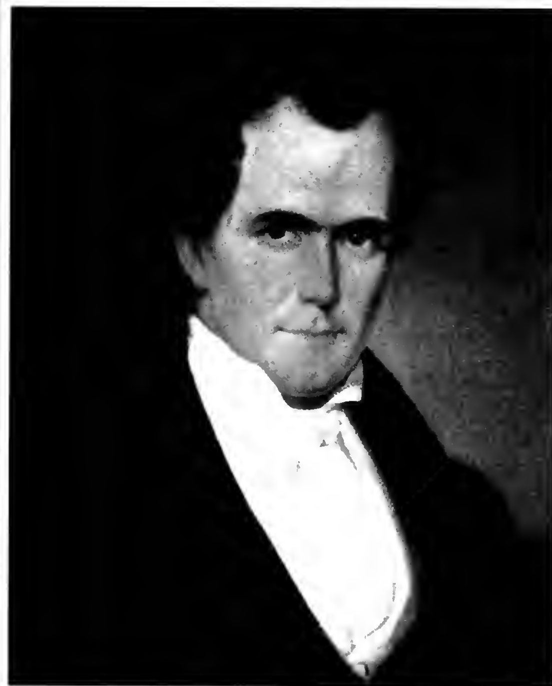
JOURNAL OF EARLY SOUTHERN DECORATIVE ARTS

SUMMER 2002 VOLUME XXVIII, NUMBER I



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Cover illustration: Portrait of James C. Bruce by George Cooke (1793–1849), 1837, oil on canvas. *Courtesy of Ellen Tully.*

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Greeking the Southside

Style and Meaning at James C. Bruce's Berry Hill Plantation House[1]

CLIFTON ELLIS

THE HOUSE at Berry Hill plantation is perhaps the finest example of Greek Revival architecture in the state of Virginia *(figure 1)*. James Coles Bruce, a wealthy financier and tobacco planter in Halifax County, built Berry Hill between 1842 and 1844 at the height of the style's popularity. In the best ancient manner, the house sits atop a series of granite steps that resemble the stylobate and stereobate of classical Greek temples. Its broad, well-proportioned octastyle Doric portico supports a full entablature of metopes and triglyphs, and a low-pitched pediment invites comparison with the Parthenon. James C. Bruce's house is a testament to the strong influence of the classical tradition that dominated American architecture, especially in the South, during the antebellum period. One way to understand the Berry Hill Plantation house, then, is to place it within the traditional narrative of American architecture as a fine regional example of a national trend.[2]

As well as representing a national fashion, the house at Berry Hill Plantation should be recognized as having meaning in the context of Virginia's Southside piedmont, that part of the state south of the James River that lies between the Blue Ridge to the west and the fall line to the east *(figure 2)*. Historians have only recently begun to

FIGURE 1. Berry Hill Plantation house, 1842–1844, Halifax County, Virginia. *Courtesy of Virginia Department of Historical Resources, photograph no. 58.*

turn their attention to this understudied region of Virginia, and their conclusions reveal its paradoxical nature. Far from conforming to the Cavalier stereotype applied to early Virginians (by later generations during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), Southside Virginians rejected early in their development the cultural example set by the Tidewater's colonial gentry. Although its political development closely followed the gentry paradigm in which a wealthy elite controlled local government, religious evangelicals served as a check on the elite's expressions of power, particularly materialistic ones in the form of great houses. By the time James C. Bruce built Berry Hill, this attitude was changing. His neighbors would have recognized Bruce's Greek Revival house as a profound break with the cultural tradition of Southside Virginia.[3]

The house at Berry Hill signaled a change in the way elite Southsiders thought of themselves in relation to their neighbors and to the world beyond. Anyone who passed by Berry Hill noted a dramatic change in the landscape of Halifax County—a change that James and Eliza Bruce *(figures 3 and 4*[4]*)* had carefully and thoughtfully planned. When their family friends Dr. and Mrs. Broadnax arrived from North Carolina to inspect the new house, Eliza eagerly reported to her husband that they both "admired it very much." Eliza's report on the Broadnax's experience is instructive, for it describes the effect that the Bruces planned for visitors to their plantation. The focal point was, of course, the main house that Bruce built facing due north on a gentle rise near the center of his plantation. From the public road, Dr. Broadnax and his wife would have viewed the house from an oblique angle, a three-dimensional view that emphasized the mass of the building, making it appear even more substantial and commanding.

Turning due south, the road placed the Broadnaxes directly on axis with the front door of the mansion, still a thousand feet distant.

FIGURE 2. Detail of a map of Virginia highlighting Halifax County.

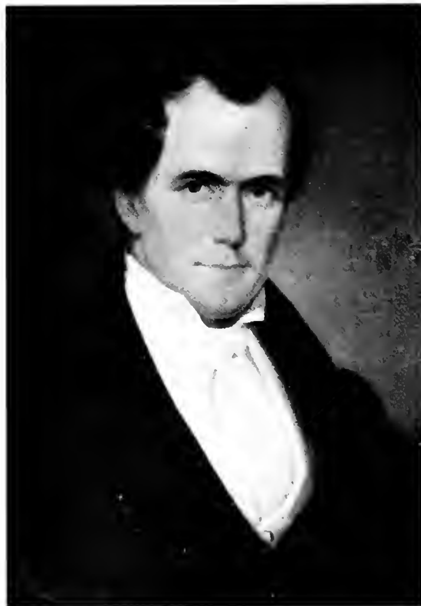


FIGURE 3. Portrait of James C. Bruce by George Cooke (1793–1849), 1837, oil on canvas. *Courtesy of Ellen Tully. Photograph by the author.*

The plantation road ends at a pair of unadorned square granite pillars that mark the entrance to the mansion house grounds. To either side of the pillars, a fieldstone wall distinguishes the pleasure grounds of the mansion house from the agricultural fields surrounding it. Through these pillars, the driveway ascends the hill to the house. Around an open forecourt, Bruce created a temple complex with a pair of small temple front dependencies of the Tuscan order. Bruce used one of these dependencies as his office, and Mr. Green, tutor to the Bruce children, used the other as a schoolroom.

During their progress through the pleasure grounds the Broadnaxes experienced the full axial symmetry of the complex as defined by the drive and the forecourt. The contrast between the picturesque landscape and the formal mansion house complex was established; the hierarchy and intent was clear. When the Broadnaxes climbed the granite stairs and stood on the finely detailed Doric porch of the Bruce's mansion, they could view from this high, classical prospect the rustic but comfortable idyll that James and Eliza Bruce had created beyond the confines of the stone-wall perimeter.

The revival of Greek forms began in the eighteenth century with the publication of James Stuart's and Nicholas Revett's *Antiquities of Athens* in 1762. Stuart and Revett had studied the ruins of ancient Greece during their sojourn there from 1751 to 1755 at the behest of a group of English dilettantes. During the eighteenth century, the Greek Revival found expression primarily through interior decoration and garden follies, but in the early nineteenth century the strong, bold lines of the style attracted the attention of professional

architects. The style quickly developed in Europe. In the New World, Americans were quick to exploit the Greek Revival's association with classical philosophy, especially as it was expressed through liberal economic theories and democratic politics.[5]

FIGURE 4. Portrait of Eliza Bruce by George Cooke (1793–1849), 1837, oil on canvas. *Courtesy of Frederick Fisher. Photograph by the author.*

Most architectural historians regard the Greek Revival in the United States as a material expression of Whig ideology, and they distinguish it from the larger classical revival taking hold in America in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, Whig ideologues like Nicholas Biddle, president of the Philadelphia-based Bank of the United States, championed the Greek Revival as an example of the chaste, austere republicanism they sought to portray in their politics and economic policies. Biddle's influence as a champion of the Greek Revival is undeniable and widespread. His role in the building of Philadelphia's Corinthian temple-style Girard College is well documented. As president of the bank, Biddle influenced the Grecian design of all its eighteen branches, from New Hampshire to Mississippi and west to Louisville, Kentucky. In Virginia, the Greek Revival flourished as public architecture in Whig strongholds such as Richmond and Petersburg. Elsewhere in the state, the classical Revival followed more the influence of Thomas Jefferson's Roman models for the state capital *(figure 5)* and the University of Virginia, both of which were built before the rise of Whig politics. Jefferson based his design of the state capitol on the Maison Caree in Nimes, France (c. 20 BC). Jefferson preferred this style of architecture because he identified it with the Roman Republic, believing its associations were more appropriate to the new American

FIGURE 5. Virginia State Capitol, 1785, Richmond. Thomas Jefferson, designer. *Courtesy of the Virginia Historical Society.*

democratic government. Jefferson went on to design several courthouses in Virginia, and his version of the Roman Revival remained a strong influence in both public buildings and private residences as builders who worked at Jefferson's Monticello and the University of Virginia incorporated his aesthetics into their own commissions. The drawing presented as *figure 5* depicts the capitol in the mid 1830s as it appeared when James C. Bruce served as a state legislator from Halifax County.

Another example of the Greek Revival preferred by Whigs can be found in the Petersburg, Virginia, courthouse *(figure 6)*. During the

FIGURE 6. Courthouse, Petersburg, Virginia, commissioned in 1838. Calvin Pollard, architect. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, VA,27-PET,29-2.*

1830s Petersburg enjoyed an expansive economy thanks to its position at the falls of the Appomattox River, which drained from the rich hinterland of Virginia's Southside. James C. Bruce often did business in the city where his father was in a mercantile partnership with James Pannell. In 1838 Petersburg citizens commissioned New York architect Calvin Pollard to design a new courthouse in the fashionable Greek Revival style, using the Corinthian order fashioned after the Tower of the Winds. The tower, surmounted by a statue of Justice, was not part of the original plan, but added by builders Daniel Lyon and Beverly Drinkard during construction. Lyon and Drinkard followed Pollard's Greek-inspired designed, which was popular in Whig strongholds like Petersburg.

The paucity of domestic examples of Greek Revival architecture in Virginia has been explained as a result of the strong influence of Jacksonian Democrats in the state. Indeed, the only two examples of monumental domestic architecture in the Grecian style are, Arlington House, which George Washington Parke Custis built in 1817, and James C. Bruce's Berry Hill; both men were unwavering in their Whig loyalties. Arlington House loomed on a hill above Jacksonian Washington, and the house at Berry Hill stood amidst a sea of Democrats who dominated Southside Virginia. The political association between Greek Revival architecture and the political agenda of the Whigs is obvious, but there was more than national politics involved in the building of Berry Hill.[6]

The culture of Southside Virginia's evangelical Baptists is the key to understanding Bruce's use of the Greek Revival at Berry Hill. Although his economic and political activities were national in scope, Bruce was decidedly a product of a conservative religious culture that had established itself in Virginia during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The evangelical Baptists' ideals and approach to life were in strong opposition to the Anglican religion and the culture it helped create. Wealth and birth into the gentry class determined a person's power in colonial Virginia society.[7] By stressing order and conformity in its spiritual expression, the Anglican Church

legitimized a hierarchical social order dominated by the gentry class and promoted the implication that God himself had ordained this social order.

The colonial gentry adopted the architectural forms and motifs of Renaissance classicism as ideological statements of their status and power. Specifically, they transformed the traditional hall and chamber plan of the Virginia house by introducing the central passage as a social channel and barrier. In addition, the gentry established the dining room as a setting for the newly popular rituals of display and hospitality that distanced them from middling and lower planters. The courthouses and churches they built also shared an unmistakable architectural vocabulary with their own houses, creating a unified visual landscape that set a standard by which all landowners were judged. Thus the architectural hierarchy imposed by the Tidewater gentry expressed and enforced the ruling social order.[8]

This idea of the gentry setting the social order through architecture is reflected through men such as John Tayloe, who built Mount Airy *(figure 7)*, in Richmond County, Virginia, and Robert "King" Carter, who built Christ Church *(figure 8)* in Lancaster County, Virginia. Both men were wealthy tobacco planters schooled in the architectural pattern books of the eighteenth century, such as William Gibbs's *Book of Architecture*. Virginia planters of the eighteenth century created a unified landscape in which their houses shared a common architectural vocabulary with courthouses and churches, the institutions dominated by the planter elite and to which all Virginians were bound by law. Architecture thus served as an emphatic visual reminder of the power of the planter elite.

By the time James Bruce the elder moved to Halifax County in the early 1790s, the old Anglican culture had been revolutionized by eighteenth-century evangelical Baptist ideology. Although Anglican planters of Halifax County still held political and economic power, they were forced to acknowledge the new order of the American Revolution that evangelical Baptists had helped bring about. Halifax County Anglicans deferred to their Baptist constituents' rejection of

FIGURE 7. Mount Airy, Richmond, County, Virginia, 1758. *Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, VA, 80-WAR.V, 4-19.*

material expressions of that power, and they dispensed with the architectural examples of the old colonial Tidewater gentry. The Baptists were a scrutinizing force in a new, ostensibly more democratic, society and they undermined the contrived and controlling architectural expressions of a hierarchical society. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Anglican gentry of Halifax County built traditional hall and chamber houses, a type that corresponded to their Baptist neighbors' notions of appropriate material expressions.[11]

One such example of the more subdued architectural expression of a Halifax County resident can be seen in Jarrod Mcarty's house, built in 1785 *(figure 9)*. McCarty was a member of an elite group of Anglican planters who controlled the political and economic institutions in Halifax County, much like his Tidewater counterparts John

FIGURE 8. Christ Church, Lancaster County, Virginia, 1732–1735. *Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, VA, 52-KILM.V, 1-2.*

Tayloe and Robert Carter. However, the Revolutionary rhetoric of democracy, combined with the rising cultural dominance of evangelical Baptists, required McCarty to assume a more modest architectural expression of his place in society. McCarty's house was substantial for its time and place, but to his anti-materialistic neighbors it was an appropriately simple domicile. Nevertheless, inside his house McCarty indulged his desire for fine furnishings and finishes.

The plan drawn by James Hunt for Gilbert Hunt's Halifax County, Virginia, house in 1782 *(figure 10)* also serves as a contrast to the splendor of Bruce's Berry Hill Plantation house. James Hunt, a Baptist minister, was also a builder in Halifax County. He drew this plan for his cousin, Gilbert, who remained a loyal Anglican and who was counted among the wealthiest men in Halifax County. The house, however, is a simple hall and chamber plan and shows none

FIGURE 9. Jarrod McCarty House, Halifax County, Va., 1785. *Photograph by the author.*

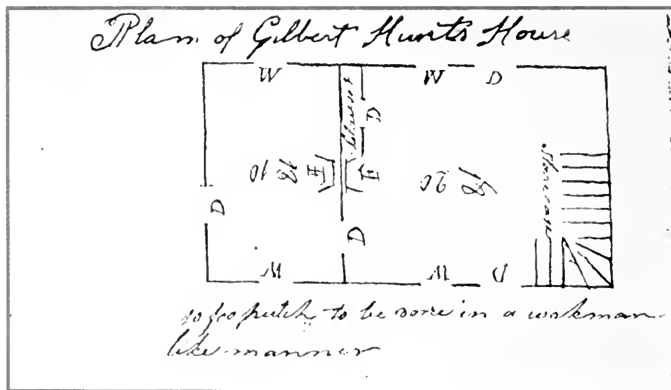


FIGURE 10. Plan drawn by James Hunt for Gilbert Hunt's Halifax County, Virginia, house built in 1782. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress, MS# 17,204, photograph by the author.*

of the architectural pretensions of Tidewater planters, whose houses invariably featured central passages and rooms dedicated for dining and entertaining.

James Bruce Sr.'s own house at Woodbourn plantation was substantial but modest. In both form and materials the house conformed to accepted expressions of wealth and status in the Southside. The house was a story and a half, raised on a brick foundation with brick end chimneys. In breadth and depth, the house was larger than most in Halifax County, but its simple weatherboard siding and its familiar form did not distinguish it as a departure from the modest expectations of its visitors. The conjectural drawing in *figure 11* illustrates a house that James C. Bruce's grandfather, Charles Bruce, built in Orange County, Virginia. James C Bruce's son, Alexander Bruce, drew this picture of his great-grandfather's house, called Soldier's Rest, and stated that his grandfather's house at Woodburne in Halifax County, Virginia, was almost identical. Charles Bruce's house appears to be a hall-chamber plan that was later expanded, as were many of the eigh-

FIGURE 11. Conjectural drawing by Alexander Bruce of Charles Bruce's house, Soldier's Rest, in Orange County, Virginia. *Courtesy of Virginia Historical Society (originally published in* Virginia Historical Magazine *Vol. XI, No. 4* [*April 1904*], *p. 44).*

teenth-century gentry houses of Halifax County during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Certainly large and commodious, it nevertheless conforms to a more modest material expression appropriate to Southside Virginia's evangelical culture.

In the mind of James C. Bruce, the bold planes, simple massing, and austere profile of its colonnade might have distinguished the Berry Hill house as an appropriately chaste Haligonian expression of fashion and taste; Berry Hill's Grecian allusions could be interpreted as a high-style nod to a cultural taboo against ostentatious display. Greek Revival architecture would seem to fulfill both of Bruce's desires—to give his political agenda an architectural expression and to acknowledge the traditional conservatism of his region. The monumental nature of Berry Hill's Greek Revival temple front, however, was an unmistakable rejection of an evangelical culture that was historically anti-materialistic and deeply suspicious of architectural expressions of wealth and power. James Bruce's temple showed little concern for the simple aesthetic sensibilities of his neighbors.[10]

Some architectural historians believe that James C. Bruce so admired the Greek Revival buildings he saw in Philadelphia that he imported the style to Southside Virginia. There is little doubt that Bruce was very much influenced by his Philadelphia connections, but the relationship between style and intent is complex and Bruce's taste is not so easily dispatched as a model of imitative behavior. Bruce and his wife Eliza did not merely mimic the manners and taste of a more sophisticated urban elite; on the contrary, they made self-conscious and deliberate choices as they considered the manner in which they would present themselves to both their neighbors in Halifax County and the world beyond. As Virginians moved toward a more democratic society, the Bruces sought to distinguish themselves further from the evangelical and political culture that threatened their quiet and traditionally inconspicuous, but undeniable, position in society.

James C. Bruce was a merchant-planter whose business interests were national in scope, and he moved in a political and economic

world that reached beyond his home in Southside Virginia. For Bruce, that larger world was centered in Philadelphia, a city whose wealthiest citizens developed a distinct aesthetic expression of their elite status as patrons of the Greek Revival. He was also, however, very much influenced by the conservative, antimaterialistic evangelical religious culture that dominated Virginia's Southside during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. For James C. Bruce, the Greek Revival was a profound and contradictory statement of self, one that simultaneously proclaimed his political allegiance even as it rejected the traditional values of his father's generation.[11]

James Coles Bruce was born in Halifax County in 1806, the eldest son of James Bruce and Sarah Coles. His father had come to Virginia's Southside in the late 1780s and established himself as the proprietor of a chain of country stores. The elder Bruce proved to have a keen mind for business in the cash-poor economy of Southside, and through a series of purchases, barters, and foreclosures, he acquired land, slaves and other property, often from his hapless customers. By the time he settled in Halifax County in the early 1790s, James Bruce had established himself as a man of substantial means. James Bruce had ambitious plans for his son, James Coles Bruce, and began to groom his son early for a place in southern society as an educated gentleman. James C. attended Hampden-Sydney College for two years before going to the University of North Carolina from which he was graduated in 1825. He went on to Harvard University to read law, but returned home after a year to study at the University of Virginia. James C. left the university in 1828 and returned to Halifax County, determined to establish himself as a planter and politician. In 1829 he married Eliza Douglas Wilkins, the daughter of a North Carolina planter, who brought with her a dowry of ten thousand dollars and forty slaves.

James Bruce gave the couple his plantation called Tarover and James and Eliza soon started a family. After two terms in the Virginia House of Delegates (1831–1835), James C. withdrew from a

promising but contentious political career, primarily because of his opposition to Jacksonian democrats. Instead he devoted himself to his wife and young family. Letters between the father and son hint at the conflict that James C. caused by abandoning the law and politics, but the elder Bruce never doubted his son's abilities. At his death in 1838, the old man left the bulk of his estate, valued at three million dollars, to James, who proved to be a conscientious steward of this legacy by continuing his father's strategy of diversified investments to augment the already substantial inheritance.[12]

James C. Bruce was a staunch Whig who supported a strong national bank, favored an active state and federal role in advancing internal improvements, and always sided with other moderate Southerners on sectional issues. The one notable exception to Bruce's otherwise moderate stance on sectionalism was his vigorous defense of slavery during the debates in Virginia's House of Delegates in 1832. During the Jacksonian ascendancy, Bruce was one of many southerners who realized that his fortunes depended on a united country. He allied himself with other unionists who formed the Whig party in opposition to Jacksonian Democrats, and although he never again ran for elected office, Bruce maintained his political ties and lobbied in the legislature.[13]

Bruce's emphasis on the fine arts was diametrically opposed to the evangelical religious culture that still held sway over much of Southside Virginia. The Baptists were traditionally anti-intellectual and antimaterialistic. Intellectualism and materialism relied on a hierarchical understanding of the world, which the Baptists rejected. Classical literature and art were pagan, and far from embodying universal principles, they obscured the individual's relationship to God. The material world was an aberration and the love of objects, especially objects that represented fashionable taste, was akin to the heresy of idol worship and represented a degenerate spiritual state. Bruce believed that the material world could inform the spiritual—could provide inspiration and expression of the unseen. Art and architecture were physical manifestations of an intellectual and spiritual state. Be-

neath Bruce's rhetoric, however, lay another understanding of the symbolic power of objects. Bruce's championing of things classical was not merely an attempt to raise the aesthetic and spiritual sensibilities of his audience. It was an implicit rejection of the way his father's generation sought to obscure their political and economic power by conforming to republican and evangelical notions of simplicity and austerity in post-Revolutionary Virginia.[14]

James C. Bruce did look to Philadelphia to inform his architectural choices, but like most educated men of his time he was no admirer of ancient Greek political institutions. Bruce considered ancient Greece to have been a profoundly corrupt society and he took care to distinguish the differences between democracy in ancient Greece and democracy in nineteenth-century America.[15]

Although Bruce found the political institutions of the ancient world a poor example for nineteenth-century Americans, he did believe that the ancients set an example for excellence in the fine arts, especially literature. He also believed that classical allusions in art and literature were valuable for their metaphorical power to inform and instruct present generations about universal truths—these truths could inspire the flowering of a unique American culture. Bruce believed that there was an urgent need for such a cultural awakening in a country that had devoted its resources to the improvement of its material conditions at the expense of its spiritual condition. In 1841, just before he began construction at Berry Hill, Bruce expressed his beliefs in an address to the graduates of his alma mater, the University of North Carolina:

> We have erected no monument of poetry, and have perhaps not a single isolated statue or painting, which will withstand the corrosion of a century . . . Individuals and communities have been busy improving their physical condition . . . In the midst of such a hurly-burly of interest and passion, the dreams of the poet have been disturbed, the contemplations of the philosopher broken in upon, and the imagination drawn down from its airy heights . . . not a perch is offered for imagination to rest her weary wings, as she flies around our land.[16]

James C. Bruce suggested that the beneficiaries of American prosperity should seek a balance between economic and cultural pursuits and turn their attention to cultivating the fine arts. Bruce cautioned against mere imitation, however, as a sign of intellectual and spiritual poverty. The Grecian temple that Bruce constructed at Berry Hill was meant to serve as the ideal setting in which to contemplate those things that gave life its meaning—a place to nurture the imagination and inspire the mind to still greater accomplishments. For Bruce, objects served the same role as the muses, and the fine arts, including architecture, were a way to transcend the mundane world he inhabited. Berry Hill, then, was a model for inspiration, not a model of imitation. The distinction was important to Bruce and it is a distinction important to understanding the meaning of Berry Hill.

James C. Bruce's first documented trip to Philadelphia was in October of 1836 when he accompanied his father to that city. The elder Bruce suffered from a facial ulcer, which he hoped to have cured by doctors at the University of Pennsylvania's school of medicine. Eliza's brother, William Webb Wilkins, had graduated from that school and practiced medicine with several of Philadelphia's finest doctors. These contacts, the family hoped, could effect a cure. Even as he attended his father, however, James found time to observe closely the sophisticated world of Philadelphia's elite. After two months in the city, he received an invitation to spend an evening with the members of the Wistar Club, a clique of wealthy and influential Philadelphians. When he returned to his lodgings, James C. described the gathering for Eliza:

> I am just in from spending the evening with the famous Wistar Club where all the great men of the city were assembled. Doctors, lawyers, judges, [and] politicians constituted the company to which I had the honor of being introduced. . . . The most interesting man I saw was the famous Nicholas Biddle to whom I was introduced and with whom I had much talk. He has the finest face I ever saw—intelligent and striking and handsome.[17]

FIGURE 12. Andalusia, Nicholas Biddle's house in Philadelphia, 1798. Thomas U. Walter, architect. *Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, PA, 9-ANDA, 1-11.*

Bruce's foray into Philadelphia's high society was not unexpected. Many Philadelphians had social, political, and economic ties to the South, and Bruce's entree into the Wistar Club was easy. Nicholas Biddle himself had strong family ties in North Carolina where his mother's family operated a chain of country stores. Elite social activities also pulled urban Northerners and rural Southerners together, particularly in the company of thoroughbred racehorses, brought to the track at popular Spring resorts in Virginia and New York. James C. Bruce also had direct ties to Nicholas Biddle through his cousin Edward Coles, a close family friend of the Biddles.[18]

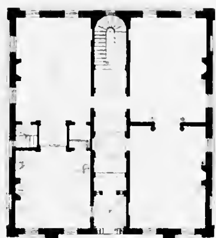
Nicholas Biddle, champion of the Greek Revival, had commissioned Thomas U. Walter to design the impressive Doric portico of his house, Andalusia *(figure 12)*, in 1835, and most scholars assume

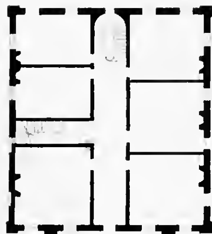
that James C. Bruce modeled his own house on Biddle's. However, where Nicholas Biddle hired a professional architect to design his portico, James Bruce, in contrast, turned to a family friend, John E. Johnson, who had drawing skills acquired in civil engineering classes at West Point. In 1838, Johnson accompanied the Bruces on their tour of the North where James and Eliza Bruce particularly noted the fine examples of Greek Revival architecture. In her travel diary, Eliza described their passing of Biddle's estate, Andalusia, outside of Philadelphia. Perhaps Bruce spoke to Biddle about his plans for Berry Hill, but Bruce never mentioned Andalusia in his correspondence.

