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AMERICAN DECORATIVE ARTS COLLECTING IN  
NEW ENGLAND, 1840-1920.

University of Delaware (Winterthur Program),  
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AMERICAN DECORATIVE ARTS COLLECTING  
IN NEW ENGLAND, 1840-1920

BY

Richard Henry Saunders

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of  
Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Early American culture.

May, 1973

AMERICAN DECORATIVE ARTS COLLECTING

IN NEW ENGLAND, 1840-1920

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Frontispiece  
A "Vendue" from Shackleton's, The Quest of the Colonial

## PREFACE

No one has ever written a history of decorative arts collecting in America and as each year passes the living links with the "early" collectors become fewer. All the major nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century collectors are deceased, as well as many of their children. Their papers are often destroyed in well-intentioned spring cleanings. The author thought that before too many more collectors' notes disappeared an attempt should be made to determine who were the earliest collectors of American decorative arts objects and what prompted them to collect.

This study was limited to an eighty-year time period and the regional area of New England, more out of expediency and time limitations, than by inclination. The intention of the author was to gain perspective on the embryonic stages of the collecting movement and to do so in the New England area where collectors first surfaced. It would be both foolish and brash to say that even in the limited geographical region of the study that all the major decorative arts collectors have been considered. Many have personalities so intriguing that they merit individual monographs.

Collectors are a strange caste. They are hard to describe because as individuals they are unique and only the results of their

connoisseurship, and not the qualities of connoisseurship itself, can be fully examined. Unfortunately, no collector, at least to the knowledge of this author, defined his criteria for making a purchase in the fashion of Charles Montgomery's fourteen points of connoisseurship.

Most everyone interested in decorative arts is fascinated by collectors, hence this study owes much of its success, if the author is not too presumptuous, to a great number of museum personnel and private collectors. There were, of course, individuals who were particularly helpful and deserve special mention. Abbott Lowell Cummings, Thomas Harlow, Wendell Garrett, Mrs. Polly Norton, Joseph Ott, and Peter Spang all made valuable contributions to this project. Francis and Edwin Benjamin provided the author with the one personal tie with Mary Harrod Northend. Charles Montgomery allowed the author to examine his notebook on collecting, in part compiled by his Winterthur students. But the greatest influence on the creation of this thesis was my adviser, Benno M. Forman, who listened patiently to questions and repeatedly made constructive suggestions.

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Collecting antiques, as we understand it today, is a relatively new thing. It began at the time of the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of American independence in 1876.<sup>1</sup>

--Edwin Valentine  
Mitchell, 1950

## CHAPTER I

### COLLECTING BEFORE THE CENTENNIAL

Until recently the idea that the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition gave the initial impetus to collecting American decorative arts objects has been generally accepted. While collecting indeed became popular after 1876, it had manifest itself in a number of ways prior to the nation's one hundredth birthday. Private collections were formed prior to the Centennial, although many early collectors were viewed with amazement and their mental stability was questioned. The more notable form of nineteenth-century collecting was the establishment of societies concerned with American historical events and the preservation of relics.<sup>2</sup>

In one sense, the historical societies of New England were the earliest "collectors" of American relics. But the term "collector" implies that a person has made a choice and suggests that an individual or organization that saves all shreds of historical material is accumulating, not collecting. The Massachusetts Historical Society, founded in 1790, was the first society to receive a furniture bequest. Three years after its organization they recorded the gift to the cabinet of "a chair of antique fashion from Mr. Hathorne of Salem."<sup>3</sup>

Other historical societies were formed in New England in the first years of the nineteenth century: the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester (1812), the Pilgrim Society in Plymouth (1820), and the Essex Historical Society, now the Essex Institute, in Salem (1821). The Essex Historical Society received a wainscoat chair given by a "descendant of the original owner, Sarah Dennis of Ipswich ..." the year it was founded.<sup>4</sup> The Pilgrim Society was given by 1828 a turned chair formerly owned by Governor Carver, although the exact date of the bequest is unknown.<sup>5</sup>

The earliest recorded bequest of an American decorative arts object to the Antiquarian Society occurred in 1819 when the Society was given a turned child's high chair made for Richard Mather. It was followed in 1833 by the gift of a "beautiful chair made of oak." John Chandler of Petersham, Massachusetts, made one of the most important furniture gifts to the cabinet of the Society in 1838 when he donated an English tall clock and a desk, both previously the property of Thomas Hancock.<sup>6</sup>

Yale University also received furniture in the early nineteenth century. A desk, said to have belonged to Jonathan Edwards, was given to the University in 1800. In the same year, the University received a chest of the Wethersfield type, and in 1841 "Rev. John Evans Bray of Clinton, Connecticut, gave to the University a wainscoat chair (1841.1) which the school accepted as the chair of the First President of the College."<sup>7</sup>

Gifts of objects to historical societies and universities during the first half of the nineteenth century were made primarily on the basis of historical associations. Nevertheless, historical societies, even in the embryonic stage, were maintaining objects of earlier periods in American history as curious relics worthy of inspection and preservation.

In 1842, the librarian of the American Antiquarian Society reported that "fashion has taken up antiquity." He stated that "old pictures, old furniture, old plate, and even old books, which have heretofore suffered neglect, and enjoyed but a musty reputation, as uncongenial to the go-ahead habits of our people, are now sought with eagerness as necessary adjuncts of style and the most cherished ornaments of the drawing room." The librarian noted in the Society's Proceedings a scant two years later that he was having to compete with collectors for objects that might be added to the cabinet.<sup>8</sup>

Collectors were increasingly aware of the intrinsic beauty of their relics as machine-made products began to displace hand-produced items. The interest in American antiquities manifest itself in other forms during the earlier part of the century. In 1830, public outcry over the proposed dismemberment of "Old Ironsides"--much of it inspired by a poem of that title by Oliver Wendell Holmes--prevented that symbol of national sovereignty from being destroyed.<sup>9</sup> Seventeen years later, a number of the residents of Deerfield, Massachusetts, pleaded desperately to preserve the "Indian House," the sole surviving dwelling from the Indian massacre of 1704. In a broadside entitled "TO ALL WHO FEEL AN

INTEREST IN THE ANTIQUITIES OF NEW-ENGLAND," five citizens requested assistance in "the purpose of considering and applying the best means of obtaining the necessary aid in preserving and securing for future generations, that memorial of the dangers and sufferings of our fathers. . . ."10 Unlike Dr. Holmes, their attempt was successful.

The efforts of Ann Cunningham and her supporters in the 1850's that prevented Mount Vernon from becoming a military asylum or the site of a hotel were more encouraging. Amidst a general clamor, the Hancock house in Boston was destroyed in 1863, but only a few years later the Old South Association was formed to save the Old South Church from demolition.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, Americans have become increasingly fascinated with their past and, in recent years, a serious effort to preserve both our architectural heritage and their furnishings has replaced mere curiosity.

Even in the eighteenth century, enough interest in the furniture of earlier generations existed to call attention to it at the time of a public auction. One advertisement for an auction in the Boston Evening Post for April 8, 1771, reads, "at the house of the late Miss Bessy Walker all of her house furniture some of which is really antique."<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, no further descriptions of the furniture are given and Miss Walker's inventory does not appear in the Suffolk County Probate Records.

Although neither the purchasers of the furniture in this 1771 auction sale nor the competitors of whom the Antiquarian Society's



librarian spoke are known, one collector, Cummings Davis, of Concord, Massachusetts, was actively amassing a collection of colonial relics as early as 1850 (Figure 1). Davis was a nineteenth-century "town character" who preserved all reliquiae that pertained to the history of Concord.<sup>13</sup> Davis occasionally made purchases but he was an impoverished individual and acquired much of his collection from the attics of other Concord residents. He was compiling his collection as early as 1850, as indicated by an 1886 inventory of the Concord Antiquarian Society's headquarters:

Two Chippendale chairs, straight legs, 'ladder backs,' bought by Mr. D. from the late James P. Brown about 1850, said to have come from the Hubbard family.<sup>14</sup>

In 1854, Davis took an inventory of his possessions. It was entitled the "Sacred Collection, Antiquarian Collection of Cummings E. Davis, Concord, Mass." and his deverse assemblage included such possessions as a "claw foot table of Dr. John Cuming," and a "female skunk caught in a snare in Sudbury."<sup>15</sup>

In 1886, a group of Concord residents realized that their town eccentric had accumulated a significant portion of the town's available relics. They proceeded to form the Antiquarian Society and offered Davis provision for the remainder of his life in exchange for an agreement to donate his collection to the Society. Davis' last years were distressing, as he appears not to have fully realized the conditions of his agreement with the Society. Although Davis was the resident curator of the collection, the Society suspected him of selling articles from it.

