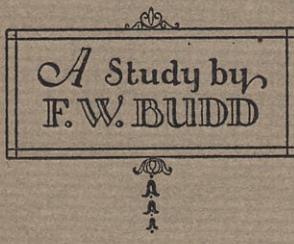
A decorative title frame with a dark background and gold lettering. The frame is ornate with a curved top and hanging tassels. A central hanging ornament, resembling a chandelier or a decorative vase, is positioned below the frame.

DECORATIVE SILKS  
IN  
AMERICA

A rectangular box containing the author's name, with a small decorative hanging ornament centered below it.

*A Study by*  
F. W. BUDD

DECORATIVE SILKS  
IN  
AMERICA



*f*rom a talk by FREDERICK W. BUDD, who has been associated with Cheney Brothers for over forty years, delivered before the Art-in-Trades Club, New York City on March twentieth, Nineteen twenty four.



CHENEY BROTHERS  
NEW YORK

## PREFACE



THE topic of this talk was: "The Development of the Silk Industry in America for the Forty Years from 1880 to 1920" in order to show what has been accomplished in our country during the writer's connection with the silk industry. The remarks were prefaced by a historical outline covering the period from the discovery of silk reeling in China over 2600 years before Christ and the beginning of silk culture in Italy about 3000 years thereafter, to its slow development through Italy, France and England for centuries thereafter.

Owing to the development of the power loom and the intelligence of our American workmen we have demonstrated to the world that we have been able to produce in a comparatively short space of time fabrics as fine or finer than those produced in Europe, where the silk industry was started over 1500 years ago.

J. W. BUDD.

# Development of the Silk Industry in America

## The Beginning



THE first silk mill in the United States seems to have been started by Rodney and Horatio Hanks in Mansfield, Connecticut, in 1810, but was abandoned by them in 1828. The first really successful silk manufacturers in the United States were Cheney Brothers, who started in the silk business about 85 years ago at South Manchester, Connecticut, where they are still located. They started in a very small way, with very limited capital, to spin silk for sewing thread. After the silk was spun it had to be dyed, but Cheney Brothers had no dyeing plant, and as there were no railroads at that time, this thread had to be carried by teams to New Hampshire, where there was a small dyeing plant. This was an expensive proceeding and after a short time the firm organized their own dyeing plant. Later on, when they commenced to make ribbons and broad silks they acquired a finishing plant, and as their business developed they were obliged to organize printing, finishing and various other departments in order to produce the finished article.

In 1861 they started to make ribbons, and in the year 1866 they commenced to make dress silks. In silk, as well as other manufacturing industries, it is indisputable that while inventions have multiplied wages, these same inventions and competition have even more remarkably lowered the price, in spite of the fact that the protective tariff rate has remained comparatively level and in many cases it is only the tariff that has made the development of the industry possible at all in this country.

## Cheney Brothers take up Decorative Silk Manufacture

In the year 1880 Cheney Brothers took up extensively the weaving of plush and velvet, for which it was considered necessary to import two looms from Germany. The velvet looms now in general use were invented in 1892 by Richard Mommers in the Cheney Mills, and Mr. Mommers is still in the employ of the firm.



*A Damask Showing the Egyptian Influence*

Inspired by the discoveries in the Valley of the Kings this design is enriched with bronze threads giving a modern touch.

In 1882 another far reaching invention was made in these mills by a man named Grant, who at that time had been employed in the factory 42 years. This invention is known as the Grant reel for winding silk and has made a practical revolution not only in silk but in cotton and worsted winding throughout the world.

In the year 1913 the United States consumed as much raw silk in manufacturing goods as France, Germany, Italy and England put together.

## Silk Statistics

Starting now on my topic as to the development of the silk industry in this country for the 40 years from 1880 to 1920, I do not wish to weary you with a lot of statistics, but I have been able to obtain from the Silk Association comparative figures on a few important items, which will show what has been accomplished:

	Year Ending	Calendar Year
	May 31, 1880	1919
Capital Invested . . . . .	\$19,125,300	\$532,732,163
Looms . . . . .	8,474	106,826
Employees . . . . .	31,337	136,775
Value of Products . . . . .	41,033,045	688,469,523
Cost of Materials . . . . .	22,467,701	388,469,022
	Year Ending	
	June 30, 1880	
Imports—Raw Silk . . . . .	\$12,024,699	\$329,338,872
Imports—Mfg. Silks . . . . .	32,188,690	54,700,816

I understand that of the entire raw silk industry in Japan 75% of their entire production comes now to America, of Italy's production over 40%. The figures for China are not available. You will therefore see that the silk industry in this country in 1880 was comparatively small.