Certainly the Bruces knew of Andalusia, but the Philadelphia house that appears in his papers is the Matthew Newkirk residence, which Thomas U. Walter also designed in 1835 *(figure 13)*. James C. Bruce attended a dinner party at this house in 1836, shortly after Matthew Newkirk completed it. The house and the party had a profound affect on Bruce. After a morning visit to the Newkirk's impressive Greek Revival house, Bruce described it to Eliza. He was particularly taken with the newly fashionable double parlors:

> I had the pleasure of paying a morning visit some days ago to Mrs. Newkirk who lives in the celebrated new marble palace on Arch. St. Verily it is a palace. The walls are ornamented with splendid paintings by an Italian artist of eminence. The ceiling of one room was painted with Venus in her car—attended by Cupid, etc. The ceiling of another represented Cornelia with her children, who presents them as her jewels to a lady magnificently attired and counting her jewels before her . . . The passage is ornamented with marble pillars and pilasters and paintings on the walls. The furniture is very rich. A glass reaches from the ceiling to the mantel of the breadth of the mantel—white marble frame. Another glass occupies the whole side of the wall between the windows. The same in each of the rooms. The sofas [are] covered with white casimer, and the chairs with fringing, etc. The only fault is that the rooms are most too small for a magnificent effect. The windows are narrow, the glass narrow and long—this for your comfort is the [latest] style.[19]

James C. Bruce was very much aware of the monumental Greek Revival style and of the relatively new spatial experience that the dou-





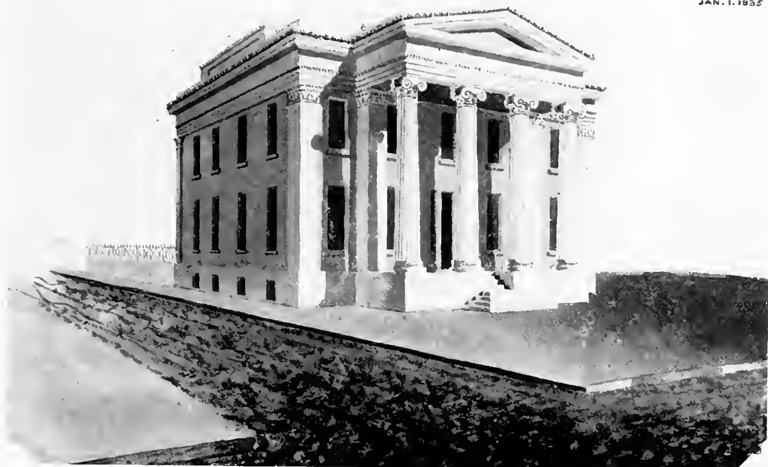


FIGURE 13. Matthew Newkirk House, Philadelphia, 1835. Thomas U. Walter, architect. *Courtesy of The Athenaeum of Philadelphi, WTU-010.*

ble parlor and its accouterments afforded. Not yet ready, however, to make such a bold architectural statement themselves, the Bruces turned to redecorating Tarover, the one-and-a-half-story frame house they occupied before building Berry Hill. Eliza wanted a set of "first quality white dinner china with a gilt rim." She also sent her husband the measurements of the passage at Tarover for a floor cloth. James duly responded with his own descriptions of things he bought for the house, confessing "I have been very extravagant since I have been here, spending six or seven hundred dollars." He was tempted to spend even more—one thousand dollars—on a bronze statue that was excavated from the ruins of Rome, but demurred. Bruce of course recognized the symbolic significance of the statue's provenance, like all members of his class. In this case he restrained, but his eagerness to give material expression to his social and economic status was strong, even as the admonishing voice of his father stayed by him. Moreover, fashion itself had conservative elements in its display. Quality and appropriateness, not quantity, determined the value of a fashionable object among the elite, and Bruce acknowledged this rule when he wrote to Eliza on the subject of dining room accouterments: "—I hope it won't disappoint you that I have countermanded your order about napkin rings. I don't see them on the tables here and I doubt the fashion in that it is rather ultra for Halifax."[20]

The Bruces, however, were not the only Haligonians with Philadelphia connections who would know that napkin rings were not so much in vogue. Halifax County's merchant-planter elite did business in the city and Bruce reported that "—a great many Halifax people are here. Barksdale, Young, Wooding and Edmondson and Easley, Cabiness and Edmunds." Bruce's neighbors were themselves witness to the fashions of Philadelphia's elite, and they would recognize and correctly interpret Bruce's aesthetic choices in furnishings. James C. Bruce, like the colonial gentry of Tidewater, was carefully constructing an image of himself—an image that ostensibly linked him to the larger national economic and political elite to which he belonged.[21]

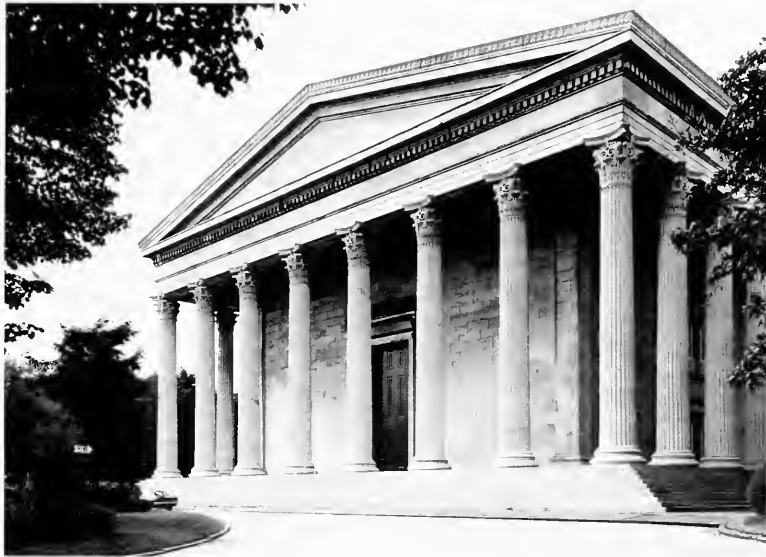


FIGURE 14. Founder's Hall, Girard College, Philadelphia, 1833–44. Thomas U. Walter, architect. *Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, PA, 51-PHILA, 459A-4.*

In June of 1839 the Bruces took a trip north through Philadelphia and New York City to Quebec City, passing through Vermont and Boston on their return. Eliza kept a diary of their trip, taking special note of the architecture that she saw along the way. In Philadelphia she saw Thomas U. Walter's Girard College, saying that "—It is the most splendid building I ever saw, the pillars particularly so" *(figure 14)*. Eliza also saw William Strickland's Exchange, Post Office, and his United States Bank *(figure 15)*, noting that she liked "—the U.S. Bank best" for its fine portico.

Leaving Philadelphia by carriage, the Bruces passed Nicholas Biddle's Andalusia, but Eliza made no comment on its Doric portico. Eliza and James were particularly impressed with the effect of granite as a building material, noting with approval the Quincy Market in

FIGURE 15. Second Bank of the United States, Philadelphia, 1818. William Strickland, architect. *Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, PA, 51-PHILA, 223-42.*

FIGURE 16. Quincy Market, Boston, 1825. Alexander Parris, architect. *Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, MASS, 13-BOST, 118-1.*

FIGURE 17. Vermont Statehouse, Montpelier, 1835. Ammi B. Young, architect. *Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, VT, 12-MONT, 2-1.*

Boston *(figure 16).* Of the Massachusetts state capitol, Eliza noted that "—wooden pillars and stairs would be much handsomer of granite." Of all the buildings the Bruces saw during their trip, Eliza was most impressed with the new state capitol of Vermont *(figure 17):*

> The [state] house is built of the most beautiful granite I have yet seen—Centre building with a dome and two wings—Handsome portico with 6 immense granite pillars—the Wings not quite high enough which makes the dome appear rather heavy, but it is a handsome & substantial building—The building is surrounded by an iron railing on a bottom off granite—a very wide walk in front—the yard laid off in 3 terraces with granite steps the full width of the walk with pillars of the same on each side.[22]

Eliza had developed a discriminating eye for architecture and landscape. Her good sense of proportion is shown by her judgment

of the capitol's dome. Her description of the axial approach to the capitol, the granite columns, and the terracing indicates that she recognized and approved the monumental effect that Greek Revival architecture created.

The Bruces may have been instructed in architecture by John E. Johnson, whom Bruce chose to draw up plans for Berry Hill and who accompanied the Bruces on their northern excursion. Although he may have been involved in the design of other houses, Johnson is credited with only one other architectural commission, the Gothic Revival plantation house at Staunton Hill in Charlotte County, Virginia, built for James C. Bruce's brother, Charles. Johnson, who probably had some training in architecture at West Point, where civil engineering classes included training in the five orders of architecture, was born in 1815 to a well-to-do Chesterfield County, Virginia, family. His father, Col. William R. Johnson, served in the Virginia Assembly and raised thoroughbred horses on his plantation, Oakland, an occupation that gave him connections to Philadelphia and New York. In 1836, Johnson married Mary Swift, the daughter of the mayor of Philadelphia John Swift, whom he probably met through his father's business partner, John Charles Craig, who was the brother-in-law of Nicholas Biddle. By 1838 Johnson and his wife were living in Halifax County, where Johnson owned land. James C. Bruce and John E. Johnson became friends, no doubt, through their ties to Philadelphia. In the small world of gentry life in Halifax, Philadelphia connections were not uncommon.[23]

Johnson is identified as the delineator of Berry Hill in the construction contract that Bruce signed with the builder Josiah Dabbs. The contract specified that Dabbs was to build a dwelling house and outbuildings "—after the direction of said Bruce according to a plan & drawing by Mr. Jno. E. Johnson. . . ." Johnson's plan *(figure 18)* called for "The main building to be Sixty four feet by fifty two with a projection of ten feet in the center of the building in rear, which projection forms a part of the dining room the balance of the dining room to extend in the main building taking up a part of the passage the whole of this part of the building is to be 2 stories high besides

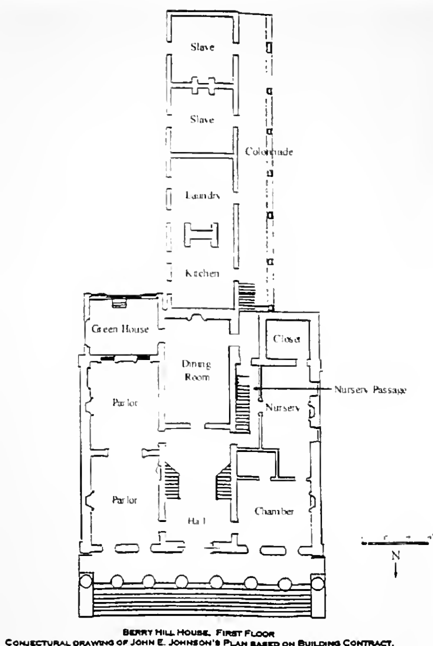


FIGURE 18. Conjectural plan of Berry Hill Plantation house based on the contract that James C. Bruce made with builder Josiah Dabbs, 1842–1844. *Image created by the author.*

the basement . . . There is to be a green house in rear of this building, which is to extend as far back as the dining room and on the Opposite Side thereof a large closet to correspond, in outward appearance, with the green house. . . ." The parties evidently agreed that Bruce's house was difficult to picture in the mind's eye, for they stipulated that "It's impossible to express every thing in a contract of this kind, but a plan & drawing having been made there can be no difficulty in understanding it. . . ."[24] The plan and elevation that John E. Johnson drew of Berry Hill are now lost. The plan presented in *figure 18* is a conjectural reconstruction based on the very detailed contract that James C. Bruce made with builder Josiah Dabbs.

FIGURE 19. Front door, with granite crosetted architecture, Berry Hill Plantation house. *Courtesy of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, negative no. 15859, frame 31-A.*

James and Eliza Bruce had specific tastes that Johnson may have helped to cultivate on the trip north. The conspicuous use of granite for the steps, portico, door, and window sills, for example, seems to be a direct influence of the buildings the Bruces encountered on the trip. The Bruces intended their new house to be as monumental as the public buildings they had admired in Philadelphia, Montpelier, and Boston. Bruce's description of the exterior is couched in terms that could well refer to such buildings: "a portico in front supported by eight columns, the floor and steps of which are to be of nice cut granite, and the whole of the external finish of this part of the building to be of the Doric Order of Architecture . . . An entablature after the Doric order to extend around the portico & 2 sides of the house 6½ feet broad according to drawing intended to accompany this contract."[25]

Specifications for the interior of the house also show the influence of early America's urban centers. "All the rooms in this main building to be papered, the two drawing rooms to be elegantly papered. There is [*sic*] to be ten marble mantelpieces two of which pure white to cost at least one hundred and fifty Dollars, there are to be eleven Mahogany Doors . . . Marble wash boards in all the rooms on the first floor, the locks, & hinges etc on the first floor to be Silver plated those above to be of the best kind not plated. . . ." These specifications ensured that the interior would be as impressive and finely finished as the exterior.

Beyond the monolithic Doric columns of the portico is a pair of massive paneled doors with silver-plated doorknobs and key escutcheon surrounded by a heavy granite architrave with crossettes *(figure 19).* James and Eliza Bruce were especially impressed by the use of granite in the public buildings they saw on their northern tour. The granite for Berry Hill's front steps and main entrance door was

FIGURE 20. Central stair hall (south view), Berry Hill Plantation house. *Courtesy of AXA Berry Hill, Inc. Photograph by John Hall.*

quarried on the property. Local stone masons, George and Enoch Taylor, extracted the granite and fashioned this bold Greek architrave for Berry Hill's front door. These heavy doors slide into pockets revealing a pair of glazed doors flanked by sidelights that give entry into the generously scaled stair hall. The monumentality of the exterior is continued inside the house using the same principles of bilateral symmetry, axial progressions, and bold architectural details.

The ceilings of the first floor are an impressive fifteen feet high, establishing the sense of expansive space. On axis with the front doors is another glazed pocket door, which gives into the dining room and completes the towering enfilade. The double cantilevered stair *(figure 20)* sweeps up either side of the hall before converging on a landing directly over the dining room door to complete the last single flight to the second floor. The double flight of stairs at Berry Hill is very similar to the double flight of stairs that William Strickland designed for the Second Bank of the United States in

FIGURE 21. Double flight of stairs designed by William Strickland for the Second Bank of the United States in Philadelphia (compare to stairs shown in *figure 20*). *Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, PA, 51-PHILA, 223-34.*

Philadelphia *(figure 21)*. This is another example of James and Eliza Bruce incorporating designs they saw in public buildings on their northern tour.

The central stair hall continues the tradition of the eighteenth-century Virginia house, establishing social boundaries and announcing a decorative program that can be read by social equals. Any visitor to Berry Hill who had had been entertained in some of

the finest houses in Richmond and Philadelphia would recognize the architectural sophistication of the entry. Members of elite society could expect an invitation into the parlors, while visitors who ranked lower on the social scale would remain in the hall for the entirety of their visit.

The monumental effect of the central hall is continued in the double parlors. Symmetry in these two rooms is carefully maintained. A pair of heavy, paneled doors slide into pockets within the dividing wall to open the north parlor to the south parlor, thus continuing the sense of enfilade created in the stair passage and creating the mirror image so important to the concept of double parlors. Triple-sash windows face each other in the north and south walls giving direct access to the Doric portico and the greenhouse. Between these two windows Bruce placed large pier mirrors where reflective qualities make the already generously scaled rooms seem even more expansive and further emphasized the symmetrical architectural detailing of the two rooms. The west wall of each parlor has a false door to balance the door that communicates with the central hall. The north parlor, used also as a library, had a pair of bookcases flanking the fireplace that balanced the doors on the opposite wall.[26]

FIGURE 22. Parlor door, Berry Hill Plantation house. *Courtesy of AXA Berry Hill, Inc. Photograph by John Hall.*

By the time the Bruces built Berry Hill, double parlors had become a standard feature in elite houses. Most parlors were finished to give the impression of a mirror image. Like the parlors at the Matthew Newkirk house, the Bruces placed mirrors between the windows of each parlor to emphasize the double vista.

Bilateral symmetry and axial progression in the double parlors created a sense of

FIGURE 23.
Central stair hall (north view), Berry Hill Plantation house. *Courtesy of AXA Berry Hill, Inc. Photograph by the author.*

monumentality that was complemented by architectural details. The doors and windows of the parlors *(figure 22)* carry the same bold shouldered, double-fascia architraves of those found in the stair passage *(figure 23)*, telling the visitor that the two spaces approach equal importance. Several features indicate the superior status of the parlors. The baseboards of the parlors are marble with double fascias that contrasts with the wood baseboards of the central stair hall, which were, however, marbelized.

The ceilings also distinguish the parlors as more important spaces. A triple-fascia, dentil cornice marks the transition from wall to ceiling surface. The plaster forms of the ceiling are shallow but

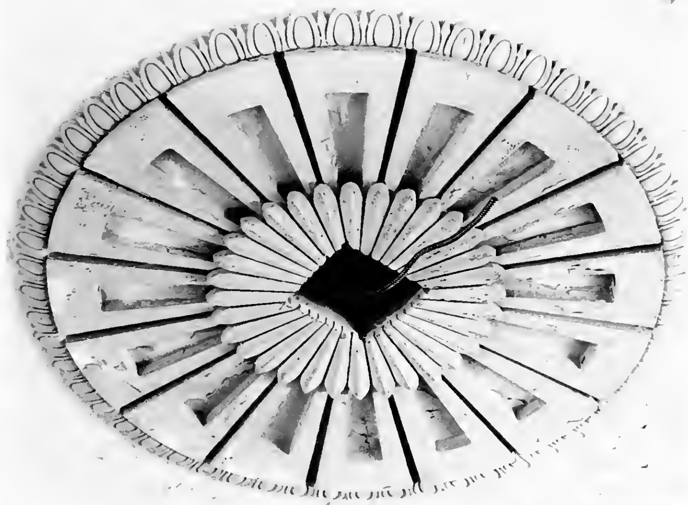


FIGURE 24. Detail of parlor ceiling, Berry Hill Plantation house. *Courtesy of AXA Berry Hill, Inc. Photograph by John Hall.*

FIGURE 25. Parlor mantle, Berry Hill Plantation house. *Courtesy of AXA Berry Hill, Inc. Photograph by the author.*

FIGURE 26. Detail of parlor mantle, Berry Hill Plantation house. *Courtesy of AXA Berry Hill, Inc. Photograph by the author.*

boldly conceived in geometric precision with square soffit panels, egg and dart, and continuous guttae ban molding. A large, flat circular medallion *(figure 24)* surrounded by egg and dart molding, which matches in effect the simple but assertive architraves of the parlor doors, defines the center of the room. Both of the parlors were papered with a fresco paper that was block printed in shades of gray, beige, and white that included a narrow matching border above the marble baseboard.

These simple, but well-conceived, architectural motifs are a sharp contrast to the Carrara marble mantelpieces in each parlor *(figure 25)*. The mantle shelf sits atop a frieze lavishly decorated with figures of harvest workers in the central panel *(figure 26)* flanked on either side by cornucopias spilling over with fruit. Solemn-faced caryatids in the best Greek manner support the entire composition. The parlor mantles are stock pieces, but the Bruces probably chose the mantles themselves from a pattern book. In his contract with builder Josiah Dabbs, James C. Bruce specified that the parlor mantles should cost at least $100.00, about a third of his overseer's annual salary. It is not clear who chose the mantles, but this style and motif was commonly found in the marble yards of New York and

Philadelphia, which furnished such pieces throughout the antebellum period. As in most of his choices for furnishing his house, Bruce equated cost with taste.

Double parlors became fashionable in American cities during the first quarter of the nineteenth century *(figure 27)*. Formal entertaining in Virginia gentry houses during the eighteenth century focused on the dining room and its accouterments and on the behavior of those participating in the social ritual of dining. During the nineteenth century, men and women met in yet another arena for social ritual, the parlor. It is impossible to know when James C. Bruce first

FIGURE 27. Double parlors, Berry Hill Plantation house. *Courtesy of AXA Berry Hill, Inc. Photograph by John Hall.*

encountered double parlors, but he first described such an arrangement of space when he wrote Eliza in 1837 about the Newkirk house in Philadelphia (see *figure 13*). He particularly noted the long mirrors that hung between the windows in each parlor and commented on how the architectural arrangements were "—the same in each of the rooms."[27]

In some elite Virginia households of the nineteenth century, the double parlors dominated the social space, replacing the dining room as a place for social ritual. At Berry Hill, the dining room retains some of its significance due to its spatial relationship to the stair passage. The position of the dining room directly on axis with the front door emphasizes its importance, while the glazed door, which slides into a pocket within the wall, allows the visitor to view the room with the door open or closed. The enfilade position of the dining room and its always-transparent quality implies a social importance to the room equal to the stair passage and the double parlors. Yet the finish of the dining room suggests that it is in many respects secondary to the parlors. The most noticeable architectural feature of the parlors, the ceiling decoration, is missing in the dining room. The long, narrow expanse of ceiling is unadorned. The door and window surrounds also indicate the room's secondary status. Instead of the robust profiles of the parlor architraves, the dining room has double architraves with delicate beaded backbands. Although these architraves are crossetted, they lack the assertiveness of those in the parlors. The baseboards here are not marble as specified, but rather plain double fascia boards. The mantelpiece is simple, composed of slabs of gray-black marble with delicate white veining in a post-and-lintel construction with pilasters of exaggerated entasis supporting a plain lintel and projecting mantelshelf. The walls were covered with paper sporting delicate green sprigs on a white background.

The finish of the dining room seems simple, even delicate compared to that of the parlors, yet its position within the house and its accouterments mitigate against secondary status. The furnishings for this room prove it to be one of equal importance with the other

public spaces of the house. It was with the furniture, the table settings, and silver plate and flatware that the Bruces indicated to visitors the significance of the dining room. Bruce's visitors, he knew, had a discriminating eye and talked among themselves about their host's table service. Eliza reported to her husband that "Mr. Clark has been enjoying himself very much partaking of the good dinners of the Richmond people. He had just returned from Mr. Warwick's dinner where all the table ware except the meal dishes were of silver and cut glass, and the courses innumerable." Virginia's elite very much appreciated the lengthy ritual of dining and they savored not only the delicacies that their hosts provided but the setting in which those delicacies were served. Mr. Clark's report gave Eliza the opportunity to compare discreetly her own table service and she passed on this information to her husband.[28]

In 1838, Bruce had rejected the notion of napkin rings as "too ultra for Halifax." By 1844, however, the Bruces were unequivocal in their choices. Just after they moved into their new house, the Bruces took stock of their dining service to determine what else they might need for their already capacious dining table (see Appendix A). In addition to the gilt-edged service for twenty-four that Eliza had ordered from Philadelphia in 1838, the inventory lists a full service for thirty-six of "white china," and a service for twenty-two of "common china." The flatware consisted of a full service for eighteen engraved with the Bruce coat of arms. Three dozen plated forks, eighteen plated knives, and twelve gilded knives could serve even more people. Among the larger serving pieces were six silver serving platters, eight japanned serving platters, four silver water pitchers, four vegetable dishes, and four fruit baskets. Numerous small items such as nutcrackers, cheese knives, and salt dishes rounded out the silver service. Three branched and two plain candlesticks lighted the table as guests sipped water from silver-plated tumblers and wine from cut crystal glasses. The large table and sideboard groaned under the 186 pounds of silver listed in the inventory. In four short years, James Bruce had thrown caution to the wind as he acquired a silver

service that would rival any in the South. There were, however, no napkin rings listed in the inventory.[29]

Fashionable expressions of status extended far beyond the Bruces' parlors and dining rooms, and into the natural world. Visitors who were admitted into the south parlor or the dining room would have a view into Eliza's greenhouse. Attached greenhouses like the one at Berry Hill were becoming more common in the South during the mid-nineteenth century. James Bruce paid close attention to such greenhouses on his travels. From Camden, South Carolina, Bruce wrote that he had visited some of "—the abodes of wealthy planters who have lands and negroes on the Santee. Most of the houses had green houses attached. I observed that the glass had two interruptions [and] only crop slats in the sash. They appeared to be one long pane from top to bottom. This gave the front a fine finish." Bruce had a keen eye for detail, and perhaps he thought that the greenhouses of the South Carolina planters were better finished than his own, for in the next line he sniffed that "—the people here think more of cotton than of literature."[30]

Eliza was in charge of the greenhouse *(figure 28)*. Greenhouses were popular among elite families, not only in Halifax County, but also throughout the eastern United States. Gardening for pleasure was one of Eliza's perquisites as mistress of the house, but she was also in charge of supervising the vegetable garden that fed her own household. She took great care in this duty, but she also indulged herself in the pleasure that she took from her exotic greenhouse plants. In November of 1845, Eliza reported to her husband that "—My greenhouse is entirely done. It is the envy of all my guests and indeed it is quite beautiful." Eliza and her children both enjoyed visiting the greenhouse and partaking of the fruit it nurtured. "Tom is charmed at pulling oranges from the tree to eat them like apples." By January Eliza was already planning botanical additions to her greenhouse and asked Bruce to bring her palm and coconut trees, and ginger and pineapple plants to complement the lime, lemon, and orange trees she already had flourishing there. Eliza val-

FIGURE 28. Greenhouse, far right behind tree, Berry Hill Plantation house. *Courtesy of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, negative no. 15859, frame 24-A.*

ued ornamental plants as well and told her husband to pack a cactus in paper and bring it with him when he returned from Cuba.[31]

Greenhouses provided fresh fruit for her family, for which Eliza was proud and grateful. She shared some of this fruit with her neighbors and they in turn sent her samples from their own greenhouses Elite Haligonians vied with one another to maintain this form of conspicuous consumption. Eliza told Bruce that their neighbor Mrs. Henry had sent her an orange from her greenhouse and she noted too that another planter, Mr. Clark, was so struck with envy that he vowed to build his own greenhouse.[32]

The elite of Halifax County were not the only visitors to Berry Hill. The Greek temple that James C. Bruce built was a notable landmark for his poor neighbors who regularly passed Berry Hill on their way to Halifax Courthouse. Such an obvious display of wealth proclaimed that the Bruces had more than enough to meet their own needs. Occasionally their poorer neighbors left the public road and made their way through the tree-lined lane to the main house, seeking assistance. While writing to her husband on a cold and raw afternoon in March, eight months after moving to the new house and shortly after the Broadnax's visit, Eliza stopped to receive one such visitor:

I am interrupted by Mrs. Grogan or Mrs. Newman—I do not know which is her name now and I must stop but will finish my letter this evening.—I resume my seat to finish my letter. Poor Mrs. Grogan had a long account of her trials and afflictions to give of the suffering of her Father who is living with her. I felt for her most sincerely for although she may be cross yet I have no doubt she is poor. I gave her some necessaries and I hope they may be of use to her. She walked here today six miles—when the poor creature comes here begging, I always feel so humbled for I cannot help thinking why has God made my lot so different from theirs certainly not because I deserve it. How thankful we ought to feel when we have food and raiment and a comfortable home. Instead of being thankful we are frequently fretting and pining for some trifling thing which is useless after we get it.[33]

As Eliza received the unfortunate Mrs. Grogan in the grand stair passage, she felt humbled by her visitor's presence. The sweeping double stair way and the vista into the silver-laden dining room that so delighted the Broadnaxes suddenly had a different and unexpected effect upon Eliza as she considered her house from a different perspective. The intended effect was inverted, and rather than basking in the approval of her visitor, Eliza was embarrassed by her luxuriant surroundings. The mistress of the great house felt more humble than her visitor, and if Mrs. Grogan felt cross, perhaps it was

because she too was wondering "why has God made my lot so different."

Eliza questioned a divine order that left so many of her neighbors to beg at her doorstep. But she never questioned the temporal order whose social, political, and economic workings required her to ponder such injustices. Eliza's faith was deep and genuine, but it was personal, not communal, and she failed to make the connection between Mrs. Grogan's plight and the larger economic system that compelled the poor woman to appeal to Eliza's sense of noblesse oblige.[34]

Mrs. Grogan was not the only Virginian who questioned the order of things. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century Virginia politics was undergoing a gradual but profound democratizing transformation. The Constitutional Convention of 1829–1830 had thwarted reformers who sought to extend the franchise and deliver to office representatives directly elected by the people. The failure to rewrite Virginia's constitution led to two more decades of conflict as the diverse ethnic, religious, and economic interests that comprised the electorate fought for political reform, striving for a system that reflected the diversity of the state's population. In spite of his architectural bid for power, James C. Bruce's neighbors consistently returned Democrats to office in both state and national elections. Fully one-third of Halifax County's voters were illiterate and, if they had any notion of things classical, they didn't give a fig for the muses that dwelt behind Bruce's Grecian portico. James C. Bruce knew that his poorer neighbors would not grasp the full significance of his Doric temple, but they would recognize, and perhaps acquiesce to, the wealth and power that built it. At the same time, the members of Virginia's elite ruling class might delight in the effect that Bruce created at Berry Hill, but they would also know that he was no dilettante—his aspirations were political, not aesthetic.[35]

CONCLUSION

Architecture is a profound statement of intent. The style of Berry Hill's main house, its room arrangement and furnishings, and its placement in the landscape were deliberate and conscious choices of James C. and Eliza Bruce. Their parents' generation had learned early how to wield influence quietly but effectively by shunning displays of wealth and power. James Bruce the elder knew that his conservative neighbors took a dim view of four-wheeled carriages and pretentious houses, and he successfully navigated a course that left him rich but relatively inconspicuous. His generation faced few challenges during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. James C. Bruce, however, inhabited a very different world from his father—one that sought to build a democratic society on the foundations of the Revolution. As his class began a fight for its privileged position in Southside Virginia, it sought to give that threatened position architectural expression. The colonial gentry of the Tidewater were very much in the minds of some Virginians who pined for the old order, and the architectural examples of their hegemony still stood as models. The fact that many of these eighteenth-century great houses were in a state of decline only emphasized the importance of maintaining the status quo. Far from allying himself with a national political and social elite, James C. Bruce built his Greek temple as a rebuff to forces much closer to home that challenged his power.[36]

Political foes, however, were not the only threat to James Bruce and his family. Malevolent forces seemed to work against James and Eliza and the home they sought to create at Berry Hill. In quick succession, three of their children died in early childhood despite the best medical attention of the time, and four other children died of the then mysterious tuberculosis, two before the age of fourteen. The blow from each death reverberated through the family, the ripples of grief barely subsiding before another child was carried away. Eliza in particular lived in dread of the approach of winter and the

inexplicable suffering that season always seemed to bring. She came to view life as a series of trials and tribulations, and placed her faith in the next world where she believed her dead children awaited her. James Bruce faced this awful attrition with stoic resignation and tender concern for his wife—her grief as well as her own health. Eliza herself succumbed to tuberculosis in 1850, six years after the completion of Berry Hill.