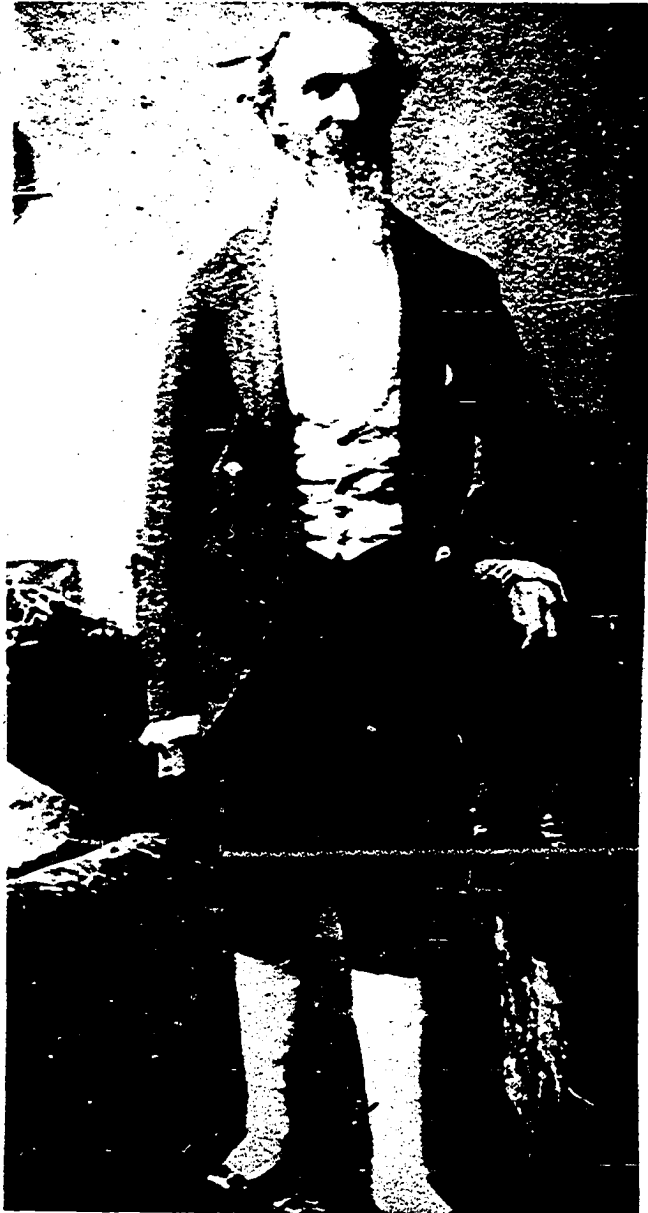


Figure 1  
Cummings Davis

A period of distrust and re-evaluation followed, during which Davis was removed from his position. Soon thereafter Davis was committed to a sanitarium where he died in 1896.<sup>16</sup>

While numerous individuals had collected European paintings, furniture, and ceramics in the mid-nineteenth century, collecting of American relics on a personal level was the pastime of an esoteric cult. Most of the nineteenth-century collectors, unlike Davis, were professional people: doctors, lawyers, teachers, and businessmen, who pursued collecting as a hobby and an art, with no desire for social acceptance, monetary reward, or immortality. The early collectors are reflections of historians who seek to stimulate their consciousness of the American past by surrounding themselves with its documents.

One of this breed of New England collectors was Thomas Mawney Potter (1814-1890), who graduated from Brown University in 1834 (Figure 2). Potter spent a number of years in the United States Navy as an assistant surgeon, and he sent home various trinkets acquired at various ports of call. His serious collection of American decorative arts objects cannot be fully documented, although his brother, Judge Elisha Reynolds Potter, recorded notebook entries for the 1860's and early 1870's that indicate his full scale collecting had begun. One of the notes reads: "High book case writing desk in study of Dr. P bought in Newport."<sup>17</sup> William Davis Miller speculated in his article on Potter in the Walpole Society Notebook for 1935 that "this last entry is of later date, probably about 1870, and refers to one of the Goddard secretaries which at one time graced the 'Homestead'...."<sup>18</sup>

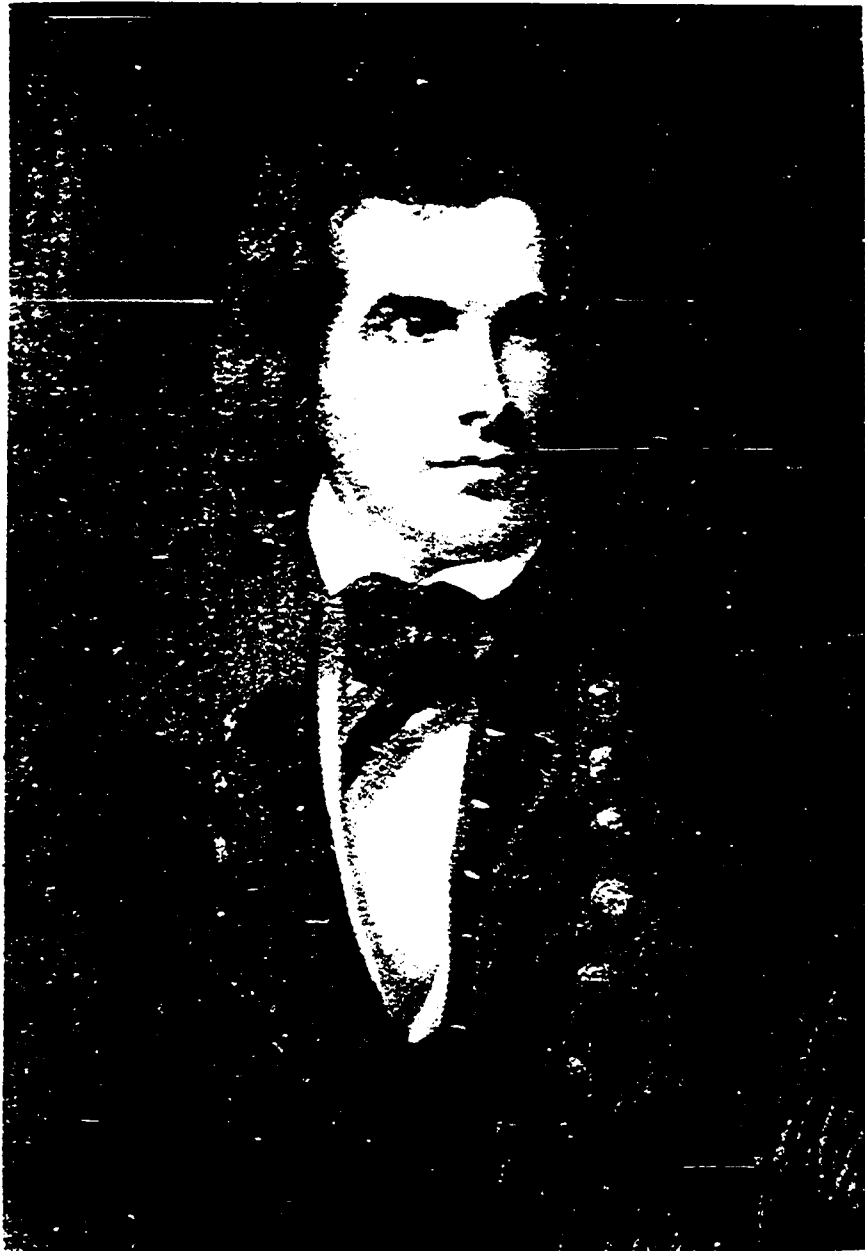


Figure 2  
Thomas Potter

Miller speculates further about the date when Potter began collecting.

Because of these entries and because of the different pieces of furniture known by me to have been in the "Red House," it would appear that just prior to the Civil War Dr. Potter had seriously commenced to form his collection. He would seem to have cared more for mahogany and walnut than other woods and to have divided his choice fairly evenly between American and English furniture.<sup>19</sup>

Potter continued to add to his collection after he retired from the Navy in 1876. He inherited a kneehole desk in the Newport style from his father and bought a large dining table and card table in that town.<sup>20</sup> When Potter died in 1890 his collection was left to his nephew who proceeded to sell some of the best pieces of furniture and ceramics. The most significant item sold at this time was a Newport desk and bookcase, signed by John Goddard, and now in the collection of Albert Lisle.<sup>21</sup> The remainder of the collection was sold at auction for about \$25,000 in 1927, after the death of Potter's nephew.<sup>22</sup>

A few other individuals, besides Potter and Davis, exhibited an interest in collecting American decorative arts objects in the years prior to the Centennial. The majority of these serious collectors lived either near Boston or Hartford, and the earliest of the known Boston area collectors is Henry Fitz Gilbert Waters of Salem (1833-1913) (Figure 3). Waters, who graduated from Harvard in 1855, was a professional genealogist. He lived in the family home at 80 Washington Square, except when he was abroad on genealogical excursions, and maintained his collection of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century furniture, ceramics, and glass there. His first purchase was recorded in 1872 when he bought six chairs for forty dollars from Emerson Shaw of North Beverly.<sup>23</sup> Two years later,



Figure 3  
Henry F. Waters

apparently he was buying from the Household Art Company, a Boston firm that dealt in antique furniture. Waters received a letter from them informing him that "The gentleman who bought the large arm chair will let you have it now at the price he paid for it viz \$85."<sup>24</sup> Other records of Waters' pre-Centennial collecting indicate that he was buying furniture from at least two other sources: John Allen, a Boston antiques dealer; and James T. Moulton, a genealogist from Lynn who also dealt in antiques; and selling to a third: the Household Art Company. In May, 1875, Waters received a letter from that firm indicating they were willing to accept on commission a clock that Waters wished to sell. They added "please give us a price at which to sell it & put it low as possible for clocks is slow."<sup>25</sup> A receipt dated November 10, 187?, records that Waters was paid \$89.00 for an "old clock," after the firm deducted a ten dollar commission and one dollar for "putting on balls."<sup>26</sup> During the same month John Allen wrote Waters that he would accept Waters' "offer for the clock case" and "will freight it tomorrow afternoon (Saty) so that it will be in Salem Monday morning."<sup>27</sup>

Numerous pieces of furniture in Waters' collection were acquired from James T. Moulton. His earliest recorded contact with Waters, with regard to collecting is August 30, 1875, when he wrote:

When I saw you in Salem on Saturday last I promised to write what I would sell the old glass pitcher & chair for. Since I saw you I have had the small 8 legged oak top table brought home, also one extremely large chair besides some smaller articles, and if you can make it convenient to visit us on Wednesday or Thursday, I think that we can make a trade.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, no receipts document whether Waters obtained any of the furnishings mentioned by Moulton.

