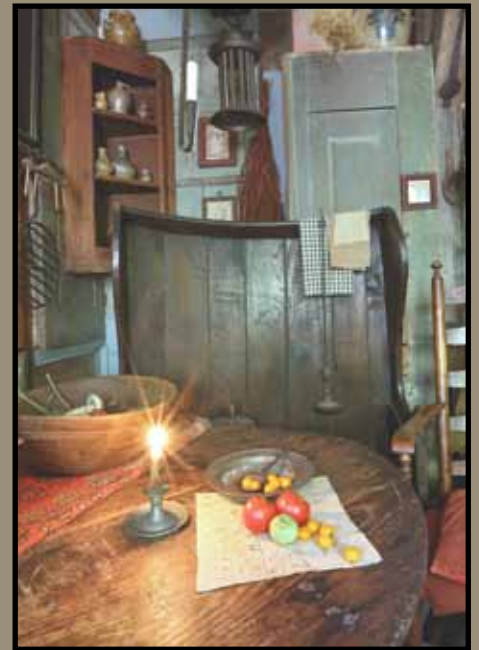


Humble Treasures

THE MAINE HOME OF ED OESTREICH MAY REFLECT THE EVERYDAY BELONGINGS OF AN 18TH CENTURY WORKING-CLASS FAMILY, BUT TODAY THOSE ITEMS HAVE BECOME HIGHLY PRIZED ANTIQUES.

By Gregory LeFever Photographs by Mark Kimball Moulton





Ed Oestreich will tell you right away he doesn't aspire to surround himself with the trappings of wealth. And that holds true if you turn back the clock a couple hundred years to when somebody built his then-humble Cape Cod-style house and filled its two rooms with furnishings suitable for a working-class family.

But with the passage of time and Ed's keen eye for antiques, his house near the coast of Maine has become a treasure, and its many furnishings from that early period have become similarly precious. Ed has spent the better part of his life studying history, learning about antiques, and scouring high and low for his remarkable collection of museum-worthy pieces, largely from Pennsylvania and New England's first settlements.

"My interest is in the everyday material culture of the Pilgrim-century settlers, whether the items were made here or brought here from Great Britain, the European Continent, or the Far

Left: Serving as the main living space in the original house, Ed has returned the kitchen to its early layout, including the hearth, dining area, and even a large bed. Among the room's prized antiques are 1700s ladder-back chairs in original worn surface from Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, the hutch table of the same vintage from upper New York State and, on the far side of the table, a curved-back English oak settle also from the 1700s. The hanging corner cupboard also dates from the 1700s and includes a collection of rare Bartmann Krugen stoneware jugs, some going back to 1500s Germany. The engraving above the mantel is "The Battle of Culloden," dated 1746. Next to the bed is a 1700s staved barrel with ash hoops, wooden pegs and rose-head nails. The bed's coverlet is early 1700s linsey-woolsey.

Above left: This brazier food warmer for George Washington's troops during the Revolution features an unusual heart-shaped iron shield, intended to protect fingers from the heat.

Above right: The curved-back settle is English oak and dates to the early 1700s.



East,” he explains. “All of these origins are reflected in the items I collect.”



This makes sense because our Pilgrim-era ancestors were focused on survival and didn’t have the time or wherewithal in the New World to create much furniture, utensils, or other domestic items. They brought these things over the sea from the Old World until they could begin producing them here.

And in Ed’s home near Damariscotta, Maine, you find yourself transported to that long-bygone era. “Most visitors tell me they feel like they’ve stepped back in time, into someone’s private home,” Ed says.

Top left: The portrait is of Mary Sidney (1561-1621), the Countess of Pembroke, one of the first English women to achieve fame for her literary works. On the hearth below, Ed has restored the original bake oven for use.

Top right: The large corner dresser is an exceptionally rare 18th Century piece from Maine. It displays several pieces of Ed’s extensive treen and stoneware collections.

Bottom: Suspended from the mantel are two rare American treen tankards from the early 1700s, both made of staves showing their original paint.

