbs. A bargain.
 Price, only \$5.00



verminderd draak



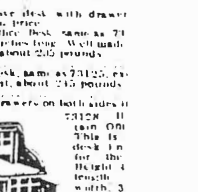
perfectly satisfactory
set line of desks. In our
one. We can furnish po
holes for 15 cents or

Desks

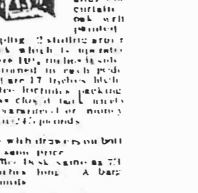
Desks



701 55 Two
 other 100
 to a la
 von M.
 of solid
 polished
 4 feet 3
 inches, 1
 inches
 point 5
 knife 4
 inch, a
 writing 1
 ed on the
 1/2 inch
 2 sliding
 back operated by four
 ties with double end



we deal with drawers
price. Best name as 71
wells long. Well made
about 215 pounds
ask name as 71 215. ca.
it, about 215 pounds
drawers on both sides it
71128 11
can 000
This is
desk in
for
Height 4
length
width, 3

[illegible]

is with drawers on
the floor

Courtesy Dover Publications, Inc.

the Memphis market.⁴³ Golden oak furnishings of all kinds are illustrated along with metal beds and an assortment of inexpensive wicker pieces. Another company, Hunter's, illustrated in their various ads all kinds of furniture with vague reference to the Louis XV style including an oak lady's desk listed at \$3.98, a large hall seat mirror listed at \$12.50, and a fancy rocker at \$2.75.⁴⁴ (Figure 343) These provide a contrast in quality compared to the grand furnishings of the Mallory-Neely House.

The Sears Roebuck Company and Montgomery Ward Company catalogs of the later decades of the century are filled with illustrations of decorative furnishings for the middle class American home. Much of it is very similar to the stylish items in the Mallory-Neely House but of much cheaper quality and poorer design. (Figure 344) These illustrations include parquet flooring, lace and drapery panels, portieres, and Brussels roll carpeting.⁴⁵

As would be expected, very little is known about the interiors and furnishings of the laboring class and the poor.⁴⁶ One stunning

⁴³Memphis Daily Appeal [advertisement], 4 November 1900, 7.

⁴⁴Memphis Daily Appeal [advertisement], 4 November 1900, 12.

⁴⁵See Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog & Buyers Guide--No. 57, Spring and Summer, 1895; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969, and The 1897 Sears-Roebuck Catalogue No. 104; reprint, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1968.

⁴⁶See Lizabeth Cohen, "Respectability at \$50.00 Down, 25 Months to Pay! Furnishing a Working-Class Victorian Home," Victorian Furniture, ed. Kenneth Ames (Philadelphia: The Victorian Society in America, 1982), 233-242.

FURNITURE

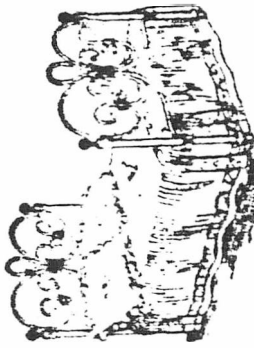
HUNTER'S

FURNITURE

New Shipment Enamel Beds

enables us to make special offering
in this attractive pattern at

\$3.98



Ladies' Desks,

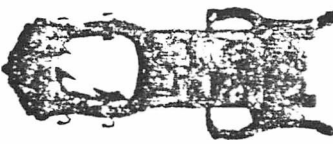


DESK AND
MIRROR

\$3.98

Dressing Tables **\$6.98,**
\$8.50, \$10.00

Hall Seat Mirrors



REGENT
CHAIR AND
STANDING
MIRROR

This
exceptional
value for
money
golden opportunity

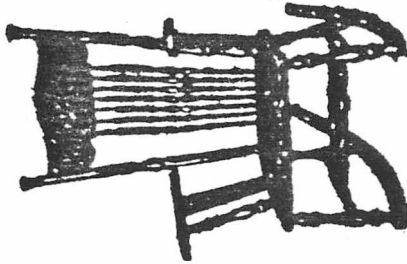
\$12.50

WE HAVE THEM FROM **\$4.98** UP

Fancy Rockers

large lot to select from. This pattern, oak or mahogany, leather seat, neat in design and finish, only

\$2.75



Dining Room Furniture is a special strong point with us, and for this week we offer real bargains in sideboards, tables, chairs, and chairs (chairs, come and see, for we can save you money.

Bamboo novelties in ladies seats, tables, window chairs, corner chairs, what not, etc.

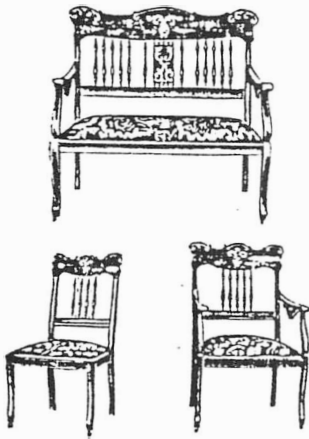
Our pieces and full suite for the perfect leather parlor and colour couch.

Figure 343. A 4 November 1900 Memphis newspaper advertisement for Hunter's Furniture Company. It shows characteristic pieces of turn-of-the-century middle class furniture.

MONTGOMERY WARD & CO.'S CATALOGUE No. 57.

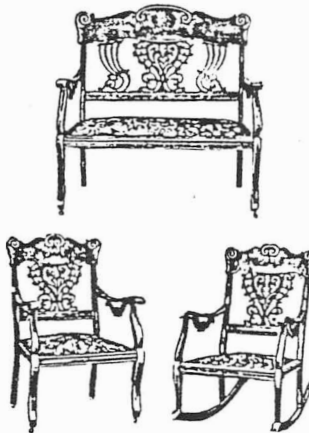
599

Parlor Furniture—Continued.



72002 Parlor Suit. Here is a beautiful reception parlor suit, made of solid oak, natural birch of imitation mahogany, and richly upholstered in brocade, velvety or plush, samples mailed free. Frame is nicely carved and well heated. This is just the thing for a small house. Weight, about 125 pounds. Suit consists of sofa, arm chair and parlor.

Grade.	H.	K.	L.	P.	S.
Sofa.....	\$7.00	\$7.20	\$7.45	\$8.20	\$8.75
Arm chair.....	4.75	5.05	5.25	6.85	6.35
Parlor.....	3.15	3.35	3.60	3.85	4.25
	\$14.93	\$15.70	\$16.20	\$18.00	\$19.35



72003 Suit. This is a very ornamental and pretty reception suit. Made in natural birch, imitation mahogany or solid oak, hand carved and nicely finished. Samples of covering mailed free. The stock in this suit is very select and handsome, very comfortable and well made. Weight, about 150 pounds. Suit consists of sofa, arm chair, rocker and parlor.

	F.	G.	H.	K.	L.	P.	S.
Sofa.....	\$8.25	\$8.45	\$8.74	\$9.02	\$9.20	\$10.10	\$12.07
Arm chair.....	5.00	5.08	5.27	5.40	5.65	7.00	7.00
Rockers.....	5.87	5.97	6.03	6.22	6.35	7.00	7.00
Parlor.....	3.50	3.56	3.67	3.75	3.81	4.00	5.00
	\$22.57	\$22.98	\$23.77	\$24.26	\$24.76	\$27.10	\$31.07

Parlor Furniture—Continued.



72004 Parlor Suit, made of solid oak and finished antique of imitation mahogany, covered with plush (velvety or plush) and trimmed with silk plush, has spring edge which is very comfortable. This is a beauty for the money. Weight, about 220 pounds. Samples mailed free upon request.

	D.	E.	F.	G.	H.
Sofa.....	\$11.50	\$8.85	\$7.40	\$7.75	\$8.05
Arm chair.....	3.30	3.70	3.90	4.05	4.15
Rockers.....	4.55	4.95	6.10	7.25	5.40
Parlor.....	4.05	5.10	5.25	5.55	5.85
Suit comp. 6 pieces.....	2.00	2.10	2.40	3.00	3.12
	\$24.50	\$24.00	\$35.25	\$28.60	\$30.00



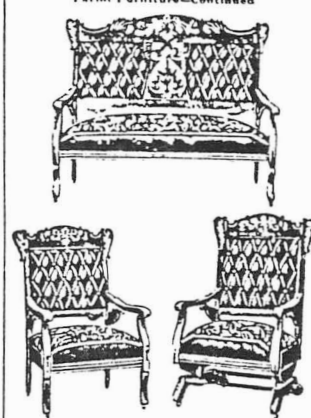
72005 Parlor Suit. This suit is nicely upholstered in plush or tapestry and trimmed in good silk plush, richly fringed, very handsome and durable. Weight, about 200 pounds. The corner chair in this suit is very artistic and pretty. This is the cheapest suit of this style on the market. This suit has arm chair same style as rocker. In place of corner chair as cut shown. Consists of the pieces as follows:

	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade
	H.	K.	P.	L.	S.
Sofa.....	\$8.00	\$8.32	\$8.65	\$9.10	\$10.55
Arm chair.....	5.20	5.30	5.85	5.80	7.45
Rockers.....	6.17	6.50	6.90	7.45	7.80
Parlor.....	3.25	3.45	3.50	3.70	4.15
Suit comp. 5 pieces.....	3.25	3.45	3.50	3.70	4.15
	\$25.00	\$27.12	\$28.40	\$30.65	\$35.00

TO the best of our knowledge and belief we sell more Baby Carriages than any other one firm in America, outside of wholesalers. We are able, therefore, to secure the latest styles and designs, the best workmanship and the lowest prices.

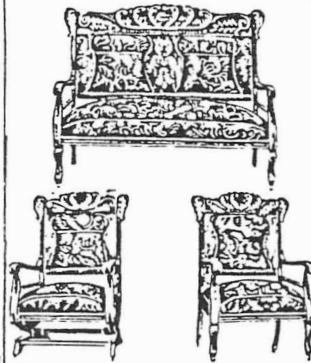
We Give What We Get.

Parlor Furniture—Continued.



72006 Parlor Suit, made of solid oak, carved and nicely finished, well heated and very durable. Richly upholstered in plush, tapestry, or brocade, samples mailed free, upon request. This is a beautiful and showy suit for little money. Weight, 220 pounds.

	D.	E.	F.	G.	H.	K.
Sofa.....	\$8.12	\$8.05	\$8.05	\$9.30	\$9.35	\$10.20
Arm chair.....	4.00	4.25	4.05	5.15	5.15	5.45
Rockers.....	5.90	6.00	6.20	6.35	6.50	6.65
Parlor.....	3.00	3.00	3.20	3.75	3.75	3.75
Suit comp. 6 pieces.....	3.15	3.60	3.70	3.85	3.85	4.25
	\$31.40	\$32.50	\$33.70	\$35.05	\$36.30	\$38.05



72007 Parlor Suit, extra large and heavy. Made of solid oak, finished antique or imitation mahogany. Frames are all hand carved and richly carved. This suit is well heated and very strong. Seats have spring edges. Weight, about 225 pounds. Extra good value.

	D.	E.	F.	G.	H.	K.	L.
Sofa.....	\$10.15	\$10.45	\$10.40	\$11.10	\$11.55	\$12.10	\$13.75
Arm chair.....	5.40	5.52	5.70	6.00	6.35	7.00	7.30
Rockers.....	6.05	6.00	7.00	7.30	7.40	8.25	8.55
Parlor.....	3.00	3.00	4.00	4.15	4.40	5.05	5.40
Suit comp. 5 pieces.....	3.00	3.00	4.15	4.40	4.55	5.05	5.40
	\$30.60	\$32.07	\$32.60	\$35.10	\$36.20	\$40.80	\$46.00

SEND FOR...
SPECIAL CATALOGUE E,
Showing Spring and Summer Styles as made up in our Dress Making Department. You'll agree that home sewing doesn't pay.