A number of other eastern Massachusetts collectors attracted attention in 1875 at the time two exhibitions of colonial relics, commemorating America's centennial year were held in Boston and Salem. The first exhibition, in Boston, was described in the newspaper, The Cabinetmaker, June 26, 1875, as follows:

The Bunker Hill Centennial was opened by an exhibition of relics at No. 56 Beacon Street, Boston, on Monday, June 14th with appropriate ceremonies.... The numerous articles of historic interest which were collected in the place were sent in from various points and formed a pleasing picture of antique customs and tastes.<sup>29</sup>

While many of the objects on exhibition were described, only one collector received special attention for his contributions to the display. "In the upper story Major: Ben Perley Poore had a room, containing selections from his Indian Hill collection of Newburyport."<sup>30</sup> Poore (1820-1887) spent much of his life in Washington as a correspondent for the Boston Journal (Figure 4). After 1852, he maintained the family home, Indian Hill, in Newburyport, Massachusetts. There Poore stored his vast collections of ceramics, pewter, and furniture, as well as a number of collections unrelated to American decorative arts. Architectural fragments from the Province and Hancock houses in Boston, and a staircase from the Tracy house in Newburyport decorated the interior. The furniture included a "sleigh" bed that had belonged to Napoleon Bonaparte, a set of chairs that had belonged to Washington, and a desk that had been owned by John Quincy Adams.<sup>31</sup>



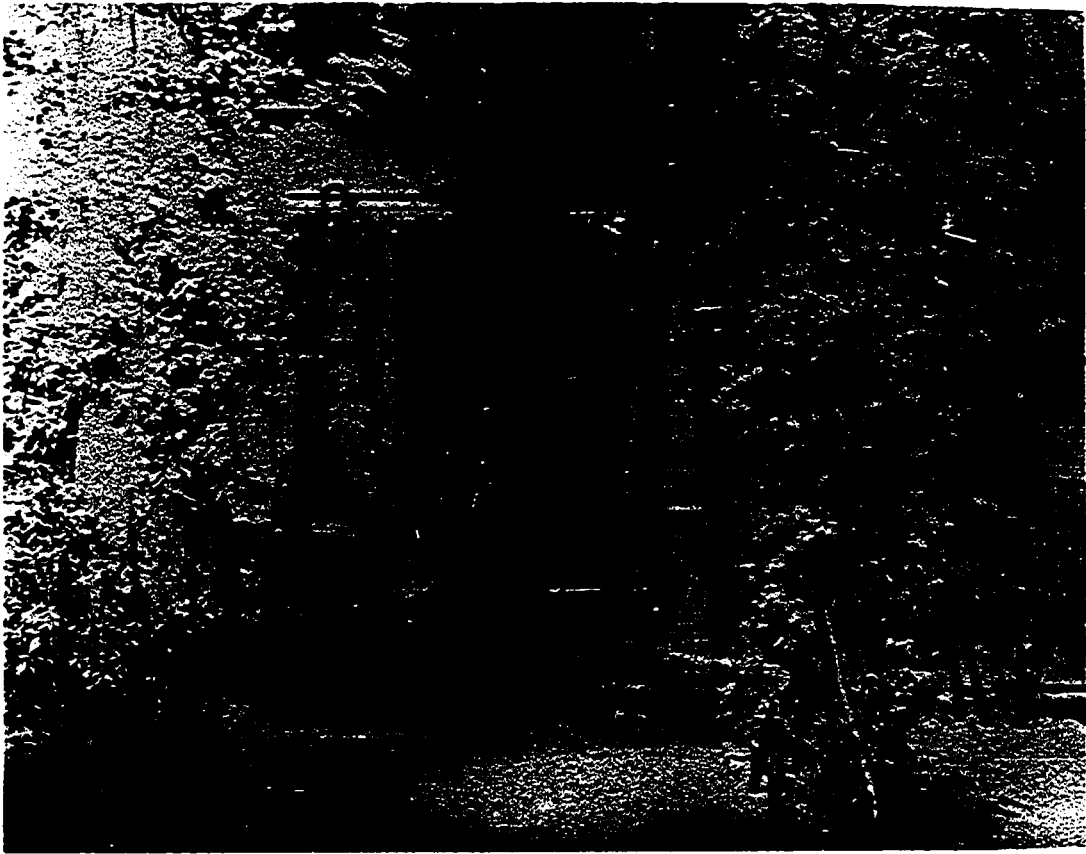


Figure 4  
Ben: Perley Poore

Poore frequently guided his friends through Indian Hill. In a letter to A. C. Goodell, he apologized for not being able to personally escort him through the collections, then added:

I shall write to my wife to welcome you and your friends and to have you shown everything not locked up. My collection of autographs will not be presentable but you can see my 'Continental Rooms,' which I hope some day to make a perfect tenement, with all the personal property of '76.<sup>32</sup>

Poore contracted Bright's disease in 1884 and died three years later, but his collection remained intact until a fire in the late 1960's destroyed the house and its contents.<sup>33</sup> Mary Harrod Northend, a journalist from Salem, had an opportunity in the early 1900's of photographing Poore's collection. Pictures of his kitchen (Figure 5) and hall (Figure 6) give some indication of the great diversity of his collection. No records have been discovered that might tell where Poore acquired the objects in his collection, but much of it appears to be of Essex County origin.

The colonial relics exhibition on Beacon Hill was the first recognizable public event that brought together collectors of Americana. The exhibition also attracted attention to the preservation of colonial relics and stimulated interest in collecting. In 1924 when Francis Bigelow, a Boston collector, decided to dispose of his collection at auction it was said of him:

Mr. Francis Hill Bigelow began to show an interest in antiques as early as 1875, when the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the Battles of Lexington and Bunker Hill brought forth for exhibition Colonial objects of those earlier days.<sup>34</sup>



Figure 5  
Kitchen at Indian Hill Farm, West Newbury, Massachusetts



Figure 6  
Entrance Hall at Indian Hill Farm, West Newbury, Massachusetts

Many of the exhibitors were descendents of the original owners of the donated objects. A number of the exhibitors, however, were collectors and one was a Boston dealer.

Theodore Lyman, a member of the program committee, was one of the collectors who participated in the exhibition.<sup>35</sup> Lyman was a zoologist and a resident of Brookline.<sup>36</sup> Seven years after the exhibition he wrote his Harvard classmate, Henry Waters:

you seemed to imply today by one remark you made that you sometimes parted with a piece of your old furniture. If this be the case what would be your price for the 'court cupboard' that I saw in the first bedroom (where was the pretty chest of drawers used as a washstand)? It was the cupboard you said has been painted in front.<sup>37</sup>

A succeeding letter from Lyman indicates that Waters had the cupboard sent to Lyman but had not yet set a price.<sup>38</sup>

James Lovell Little was a second Brookline collector who exhibited at the Beacon Hill celebration. His loans to the exhibition included a portrait of David Mason and "a punch bowl of Jacob Petit."<sup>39</sup> Little was a collector of Liverpool and Staffordshire, as well as furniture. A bill of sale for \$26.50 exists for an Essex County oak wainscoat chair that he bought from James Moulton in 1875.<sup>40</sup> In 1898, the interior of Little's home, the Isaac Cook house in Brookline, was included in a portfolio of architectural views (Figure 7). In the background of the photograph appears the wainscoat armchair, now in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Bertram K. Little.<sup>41</sup>



Figure 7  
Interior of James Little's House, Brookline, Massachusetts

John Allen, the Boston dealer, also exhibited several pieces of furniture at the Beacon Hill celebration, including an "old table rescued from Fire in Charlestown, 1775."<sup>42</sup> There is no indication whether the objects he exhibited were from his shop or his personal collection.

In December, 1975, residents of Salem presented an exhibition at Plummer Hall of the Essex Institute that was surprisingly similar in both content and catalogue to the Beacon Hill celebration. Of the group that put together the Salem exhibition a few individuals were collectors. The most prominent was Henry Waters, who contributed a "Wainscoat chest, of oak," a "Dressing-case, of oak," a "High Case of Drawers, six legged," and an "Eight legged table, with twisted posts."<sup>43</sup>

One of Waters' fellow collectors was George Rea Curwen, who loaned a group of "Leather-backed and cane-seated chairs" and a "Hall clock with chime (1737)," as well as a number of portraits.<sup>44</sup> Curwen, a life-long resident of Salem and close friend of Waters, left most of his personal possessions to the Essex Institute at the time of his death in 1900.<sup>45</sup> Both the hall clock with chime and a group of leather-backed chairs were among his bequest.

Mrs. George B. Loring was another prominent contributor to the Plummer Hall exhibition. She loaned a "Dressing case" which was noted as being similar in style to Henry Waters' high case of drawers, as well as over thirty pieces of silver. Among the silver objects she exhibited were "Two Servers with feet," a "Tankard 1785, Mary Pickman," and a "Sugar Basket."<sup>46</sup> Mrs. Loring's husband was active in Massachusetts

politics and in 1881 was appointed by President Garfield to the position of commissioner of agriculture.<sup>47</sup> George Curwen noted in a letter to Henry Waters dated 1884 that Dr. Loring was moving his "old furniture, silver, etc. to Washington." Curwen reminded Waters that the Loring's had a "case of fillagris which you will recollect he exhibited at our centennial exhibition at Plummer Hall ..."<sup>48</sup> Little else is known about Loring's collecting habits or the present location of his collection.