Berry Hill is a paradox—one that illustrates the untenable position that James C. Bruce took when he undertook his ambitious building campaign. For all his rhetoric about the beneficial leveling effects of democracy and free market capitalism on American society, Bruce was profoundly undemocratic in his actions. James Bruce, could not reconcile this contradiction, a contradiction that he might contemplate every evening as he settled by the fire in his own parlor. To the right of the fireplace was a silver-plated lever which, when Bruce turned it, would ring a bell in the back hall summoning his butler Ellick to the parlor. Every room in the house had such a lever and the effect was magical—a silent turn of the lever and a slave appeared to do the bidding of the one who called. James C. Bruce, however, revealed a fundamental contradiction in his character and in his understanding of the real power of such a silent summons. There before him, carved in the carrara mantelpiece, were figures of putti gathering the year's plenty, and cornucopias brimming with the earth's rich offerings *(figure 26)*. The harvest motif is ironic and points to the fundamental paradox of Bruce's mansion house. Every year at harvest time, Bruce's slaves toiled the fields of his plantation, reaping the fruit of their labor for their master's benefit. The figures that adorn the parlor mantles, however, are fanciful allusions to a classical idyll in which the earth freely renders up its bounty for easy gathering. Bruce could not have chosen a sharper contrast to the reality of his enslaved laborers. But neither could he imagine or accept a system of free white laborers, whom he referred to derisively as "white negroes." If Bruce believed in the power of classical architecture to inspire distinctively American aesthetic accomplishments, he

also believed in its power to convey, and possibly invoke, a particular social and political agenda.[37]

James C. Bruce's rhetoric reveals a profound contradiction between his beliefs and the reality of the world he created at Berry Hill. Even as he extolled the leveling effect of democratic institutions and free market capitalism, Bruce practiced a form of paternalism that created a rigid hierarchy in southern society for both enslaved African Americans and for white society. Classical architecture, by its very nature, is an expression of hierarchical relationships and Berry Hill was an eloquent exposition of Bruce's intent. Bruce did not merely imitate elite Philadelphia's notions of fashion, or symbolically ally himself with a political ideology.

As a slaveholder, Bruce ultimately sided with the forces that would seek to thwart the promises of the Revolution, and in 1861 he reluctantly voted for Virginia's secession from the Union. With the fulfillment of the promises of the Revolution imminent, Bruce contemplated the world he had created at Berry Hill. Shuttered against the heat of a hot July afternoon in 1863, James wrote a musing letter to his sister, Sally. Eliza had been dead for thirteen years. Eight of his eleven children were buried near her, and the fate of his remaining three sons was uncertain. Indeed the fate of his life's work would soon be determined, and Bruce suspected the outcome would not be to his advantage. Bruce described to Sally his own search for meaning behind the Grecian facade of his house at Berry Hill plantation:

> I am leading the life of a hermit. Spend my time in the house day after day, and have none but the worst company in the world, that of myself. I read incessantly, and do it for the reason that the plowman whistles 'for the want of thought.' This is Sunday and I have been studying all day the Apocalypse, but can make nothing of it. It is not Revelation to me, but a puzzle.[38]

James Coles Bruce died in his fifty-ninth year on 28 March 1865 at Berry Hill plantation.

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ENDNOTES

1. I am indebted to several people and institutions for their help in developing their essay: The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, The Virginia Historical Society, Henry Lewis, Camille Wells, Robert Pottage, Hal Sharp, and Judith Kucharski.

2. See Howard Major, *The Domestic Architecture of the Early Republic: The Greek Revival* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1926); Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America: Being an Account of Important Trends in American Architecture Prior to the War Between the States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944). For more recent work on the classical revival see, Wendy A. Cooper, *Classical Taste in America, 1800–1840* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1993); Gregory R. Weidman and Jennifer F. Goldsborough, *Classical Maryland, 1815–1845* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1993); Page Talbott, *Classical Savannah: Fine and Decorative Arts, 1800–1840* (Savannah: Talfair Museum of Art, 1995); Roger Kennedy, *Greek Revival America,* published for the National Trust for Historic Preservation (New York: Stewart, Tabori, & Chang, 1989), W. Barksdale Maynard, *Architecture in the United States, 1800–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

3. Richard Beeman, *The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746–1832* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); Frederick F. Siegel, *The Roots of Southern Distinctiveness: Tobacco and Society in Danville, Virginia, 1780–1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Charles Farmer, *In the Absence of Towns* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1993). For an explanation of how the eighteenth-century gentry extended their hegemony westward to deliberately replicate the social and economic order of the Tidewater, see: Turk McCleskey, "Rich Land, Poor Prospects: Real Estate and the Formation of a Social Elite in Augusta County Virginia, 1738–1770," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98 (3) (July 1990): 449–486.

4. In 1837, James and Eliza Bruce sat for portrait painter George Cooke (1793–1849). Cooke began a successful career as a painter in 1819 after several failed attempts as a merchant. By 1825 he had painted 130 portraits. After a five-year tour of France and Italy he began painting historical scenes and landscapes, and in 1837 wrote James C. Bruce that he had sold a view of Naples to a gentleman from Philadelphia for which he was paid $300, the same amount in annual salary James C. Bruce paid the tutor of his children. Cooke remains known for his prolific portraits, his subjects being wealthy planters and merchants throughout the country. His work was exhibited at the Boston Athenaeum, National Academy, Pennsylvania Academy, American Academy, and at Richmond, Virginia. It is not clear how James C. Bruce came to know Cooke, but both men moved among an elite group of men whose Whig politics had a distinct aesthetic that found expression in art and architecture.

5. Kennedy, *Greek Revival,* 181–195.

6. Roger Kennedy, *Architecture, Men, Women and Money in America, 1600–1860* (New

York: Random House, 1985), 238–47. For evidence of Whig strongholds see William G. Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion: Virginia and the Second Party System 1824–1861*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 114–157, esp. 118. Greek porches and other Greek details were of course used on otherwise vernacular buildings, but Arlington House and Berry Hill are the only monumental expressions of the style.

7. See Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740–1790*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982.)

8. Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986); Mark Wenger, "The Dining Room in Early Virginia," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, II*, ed. Camille Wells (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 149–59; and Mark Wenger, "The Dining Room in Early Virginia," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, III*, ed. Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 149–59.

9. Clifton Ellis, "Dissenting Faith and Domestic Landscape in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, VII*, ed. Annmarie Adams and Sally McMurray (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 23–40.

10. For analysis of voting patterns according to religious and political affiliation, see Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion*, 128–132.

11. The classical world had enormous influence on the aesthetic sensibilities of Americans during the early nineteenth century. The decorative arts, painting, and architecture of the period show an undeniable national trend toward things classical. Two interpretations dominate the discussion of the classical revival in America. The first interpretation contends that the classical revival, especially the Greek Revival, was an expression of nationalism inspired by, or at least coinciding with, the wars for Greek independence. The second interpretation holds that the classical revival was primarily an aesthetic movement in which patrons sought expressions of absolute beauty, and cultural symbols that could express the nation's new democratic ideals. Most historians have described the Greek Revival as a "democratic" style, emphasizing its popularity among the middle class and the plethora of vernacular examples. These interpretations focus on urban examples of the Greek Revival, especially in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions. More importantly, these interpretations promote a model of imitative behavior among the elite that obscures the deeper motivations behind displays of power and privilege. A truer understanding of the political and social implications of the classical revival is gained by closer examination of particular regional examples. See for example Maurie McInnis, "The Politics of Taste: Classicism in Charleston, South Carolina, 1815–1840," Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1996. The dissemination of style and fashion is not the result of mere imitation as some historians of the classical revival imply. Rather, style and fashion are appropriated as symbols with deep social, political, and cultural significance. This essay deals with the issue of how style and fashion are adopted and adapted by different status groups. The method of inquiry here is based on Marxist thought as adapted by later scholars, particularly Max Weber and Joseph Gusfield. See Max Weber, "Status, Class, and Religion," in Talcott Parsons, et al. (eds), *Theories of Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1961), 1141–1154; and Joseph Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

12. Some of James C. Bruce's business and family papers are held at the University of Virginia Library's Special Collections, hereafter cited as BFP-UVA. For explanations of Southside Virginia's colonial and antebellum economy and role of the country store see: Charles J. Farmer, *In the Absence of Towns: Settlement and Country Trade in Southside Virginia*,

1730–1800. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993); and Robert P. Swierenga, *Pioneers and Profits: Land Speculation on the Iowa Fronier* (Ames: University of Iowa Press, 1968) 158–83. James C. Bruce's early career in the Southside is not well documented in public records. A letter from his brother Charles is addressed to James Bruce in Amelia County and dated 1784. See Bruce Family Papers, BFP-UVA, Box 19. James Bruce bought land in Halifax County in 1789. For the Bruce genealogy see John Goodall Bruce, *The Bruce Family Descending from George Bruce (1650–1715)* (Parsons, West Virginia: McClain Printing Co., 1977) and Henry W. Lewis, *More Taste than Prudence: A Study of John Evans Johnson* (Chapel Hill: Borderer Press, 1983), 18. The early Bruce genealogy is described in a letter from George Morton Williams to his cousin Philip Alexander Bruce dated 8 September 1902, MSS 1, B8306, a33 at the Virginia Historical Society (hereafter cited as VHS), and in a letter to James C. Bruce from his cousin Henry Bruce of Kentucky, VHS, MSS 1, B8306, a 25–26. James Bruce's business dealings were shrewd and drew the dubious comments of people who did not know him personally, but who knew of him. See Diary of Hugh Grigsby, VHS, MSS 1 G8782, b76. A series of letters between the elder and younger Bruce's show tension between the two as regard to career choice and money. See James C. Bruce to James Bruce, 12 July 1823; 30 January 1826; 20 April 1826; 4 May 1826; 8 July 1828, BFP-UVA, Box 3. For Eliza Bruce's dower and legacy, see will of William Wyche Wilkins, Will Book 4, 222–224, Northamton Co., NC dated 18 October 1834, probated Dec. court 1840. Will of James Bruce, Will Book 18, 183, Halifax County, Va., dated 28 September 1836, probated 22 May 1837.

13. For James C. Bruce's political affiliations, see letters between James C. Bruce and his father and friends, BFP-UVA, acc. # 2692, Box 5, Vol. 3. For secondary accounts of James C. Bruce's political activities, see Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion*, 222, 297. Also see Kennedy, *Architecture, Men*, 259–72; For a review of the slavery debates in Virginia, see Shade, 191–224; for the standard account of the question of slavery in Virginia see Joseph C. Robert, *The Road from Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1941). For more recent studies see Alison Goodyear Freehling, *Drift toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831–1832* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1982) and Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *The Rhetoric of Conservatism: The Virginia Convention of 1829–30 and the Conservative Tradition in the South* (San Marino, Ca.: Huntington Library, 1982).

14. James C. Bruce, "An Address Delivered Before the Alumni and Graduating Class of the University of North Carolina, at Chapel Hill," (Raleigh: Printed at the office of the North Carolina Standard, 1841), reprinted 1989 by John Cox's Sons, Baltimore, Md., BFP-UVA, acc # 2692, Box 5.

15. James C. Bruce, "An Address Delivered Before the Alumni and Graduating Class of the University of North Carolina, at Chapel Hill," (Raleigh: Printed at the office of the North Carolina Standard, 1841), reprinted 1989 by John Cox's Sons, Baltimore, Md., BFP-UVA, acc # 2692, Box 5.

16. James C. Bruce, "An Address Delivered Before the Alumni and Graduating Class of the University of North Carolina, at Chapel Hill," (Raleigh: Printed at the office of the North Carolina Standard, 1841), reprinted 1989 by John Cox's Sons, Baltimore, Md., BFP-UVA, acc # 2692, Box 5.

17. James C. Bruce to Eliza Bruce, 31 December 1836, BFP-UVA, Box 5.

18. For an explanarion of the intricate social and kin ties between Biddle and the Virginia elite and between Bruce and the Philadelphia elite, see Lewis, *More Taste than Prudence*, 27–59, and Kennedy, *Architecture, Men, Women and Money*, 243, 258–265.

19. James C. Bruce to Eliza Bruce, 28 February 1837, BFP-UVA, Box 5.

20. Eliza Bruce to James C. Bruce, 4 March 1837; James C. Bruce to Eliza Bruce, 13 March 1837, BFP-UVA, Box 5.

21. James C. Bruce to Eliza Bruce, 13 March 1837, BFP-UVA, Box 5.

22. Journal of Eliza Bruce, 1838, BFP-UVA, acc. #2692, Box 8.

23. Lewis, *More Taste than Prudence*, 1–12, 19–23. Lewis speculates that Johnson may have helped in the design of Tarover, the Downingesque house that Bruce's son Richard built one mile west of Berry Hill. Lewis also tentatively credits Johnson with Waverly, the Botetourt County plantation house of Bruce's son Alexander, and with Redfield and Millwood, plantation houses in Halifax County. As Lewis points out, however, there is no documentary evidence that links these houses to Johnson.

24. On Dabbs see: Lewis, *More Taste Than Prudence*, 45–57, 90–91; John Emory Wells, "Berry Hill: Greek Revival in Virginia with Notes on Related Buildings," unpublished paper, 1976, copy at South Boston Public Library, South Boston, Va.; U. S. Census 1840 and 1850. On the Taylors see: BFP Boxes 8 & 9. On slave stone masons, see BFP Box 10, and slave list Box 13. On Whitice see: BFP Box 8, 8/16/1842. On Dabney Cosby the brick mason at Berry Hill, see Catherine Bishir, Charlotte Brown, Carl Lounsbury, and Ernest Wood, *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 147–62.

25. Contract between James C. Bruce and Josiah Dabbs, 1 March 1842, BFP-UVA, Box 9. Johnson's original plan for Berry Hill has never been located.

26. The bookcase north of the fireplace was removed sometime during the early twentieth century and replaced with a window.

27. For more on how elite men and women interacted socially in architectural settings, see Wenger, "The Dining Room in Early Virginia," and Barbara Carson, *Ambitious Appetites, Dining, Behaviour, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington* (Washington, DC: American Institute of Architects Press, 1990). Many elite householders reconfigured their eighteenth-century floor plans to incorporate double parlors. For examples, see the Little Brice House and the Dr. James Murray House in Annapolis.

28. Eliza Bruce to James C. Bruce, 28 January 1845, BFP-UVA, Box 10.

29. An inventory of silver at Berry Hill is listed in BFP-UVA, acc. # 2692, Vol. 6. An unitemized receipt for furniture is in BFP-UVA, Box 11, 1848.

30. Eliza Bruce to James C. Bruce, 29 October 1844, BFP-UVA, Box 10.

31. Eliza Bruce to James Bruce, 2 February 1844; 18 November 1845; 10 December 1845, BFP-UVA, Box 10.

32. BFP-UVA, Box 10, 12 March 1845.

33. Eliza Bruce to James C. Bruce, 10 March 1845, BFP-UVA, Box 10.

34. For more on how evangelical religion helped to mask the workings of antebellum Virginia's economic system, see Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 54–57. See also Richard Rankin, *Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen: The Religion of the Episcopal Elite in North Carolina, 1800–1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

35. For an account of the complex social, political, and religious issues that characterized Virginia politics during this period, see Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion*.

36. For a description of how elite Virginians of the early nineteenth century perceived the decline of their class see Robert P. Sutton "Nostalgia, Pessimism, and Malaise: The Doomed Aristocrat in Late-Jeffersonian Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 76 (January 1968), 41–52; Michael Flusche, "Thomas Nelson Page: The Quandry of a Literary

Gentleman," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 84 (October 1976), 40–52; Lorraine Holland, Rise and Fall of the Ante-Bellum Virginia Aristocracy: A Generational Analysis, PhD Dissertation, Univ. of California, Irvine, 1980, 1–13. William Shade's work debunks the myth of Virginia's decline, a myth that many historians perpetuated by basing their work on anecdotal evidence. While the perceptions of elite Virginians of the nineteenth century were valid and contributed to their defensive nature, Shade reveals the more complex social and political forces that lay at the base of their perceptions.

37. James C. Bruce to Eliza Bruce, 22 February 1837, BFP-UVA, Box 6. Eugene Genovese explains the ideological basis for this paradox in *The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820–1860*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992). For more on the origin and use of call bell systems see Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press 1978), 219, 264. See also Mark Wenger, "House Bells and House Planning in Early Virginia," unpublished mss.

38. James C. Bruce to Sarah Bruce Seddon, 9 July 1863, VHS, Mss1, G1875, a 157.

APPENDIX A

Berry Hill Dining Room Inventory 1842

LIST OF PLATED WARE

3 large waiters
2 small waiters
4 vegetable dishes
4 fruit baskets
1 bread basket
3 branch candlesticks
2 plain candlesticks
2 sets snuffers and trays
6 pair nut crackers
1 cheese knife
18 knives
12 gilded knives
4 japaned waiters
4 small japaned waiters
3 urns
2 cream jugs
2 sugar dishes
2 butter tabs
4 pitchers
18 tumblers
2 pepper bowls
3 doz. forks
2 ladles
4 small ladles
18 crested large spoons
18 crested desert spoons
18 crested tea spoons
4 salt dishes and spoons
1 doz. large spoons
1 doz. large desert spoons
21 plain tea spoons
1 fish knife
2 butter knives
1 silver tureen

41 large white dinner plates

WHITE CHINA

31 soup plates
30 small breakfast plates
23 large breakfast plates
36 small deep plates
2 nice pitchers
1 white water pitcher
5 butter bowls
2 sauce tureens
2 large tureens
24 white dishes
4 covered dishes
1 steak dish
2 lettuce dishes

GILT SET

21 large plates
47 deep plates
12 dishes
4 round dishes
1 covered dish
1 custard stand

CHINA IN USE COMMON

22 dinner plates
18 soup plates
18 breakfast plates
3 covered plates
1 tureen
8 dishes
2 lettuce dishes
1 lettuce bowl
2 fruit baskets
2 milk pitchers
1 steak dish

[University of Virginia Library's Special Collections [hereafter cited as BFP-UVA], Box 14, 1858 Business Papers]

20 May 1857:

Pannil & Sons [of Petersburg, VA] Pannill writes saying that he is sending Bruce the paintings he bought and sending a catalogue with other paintings to consider, which paintings cost between $8 and $30 each.

30 May 1857:

cash paid for oil paintings:

#78	scene on Pasaic River by Rosenburgh	$34.00
#62	view on Lake Huron by Frost	$10.00
#58	view on the Mohawk	$8.50
#42	Winter scene on the Fox River by Bent	$8.00
#50	Figure piece by Boesen	$11.00
#102	The First Love by Freeman	$5.00
	packing and shipping	$1.43
		$78.93

30 October 1858:

Richardson & Co., Richmond, VA. importers of carpets, rugs, door mats, curtain goods, Floor and other oil cloths

1 Floor Cloth	1,200 [sq. ft.?]	$12.00
1 Door mat	175	$1.75
1 Door mat	100	$1.00
		$14.75

[BFP-UVA, Mss 2692a Box 2, Business Papers]

21 May 1850:

Pannill & Sons, Petersburg, VA.

James C. Bruce orders: "One refrigerator size for a large family of the simplest and most approved construction."

26 June 1838 Charles B. Williams writes to JCB from Richmond "A few days after you left this city, W. Hallowell had a fresh arrival of refrigerators from Philadelphia. Although not as highly finished or as large as the one we saw at the Marshall house [in Philadelphia: see BFP, Box 6, JCB to EB, 3 June 1837]." Williams bought one for $28.00 and shipped it to Halifax.

[BFP-UVA, Box 7, 1839 Business Papers]

Fiot, Meigner & Co., of Philadelphia

One harp "Gothic Brand" for $900.00

Collection of Essays by John Bivins, Jr.

The Luminary Editorials

The Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts *is proud to announce the establishment of an endowment in the memory of John Bivins, Jr., that will help perpetuate his commitment to southern decorative arts scholarship. Made possible by John's wife, Anne McPherson, his sons, Evan and Matthew, and dozens of caring gifts made in his honor, the John Bivins Memorial Endowment will aid in financing the* Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts, *for which John served ten years as its editor and helped bring the publication to national prominence. John also wrote over a half dozen articles for the* Journal.

Providing an outlet to disseminate recent research findings in the field of early southern decorative arts is the primary goal of the Journal *in its support of MESDA's mission statement. This endowment, then, is a fitting and everlasting tribute to John and his passion for decorative arts research and a continuation of his commitment to making the* Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts *a thriving force in its field.*

To recognize the establishment of this endowment and to celebrate John's indelible mark left on our community, the Journal *has collected and reprinted here several of the many editorial commentaries and articles that he wrote for* The Luminary, *MESDA's members' newsletter. Because of the obscurity of many of the early issues of* The Luminary, *a collection of John's writings from that publication is a welcome source of insight, understanding, and—as always—humor.*

A note of caution to the reader: Many of the articles presented below contain ephemeral information or references to events that transpired at the time of writing; both organizational (the gift of an important

Windsor bench, for example) and social (the introduction of "New" Coke in 1985). Readers should be careful to discern dates and transitory information and apply this information accordingly to their understanding. The Luminary, *after all, is a periodical and the information presented in its pages is by its nature time-specific. . . .* Editor

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HELLO

Winter 1980 (Vol. 1, No. 1)

With this, our first issue of the, *Luminary,* MESDA begins a twice-yearly offering of tidbits, revelation and general goings-on to share with our friends and colleagues. What, you might well ask, is a "luminary." Mr. Webster has it as "A body that gives light" and "One who is a source of light in the world in which he moves." Yet another archaic definition is "an artificial light." While we'll try to avoid artifice in our attempts to enlighten, we hope that our *Luminary* won't be such a stuffy fellow as to think of himself as a "light in the world." Light*hearted,* perhaps, as the excellent masthead cut of a querulous oil pedant by artist Jim Stanley might indicate. We offer a bit of apology to Mr. Hogarth for any overt plagiarism in presenting this rumpled gentleman. In all he's something of an archetype of the antiquarian, comically peering out from the ages all in the fashion of Rowlandson's owlish "Connoisseur." Like Hogarth's huge family of startling *genre* characters, perhaps our "luminary" should teach us something, such as our need to keep a distinctly non-stuffy point of view in interpreting the early decorative arts . . . a matter which should concern us all.

Like the MESDA *Journal, Luminary* will be published twice yearly, in February and August, which will fall exactly between the usual publication dates of the *Journal.* The *Luminary,* however, will report on behind-the-scenes matters that the *Journal* doesn't concern itself with. Things happening at MESDA, including classes, lectures, exhibits, research and the like will be given space, along with news of our field research.

We'll present items new to the collection, and provide you with a full six-month calendar of coming events, all to keep you abreast of the things which keep the MESDA staff in an animated state.

DOG DAYS

Summer 1980 (Vol. 1, No. 2)

Weather is one of those things that man has always needed, not just as a necessary part of the environment, but also as something beyond controlling that could be freely and openly cussed by all and sundry without fear of giving offense or revealing low-bred manners. Summer weather in the South most particularly has been the vehement target of both visitors to and inhabitants of our region, though the former of course have been historically the most vociferous. And such meteorological diatribes are not without good reason at times, it must be admitted. As we sit all smug and comfortable in our nicely insulated and chilled twentieth-century cocoons, largely immune from the brassy skies, gasping humidity, and wilting heat of August, we might well reflect upon the plight of the early visitor who was forced to deal with the Southern summer on its own terms. There was no shutting it out, in fact. After a day's journey in the withering sun, choking from the dust of indifferent roads, the scorched and limp traveller could do little better than fortify himself with copious quantities of lukewarm arrack in order to endure a stifling, sweaty night in the garret of some roadside establishment. Even clean linens must have done little to overcome the suffocating confinement of lumpy and sunken ticking, and of course almost no one could afford the expensive brass sieving occasionally used for window screens. An English visitor to Charleston in 1774 showed "great restraint in describing the "swarms of Mosqueto's and flies in the Houses" as merely II excessive Troublesome and disagreeable all the warm Weather season." A somewhat more verbal foreigner had left behind a bit of rhyme five years earlier that left nothing to the imagination in his swift sketch of a Low Country summer:

Boisterous winds and heavy rains
Fevers and rhumatic pains
Agues plenty without doubt
Sores, boils, the prickling heat
and gout
Musquitos on the skin make
blotches
Centipedes and large cock-
roaches. . .

The good Reverend Charles Woodmason, working his way through the tattered souls of the upper piedmont area of South Carolina in the late 1760's, found August weather in the area to be particularly worthy of scathing comment. He remarked that "The Nature of the Air here, is but little known, or attended to by the Natives—and yet much depends on it—for Many noxious Damps Exhalations arise that generate putrid and fevers and other Disorders . . ." Wood mason himself had been "seized with a fever" after being drenched by a summer storm, and was at once smitten with "Extream Lassftude—Griping, Purging . . . and Great faintness," though he was able to drag himself to the pulpit the following day and exhort a congregation with a treatise on "Baptism and Spiritual Regeneration."

It was the heat, though, which had to be dealt with above all. Wood mason considered it "a Great Novelty to a Londoner" to see back country women running about "bareheaded, barelegged and barefoot with only a thin Shift and under Petticoat," though he confessed that "the heat of the Weather admits not of any [but] thin Cloathing." The real problem to Woodmason was that these ladies had a "most uncommon Practise" of drawing "their Petticoat close to their Hips to shew the fineness of their limbs—so that they might as well be in Puri Naturalibus . . ."

Fine ladies certainly weren't immune from the oppressive heat, either. Janet Schaw, visiting the Cape Fear in the summer of 1775, reported that she and her friends spent days "panting for breath and air, dressed in a single muslin petticoat and short gown," quite ren-

dered "languid in thought, word, and deed." Working in such heat was unthinkable, of course, and Miss Schaw noted that the men of the region whiled away the heat of the day "sitting under a rustick shade, drinking New England rum made into a grog, the most shocking liquor you can imagine." Such living, according to that prim English lady, caused the blood to be "spoil'd and rendered thin beyond all proportion . . . and hence the constant slow fevers that . . . infeeble the whole frame." Landon Carter of Virginia, however, had a speedy if unpleasant remedy for heat exhaustion. When some of his field workers became faint in the heat, Carter "had them up and ordered them a vomit a piece being satisfied . . . that this sudden faintyness with heat is occasioned by a stomach loaded with bile to thick to be vomitted without an Emetic."

Charlestonians, mindful of an apt description of the low Country in the warm months as "heaven in the spring, hell in the summer, and a hospital in the fall," often forsook the South for more pleasant latitudes if they cou ld afford it. Many, as Woodmason reported, were wont to "embark annually for *Rhode Island* or *New York* for the Benefit of—*Cool Air*." Certainly, that was better than suffering from putrid fevers and thickened bile, but such travel was expensive nonetheless.

It's cheaper to stay cool in the summertime these days, though. And even maintaining a certain state of in *puri naturalibus*, thankfully, is not so shocking any more, even in the South.

ON THE MIGRATORY FLIGHT OF STYLE

Winter 1981 (Vol. 2, No. 1)

The muse of urban style has long beckoned to American furniture historians, who have panted after her shapely form through the labyrinthine pages of Chippendale, Manwaring, Ince and Mayhew, Copland, Hepplewhite, Sheraton, and other lesser-known purveyors of the High Style. Quite rightly, every attempt has been made to find influence by the great English design books upon American artisans.

Such pursuits have indeed met with certain success, particularly in the Middle Atlantic and Southern states, providing us with solid proof that some cabinetmakers here—and their patrons—were indeed sensitive to shifting tastes across the Atlantic. Such design ties are of no small moment, especially in view of the rather staggering prices larger volumes such as the *Director* fetched in colonial cities.

Urban American furniture of the 18th century that borrows closely from such elegant published sources, though, is comparatively scarce—with the exception, perhaps, of chair splats. What of that great mass of furniture that seemingly has little relationship to the design books? Did all the poor sods that didn't happen to own a *Director* simply sit down at the drawing board and rip out their own elevations and decorative details, pulling things from mid-air? That's a complex question, for while we certainly must give American artisans credit for the ability to design, we can't ignore the fact that the roots of many regional styles lie in the misty apprenticeship histories of emigrant cabinetmakers. Such men were often from British cities and towns outside the pulsating London orbit of frenzied Rococo and Neoclassical modes. These emigrants came to America with an often more conservatively Baroque concept of just what furniture designs might be considered appropriate for "elegant apartments." The phrase "plain and neat," one which is frequently found in early records here, describes rather well the prevailing American taste in many cities. Boston furniture, for example, though never thought of as anything but stylish here, remained four or five decades out of step with London throughout most of the 18th century. Even the elaborate statements of Philadelphia often speak more to the early 18th century, with their great looming scrolled and carved pediments, than many of us have cared to admit.

Such material evidence of cultural lag, however, provides a challenge to those who would understand the development of American style, rather than just showing up American work in the harsh light of international design scrutiny. It matters little to us that a Londoner of 1770 would have giggled over the "outmoded" appearance of a

Dressing Table, walnut with cypress and yellow pine secondary, Roanoke River Basin area of North Carolina, 1750–70. *MESDA research file 3066.*

nine-shell Newport desk-and-bookcase of the same date. More important to us are the elusive roots of regional modes, and how and why they proliferated.