## The Dyeing of Silk

We have had so many inquiries as to what has been accomplished in this country in developing dyes for fine silk fabrics that you may be interested in a letter which I have received from our laboratory at the mill, from which I quote as follows:

"In reply to your inquiry regarding the progress made by the American dyestuff industry in the past few years:

"This progress has certainly been quite remarkable, as our own experience will testify. It is true that we were unable to furnish fabrics for exhibition purposes which we could guarantee had been colored with 100% American dyes; but in practically every case the proportion of foreign made dyes was extremely small.



*A Brocade of the Byzantine Period*

Inspired by a black and gold design found in an old book at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the glowing sub-surface tones makes this fabric distinctly a creation by Cheney Brothers.

"It is of course too large a task to analyze all of our shades in detail, but I can give you some interesting figures based on our total yearly consumption of dyestuffs. Before the war in 1913, we used 92% German made dyes and 8% American made. During the year 1923, figures for which we have just completed, we used 86% American, 8½% German and 5½% Swiss dyes.

"If we consider the ordinary acid and direct dyestuffs which represent about 80% of our total consumption, we find that we obtain about 95% of these from American sources. Even in the so-called extra-fast or vat colors, the Americans have made a very substantial gain during the past year. In 1922 we obtained 77% of our vat dyes from foreign sources, while in 1923 this proportion dropped to 55%, which represented a gain of 22% for the American industry. I think it is safe to say that at the present time at least 50% of our vat dyes are made in America.

"There is one very important fact in this connection which I think it would be well for you to emphasize; which is that we have never substituted an American product for an imported type, without first satisfying ourselves by careful tests both in the laboratory and the plant, that it is fully equal both in fastness properties and working qualities. We have never made it our policy to lower our standards of quality in order to favor American manufacturers. We have, however, made every effort to give the Americans a fair and impartial trial.

"The amount of work which has been accomplished by the American dye industry since the war can best be realized when we note that the United States Tariff Commission lists approximately 400 types of dyestuffs which are being produced in this country at the present time. Each individual type requires months and sometimes years of research before it is developed to such a state that it can actually be placed on the market in regular and uniform deliveries."

The majority of dress goods fabrics made by Cheney Brothers in 1880 were so inferior to the qualities of today that they could not find a market now, and when we started to make better goods we had to contend with a prejudice that existed in the trade against American goods, and this prejudice continued for many years.

## New York Decorators in 1880

In the year 1880 there was not a piece of fine silk upholstery goods made in the country and it was not until about 1885 that Cheney Brothers commenced to make some very inferior upholstery fabrics. At that time, 1880, Arnold Constable & Company were the leading upholstery jobbers in America. Their main competitor was Nicol Collishaw & Company, an English firm who carried a large stock of fine upholstery goods, which were made in England. W. & J. Sloane were on Broadway near Great Jones Street and had not commenced to deal in upholstery fabrics. Johnson & Faulkner were on the corner of Lafayette Place and I believe that their main business at that time was in haircloth and upholstery findings. The leading decorators were Herts Brothers, Herter Brothers,





*A Brocatelle of the Italian Renaissance*

An exquisite blending of pastel shades gives a most striking appearance to this design which follows the best traditions of the early Italian.

B. L. Solomon's Sons, Arnold Constable & Company, McGibbon & Company and a few others. The retail trade was all below 23rd Street. As to decorators outside of the city I think I am safe in saying that in 1880 there was no concern handling fine decorative fabrics west of Chicago.

It is an interesting fact that our first customer in fine decorative fabrics was a woman by the name of Mrs. Candace Wheeler. Her business was conducted under the name of The Associated Artists. She had with her several women who had artistic taste like herself, and they occupied an entire house on East 23rd Street. Mrs. Wheeler was an unusual type of decorator. She created in her studios her own designs for printing and weaving and I can remember as a boy that Mr. Cheney would come down from the mill to consult with her as to the fabric that she wished to have made. She possessed a wonderful combination of vision and good taste and from this business connection was developed our decorative department. Her business grew to such an extent that she was obliged to form a partnership with two gentlemen, who unfortunately were more commercial than artistic and Mrs. Wheeler finally retired.