In the early 1870's, concurrent with the rising number of collectors in eastern Massachusetts, an interest in collecting was beginning to manifest itself in the Hartford, Connecticut, area. Both Hartford and New Haven held Centennial celebrations in 1875 that included exhibitions of colonial relics. Like those in Boston and Salem, the Connecticut celebrations undoubtedly stimulated further interest in colonial relics. New Haven took the initiative and held its exhibition in June and July. This event was similar to those held in Massachusetts and the contributions were primarily portraits, silver, ceramics, and furniture with historical associations. The eight hundred and eleven exhibits included furniture such as a "large mahogany arm chair, that belonged to Madame Hillhouse more than 100 yrs ago."<sup>49</sup> Unlike the Massachusetts exhibitions, none of the New Haven participants are known to have been collectors.

Hartford opened its Centennial celebration four months after New Haven. An exhibition of relics was held with the expressed purpose of trying to raise one thousand dollars toward the Woman's Pavilion planned for the national celebration in Philadelphia. One description



of the exhibition reads:

The exhibition opened on the 8th of November 1875, in the Phoenix bank building on Main Street.... The 'relic room' was beautifully decorated with the national colors, and contained a large and varied assortment of treasures of the past. Glass cases down the sides of the room and the center, were filled with the more valuable and fragile articles, and grouped here and there were lay-figures in ancient costumes, antique furniture, portraits, and pictures.

Among the individual objects exhibited were "decanters and wineglasses that were brought to America in the Mayflower ..." and "tankards and porringers of solid silver."<sup>50</sup>

Private collectors were active in Connecticut even before the historical fervor aroused by the coming Centennial celebration. One of the earliest was Henry W. Erving (1851-1941), a Hartford banker (Figure 8). Erving began collecting in his teens, just after he began working as a clerk at the Charter Oak National Bank. Soon after his marriage, Erving began more extensive collecting peregrinations. The Ervings made their first tour in search of antiques in 1879, driving through Connecticut, Massachusetts, and southern New Hampshire in a horse and buggy. Erving once remarked on his collecting habits:

In the course of my life I have disposed of perhaps a dozen pieces, always because I was extremely anxious to obtain something that seemed more necessary at the time, and always the article sold was a piece that might be considered a duplicate. However, I may say this: that while I never regretted a purchase, even at the sacrifice of other things, I have always been sorry that I ever sold anything.

Inasmuch as he lived in the Hartford area, Erving eventually met Edwin Simons, a Hartford cabinetmaker and Walter Hosmer, a Wethersfield



Figure 8  
Henry Erving

upholsterer, who were active when the collector was a young man. Hosmer and Simons both had known the celebrated Hartford cabinetmaker Eliphalet Chapin, and Erving likened that to knowing men who had known Washington.<sup>51</sup>

To Erving goes the distinction of having named a genre of chests: the "Hadley" chest. He found his first chest of this type in Hadley, Massachusetts, in 1883. Erving's collection, which is still intact and in the possession of descendants, included a seventeenth-century oak cupboard, a "sample chair" attributed to Benjamin Randolph, and a mahogany, block-front desk and bookcase. Although an octogenarian in 1935, it was said of Erving that he knew the Connecticut dealers of the twentieth century just as closely as he had known the dealers of his youth.<sup>52</sup>

What was it that prompted collectors to acquire seventeenth- and eighteenth-century furniture and other colonial furnishings? One early twentieth-century collector, Henry W. Kent, expressed the opinion that "it was the revulsion to the tasteless machine-made things and the desire for the reinstatement of the dispossessed objects of house-furnishings of the eighteenth century which, eventually in the 70's, led to the collecting of what were called 'antiques,' or colonial things--furniture, silver, pewter, and pottery."<sup>53</sup>

The nineteenth-century collector was not faced with the modern problems of a paucity of desirable objects, great competition, or staggering prices. His primary problem was to locate individuals who dealt in American decorative arts objects. Before the Centennial there

were no dealers in "antiques" listed in the directories of the major New England cities except Boston.<sup>54</sup> When a collector wished to purchase colonial furniture, he was most likely to find it at dealers who advertised that they carried "second hand" furniture. A primary purlieu for collectors, once they moved beyond their immediate environs, was Sypher's, a decorative arts emporium located on Broadway in New York. Trow's New York City Directory indicates that Sypher's was founded in 1869 as a successor to a furniture store at the same location.<sup>55</sup> By 1876 Sypher's had changed their business directory entry to read, "Sypher & Co. antique furniture, bric-a-brac & bronzes, 593 & 1494 B'way."<sup>56</sup> Sypher's must have had antique furniture in stock even before they advertised it. William Miller noted in his article on Thomas Potter that during the early 1870's Potter was visiting Sypher's, where he obtained much of his furniture.<sup>57</sup>

The current choices for home decoration shops in New York appeared under the column "Culture and Progress," in Scribner's Monthly for August, 1874. After describing the dealers in contemporary furniture, the author stated:

There is, of course, Sypher's, and, for certain people, Sypher's is the very place. For the majority, however, it is too unconventional, requires too much independence, and implies too sentimental a love of the past and its fashions. We are speaking now of the antiquarian part of Sypher's establishment, the part that distinguishes it from the cut-and-dried cabinetmakers shops. It is the only real bric-a-brac magazine we have in New York, and with money and taste in equal quantities, a young couple may make even a New York house attractive, by picking up, now a chair, and now a table; to-day a lot of china, and to-morrow a looking-glass in a quaint frame. But they must expect to do this in a leisurely way. It takes time and patience, besides

no little judgement, and one must make large allowance for mistakes and disappointments. Sypher's is a pleasant place to move about in, and we owe him many of our household treasures, but we are aware he won't do for everybody, and the great majority of people, who are bent on being in fashion, and up on the times, and who have no weak sentiment about grandmothers, must be cared for; -- and the place for them is Cottier's [the most prominent of the au courant furniture dealers]<sup>58</sup>

It is now known whether the small group of Connecticut Valley collectors that emerged in the 1870's and 1780's took advantage of Sypher's, but their proximity to New York does not preclude the possibility.

Probably the easiest method of obtaining American decorative arts objects in the 1870's or earlier was through private sale or auction. The public vendue, or sale of household goods to liquidate an estate, had been a part of American behavior since the early-eighteenth century. The sale was, and is, the arena in which the collector with an observant eye could afford to spend money and outwit his competitors. In March, 1875, Scribner's Monthly described an auction sale that was perhaps typical of any number of sales that occurred in New England during the nineteenth century. The Thomaston, Maine, home of General Knox was the scene of the sale:

In 1854 the last child of Knox died, and the heirs sold the house and furniture at auction. The latter was bought by people of the town, who exhibit with pride the old-fashioned, well-worn sideboards, the handsome plate and dainty wineglasses that once belonged to Lady Knox.<sup>59</sup>

The individuals who acquired curios at the Thomaston sale could hardly be classified as "collectors," but the instinct to acquire mementoes with an interesting history was prevalent throughout much of New England.

Collecting spread slowly throughout the country from predictable sources. The first serious collectors, like Waters, Potter, and Erving, had a curiosity about the American past as well as the means with which to collect. By modern standards, most of the early collectors, however, would not be considered affluent and they made their purchases with discrimination and prudence. They possessed both an interest in and knowledge of the American past, and in a number of cases they owned family heirlooms that had historic and aesthetic merit.

No books were published prior to the Centennial that dealt expressly with decorative arts objects used in the colonies. Early collectors had to turn to books printed primarily for the English and European collecting market such as: J. Marryat, History of Pottery and Porcelain (1869); John Hungerford Pollen, Ancient and Modern Furniture (1874); Mrs. Bury Palliser's, The China Collector's Pocket Companion (1875); and Major H. Byng Hall's, The Bric-a-Brac Hunter (1875).

Also very few magazine articles had been written before the Centennial to which a collector might turn for information about decorative arts objects of colonial America. In most cases the references appeared in such literary works as Longfellow's The Old Clock on the Stairs, and Hawthorne's The Whole History of Grandfather's Chair. Hawthorne played upon the romantic fascination that many Americans had with the past in such passages as:

The chair in which Grandfather sat was made of oak, which had grown dark with age, but had been rubbed and polished till it shone as bright as mahogany. It was very large and heavy, and had a back that rose high above Grandfather's white head. This back was curiously

carved in open work, so as to represent flowers, and foliage, and other devices, which the children had often gazed at, but could never understand what they meant. On the very tiptop of the chair, over the head of Grandfather himself, was a likeness of a lion's head, which had such a savage grin that you would almost expect to hear it growl and snarl.<sup>60</sup>

One of the earliest engravings of a piece of colonial furniture appeared in the New England Genealogical and Historical Register in 1855. In a letter addressed to the Society, Dr. S. B. Swett enclosed a drawing of a "Cabinet" which he had "purchased at auction in Boston, in 1845, for two dollars."<sup>61</sup> The Society reproduced both the drawing and the letter primarily because Dr. Swett argued that the "cabinet"--actually the bottom of a court cupboard--had belonged to Rev. John Eliot, "the apostle," and translator of the Bible into the Indian language.

Eight years later a group of drawings of colonial furniture appeared in W. H. Bartlett's The Pilgrim Fathers.<sup>62</sup> The furniture illustrated included several seventeenth-century turned chairs and one was accompanied by a poem that furthered the mystique about colonial life.