Figure 344. Typical pieces of American middle class furniture as illustrated in the 1895 Montgomery Ward catalog. Courtesy Dover Publications, Inc.

photograph, though, in the Scruggs' Collection taken of an immigrant family standing in the filthy rundown interior of their modest home suffices. (Figure 345) It is a priceless document. The full impact of the economic and social class differences that existed in Memphis during the Victorian Era are evident in the comparison of this interior with the Mallory-Neely parlor.

Apparently the poor purchased whatever they could afford; but, as they still do, they probably made do with homemade objects, thrown away refuse, and junk. It is an old Southern tradition to give worn out or outmoded household items and furnishings to poor blacks. The poor inherited the discarded neighborhoods, architecture, and furnishings of the more fortunate.

Late nineteenth century Memphis, like other typical American towns, experienced phenomenal industrial and economic growth and because of this a mushrooming population. Social order within this rapidly changing urban setting was established in part through the visual symbolism of neighborhood location, garden surroundings, home, and interior furnishings. But these were not the only class-oriented communicative symbols used at that time.

The Mallory-Neely Interiors: A Stage for Victorian Ritual

A major source of class power is for the ruling elite to convince the rest of society that they are "superior beings" who have

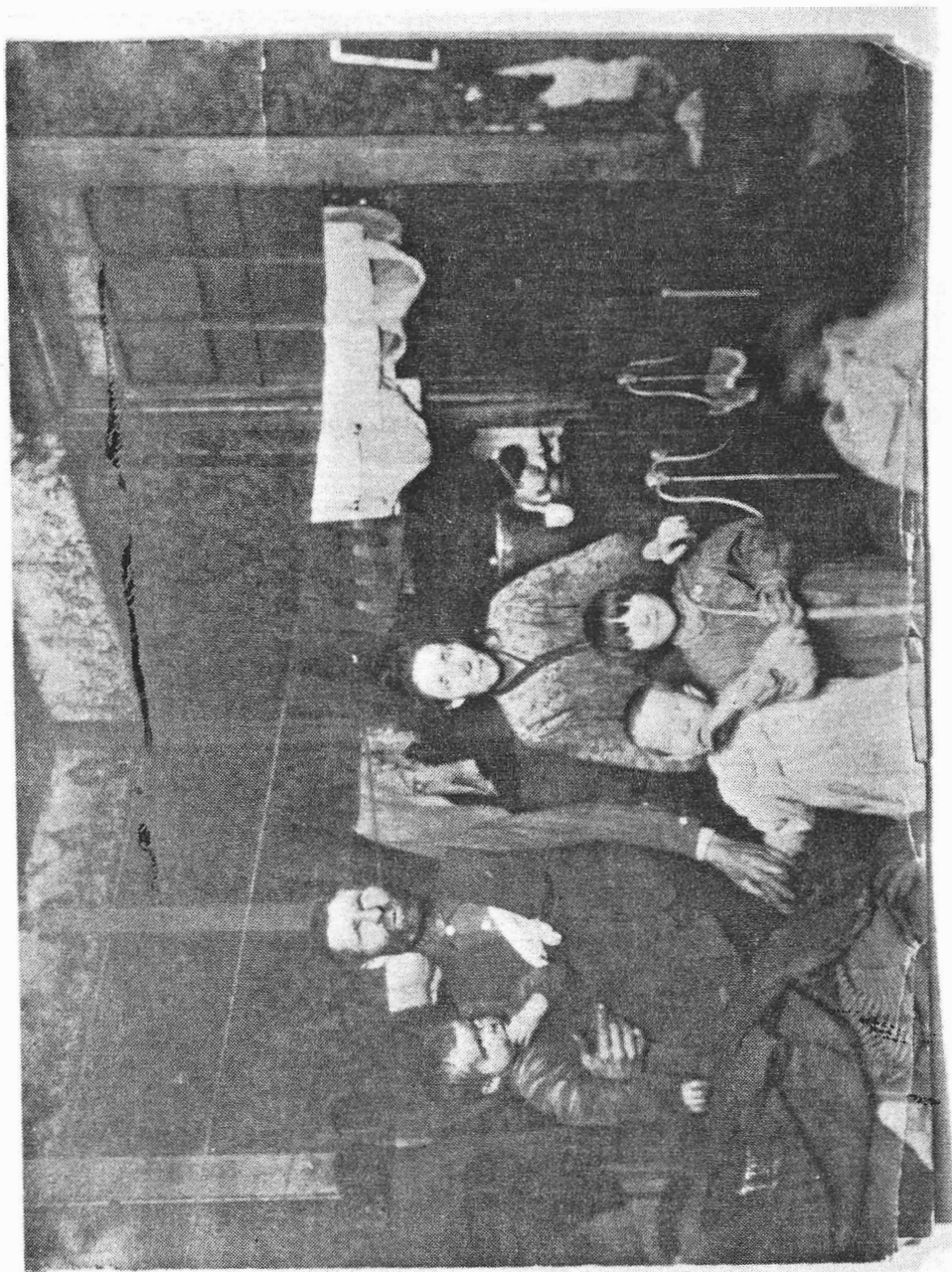


Figure 345. Photograph of a poor Memphis family taken inside their home from the Susan Coulan Scruggs Papers. Courtesy Memphis Room, Memphis-Shelby County Library and Information Center.

the moral authority to rule without force.⁴⁷ To do this they resorted to the use of signals, communication, speech, and manners that set them apart from the other classes. In order for a class system to exist, there must also be defined boundaries and restricted membership.⁴⁸ Certain symbolic functions and actions constitute a social barometer and a visual demonstration of belonging.⁴⁹ America's new business nobility looked to the European aristocratic system not only for material visual symbols, but they also adopted and adapted its social rituals and modes of behavior. Accordingly, membership in America's new financial elite usually required the following (all based on European prototypes): mastery of social etiquette and deportment; education at exclusive private schools; membership in private clubs; fulfillment of social obligations, particularly charitable works; interest in and sponsorship of art and culture; conspicuous leisure activity such as travel, racing, and hunting; and especially participation in publicized social and ceremonial ritual, including the social season with its debut parties, balls, receptions, banquets, and weddings.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Richard L. Bushman, "The World of Gentility," Paper presented at the Winterthur Winter Institute, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, 22 January 1985.

⁴⁸Williams, 22.

⁴⁹George Talbot, At Home: Domestic Life in the Post-Centennial Era, 1876-1920 [exhibition catalog], Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin (Spring 1976-Fall 1977), vi.

⁵⁰See Jack L. Roach, Llewellyn Gross, and Orwell R. Gursslin, Social Stratification in the United States (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), 155-158; and Suzanne I. Keller, Beyond the Ruling Class (New York: Random House, 1963), 304-305.

Late-century Memphis elite, like their counterparts in similar towns across the nation followed suit. Private academies were founded for the education of their children. Etiquette and deportment were high on the curriculum of these finishing schools. J. C. Neely's daughters attended the city's exclusive Clara Conway Preparatory Institute. Later both attended Mrs. Sylvanus Reed's Finishing School at 5th Avenue and 53rd Street in New York, where children of that city's leading families, including those of W. H. Vanderbilt, were enrolled.

In the school's catalog Mrs. Reed described her academy as a "girls' school of rank." In the introduction she stated that its pupils are drawn "from American families of the highest social and intellectual culture."⁵¹ While there, along with deportment, the Neely girls studied history, elocution, French, and drawing. For additional enrichment they attended opera and the philharmonic, visited museums, and learned to dance at Dodworth's Dancing Academy and mastered equestrian skills at Dickel's Riding Academy. Mrs. Reed emphasized in the catalog that it was the school's purpose to prepare its students for their place in civilized society.⁵² (Figure 346)

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, clubs of all types, including social, charitable, and educational

⁵¹New York, Mrs. Sylvanus Reed's French and English Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies (New York: n.d.), 1, Folder 128, Special Collections, New York Historical Society, New York.

⁵²Ibid., 2.



Figure 346. Miss Pearl Neely. Courtesy Barton Lee Mallory, Jr.

ones, proliferated in the city. There were so many in fact that a reporter in a 1905 Evening Scimitar article described Memphis as the "Queen of Clubs."⁵³ Those founded by the city's elite, such as the Tennessee Club, the Memphis Country Club, and the Chicasaw Guards, had an exclusive and restricted membership including the Mallorys and the Neelys.

Thorsten Veblen stated that an important characteristic of the leisured class is charitable activity which symbolically sets them above those they are helping.⁵⁴ Late in the century there was a national trend among women's clubs to do charitable works.⁵⁵ The first to do so in Memphis was the Vanity Fair Book Club (1892) of which Miss Daisy Neely was a founding member.⁵⁶ The Nineteenth Century Club, another elite women's club, still in existence, was founded in 1870 by Mrs. Clarence Seldon as a social, educational, civic, and philanthropic organization.⁵⁷ She received her inspiration for the club while visiting a similar one in New York City. The Nineteenth Century Club's motto, "Influence is Responsibility," reflects

⁵³"Women's Clubs of Memphis," Art Supplement to the House Warming Edition of the Memphis Evening Scimitar (1903), 28-29.

⁵⁴Veblen, 246.

⁵⁵See Sheila M. Rothman, Women's Proper Place, A History of Changing Ideas and Practices, 1870 to the Present (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978).

⁵⁶"Death Marks End of Era When Charities Eclipsed Parties," The Commercial Appeal, 30 July 1970, 1(2).

⁵⁷Memphis Clubs Folder, Special Collections, Memphis-Shelby County Public Library.

the spirit of noblesse oblige" felt by these wealthy women. The various women's organizations did manage to do a lot of good for the Memphis community, raising funds to sponsor hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged, a shelter for stranded and unemployed women and children, day nurseries, and free kindergarten.⁵⁸

Interest in the arts also mushroomed among the elite in late nineteenth century Memphis as it did across the nation. Conspicuous art activity often included membership by the wealthy in one or more of the city's numerous culture-oriented clubs such as the Memphis Art League, The Shakespeare Club, or the Mozart, Mendelson, Apollo, and Beethoven Societies.⁵⁹ Surviving letters in the Trezevant and Snowdon Family Papers and those of Mrs. Robertson Topp and Leila Nichol Griffing attest to the importance of cultural activities in the lives of elite Memphis families.⁶⁰ In these, occasional mention is made of the social season being enlivened by music festivals, parlor concerts, theatre box parties, orchestral concerts and recitals featuring visiting singers, pianists, and violinists.

⁵⁸"Women's Clubs of Memphis," 29.

⁵⁹Capers, 228-229.

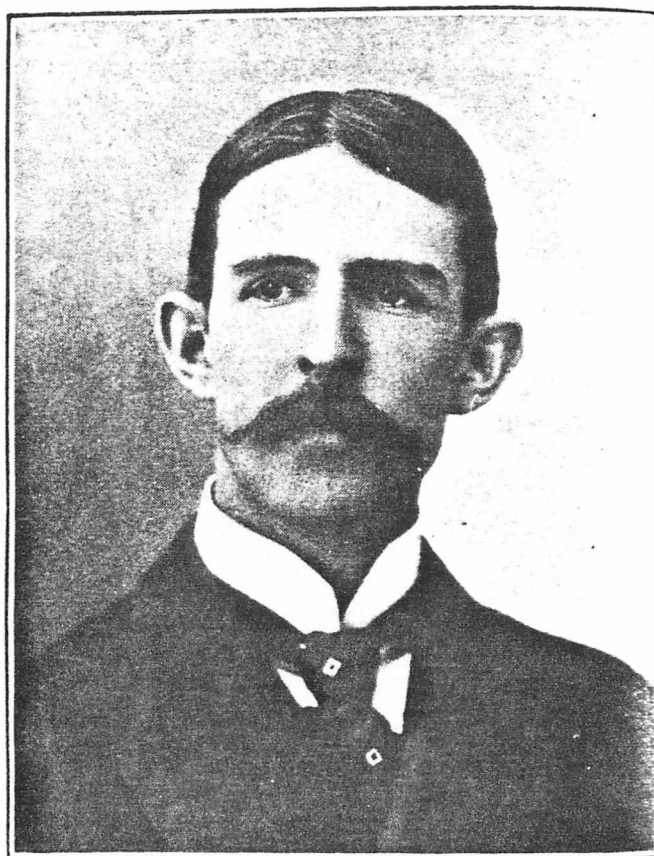
⁶⁰The Trezevant Family Papers are in the Memphis-Shelby County Public Library. The Snowdon Family Papers are in the Mississippi Valley Collection of the Memphis State University Library. Mrs. Topp's papers are in the Robertson Topp Papers at Rhodes College, Memphis. A photocopy of extracts from letters by Leila Nichol Griffing (c. 1876) is in the Memphis-Shelby County Public Library.