Right: The raised panels above the mantel came from a 1785 meeting house in Massachusetts that was being dismantled. The large needlework piece depicts Boston Commons in the early 1700s, including a rendition of the Hancock mansion and a scene related to beekeeping. Other early artwork includes an Anna Claypoole Peale portrait of Colonel Peter Comstock, as well as two unsigned portraits attributed to noted folk painter Jacob Maentel and one to Rufus Porter. The large porringer hanging from the mantel is a rare New Hampshire piece from the 1700s that was part of the Reginald French pewter collection, most of which now resides at Historic Deerfield.

Lower left: This late-1600s piece is a northern Europe couvre feu, French for "cover the fire." These containers protected embers overnight so hearth fires could be restored in the morning. This particular one is unusual because of its three embossed profiles as decoration. Standing against the back of the hearth is a rare iron fireback, showing English King George I or II astride his rearing horse.

Lower right: These watercolor portraits depict Theodorus Muller, the governor of the first Dutch colony in South Africa, and his wife Regina Roche. He assumed the governorship in 1768. The artist is not identified.





Top left: The parlor's flame-stitched William & May wingback chair is from England and dates from about 1700. It was found in the offshore Maine home of a lighthouse keeper. Above it hangs a portrait of John Gilman, elected governor of New Hampshire in 1782. The painting was in Gilman's family for several generations, with all attributions written on its reverse side. It is a previously unlisted painting by John Brewster Jr. (1766-1854), a renowned itinerant folk artist who was deaf and lived much of his life in Maine.

Top right: The early banister-back chairs in this section of the parlor are from Connecticut, all in their original black paint. The original blue-green corner cupboard is a Massachusetts piece from the 1700s, displaying Ed's significant collection of English salopian ceramic, popular in America from about 1790 to the 1820s. The 18th-century table is a Connecticut piece in original red wash. Among the items on the table are an early 1700s Dutch delft double-lobed deep dish, and an English hand-painted quart mug from about 1820.

Discovering a Passion

Ed's early background established his appreciation for everyday items. A child of the Depression, he was born in Ashland, a borough deep in the anthracite coal region of eastern Pennsylvania. His father supported the family on meager earnings as a carpenter in the mines, constructing the sturdy framework that protected his fellow miners. Ed says he always appreciated his family's humble belongings and the things his father taught him about wood.

But Ed's parents wanted their son to have a better life than the mines offered. His maternal grandfather had been a Lutheran minister and Ed was steeped in the religious life, so it followed that his parents scrimped to put him through Susquehanna University where he got a bachelor's degree in Greek and English Literature. He went on to obtain his master's degree at the Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, was ordained as a Lutheran minister, and continued his theological studies by completing his doctorate.

Ed's first parish was in Allentown, Pennsylvania, during the 1950s. One day, traveling the countryside around nearby Kutztown, he met Jack and Lucy Lamb, owners of Lamb's Mill – one of the better-known antique shops in an area well-known for dealers of Pennsylvania German artifacts and folk art. A Kutztown newspaper once described Jack Lamb as “a near genius at finding rare colonial period furniture, he was temperamental and only a few dealers could get along with him.”

But, apparently, Ed could. He admits he knew little about antiques when he first met the Lambs. He was eager to buy from them, but rather than take advantage of him, they pointed out books for him to study and told him to come back when he was better informed. As it turned out, his first significant antique purchase was from the Lambs – a circa 1690 black-walnut American refectory table authenticated by Winterthur Museum – that remains the focal point of Ed's great room, all these years later.

Lure of the Seacoast

For years, Ed vacationed in Vermont, roaming the Green Mountains and visiting the state's quaint antiques shops. He figured it would be an ideal place to retire. All that changed during the 1970s when he and a friend decided to go camping in Canada and they stopped along the way at a place called Pemaquid Point, on the Maine coast.