In this country, settlement patterns often provide a startling network of stylistic dissemination. Large segments of the piedmont South, for example, were settled by emigrants moving out of the Delaware Valley from the 1730s to after the Revolution, so it comes as little surprise to find certain elements of the Philadelphia style in southern piedmont case furniture. In the tidewater, maritime trade tended to reinforce the retention of such cultural baggage. Much of

Desk, walnut with white cedar and yellow pine secondary, Chowan River Basin area of North Carolina, 1760–75. *MESDA accession 3250.*

the North Carolina Albemarle, for instance, was settled in the early 18th century by planters moving out of southeastern Virginia during the first four decades of the century. No small number of these were Quakers, many of whom had moved to Virginia from eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island in the 17th century. These people dominated the social and political scene in North Carolina until past 1730, and they tended to retain family and trade associations with New England established long before. Yankee traders, in fact, were legend even in the early 18th century. William Byrd of Virginia caustically remarked to a Scottish correspondent in 1739 that the "New England men will carry our wheat & other things to the same mar-

kets you do in greater quantitys . . . and they will buy those commoditys here cheaper than you can do with all your good management, they will be able to undersell you in every market."

Naturally enough, furniture was one of the commodities shipped from the New England states to the South as venture cargo. The port records of Edenton and Wilmington in North Carolina abound in entries of furniture arriving in bottoms which had sailed from Portsmouth, Newburyport, Boston, Salem, Newport, Providence, Norwich, and New London. In one quarter of 1771–72, eight "sets mahogany bedsteads," seven desks, and seven dozen chairs were landed in Edenton from Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Merchant Christopher Ellery of Wilmington advertised in the 1780s that he had "imported NEW-ENGLAND RUN . . . Maple Desks," a typical entry. One ship arriving in the same port about that time carried 70 Windsor chairs along with other furniture from Connecticut.

Seeing these wares departing for Southern ports, it shouldn't be any wonder that journeymen in New England shops gathered up their tools and sailed southward themselves. The Albemarle area of North Carolina demonstrates this phenomena particularly well, perhaps better than any other region of the South, and this stylistic impact began there well before the middle of 18th century. We seldom encounter slavish duplications of New England furniture in Carolina, however. Though a Rhode Island-trained cabinetmaker might burst forth with a full-blown Townsend-Goddard desk interior after settling in Carolina, he might at the same time bow to existing regional styles in case format, even to providing a curious fifth foot in the center front.

The thread of style, then, is traceable, whether to St. Martin's Lane in London, some obscure town in Yorkshire, or to Bridge Street in Newport. Basic to all this unraveling, though, is the need to understand the existence of many regional cabinetmaking schools in Britain, and it is to that end that LUMINARY proudly offers the "freshest advices" that follow.

Summer 1981 (Vol. 2, No. 2)

The ambitious theme of MESDA's Summer Institute this year was the Back Country South. Ambitious, one must freely admit, because the Back Country was such an enormous geographic region, its awesome vastness embracing a great mass of settlers in the eighteenth century. Those people . . . Scots, English, Scots-Irish, Welsh, and Germans . . . brought with them as part of their cultural heritage a rather incredible diversity of style and form in the decorative arts. The resulting material culture was a colorful stew laden with bits and pieces from every imaginable stylistic recipe from Dresden to Philadelphia, and those who would understand the menu from such a huge cultural kitchen face a formidable task indeed.

Due to the swirl of ethnic settlers, not a few of whom were the sturdy sort still thought of as peasants in Europe, and due also to the considerable separation geographically and culturally from east coast urban centers, the Back Country was a fertile garden for the flowering of what we moderns think of as Folk Art. In this day and time, that is a subject which tends to cause a certain tightening of the lips among many decorative arts scholars, most of whom flatter themselves with the notion that their work is a finite discipline. The problem is, though, that folk art, and just what objects represent it, can be most elusive depending upon one's point of view, whether artistic, technical, or socio-historical. LUMINARY dares not tread on such heaving ground, and leaves the Bruised Heads to folklorists, antiquarians, and other such fulminatory sorts.

Let's consider, though, one facet of the study of material folk culture, and that is "tradition." Surely that term is one abused equally as much as "folk art," often a catch-all term blithely applied to anything conservative and "country." But the word does have certain merit in the study of folk. Part of Mr. Webster's definition of the word carries the phrase "an inherited culture, [or] attitude," and in that we find a little something we can apply. Part of this definition describes the strong tendency in folk culture to retain things which

are familiar and therefore "safe", since they denote a tried-and-true means of ordering one tiny part of the environment in some significant way. Change, whether in language or furniture form implies a vague feeling of threat; it's more comfortable, so to speak, not to be particularly innovative. Things old-fashioned keep one anchored firmly to the Real World.

Hence, we have what the antiquarian loftily assures us is "the retardataire" and the sociologist recognizes as "cultural lag." Elements of this can pervade all segments of material culture, but it is in folk art that it becomes most frolicsome. Consider, as an example, the small chest-of-drawers illustrated here [see page 64]. Something of a rude and "knocked up" affair, just the sort of thing one might have standing next to the furnace in the basement, filled with rusty nails, mouldering cigar boxes, unidentified TV antenna parts, and congealed cans of varnish. Hideous? Yes. But hideous in a very significant way. Beneath the mud-fence brown enamel is a *seventeenth century joined chest made in 1900.* The drawers are rabbeted and nailed (wire nails, of course), the paneled frame has pinned mortise-and-tenon joints throughout, the drawer bottoms are adze-finished, and the case stiles serve as feet. It takes little study to perceive the attitude of a seventeenth century joiner in the split spindle decoration, and the form of the flat appliqués speak of the bold geometric paneling of early chests, though used here in very degenerate fashion.

What inherited attitude prevailed so strongly in the mind of the Blue Ridge artisan that he was content to repeat structural and stylistic details two hundred years out of date? For that matter, why did such styles prevail in the Watauga area of North Carolina where this chest is from, when the region wasn't settled until the 1770's? Other Watauga furniture dating from the nineteenth century, and including both case pieces and chairs, shows an even closer allegiance to the seventeenth century. This is no matter of "revival" art, but an astounding continuity of form and construction spanning three centuries. In fact, some of the fiercely independent mountaineers who owned such furniture were still muttering Elizabethan phrases and

Chest of drawers, oak, cherry, and maple with poplar secondary, Watauga County area of North Carolina, 1890–1910. *MESDA Research File (MRF) S-11221.*

ranging the forests with flintlock muzzleloaders well into the twentieth century, long after grammar schools and Oliver Winchester's shiny repeaters had reached the mountain coves.

Such things should serve to illustrate the complexity of cultural statements made in the decorative arts, whether in a rude mountain chest or a magnificent Tidewater carved chair. The occurrence of stylistic cultural lag, whether in small details on urban pieces or in massive doses as we see in this curious mountain chest, should remind us that the decorative arts were, and are, communication, just

as surely as the spoken word. Studying objects in a scholarly vacuum without regard to the people who made and used the objects leaves us with an imperfect view of the arts, whether folk or sophisticated. If we "listen" to objects, we can likely hear something of the values held by early owners. In the example of this chest, it doesn't require an acute ear to discern shocking comments upon the encroachment of motorcars, telephones, sliced bread, newspapers, revenuers, and all the other twentieth century flatlander trappings that had no business violating the sacred stillness of the high ridges.

Cultural lag, though, is but one slice of the decorative arts pie. Over the past nine years, MESDA has been engaged in a close scrutiny of arts over most of the South in the Field Research Program, and LUMINARY has asked *Frank Horton* to review this research for us. Most of this issue, in fact, is taken up with this, along with views of some of the objects recorded, which is appropriate in view of the fact that the Field Research is now nearing completion after many thousands of miles driven and miles of film run through the "soup."

DOWN WITH QUEEN ANNE: LONG LIVE THE BAROQUE

Winter 1982 (Vol. 3, No. 1)

In this issue, LUMINARY takes a turn toward the controversial, speaking toan issue which may well have decorative arts historians growling and baringteeth for many years to come.

Since the 1880's, students of American decorative arts, and most particularly those interested in furniture, have skipped along with a popularized nomenclature for identifying style and period, We all know the terms well, and wear them as comfortably as a pair of old Levis . . . Jacobean, William and Mary, Queen Anne, Chippendale, Hepplewhite, Sheraton, Empire, and Victorian, along with certain semantic digressions into things such as Phyfe and Federal, all stock items in our everyday vocabulary which roll off the tongue with no more thought than a "how d'ye do." And it's no wonder. Those terms have been dunned into our heads through publication, rein-

forced many times over by the writings of various High Priests of western material culture like Luke Vincent Lockwood and Wallace Nutting.

During the past two decades, decorative arts studies very rightly have turned more and more toward a better understanding of the implications of social history and toward a more complete grasp of early design sources. This scholarly re-creation of the world which produced the objects we study so avidly today has placed the decorative arts in clearer perspective, Among other things, it has raised certain questions about the manner in which we identify objects . . . questions which we must now begin to answer, unless we perpetuate an earlier and less valid stylistic language in the ever-increasing whirl of fine books the field is producing today, The problem, of course, is that popular terminology . . . Queen Anne and the Boys . . . is wholly inadequate, almost a cutesie cocktail party patter from the Cult of the Antique. The MESDA staff has been rooting about for means to sidestep this dogma for a couple years now, and recently Colonial Williamsburg's curators began discussion of the problem. A meeting of a number of museum professionals held during the Antiques Forum at Williamsburg in late January, in fact, will very likely result in a large conference later that will treat stylistic definitions . . . or so LUMINARY hopes.

Enumerating all the problems we have with current terminology would fill the pages of a goodly number of LUMINARIES, so let's try to take a brief look at our current ragbag of terms, and how we might go about stuffing it with better fabric.

One very serious problem is that designations of furniture styles quite often can't be applied to other decorative arts forms. For example, we don't refer to "Chippendale" silver. For that matter, popular furniture styles usually don't fit other categories of the arts at all, such as fine arts, architecture, music or literature. Perhaps it's idealistic to imagine that *all* the arts of a given age can be linked somehow under a verbal umbrella, but history does demonstrate to us that we can hardly separate culture from people, events, and the rise and fall of national economies. We stop short at attributing the Baroque era

to a lengthy episode of sunspots in the seventeenth century, but if there *were* shared philosophical ideals threading through each discipline of the arts, then it would be a fine thing to reflect that in terms of stylistic language. Art historians, in fact, have been struggling for years with what Thomas Munro of the Cleveland Museum of Art has called "aesthetic morphology." Munro very rightly calls for the identification of period, place, and people in a standardized system of identification.

An equally serious fault with popular stylistic terms is that they are arbitrary to the point of tossing out tub, bath water, and baby. The terms currently used here steadfastly cling to things that we can identify with English culture, and gloss over the fact that great international design trends swept most of western Europe as well as the British Isles from the Renaissance into the nineteenth century. Behind Thomas Chippendale stood a host of Paris artists like Berain, Marot, and Pillement. In fact, the publication of designs by English artists is almost paltry in comparison with the flood of French material from the middle of the seventeenth century on. Matthias Darly, who was associated with Chippendale in his publication efforts, remarked in his 1773 *Complete Body of Architecture* that "Ornamental drawing has been too long neglected in this trading country. . . ." Chippendale himself admitted that his work was a "storehouse of suggestions conveyed from the French Renaissance," and was guilty of plagiarizing directly from Meissonier's work, as Esther Singleton shrewdly exposed in her *Furniture of our Forefathers* in 1901. That particular work, in fact, contains a very surprising degree of perception about the international flow of style, much in contrast to other books of the time. Singleton also took note of the fact that "*Chippendale* is loosely used as a designation for a whole period of

furniture to which many artists and craftsmen contributed . . ." including English contemporaries such as Thomas Johnson and Matthias Lock. Nowadays, though we have long acknowledged what Singleton knew three-quarters of a century ago, we are still eager to identify anything with a claw foot and a pierced splat as "Chippendale," and a fig for all those anonymous artisans of the 1730's and 40's who really *did* usher in the writhing rocaille. Of course, early published design sources are exceedingly important in establishing the chronological boundaries of style, but one must be circumspect in such things. Chippendale lagged thirty years behind Paris drawing books with the *Director*, though he had quickly adopted the new "Antick" style in his own production of the 1760's. By the early 1790's while Boston was still content with carved bombe case furniture, Sheraton was remarking that designs in the *Director* were "wholly antiquated and laid aside" though they had "possessed of great merit, according to the time when they were executed." Even poor Hepplewhite, according to Sheraton, had "already caught the decline." From such things, we can see that though we seek an international definition of styles, we must still qualify these definitions with place, just as Munro suggests.

So, if we're to take note of these and other problems in our stylistic language, shall we just bury old Tommy and his buddies, like Jim Stanley's cartoon suggests? Well, LUMINARY is ready to grab a spade. But if we're to topple the Old Order, we must construct a new one with sound joints and decent architecture. There are several approaches possible; one is the identification of style with strictly chronological markers, such as "third quarter of the eighteenth century." That's a bit wordy, both verbally and in print. Another proposal has been to identify styles with specific monarchies straight through, which has been fairly successful in France, it must be admitted. Here in America, though, where we've long experienced a great hodgepodge blending of national styles, such a system would again bind us tightly to English culture and ignore all else, at least in semantic fashion.

The MESDA staff prefers to give consideration to something more broad, which might answer the needs of the decorative arts, fine art, and architecture, and which would indeed cross international boundaries and oceans as well. Seven classifications might do the job: Renaissance, early, middle and late Baroque, Rococo, and early and late Neoclassical. Time and a great deal of discussion will tell, but these stylistic descriptions appear to lack many of the shortcomings of the old terms. However, they aren't without shortcomings of their own.

Such a "new" system will be arbitrary, just as the old one was, though less so since it can provide flexibility. The periods in time spanned by the use of these terms must be considered more carefully, since they connote international styles. And as we noted before, we must recognize national and regional developments in the use of these words, hence "English Rococo" or "American late Baroque."

Though these terms have been employed in scholarly fashion by art and architectural historians for some time, they were once "popular" as well, and some of them even derisive. The English *Foreign Quarterly* in 1836 spoke of mid-eighteenth century art as a "species of delicacy [that] seems now to be so thoroughly *perruque*, and *rococo* or whatever be the newest and most approved term for old-fashioned. . . ." The very word "baroque," long thought to have been a derivation of the Italian "barocco," or misshapen pearl, is now considered to have been a term used in sixteenth century logic, though by the eighteenth century it had assumed connotations of "extravagant" or "bizarre." Though a shift in definition may be occurred, at least we have in such terms descriptions of style that were in use, albeit in a limited way, during the time when the art was produced.

Yet another fly in the stylistic ointment is the usual phenomenon of cultural lag, which inevitably caused overlapping and even something of a "splattering" effect. For example, it can be rather difficult to separate Rococo from late Baroque in French art; an examination of individual details and comparison with published designs can leave one's head reeling with ruffled scrolls and diaperwork. The

Germans, in fact, have often refused to separate the two, and not without reason, since the Rococo is really a fanciful extension of Baroque design, a whimsical maturation, if that isn't too much of an anomaly. A new system of stylistic definition won't solve the overlapping problem any better than the old one did. When we encounter transitional work and things quite *retardataire*, we'll still have to describe the thing in terms of all the styles it represents, regardless of what we call them.

There are other problems, too. For instance, try and find the early Baroque in English furniture. One tends to get the distinct feeling that British cabinetmakers lurched out of the Renaissance, tripped over the early Baroque, and fell face forward into middle Baroque. And what about the early nineteenth century "revival" styles, such as the flowering of Egyptian forms; what shall we do with them? "Revival," for that matter, is a Pandora's Box unto itself, for virtually *everything* was "revival," a very interesting comment on one Greek's insistance that we are forever doomed to repeat, and that nothing is created anew. Also, if we intend a new stylistic vocabulary to be a clarifying instructional aid, which it certainly should be, we mustn't allow it to founder under pedantry. For example, it's very tempting to identify pre-Baroque mannerism as a style unto itself, rather than seeing it as a transitional phase of the Renaissance.

Discussions of this semantic trend hopefully will continue for some time, and both the follies and the triumphs of trying to bury the Old Order hashed out among all those who consider such things important. MESDA is determined to have a go at it, though we expect Queen Anne to box us about the ears with her scepter for years to come before she is firmly planted. We'll have to use the old terms alongside the new for a while, without doubt. MESDA might well be considered an ideal proving ground for this mass interment, due to the diversity of the collection, the moderate size of the organization, and the broad geographic and ethnic spectrum that is interpreted here.

Let the clods fly!

Summer 1982 (Vol. 3 No. 2)

It would be difficult indeed to overestimate the importance of understanding the technology of early trades, whether we are museum curator or collector, if we are to have a full and realistic view of the products of those trades. Perceiving the total fabric of an object, whether as a matter of honing one's capability as an antiquarian, or simply as an exercise in appreciating the decorative arts, is not something that should be lightly considered. What an enormous amount we can learn from objects, simply by considering them as documents of the minds and technical skill of the artisans who made them. Seeing and understanding even the tiniest details in hidden places can result in a startling flash of insight: the brief stroke of a cabinetmaker's tooth plane, the hurried pass of a shaping rib by the potter, and a particular twist given to the burin by a silversmith all leave permanent signatures of the artisan's skill—or lack of it. No matter how insignificant such things may seem, all of them contribute inestimably to our understanding, if we teach ourselves to see them. Understanding technology and its evidence is one of the great means we have of developing the "Eye."

Things were not always that way. There has always been a tendency to view the decorative arts simply as art, and not as applied art as well. The hands-off antiquarian, if you will, was ever ready to stand across a gallery and peer at some great object from afar, seeing all that needed to be known from whatever visual statement the thing had to make of itself. The study of furniture in particular has periodically suffered from such arms-length approaches, and often still does in Britain and Europe, where even the histories of objects at times are lent more significance in interpretation than any evidence regarding construction that we might use to identify the work of a shop or "school." As for crawling about on one's hands and knees and peering under dusty carcasses, feeling of drawer bottoms, and remarking upon glue blocks, saw kerfs, and full dust boards . . . well, that's rather as gauche as ordering a beer and a salami sandwich at the Four Seasons.

There's certainly little question that the total visual statement made by any art object is exceedingly important. No such object, however, sprang to life magically from the fingertips of some ancient genius. Regardless of style and sophistication, form or finish, most objects of decorative art required learned technical skills applied in a logical sequence of functions. In furniture, this began with the selection of proper woods and ended with a final pumicing of the finish, and each aspect of the job was as important as the next. In a great sense, furniture, if it is made well, is an engineered system. All the academic style and elegant decoration imaginable were to naught if a carcass was badly joined and subject to the beginnings of creaking self-destruction on the first foggy night. The skilled cabinetmaker needed a critical perception of the natural limitations of his materials, so that each facet of construction and finish complimented the laws of nature rather than opposing them. Of course, such things were not always considered as they might have been, and even surviving work that is considered important is not always a monument to competent workmanship. One of the highest prices ever fetched for an article of Rococo furniture, in fact, was for a French scrutoire that was so shakelty that when touched it would threaten to pitch forward onto its magnificent ormolu, spewing kingwood in all directions.

In making an attempt to understand the technology of early artisans, and from that begin to see their surviving work with a sharpened eye, we begin to deal with something of the "art and mystery" so commonly mentioned in apprentice indentures. That phrase seems to imply conjure, dread potions privily stirred in the dark of the moon, and rising mists in the graveyard, but to the "mechanick" it was nothing romantic at all. The "mystery" was simply the body of technical knowledge gained by the shop master's own experience, and the "art" was the manner and skill in which that knowledge was applied. Despite our increasing studies in technology, though, we often still encounter an enormous and bulging cloud of romantic sentiment which maintains, perhaps subconsciously, that early tradesmen really *were* gnarled specimens grimly hunched over their

benches, trying to make do with odds and ends of queer and primitive tools like some creature from Aesop. The fact of the matter is that artisans who cared to eat on a regular basis found that they had to hone their skill, speed, and efficiency, just as we might today. That is why the technology of the early artisan was far from crude. In fact, early tools tended to be a good deal more specialized than those used by today's handworker, and they were both well designed and well made in most instances, particularly in comparison with some of the products of modern calculated mediocrity. Of course, the early tradesman was not without certain handicaps. The cost of his tools was much higher in proportion to his income than they would be today; he wasn't able to control his working light easily under varying conditions, and some of his materials, such as abrasives, were not particularly convenient to use. Today, of course, we can do things quicker with electrical power, but not necessarily better. Power tools, for that matter, have made us a little lazy, and have tended to leave us with a certain sterility which lacks that subtle tactile sense which handmade surfaces possess.

If we are to take the fullest advantage of the study of early technology, and apply that study to the decorative arts in such a way that we gain a sharpened perception of objects, how can we best teach ourselves the significance of that technology? Well, the solemn eighteenth century admonition that "actions speak louder than words" spoke largely to social matters, but we can make it apply equally as well here. Having to carry out some job, even a simple one, with one's hands tends to imprint that work in the mind ever so much better than just the telling of it. Certainly, a student of ceramics might appear to learn everything necessary about the technology of the early potter from published sources and by interviewing contemporary artisans. Learning to wedge clay properly, and trying to center it on the wheel, however, speaks louder than a hundred lectures and a score of books. Learning to set the iron of a scrub plane, or cut a simple mortise and tenon joint, teaches the student more about cabinetmaking technology than any long-winded seminar. Doing the

work, even if only in a fragmentary way and with ragged skill, reveals questions formerly unseen, and thereby opens the mind more fully to the complex world of early technology. Not only do we begin to better appreciate the attributes of real competence in early objects; we begin to understand the significance of the mute language of tools . . . why we find a tooth plane mark where we do, and what shape of burin point made an engraved border look just so.

This country has been returning increasingly to the hand trades in decades recently past. There are many reasons for that, such as the need to preserve the individual, a desire to find permanence and intrinsic value in a disposable society, or perhaps just nostalgia and a perceived need to slow the blinding speed of modern technological development. Whatever the reasons, the preservation of hand skills is no luxury in this modern world of ours. The decorative arts student stands to gain particularly well from this groundswell of respect for the hand arts and the consequent proliferation of training programs. Learning manual skills provides the visual and mental keys to unlock many a creaking door to early technology, and that is something that decorative arts institutions must increasingly understand. How much better to be able to see beyond the visible magnificence of a block-front chest of drawers, and to understand the mind of the artisan who produced it, and the evidence of his skill, even in hidden places.

PROVENANCE AND THE DECORATIVE ARTS

Winter 1983 (Vol. 4, No. 1)

Provenance is a word that's frequently used in decorative arts circles, though occasionally with little understanding about just what it means, and what its importance to us might be. The definition is clear enough, according to Webster: "origin or source." A similar word, *provenience,* carries the same definition with additional edification "place where found or produced," perhaps even more appropriate for our use. The latter word is a modernization of a present participle of the Latin verb *provenire,* "to come forth," and provides good ancestry for the French *provenir,* "to originate." What do we

mean when we make use of these ancient words? Certainly more than "place where found or produced," though that consideration unquestionably is uppermost in our minds. Today, provenance also implies an understanding of all of the past ownership of a cultural object as well . . . in other words, the history of the object from its inception to the present time.

Among various disciplines in the arts, it has been the study of fine art that has brought about the most frenzied pursuit of provenance. The reasons for this are simple enough. The value of an unsigned painting is greater if the work may be attributed to a known artist, or, if the work is a portrait, the sitter can be identified. If neither of these things are known, then an anonymous painting may be enhanced in the marketplace if at least the region where it was painted can be guessed. A verifiable history of the painting can add inestimably to such identification. The same is true in matters of authentification, especially with important works of great value. Competent early copies of master works are not uncommon, and outright forgery is nothing in the least new, nor for that matter has that sort of skilled cunning been confined to the world of fine art over the centuries. Values in art have risen so in our own breathless century, though, that the histories of fine works have become more important than ever.

One might think that considerations of provenance might have become equally as weighty in the area of decorative arts, as single objects of furniture, for example, inexorably heave themselves toward the million-dollar mark in the world's great auction houses. Sale catalogs, in fact, do often provide the pedigree of objects, especially when the piece is a particularly imposing one, or when association with past connoisseurs of renown offers the possibility of ringing those dollars down under the hammer. A very high percentage of decorative arts objects sold, however, are not accompanied with any history, whether mean or grand. That often means that a certain percentage of the collection of any museum which treats the decorative arts is without specific attribution to place or history of ownership, and it must be said that vague generalities do not good inter-

pretation make. There are reasons for such orphanage, of course. A great deal of fine decorative art has been purchased or sold simply as handsome *things* intended to gracefully decorate some household, with little care about who made the object, or what manner of migratory flight it had made during its long survival. No doubt many a provenance has been lost, particularly in this century, when a "picker" or dealer was unwilling to reveal a highly lucrative source.

When provenance has flown, what are we left with? Well, every object is a document by itself, of course. We may establish possible origins through the study of style, and we may take advantage of our knowledge of technology to ferret out facts, by identifying materials, construction, decoration, form, and the like. All of these things are very real evidence, just as the study of the components of pigments and techniques used in brushstrokes helps us to verify the background of a painting. There are times, however, when even an intensive study of such details may utterly fail us, especially when there is a paucity of comparative information available from publications. In such harrowing cases, a sound provenance might save us in some wise from disaster, either when a purchase is under consideration or when some well-meaning decorative arts historian is about to commit himself to posterity . . . or to eternal giggling finger-pointing . . . by plunging into print. Let's have a look at a few brief examples, formerly orphans all, that could offer such a black and yawning maw of erroneous attribution to those earnest sorts who like to see things buttonholed.

Consider, for example, the fine cherry cabriole high chest shown here [see page 77]. This piece was kindly lent to MESDA for study by Mr. and Mrs. Butch Elder of *1740 House* in Charlottesville. With only a twenty-year history of ownership in that city, the chest exhibits certain significant details that would make one wish to place it in Tidewater Virginia. In that region, the enticing presence of such chests is but fragmentary, owing to the fact that such Baroque forms were really out of favor there after the 1730s and early 40s. This chest, in fact, appears to date from the late 1740s, even retaining its original brass. The broad stance of the piece suggests in its Baroque propor-

tions the form of a six-leg chest, and a distinct British feel is the result, just the sort of thing we might expect in a southern case piece. The rounded knees and molded upper leg stiles parallel Virginia dressing tables of the period, and the skirt shaping matches rather well a dressing table of probable Norfolk origin. The quirk-beading of the skirt is another familiar Virginia and Carolina detail, something of a stylistic remnant of the cockbeading used in an earlier time. Drawer and case construction showed some curious affinities toward Piedmont work, but the presence of yellow pine throughout the carcass, including the full dust boards, seemed to assert a probable Virginia origin, since Pennsylvania and Maryland chests using that wood hadn't the least stylistic tie with this example. The resemblance of the heavy, squarish slipper feet to certain early New York side chairs brought about transitory alarums and excursions, soon quelled by the lack of recognition of other details on the chest by northern scholars. Just as MESDA was about to warmly welcome the chest into the hallowed halls of the Most Exquisitely Rare, the missing provenance was suddenly uncovered. The chest had been purchased with blackened visage for a paltry $750 in the early 1960s, bought from an old

Cabriole high chest of cherry with all yellow pine secondary except for white oak drawer guides. Probably New York city, 1745–60, HOA 73½, WOA 45⅛, DOA 23⅝, shown with a detail view of the back *(MESDA research file S-12166).*

Yellow pine in the Big Apple, tra la: a detail of the high chest.

most of it was intended for flooring. In fact, there is evidence that yellow pine *grew* in New England in isolated stands in the early period, and even today scrub pine, an impoverished member of the yellow pine family, can be seen growing on Massachusetts' South Shore, maugre the learned judgments of the North American botanists who suggest that Cape May, New Jersey is the usual northernmost limit of *pinus taeda* and its cousins.