As early as 1874 Harper's Monthly took notice of the increased interest in ceramics collecting in America. In an article entitled "Some Notes About Pottery and Porcelain," the author, William C. Prime, commented, "none of the arts are more interesting or important than that which is now generally known as the ceramic.... Unfortunately it is little known to us in America by actual sight, since we have no public collections to educate the people in its history. But of late attention has been given to it by not a few private collectors."<sup>63</sup> Five months

later Harper's Monthly published an article on American life in 1776. While the emphasis was on colonial life rather than the collecting of objects related to it, the article undoubtedly reminded many readers of the colonial furnishings that were still used or stored in the garrets of many New England homes. The article illustrated the interior of Washington's headquarters at Newburgh, New York, which included a Queen Anne side chair, and a sideboard surrounded by other house furnishings (Figure 9). The descriptions of colonial life included a substantial comment on these items. The section on furniture stated:

The articles of furniture in the ante-Revolutionary households were not numerous. Mahogany was the most costly and aristocratic material; and of it were made their choice chairs, straight and high backed, bedsteads, chests, drawers, stands, tables, and buffets. Few families were without a 'dresser' and a 'corner cupboard,' and the wealthier ones adorned their houses with the stately 'Dutch cupboard,' made of costly wood, often imported from abroad, and almost capacious enough for a town-meeting. The ordinary furniture of the houses was usually made of bilsted, gum, pine, walnut, cherry, or red cedar.<sup>64</sup>

In 1875 and 1876, Clarence Cook authored a series of articles on interior decoration for Scribner's Monthly which attracted attention to the art of collecting colonial furniture. Cook described many different methods of furnishing rooms but he had a obvious penchant for collecting and decorating with American relics. In a letter to Henry F. Waters, Arthur Little, presumably the author of Early New England Interiors (1878), asks permission to "bring by my uncle Mr. Cook and his wife to see your collection." In a postscript he adds "Mr. Cook has written some articles on Furniture in the Scribner's and so is very much interested."<sup>65</sup> Cook's articles illustrated a number of different pieces of colonial





Figure 9  
"Glimpse of '76" from Harper's Magazine

furniture. The author also encouraged individuals to acquire furniture at a shop like Sypher's or on their own in the country. Scribner's considered Cook's articles worth publishing in book form, and in 1877 they appeared as The House Beautiful with little change in subject-matter or photographs.

Scribner's History of the United States, compiled by William Cullen Bryant, et al., was published at the same time as Cook's articles. Several drawings of American furniture appear with the text. One of the illustrations (Figure 10) that had been used by Cook in his series of articles for Scribner's Monthly, shows a court cupboard and toilet stand from the Waters' collection, as well as a wainscoat chair in the Essex Institute. None of the furniture is identified in the text.

Whatever the interest in collecting colonial relics before 1876 had been, it was overwhelmed by the contagious spirit of the colonial revival movement which affected the country after the Centennial. The watershed year, 1876, focused attention on the fact that America was one hundred years of age. No longer were colonial furnishings mere "relics;" they were more frequently glorified by the eloquent label "antiques." Although the collecting movement was still a generation away from becoming nationally understood, the year 1876 gave the movement direction and saw its tentacles spread further over the New England countryside.

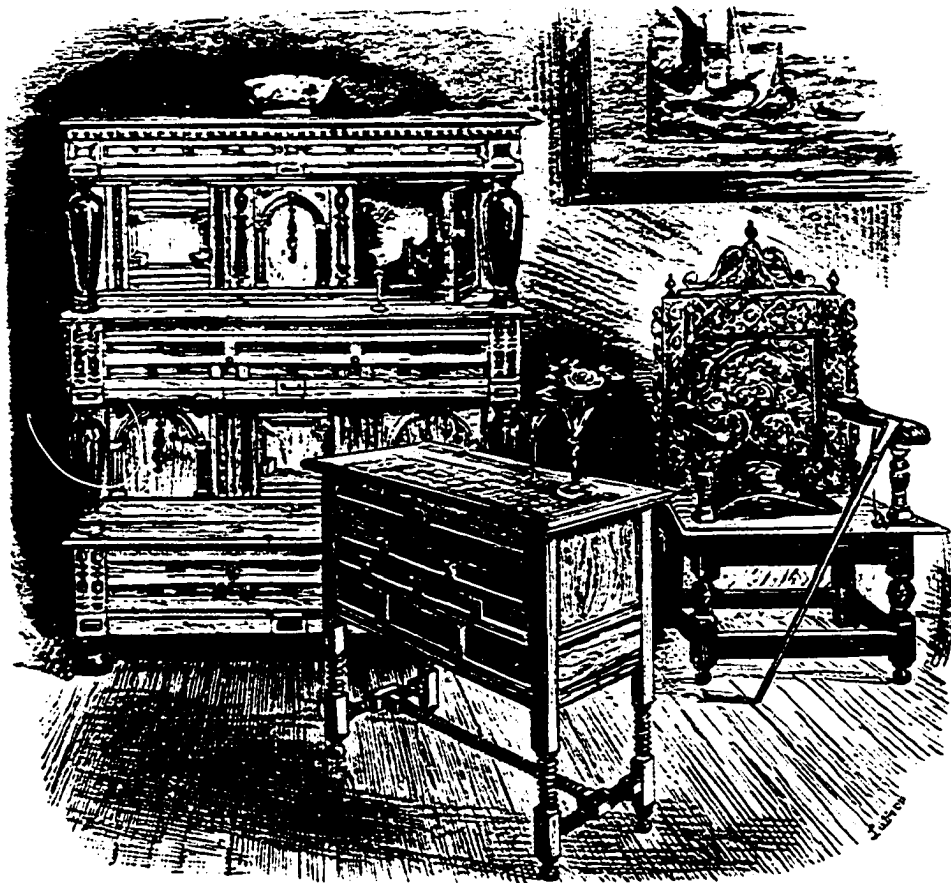


Figure 10  
"Colonial Furniture" from Scribner's History of the United States

## FOOTNOTES

### CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>The Romance of New England Antiques (New York: A. A. Wyn), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Between 1790 and the Centennial, thirty-three historical societies were formed in New England with representation in each of the New England states. By the time of the Columbian Exposition, that number had swelled to seventy-eight. See David D. Van Tassel, Recording America's Past (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 181-190.

<sup>3</sup>Quarterly Meeting, Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1 (July 1793), 53.

<sup>4</sup>Frances Clary Morse, Furniture of the Olden Time (New York: MacMillan, 1926), p. 157--hereafter cited as Morse.

<sup>5</sup>Interview with Marjorie Anderson, Secretary, The Pilgrim Society, March 1, 1973.

<sup>6</sup>Wendell D. Garrett, "Furniture Owned by the American Antiquarian Society," Antiques, 97 (March 1970), 403, 405, 406--hereafter cited as Garrett.

<sup>7</sup>Letter to the author from Patricia E. Kane, Assistant Curator, Garvan and Related Collections of American Art, February 15, 1973.

<sup>8</sup>Garrett, 406.

<sup>9</sup>Oliver Wendell Holmes, The Poetical Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes, 2 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup>J. M. Arms Sheldon, "The 'Old Indian House' at Deerfield, Mass., and the Effort in 1847 to Save it from Destruction," Old-Time New England, 12 (January 1922), 102.

<sup>11</sup>Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., Presence of the Past (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), pp. 41-62, 103.

<sup>12</sup>Luke Vincent Lockwood, Colonial Furniture in America (New York: Scribner's, 1901), p. 12--hereafter cited as Lockwood.

<sup>13</sup>Allen French, "The New House and Old Collection of the Concord Antiquarian Society," Old-Time New England, 21 (April 1931), 147.

<sup>14</sup>See the unpublished M.S., Inventory of Cummings E. Davis Collection, 1886, in the Concord Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection, leaf 1.

<sup>15</sup>See the unpublished M.S., Collection of Cummings E. Davis, 1854, in the Concord Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection, leaf 1.

<sup>16</sup>Russell H. Kettell, Cummings E. Davis and His Concord Furniture (Concord: Concord Antiquarian Society, n.d.), unppd., leaves 3-4.

<sup>17</sup>William Davis Miller, "An Early Rhode Island Collector," Walpole Society Notebook, 1935 (Boston: The Walpole Society, 1936?), 45--hereafter cited as Miller.

<sup>18</sup>Miller, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup>Miller, p. 45.

<sup>20</sup>Miller, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup>Wendell D. Garrett, "Speculations on the Newport Blockfront in 1928," Antiques 99 (June 1971), 890.

<sup>22</sup>Miller, p. 46.

<sup>23</sup>Promissory note from Henry F. Waters to Emerson Shaw, October 7, 1872, Waters Family Papers, Box 29, "Henry Fitz Gilbert Waters, 1885-1913," Folder 8- Bills and Receipts, in the Essex Institute Manuscript Collection--hereafter cited as Waters, Box 29.

<sup>24</sup>Letter from the Household Art Company to Henry F. Waters, March 18, 1874, Waters Family Papers, Box 28, "Henry Fitz Gilbert Waters, 1855-1886," Folder 4-1873-1874, in the Essex Institute Manuscript Collection--hereafter cited as Waters, Box 28.

<sup>25</sup>Letter from the Household Art Company to Henry F. Waters, May 12, 1875, Waters, Box 28, Folder 5-1875.

<sup>26</sup>Receipt from the Household Art Company, November 10, 187?, Waters, Box 29, Folder 8-Bills and Receipts.

<sup>27</sup>Letter from John Allen to Henry F. Waters, May 25, 1875, Waters, Box 28, Folder 5-1875.