Reviews as well as advertisements of the wide variety of dramatic plays, musicals, and operettas performed in the city's theatres appeared in Memphis newspapers. They also recorded visits to the city of such theatrical luminaries as Sarah Bernhardt, Edwin Booth, Lilly Langtry, and Otis Skinner. The newspapers often listed the names of the city's elite who attended these various theatrical performances. A reporter in The Memphis Appeal, for example, stated at the beginning of his article describing the opening night of the new Lyceum Theatre that the whole assemblage of those in attendance "was splendidly representative of the wealth, fashion, and culture of the city."⁶¹ Listed among those "In the Boxes" were Miss Daisy Neely, Mr. J. C. Neely, Jr. and Miss Mary Mallory. (Figure 347)

Wagner's Lohengrin, Gounod's Faust, and Puccini's La Boheme were among the many classics offered in the Grand Opera House. The minutes of The Grand Opera House Company record the discussion relating to the drawing by its subscribers (J. C. Neely among them) for their elite box seating. Their documented statements stress the importance to them of the symbolism of civic and social rank represented in the hierarchical arrangement of the seats in the opera house and the importance they placed on their families being seen in the most exclusive of these by those in attendance.⁶²

⁶¹Memphis Appeal, 30 September 1870, 1.

⁶²Grand Opera House Company 1888-1892, Minute Book, Special Collections, Memphis-Shelby County Public Library, 52.



J. C. NEELY, JR.

Figure 347. Mr. James Columbus Neely, Jr. Courtesy Memphis Room, Memphis-Shelby County Public Library and Information Center.

Aristocratic leisurely pastimes also came to play a prominent role in Memphis social life at this time. International travel by prominent Memphians was often reported in the society columns. The detailed description of prominent businessman John S. Toof's three-month European tour is illustrative. The reporter states that Toof traveled round-trip via the luxurious Cunard steamer Aurania. While on the continent he toured art museums and cultural attractions in seven countries. A newspaper reporter quoted Toof as saying: "The recollections of the countless works of art we saw will never fade from my mind."⁶³

Memphis business executive Henry Montgomery founded The Montgomery Park Race Track and served as president of the Memphis Jockey Club.⁶⁴ The club sponsored the Tennessee Derby and several seasons of racing annually. These became major status activities for the city's elite, as equestrian sports still are to this day for aristocrats in Europe and elsewhere.⁶⁵

A lengthy article in the 1890 Memphis Appeal entitled "Hunting and Fishing" describes the city's various elite outing clubs or lodges

⁶³"A Tour Through Europe," Memphis Daily Appeal, 17 July 1887, 3.

⁶⁴Henry Montgomery Papers, Box I, Folder I, Special Collections, Memphis-Shelby County Public Library.

⁶⁵For an illustrative season's schedule, see "New Memphis Jockey Club," Memphis Daily Appeal, 18 October 1883, 7.

whose rolls "represent the most prominent merchants and professional men of the city."⁶⁶ The Arkansas Prairie Club, The Memphis Outing Club, The Blackfish Gunning and Trolling Club, and The Beaver Dam Ducking Club were just a few of the many hunting clubs mentioned. The article cited by name the elite members of each of these lodges. W. B. Mallory, for example, was listed as vice-president of the Arkansas Prairie Club, the oldest hunting society in the city. The accompanying description of the club's activities communicated well to the average Memphis citizen the aristocratic nature of its approach to the hunt and the conspicuous leisure of its membership.

Prairie hunting is of all field sports the most luxurious. The huntsmen travel in spring wagons with Irish, Laverac, Lewellyn and native setters, and also pointers, ranging in front and on either side. When a staunch point is made the hunters slight and fire right and left at the coveys, which are then marked down. They then mount again, ride to the scattered bires and resume the sport. The meals to which they sit down at night are enough to make an epicure smack his lips by the bare mention. Besides the good things they carry over, they have eight or ten kinds of game at each meal--wild turkey, goose, prairie chicken, quail, snipe, duck, deer, possum, rabbit, and occasionally woodcock.⁶⁷

By late century social ritual and etiquette were yet other methods used to differentiate class in Memphis and elsewhere in the United States. Family ritual, ranging from formal weddings and funerals to the informal such as church attendance and dining, was important through most of the century to the Victorians. The emphasis

⁶⁶"Hunting and Fishing," Memphis Appeal, 28 September 1890, 10.

⁶⁷Ibid.

placed on these rites was a major method of reinforcing the primacy of family and home within the social structure.

Many of these family ceremonies as well as others were elaborated into symbolic social ritual with accompanying etiquette that became an important part of the late Victorian class structure. The etiquette of social calling, dinners, dances, weddings, and the debutante season were just some of the many. The public view of these society rituals through newspaper coverage was a major method of communicating elitism.

Filled with aesthetic material culture the ceremonial rooms of the Mallory-Neely House and others of its kind served as settings for these symbolic rituals. Harvey Green in The Light of the Home observed that the rooms which constituted the public sphere of the Victorian house were "devoted to the rituals of communication and show."⁶⁸ The network of ceremonial rooms in the Mallory-Neely House, including the entrance hallway, parlor, music room, sitting room and dining room, were created as the stage set of a social theatre in which symbolic aristocratic ritual was performed. (Figure 348) The carefully chosen symbol-laden artifacts used in these areas were the stage props. The conspicuous use of so much space reserved primarily for social functions was in itself a symbol of wealth.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Green, The Light of the Home, 31.

⁶⁹Nicholas Cooper, The Opulent Eye: Late Victorian and Edwardian Taste in Interior Design (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1977), 7.

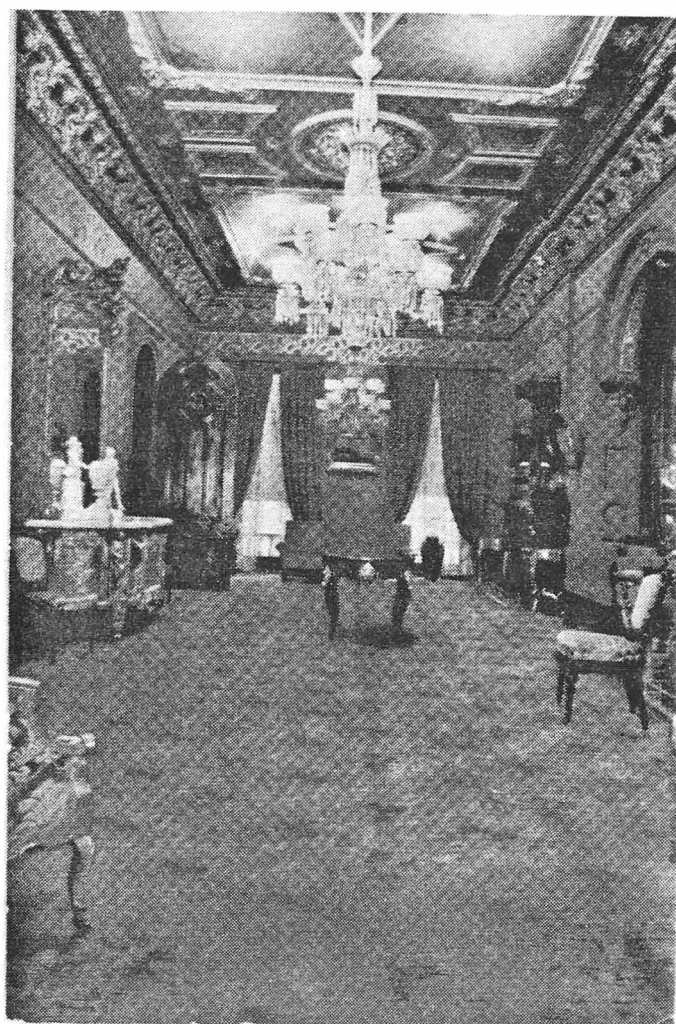


Figure 348. The Mallory-Neely parlor, sometimes called "the dancing room" in newspaper accounts, was the appropriately appointed scene for the staging of numerous social functions.

The middle class following the example of the elite set aside their parlors for similar functions on a much diminished scale.⁷⁰

The society columns in late century Memphis daily newspapers effectively chronicle the communicative symbolic social ritual staged and acted in by the city's ruling financial elite. Society events held in the Mallory-Neely House ceremonial rooms are among those so reported. Two of the more floridly detailed of these recount the 2 December 1890 debut party given for Daisy Neely and the 27 May 1890 wedding of her sister, Pearl. (See Appendix B, Figures B-1 and B-2). In this instance written documentation and material culture artifacts complement each other to such an extent that the reader could easily discern the ceremonial function of the space described.

The society reporters gave detailed accounts of these Memphis social functions, often listing the elite in attendance and describing their attire, the decoration used, the food served, the entertainment and activities that took place. They consequently set apart members of the well-to-do class from the average and poorer citizens of Memphis because of their ability to engage in conspicuous display.

The manner in which these columns were written also helped to communicate the idea of exclusiveness. Peppered throughout these descriptions of social functions are references to the interiors and furnishings of the homes of the elite hosts and/or hostesses in which adjectives like "palatial," "kingly," "princely," "aristocratic," and others are used.

⁷⁰Lynes, The Domesticated Americans, 149.

Also occasionally emphasized in these articles are "objects of prestige" embedded with communication class symbolism.⁷¹ These include costly props or accessories forming part of the setting or used as ritual implements in the social ceremony, such as silver tea services or presents given as part of the festivity.

The white luncheon given by Mrs. J. C. Neely II Friday afternoon was an affair of unsurpassed beauty and pleasure. . . . The table at which they sat glittered with cut glass and silver in the twinkling light of the white candles set in silver candelabra with white chrysanthemum shades. The centerpiece was a huge cluster of great froway white chrysanthemums set in a silver loving cup on a silver tray.⁷²

Exclusivity is also illustrated in the article describing Daisy Neely's marriage and enumerating her wedding gifts, displayed in the third floor hallway of the Neely home.

The presents were beautiful in the extreme, and show the popularity of the bride and groom. The bride's father and mother presented them with a handsome check, and the groom's parents a chest of massive silver. Three exquisite decanters of cut and Bohemian glass, covered with silver fret work, and five dozen glasses was the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlain, a silver punch bowl of exquisite workmanship from Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Grant, a tea service of Russian silver and old ivory, and the ponderous cut glass punch bowl from the board of directors of the Merchant's Exchange were a few of the many beautiful presents.⁷³

The reporters also often engaged in "name dropping," using brand names associated in the public mind with luxury and aristocracy.

⁷¹Roger D. Abrahams, "The Language of Festivals," Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual, ed. Victor Turner (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 257.

⁷²Commercial Appeal, 11 November 1900, 6.

⁷³Ibid.

For example, in the description of the debut party given for Daisy Neely by her parents reference is to the "exquisite vases of Royal Worcester, Dresden, Doulton, and Crown Derby were filled with rare American beauties."⁷⁴

Along with objects of prestige the society writers seemed to relish itemizing the "conspicuous creations" which decorated these ceremonial affairs.⁷⁵ Used to embellish already ornate interior surroundings, these garnishes helped to symbolize the special nature of a particular event. Also the lavish use of these perishable and often throw-away decorations was another conspicuous sign of wealth. Illustrative of this is the description of the decorations for the grand ball given by the Hugh Neely family in celebration of the opening of their new mansion.