Other forms of decorative art lacking provenance can offer equally thorny problems. The two earthenware plates shown here are fine examples of that. The one on the top, an imposing charger nearly twenty inches in diameter, shouts its Europeanness with its early date and the form of the decoration, which employs slips in white, green and red over a dark brown iron-oxide slip wash . . . all details distinctly foreign to the familiar ceramic orbit of southeastern Pennsylvania, where one might otherwise try to place such a piece. Even the back of the plate, with its carefully sponged finish and ponderous double booge, sings a distinct Teutonic aria. The plate illustrated below it appears to warble the same gutteral tune, including the use of four colors of slip over the red body, the decorative motifs on the rim and even the identical potting form on the back. The lacy imbrocation of the center is redolent of eastern European faience, suggesting possibly that an east German attribution for both pieces would cause no red faces later. The bottom plate, in fact, retains no more history than its larger brother, but it does have an exceedingly sound provenance established by archaeology and comparative study. It was made in Salem, North Carolina about 1800 by the potter Rudolph Christ, whose master, Gottfried Aust, was born in . . . you guessed it . . . the province of Silesia in eastern Germany. A number of such southern Moravian plates have sold as European in the northeast, since they lost documentation of their provenance *in this century.*

Of course, such things can work both ways. A collector or curator

Earthenware plate, left, eastern Germany, dated 1673, decorated with green, red, and white slip on a dark brown slip wash, diameter 19" (MESDA research file S-2978). Shown with a 10" plate decorated with the same colors, right, attributed to Rudolph Christ, Salem, NC, 1790-1800 (Old Salem, Inc. research file S-1904).

house near Red Bank, New Jersey, where it had stood for at least eighty years previously. No doubt we'd have guessed that early on if there had been a good monograph on New York furniture available. In any event, we'd lost a "Virginia" chest, and yellow pine as a much-vaunted proof of Things Southern was left horribly splintered. We might have known better; years ago the staff had attributed an exceptional mid-eighteenth century architectural cupboard to New England because it was constructed of white pine, cooly ignoring the fact that white pine was being shipped to the Chesapeake at least as early as the 1720s. The cupboard, of course, was Eastern Shore, which we discovered *after* the piece left the collection. The fact of the matter is that cabinet woods used in this country have not received the study they should have. For example, a number of superb carved chests from Wethersfield, Connecticut are known to have yellow pine tops. While vast quantities of that wood were shipped north from southern ports, even in the seventeenth century,

knowledgeable in obscure and seemingly orphaned objects can make real steals in the marketplace. Our own Whaley Batson reports here on a Charles Peale folk painting, for instance, whose signature had been playfully covered by a frame rabbet. The lack of recognition of the work, coupled with a fragmented provenance, caused the painting to go for a fraction of its value at a major sale. That provided a juicy windfall, but the fact remains that having a glossy provenance in hand means a great deal more than just saving bucks. We can't afford to treat the matter of provenance in the decorative arts any more lightly than we have in fine art, for we all stand to lose in one fashion or another when the history of an object has not been preserved. It matters not whether a surviving history reads like a classical epic filled with Heroes and Grand People, or is just the record of the material goods of generations of a hardy family of yeomen. Witness, for example, the enormous mass of sadly orphaned British furniture scattered through parlors and shops world-wide; how nice it would be to say "That's London work," or "That looks like Yorkshire." In contrast, MESDA has long since reached the point where it just isn't enough to cautiously suggest "possibly Virginia." If we are to educate, which is certainly our job, we should be able to say "southeastern Virginia, possibly Surry County, 1740–55." To make such statements with sound conviction, we must consider every possible channel of study that can provide provenance. Of this, documented history, or even oral history, is ever the most elusive. That can be faked, of course, as Dwight Lanmon illustrates in "Unmasking an American Glass Fraud" in the January *Antiques.* Even so, the historical aspect of provenance is often enormously important to establishing precise origin, and can prove to be a foundation for constructing an entire socio-historical interpretive framework around an object. That's the sort of thing that brings antiquities alive, for it's much more interesting if we can put *people* into the picture with objects. We'd all do well to remember that.

Summer 1983 (Vol. 4, No. 2)

The conservation of antiquities is a weighty matter which should concern all of us. It's no small responsibility to care for objects in such a way that they will be preserved intact for future generations to study and enjoy. Familiarity breeds contempt, as the well-worn phrase goes, and just because we throw dirty socks in an old chest every night doesn't mean that we should ignore the fact that hinges are loosening, a top molding falling off, or the finish bleaching out from sunlight streaming in a window. Responsible conservation requires that we see to the stability of antiquities, *especially* if they are in daily use. Understanding the very diverse sort of care that objects must receive in order to maintain anything like their original condition calls for critical examination of how we use things. We should know by now that we musn't tilt back in an early chair like the good 'ol boys swigging Cheerwine on the front porch of Jethro's Ready Cash Grocery, nor should we strain it by picking it up by its arms or dragging it across the floor. That's all common sense. We should know, too, that if our decent old chair has been curiously encrusted with innumerable coats of modern enamels of many hues, we don't "refinish" the piece by gaily consigning it to a strip shop whose usual *modus* is to dredge a piece through a caustic lye tank until it is left bleached and weathered like a skeletal artifact from Death Valley. There's a good deal more to conservation, though, than just common sense, and we are not exactly burdened with detailed published material regarding methods or even attitiudes we should adopt that will assist in preserving our antiquities. One recently published introductory source on the subject is *Furniture Care and Conservation* by Robert McGiffin, available from the American Association for State and Local History in Nashville. Unfortunately a great deal of critical information still remains to be published.

One area of conservation surrounded by swirling mists of misinformation is the application of furniture finishes and polishes, and

this isn't helped in the least by sumptuous advertisements by contemporary patent finish quacks and drummers who would like us to believe that we must regularly "feed" our furniture to keep it alive and well. Those fellows would like us to liberally dose wooden surfaces with their wonderful concoctions which allegedly contain rare and secret waxes, soothing and aromatic oils, and possibly even frankincense and myrrh, if they think we'll buy it, all to keep our furniture sleek and contented. No matter how yummy such potions might seem, such advertising really approaches the anthromorphization of inanimate objects. One almost suspects that if we bathed in those luxurious compounds ourselves, we'd remain glowing and youthful forever. Something of a parallel in the advertising world is the usual luscious presentation of dog food, where we are asked to believe that Fido will gobble his din-din ever so much more voraciously if it looks like something so good that his loving master would willingly fork it onto his own plate. Of course, Fido really doesn't need a cunningly faked filet mignon for nourishment, nor does furniture require the constant loving application of gallons of ridiculously expensive perfumed oils elegantly bottled up. Most such *haute cuisine* for cabinet woods really amounts to a few cents' worth of chemicals, some of which are not in the least useful for the long-term preservation of furniture. And as for "feeding" furniture, *indeed.* Furniture wood is *dead;* it stops being fed the instant it is cut off from its leaf and root systems, and coating it with silly compounds doesn't keep it from "drying out." Common sense should tell us that, for we don't "feed" the back of a chest or the underside of a drawer, and in any event the excessive "drying" of wood is a function of improper atmospheric controls . . . too little humidity . . . and that certainly isn't reversed by the application of even the rarest unguents.

In reality, furniture needs very little surface treatment once a suitable finish has been achieved. Such a finish might be a cleaned and stabilized original surface, or a proper modern coating designed to give the appearance of an old natural-resin varnish. What is "proper" among modern finishes is a problem all unto itself, for since the nineteenth century discovery of synthetic resins, we've been deluged with an ever-increasing ocean of coal-tar derivatives, polymers, complex organics, and sophisticated dyes all vying to provide us with mellow and glowing finishes for wood. But is it enough for a piece of furniture just to look good? One is tempted in fact, to believe that modern chemistry certainly should provide us with coatings that are far better than the old ones, but such is not necessarily the case. Many such finishes have been compounded more for production speed than longevity. The verdict is still out, and may be for many years. For instance, not a few twentieth-century synthetic-resin varnishes surprisingly still use linseed oil as a plasticizer . . . that is, to lend the hardened finish a bit of elasticity so that crazing and loss of adhesion may be avoided. Linseed, however, has been identified as the source of some of the more serious problems which have caused early finishes to degrade with time. Linseed, in combination with various resins and solvents, tends to continue a process of polymerization, or change of compound structure. That all sounds rather academic to us, but the part we are interested in is the fact that finishes which contain linseed oil as a vehicle or plasticizer may tend to darken excessively, and will likely be exceedingly difficult to remove later. Responsible conservation practice tells us that all compounds applied to wood should be readily reversible, including adhesives. In the old days, cabinetmakers used collagen-type animal glues, which may be dissolved with a bit of water, and one of the "spirit varnishes" they favored was common shellac, which is an excellent finish, and is still available to us today. In fact, shellac is one of the last natural-resin finishes still in constant use. It is readily removed with alcohol, which evaporates quickly and contains no caustic chemicals. Some of the modern lacquers may also be considered suitable for conservation, since some are easily soluble in

volatile spirits such as toluene. In any event, whatever new finish is applied to a piece of old furniture should be easily reversible, and that leaves out linseed oil or compounds containing it.

Other than an occasional waxing, furniture needs nothing else other than a fairly stable atmosphere. Even waxing can be vastly overdone, for it seems that we almost feel something akin to deprivation if we aren't allowed to stroke our furniture just as we do the family canine. While the best microcrystalline waxes are expensive, common off-the-shelf waxes like Johnson's paste floor wax or Kiwi clear shoe polish are dandy and safe for fine furniture. Many of the liquid waxes, especially those containing silicone, should be avoided like the Black Death. And while table tops in constant use may need more frequent rubbing-up with a good inert wax, cases and drawer fronts really need nothing other than dusting. At MESDA we feel that "less is better," and do nothing to furniture surfaces other than wipe them off with a densely-woven but soft cloth.

So, if you fancy that your pet high chest has growled at you, don't be tempted to run for that bottle of Master Cabinetmaker's Best Oulde London Rubbing Oil, but rather check to see if the complaint wasn't issued by the dog instead. And if you're bent on serving poor Fido sham filets swimming in ersatz gravy, then have at it. After all, Fido is rather more like a person than a chest of drawers is, and at least he is less likely to be harmed by visually "enhanced" tidbits of soya products than furniture is to be hurt by curious admixtures of things like vinegar, soft waxes, citrus oils, and linseed.

OF FAKES AND FORGERIES

Winter 1984 (Vol. 5, No. 1)

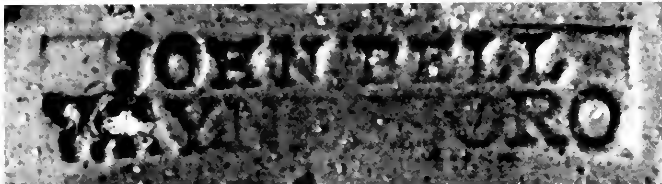
Ever since man first created some object of merit, fakes have been with us. No doubt if John Neanderthal gained a reputation for the quality of stone cranium-crushers he made, then James Neanderthal over in a neighboring cave was likely to cash in on cousin John's success by aping the style of his work. Well, such an instance didn't exactly constitute a *fake*, at least not unless James also copied some

Will the Real antiquity please stand up? A Fake of ca. 1968 . . .

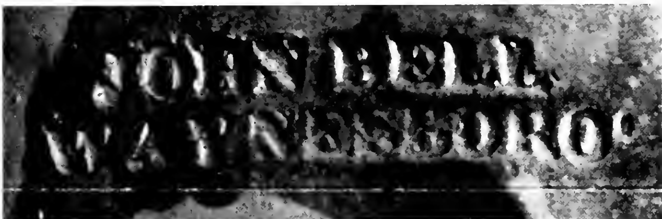
. . . and the real thing of 1750–70; an eastern North Carolina stretcher table.

primitive ideogram John had chosen to use as a signature. Fakery can be a matter of degree; it's certainly a matter of intent. Mere plagiarism has been rife for centuries. In the early eighteenth century, for example, Dutch watchmakers often duplicated London fusee watches, rightly esteemed the finest in the world at the time. The wily Dutch artisans even engraved London tradesmens' names on the elaborate champlevé dials, though to their credit, usually chose to deliberately misspell the masters' name. Today we have Oriental forgeries of designer jeans to deal with, maybe even with the designers' names spelled correctly. Caveat *emptor,* let the buyer beware, is an adage that very rightly has retained a respected position among the scant Latin tags still in use.

The word *fake* means something a great deal more to the antiquarian, antique dealer, or collector, however. Just as in the case of the high fashion denim ripoff, the intent which motivated the production of a phony antiquity is a matter of fraud perpetrated for finan-



A "JOHN BELL/WAYNESBORO" mark cunningly contrived on an earthenware vase . . .

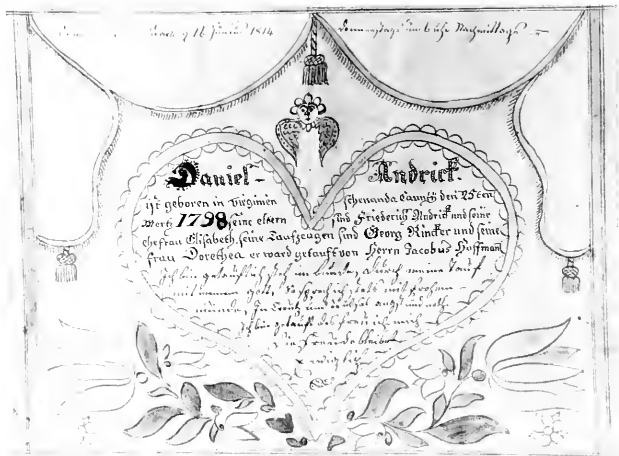


. . . and the bona fide signature on a storage jar.

cial gain. Now, according to the laws of the land such things are considered to be a criminal act. The marketing of ersatz jeans, of course, interferes with megabucks investment by the manufacturers of the real thing, so it is nothing unusual for the copier, if caught, to be served with a lawsuit so large that the proceeds would purchase half the drilling rights in Kuwait. While a consumer may suffer no more inconvenience than the loss of a few rubles and the early demise of a pair of ill-fashioned trousers in such a scam, however, what about the faked antique that turns over in the marketplace? While the loss of investment may be substantial, the embarrassment of having a Tricky Teatable standing in midmost living room seems greater than a split pants seat in the middle of Lennox Plaza. Said teatable tends to quietly slip out the kitchen door and back to the person who sold it, if he can be found, only to be foisted on someone else later. Seldom, seldom do antiquity frauds come to court, which is a situation which

New paint and a new price: a once-plain chest of 1820–30 . . .

. . . and an authentic Wythe County, Virginia example; the fake was "salted down" in the same area.



A Taufschein by the famed "Stoney Creek" artist of Virginia . . .

. . . and a curious English-language version; old paper but new ink.

should certainly encourage fakers if the enormous prices current in the marketplace do not. But who really loses the most when such items are made up? All of us who consider ourselves students of early material culture. We're the ones who are robbed in the long run, even when the actual degree of fakery is relatively small. For example, restoration work that craftily conceals the evidence of replacement from every conceivable view save X-ray. There's a thin gray line between what can be considered responsible conservation and what constitutes restoration so zealous that an original has become a fake; that has usually happened when any antique begins to serve more as a document of the restorer's skill than as testimony of some past artisans' work. The most poignant robbery, however, occurs when fakes are made up with materials removed from what had been a decent original work, or when an original is rendered more toothsome by the addition of spurious detail. Such pieces may assume the status of a great document of style, such as the nine-shell Connecticut chest-of-drawers illustrated in Plate 171 of Downs' well-known tome *American Furniture: Queen Anne and Chippendale Periods.* That particular item has been found to be made up of old material prized off other furniture, and even the drawers may have been from another block-front piece which had a different shell arrangement. With the prices that such things bring now, fakers can afford to spend a great deal of time wreaking their sins upon the world, though if they do their job cunningly, they have to be top-notch antiquarians themselves. Thousands of collectors and students have read Downs and seen that Connecticut chest, and no doubt thousands more will see it there in the future, with no inkling that the chest is anything more than a zenith example of American cabinetry. That's how the fake catches us where it really hurts; the pocketbook is a transitory pain.

Every museum that collects aggressively has undergone such an experience. Armand LaMontagne's frolicsome "Great Brewster" chair managed to set the museum world on its collective ear in 1977. The piece had been made of freshly-sawn wood that had been turned, shrunk, chipped, smoked, dusted, stained, painted, and stroked with poetic fervor. That one, fortunately, was intended sole-

ly to teach us all a painful lesson, and the hoax wasn't allowed to go on long. We've all learned something from that affair. Scholarship in matters of early technology—materials, construction, technique and the like—is better now, and we're learning as well to make use of modern technology. Procedures such as X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy, for example, can give us a precise reading of the alloy constituents of a metallic object.

While museums may increasingly find the means to identify faked objects, however, fakers are increasingly able to produce more of them. Though fewer frauds will wind up on museum floors, more of them will be sold—usually unwittingly—at vendue and in showrooms, and ultimately that's just as bad. In the past two decades, southern antiquities have become increasingly popular among collectors, especially regionally unique objects like certain ceramics, some of which are not especially difficult to fake. Fakers, of course, seize upon the easier jobs first, things like wrought iron, scrimshaw added to an old powder horn, or new painted decoration to an antique chest. While there is certainly no room here to venture into a discussion of how to identify fakes, LUMINARY presents to the full light of day a few such objects, one of which, an earthenware vase, is actually not a fake of a southern piece, but does a fair job of fraudulence on poor John Bell of Pennsylvania. Most of the objects shown here are by known fakers, the table by a Piedmont North Carolina individual, and at least two of the others by a southwestern Virginia operation which appears to work in virtually every medium. A financially triumphant series of forgeries from their shop a few years back was a number of earthenware lions in the style of Samuel Bell of Strasburg, Virginia; these lions began life as honest—but unmarked—reproductions in a North Carolina potter's shop.

How can we combat this sort of onslaught upon the world of antiquities? By having the courage and fortitude to use the existence of such fake to prosecute their makers whenever possible, and by learning how to identify them in the first place. The educational end of this problem is one big job that museums such as MESDA have to

perform. Museums need good collections of fakes of all sorts to use as teaching aids, for the public needs to be able to see such things close at hand. Germane to that, an exhibition dealing with fakes, forgeries, and even dangerously innocent reproductions was held at the Hunt Valley Antiques Show in Baltimore on the 24th through the 26th of this month; a catalog entitled *Fakes and Forgeries, Marriages and Deceptions and the Winterthur Museum Battle,* written by Richard Goodbar with the assistance of various members of the Winterthur staff, provides a fine introduction to methods of detecting fraudulent furniture, ceramics, and metalware. The Connecticut chest-of-drawers mentioned above is one of the exhibits. The catalog is available for $4 postpaid from Mrs. J. Carter Burgin, 303 West Chesapeake Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21204. LUMINARY salutes this effort, and would like to see a good deal more such exhibits and publications. Fakery is not amusing. It is criminal, for it distorts the material documentation we use to increase our knowledge of our own cultural heritage.

USE AND ABUSE IN THE EARLY SOUTH

Summer 1984 (Vol. 5, No. 2)

Decorative art, after all is said and done, is really *applied* art. Most of the objects that we revere as examples of an early artisan's consummate skill were things intended to be used rather than just gawked at. Of course, there are exceptions, such as portraiture or elaborate slip-decorated earthenware, either of which more likely was intended as monuments of taste and wealth than anything really useful in the pragmatic sense. Even silver fell somewhat into that category. William Fitzhugh of Virginia wrote frankly on the subject surprisingly early in the eighteenth century: "I esteem it as well politic as reputable, to furnish myself with a handsom Cupboard of plate which gives my self the present use & Credit . . ." While objects intended largely for sumptuous visual pleasure might well represent the zenith of a tradesman's ability, though, things that were in

everyday use tell us a bit more about how people lived. Such objects offer plenty of interesting evidence themselves. Candle burns under the shelves of a cupboard speak quite plainly of someone tipsily rummaging about for a missing flip glass during those dim times before Mr. Edison illuminated our dining rooms. The pungent odor of cloves in the drawer of an early spice chest might equally well document many an evening rout replete with heady and aromatic punches. Heavy wear on the outside of the posts of a small ladder-back armchair instantly calls up a noisy scene from the mists of time, where a grinning toddler enthusiastically skids the overturned chair about the room while learning to walk, cheerfully crashing into everything in sight. The amount of wear on that chair, in fact, might tell us that not only did a large family of kiddies use the thing as an impromptu walker, but also that mama customarily scoured the floors with gritty sand.

Even more interesting, though, are those rare instances in antiquity when someone took the time to actually record objects in use. Not everyone in the South, naturally enough, could boast of a collection of plate such as Fitzhugh's. The Marquis de Chastellux, after stopping over an evening with a Waynesboro, Virginia, family, observed that he had "never seen a more badly furnished house . . . A poor tin vessel was the only 'bowl' used for the family, our servants, and ourselves," he observed, wryly adding "I dare not say for what other use it was offered to us when we went to bed." Night jars, no doubt, have ever been a source of low humor, at least until the advent of inside plumbing, when [they] most quite likely were smashed with ceremonial glee. William Byrd observed an unusual use of one in North Carolina in the late 1720s. Some of his fellow Virginians fancied themselves "furious Lovers" after imbibing a quantity of brandy. Taking alarm, the lady of the house "fortify'd her Bed chamber & defended it with a Chamber-Pot charg'd to the Brim with Female Ammunition."

Also in North Carolina, but some sixty years later, the intrepid traveller J.F.D. Smyth made note of another sort of "ammunition" which provided great sport at the expense of his loud and boorish

host, a man named Glenn. The man had "just purchased a very handsome fowling-piece," and Smyth cunningly "took an opportunity of loading her with powder, and wadding her with spunk, charge over charge, several times, until the barrel was almost full." Smyth "dropped a spark of fire into the muzzle" of the gun before handing it to Glenn, who rode away completely unaware of the spark burning its way through the fungus wadding. After a short distance, the fowler "fired off with a loud report," throwing the man off his horse, which bolted. Picking the gun up, Glenn walked on, but the gun fired again, "recoiling against the side of his head," and the "cock-pin almost tore off his ear." Examining the gun with "the greatest timidity, care, and attention," the poor sod again began his homeward walk,

holding the piece in front of him at arms' length. "Presently she fired a third time," as Smyth noted with gleeful satisfaction, and Glenn's "astonishment [was] not to be described." Throwing the gun down, the man fled, while the fowler proceeded to fire twice more as the fellow crashed in a headlong panic through the underbrush. Reaching home, the wretch "declared his full assurance that the devil, or something worse, had fixed his head quarters in the fowling-piece." Perhaps after recovering from that incident, Glenn might have taken the same precaution as Edward Cole of Virginia, who in 1671 was careful to have a "horseshoe nailed at ye. door," especially in view of the fact that a certain Mrs. Neale had placed his family "under an ill tongue," after which everyone fell ill and cattle began to die.

Early inventories and sales seem to reveal strange objects in use, at

least when considered in the light of modern semantics. For example, the planter John Duke of Northampton County, North Carolina, had a "Silver Mycrophone" in his 1787 estate, though it appears unlikely that he was operating a super-swank radio station. A Savannah citizen offered a "very handsome brass mounted Mahogany Copying Machine" for sale in 1803, seemingly upstaging the Xerox Corporation by 150 years. Ralph Wormeley of Virginia had a "Groning chaire" in his 1701 inventory, an object which his wife might have thought quite properly named. One might have been cautious about sitting at the "Snap table" listed in a late eighteenth century Carolina inventory. Such listings contain far more than just vernacular curiosities, however. They document use, and even regional patterns of preference. It's nothing unusual, for instance, to find a tall-case clock in the inventory of even a modest German-American household, but like as not a coastal English settler's list of worldly goods might show more favor toward cellarets. Inventories can document earliest known use, such as the "side Borde" in a 1671 Virginia listing which Carol Mulcox cites elsewhere in this issue. Like the quaint description of Mr. Duke's hearing trumpet, however, such terms must be used with a bit of caution.

Damage or even outright destruction of objects has ever drawn the most excited prose. William Byrd visited Mrs. Alexander Spotswood in 1732, finding a "brace of tame deer" that ran "familiarly about the house." Byrd was received in a room "elegantly set off with pier glasses," and one of the deer trotted up to view the visiting stranger, but "unluckily spying its own figure in the glass, he made a spring over the tea table that stood under it and shattered the glass to pieces and, falling back upon the tea table, made a terrible fracas among the china." Some household attrition was not altogether due to frolicsome accident, however. The *Maryland* Gazette printed an English visitor's impressions of American-style spring housecleaning in 1785. During that "season of female rage," as the narrator saw it, the occasion of whitewashing walls generally left "paintings, prints, and looking glasses" lying in "huddled heaps upon the floors," the "curtains torn from the testers, the beds crammed into the win-

dows. . ." After the walls were duly daubed, the contents of each room required intense scouring. "It matters not how many useful, ornamental, or valuable articles are mutilated or suffer death under the operation," observed the astounded traveller. Every object was to be "made clean at all events; but their preservation is not worthy of attention." Such vigorous housecleaning wouldn't have suited Joel Poinsett of Charleston, however. He wrote a friend in 1833 that he had a pair of card tables at the cabinet shop of John May, and wished that the cabinetmaker "abstain from cleaning them up and making them look new—a thing I abhor—I like old looking furniture . . ."

Some furniture was not even given the chance to acquire the gentle patina of age. A Savannah paper of the early 1780s reported about a billiard table which had been seized by the magistrate and "sold at the Courthouse . . . to a gentleman whose publick spirit means to consign it to the flames." Cabinetmaker Edward Long of eastern North Carolina was no doubt less high-minded when he strode into the Beaufort County "Court House and cut to pieces, destroyed and carried away the two large, substantial and admirable Desks" which stood in the courtroom. It seems that Long had been given an order for a pair of tables to be used in the same spot, and contemptuously elected to dispose of the desks without ado. When an enraged court officer demanded that Long put the desks back "as he found them," the cabinetmaker cooly replied that he "cared not for him nor any one else [and] he had made fire wood of the Desks."

The hand of man no doubt has been responsible for the greatest attrition of antiquities, at times on a grand scale. Scarcely any southern city escaped the ravages of fire, which accounted for the loss of a substantial amount of furniture. In one particularly ironic instance in 1798, "the most elegant part" of Wilmington, N.C. was consumed by fire, some 47 houses going up in smoke. The conflagration began in a bake-house owned by "Mr. Ralph" cabinet-maker from Charleston. One might think of better methods to drum up business.

Ma Nature has managed to make her own use of household trap-

pings from time to time. Early accounts of "hurricanos" striking southern port towns often detail the wrecked contents of entire houses forlornly washing about in the streets. Electrical storms inevitably excited the scientific bent of eighteenth century narrators, such worthies taking awed delight in tracing the path of destruction a bolt of lightning wreaked in their household goodies. James Laurens wrote of a violent summer storm which struck Charleston in 1771, a bolt entering his house via one of the chimneys and charring the "Chimney Piece on that side surprisingly." "The Chimney & two Sconce Glasses in this Room were broke to shivers," Laurens related, "& the Pieces flew with such force that my Mahogany Desk is cutt in many Places near ¼ In: deep. . . ." One T. Campbell, a planter on the Patuxe River in Maryland, was "sitting writing at a Desk and Bookcase" one evening in the summer of 1762 when he experienced the jarring shock of "the most surprising Delivery," an electrical discharge having been transmitted right through the desk.

In view of all the paths of natural wear and eventual destruction that objects in everyday use are subject to, not to mention the cyclical contempt for things which had "caught the decline" in fashion, one supposes that more than a little gratitude should be felt for the survival of a collection of material goods as sumptuous as MESDA's.

THOUGHTS UPON MESDA AT TWENTY

Winter 1985 (Vol. 6, No. 1)

What must one say of a person who eagerly works a seventy hour week, and whose idea of a vacation is just work with a change of view? A fellow who, if given the choice, would rather be rocketing down back country roads in a camera-filled station wagon, looking for old stuff, than sailing the main in a tall ship? Would rather stare at microfilmed records about dead people than see the wonders of the world? That would describe a dull fellow, would it not? No. Because there is no one else but Frank Horton that has such strange pleasures, and no one could call Frank dull, even if they didn't know him. After all, how could anyone with no imagination and no ex-

The source of MESDA's logo: a silver salver by Alexander Petrie of Charleston (working 1745–1765).

citement in his life conceive of turning a Kroger store into a major museum? Who else could have envisualized carved slab tables where dusty cans of tuna once reposed, or elegant portraiture where country hams dangled in stained canvas bags?

Well, though the hams have been gone for twenty years, the excitement has just continued to swell. No dull place, this. After all, MESDA is still an upstart among the solemn ranks of American decorative arts museums, some of which have been around since the last century. And like most brash youngsters, MESDA is a noisy brat. It wants to make itself heard. In a way, that's an ironic thing, for Frank's total concept in opening the museum was to exhibit southern arts, to show people that the material South existed beyond the misty porticos of Antebellum Plantations. But the thing

got away from him, "deviated," as Frank puts it. Too many people caught Frank's excitement when they saw what he'd done, and the grits have been boiling ever since.

When MESDA was still a gleam in the eyes of Frank and his mother, there were no collectors who cared to collect southern antiques just because they were southern. In fact, stuff from Dixie was considered downright gauche. That's why the bigtime antique dealers quietly put it on their floors, and didn't say anything about where it was from, letting their patrons think that maybe a magnificent Virginia chest was from New York, or that a great Carolina slipware plate was "Pennsylvania German." But all that has changed. Southern antiquities have become fashionable, and people collect things from specific regions of the South, though it was not so long ago that no one knew of those regions except the folks living there. Some of this is the result of the zeal for research which MESDA has spawned. That hasn't happened overnight, though. When the doors opened in January, 1965, not a single piece of furniture in the MESDA collection could be firmly attributed to a specific cabinetmaking establishment, and a number of pieces were just known as "southern." Now the collection contains a goodly number of pieces that are actually signed and many more that can be attributed to specific schools and regions. *Luminary* recalls the first signed piece acquired in 1971. It's a tea table by James Main of Charleston; his name is scrawled in chalk under the top. Not long after finding the table, frank was proudly describing the piece to an anciently elegant little southern lady who truly believed that nothing of merit was made west of London. Seeing that she remained unimpressed, Fank mentioned the all-important signature. "Well, Mr. Horton," she quavered, "did you write that in there?"