<sup>28</sup>Letter from James L. Moulton to Henry F. Waters, August 30, 1875, Waters, Box 28, Folder 5-1875.

<sup>29</sup>"Bunker Hill Centennial," The Cabinetmaker, June 26, 1875, p. 88.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Josephine P. Driver, "Ben: Perley Poore of Indian Hill," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 89 (January 1953), 11.

<sup>32</sup>Letter from Ben: Perley Poore to A. C. Goddell, June 11, 1872, Ben: Perley Poore, Mss. Letters, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>33</sup>Letter from Harold B. Whiting to Benno M. Forman, April 7, 1972.

<sup>34</sup>Sale catalogue, Colonial Furniture, the Superb Collection of Mr. Francis Hill Bigelow of Cambridge, Mass. (New York: Anderson Galleries, Inc., 1924), No. 1795, leaf 3.

<sup>35</sup>Catalogue of the Revolutionary Relics Exhibited at No. 56 Beacon Street, June, 1875 (Boston: Ladies Centennial Commission, 1875), leaf 1--hereafter cited as Beacon Hill Catalogue.

<sup>36</sup>H. M. V[arrell], "Lyman, Theodore," in Dictionary of American Biography (1961)--hereafter cited as DAB.

<sup>37</sup>Letter from Theodore Lyman to Henry F. Waters, May 13, 1882, Waters, Box 28, Folder 7-1878-82.

<sup>38</sup>Letter from Theodore Lyman to Henry F. Waters, July 22, 1882, Waters, Box 28, Folder 7-1878-82.

<sup>39</sup>Beacon Hill Catalogue, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup>Letter to the author from Mrs. Bertram K. Little, February 1, 1973.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Beacon Hill Catalogue, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup>Catalogue of the Antique Articles on Exhibition at Plummer Hall, Salem, December, 1875 (Salem: Salem Gazette, 1875), p. 4--hereafter cited as Plummer Hall Catalogue.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 4, 9.

<sup>45</sup>"The Will of Geo. Rea Curwen," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 36 (July 1900), 248.

<sup>46</sup>Plummer Hall Catalogue, pp. 3, 7.

<sup>47</sup>R[alph] H. G[abriel], "Loring, George Bailey," DAB (1961).

<sup>48</sup>Letter from George R. Curwen to Henry F. Waters, November 10, 1884, Waters, Box 28, Folder 8-1883-84.

<sup>49</sup>Handbook of the Centennial Exhibition of Antiquarian and Revolutionary Relics, Held in New Haven, Connecticut, From June 10th to July 2nd 1875 (New Haven: Punderson and Crisand, 1875), p. 50.

<sup>50</sup>George D. Curtis, Souvenir of the Centennial (Hartford, 1877), p. 62.

<sup>51</sup>"Henry Wood Erving," American Collector, 4, No. 3 (July 1935), 5, 13--hereafter cited as Erving.

<sup>52</sup>Erving, 5, 13.

<sup>53</sup>Henry W. Kent and William Davis Miller, The Walpole Society, A Tribute to Its Founders and Other Walpoleans of their Time (Boston: The Walpole Society, 1948), p. 4.

<sup>54</sup>An examination of the business directories of Boston, Hartford, Newport, New Haven, Providence, Salem, and Worcester for the years 1870-1900 revealed that no antiques dealers outside of Boston advertised before 1876. The two Boston dealers were: The Household Art Company, 158 Tremont Street, and John Allen, 1792 Washington Street.

<sup>55</sup>John F. Trow, Trow's New York City Directory (New York: John F. Trow, 1870), 72, 1061--hereafter cited as Trow.

<sup>56</sup>Trow, 89, 1307.

<sup>57</sup>Miller, p. 45.

<sup>58</sup>"Culture and Progress," Scribner's Monthly, 8 (August 1874), 500.

<sup>59</sup>"Two Ancient Landmarks," Scribner's Monthly, 9 (March 1875), 617.

<sup>60</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Whole History of Grandfather's Chair (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1900), p. 3.

<sup>61</sup>S. B. Swett, "The Eliot Bureau," New England Historical and Genealogical Register, 9 (October 1855), 329.

<sup>62</sup>W. H. Bartlett, The Pilgrim Fathers (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1863), p. 204.

<sup>63</sup>William C. Prime, "Some Notes About Pottery and Porcelain," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 48 (February 1874), 321.

<sup>64</sup>Charles A. Desbier, "A Glimpse of Seventy-Six," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 49 (July 1874), 231, 242, 244.

<sup>65</sup>Letter from Arthur Little to Henry F. Waters, August 13, 187?, Waters, Box 28, Folder 3-1870-72. Although the letter is distinctly dated "71," this date is incorrect because Cooks' articles on furniture did not begin to appear in Scribner's Monthly until 1875.



A change is coming over the spirit of our time, which has its origin partly, no doubt, in the memorial epoch through which we are passing, but which is also a proof that our taste is getting a root in a healthier and more native soil. All this resuscitation of "old furniture" and revival of old simplicity (more marked perhaps, in the east than here in New-York) is in reality much more sensible than it seems to be to those who look upon it as only another phase of the 'centennial' mania. It is a fashion, so far as it is a fashion, that has been for twenty years working its way down from a circle of rich, cultivated people, to a wider circle of people who are educated, who have natural good taste, but who have not so much money as they could wish.<sup>1</sup>

--Clarence Cook, 1877

## CHAPTER II

### THE CENTENNIAL TO THE COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION

The Centennial celebration in Philadelphia was a time for rejoicing. The year 1876 pronounced the first hundred years of a country that had grown from thirteen floundering colonies into the burgeoning industrial giant of the nineteenth century. The tone of the Centennial was much more a glorification of American manufacturing successes, as symbols of "progress" during the preceding one hundred years, than it was a recounting of the mysteries of the Country's colonial past. The events of the year, however, including the horn-blowing by historical societies throughout New England, spread an infectious spirit of both reverence for and curiosity with colonial life.

The Centennial celebration has been thought of, for a number of years, as an exhibition place for colonial relics. It was not. Only two exhibits at the Centennial were devoted entirely to America's colonial history. The first was the "Old Log Cabin" and like other exhibits at the Centennial it served a commercial function by offering meals to the public. The exhibition was a "combination of quaint architecture, antiquated furniture, and the epochal costumes of the attendants gives one a pleasing view of life in New England a century ago." Another individual noted that:

About twenty ladies, dressed in the costume of a hundred years ago, did the honors of this establishment, and conducted the visitors through the different rooms, explaining with courtesy the wonderful articles of furniture and cooking utensils, whose very simplicity made them incomprehensible to the victim of modern improvements.

The exhibit was created by individuals with a limited knowledge of colonial dwellings. The romantic nature of the exhibit is revealed by the use as a symbol of colonial life of a log cabin, a type of building not used for domestic purposes in New England. The cabin's interior was decorated with colonial furniture including a seventeenth-century cradle, a gate-leg table, and a high chest of drawers (Figure 11).<sup>2</sup>

The "Connecticut Cottage" was the second and only other exhibit at the Centennial devoted entirely to colonial life. Its eclectic design was intended to be "of the character of American houses of a century ago," and almost every article used to furnish the Cottage was of a historical nature (Figure 12). The articles exhibited included an "eight-day clock and spinning wheel," loaned by Mrs. S. J. Cowen of Hartford, a "settle, made in 1769," loaned by Mrs. O. H. Whitmore of Hartford, and a "brass fender, andirons, shovel and tongs and mahogany side-board," loaned by Mrs. Alfred Hall of Portland.<sup>3</sup>

The "Connecticut Cottage" and the "Old Log Cabin," as well as some Washington memorabilia in the United States pavilion, did not indicate a nationwide appreciation of colonial craftsmanship. Rather, these exhibitions were a measure of the increasing awareness of colonial history in New England and along the East coast. In fact, the lack of general concern for colonial furnishings, at least with the