The front door which is a marvel of carving opened into a hallway 14 x 60 in size. At the farther end is a massive mantel, above which is a stained glass window let into the chimney. . . . The mantel was half hidden by calla lilies, geraniums, and in every corner a stately palm reared its head and nodded with graceful familiarity to the guests. . . . The stairway was festooned with trailing arbutus, that seemed to have its root in the same earth that nourished a rose tree in full bloom that graced the floor of the railing. . . . The salon was partially draped in brocaded pink satin and lace, and decorated with palms and pink roses. . . . Suspended from the arch over the entrance to the bay windows was a bell of roses. . . . Immediately back of the salon is a nook finished in cherry and hung with garnet plush. It was tricked out with palms and plants, bearing dark red blossoms. Hanging from the arch between the salon and the little snugery was an umbrella of pink roses. It was a work of art.⁷⁶

⁷⁴Abrahams, 262.

⁷⁵Appeal Avalanche, 2 December 1890, 2.

⁷⁶"Under the Neely Roof," Memphis Appeal, 18 April 1890, 7.

Furnishing the decorations for these society functions was a lucrative business. Elite Memphians brought flowers and plants for this purpose up river by steamer from semi-tropical New Orleans.⁷⁷ City directories and industrial guides of cities such as Chicago and St. Louis list specialist florist decorators. For example, T. J. Corbrey, Florist and Decorator, stated that he furnished "bouquets, wreaths, and various emblematic designs for weddings, balls, parties, and also funerals in new and original conceptions and forms."⁷⁸ Paul Krohn's floral business rented tropical plants such as palms, flowering and decorative house plants. He specialized in the arrangement of these "in the most refined and cultured taste."⁷⁹ The elaborate floral decorations used at Memphis society functions and provided by firms such as these very possible equaled a sizeable portion of the annual income of a poor family.

The well documented events of the late Victorian annual Memphis social calendar can be categorized as follows: general social ritual and entertainment, rites of passage, seasonal ritual, political-civic celebrations, and special festivities.⁸⁰

⁷⁷Victorian Village Arts & Pop Festival '84, Second Annual Commemorative Program, 44.

⁷⁸Half-Century's Progress of the City of Chicago: The City's Leading Manufacturers and Merchants (Chicago: International Publishing Company, 1887), 257, Special Collections, Chicago Historical Society.

⁷⁹Ibid., 249.

⁸⁰See Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual.

General Social Ritual and Entertainment

Social entertainments of all types were "de rigueur" for maintaining one's social standing. They provided periodic opportunity for the display of one's knowledge of social deportment, home, and possessions as symbols of status.

Basic to Victorian social etiquette was the ritualized social call, a topic that has been subject of several articles!⁸¹ At the time many etiquette books were published such as Our Deportment or the Manner, Conduct and Dress of the Most Refined Society (1881), or Decorum: A Treatise on Etiquette and Dress of the Best American Society (1890) which gave detailed instructions as to the design of calling cards; the various types of calls ranging from those of ceremony, friendship, congratulations, to those of condolence; the length of time appropriate for these various calls; and even modes of decorum and conversation suitable while making these calls.⁸²

One of Mrs. J. C. Neely's calling cards survives engraved with her name and those of her two daughters.⁸³ (Figure 349) An Anglo-Japanese style card receiver for her callers' cards sits today on the marble plinth of a large mirrored hall tree in the Mallory-Neely entrance hall as a material culture document of the time when

⁸¹See, for example, Ames, "Meaning in Artifacts: Hall Furnishings in Victorian America."

⁸²John H. Young, Our Deportment or The Manner, Conduct, and Dress of the Most Refined Society (Detroit, Michigan: F. B. Dickerson & Company, 1881); and S. L. Louis, Decorum: A Treatise on Etiquette and Dress of the Best American Society (Chicago: Acme Publishing House, 1881), Special Collections, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware.

⁸³Neely Family Papers.

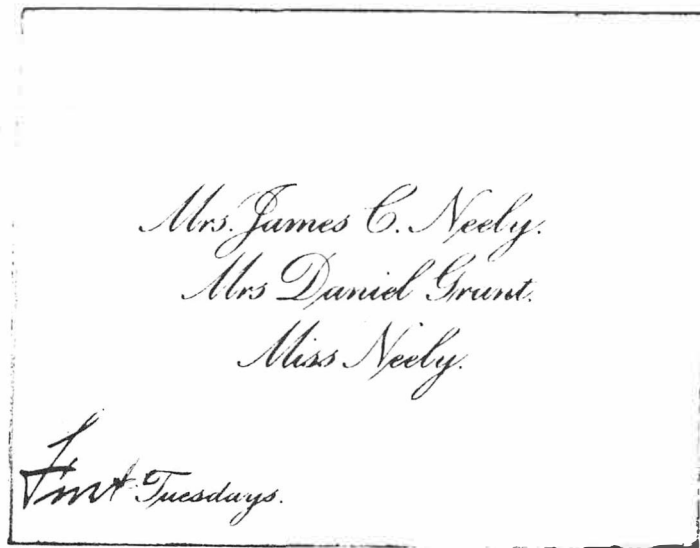


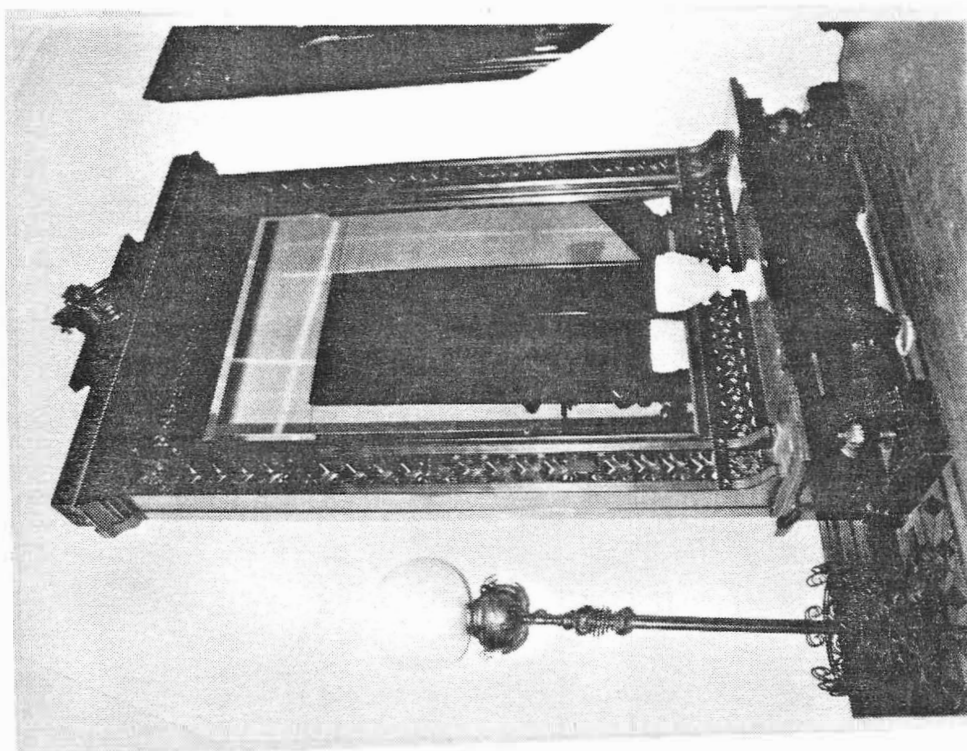
Figure 349. Neely calling card. Courtesy Barton Lee Mallory, Jr.

formalized calls ceremonializing the entering and leaving of a home were of such importance. (Figure 350) Very often the caller went no further than the foyer; therefore, the decor of this area was symbolically charged to communicate the owning family's status. The richly ornamented entrance hall decor, its collection of European and Oriental furniture and accessories, and two large oil portraits showing the Neely daughters in their Parisian debut gowns left no question in the mind of the caller as to this family's position in Memphis society. (Figure 351) Until her death in 1969, Mrs. Daisy Mallory continued something of this Victorian tradition by accepting callers at her locally famous "Mondays--At Home."⁸⁴

Card parties, luncheons and formal dinners, tea parties, receptions, and dances were among the many forms of social entertainment given throughout the year by elite Memphians in their homes. Etiquette books like The Social Mirror and articles in fashionable periodicals such as "The Doings of the Fashionable World" in Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine gave complete instructions on how to stage events such as these, including everything from the invitations to the decorations.⁸⁵

⁸⁴Leeker, "Miss Daisy and Her Remarkable Home," 35.

⁸⁵Cleveland Rose, The Social Mirror (St. Louis: Dan Linahan Publishing Company, 1888), 375, Special Collections, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware; and "Comments Upon the Doings of the Fashionable World," Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine, 56, No. 634, April 1863, 183.

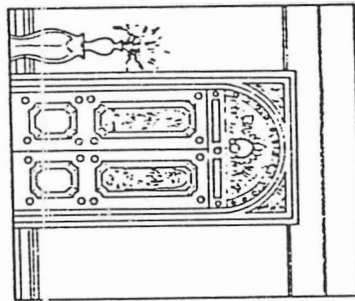
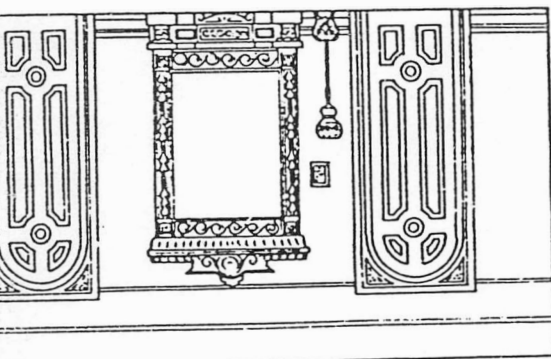
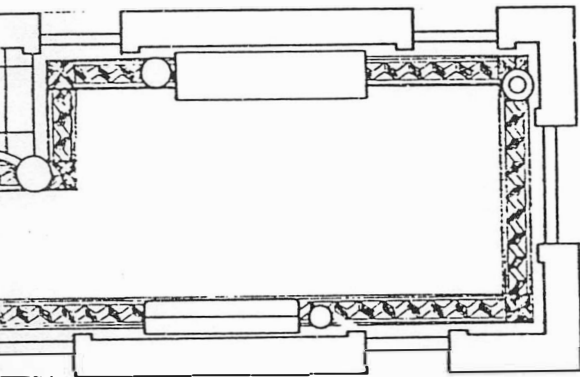
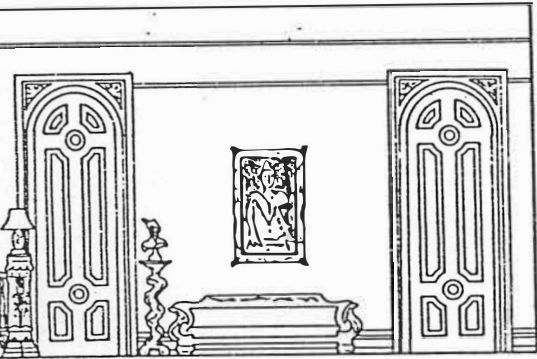


A



B

Figure 350. Neo-Tudor hall tree and Anglo-Japanese style calling card receiver.
A. A large Neo-Tudor style hall tree dominates the Mallory-Neely entrance hall.
B. On its marble topped plinth rests an Anglo-Japanese style calling card receiver.



of the Mallory-Neely entrance hall.