Impressed with the dramatic beach, bays, and inlets that penetrate Maine's coastal region, Ed decided he'd rather live there. He switched his vacation venue to the Maine coast, and by 1992 was ready to move there. He wanted to purchase a house built during the 1700s, and soon a realtor told him about the little Cape near Damariscotta. Ed liked the house enough to make two major concessions – it was located about fifteen miles inland instead of on the coast, and was built in 1800, a few years later than his ideal.

But the area had much going for it in Ed's eyes. The Pemaquid Peninsula was one of the earliest parts of North America the English explored, establishing fishing grounds and fur trading there a dozen years before the Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock. An early colonial English community of at least thirty houses was built

Top: This doll's pocket is from New England and dates to around 1800. It was in the private collection of the late Roger Bacon, an influential 20th century collector of New England artifacts.

Left: The Connecticut banister-back armchair is from the 1700s, in original black finish. The stately highboy from the same period is from Shirley, Massachusetts, and has its original red wash and engraved English brass hardware.





at Pemaquid during the 1660s – a site where Ed has spent time as an amateur archaeologist unearthing cellars and artifacts.

About fifteen miles inland along the Damariscotta River and much closer to Ed's house is the seaport town of Damariscotta itself, settled in the 1640s. After struggling economically for decades, the town grew wealthy around the time Ed's house was built just east of town. The source of this good fortune was a flourishing shipbuilding business, where local shipyards manufactured a number of sailing vessels – including eight clipper ships, among them the famous Flying Scud – that could sail down the river to the ocean and seafaring glory.

The town's gentry soon built fine examples of Federal, Greek Revival, and Italianate homes for their families, while workers from the shipyards and brickyards were content with much more modest homes – such as the one Ed bought.

Emphasizing the Original

Typical of New England working-class dwellings, Ed's Cape Cod house originally was small and sturdy. It had two rooms totaling no more than eight-hundred square feet, a large central chimney with two fireplaces, and a storage attic accessible by a tightly twisting "winder" staircase.

Over the course of two centuries, its owners expanded the floor plan through adding a summer kitchen and, more recently, a great room. Upstairs, the attic was converted to a small bedroom.

Much of Ed's work on the house has been to take parts of it back to original usage. For example, though early owners had removed the wall between the original kitchen and buttery to create a larger kitchen, Ed replaced the wall – using vintage 1700s paneling to provide more authenticity – restoring the area to two rooms.



Top left: A Pennsylvania fraktur from the 1700s hangs above the doorway separating the kitchen from the entry hall. To the right of the doorway is a rare English spoon rack from the 1600s, holding six spoons from the same period.

Lower left: Early homespun textiles hang from the door bar in the entry hall and from a shoe-foot drying rack. To the left of the doorway is a signed English wag-on-wall clock from about 1700.

One of the rooms restores the original kitchen with its hearth for preparing meals and a functioning bake oven. That section also contains a large bed, as likely would have been the case when the upstairs was devoted to storage and the cooking hearth could provide heat for a slumbering family. Instead of a buttery, the other room is a modern Pullman-style kitchen, furnished with today's appliances, where Ed prepares meals. This way, he can conceal all hints of modernity by simply closing a door.

A previous owner had repaired a damaged area above the kitchen hearth using sheetrock – unacceptable to Ed's standards – so he restored much of the area using the paneling from pew doors from a dismantled Maine meeting house. Similarly, he used two 1700s-era doors – one from nearby Topsham, Maine, the other from Massachusetts – to replace newer ones.

It's evident that Ed has spent considerable time stripping interior paint to reveal the home's original décor.

"In the original kitchen, I've uncovered the original bluish-gray paint on the wainscoting, doors and windows," he explains. "I've also exposed sections of woodwork that were left intentionally bare. As for the kitchen floor, I spent a full week scraping off seven layers of paint and a layer of tarpaper. It's a decidedly uneven surface, to be sure, requiring shims to be wedged under ball-footed chests, table, and bed."