Figure 11  
Interior of the "Old Log Cabin" at the Centennial

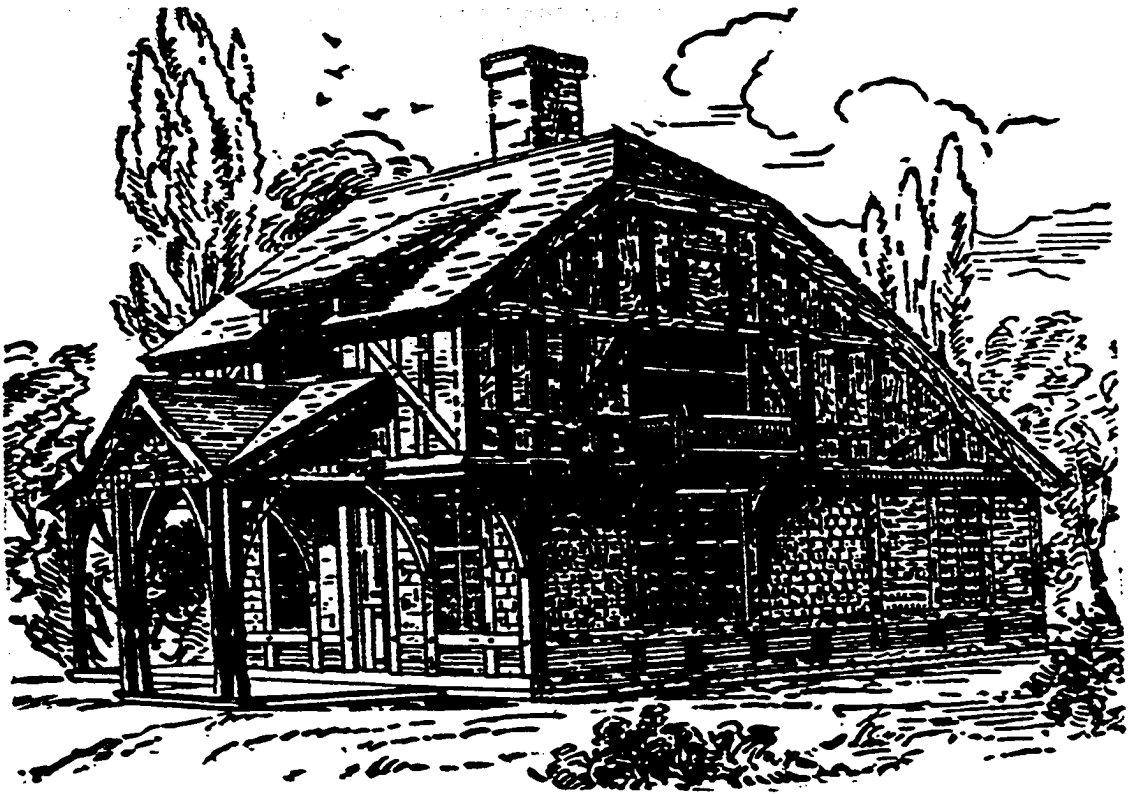


Figure 12  
Connecticut Cottage at the Columbian Exposition

business-conscious minds that organized the Philadelphia exhibition was apparent. But the awareness of the beauty in colonial furniture, and collecting in general did not begin with the Horatio Algers of the nineteenth century, or the manufacturing people who underwrote the Centennial Collecting, as illustrated by the few individuals who were amassing objects in the late 1860's and 1870's, was mostly the fancy of professional people.

Whether the Centennial celebration directly produced new collectors is questionable, but it vicariously stimulated the latent collecting instincts of individuals with the desire to collect and preserve objects from the American past. After the Centennial popular periodicals included articles more frequently than they did in the early 1870's, that dealt with some aspect of the colonial period. Most of these articles discussed the romance of the colonial atmosphere rather than furniture, ceramics, or other decorative arts objects.

In December, 1876, an article entitled "The Knickerbockers of New York Two Centuries Ago" appeared in Harper's New Monthly Magazine. The article attempts to instill in the reader an awareness of the pleasant atmosphere of colonial life. One of the rooms in a Knickerbocker's house is described: "quaint settees and an antique book-case, with rare old engravings on the walls, constitute the furniture, while over all an air of quiet comfort and repose pervades."<sup>4</sup> The accompanying illustrations are as indicative of the nineteenth-century fascination with the colonial mystique as the author's words (Figure 13). Many of Harper's readers, as well as readers of similar periodicals,<sup>5</sup> must have found the



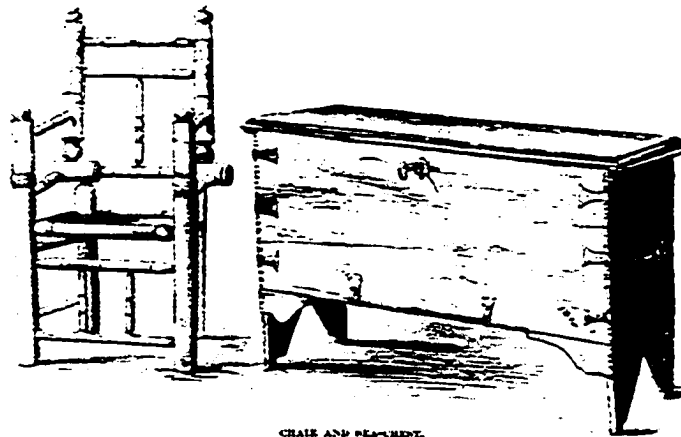
Figure 13  
"Mementoes in the East Room" from Harper's Magazine

rediscovery of colonial life and the collecting of its artifacts a contrast to the pressed, stamped, and laminated world of America in the 1870's.

As the awareness of colonial relics grew, articles, and for the first time books began to appear in which colonial life was treated with less romanticism than in earlier discussions. Articles, such as "The 'Good Old Times' at Plymouth," published by Harper's Monthly in 1877, placed an emphasis on describing and depicting individual pieces of furniture. The author, in addition to illustrating and discussing the history of the Peregrine White cradle and the Brewster chair (which he called "one of the best examples of the household art of that early and rude time"), included a number of lesser known pieces of seventeenth-century furniture (Figure 14).<sup>6</sup> Colonial furniture still connoted "relics" and continued to be viewed by the periodicals as "curious," but the emphasis on it in an increasing number of articles indicates a growing appreciation of the artifacts of colonial life.

The first two books that treated objects used in the colonial period as collector's items were published in 1877. The first, Clarence Cook's The House Beautiful was a compilation of the articles he serialized during 1875 and 1876 in Scribner's. Cook was the first author to imply that grandmother's furniture could be integrated into current modes of interior decoration. The author includes a number of illustrations of seventeenth-century chairs, and case furniture, as well as a variety of eighteenth-century examples. After extolling the virtues of the eighteenth-century tea table (Figure 15), Cook states:





CRADLE AND CHEST.

amples of the early furniture of the Pilgrim stockade. The first graves, as has been period, saved for us in the Athenaeum at said, were not here, but on a rise above the

"Rock," called Cole's Hill. Here they buried the fifty who died in the first winter of their landing; for here in some degree they could be protected with loving care. From this Burial Hill now we have a long look-out toward Cape Cod, as well as a view of the hills and woods which extend westward. From this high point, also, the "Captain's Hill," at Duxbury, is in full sight, and at our feet nestles the lovely town of Plymouth.

The old burying-grounds of New England are full of melancholy evidences of human weakness. No explanation has been ever suffi-

Hartford. They show, first, the plain sea- chest, such as any sailor now takes upon his voyage; second, the chest with turned and applied ornaments, and with two small drawers at the bottom; third, the chest more ornamented and with more drawers, but still with the lid at the top. The next step is to the chest of drawers complete—what we call the *bureau*—and which we shall show hereafter. So we see how all things grow, and that even the chest of drawers was not born full-grown.

One of the most sightly and interesting spots on the "Wild New England shore" is the Burial Hill at Plymouth. Upon this stood the fort first built

One of the most sightly and interesting spots on the

"Wild New England shore"

is the Burial Hill at Plymouth. Upon this stood the fort first built

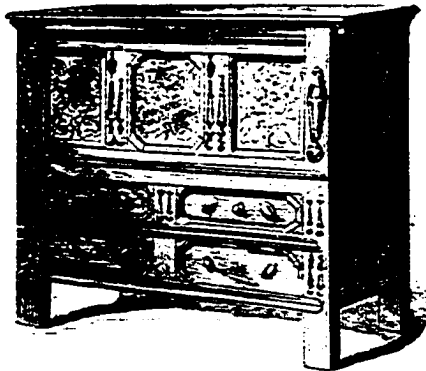


Figure 14

"Good Old Times at Plymouth" from Harper's Magazine



Figure 15  
Tea table, illustration from Clarence Cook's, The House Beautiful

to the eye of one whose liking for our Revolutionary furniture is not a new thing, the charm of it consists, apart from its usefulness, which is evident to everybody, in the color given to it by age, and in the simplicity with which its ornament is obtained. Its mouldings are always good and quiet; just what is needed, and no more, to round an angle with elegance, and to catch the light agreeably, and whenever any carving is attempted, or paneling, there is a certain moderation in it that is very refreshing in these loud times.

The author suggests Sypher's as a shop where a buyer is likely to obtain colonial furniture. "I would not hesitate, if I were in want of a side-board, to buy a good example of the style shown in cut No. 69, if I could find a genuine old piece in first-rate condition, like some Mr. Sypher has recently picked up, and which are in his showroom" (Figure 16).<sup>7</sup>

While Cook failed to mention the names of any established collectors, he did describe the collection of an acquaintance:

I know of one house which is almost entirely furnished with old American (or English) and old Dutch furniture, but it is one house picked out of ten thousand. It belongs to a deservedly prosperous artist and the collecting of this furniture has been the amusement of stray hours for many a year. . . . The specimens of American, or old English, furniture that he has in his town house, and with which his country house is furnished throughout, were all collected from the farm-houses of the region around his country house, and they were all bought for far less than must have been paid for ordinary furniture.