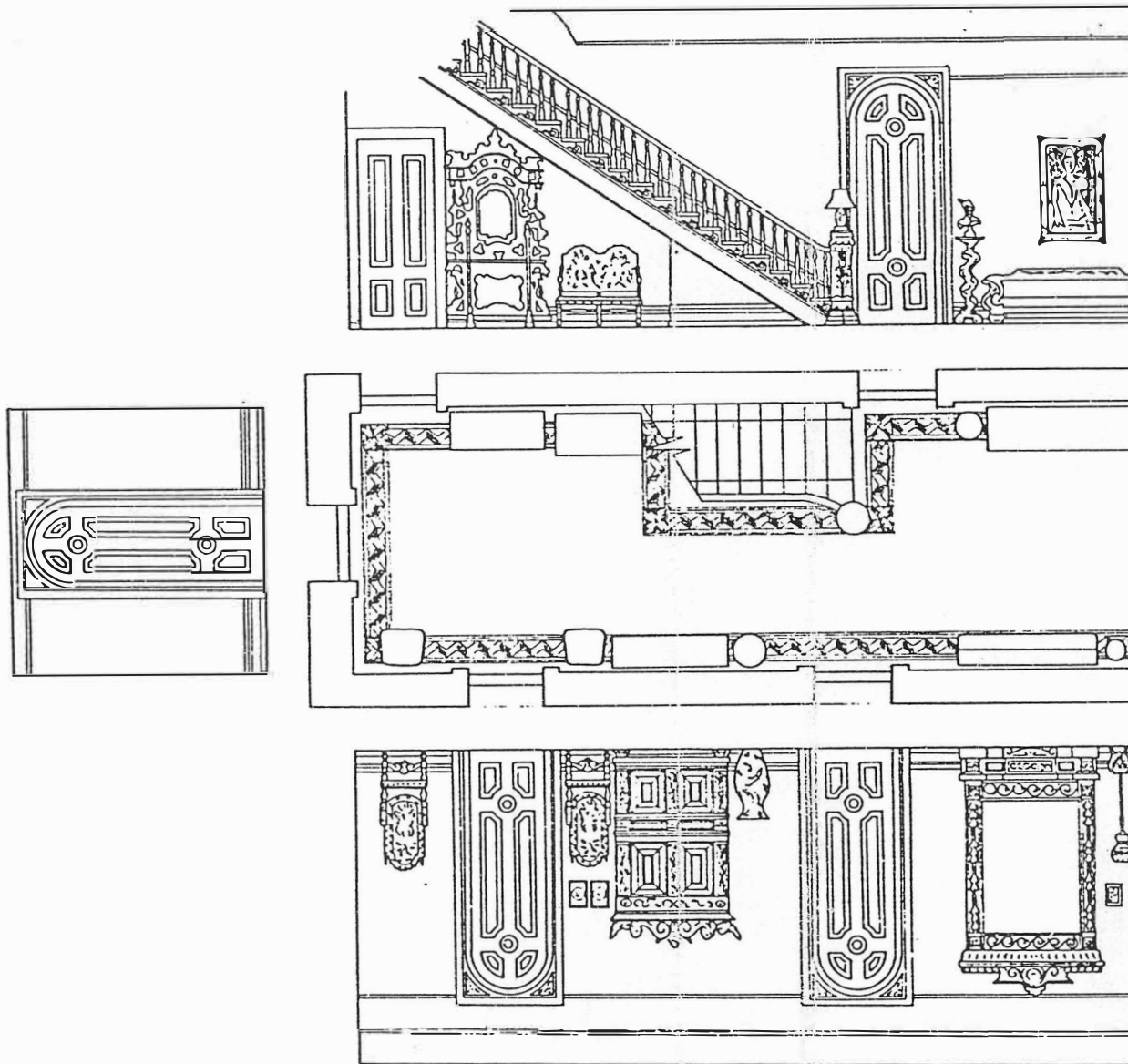


Figure 351. Plan and elevations of the Mallory-Neely

For the elite, participation in a really grand and active social season required assistance from a staff such as the Neelys' five or more live-in servants. Household guides like The Book of Household Management and Good Form: Dinners, Ceremonious and Unceremonious gave detailed instructions for the mistress of the house in overseeing and itemizing the obligations and duties of the servants.⁸⁶ Vestiges of an elaborate bell system survive throughout the Mallory-Neely House that aided the family members in calling for assistance when necessary. The presence of servants in a household was also another recognized standard of wealth.⁸⁷

Dining has been the subject of much attention of late among scholars with an orientation to material cultural studies because of its importance as the central ritual of the Victorian home.⁸⁸ Dining was one of the most elegant of social entertainments. Dining socials such as breakfasts, buffets, luncheons, and dinner parties were important status communicators. For this reason the Victorian dining room has been likened to a social arena.⁸⁹ Dining etiquette

⁸⁶Mrs. Isabella Beeton, The Book of Household Management (London: Ward Locke & Company, 1880); and Mrs. Abby Longstreet Buchanon, Good Form: Dinners, Ceremonious and Unceremonious, and The Modern Method of Serving Them (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company Publishers, 1890), Special Collections, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware.

⁸⁷Veblen, 62-67.

⁸⁸See Williams, Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts: Dining in Victorian America.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 22.

guides like Good Form: Dinners, Ceremonious and Unceremonious and the Modern Method of Serving Them and articles like Harper's Bazaar "The Gentle Art of Dinner Giving" helped hostesses organize these dining socials and master the complex intricacies of Victorian dining etiquette.⁹⁰

The aesthetic artifacts present on the elite Victorian dining table must surely represent the pinnacle of conspicuous display for that era. The supporting array of utensils and furnishings created by enterprising manufacturers for the Victorian dining table including dinner services, stemware and other glassware, silverware, and linens, is almost staggering.⁹¹ The following partial list of items for the table advertised in the 1889 Sillito Department Store Home Decorative Art Souvenir is illustrative:

water sets	bone dishes
dinner sets	ice tubs
ice cream sets	dishes for scalloped oysters
sardine dishes	pudding dishes
table ornaments	cracker jars
roll trays	Venetian nut bowls
	cake baskets ⁹²

⁹⁰Longstreet, Good Form: Dinners, Ceremonious and Unceremonious and the Modern Method of Serving Them; and Caroline B. Burrell, "The Gentle Art of Dinner Giving I," Harper's Bazaar (27 October 1900), 1660-1662; and "The Gentle Art of Dinner Giving II: The Dinner Table" (10 November 1900), 1790-1791.

⁹¹See Gerald Bret, Dinner Is Served: A Study in Manners (Hampton, Connecticut: Anchor Books, 1969), 92-130; and Noel D. Turner, American Flatware 1837-1910 (San Diego: A. S. Barnes & Company, Inc., 1972).

⁹²Home Decorative Art Souvenir, n.p.

Conspicuous creations such as napkin art and artistic table decorations of every description completed the status-laden table ensemble.⁹³

The elegantly decorated Mallory-Neely dining room was an integral part of the inter-connected ceremonial area of the house. (Figure 352) The mellowed colors, faux leather, gilded surfaces, patinated brass, antique furnishings, and family portraits created the perfect ambiance for dining. The elaborately carved Neo-Elizabethan style extension table could seat as many as twenty-four for grand dining events. When set with the family's costly linens and table appointments, the table at which the Neelys' dinner guests sat could not have failed to be impressive. (Figure 353)

Dances were another popular form of social entertainment for the elite families of Memphis. In rooms like the Mallory-Neely parlor (sometimes called the dancing room in contemporary newspaper accounts) balls and other gala festivities, where dancing played a major roll, were staged. In order to accommodate this, temporary canvas flooring was put down over the carpets as was the custom of the time.⁹⁴ The Neelys also laid canvas over their plank verandah flooring so

⁹³See, for example, "Table Decorations," Art, Society, and Accomplishments, ed. R. Barry Blackburn (Chicago: Blackburn Company, 1891), 317-326, Special Collections, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware and Louise Conway Relden, Table Decorations and Desserts in America 1650-1900 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983).

⁹⁴See Cleveland, 94.

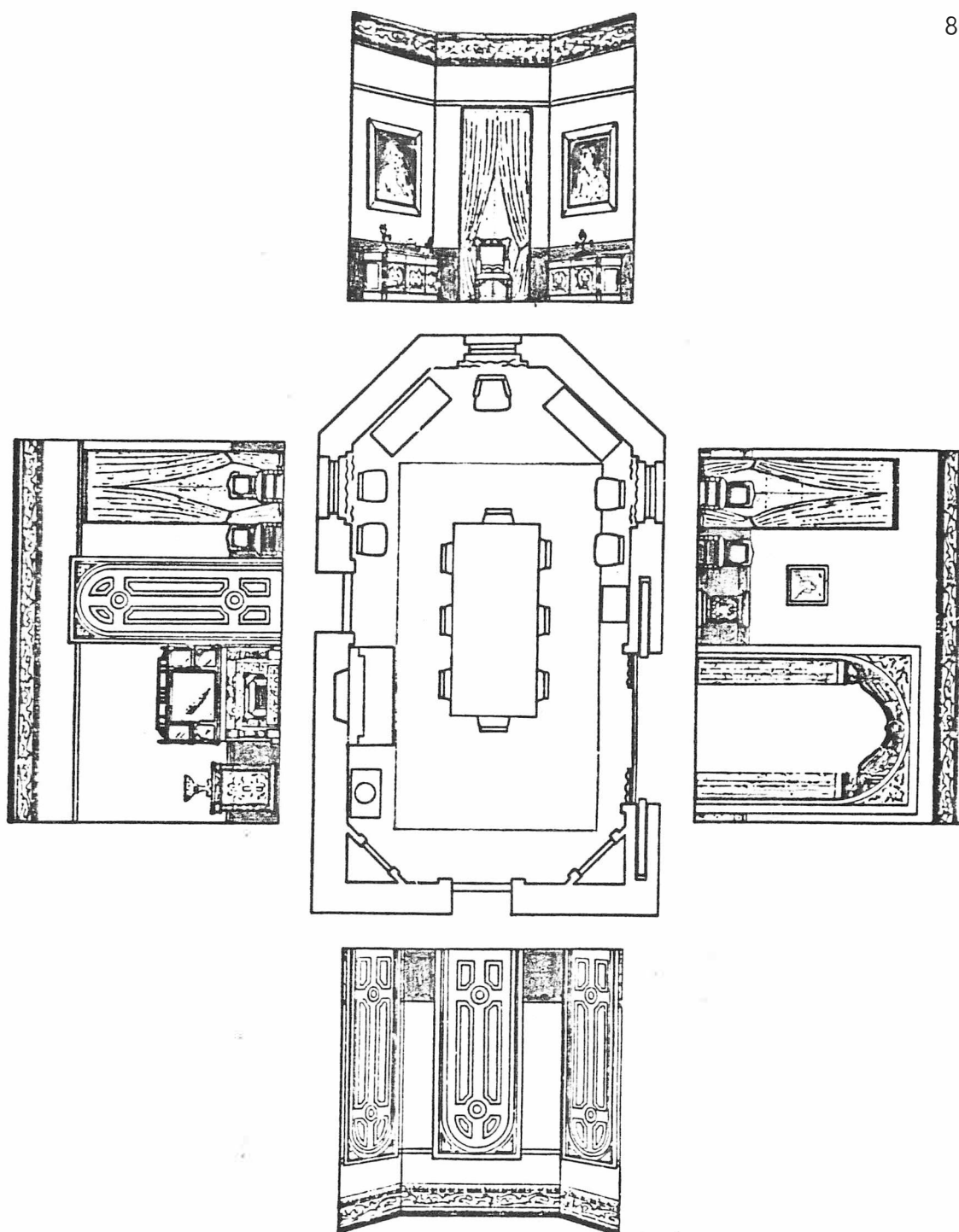


Figure 352. Plan and elevations of the Mallory-Neely dining room.



Figure 353. Dining room of the Mallory-Neely House as set by Mrs. Daisy Mallory for a garden club tour in 1961. Courtesy Barton Lee Mallory, Jr.

that by opening the parlor and sitting room window-doors festivity was extended into the moonlit garden.