Wallpaper is found only in the home's entryway, where Ed selected a pattern reproduced from an 18th-century fragment found in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Appropriate to the Period

While Ed stays true to his 17th and 18th century theme of working-class antiques, he also portrays how a typical family of that era would display their belongings. In other words, the kitchen area has more utilitarian items, but the parlor – where the family would entertain guests – puts the home's best foot forward.

For example, early ladderback chairs and a rustic English settle provide seating in the kitchen while the parlor offers a much finer William & Mary wingback chair, early New England banister-back chairs, a Connecticut tea table from the 1700s, and an impressive architectural corner cupboard in original blue-green paint from the same period.

Above: Standing upright against the rear wall is a remarkable "Engle Loom" from the 1660s. It was a wedding gift in 1662 from the New Hampshire colonist Edward Gove to his daughter. Later, he instigated "Gove's Rebellion" against the English Crown, was sentenced to death and sent to England for execution. Gove eventually was pardoned and allowed to return to New Hampshire. Leaning against the loom is the earliest known American initialed hetchel, from 1737. Also shown are an early German manganese-spatter delft jug with pewter lid, a 1660 English bronze mortar and pestle, an early 1700s wall box with make-do tin patch secured with rose-head nails, and a leather costrel from the notable Monahan Collection. All are displayed on a 17th-century American grain-painted chest that descended in the family of renowned artist Andrew Wyeth.



Previous Page: A 17th-century walnut refectory table from Pennsylvania dominates the great room. Among the items on it are an American colonial bookstand dated 1669. The early 1700s octagonal-galleried Maine candle stand in the foreground has its original red paint. The chair at far end of the table is an impressive English cane-back side chair from the 1600s. Next to the candle stand is a late 1600s American armchair found near the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts. To the far right is an English yew-wood table from the 1600s, supporting the upper portion of a secretary dated 1743 from Dover, New Hampshire.

Left: This rare English raised-needle-work ("stump work") box is from the mid 1660s. Prominently featured in the pattern are two unidentified figures, various birds, and plants.

Lower left: Another view of the great room, which is a 20th century addition to the house. With its large window, the room has considerable light, which Ed uses to the advantage of displaying some of his finest antiques.

Below: The framed, sepia-toned birth record is from Falmouth, Maine, for baby Polly Grant, born in 1786.





Top left: The great room's six-board chest is constructed of chestnut wood and features hand-carved "shadow molding" on its sides and front, as well as original snipe hinges. It dates from about 1690. On the shelves hanging above the chest, are pieces of Ed's extensive redware collection, including a charger dated 1773 that had been in the private collection of Henry Francis DuPont. The New England tall case clock is grain painted. In front of it is a Nantucket lady's slipper chair from about 1720 with its original red wash.

Top right: The secretary in original red paint is from the 1820s from Cumberland, Maine. The green ceramic "handled basket" is Danish and was used by women in the 1800s to carry baked goods to mothers of newborn children.

Left: This 18th-century English gentleman's "everyday wig" is made of chestnut-colored human hair. When appearing in public during the era, fashionable men wore elaborately curled and powdered wigs such as this one. Near it is a beautiful crewel pocketbook, ivory comb, and pipe-clay wig curlers.



Though many of his antiques are typical household items, their value is greatly enhanced because of their age, quality, and provenance. Among them is a rare built-in corner dresser from Maine, dating to the 1700s, in excellent condition because its original paint was preserved under layers of wallpaper.

A remarkable example of provenance is the “Engle Loom” that was a wedding gift in 1662 from New Hampshire colonist Edward Gove to his 16-year-old daughter. Years later, in 1683, he instigated “Gove’s Rebellion” against the Crown, was arrested and sentenced to death, shipped off to the Tower of London for execution, pardoned and allowed to return to New Hampshire.