In the past two decades of its young life, MESDA has indeed "deviated." Frank's idea of a museum that would "put a frame around Old Salem," as he recalls it, has become quite a lot more than a fine collection. The museum has long since burst through its own doors and ranged all over the South, identifying southern antiquities and recording information about the people who made them through its

unparalleled field and documentary research programs. The field research half of that venture has stuffed a great row of filing cabinets full of photos and data on some 14,000 objects, while the documentary part has discovered 50,000 southern artisans and even filed them neatly in a computer. The museum's library has expanded enormously from the "core" books which once filled Frank's personal library. The staff has constantly grown and diversified. The Summer Institute has drawn students from all over the country to learn about southern arts, and an impressive menu of lectures, seminars, and workshops has been served up to audiences hungry for information on southern-made objects. The building has expanded, first with an auditorium and office wing in 1974, and next month the first yards of concrete for the new West Wing will flow. Publications have been spawned by the research programs, first the *Journal* in 1975, then this newsletter in 1979. Five major books on southern decorative arts are in the works, all of which will reveal the material South in a detailed and widespread way that no stationary museum collection could ever hope to do.

In the midst of all this energy, though, the collection has managed to keep pace. From a time when—believe it or not—a New York sofa was actually used in the Edenton Parlor to fill space, the collection has matured considerably. For example, two carved tables with claw-and-ball feet are now on exhibit in that same Parlor, both from the shop of the Edenton artisan who also executed the carving in the Edenton stair hall. 600 pieces have been added in the last ten years alone. Quite a number of zenith pieces have been added, some of them "firsts," ranging from the only known piece of American architect-designed furniture to the only known pair of American boxlock pocket pistols of the flint period. The collection has become increasingly specialized, and has shifted scope in concert with MESDA's expanded horizons. Personal interests of staff members have proven a catalyst in this. For example, MESDA now has a major collection of southern cast iron, thanks to Brad Rauschenberg's own fascination with the work of early blast furnaces from Maryland to South Carolina. This material, along with the museum's

small but significant array of southern longrifles, certain key pieces of silver, and other metalwares will be spotlighted in a permanent metals exhibit in the West Wing.

Naturally enough, a museum that has accomplished as much as MESDA has in such a short span of time hasn't done so without maintaining a pretty heavy "wish list." That certainly hasn't changed. In the short run, mundane things like a face-lift for the office, better atmospheric controls in the collections, and more effective lighting in the galleries are musts. More computer hardware is needed, in view of the amount of writing that the staff does, and plans are afoot to begin work with database management of technological details in the arts, an electronic aid that will help us group and attribute early furniture in particular. And the same data management will be of inestimable value in organizing the myriad of details which make up Sally Gant's education programs, including the "room files," or cards filled with interpretive information about all the objects in the collection. Extending such use to the future, naturally enough, should include accession files as well.

In both the short run and the long run, MESDA's greatest need is just the same as other museums, and that is increased endowment. Income from endowment is essential for operating expenses, salaries that are competitive with similar institutions, and acquisition funds for important pieces that come along, in order to meet the museum's continuing goal of exhibiting examples from every important southern "school" in every area of the arts. Steady addition to the decorative arts library is equally important. MESDA's library, while a fine one, is particularly weak in the area of European arts. Endowment also must be increased as an inflation hedge and to provide support for expanded facilities. Long in planning, for example, is a South Wing. As the final addition to the museum's physical plant, that wing will provide the space for four more Neoclassical rooms, increased storage and office area, and will give us the ability to mount major loan exhibitions and extensive conferences. Subjects such as "Fakes and Forgeries," which is just one of such seminars planned, should span well more than a day's time, should host at

least a hundred more participants than we can accept now, and should result in published information. The natural extension of such expanded educational capability, in the long run, must give consideration to the possibility of molding the structure of the time-proven Summer Institute into a full-fledged graduate program in southern material culture.

Despite all that's happened since our doors first opened, all the intricate ways that MESDA's presence has augmented the public's perception of southern arts, and despite all that's eagerly seen for the near future, some things don't change. The Boss still works a seventy-hour week, though most of the staff has learned not to feel guilty if they don't put in more than fifty. Well, maybe a *little* guilty. When the museum opened in 1965, there were two known southern court cupboards. In 1985, the same two are still the only known, and the museum collection still contains only one of them. Most importantly, the MESDA "experience" has not changed. The staff indeed has grown, but from the beginning it has worked as a rather unique family instead of a structured bunch of specialists. MESDA has no committees to speak of, nor does it even have a curator. The whole staff is the curator, and the whole staff the committee, for everyone here shares a very powerful sense of common purpose. Distilled to one concept, that purpose is pure education: revealing the early South, discovering unique regional statements from Tidewater pocosins to over-mountain plateaus. And finding out why those statements were made by studying the people, both patron and artisan, behind them.

All that seems pretty good for a fledgling museum that was a grocery store not so long ago. Dull? No. No indeed.

THE QUALITY OF TIMELESSNESS

Summer 1985 (Vol. 6, No. 2)

Those of us who frolic about in the world of decorative art seldom really try to find very precise reasons why we find one object more compelling than the next, due to some intrinsic value that far

transcends monetary worth. Understanding our feelings toward objects is tantamount to prizing open some psychological Pandora's box filled with the whys and wherefores of all human experience, and perhaps that's a bit much to deal with. Maybe we should be content to leave well enough alone, and just enjoy. Books on the arts often seem to imply that the usual scholarly matters of attribution, provenance, materials, probable dates, and stylistic comparison should be enough to satisfy us. But are they? Try as we may, how can we be really objective, and refuse to acknowledge the personal and emotional impact we feel in seeing or handling an object? And just what are we really using as measuring rods to define how we feel about something? Is it great age, impressive rarity or historical association, or an intense statement of artistry, or a combination of such things that clutches our emotions and causes us to think, "Now, that is really *something?*" The question is a complex one. Something as mundane as a chamber pot may be either quite humble or stylistically vibrant. Most of them, owing entirely to shifts in utility, are rare, but few would attract the admiring gaze that we might bestow upon a great swelled earthenware jug.

In such considerations, all of the possible arguments become quite frustratingly circular. But after centuries of scrabbling about after definitions of quality, art, and the like, perhaps we can find some singular attribute that objects either possess or do not possess, and which cause us to either like or dislike them, or even just yawn a little. This goes beyond the usual structured matters of esthetic that we like to apply in the juicy captions that describe decorative art.

Take, for example, that object which Ivor Noel Hume has described as "probably the most ubiquitous artifact of the twentieth century," the omnipresent Coca-Cola bottle. That container, and most particularly the nature of its contents, has much concerned us of late. It's the bottle itself, though, that interests us here. Hume, in a whimsical effort to "provide collectors and archaeologists of the future with a beacon to light their way back into the darkness of the twentieth century" described in some detail the evolution of said

container. The waisted bottle with its characteristic ribbed surface was introduced in 1915; the following year it was given its familiar pale green color. Though the form has remained the same since then, various markings such as patent dates, town names, and the like continued to evolve. Nothing really big changed until 1957, when it was decided that the Coca-Cola trademark would better show if it were rendered in a glaring white decal rather than just being incorporated into the bottle mold itself. Perhaps that decision was an aesthetic glitch, but at least the basic form of the bottle itself has gone on and on, no matter if the contents have stimulated controversy, fear, hatred, or pleasure.

In fact, we are more aware of the Coke bottle than perhaps any other commercial container. Why is that? If familiarity breeds contempt, then why should we notice it at all, for millions of them have been made since 1916. But we do, and it has survived. The example shown here, in fact, was found in a crate of bottles in the MESDA lounge in 1983. According to Hume's chronological study, the bottle was between twenty-six and thirty-two years old when it was finally removed from service. It had first seen use during the day of the old rounded Coke machine which dispensed six ounces of bottled delight for 5 cents, a time when cars had fins and ducktails didn't just refer to waterfowl anatomy.

Englishman David Pye, in his most introspective *Nature and Art of Workmanship*, defines quality in terms of both soundness and the success of the aesthetics which the designer intended. As in many durable objects, both of these qualities have contributed to the longevity of the Coke bottle. Its very organic, flowing form provides a great measure of strength by distributing stress and providing mass of material where it's most needed. The organic form was no accident; the company intended the ribbed design to imitate the convo-

luted surface of a cacao pod. This ribbing of the bottle further enhances its strength. It also supplies diversity and movement of the surface, and the tactile sensation of this surface is equally pleasant.

These are qualities, of course, which appeal to the decorative arts historian. If London had been able to boast of a Coca-Cola distributorship in 1755, Hogarth no doubt would have included an engraving of a Coke bottle in his pictorial essay on the "Line of Beauty." The organic form of the entire shape satisfies fundamental rules of natural proportion. Seen in the modules of eight that comprise the ancient Golden Mean, the distance from the rim to the lower edge of the upper ribbing is a proportion of three, while the lower portion of the bottle represents precisely a proportion of five . . . the same proportions which exist in, say, the spiral of a chambered nautilus or the form of the human head. Classical architecture is wholly founded upon this central order in nature. The rule of dynamic proportion permeates all successful forms, though we may be aware of it in only the most subliminal fashion.

So the Coke bottle, aside from matters of comfortable familiarity, satisfies a number of necessary tenets that have made it a physically and aesthetically durable item of material culture. If it should be cast aside tomorrow by the High Priests of marketing design, and some evil genius went about systematically buying up the bottles and smashing them, leaving only a dozen in the world, would the Coke bottle suddenly assume the aesthetic importance of an Amelung pokal? If not, why? It's too simplistic just to dismiss the Coke bottle as "mass produced." There must be some other missing attribute that is present in an article of free-blown glass. Certainly the remaining dozen Coke bottles would have enormous market value, but what beyond rarity would cause us to study them reverently?

Pye pretty well spelled it out for us in his concepts of *workmanship of certainty* and *workmanship of risk.* In the former, according to Pye, ". . . the result of every operation during production has been predetermined and is outside the control of the operative once production starts." In the latter, Pye notes, "the result of every operation during

production is determined by the workman . . . and the outcome depends wholly or largely on his care, judgement and dexterity."

While any product of the workmanship of certainty, like our excellent old Coke bottle, may be imbued by all manner of competence of form and function, such things cannot appeal to us quite in the same way that an object which speaks of individual effort. Ironically, the pattern maker who executed the first master for the Coke bottle engaged in workmanship of risk, and if that pattern existed, it would garner considerably more admiration than the excellent and shinily uniform bottles endlessly chucked out of machines. A better example of that, shown here is a seemingly insignificant piece of carved white pine scarcely more than an inch long. It was once a tiny element of that magnificent ballroom ceiling ornament at Whitehall near Annapolis. Like the Coke bottle, this scrap, even though broken, demonstrates successful organic form and diversity of surface. But it has much more than that. What makes this small bit of wooden acanthus infinitely important in our own minds are qualities given it by the sure hand of an artisan. The unhesitating—workman like, as they would have described it in past centuries—fluency of the gouge work, the enormous understanding of material that permitted the carver to lend a lyrical, dynamic quality to the work, are attributes of the workmanship of risk. And that is the essence of what is precious to us over the centuries: skill and artistry of individual effort, rendered in often difficult natural materials, the entire success or failure of the object pivoting constantly on the artisans' understanding of his work and of nature. As Pye put it, the ". . . characteristic aspect of nature, order permeated by individuality, was the aesthetic broth in which the human sensibility grew." No matter how symbolic and enduring a

Coke bottle might seem, our greatest admiration of material culture inevitably lies in objects which gloriously reveal the presence, effort, and even struggle of the artisans who produced them. Such things provide their own light in what darkness we may find in the past, and leap well beyond simple matters of rarity or even durability.

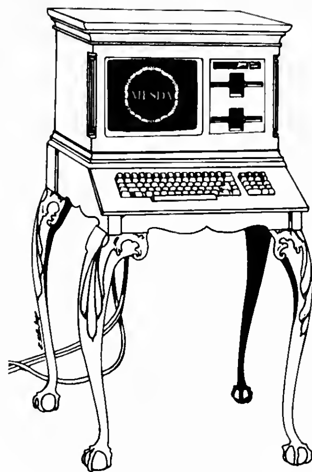
THE CURATOR AND THE COMPUTER

Winter 1986 (Vol. 7, No. 1)

Like it or not, we've been enveloped by the computer age, the essence of which has bleeped itself into every corner of our lives. Microprocessors run our kitchen gadgetry, and we receive chatty telephone sales pitches smugly placed by machines. Most of our financial affairs, along with other vitae, are nervously enmeshed somewhere in a jungle of silicon chips and diodes. Our automobiles, which once stood mutely in the carport ready for use, now complain to us about fastened seatbelts, various apertures ajar, and even the state of their bodily fluids. We can't make a midnight stop at a convenience store without hearing Zork snarling next to the frozen foods. We cannot attend any gathering without feeling a little discomfort unless we can at least display a knowing nod when the inevitable CompuSpeak invades a conversation. Fear, no doubt, has motivated the acquisition of many a personal computer, for we don't want to be left out of the mainstream of What's Happening Now. One wonders if nineteenth century artisans felt the same degree of discomfort when they discovered themselves in the midst of the Industrial Revolution, suddenly surrounded by whirring machinery and a whole new way of living. For denizens of the twentieth century who have steeped themselves in the culture of the past, one might equally wonder where Random Access Memory, interfacing, and modems fit with research files, patinated antiquities, and the trusty typewriters that have long served to place information before the public. MESDA has had good reason to ask such things, for we've been computerized for some time now.

In 1982, we purchased a computer system for the research room which had 64K of memory and 10 megabytes of external data stor-

age, a real whiz-bang collection of electronic goodies that amazed everyone. Now it's wholly obsolete, it's Winchester drive flowing over with more data than it can manage, so we've ordered a new system. The new computer will take up less than half the space of the old, will compute or sort at four times the speed, has eight and one-half times more data storage, all of it internal at that, and its cost will be only a third of the old system. Wheezing though it may now be, the old computer had far more power than ENIAC, the first electronic digital computer, whose 18,000 vacuum tubes and 70,000 resistors were switched on in 1946. That machine required the space of two 2-car garages; now we can do more work, and at blinding speed, on various compact peripherals hooked to a silicon chip that you could lose in the palm of your hand. As the financial bite of the byte rapidly descends, with computers designing computers and the software to run them, even very powerful machines have become cheap enough for anyone to own. Budgetary matters aside, though, what's in it for museums? Plenty. Teatables can live amongst terminals, and fraktur amid floppies.



Aside from Frank's ancient and forbidding Underwood, many MESDA typewriters have begun to gather a significant layer of dust. Word processing, of course, represents the overwhelming use of six computers in use here, and the quality of our writing has improved for it. An estimated 3200 pages of manuscripts of various sorts are now stored on MESDA discs, aside from voluminous correspondence. All of the LUMINARY and the *Journal* copy is cheerfully crunched through the chips, the "menu-driven" software making it ridiculously easy to move about, delete, or insert letters, words, sentences, paragraphs, and pages while providing footnoting, text merges, and various editing nuances that formerly required reams of paper and gallons of red ink and "whiteout." Our processor, WordPerfect, has an extensive speller as well, which is quite useless to anyone who insists on using nice old quotes filled with quaint phonetic

spelling, which of course is all of us. When one finds a singularly persistant error, though, it's terribly nice to run a global search and replace, like the time we whizzed through 1,000 pages of book manuscript and replaced "windsor chair" with "Windsor chair." It's comforting, too, to know that we can send out large manuscripts on electronic media that can be read into computerized typesetting hardware, thereby avoiding both the large expense of re-key punching millions of characters, and sidestepping as well the time, expense, and additional introduction of error that typesetting from "hard" copy inevitably brings. The largest of books may be sent quite readily over the telephone, for that matter, and nasty jobs like indexing can be vastly simplified with the right software.

MESDA's heaviest single use of electronics remains with the research room database, which regularly pulls up queries on well over 50,000 southern artisans whose feats and foibles alike are to be found spinning on the miraculous surface of a Winchester disk. Other database implementation of a less complex nature includes all of the Members of MESDA data, along with other specialized mailing lists. When a publication is ready for mailing, the computer quickly sorts and prints labels in zipcode order, sparing us paper shuffling and dark postal service frowns. Extensive bibliographies are another useful database application, and one of which Sally Gant's department makes constant use. A huge list of titles treating the arts of the South can be sorted to provide specialized bibliographies for all manner of training sessions and lectures. By the same token, interpretive room cards, which contain pertinent information about each piece in the collection for the benefit of interpreters and visitors alike, are now being tapped into the computer. By merging copy formatted by the word processor with the various functions of database software, information from those cards may be called up and sorted at will. New information can be added to the system instantly. Ideally, no doubt, we'll eventually have a simple terminal in every location a room file should be, though hiding a CRT in a "period" room setting may prove challenging. One doesn't want the hypnotic green-eyed glare of a tube vying for attention with a room full of antiquities, but even

that's not so far-out when we consider the possibilities of the future. For instance, how about calling up a full-scale hologram of an object to dance before the amazed eyes of your guests?

DEVICE ERROR: A Zenith Z-100 comments upon Frank's digit—*not* digital—machine.

These things, of course, are specialized applications for museum computers. At MESDA, we also use everyday business-type software programs for budgets, bookstore inventories, and personnel data. Database software, however, can by used in a host of ways to assist both museum operation and research. For example, Brad Rauschenberg and Forsyth Alexander are compiling a profile of furniture forms in Charleston. Utilizing information from probate inventories, the computer can shuffle thousands of items instantly, sorting the data by form, style, evaluation, chronological period, or any other parameter which can be used to define a database "field." Under discussion here for some time, though not yet implemented, is an electronic system of recording the technological "signatures" of furniture, such as carcass drawer, and foot construction. Any writer dealing with a complex school of work comprised of the work of many shops, whether urban or rural, would find it a much easier matter to group or attribute furniture if such details could be sorted and compared by the computer. Such a powerful method of studying objects could be further enhanced by merging the database with graphics software which would allow us to compare dovetail pitches, molding profiles, and even linear proportions, all of which could be read onto disc right from the screen with an electronic light pen.

Other possibilities seem virtually endless to the imaginative museum hacker. A number of institutions have already begun to computerize accession files, which again could incorporate graphics in a sophisticated system. Conservation scheduling could by similarly

filed on disc. Slide catalogs and field research files are also naturals for database storage and sorting. The only limiting factor is the amount time required for someone to insert the material. Uniform coding and language must be established so that the computer can find and group the desired data, and of course a good deal of time can be consumed in actually punching in the information. Even this, however, along with the editing of hard-copy manuscripts, could be vastly shortened with an OCR system—Optical Character Recognition—which scans a page of material and converts scripts to electronic signals fed directly to either memory or disc. OCR hardware has been in use for some while, and while it has been very expensive and not terribly accurate, costs are steadily falling while quality of resolution improves. And virtually any sort of computerized data, whether just straight copy or elaborate graphs and three-dimensional graphics, can be run quite readily on the current generation of multi-directional printers. Both ink-jet and laser printers run in letter-quality mode at blinding speed some over 200 characters per second and with color, yet. Communication between computers has become simple, too, allowing institutions to share an international electronic network of information if they so choose.

All of these wonders don't come without a certain price tag that goes beyond the cost of the hard and software, though. It's not always simple to find a system tailored to your needs that is accompanied by a reliable service network. So-called "handshaking" between computers and peripherals, especially printers, can be a thorny problem, and the lack of compatibility between different computer systems can cause even more trouble if museums are to share data or edit copy compiled on different machines. We're a long way from standardization in such things, especially due to the enormous and often confusing collection of software on the market. Electronic recognition between operating systems such as CP/M, MS-DOS, UNIX, XENIX, and the proprietary systems created by computer manufacturers such as Apple can be a serious problem. Conversion utilities, computer porting, and communications can solve some of this, but even so it's not unusual to find a screen filled with amusing

lines which read "$$st'-)### and,thCentury?" One wonders at times if computers would really prefer to compose in the style of e.e. Cummings, but there's logic in there somewhere. Finding logic, however, in the mystifying language of some computer and software "documentation"—manuals, to us laymen makes reading a land grant written in seventeenth-century Secretary hand seem like child's play.

Then there are the usual problems of everyday use and "computer housekeeping." Coffee spilled into a keyboard creates interesting hazards from blown microswitches, cursors racing blindly all over the screen. A misdirected keystroke can wipe out many lines of careful analysis that our trembling brain cells can't reconstruct quite so nicely. And when someone stumbles across a computer line cord and dumps a days' worth of work in memory, it's difficult to adequately describe the chilled, stonelike feeling that transforms the writer sitting before the keyboard into a sorry, hulking, wreck. If one is tempted in such instances to ask the computer to "Bring me drink of likker" the usual and logical response is "Bring?" or "SEEK ERROR ON DRIVE A: INCORRECT FILE NAME." One must be eternally cautious about the need to continually save data in memory, and to make backups. Floppy discs are not without their own idiosyncracies. Touching a disc surface, dropping the thing, or leaving a disc near any magnetic field such as a telephone bell can scramble the most elegant electronic prose.

Of course, we could invent new computer games to relieve the occasional stress of dealing with high tech. For the curator, perhaps something like ANTIQUARIAN QUEST might be the ticket. In this game, you'd have to correctly furnish a room based upon chronological, stylistic, and regional parameters. If you inadvertantly chose a Delaware Valley trifid-foot dressing table for a high-style Neoclassical Baltimore parlor, huge electronic powder-post beetles would scurry out and effect an instant on-screen destruction of the table. Fun! Just keep your CRT turned so that the boss can't see what you're running, and don't become too animated with the joystick . . .

Summer 1986 (Vol. 7, No. 2)

During the past decade, American museums have found good cause to examine in some detail the validity of using "period" room settings to interpret material culture. A number of top-notch curators and educators have come to believe that such installations have become a time-worn and inadequate means of introducing the public to a collection. Many of these professionals suggest that the day of the period room is over, so to speak, and that museums which want to provide an in-depth study of objects have no business installing more of them. Quite a lot of this current, if provocative, thinking is entirely valid. Since MESDA is an institution filled with these settings, has just installed more of them, and plans even more for the future, we obviously have to take measure of the worth of such rooms, just as other museums do. Somewhere in this controversy, surely, must be a decent balance between the pleasantly-furnished early interior and the hard facts that determine valid educational technique. After all, we aren't here to provide our visitors with a misty-eyed, moss-hung, bejulep'd, and heroic-porticoed voyage through the Antebellum South. Frankly, my dear, we don't give a—well, let's just say that we'd like our visitors to leave MESDA with an accurate sense of the objects people lived with, and what they meant . . . and mean.

The "period room," whatever that really means, has been with us for quite a long time. Perhaps "museum room installation," though wordier, is better. Europeans were dragging up collections of old rooms and even entire buildings by the 1880's. This country saw a great interest in such things even before the First War, as the groundswell of the Colonial Revival began to make itself felt. Curiously enough, and ironically for MESDA, southern rooms have ever been the darlings of northern museums. Before the 1940's, southern interiors were available in large quantities. They tended to be sophisticated in style, certainly a hallmark of the Palladio-conscious Southerner of the eighteenth century, and they tended to be large in scale.

These attributes made them juicy to large museums with scads of urban furniture to exhibit, needless to say. Elegant southern interiors began rolling northward as early as 1918, when the Brooklyn Museum acquired the famous Cupola House rooms from Edenton in a pioneering move to exhibit such interiors. Also on exhibit now at the Brooklyn are a Low Country drawing room and three rooms from an early Eastern Shore house. Even a hasty catalog of southern rooms in various museums is, in fact, rather staggering. At least 53 southern rooms are owned by seven museums outside the South. In addition to the nine rooms at the Brooklyn Museum, there are two Virginia rooms and one from Maryland at the Metropolitan. Five Charleston rooms are owned by three other museums, two at the St. Louis Art Museum, two at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and one at the Cincinatti Art Museum. Winterthur, which of course owns far and away the largest collection of American interiors, has a full three dozen southern rooms, 12 from Maryland, 10 from Virginia, and 11 from North Carolina. Many of these "expatriate" rooms are major ones, such as the Marmion parlor and Gadsby's Tavern assembly room at the Met, the John Stuart house drawing room from Charleston at Minneapolis, and both the "Flock Room" from Morattico Hall and the Montmorenci stair hall at Winterthur. Despite this large migration of interior architecture from Dixie some decades ago, however, there was little interest in southern "movables" at the time, particularly furniture, to use in those spaces. As late as the present decade, in fact, one museum catalog, in the process of describing the institution's southern rooms, observes that "relatively little southern furniture survives." Actually, a sizeable quantity of southern furniture was sold by northern dealers even five decades ago, much of it unidentified in regard to region since cabinet ware made south of the Mason-Dixon wasn't considered fashionable.

LUMINARY makes no cry of "carpetbagger" about all those rooms that have been trucked away. The rooms have been saved, and are on public view, usually stunningly dressed. What we should consider in this day and time, perhaps, is whether we should presume to remove rooms from old houses at all, regardless of where

they stand. The integrity of an old building is seriously damaged by the removal of its innards, and we must have a very large measure of justification for pulling out woodwork now. If a structure is in ruinous condition and rapidly deteriorating, is located in an isolated setting, and is supported by no public or private preservation resources, then perhaps we are justified in considering what the fate of its interiors will be. Even then, if the building is of great architectural or historical importance, or both, it undoubtedly would be better served by preservation *in situ* than by even a very careful gutting. The disembowelment of a building, in fact, is fraught with all manner of possible horrors. Thousands of nails thoroughly rusted in place do nothing good for delicate woodwork during the process of removal. Fragile cornices, chair rails, and sash are easily damaged, and even hardier elements such as doors, flooring, and paneling can be wrecked by simple errors. MESDA has been careful in such matters, and has studiously avoided removing interiors from buildings that showed promise of being preserved where they stood. Even so, we stand accused of having dynamited one fine dwelling! Perhaps if explosives have become a tool of preservationists, then as one astute colleague has suggested, we might institute the use of specialized trash-mashers to better condense our study collections as well.

The philosophical questions raised by the acquisition and removal of building interiors pale before the problems posed by what we do with those interiors after we've taken them out. The romance of an earlier age permitted both museums and private collectors to use such material as they wished. Original rooms were enlarged, their fenestration—the location of windows and doors—moved about, colors changed, and even architectural detail augmented, all to suit some particular taste or use. Of course, by no means all such installations were marked by such a cavalier attitude, and even those which were "warmed over" at least had been saved. Luke Vincent Lockwood, who oversaw the room exhibits in the Brooklyn Museum, was quite faithful to the spirit of the houses he dealt with, and wished students to experience rooms in the same fashion they might have viewed them in their original context. Today, hopefully, Lock-

wood's sense of such things will prevail. We should understand that early woodwork is due the same respect in conservation that we afford a piece of furniture, for it is no less a document of its maker and his times.

So. If we have a good interior, professionally removed from a "lost" structure and accurately installed in a museum, what do we do with it? That question is of particular importance to a decorative arts museum, which as LUMINARY has pointed out in the past, is neither dog nor wolf. We cannot readily assume of the roles of house museum, gallery, and decorative arts museum all in one elegantly paneled space. A good house museum must reflect a very detailed study of how people lived and used their objects in some time past, even if only a decade ago. The placement and interpretation of objects must bring every possible shred of historical data to bear in order to realize that important educational goal. The room of a house museum should reflect a moment frozen in time, like an old daguerrotype that darkly captures the antimacassars, whatnots, half-empty bottles of port, and other impedimenta of a Victorian drawing-room. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the museum gallery setting presents objects as shining, individual islands of intensive study. The objects are set against a neutral, uncluttered backdrop and provided with special lighting to heighten perception of scale, profile, detail, materials, and color, all factors especially critical to the full perception of complex and important pieces.

The reason that a decorative arts museum, or even a single room installation in a museum, is neither dog nor wolf is that we try to make our room settings serve the purpose of both the house museum and the gallery. We want to put people in the picture by providing the umbrella of social history used by the former, but we want the visitor to have a special understanding of the objects within the rooms, much in the fashion of a gallery. In many instances, probably, we fail at both of these things to one degree or another. For example, we can't take a Chesapeake room, furnish it with goodies garnered from a vast region stretching from Annapolis to Edenton, and have a room that is an accurate interpretation of the way people

lived in the specific area the room is from. The problem of mixing chronology is less of a problem than a geographic crunch, for we can fit Neoclassical objects into a Neoclassical room. Whatever the period of time, chances are we have loaded the room with far more objects than even wealthy people owned, for that matter—and that is an evil, it must be said, that even house museums fall prey to. There's a bit more justification for the busy room setting of a decorative arts museum, for presenting the collection is the thing. The early inventory, that most hallowed of documents to the house museum, can be used only selectively in a museum room setting. We have a fine violin case from Edenton, for example, that recalls an entry for such an object in the 1778 inventory of Edenton cabinetmaker Alexander Montgomery. Our imagination is further pricked by learning that another Edentonian, Joshua Bodley, listed a "fine Stradivoire Cremona" in his 1762 will. We wouldn't want to use Montgomery's inventory to furnish our Edenton parlor, though; we'd have to toss out our Virginia furniture there, hurl the William Williams portraits from the wall, and dispose of the brass andirons. Of course, if someone would like to donate a Strad that fits our case . . . well. The ability to teach social history in a museum room setting, then, is limited by the very nature of the diverse material which the decorative arts museum must present all in one space.