The orchestra or band was tucked in a corner or discreetly out of the way in a small adjoining room like the Mallory-Neely music room. (Figure 354) Originally the library, it received its present name because of this practice. A letter survives written by Mrs. Daisy Mallory from the famous W. C. Handy, composer of the St. Louis and Memphis Blues, in which he says that he often remembers his early career in Memphis when he played for the Mallorys and Neelys and other Memphis socialites in their palatial homes, and especially the many tips they had given him.⁹⁵

The turn-of-the-century was the great era of the waltz, but there were other dances. According to local newspaper accounts a form of group dancing, "The German or Cotillion," was also a popular dance performed in late-century Memphis. Often these dance socials were even entitled "A German." In doing these dances, a practiced master of the "German" led the ensemble in a series of "figures."⁹⁶ These were often complex and colorful, requiring frequent changes of partners.⁹⁷

Occasionally these Memphis dances were elegant costumed affairs. The 17 December 1889, social column reported that the palatial home

⁹⁵W. C. Handy to Mrs. Daisy Mallory, 8 July 1957, Special Collections, Mallory-Neely House Museum.

⁹⁶Cleveland, 95.

⁹⁷Schlesinger, 44.

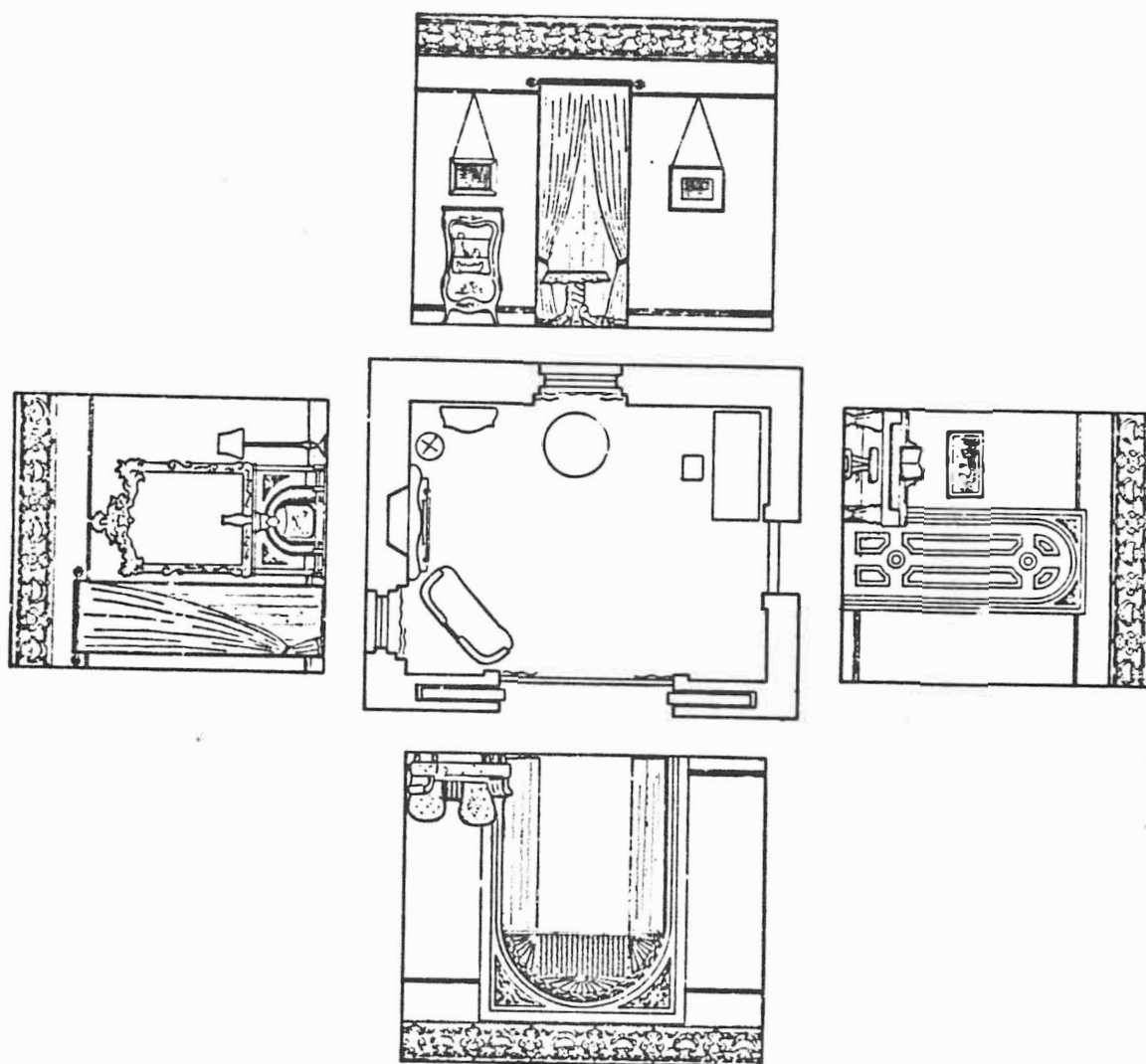


Figure 354. Plan and elevations of the Mallory-Neely music room. It adjoined the parlor making it the ideal location to place a band or orchestra.

of Captain Dillard was the scene the night before of a "Select German" given by his daughter in honor of society friends from Virginia. All of the elite guests, including Pearl Neely, were costumed in the Louis XV mode.⁹⁸ Another article announced plans for a masked ball to which all were to wear black dominos and black masks.⁹⁹ To the average reader these romantically glamorous social happenings must have seemed a world apart from their sober lives.

Rites of Passage

The celebration of significant moments in the life of a family member, sometimes labeled "rites of passage or transition" were important to Victorians of all classes.¹⁰⁰ These were usually constructed performances of formalized ritual sometimes but not always connected with religious traditions.

The difference separating the celebrations of rites of passage between the upper and middle-to-lower classes was one of degree. Highly publicized elite celebrations of weddings and debuts, connected with a young lady's coming of age, were often lavish affairs, as illustrated by the following description of the wedding reception of Daisy Neely which took place in the ceremonial rooms of the Mallory-Neely House. (Figure 355)

⁹⁸Memphis Appeal, 17 December 1889, 2.

⁹⁹Memphis Daily Appeal, 10 February 1885, 12.

¹⁰⁰See, for example, Barbara Myerhoff, "Rites of Passage, Process, and Paradox," Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 109-135.

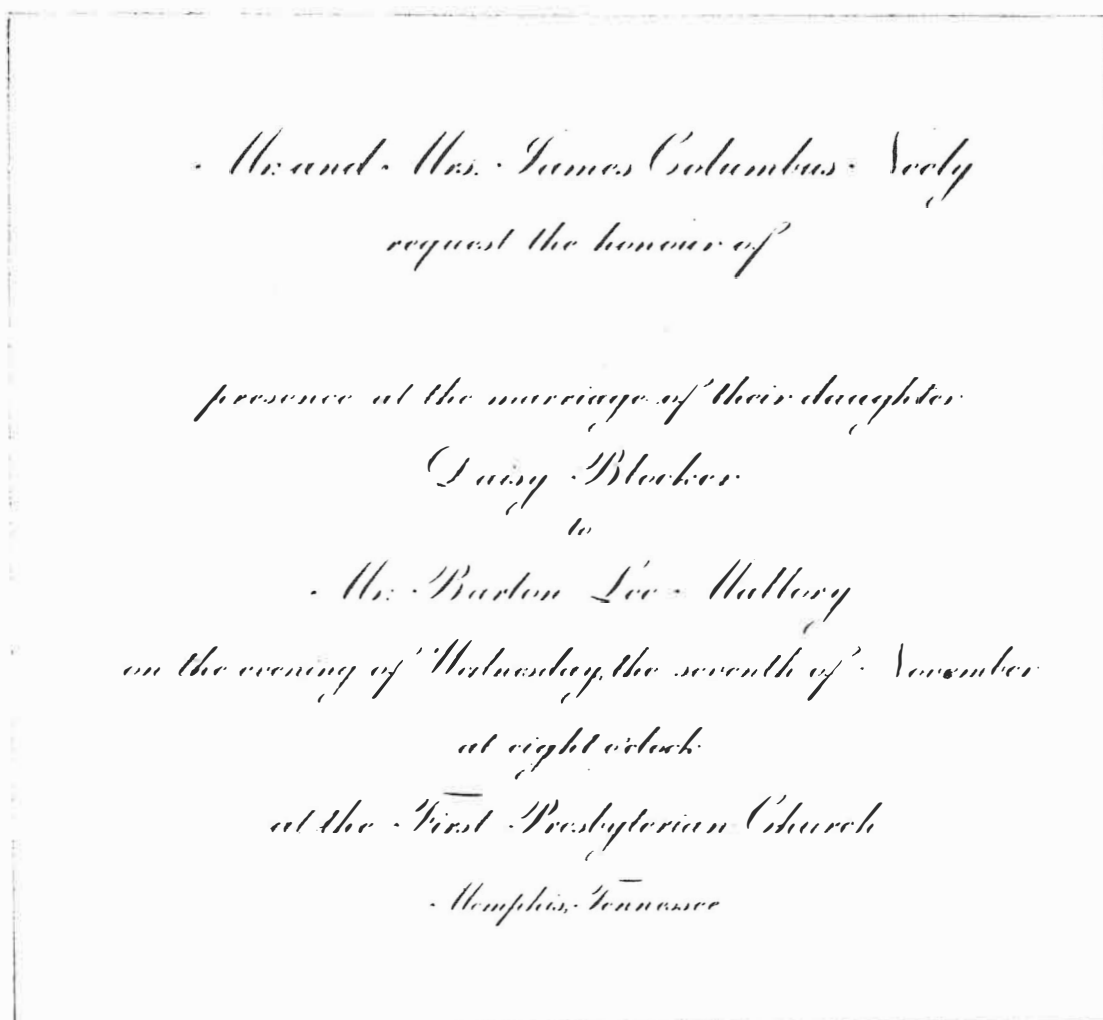


Figure 355. Daisy Neely and Barton Lee Mallory's wedding invitation. Courtesy Barton Lee Mallory, Jr.

After the ceremony the bridal party went to the home of the bride's parents, on Adams Street, where preparations for an elaborate reception had been made. The house was beautiful with palms and enormous ferns set in every possible nook and relieved by white chrysanthemums. In the long parlor to the left of the hallway the bride and groom received, standing under a marriage bell of Bride roses and lilies of the valley. Magnificent white chrysanthemums and ferns completed the decorations and at the farther end a bank of palms cut off an ante-room in which musicians sat. The reception room on the right of the hall was decorated in the same artistic fashion and from it could be seen the dining room, which was unique. The table, covered with Russian lace over satin, had for a centerpiece a huge jardiniere of ferns, in which were stuck willowy rods, bearing bows of white tulle, and at one corner was a basket of flowers formed of candy. Tulle was very much in evidence in all the decoration, being one of the newest ideas from the fashion capital.¹⁰¹

For months prior to an event like this or previous to the climax of a debutante season, the social columns would be constantly devoted to the round of parties, balls, receptions, and many other activities given by elite families in honor of a bride or debutante. Daisy Neely's debutante season included a dancing party given at their home by the S. H. Brooks; a German at the Peabody Hotel hosted by George Waddell; a "Ribbon Cotillion" at Miss Virginia Bethell's home; a theatre party at the Grand Opera House given by John C. Rogers; and a ball given by her parents at their Adams Street mansion.¹⁰²

(Figure 356)

¹⁰¹"Society," Commercial Appeal, 11 November 1900, 6.

¹⁰²Mrs. Clarence A. Smith, "A Few of the Many Parties Given by Friends of Miss Frances Neely During the Season of Her Debut--1890" [photocopy, unpublished mimeographed data], DAR-SAR-CAR House, Inc. scrapbook, Memphis, Tennessee.



Figure 356. Oil portrait by Memphis artist, Kate Karls, of Daisy Neely in her debut gown.

Funerals were another important Victorian rite of passage. Etiquette books of the period, testifying to the elaborate ritual surrounding Victorian funerary custom, include guidance in the length of mourning, mourning calls, mourning attire, and stationary.