Ed’s home is filled with historically accurate subtleties. For example, a rare English, hand-colored engraving from 1746, “The Battle of Culloden Moor,” hangs prominently above the kitchen’s

From Top left to bottom Right: The Spanish cross-topped mirror with its original glass and painted frame is from the 1600s. The early Dutch delft plate reveals a staple repair on its reverse side. The small, early watercolor of a bird is from Maine. ♦ A white beaver-fur hat from about 1820. ♦ Quill-work tea boxes such as this one often were made during the 1800s by the daughters of wealthy families. ♦ This child’s corner chair has exceptionally rare turnings and slats. The original hide seat still has animal hair on the underside. Corner chairs were popular for men and boys in the Queen Anne and early Chippendale periods. ♦ This child’s christening bonnet from the 1600s is made of fabric from the mother’s wedding dress. ♦ This early-1700s joint stool shows its original worn surface.

Right: The garden entrance gate is made from an 18th-century Dutch-style door from a colonial New England barn. It is heavily studded with rose-head nails.

Lower right: The double-batten door on the Oestreich house is from Topsham, Maine. The door itself is from the 1700s, while the hinges and rare latch are from the 1600s.

Below: This New England mourning sampler is dated 1804, stitched by a young woman grieving for her beloved. It reads in part: "William Norton who died in the West Indies. Aged 19 years. In a foreign port."



hearth mantel. "These engravings were made exclusively for the American market," Ed explains, "where they were framed for over-mantel display in homes where the families were too poor to hire an artist to paint an original work."

A painter himself, Ed has amassed an extraordinary collection of early portraits. Among his nearly 80 paintings are portraits by some of early America's finest folk artists, including John Brewster Jr., Rufus Porter, Jacob Maentel, Benjamin Blythe, and Anna Claypoole Peale. He also has collected an array of items related to George Washington, Paul Revere, John Paul Jones, as well as items of local historical interest, such as a letter dated 1667 from a tax collector to the overseer of Pemaquid.

"I have a great interest in the clothing of that early period," Ed adds. There are early work shoes, two early 1700s baby bonnets, and a waistcoat made for one of last Royal governors of New Hampshire and later worn by his grandson, who became president of Harvard College.

"There's a pair of men's homespun, linen-tow pants," he says, "equivalent to today's denim dungarees that are usually thrown out when well worn. But these are heavily patched."

Collecting Far and Wide

Like many of his antiques that have survived for centuries, Ed has come a long way from Pennsylvania's coal country. He's been able to dovetail his love of antiques with his ministerial work to absorb history and culture the world over.

As part of his theological studies, he has traveled to Israel, Jordan, and Egypt. He has performed ministerial duties in Pennsylvania, in several locales in New York State, and even a stint as chaplain aboard Swedish luxury liners. "On these extended voyages, I visited about twenty countries, including then-Communist Russia, all the Scandinavian countries, and many countries on the European continent, Sicily, and North Africa among others," he recalls. "On trips ashore, I acquired many of the early antiques for my home and sculpture gardens."

Ed has spent the Damariscotta years continuing his studies and collecting. He operated a small antiques business until 2009 and still enjoys entertaining visitors who appreciate his extensive and rare collection of items, as well as his deep knowledge of antiques.

As a writer, he has published articles in ecumenical journals and has had his poetry published in Maine chapbooks and a National Anthology of Poetry. His volume of poems *Far From Home* was published in 2010 to critical acclaim. Another volume of poetry, *Song in a Minor Key*, is slated for publication this year.



Just Yesterday

(For Gregory)

Just put down, the spectacles, round iron
rims, one glass cracked; eyes tired from the
strain of reading once again the
Abend Andachten – many times thumbed,
hand-stained, well worn . . .

a tallow candle gutters out; hearth fires just
a mound of embers – still aglow. Stout wooden
bar in place, the house secure – creaking with
the sounds of whispered conversations.
Just yesterday. Snow fell last night.

By dawn, a neighbor stops, his horse tied
to the granite hitching post. Deep tracks
in drifted white. Hard-cider-bite takes
away the chill. It's all as it was, just yesterday . . .
but . . . two hundred years ago.

~Ed Oestreich ©

AN INVITATION TO VISIT

Or for information, provenance of all antiques illustrated,
and major recent resources and sources

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