The development of our upholstery fabrics for the first 10 years was very slow and discouraging. We had no skilled workmen for jacquard looms, nor had we looms to weave fine fabrics. The only real help and encouragement we received outside of Mrs. Wheeler was from Mr. Faulkner and Mr. Whitney, who was then the head of the upholstery department in Arnold Constable & Company. The trade in general was afraid to show us anything for fear that we would copy their fabrics, and the Museums had nothing with which to help us. Furthermore, we had no designers who knew anything about period designs, and we did not know much about it ourselves. But fortunately for us most of our customers did not know much more. Under such conditions and with the growing demand for French fabrics the selling department in New York was on the ragged edge. We felt that at any time the firm, all the members of which lived at South Manchester, would decide to throw out the department, as many others would have done, but the turning point finally came and for the past 20 years, we, as well as our American competitors, are making upholstery fabrics that are equal, and in many respects superior, in workmanship to our foreign competitors.

The prejudice against American goods has largely disappeared, but we do meet people who do not know that fine upholstery goods



*A Spanish Damask of the Sixteenth Century*

The magnificence and luxury that was Spain at the zenith of her glory marks this damask recently developed by the South Manchester looms to meet the current mode for things Spanish.

are made in this country and I am led to believe that some decorators may still find it easier to sell French fabrics, because they are French.

As an illustration of this, I recently called on some friends who had been redecorating their apartment. I was told that the decorator had used French fabrics—but they were made at our mills at South Manchester, and I believe that my hostess was as much disappointed when I told her so as she probably would be if told that her Paris gown had been made in America.

## Then and Now

Twenty-five years ago, however, our salesmen had much harder problems to contend with. As an example, a large jobber in those days was selling our satin damask in considerable quantities to a furniture manufacturer. The sale of this fabric was probably hurting his business with imported goods and he did not wish to develop this business by putting in new patterns. We finally offered new patterns of a similar quality to the furniture trade and we were met with the remark by one of those manufacturers that when we could produce American goods that were as good as his French goods he would give us some business, and when we asked him to show us the French fabric that he liked, he took us into his sales-room and showed us several suites of furniture covered with material made by our mills in South Manchester. We could not, at that time, reveal the fact that they were our goods, as by so doing we would have lost a good jobbing customer.

How would a salesman like to stand by and hear a conversation between a salesman and a retail customer, who happens to be admiring a fabric and hear the salesman tell his customer that the goods would be out of the Custom House (which meant our warehouse at South Manchester) the following week?

I have recently been told of an American lady paying a very high price for some antique furniture in Italy, which when examined by her husband on arriving at their home, was found to be stamped under one of the chairs: "Made in Grand Rapids." Stories of this kind are numerous in the trade and apply to many of the artistic things produced in this country.

I am told that our fabrics were used in the palace of the President of the Argentine Republic at Buenos Aires, but the English firm who did the work there told us that if it had been known that they were American goods they could not have been used.

The American woman had been led to believe for years that she must look to France for the material for her fine gowns and correct fabrics to furnish her home. When the great war broke out we commenced to realize that we must depend more upon ourselves, and as we found out how much the great nations of Europe looked to us for help our people gradually came to realize what we were actually producing right here and many people, who a few years ago would not use goods made in America, have become Americanized themselves, but there is still much room for improvement.

The American manufacturer had to contend with the prejudice against American made goods for years and unfortunately, propaganda which has created this prejudice, has come as much from our own people as from abroad. Prior to the war you could meet Americans every summer in Europe, who professed to know so much about Europe and actually knew so little about their own country.

In our mills at South Manchester today we have the expert Frenchman, who creates the weaves for jacquard designs; the Germans who learn their trade of dyeing silk yarns in their homeland; the English weaver who handles the jacquard loom. All of these are now American citizens. In fact I understand that we have 32 nationalities now working in these mills. We also have the American born men, some of whom have been in the employ of Cheney Brothers for 40 to 50 years, who have created attachments for power looms that have been the means of reducing the cost or improving the weave or finish, that has enabled us to compete with the lower cost of foreign manufacturers. Our jacquard velvets are also woven on a power loom in a manner created by Clifford Cheney.

Such success as we have acquired is due to hard and intelligent work at our mills. In one of Secretary Mellon's speeches he says: "The most noteworthy characteristic of the American people is their initiative." It is this spirit which has developed America and it was the same spirit in our soldiers which made our American armies successful abroad. Woodrow Wilson recognized the power that this nation could exercise for the good of mankind. He had vision and for that I admire him. To be successful in business we must have vision, and faith in what we are undertaking to do, and it is this faith in America, and what the American manufacturer has accomplished, that we must broadcast to the American people.

**CHENEY  
SILKS**