Spotlighting individual objects *a la galerie* also tends to be defeated by the museum room setting. An assembled group of toothsome things all vying for attention is the first problem, and the second is atmosphere. A comfortable and fetching "period" room doesn't care for lots of light, so many small details go unseen by the visitor. The tone and shape things are lost against colorful paneling, fabrics, wallpapers, and the like. So how do we make the decorative arts museum a friendly blend of dog and wolf, if rooms can't look like a Calke Abbey bedchamber or every object perched grandly on a sterile plinth? MESDA has some alternatives. We can't be a house museum, nor do we want to, but we can present unified groupings in the collection that represent specific regions. We can illuminate the importance of single objects by providing them with a matrix of infor-

mation regarding style, technology, and social history, even if we can't do that in a fashion that is valid for an entire room. And we don't have to leave things sitting in the much-cherished gloom of colonial ambience. We can provide secondary gallery-type lighting to bring up every detail, just as our visitors will see in the new Charleston rooms on November 15.

So what's the bottom line? Are "period rooms" dead? No, but they need new and energetic thinking to keep them abreast of our ever-increasing understanding of early material culture and the best ways to present it. The decorative arts museum can learn a good deal from house museums, even if it can't use all of its techniques. MESDA is surrounded by a restored town, after all. And, to a certain extent, we can take advantage of gallery applications in the room settings, and to an obviously far greater extent by providing more actual gallery space that compliments the rooms. Our new metals gallery, which brings together all of our finest silver, cast iron, and southern arms, does just that. It will allow our visitors to really see things that were formerly a bit buried in various room settings. But the museum room settings, even if they don't "read" like a page of historiographer's prose, are still important to us, for they still connect objects to people, and we should not mistake the impact which that has upon the visitor, who is, after all, people.

ON THE CONSERVATION OF OBJECTS

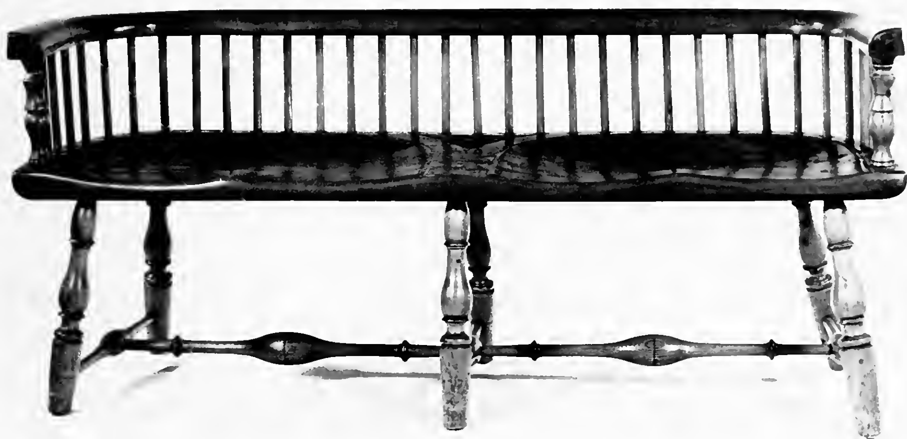
Winter 1987 (Vol. 8, No. 1)

In the Summer, 1983 issue, LUMINARY commented on "the care and feeding of wooden pets," something of a debunking of romantic notions about trendy, perfumed furniture finishes and polishes that are more gratifying to the nostrils of collectors than they are to the pores of old wood. Part of that editorial touched upon the responsibility that all of us, whether we are curator or collector, should feel toward our antiquities if we are to care for them in proper and responsible fashion.

The art of conservation, of course, is vast subject due to the diver-

sity of objects and the media in which they were executed. That's why good conservators usually are specialists. A furniture conservator may learn the stabilization or repair of ceramics or paintings, for example, but the complexity of knowledge needed for the preservation of wooden objects alone is enough for most people to have on their plate at one time. Regardless of the sort of object that may require care, there are basic considerations to be made before we launch forth upon any restoration project. Such considerations transcend ownership and use. It matters not whether the piece is reverently displayed in a museum or put to daily use by a collector; responsible conservation is responsible conservation. The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) has given voice to such things in its code of ethics for conservators. This code should apply with equal strength to the *owners* of objects, not only because they need to know how to keep fine antiquities in good health, but also because they should be able to communicate intelligently with conservators. The AIC observes that all of the professional activity of a conservator "be governed by unswerving respect for the integrity of historic and artistic works," that he or she should accept work only within "the limits of his professional competence and facilities," that a full report of the state of the object and proposals for treatment be written, and that a final report of treatment be prepared, including photographic records of the object before, during, and after conservation. Not many private conservators, with the exception of people working in the fine arts field, provide such complete records of their work, and many museums in fact are equally lax in recording such things. No matter how much we may want to preserve our collections responsibly, though, if we don't take the time to examine what is really needed and then record the procedures used, we are taking a cavalier attitude toward the object. Further, lack of adequate documentation can hinder the continuing preservation of an object, and rob future students of a full understanding of the originality or even authenticity of some work.

Even the simplest of conservation matters may be fraught with all manner of pitfalls not readily perceived. In something of a deviation



from our usual editorial chatter, let's do something different to illustrate this, and take a look at one case study that reveals some of both the physical and philosophical problems at hand. Our "patient" is a fine Virginia Windsor bench of the late 18th century, a piece which once graced a hall or porch of the Skipwith family seat, Prestwould, an elegant two-story stone manor which was built in the early 1790's and still stands in Mecklenburg County, Virginia. This bench was kindly donated to MESDA in November, as "New in the collection" details.

Common to the bulk of early examples of Windsor furniture surviving, especially southern examples, this bench has long since lost its original paint. That loss, at least to a museum, is both an interpretive and esthetic problem which we'll consider later. The more immediate problem was the loss of leg height, which although no more than 1¾ inches on the front legs, gave this dainty bench a dumpy appearance, as the "before" picture shows. The loss had resulted both from wear and moisture damage, and the front legs had suffered the most, raking the seat forward at an angle suggesting that

FIG. 1

FIG. 2

the user might be pitched forward onto his or her nose in an unseemly fashion. To a collector who would use such a piece, then, the damage affected utility as much as esthetics. Of prime concern to a museum was the visual distortion of form. What to do? Well, the old story is brought to mind about the frustrated fellow who began a frenzied "eyeball" trimming of the uneven legs of a table to level them, continuing to have at it until he reached the frame. When queried about his bizarre mutilation of the piece, the inevitable reply was, of course, "Ayup. Well, it's level."

Salem College student Jennifer Heatwole has provided us with an excellent series of pencil sketches detailing the procedures used by furniture conservator Hayden Allen to tip the legs of our bench. The maple legs varied in height according to the degree of damp rot they had been subjected to. The bottom of each leg was ragged and uneven, but protected by steel glides (fig. 1). In order to provide a clean joint for the material to be added, and to distribute loading evenly across the joint, a necessity for any piece that is to be used

FIG. 3

(although this one will not), Hayden taped each leg just above the damaged portion (fig. 2) to provide a guideline for cutting a fresh surface perpendicular to the centerline of each leg, using a fine-toothed backsaw (fig. 3). While this is a simple enough procedure, and provides the greatest amount of strength since the joints will be loaded in the same plane as the leg, the cut is also destructive. That is, sound wood, as much as a half inch on the outside faces of the legs, was removed in order to provide a right-angled butt joint. Ideally, good conservation procedure calls for doing as little as possible to effect stabilization or repair. An angled or scarf joint could have been used here, and less original material would have been removed. There are instances when the most cautious approach may result in additional destruction later, however. Without a tricky internal support, a scarf joint eventually would have given way, for no adhesive is an effective binder on the end-grain of wood, even though such a joint provides more gluing surface than a right-angled cut. Our procedure here is a compromise; a cut perpendicular to the centerline of

FIG. 4

FIG. 5

the leg makes it easier to establish a strong joint that can be tightly fitted up.

Necessary for maximum strength in any sort of leg-tipping is some form of tenon on the tip. The tenon could be a sawn projection intended to fit an open mortise in the original part of the leg, but that would result in further surface loss to the original fabric. The better alternative is a tenon turned on the new tip which can be concealed in a hole drilled in the original portion of the leg (fig. 4). This is still destructive of original material, but at least in a concealed fashion. When the new tips were turned on the lathe, these tenons were given a radiused fillet where they meet the shoulder of the tip (fig. 5); the holes drilled in the legs were slightly chamfered to accomodate the fillet. The weakest element of any structure is a sharp corner, so the radius turned with a round-nosed tool greatly reduces the possibility of a sheared tenon later. An even better alternative for such a tenon, according to conservator Wallace Gusler of Colonial Williamsburg, is a tapering square tenon, which although difficult to fit, lessens the

possibility of a tenon becoming loose through shrinkage later. Further, a tapering tenon requires less removal of original material while providing maximum strength at the joint.

Why not use some other material for a tenon that is *really* strong, such as, say, a half-inch steel rod? Such a heavy pin could be glued into holes drilled in both leg and tip, and could never shear. The problem with the use of such disparate materials falls victim to the often-ignored axiom "you can't fool Mother Nature." The properties of any organic material must be taken into account whether we build anew or repair the existing, unless we find it amusing to constantly rebuild the new or repair repairs. Most of us don't. Wood, no matter how old and seemingly stable it is, expands and contracts with changes in humidity. Steel doesn't. When wood tries to shrink around a "foreign" material, either splitting, compression shrinkage, or both, will result. Compression shrinkage by itself could readily loosen such a joint in the space of one season.

Even the material which the leg tips are turned of must be considered. Since the legs of our bench are maple, any old piece of maple will do, we might think. No such thing. The original material is red maple. If we chose to make the tips of sugar maple, which is much harder and denser, we have a bit of the same problem we would have in using steel pins. Greater compatibility is achieved by using the same variety and density of material, preferably taken from scrap that is well aged and close to the size of the tips to be turned. Even the structure of the new wood is important. Wood shrinks across the grain, which means that a turning tends to become oval in time. If we add a new piece to an existing section, then the grain structure of the new wood ideally should be aligned with the original portion of the legs, or differential shrinkage—the original leg moving in one direction, and the tip in another—can loosen a joint, or worse. Such problems are accentuated in an environment where humidity cannot be monitored closely, such as a residence.

So, with new tips of the correct material, turned somewhat oversize and finished with tenons that are a snug slip-fit in the holes of the legs—not a drive fit—we are ready to glue the extensions in

place. What adhesive do we use? Epoxy certainly is the strongest of available substances, and would seem the best for a bench leg, which is stressed even by the static weight of the piece of furniture itself. And when the weighty mass of a slouching and full-bodied guest who cares not a whit about old stuff is added, the new joints may shriek in agony. But epoxy, for all its strength, has some nasty properties. First, most epoxy formulations have a hardness, tensile, and shear strength that far exceeds that of any wood. Using it is not unlike introducing the ghastly steel rod, though in a lesser degree. More importantly, it violates one basic requirement for any conservation material, for it is not easily reversible. No repair should be effected that can't be undone by some means, for we may find later that the repair is either stylistically or technically improper. Instead, we need an adhesive that is more compatible with the strength of the structure itself, and which can be dissolved or loosened. The hide glue used by cabinetmakers for centuries has admirable strength and instant reversibility with water, and is the best glue for most furniture repairs. Where greater strength is required, one of the modern polyvinyl acetates (PVA), popularly known as "white" glues, have a broad range of tensile strengths, and are resistant to most solvents except water. At the upper end of the scale in strength of the PVA adhesives is Titebond @ glue, produced by Franklin Chemical Industries, which also makes a hide glue that may be applied cold. Titebond @, which we used on the Windsor bench, has more than adequate strength for stressed repairs, and like the other PVA's is soluble in water, although slowly. A hole drilled through a new leg tip or other such repair, providing that it reaches the area of the joint, will allow water to be injected with a hypodermic. A half-hour's soaking is enough to thoroughly loosen a joint, and the offending addition can be plucked off and consigned to the flames. Such reversibility of adhesives and finishes is an absolute necessity in good conservation work. If there is some doubt whether such materials can be readily removed or loosened, a call to the manufacturer of the product usually yields the proper solvent, if one exists.

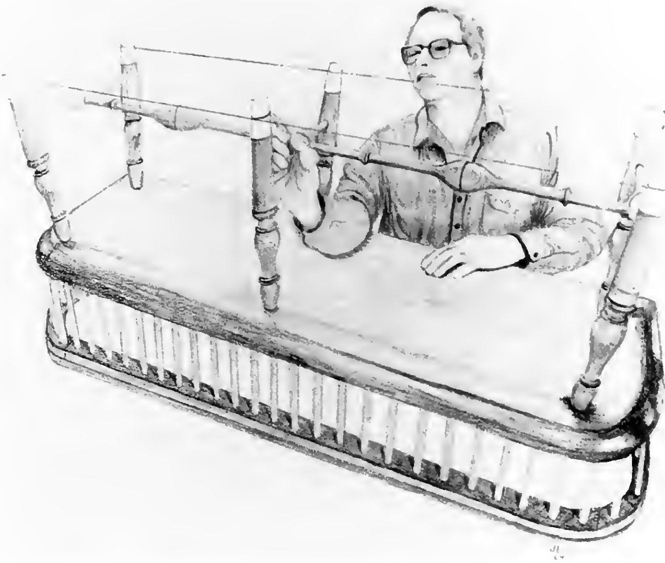


FIG. 6

With the leg tips glued in place, Hayden established the correct finished height of the legs by the simple expedient of stretching a string around them all (fig. 6), at the same time marking pencil lines to establish the cutting angle necessary to make the piece sit level. The finished seat height, as it so happened, was 17″ at the front of the seat, the common height of most early seating furniture. With the tips cut to length, they were shaped down to match the existing portions of the legs, all of which are relatively oval in section from shrinkage.

The final step in the restoration of the bench is quite a controversial one. The original paint had been removed long ago during the "get back to nature" phase of American collecting, although good traces of dark red remain under the seat, as well as subsequent daubs

of both light gray and green, both likely from nineteenth century re-paintings. For purposes of interpretation, MESDA prefers to return painted surfaces to objects painted originally, for in the "stripped" state they have a wholly different visual impact than the maker intended, especially pieces such as Windsors which may be made of three or four different woods. Each piece must be considered on its own merit, though; especially thorny are items such as decorated chests whose tulips may have faded into oblivion, leaving us facing the question of how much in painting is too much. A parallel might exist in an oil painting which has lost sizeable portions of surface. In the case of simple painted furniture, the replacement of missing paint is more akin to the restoration of original paint schemes on architectural woodwork. A piece of antique furniture, however, shouldn't shine like a newly-minted Edsel bumper, so a new painted finish should show "wear" where appropriate. Now, this brings us into a very gray realm indeed. Such finish reconstruction, all poetic with *faux* patination, demonstrates the skill of a contemporary fin-

isher, not a surface provided by the original maker. It really borders upon fakery. The museum visitor must be made aware of that, and care must be taken to leave plenty of documentation of what has been done. We try to approach our "antiqued" new paint on such pieces as a forthright but necessary compromise. We avoid the destruction of the documentary essence of the piece itself by giving it a shellac coating before painting. The shellac acts as an interface, preventing new paint materials from invading surface pores while preserving tiny shreds of the original paint skin, while at the same time allowing us to remove a new painted finish easily. Another excellent interface is a reversible copolymer soluble in toluene or methanol, Acriloid 8-72 by Rohm and Haas, which is also useful as a consolidant for rotted or insect-damaged organic materials. The paint we used for our bench was a flat latex, rubbed out with a petroleum distillate-based overglaze tinted with burnt umber. The glaze is easily removable with lacquer thinner, the latex with methylene chloride, and the shellac interface easily wipes away with an alcohol-saturated

rag. None of these materials could be mistaken for an early oil-based paint compounded with red lead or other metallic pigments, although the finished product is *visually* the same. We studiously avoided *any* sort of over-coating on the traces of original color under the seat, thereby leaving the documentation of our paint reconstruction intact.

Our bench, returned to an altogether more pleasant appearance, is now back in the collection. What might seem to have been a very simple job of tipping out, as we see, really involved considerations of physics, design, the physical properties of both original materials and repair media, methodology, ethics, and conservation philosophy. All those things embrace more than one might imagine necessary for making an old bench spiffy. But that's the essence of good conservation practice: consider first what is best to preserve the integrity of the object, and not just what will suffice to please our own personal taste. So the next time any of us gleefully haul off a filthy, bedraggled, but otherwise elegant new-found antique to be fixed up, let's think beyond "make it look nice."

THE FRENCH CONNECTION.

Summer 1987 (Vol. 8, No. 2)

The emergence of regional style in the decorative arts is a remarkable phenomenon. Numerous aspects of anthropology are imbedded in this, the most important of which is the origin of settlers—ethnic groups, to use the common term. The arrival of immigrants from a particular European region or country had an immediate impact upon the material culture of early America. That is an accepted and proven fact in the study of American decorative arts, but the nature and extent of the introduction of "foreign" style is far from being plumbed to its fullest depth. Consider, for example, the coastal South of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Unlike the copious survival of goods from that period in New England, eastern Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas have not yielded up

luscious quantities of household movables, especially furniture. That which has survived, quite interestingly, often shows little stylistic relationship to familiar northern forms. Furniture historians have been puzzled over this apparent anomaly, but most have been content to let ancient southern dogs lie. In fact, the South at times has been something of a convenient "black hole" into which early furniture with weird and uncomfortably unusual details could be tossed. This is hardly a useful solution to the problem of identifying seemingly aberrant American styles. We don't need a polite shuck-and-jive in the interpretation of such objects; we need understanding and recognition of stylistic roots, no matter how obscure they seem at first blush.

The root of such mysteries often lies in a better understanding of settlement patterns. We have not done a terribly good job of identifying ethnic groups present in the coastal South, quite in contrast with the extensive delineation of the potpourri of immigrant profiles in the back country. Most everything in the tidewater is taken to be quite British, thank you very much. The exception to this is Charleston, where acknowledged European modes comfortably lay alongside English traditions throughout the eighteenth century. But what of the stylistic "floaters" from the upper coastal South, especially those early pieces that seem to murmur in foreign tongues? Can we retrieve some of them from our cultural black hole? Perhaps so, and in a rather surprising way.

Louis XIV, the Sun King, in his unending search for exquisite design and monumental architecture, indirectly contributed to the arts of the western nations in a fashion so widespread and complex that the extent of French influence often virtually defies comprehensive recognition. Ironically, one of his finest gifts to international style was one of the greatest mistakes of his reign: the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Louis' grandfather, Henry IV, had proclaimed the Edict in 1598; it guaranteed religious tolerance toward French Protestants, chiefly the Huguenots. A seventeenth century Catholic revival, however, brought about a renewal of the persecu-

tion of these people after the death of Cardinal Mazarin in 1661. Louis XIV steadily eroded the Edict in a series of proclamations that terminated in his grievous Revocation which ordered that "all the Churches" of the Huguenots "be forwith demolished." The Protestants were forbidden to leave the kingdom or to "Transport thence their Goods and Effects."

It seems that Louis was scarcely aware of the numbers and importance of these people. Imbued with Calvinistic ethics of hard work, self-discipline, and rational behavior, the Huguenots were known in their own time for sobriety, frugality, and industry. As many as a quarter-million of them fled France before the end of the seventeenth century. Forty to fifty thousand settled in Britain, another twenty-five to thirty thousand in Germany. An indeterminite number sailed for America from both of these countries as well as Holland, the country which had welcomed the greatest number of Huguenots, perhaps 60,000. When William of Orange marched to London to assume the throne in 1688, he was accompanied by numerous Huguenot officers and soldiers in his own army, which is no surprise in view of his firm Protestant stance. William III lost no time in issuing a royal order assuring that England would "Support, Aid, and Assist" the Huguenots "in their several and respective Trades and Ways of Livelyhood." With royal patronage and protection of the French protestants assured, Britain leapt from plodding Mannerism into the glorious High Baroque. Most appropriately, three centuries after the Revocation, the Museum of London and the Huguenot Society of the same city mounted an elegant exhibition documenting this great injection of Gallic genius into Britain. Accompanied with a fine catalog, the 1985 exhibition was entitled *The Quiet Conquest: The Huguenots 1685 to 1985*. The French artisans listed read like a "who's who" of London's finest, capped by notables such as Daniel Marot, Jean and Thomas Pelletier, Louis Francois Roubiliac, and Paul De Lamerie, whose contributions ranged from major urban architecture and exquisite carving to sculpture and writhing objects of silver. Later generations of Huguenots born in

England excelled in a host of other areas as well. David Garrick was the foremost English thespian of the eighteenth century; Henry and Sealy Fourdrinier made books affordable through their mechanization of paper production, and Peter Mark Roget added variety to the words which filled the books.

The protestant émigres which reached our shores left their own mark. For example, the son of a French-born Boston goldsmith, Apollos Riviere, was—and is—rather well known for his patriotic exploits, exceptional artistry, and a fine head for industrial pursuits. His name was Paul Revere. There were others in the North, most of whom not only changed the spelling of their names, but adapted to prevailing American styles as well. Such acculturation wasn't always total, however. When we find swelling, sinuous skirts on an early Newport table, for example, we might well pause and consider the source. In reality, emigrant French tradesmen have been given very little recognition for the often-subtle contribution they made to American arts.

The Huguenots were strong in the lower Chesapeake and the low country. They began to arrive in Virginia at least by the 1680s. In 1700, 205 "French Protestant Refugees" aboard the ship *Mary and Ann* sailed into the James estuary; Governor Francis Nicholson considered it best that they "go to a place about twenty miles above the Falls of the James River, commonly Called the Manakin Town," where they could "quickly make a settlement." More followed in rapid succession, but the settlement was not without problems. In 1701 the explorer and naturalist John Lawson found the French settlements in South Carolina to be thriving, observing that "by their Endeavors and mutual Assistance amongst themselves . . . have outstript our *English*" in regard to industriousness. On a 1706 visit to the North Carolina town of Bath, he found the same to be true of French settlers there, but noted that these people were rather less fortunate. They were "from the *Mannakin* Town *on . . . James* River in *Virginia*" and "had, for the most part, removed themselves to *Carolina*." According to Lawson, Hugenots had "small Encourage-

ment in *Virginia*" since they had been allotted only ten to twenty "Acres to a Family," following European tradition, while the English "took up and survey'd all the Land round about" the French settlement.

The movement of these French settlers about the lower Chesapeake and into Carolina late in the seventeenth century and early in the eighteenth brought was almost certainly responsible for a striking degree of continental influence in some of the earliest surviving furniture of the region. In the MESDA research files, examples from virtually every category of early lower Chesapeake household furniture exhibit details which have no known connection with British fashions. In our May, 1986 Journal, Jim and Marilyn Melchor explored Gallic aspects of an early press in the MESDA collection. Chairs in particular have long served as strong indices of regional design; four in our collection, spanning a 1690–1740 chronology, openly suggest provincial Frenchmen in the southern rural woodpile. Three MESDA chairs from Virginia are shown here, along with a fourth from North Carolina which is in the collection of the Mint Museum of History in Charlotte.

An important recent addition to the collection, the chair in Fig. 1 very well may be the earliest known southern turned armchair. Entirely of cherry except for its seat rounds, the chair has lost its feet and at least two inches of its finials. The crisp turnings are a combination of Classical and Mannerist styles, and withal suggest a very strong French background both in form and arrangement. The upper side and single rear stretchers have simple decorative turnings, a feature not part of the British tradition. The arms pass over the front posts, which is typical of many early southern chairs, and although observed on a few rare British examples, turned arms that overhang the posts are not known on chairs from northern America. Both overpassing arms and turned decoration on side and rear stretchers, however, are common on French chairs of the Louis XIII style or on chairs made in the provinces later in the seventeenth century.

Even more clearly continental in style are the three other arm-

FIG. 1

FIG. 2

chairs illustrated here. Each is constructed with a rail-and-spindle back. That is, the back spindles are set into flat rails rather than the turned rounds usual to British parlance. Of these, Fig. 2 is the most European, with its crest finials and sloping arms. Fig. 3 is a slightly later chair from Mecklenburg County, Virginia; two closely-related examples are known. The final example, Fig. 4, is the latest chair in the group, possibly dating as late as 1740. It was found in Pasquotank County, North Carolina. In addition to having decoratively-turned stretchers all around like the chair in Fig. 2, this example also has turned rear feet, another detail common both on the continent and in the South, but seen less frequently on northern work.

There is something to be learned from the presence of decorative

FIG. 3

FIG. 4

arts traditions that do not warble *Rule Britannia:* we shouldn't simply dismiss the appearance of odd regional styles as the quirky result of artisans isolated from the mainstream of style. Neither should we be surprised at the phenomenon of international modes occuring so early, for many artisans in the Chesapeake South of 1690–1740 were born abroad, and some well east of London. In maritime America, acculturation in a predominately British society did indeed quietly but rapidly erase many traces of continental stylistic traditions, but some persisted nonetheless, if only in small details of form and construction. The French in particular tended to cling to their cultural heritage, as Lawson so perceptively knew. He wouldn't have been surprised to know that almost eighty years after his death the Federal census for the area of Bath on the Pamlico River contained nu-

merous "foreign" names still uncorrupted, such as Campin, Purnal, Pilly, Duso, Bainer, Gautier, Conde, Cordin, Roulhac. There were others in the same county, and French names are scattered throughout numerous additional coastal southern counties at the end of the eighteenth century. These people have been given scant notice by historians, but sound documentation of their existence in the South, aside from census and court records, is certainly provided by surviving material culture. Louis, turn in thy royal sepulchre. The king is dead; long live the Revocation.

FRANK'S PLACE

Winter 1988 (Vol. 9, No. 1)

That sounds like a back-street bar, some smoky and dimly-lighted, comfortably shabby neighborhood retreat with worn vinyl booths, big jars of Polish sausage, and beery ambience. A place where people can go as a momentary shelter from the slings and arrows of whatever outrageous fortunes comprise their everyday lives.

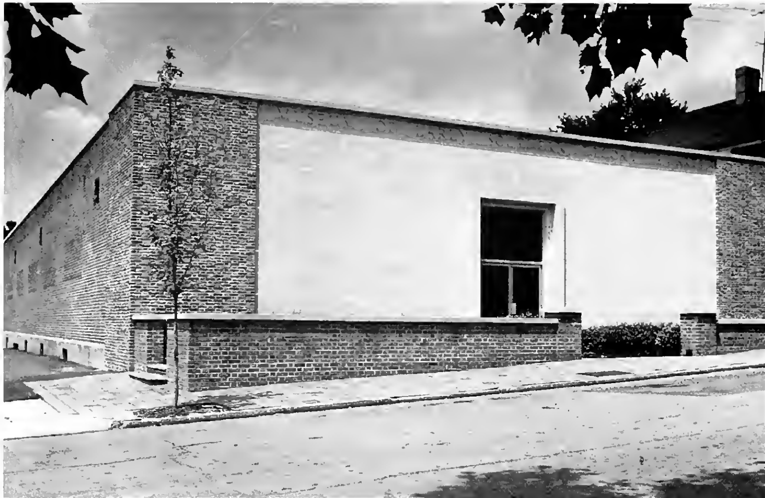
Well, around here, Frank's Place isn't a beer joint. And as far as Frank Horton is concerned, there's no such thing as Frank's Place. But in some circles, that's the moniker that has settled upon the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts. Frank views that appellation with considerable discomfort, for it seems to imply a museum constructed solely around the tastes and ambitions of one person. That's particularly worrisome to Frank right now, for on March 21, at the age of 70, he retires from the directorship of the museum. Whoever takes his place, he feels, shouldn't have to labor under the shadow of a previous proprietorship.

Well, even though we don't serve up pretzels and lager, this museum is indeed Frank's Place. But the real-world implications of that are far from negative, and should hold no forboding to Frank's successor. Instead, they define the nature of this institution, which happens to coincide with the philosophy of the man who started the whole thing, and the people he has hired over the past twenty-three

From meat market to museum: the old Kroger store on Main Street, before . . .

years to help him with it. Frank likes to refer to his "dream," but it's the realities of what has been accomplished that enable us to understand why the term "Frank's Place" is not deprecatory. It describes not a cliquish proprietorship, but rather a vibrant museum program that has every expectation of continuing far into the future if those who manage it have the ability and sensitivity to understand the museum's priorities.

Sure, Frank has been at the center of it all, both Old Salem and MESDA, and because of that, he has had a high profile. Far more than he has ever cared for, in fact; he is a behind-the-scenes sort of person, and always perfectly willing for someone else to bask in the glory. As one journalist put it in 1965, "about himself he is singularly reticent." He's no different now, but at this singular turning point in the history of MESDA, it's well for our readers to know something about a man who has characteristically styled himself "an amateur historian and antiquarian."



. . . and after.