Though less a home-based rite, by the late nineteenth century, when due to the general concern for health the services of the undertaker and his funeral parlor had become commonplace, many continued to keep deceased family members in the homes and to hold the funerals there. In the same manner as other elite functions, the funerals of prominent personages were widely publicized. The coverage was similar to that of other social functions with those in attendance listed, and conspicuous floral creations cited. James Curl in The Victorian Celebration of Death states that the "style of funeral helped to establish social position even more than a wedding since the wealth and power of a family could be publicly displayed."¹⁰³

The obituaries of J. C. and Frances Neely state that their funerals were conducted at their Adams Street mansion but give few details other than mentioning the floral tributes sent by friends. Fortunately, though, elaborate descriptions of an elite home-based funeral survive. (See Appendix C, Figure C-3) In these the reporters paint a mental picture of a home-based Victorian funeral. The entire funeral including the burial ceremony of Henry Montgomery was recounted in column after column of more than one of the city

¹⁰³James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death (London: David S. Charles Publishers, 1972), 20.

newspapers. Floral tributes sent by many of the city's most prominent civic and social leaders were itemized. The sitting room or the parlor of the Mallory-Neely House served as the setting for similar ritual functions.

Seasonal Rituals and Festivals

Memphis papers also record the various seasonal social functions or rituals sponsored by the city's elite, ranging from informal Halloween parties to formal New Year's events. Christmas was largely a private family holiday celebrated at mid-day with a feast. A Christmas tree, decorative greenery, and a profusion of flowering plants helped to lend an air of festivity.¹⁰⁴

In contrast to the privacy of a Christmas celebration, emphasis was placed on socially celebrating the opening of the New Year. In Memphis, society was expected to make a round of social calls at staggered hours at a select group of elite homes. At each of these the hostess of the house was assisted in receiving her prominent callers by a group of society ladies. The home of J. C. Neely was often open for this purpose.

At all the houses named below elaborate preparations had been made to entertain visitors, and in addition to graceful and artistic decorations, there was an abundance of good cheer. . . . Music was also provided at most of the houses. . . . The great number of open houses visited makes it impossible to do justice to the magnificent decorations and other accessories that everywhere abounded. We must content ourselves,

¹⁰⁴Eugene L. Tennant, American Christmases from the Puritans to the Victorians (Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1973); and Harnett T. Kane, The Southern Christmas Book (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1958).

therefore with simply furnishing a list of ladies who received and what they wore.

At Mrs. J. C. Neely's
 Mrs. J. C. Neely, black silk en traine, with bugle trimming.
 Mrs. H. M. Neely, mauve brocaded silk en traine.
 Mrs. J. W. Falls, copper colored rep silk, blue trimming, pink lace.
 Miss Pearl Neely, green velvet and tan silk, en traine, amber trimmings. . . .¹⁰⁵

A newspaper reporter in a description of a similar open house stated that the brilliantly illuminated parlors were handsomely decorated with plants and flowers. These were arranged to represent the four seasons. He further related that the reception was followed by dancing "which continued until a late hour."¹⁰⁶

Special Festivals and Political-Civic Celebrations

City-wide festivals and celebrations are often encoded with all types of symbolic messages "which help distinguish leader from subject; and higher from lower."¹⁰⁷ In reading Memphis newspaper accounts of civic festive occasions, there is no doubt which families constituted the ruling elite.

Many American cities to this day at least once or twice a year play host to special festivals that are often connected in some

¹⁰⁵"New Year Receptions," Memphis Daily Appeal, 2 January 1887, 1.

¹⁰⁶"New Year's Day," Memphis Daily Appeal, 2 January 1885, 1.

¹⁰⁷John MacAloon, "Sociation and Sociability in Political Celebration," Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1982), 256-257.

way with a product or products which form the economic base of the community.¹⁰⁸ In the late 1870s an annual Memphis "Mardi Gras" was established. This was the forerunner of the city's noted Cotton Carnival. The "Mardi Gras" was wholeheartedly celebrated by the city, with seemingly no expense spared in its production. The association in charge staged spectacular street pageants enjoyed by citizens of all classes. The parade theme in 1876, for example, was "Poetry." The twenty-eight floats accompanied by bands of wandering minstrels were based on the titles "The Grecian Epoch," "The Roman Epoch," and on Italian (Dante), Spanish (Cervantes), French (Molière), German (Goethe), English (Shakespeare), and American (Longfellow) poetry. At the end of the parade was the "Muse and Memphi" float described as "a swan-like silver chariot richly carved and decorated with garlands and lotus leaves drawn by lions."¹⁰⁹

As part of the celebration an elite secret society, "The Mystic Memphi," was founded. Membership in this organization was another sign of belonging to the city's ruling class. Its activities were subject to the usual society coverage in the newspapers. Before and during the Mardi Gras season parties, dances, and other socials were given by the elite in their homes, with all culminating in a grand costumed "Memphi Ball." The focal entertainment of this was

¹⁰⁸Abrahams, 171.

¹⁰⁹Annual Spectacular Display Mystic Memphi Mardi-Gras Program, 29 February 1876, Folder II, E2, Green Collection, Special Collections, Memphis-Shelby County Public Library.

a series of elaborately staged tableaux. Members of the various elite families appeared in these. Floats, properties, sets, and costumes for the parade and ball were created by designers in New York, New Orleans and elsewhere but the most lavish were surely those furnished by The Maison Nonnon, costumers to the Paris Opera.¹¹⁰ In 1878 the tableaux theme of the Memphi Ball was "Mythology: Classical versus Nordic." Tableaux based on ancient Grecian and Roman themes like Olympia, the Gods and Titans, Aurora, Earth, and Castor and Pollux were contrasted with Scandinavian themes like Valhalla, Thunder, Frost, Fire, Elf-Land and Troleland.¹¹¹ These festivities staged by the Memphis elite were examples of conspicuous display and expenditure at its grandest.

The 2 February 1872 visit to Memphis by the Grand Duke Alexis Romanov, son of Czar Alexander II of Russia, and the 14-15 October 1887 visit by United States President Grover Cleveland and the First Lady gave Memphians ideal opportunities for civic and/or political celebration. In the lengthy newspaper reports of the functions staged by the city's social leaders in honor of these distinguished guests, one can read between the lines the jockeying for position and attention among the rich. Though all classes witnessed the public ceremonial

¹¹⁰[Assorted invoices and itemized bill from, handwritten notes and typewritten contract, with the Maison Nonnon], 5 August 1875, Folder II, E2, Green Collection, Special Collections, Memphis-Shelby County Public Library.

¹¹¹Libretto of the Annual Spectacular Display of the Mystic Memphi, Mardi-Gras, 5 March 1878, Folder II, Green Collection, Special Collections, Memphis-Shelby County Public Library.

activities of these visits and enjoyed the spectacle, there is no question that these civic festivities were used to the fullest by the city's elite to symbolically communicate their power and status.

The Grand Duke was met at the Memphis Charleston Railroad Terminal, from where a cortege, made up of the carriages of the city's well-to-do, then proceeded to a lavish banquet and ball at the Peabody Hotel. Decorations, food, and the gowns of elite Memphis ladies like that of Mrs. J. C. Neely were described by the society reporters in vivid detail.¹¹²

James Columbus Neely served on the reception committee for President Cleveland's visit to the city. After arrival by river steamer the Presidential party was escorted into the heart of the city, through crowds made up of thousands of citizens, by a parade of carriages carrying the city's elite, among whom were Mr. and Mrs. Neely.¹¹³ While in town the President and his wife were guests at an exclusive garden reception given in their honor by the Noland Fontaines on the grounds of their mansion two doors from the Neelys. This event must have been one of the high marks of the "gilded era" in Memphis. As their carriage traveled up the long drive towards their mansion, returning from social events such as this one, J. C. Neely and his wife, Frances, must surely have been pleased that they had created a home, a stage of status, which effectively succeeded

¹¹²Memphis Daily Appeal, 3 February 1872, 1.

¹¹³Memphis Daily Appeal, 15 October 1887, 1.

in symbolically communicating the message of their family's privileged membership in the financially elite class of America's Gilded Era. (Figure 357)

Due to the stratified layering of changes and additions made throughout the century both inside and out and its remarkable preservation into the late twentieth century, the Mallory-Neely House has even broader symbolism for us today. It survives as a document of an important transitional phase in the history of the United States as it evolved through the growing pains of modernization.

As an American patriot, the Neely's daughter, Daisy, would surely be pleased to know that her home, through scholarly interpretation, can serve as a prismatic material culture document of the nation's history and especially of the evolutionary changes that occurred during the nineteenth century, leading to and molding the twentieth century. The artifactual resources of the Mallory-Neely and other historic houses in the Mid-South region have only begun to be mined.

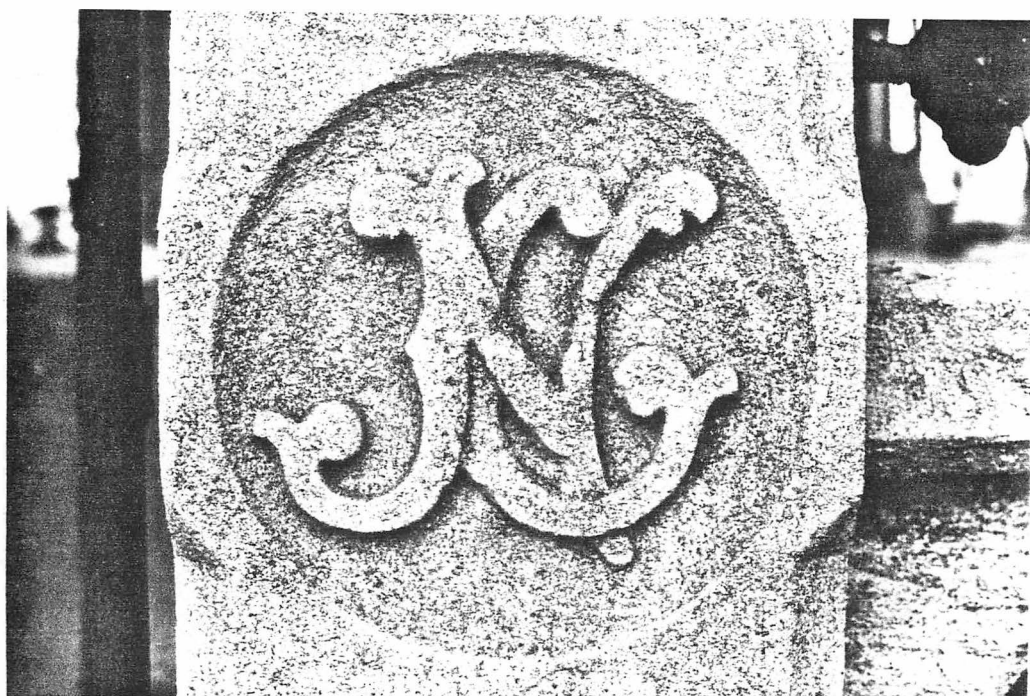


Figure 357. Proudly proclaiming ownership and residence, James Columbus Neely's initials, chiseled in granite, repeatedly adorn the ornamental front fence of the Mallory-Neely House.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

METHODOLOGICAL RESEARCH FORMS

FORM A: INDIVIDUAL OBJECT ANALYSIS

_____Room Code

_____Object code on elevation
- plan

Attach
photograph/s
of artifact/
documents
and/or
fragments
of document

I. Artifact/document: _____

II. Location: _____

III. Visual analysis and physical
description of artifact/document
A. Measurements:

Diagrams of measurements in plan
and elevation:

B. Materials made up of:

C. Technical construction/process
used to create:

Attach photographic
details of object/
document illus-
trative of
technical
process/es used
to create

D. Finish, surface embellishment,
ornament, iconography:

Attach photographic
details, drawing,
or rubbings of
ornament,
iconography,
etc.

E. Materials and process used to
create:

F. Design analysis (composition, color, shape, line, etc.):

G. Label, stamp, signature:

Location on or within object:

Attach photograph/s, drawings, rubbing/s of labels, signatures, etc.