Frank Liipfert Horton was born in Raleigh, North Carolina on March 21, 1918, the year armistice was signed between Germany and the Allies. When Frank was about five years old, the family moved to Winston-Salem, the home of Frank's mother, Theo Liipfert Horton. Frank grew up in Winston-Salem, attending Wiley, Reynolds High School, and Augusta Military Academy in Virginia. He doesn't remember much about such segments of his life. "Ask me what happened in Edgecombe County, North Carolina in 1785 and I can tell you," he says, "but don't ask me when I did something." After high school graduation, Frank and his brother Miles moved to Clarksville, Virginia to the Liipfert family farm. From there Frank and Miles attended the New Mexico Military Academy; Frank later enrolled in a business curriculum at Pace Institute in New York. During the 1930's, as Frank puts it, he and his mother "became antique dealers in Clarksville and I ran the business until I went into the Navy in 1942." The antique business was a natural progression, for

Pocomoke room in sad and sagging disarray . . .

Frank's mother had long been a collector, and Frank himself was a stamp collector at an early age. His tales of antiquing about the South during the 1930's are legend. On one occasion, as he recalls it, he was driving "down a long country road, antiquing without any particular lead." He spied a Queen Anne corner table on the porch of a farmhouse, and quite naturally asked if the owner would sell it. After some rumination, the farmer allowed that he'd take 50 cents for the table. "I stood there a minute," Frank says, "and then said OK. Then my conscience started bothering me, so I said 'My Mother wants me to get a chicken for dinner.'" The farmer "caught one and tied its feet together, and I paid him his price for it. As soon as I got down the road a bit I set the chicken loose. I've often wondered what that farmer thought when he saw the chicken coming home. I sold the table that afternoon for $150."

With Frank's service as a yeoman in the Navy completed at war's

end, the family returned to Winston Salem in 1947. Frank and his mother opened an antique shop at their residence at the corner of Fifth and Poplar streets where the Integon building now stands. Frank recalls that the business did badly, largely because he was too quick to point out problems which various pieces had. One fine Windsor bench in the MESDA collection still bears a printed label from that period, attesting to Frank's zeal for honesty: "Frank Horton—Antiques! 512 West Fifth Street! Winston-Salem, N.C./ This

. . . and cheerfully reassembled in MESDA.

piece guaranteed to/ be a genuine antique." The bench had come from the great Mecklenburg Country, Virginia house, Prestwould, where Frank's mother vividly remembered visiting as a child. Stacked next to the doors of second floor bedchambers were piles of tall-post beds sawn to lengths that would fit the fireplaces. Pigs languished in the shade of the cellar, and chickens had their run of the first floor.

It's just as well for Old Salem that the antique shop was not a going concern. Frank became fascinated with the crumbling charm of the 1766 Moravian town, and soon fell under the spell of the great archivist, Dr. Adelaide Fries, whose monumental seven volumes of the Records of the Moravians had already been published by 1947. Frank began systematic research on the history of various buildings in Salem, realizing that "if people had enough guidance about what was here it would encourage restoration." How right he was. Old Salem, Inc. was established in 1950, and Frank quite naturally was appointed director of research. He's had various titles since, reflecting that he's "had all the fun jobs around here," but has never accepted a dime of salary for any of it. The enormous complexity of his work is documented well enough in the town today. By 1966, the year after MESDA opened its doors, Frank had overseen the removal of 100 non-conforming structures, had restored or reconstructed twenty-seven buildings, over saw the construction of the Old Salem Visitor Center and the installation of MESDA, and had compiled complete files on every early resident of Salem and each of the building lots in the town. During the same time, all of the electrical poles and overhead wires were removed, and a four-lane bypass was constructed to route traffic around the historic district. There's much more, but Frances Griffin's excellent *Old Salem: an Adventure in Historic Preservation* tells it all.

MESDA itself, naturally enough, was a long-term project. Frank conceived of the idea of such a museum during the course of assisting with the 1952 *Exhibition of Southern Furniture 1640–1820* that was sponsored jointly by *Antiques* magazine, Colonial Williamsburg, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. That very successful exhibit

laid to rest Joe Downs' now-famous remark at the 1949 Antiques Forum that "little of artistic merit was made south of Baltimore," but Frank was scarcely satisfied with nothing more than a one-time show. MESDA really sprang to life from the collection which Frank and his mother had begun to assemble well before the war. After moving from Fifth Street to a large and rambling house on Reynolda Road, the exceptional collection which they lived with resembled something very like what H.F. du Pont had initially gathered about him in his own country residence, Winterthur.

In an ancient newspaper clipping, a young Frank Horton ruminates upon the court cupboard that was later to be a star attraction at MESDA.

After 1952, Frank began gathering southern antiquities with considerable zeal, along with interiors from early structures. He already had in storage Edgecombe room, the two "Queen Anne" rooms from Hertford County, as well as the Edenton rooms and Chowan, all from North Carolina, and Whitehall from South Carolina. Frank shied away from removing woodwork from any sound structure. He corresponded with one antique dealer in 1957 about an interior which had been offered him. "The woodwork is wonderful," he wrote, "but I cannot conceive of removing same from such a house! I hope that someone along the line will use better judgement than to strip this fine house of its integrity." For the same reason, he refused to consider the purchase of Christ's Cross (Criss Cross) house in New Kent County, Virginia, and elected instead to reproduce the 1690 room.

Frank's initial plan of a museum concerned with southern antiquities was to build a house for himself and his mother which contained early interiors as a backdrop for their collection, not unlike what duPont had done. The exigencies of modern living, however, made it apparent that the use of old rooms, with their disparate ceiling heights and fenestration, posed interesting problems for a practi-

cal domicile. An alternate plan was sought. In March 1960, Frank proposed to the Old Salem board that a structure to house the collection could be built at the southern extremity of the historic district, in an area where no early buildings had existed previously. The proposal was quickly accepted, but three months later the nature of these plans changed when the Kroger store diagonally across from the proposed museum site became available. By the spring of 1961, Old Salem had purchased the building, the cost of which was later reimbursed through a contribution by Mrs. H. Frank Forsyth. Frank and his mother agreed to undertake the conversion of the building to house the new museum, something of a "reverse adaptive use" amidst the normal utilization of restored buildings in Old Salem. The core collection was already assured, for in the fall of 1960 Frank and his mother had presented their plan to donate their joint collection to the museum. As accession records of the period reveal, this consisted of 229 pieces. Many other objects were to be placed on indefinite loan. Among this collection were major American pieces such as the Virginia court cupboard which Frank had acquired before the war and the Charleston library bookcase. During this period, the steady acquisition of additional early southern objects and art was taking place.

In his annual report for 1961, Chairman of the Board Charles B. Wade, Jr. reflected that the planned museum "has enabled us to broaden our horizons," placing the Moravian town "in a better and more understandable relationship to the South of which it was and is a part." By spring of the following year, eleven rooms had been installed, and Frank was still in the process of room acquisition. The last of the interiors were in place by December, 1963, and the lengthy process of installing furnishings, floor coverings, and fabrics was begun. Frank was assisted by Old Salem board member Ralph P. Hanes, one of the pioneers in the establishment of Old Salem. Inc. and who was an amateur antiquarian of considerable taste and knowledge. New York interior designer John Winters and the staff of Brunschwig et Fils figured importantly in the final installation as well.

In 1964 the MESDA endowment was established with $400,000 in funds provided by Frank Horton and Theo Liipfert Taliaferro. This endowment has increased to over $2,750,000 since its inception, and income from it is intended solely for the enhancement of MESDA programs. The museum was to operate under the administrative umbrella of Old Salem, Inc., which it still does.

The museum opened its doors on the 4th of January, 1965; the interior contained fifteen rooms and four exhibition galleries. In 1972 an addition to the north side of the museum was added, providing office space, a classroom, auditorium, and additional exhibition areas. What has happened since that time, including such programs as the field and documentary, research, Summer Institute, publications, and the west wing, has been reported extensively to our readers.

The collection itself has increased by hundreds of objects since the early 1970's. Former MESDA research archivist Rosemary Estes compiled an excellent history of MESDA in 1978. She observed quite rightly that "it seems to have been MESDA's destiny to provide a clear example of the value of early American decorative arts as documents for the study of social and cultural history." She noted that a significant number of research and interpretive trends "have come together in this one small museum." That's not bad for an institution which, in Frank's words, had "not one piece of paper" to document its collection when the museum opened. Frank's early ambitions for MESDA, Rosemary wrote, "have been surpassed and have brought him a level of satisfaction which few people ever experience."

In truth, Frank's retirement, as he puts it, is "not really retirement but a change in job description." He is leaving administrative duties behind, but he could no more leave his research than a mother hen could desert her eggs. He has reserved "a little nook in the research room" for such pursuits, and plans to "get out on the road and search out the antiquities MESDA needs to round out its collection." He says that "I might just stop getting up at 5:00 every morning." We doubt that.

Frank's Place? Yes, for any successful institution is inevitably imbued with the energetic personality of its founder. But MESDA is

far more than that, for Frank would never have the museum seen as a monument to himself. In that, he has been eminently successful, for the museum belongs not to Frank Horton, but to the people of and from the South who happen to care about the early culture of their region. And that's exactly what the man intended.

HISTORY *et. al.* VS. THE ARTS.

Summer 1988 (Vol. 9, No. 2)

Decorative arts historians often face a bewildering network of paths when they seek the best route leading to a full understanding of any object. An object by itself may well provide a good deal of its own documentation of style and technology, but there is more. In this day and time, we are remiss if we don't recognize the efforts of the many scholars who assiduously pore over the tangled map of early culture. The "material" part of that culture, indeed, is only one of the keys necessary in understanding the ichnography of man's existence. The fields of historiography, archaeology, anthropology, architectural history, art history, and the numerous and specialized studies comprising decorative arts history all should be brought to bear as needed in order to perceive everything that we need to know about objects. However, assembling this goodly collection of scholarship hasn't always proven easy. The various disciplines at times have been uneasy bedfellows, and a certain baring of professional teeth still may be noted now and again. Each field of endeavor has a great deal to gain from the other, yet that is not always seen very clearly. For example, historians don't often regard objects as documents, nor do decorative arts scholars always scrutinize the matrix of history surrounding what they study. Nevertheless, geography, settlement patterns, the development of social structures, maritime and overland transportation, economy, and historical events all have to do with the "who, what, when, where, and why" of objects. If we ignore such paths of study, then the people who produced and used the objects are shucked out of the picture, and our understanding of the decorative arts falls short.

Dressing table, attributed to Thomas White, Perquimans or Northampton County, N.C., 1756–1770, mahogany with white cedar and yellow pine, HOA 28½, WOA 32½, DOA 21½, courtesy of the Bayou Bend Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Let's have a look at one such application, where certain thorny questions regarding the presence and development of a strong regional trade in one section of the rural South beggared the usual approach of simply cataloguing toothsome objects. In addition to the usual presentation of goodies, a re-evaluation of published histories and perusal of a quantity of "raw historical data was needed. The job at hand was the study of cabinetmaking in the North Carolina coastal plain, particularly that of the prolific Albemarle region in the northeastern sector of the state. This subject, as most of our readers are aware, is the central business of a book which will be released about the time that you receive this *Luminary.* See the calendar at the back for more on that.

J. F. D. Smyth, the intrepid Englishman who traveled extensively

in eastern Carolina during the 1760s, remarked that the towns he had encountered there were "so inconsiderable, that in England they would scarcely acquire the appellation of villages." With the exception of New Bern and Wilmington, this remained true until the end of the eighteenth century. In 1791 President Washington managed a tongue-and-cheek impression of the essentially rural nature of the region when he visited the small town of Tarboro and was "recd. at this place by as good a salute as could be given by one piece of artillery."

Although it has been compared with the wealthy tobacco regions of the Maryland and Virginia Chesapeake, coastal North Carolina in the eighteenth century is better characterized as an emerging society comprised of moderate estates than as a landed aristocracy surrounded by monumental Palladian manors. Tobacco, which was the primary source of wealth in the colonial Chesapeake, was but a trifling staple in eastern North Carolina despite the importance assigned to sotweed in various Carolina histories. The wealthy Albemarle planter Cullen Pollock wrote in 1741 that he did not "know of any one in this part of the country who has made it worth their while in making tobacco." Instead, the principal exportable staples consisted of naval stores such as spars, timber, and tar.

The greatest detriment to coastal North Carolina's economic growth was the inescapable problem of treacherous coastal waters. Shoals, shallow inlets, and barrier islands gathered the bones of many hapless vessels, and the entire maritime region of the colony garnered the dread appellation "Graveyard of the Atlantic." Royal Governor Burrington remarked in 1730 that the "illconvenience of the Sand Banks prevent all merchantile Vessels to pass" and observed that the shallow inlets caused "all Merchandize to be brought in small vessels thither or by land, either from Virginia or other neighboring Colonies." Smyth noted that this was a "vast impediment to the trade" of the Albemarle and "also the great misfortune of all North Carolina."

The exportation of profitable staples, then, was difficult, and the

result was predictable. William Byrd II observed that in Carolina "for want of navigation and commerce, the best estate affords little more than a coarse subsistence." Cullen Pollock wrote a friend that "the badness of our navigation makes our land and slaves of very little profit to us." Land therefore was cheap; Governor Burrington noted that "land is not wanting for men in Carolina, but men for land."

Such economic travail did nothing for the development of a stable society. Before the middle of the eighteenth century, there was little evidence in Carolina of the sort of closely-knit family ties which had nurtured Virginia's enormous wealth. Even the Anglican church failed to draw communities together. William Byrd remarked that Carolinians were "not troubled with any Religious fumes . . . They do not know Sunday from any other day, any more than Robinson Crusoe did."

One might well wonder how an artisan class emerged within this seemingly dismal setting. Any substantial patronage in such a primitive and land-locked region surely must have been sparse. Nevertheless, documentation of hundreds of Coastal Plain cabinetmakers has been found, and a very substantial body of their quietly stylish furniture still exists. Most of it was not made in towns, but in the countryside, and that is the most interesting phenomenon of all. Our study has revealed that by the 1760s a series of converging factors resulted in the encouragement of an eastern Carolina cabinet trade which prior to that time had been rather insignificant.

Most of the small towns that emerged on the sounds and rivers were incorporated after the 1720s. By the late 1760s, the colony's "itinerant Publick assemblies" finally had been fixed in New Bern by the construction of the governor's residence; there had been no official seat of government previously. Therefore, New Bern did not develop a significant cabinet trade until after the Revolution. Wilmington, which was North Carolina's only deep-water port, also failed to encourage much production of furniture until late in the century, although the coastwise venture trade in movables found ready mar-

ket in both of these towns. Neither town was supported by much custom from their hinterlands, as they were largely unpopulated.

All of this stood in contrast to the situation in the Albemarle in the last decade of the colonial period. Although equally hampered by lagging maritime trade and without a substantial urban center of its own, by the 1760s the Albemarle had managed to garner a rural community of small upriver planters that comprised a greater population density than the Pamlico and Cape Fear regions to the south. Both the earlier settlement of the Albemarle and the more inviting nature of its countryside contributed to the development of its hinterland. By the decade before the Revolution, many of the Roanoke planters were second and third-generation people who found themselves increasingly able to turn from the purchase and clearing of land and more to the acquisition of amenities. The majority of these families had emigrated to Carolina from southside Virginia counties. Partly because of this, they developed a strong overland commerce with Norfolk, which in a very real sense became the cultural and financial center of the adjacent Carolina Albemarle. Produce, livestock, and forest products traveled north on routes skirting the Great Dismal Swamp, connecting with the system of rivers south of Norfolk, and that trade assisted in making the Virginia city by far the largest in that colony before the Revolution. This useful market made the Albemarle far less dependent upon inefficient shipping, yet it did little to encourage the growth of urban centers in the region. Although thriving in their own modest way, Albemarle towns such as Halifax and Edenton scarcely contained more than a few hundred souls until the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

Indeed, land was more important than towns in the Albemarle, and in a great sense the planters themselves had created an extended rural community there by the 1760s. This was especially true of the Roanoke basin. In the late 1770s Elkanah Watson, a New Englander, observed that "many elegant seats" had been established "on the margin of the Roanoke." Josiah Quincy of Boston took a slightly more conservative view of the region in 1773 when he noted that

"property [was] much more equally diffused" than in other colonies. That is, the wealth of the region was spread among a larger percentage of the populace than that in Maryland and Virginia. Land parcels were smaller, there were far fewer slaves than elsewhere in the Chesapeake, and, as Henry McCulloh described the region, there were no "fairy scenes of ease, elegance, and pleasure." Nevertheless, probate inventories show that the "middling" planters of the Roanoke basin lived comfortably, albeit modestly, by the 1760s, and their growing presence there made it evident that an urban focus was not necessary to encourage the establishment of trades.

One result of this potential rural patronage was the establishment over thirty cabinet shops in a twenty-mile radius of the Roanoke basin between 1765 and 1805. Most of these artisans comprised what has been defined as the Roanoke River basin school of cabinetmaking. They were largely farmer-artisans, or as one census-taker wryly remarked, "Summer Agricultorists and Winter Mechanicks." Despite their presence in a rural setting, the work of these men was by no means "country," nor was it far separated from prevailing fashion. Instead, it reflected a consistent local demand for fine workmanship and an appreciation for conservative British classicism. Such things were part of the cultural background of the Roanoke planters themselves, but they were drawn equally from the training of the cabinetmakers, some of whom had apprenticed in Norfolk. "Plain and neat" was the household catch-phrase of the Chesapeake, even among the gentry, and the existing work of Albemarle cabinetmakers illustrates that sentiment. The artisans of the area had eschewed urban locations for the countryside, seeing the availability of cheap land as a means to ascending from workbench to counting-house. Fortuitous marriages no doubt contributed to the rise of those most successful in economic and social mobility. One Bertie County man was working as a cabinetmaker in the early 1790s, but at the time of his 1816 death he owned 47 slaves and over 3400 acres of land. His estate inventory still contained cabinetmaker's tools, but it is probable that they had long since gathered dust. This was

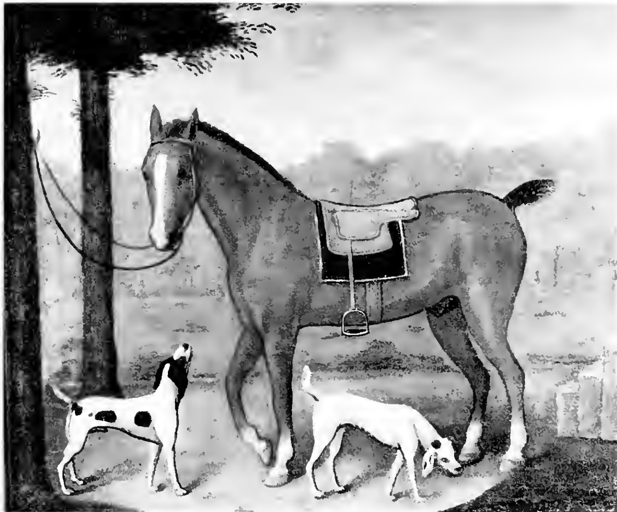
quite a contrast to the "coarse subsistence" that had been typical of the region more than a half-century earlier.

The development of a rather sophisticated cabinet trade in a region better characterized by the paucity of towns than their presence, then, can be placed into the perspectives of time, place, and stylistic origins through the study of history and demography. By such means we are able to see beyond the objects to the people that comprised the trade, and the nature of the society which gave it business. And by examining the world that surrounded such objects during the time that they were made and used, we inevitably must open all of the doors leading to any scholarly discipline that can assist in fleshing out a 'real-time" understanding of the past. That indeed is beginning to happen, but not always fast enough. It's past time for scholars representing each aspect of the study of early culture to come together in conference and see what they can do to help each other and the public in general. Something of a verbal fireworks show might well result, but the display would be inspiring.

HUNTING FOR THE HUNTBOARD

Summer 1989 (Vol. 10, No. 2)

Hunting on horseback is a sport just about as ancient as one could possibly imagine. All sorts of creatures, including every member of the deer family, boar, bears, and other furry prey were noisily chased by hound and horse from the Middle Ages into the nineteenth century. The sport of the chase began to narrow considerably by the early 1800's, particularly in Britain. Where stags represented the prime prey in the eighteenth century, the wily fox now offered the greatest sport, as countless British engravings and lithographs attest. Part of this shift simply was due to a dwindling supply of edible game in Europe, and stalking largely took the place of horseback pursuit. So the chase became pure broad sport abroad, since foxes were numerous and considered something less appropriate for the table than a common household tabby cat. Running deer with



Anonymous artist, *Mr. William Eaton's horse Whittendon and deer dogs Rock and Music,* Warren County, N.C., 1800–20, oil on canvas, 14¼" × 17⅞". MESDA accession 3462, the gift of Virginia Eaton Curran in memory of LaFayette Browne Eaton.

hounds, however, is a diversion that has survived in the coastal South, but the horses have been replaced rather inelegantly with pickup trucks, and hunting horns have given way to squawking CB radios.

Fox hunting remains an exceedingly traditional and popular sport. This is especially true in the South, where individuals in some locales are often better known for their membership in a particular hunt than for any other accomplishment. Long-established hunts indeed are impressive bastions of tradition, which is more evident in the panoply of the sport itself, the special sort of noisy camaraderie, and dark clubhouse walls hung with yellowing photographs of long-deceased huntsmen and hounds memorable for their skills afield.

The chase has been an essential recreation for southerners for quite a while. One of the earliest hunts know was the "St. Andrew's & St. Philip's Club" of Charleston, whose first meeting was held in

the "hunt house, where they spent the afternoon very Merry, after killing two foxes," as a report in the *South-Carolina Gazette* noted. As that merriment implies, an important element of the sport has been liberal consumption of both spirits and victuals. French traveler Ferdinand Bayard reported from Virginia in 1791 that "Hunts usually wound up in a tavern, where Americans like to get gay on Alcohol." An 1808 notice in the *Virginia Herald* announced that a "much famed Red FOX" would be "turned loose" at Bennet's Hotel in King George County. All sportsmen were "requested to attend with their dogs" and would be rewarded with a dinner "prepared with partridge and a plenty of it." During the following year Abraham Kauffman of Baltimore County, Maryland proposed a "DEER CHASE" on his property, and his friends were solicited to "come and partake of the sport . . . especially those who have good DOGS." Kauffman promised that if the animal was "caught on that day, to have him *Barbaqued* on the day following."

The venerable institution of the southern hunt, then called for felicitous comestibles as part if the entertainment, a veritable groaning board for those attending. What sort of board, we might wonder, did the groaning? Were hunt breakfasts or dinners served in the manor or the field? Many would have it that true hunt hospitality called for serving the hunters while astride their steeds. From that custom, which indeed does persist, the notion has arisen that a special piece of furniture was developed that made it convenient to serve oneself from saddle height. This, we have been told often and reverently, was the *huntboard,* an object now considered as sacredly southern as hominy grits and sour mash whiskey. Huntboards have, like the pineapple, become symbolic of the deeply-entrenched code of hospitality. According to oft-repeated tradition, many's the huntsman that leaned from his saddle to lift a brimming glass off a tall huntboard to fortify mind and body against the chill of early morning mists and to toast the master of the hunt, the dogs, and even the prey, whatever it was to be. The *espiritus fermentum* arrayed on the huntboard no doubt contributed to the jollity of the hunt as well as

serving as an anesthetic for the hapless horseman pitched off his mount in the midst of a sailing jump. And, so 'tis said, the huntboard was of equal if not greater importance to the returning hunters who needed liberal libation to relax from a day of dodging limbs and abrading derrieres.

Horsefeathers.

There is no doubt about hunters bending an elbow at the end of a hunt of even at the beginning. That was part of the sport then, and now as well. But what sort of furniture, if any, was used early in the last century for both dram and dinner is really something of a conundrum. In terms of actual semantics, the word *huntboard* is a modern invention, no less than "highboy" or "lowboy". And in terms of utility, common sense suggests that a curious nudge from a huge equine snout or even a tipsy bump from a well-lubricated paunch would pitch a tall and spindly table-like affair over into the cow pies. That is, if the thing hadn't toppled previously under the weight of potable and culinary spread, its thin, tapering legs sinking into the soft red mud of a pasture or farmyard.

Despite the many thousands of southern inventories, wills, newspapers, and other documents read by MESDA researchers over the past fifteen years, no documentation of the use of the word "huntboard" has ever surfaced. Nor has anyone found any description of any sort of serving piece carried outside, even though there is quite a bit of mention of the suitability of seating furniture, particularly Windsors, for outdoor use. Past MESDA Summer Instituters Mary Beth Wood and Linda Chesnut avidly but fruitlessly sniffed out elusive huntboards in their institute projects. Bill Griffin, in an excellent essay on Georgia "plain-style" furniture for the 1983 exhibition catalog *Neat Pieces,* described a similar empty-handed search for any mention of "hunt-board." "No entries of huntboards were found on nineteenth-century inventories," he noted. Instead, "numerous entries" for *slabs* appeared on "inventories throughout all parts of Georgia." That "slab" denoted a serving piece was indicated by a number of instances in which entries such as "slab or sideboard"

were found. "Slab" is not a term that MESDA researchers have found in other parts of either the rural or urban South, but if it was so prevalent in Georgia, then the term certainly must have been familiar to emigrants from outside the state. It may be that the term was derived from an earlier description of the sideboard table, which not infrequently was fitted with an elegant marble slab.

Sideboard tables with marble tops, however, were the trappings of gentry. So were the sumptuously veneered and inlaid Neoclassical pieces known as sideboards even before the Revolution. And therein, perhaps, lies a key to some sort of *terminus ante quem* we might place upon the word "huntboard" and all that it connotes. Hunting with horse and hound, like slab-topped tables and shinily varnished veneer, was largely part of the leisurely world of gentry, both urban sportsmen and rural landowners of substance. Few small planters had the time for such large-scale and expensive romps. When they did seek recreation, more often than not it was in shooting matches, which indeed were perhaps the number-one public sport in the early nineteenth century.

If we must bring out a discussion of social class, then, why not air the whole thing? Huntboards, almost by definition, are quite vernacular pieces. They are found throughout the rural South, particularly the piedmont, and most particularly from piedmont North Carolina south to central Georgia. Their humble nature appeals to us today, but how would they have suited a typical country squire of 1820 who preferred sophistication and therefore looked to urban centers for household goods? Of course, a piece of furniture that might have seemed "rustick" sitting a gilt pier glass in the dining room instead might have been consigned to the back hall or even a porch, especially if the idea was to use it in the yard.

Too many so-called huntboards, however, speak against such a notion. Many of them indeed are severely plain, often made of pine and painted, but a sizable number of them are made of walnut or cherry and all tricked out with inlay and other such niceties. Such details can be naïve, but they show a decided attempt on the part of

Sideboard, 1810–25, attributed to north-eastern Georgia. Walnut with yellow pine secondary throughout, HOA 46″, WOA 49″, DOA 22¼″. MRF S-6452.

both artisan and patron to be *high style*. Now, that sort of attitude just doesn't jibe with the idea of a useful piece that could be used in the yard. If someone wealthy enough to arrange hunts wanted a "yardboard," then likely he would have ordered it sturdy, plain, and of a finish and materials that wouldn't be sullied by mud, water, and who knows what else. The thing would have to be stable enough to stand on uneven ground, and light enough to be portable.

The classic popular concept of a huntboard might be described as a serving piece that is, say, between 42–48 inches in height, no more than 20 inches deep, 45–55 inches in width and containing but one tier of drawers. Nevertheless, various publications have set forth a much broader definition of a huntboard, and include pieces no more than forty inches high—the average height of an urban side-

board—and with case depths exceeding 25 inches. MESDA has added a piece to the collection that would fit that category of "huntboard" (see New in the Collection).

The northeastern Georgia "huntboard" illustrated here largely fits within the norm, albeit with a bit of added frippery in the cyma shaping of its skirt, and it does exceed usual depth by a couple of inches. Its very substantial height, a full six inches more than a usual sideboard, seems to fix it firmly within the familiar huntboard category. But what of the rest of it? The coved crown molding, cockbeaded with inlaid stringing, and the use of walnut don't seem quite suitable for occasional yard use. The skirt shaping certainly wouldn't add to portability. This elegant little piece, in fact, has nothing to do with mud, horses, hounds, and the sport of gentry. Instead, it has everything to do with the simple dining room of a small rural planter who wished to be as stylish as possible. Has the piece been of painted pine, and lacked the fancy skirting, the *Luminary* doubts that the cultural statement and nature of utility would have been different. The dining room just would have been plainer.

Wherefore huntboard, then? Mightn't these pieces have been *drinking boards* just as easily, since they're often tall enough to lean on? What such objects were called by their original owners, and how they were used, indeed is very important to any museum. But we must sift through the usual twentieth-century chaff of popular terminology to find the real kernel of truth. In the meantime, if we must have a *huntboard,* then perhaps we can be sure of what we own if we simply take a foot-wide quarter-sawn yellow pine board and paint the word "HUNT" slam in the middle of it with white enamel. Rested over a pair of sawbucks in the yard, it might be more sturdy and useful for serving likker n' ham biscuits than a dainty sideboard of small size and light weight.

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