IV. Original function/usage of artifact/document:

V. External evidence/documentation:

A. Known information

Oral tradition/history

Printed/written documentation
(Notes or photocopies attached when possible.)

B. Researcher's findings:

Notes or materials found in original documents/articles, books (photocopies attached when possible)

Researcher's comparison of artifact with like-objects found in other historical house or museum collections or in photographic illustrations (photocopies attached when possible).

VI. Stylistic analysis/classification/approximate dating:

VII. Cultural analysis (international, national, regional):

VIII. Speculation, interpretation of artifact/document by researcher:

FORM B: INDIVIDUAL ROOM ANALYSIS

_____ Room Code on Plan

- I. Room: _____

Attach photographs
of room, including
varied walls, ceiling,
floor, etc.

II. Visual analysis and physical description of room:

- A. Measurements of room:
(Diagram plan/elevation/doors/windows)

- B. Architectural features of the room:
windows, doors, fireplaces,
stairway, etc.

- C. Fixed interior decor of room:

1. Wall treatment

2. Paint colors

3. Ceiling treatment

4. Floor treatment

5. Window treatment

6. Hardware

7. Lighting fixtures

D. Furnishings of the room:

1. Furniture

2. Accessories

3. Textiles

E. Proxemics/analysis of spatial organization and arrangement:

III. Original usage of room: Ceremonial, utilitarian, private

IV. External evidence/documentation:

A. Known information

Oral tradition/history

Printed/written documentation
(notes or photocopies attached when possible)

B. Researcher's findings

Materials found in original documents/articles, books
(notes or photocopies attached when possible)

Researcher's comparison of room with like rooms in historic
houses, museums, photographs, watercolors, drawings, etchings
(photocopies attached when possible)

Evidence, if any, of regional characteristics/
differences:

V. Technological, design, and stylistic analysis:

VI. Final speculation and interpretation of room:

APPENDIX B

MEMPHIS NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

FIGURE 1

At the handsome residence of Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Neely, last evening a delightful entertainment was given in honor of the debut of their charming daughter, Miss Frances, and her guests, Misses Marguerite Taylor and Eleanor McGhee of New York City. The house was brilliantly illuminated and handsomely decorated for the occasion. The carriages of Memphis fashionable society deposited fair ladies and gallant gentlemen until the house was filled. The fair debutante was assisted in receiving by her mother, Mrs. J. C. Neely, Mrs. Daniel Grant, Mrs. S. H. Brooks, and Misses Taylor and McGhee of New York and Miss Edith Brooks. In the handsome white and gold drawing rooms a reception was held until 10:30 o'clock and then dancing was the order until an early hour this morning. The beautiful Neely mansion was illuminated throughout and the effect transformed it into a veritable place of light and beauty and thorough systematic and artistic completeness.

The reception room was in pink. From the mantels hung gracefully large clusters of LaFrance roses, fastened loosely with ribbons of the same tint. On handsome stands were vases of the rarest ware filled with the same, while from lamps of "ye olden times" burned the softest lights of the harmonizing tints, which completed a beautiful and artistic effect.

The handsome parlors of white and gold were decorated in red. From the cabinets on either side of an exquisitely dressed window were large clusters of passion flowers, while from the chandeliers gracefully twined the same beautiful effect. Exquisite vases of Royal Worcester, Dresden, Doulton and Crown Derby were filled with rare American beauties, that combined with the effect of graceful palms and brilliant lights from cut glass chandeliers, made a beautiful picture.

The dining room was in pure white and green. In the center of a table covered with white satin, embroidered, was a large cluster of ferns. Surrounding this was a double row of white Nephitis rosebuds, and a circle of ferns, and completing the artistic effect was a vase of Nephitis roses and carnations. Burning from white and gold candelabras were harmonizing colors of white and green lights.

The verandas were canvassed and filled with rare plants and beautiful blooming roses. The halls were full of ferns artistically arranged. The stairway was twined with roses and smilax, and the entire house a garden wealth of beauty. The menu was delicate and excellent in its arrangement, and the service perfection.

Mr. and Mrs. Neely should feel proud of the grand and brilliant success of last evening's entertainment. The ladies were attired in handsome and becoming gowns--Miss Taylor, a beautiful brunette and leading society queen in New York City, wore an imported gown

of yellow Mouseline de Chiffon and diamonds, holding in her hands a beautiful bouquet of yellow roses. Miss McGhee, another of New York's leading belles, a beautiful blonde, wore a costume of Worth's of white gauze, elaborately trimmed in violets. A necklace and bracelet of elegant diamonds were her jewels. She carried in her hand a beautiful bouquet of sweet violets. Miss Frances Neely wore a "Rau-Initz" gown of white gauze trimmed in apple blossoms, diamonds and pearls. Her flowers were rose-chatterne mermet. Miss Edith Brooks wore an exquisite gown of white and gold gauze; diamonds and pearls, and a beautiful bouquet of red rosebuds. (Appeal-Avalanche, 2 December 1890, 6).

FIGURE 2

At the bride's home and amid the assemblage of admiring and loving friends, Miss J. Pearl Neely and Mr. James Daniel Grant, of Atlanta, were married last night. The whole city was interested in the event. The bride, the daughter of the wealthiest and most respected citizen of Memphis, is recognized as one of the most beautiful of Southern women. Her winsome personality, in which were blent every grace of mind and heart, has gained for her the affection and high regard of all who have known her. In Memphis society, no star has ever shone with brighter luster. She has been queen over many hearts, and a welcome, brilliant presence wherever she has gone. The groom is the son of the late Mayor Grant, of Atlanta, and his family is among the wealthiest in the State of Georgia. He is a gentleman who enjoys the respect of all with whom he has come into contact, because of his sterling worth and his many engaging qualities. It is the happiest possible match, and the principals have been overwhelmed with felicitations.

At 8 o'clock the ceremony began, in one of the rooms of the luxurious Neely mansion, the Reverend Eugene Daniel of the First Presbyterian Church, officiating. The bride and groom stood under three bells of nuptial roses, while about them were gathered about 450 relatives and intimate friends. . . . The bride wore an elegant costume of white satin en train, point lace and diamonds, diamond butterfly pendants, a veil and orange blossoms. No bride ever looked more lovely, her blonde beauty and exquisite grace of bearing captivating all eyes and hearts. The bridesmaids wore costumes of white tulle, with bouquets of La France roses. The souvenirs were handsome two hearts of pearls linked by bands of gold.

The decorations of the home were surpassingly gorgeous. In the drawing room where the ceremony occurred there were masses of white flowers and clouds of drifting tulle, the effect being wondrously beautiful. In the hall were countless growing flowers, rare ferns and plants. The reception room was in red, and the dining room in pink carnations. In the center of the table immediately under the handsome cut glass chandelier hung a star of carnations enveloped in tulle, the same decorative idea being carried out on the sideboards and mantels. The entertainment of the guests was that which only great wealth could provide. . . . The supper room was in white; a large star surrounded with garlands of white carnations suspended from the chandelier occupied the center table; the whole covered by a veil of tulle. The mantel was banked with white carnations enveloped in a similar veil, the cloth on the table was of white satin damask with a border of antique lace; the large star of white carnations was in the center of the table. The sideboard was completely

covered with maidenhair ferns and stately lilies, the whole lighted by white wax tapers set in candelabra of crystal and silver. The hall was beautifully decorated in palms. To the right was a handsome stand of palms and ferns and a large Marchel Neil rose vine in full flowers. The railing of the stair was draped in smilax.

After the cotillion the bride changed her toilet to a handsome traveling dress and the happy couple left for an extended bridal tour. They will sail for Europe on Saturday, accompanied by the bride's young sister, Miss Daisy Neely, who will join them in New York. They will return to Memphis in the fall and make this city their future home. (Memphis Daily Appeal, 28 May 1890, 4).

FIGURE 3

Inside the house the undertakers had just finished their work. The servants, with tear-stained faces, silently passed through the handsomely furnished halls and apartments on some errand, while the bereaved members of the family awaited the call to look for the last time upon the face they loved so well.

The casket had been placed in the front parlor. It was made of cedar covered with black broadcloth, heavily mounted with solid silver. On the plaque was the inscription:

Died October 20th, 1887

Henry A. Montgomery

The flowers were very tastefully arranged about the casket, on the floor beside it, on the tables about the room and on the mantel. They seemed to be unlimited and many of the set pieces were beautiful. At the head of the casket on a table was the last tribute of esteem of the employees of the Merchants' Compress and Storage Company, who knew the goodness of their dead employer. It was a magnificent piece of floral workmanship, in the shape of a bale of cotton, suspended from a set of scales, resting on a bank of roses and smilax. The bale itself was of pure white roses, encircled with bands of forget-me-nots, while the scales were composed of white pinks, different colored roses, and ferns. On the bed of roses just beneath the bale were the letters "H.A.M.," in immortelles. This work of art was sent from New Orleans.

At the foot of the casket was a beautiful mass of flowers formed to represent "The Gates Ajar," from the members of the Cotton Exchange. It was made of tuberose, tea roses, pink roses, begonias, and ferns. Over the gates was perched a pure white dove, holding an olive branch in its bill. The gates were intertwined with smilax.

On the floor beneath the last described piece was an exquisite willow of roses from Gen. Peter Tracy. The flowers were roses of every kind appropriate to the sad occasion, beautifully arranged and surrounded by smilax. "Memphis Mourns Montgomery" was the inscription. An anchor of roses and white pinks from H. E. Avery lay at its side.

Most noticeable among the other floral pieces was a pillow of white and yellow roses, surmounted by a dove, from Mrs. Napoleon Hill. Mrs. J. W. Waynesburg sent a pillow of white, pink, and yellow roses. Mrs. W. A. Williams sent a harp of tuberose, smilax, and maiden-hair fern, with the words "Rest" in immortelles. A pillow of white rosebuds was sent from Mr. and Mrs. Mhoon. Mrs. R. McKay sent a sickle of white roses and smilax. A large harp, overhung with a star made of carnations, tuberose and pinks, stood by the window; it was sent by T. H. Phillips. Mrs. M. C. Pearce sent a

pillow of camellias and roses. There were numbers of other designs and a great quantity of cut flowers, which together almost hid the lower part of the casket from view.

As the hour for the ceremonies approached, the house began to fill with the friends and acquaintances of the deceased. The regular pall-bearers . . . assembled in the library, while the honorary pall-bearers . . . took their positions on either side of the hallway at the entrance.

. . . It was just 2 o'clock when the Rev. Dr. Harris of Mississippi, Rev. Dr. Paterson of Grace Church, and Rev. Dr. Kline of St. Mary's, issued from the reception-room and walked slowly into the parlor where the casket was. About the parlor and the room adjoining sat the relatives and old friends of the deceased. Near the window, opposite the door had been placed a small organ, and about it sat the choir. . . . (Memphis Daily Avalanche, 24 October 1887, 5).

VITA

Lawrence Allen Ray received a B.A. degree in May 1964 from Lambuth College where he served as Student Government President and the M.A. degree from the University of Mississippi in August 1966. Since September of that year he has been a faculty member at Lambuth, currently serving as chairman of the Department of Art, Fashion Merchandising, Home Economics, and Interior Design. Ray was chosen Lambuth's Outstanding Educator in 1977. In November 1982 he received the college's Outstanding Alumni Award, and in May 1983, the Student Government's Special Recognition Award. Extensive foreign study has included work at Oxford University, the Attingham Institute and Knole Historic Textile Institute, all in England; Parsons in Paris and Loire Valley Programs; and an Art-Architecture Travel Institute in the People's Republic of China. Ray has completed both the Winterthur Museum's Winter Institute and the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts Summer Institute. The author is a member of Delta Sigma Phi Fraternity, Omicron Nu and Phi Delta Phi national honor societies, and is or has been affiliated with the Decorative Arts Society of the Society of Architectural Historians and the Furniture History, Victorian, Tennessee Historical Society and West Tennessee Historical Society and with the American Society of Interior Designers. Ray is listed in Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities and Outstanding Young Americans.