In another instance the author comes to the defense of buyers of colonial furniture. One gentleman from Texas wrote Cook and complained that "the furniture of 1776 is nice for those who like odd things, and have a mania for such collections; but, for actual use, I don't like them. Most of them are square, angular, and 'spindling,' looking as if

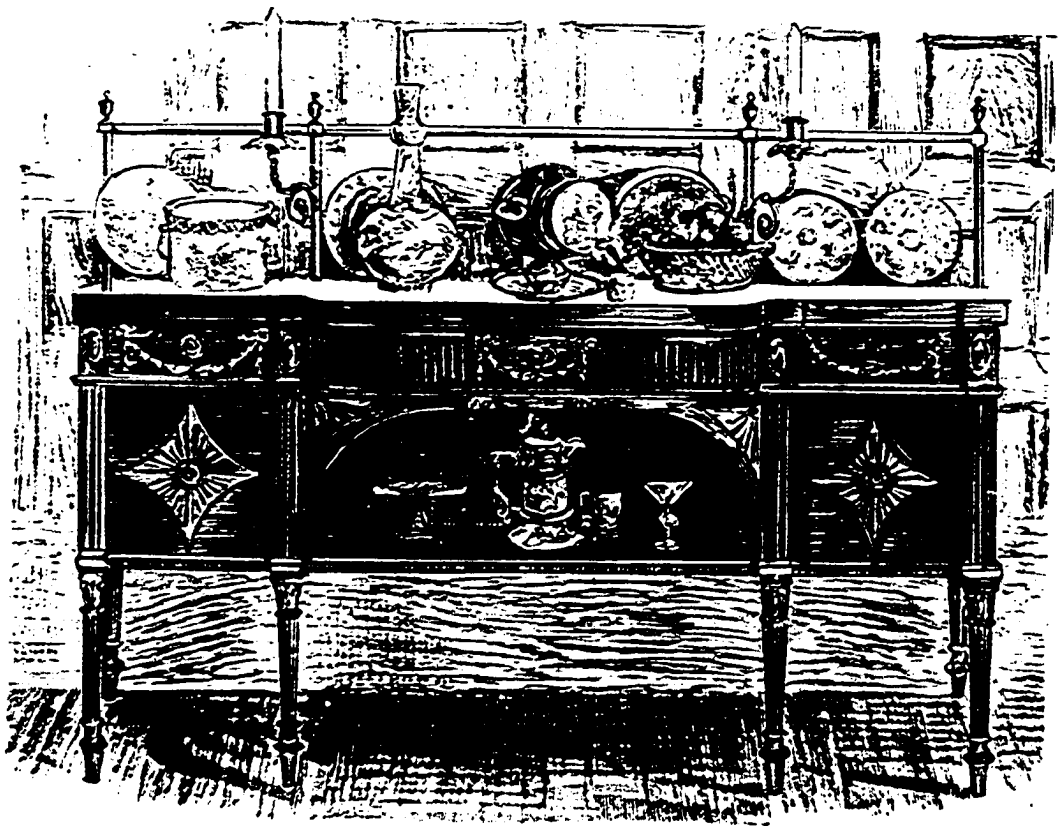


Figure 16  
Sideboard, illustration from Clarence Cook's, The House Beautiful

they would not last--not solid enough." Cook's reply represents the attitude of a person who appreciates collecting. The author stated, "the truth is, it [colonial furniture] is almost all of it first-rate furniture; well designed for use and good looks, and it is no mania for collecting that makes people snap it up wherever they see it for sale, but good sense and good taste." Colonial furniture collectors did suffer from the "mania for collecting," but Cook's point is well taken. Individuals were prompted to become collectors by their awareness of the character of colonial furniture and a distaste for the current mode of decorative arts.<sup>8</sup>

Pieces of furniture were not the only colonial decorative arts objects sought by the early collectors. Ceramics quickly caught the fascination of a number of collectors, particularly women. William C. Prime published Pottery and Porcelain the same year as Cook's The House Beautiful. Prime had contributed articles on ceramics to Harper's for several years.<sup>9</sup> His five hundred page work is an extensive account of the history of ceramics from Egyptian times through the nineteenth century. Prime states in his preface "ten years ago there were probably not ten collectors of Pottery and Porcelain in the United States. To-day there are perhaps ten thousand. The exhibition in public museum of the fine works of ceramic art loaned by the few collectors who possessed them, revealed for the first time to the American public the wealth of beauty which is in 'old china;' and now in nearly every city, town, and village in the land more or less persons are collecting."<sup>10</sup> Naturally,

many of the individuals whom Prime describes as collectors were not limiting themselves to, or even collecting, ceramics used in the colonies.

One of the last chapters of Prime's book is entitled "Collectors and Collecting in America." The author encourages American collectors not to "fail to gather specimens" of the different Staffordshire potteries that produced wares with American scenes. He beckons the collector further by stating "the common notion that these printed wares are valueless crockery leads collectors to neglect them. They are becoming more and more rare, and will soon be highly prized."<sup>11</sup>

The frontispiece of Prime's book, to which the author refers in the text, affirms how the author's methods of exhibiting collected ceramics (Figure 17). Photographs taken in Essex County, Massachusetts, collections in the early 1900's by the journalist, Mary Harrod Northend, indicate that Prime's method found acceptance (Figure 18).

Prime, who eventually became director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, suggested that collectors who eventually wished to dispose of their gathered objects should will them to museums. "There are museums of art in many American cities, and historical and other museums in hundreds of our large and small towns and villages. Make your will, and if you have no children who will be educated and benefited by your art collections, in whatever department, give them to a museum of art or other public institution."<sup>12</sup>



Figure 17  
"Home Decoration" from William Prime's, Pottery and Porcelain



Figure 18  
Dining Room, Essex County, Massachusetts



A year after Prime's volume on ceramics appeared a book entitled The China Hunters Club was published. It was a guide for those who wished to learn about the exploits of a small group of New England ladies whose pastime was to pursue and collect ceramics used in the colonies and early republic. In nineteenth-century, lady-like fashion, the author, Annie Trumbull Slosson, used a pseudonym and disguised the names of her friends and fellow "hunters." To give a sense of legitimacy to the volume it was introduced by her brother, William C. Prime. The China Hunters Club is of limited value to the historian because none of the individuals or their collections can be determined. The book, however, testifies to the early and sincere interest of a number of individuals who saw ceramics collecting as a pleasant, enlightening, and challenging way to spend their time.

Miss Slosson's book gives fundamental information on basic types of ceramics as well as relating a number of amusing anecdotes about the adventures of early collectors. In one instance the author describes a visit by several of her fellow collectors to a little back woods town with the apocryphal name of Littlefield. The travelers were met at the station by an escort and transferred to carriage for the remainder of their trip. As they rode along, they asked their escort about the contents of their host's house:

"I suppose Mrs. Bate's house is very old," I said to my small escort.

"Yes'm, orful ole," chuckled the boy; "ole as 'Thusalem; ole as-Ole Hundred;' ole as ole Mister Ole hisself;" and he laughed shrilly at his own wit.

"And there must be a great many curious old things there," I said, suggestively.

"You bet!" was the concise reply.

"Quaint old furniture," I went on, "and ancient books, and--and ole china?"

"Yes'm. Ole chairs an' tableses an' stools an' sofys an' wash-stan's an' boxes an' bar'ls an' tubs an' pails an' bricks an' rags an'--

I think that boy would have gone on with the list till now, had I not desperately exclaimed, "Yes, yes, my good boy; but has Mrs. Bates any curious old china--dishes, you know--bowls or pitchers?"

"Chiny? Why, you jest wait, an' you'll think you got to Chiny hisself where the Chinymen live. There's bowls an' jugs an' jugs an' mugs an' mugs an'--

"Oh, stop--do please stop!" I cried, nervously; "you'll frighten the horse."

And indeed a braver steed might have been startled, for the irrepressible darkey, besides shouting out this ceramic chant at the top of his shrill voice, accompanied it by shaking the reins wildly and flourishing his whip. Still, in spite of myself, my spirits rose at this inventory of the Bates antiques. We are so credulous, we poor victims of manie a poterie! And yet dreaming of hidden treasures, bearing wonderful marks and mystic ciphers, I reached Littlefield.<sup>13</sup>

The impact of such anecdotes is increased by illustrations of china hunting adventures (Figure 19). Miss Slosson's book has all the romance of a mid-nineteenth-century novel, including the chase and the conquest, and the effect of her writing on the collecting movement was undoubtedly beneficial. Regardless of its direct impact on collecting, The China Hunters Club helped to glamorize the pursuit of the antique and make it acceptable to people who had formerly viewed relic gatherers with a degree of incredulity.

Arthur Little, an architect, published a book entitled Early New England Interiors the same year as The China Hunters Club. His book was a collection of sketches which he stated were completed "for my own pleasure and instruction, and also with the desire to preserve the relics of a style fast disappearing." Little's sketches are primarily of interior woodwork with no emphasis on furniture. The author does



Figure 19  
"China Hunting at Daisy Farm" from the China Hunters Club

mention, however, in describing the Waters' house that it "probably contains the finest collection of colonial furniture in the country."<sup>14</sup>

While the collecting habits of many Americans still went unnoticed, a number of early collectors received notoriety in the late 1870's. Individuals like Henry F. Waters began to come more into the open and communicate their finds to collectors with similar interests. In April, 1876, the Art Furnishing Company of Boston notified Waters that they still had the "clawfooted andirons" in which Waters had expressed interest.<sup>15</sup> No following letter or receipt exists, and it is unknown whether Waters bought them.

James Moulton continued his business with Waters in the late 1870's. On September 23, 1876, he wrote Waters that he could "have the oak sideboard for \$40."<sup>16</sup> The following spring Moulton wrote again:

I have an oak chest carved in front with date 1641  
on back--top pine. Also another with oak frame &  
end pannels, all the rest is pine. Also an oak  
drawer<sup>17</sup>

In May, 1877, Waters received a letter from Julia P. Dabney of Boston. She wrote that "knowing you are interested in old furniture I wish to ask you to call & look at two old inlaid marble tables that I have here. . . ." Since Miss Dabney was not known as a dealer she may have been requesting Waters' expertise rather than trying to sell him furniture, although she may have been selling as a private individual.<sup>18</sup>

Two other Boston dealers, John Allen and Clarence McCarthy of 1640 Washington Street, were doing business with Waters in 1877. Allen

wrote Waters in May that he "had finished the repairs on the Oak Bureau, that you [Waters] saw in my work shop. I am now at a loss to know how to finish it, some time that you are in Boston and can spare the time, without interfering with your business, why do me the kindness, to come and give me advise on the style of finish."<sup>19</sup> Apparently, Waters must have made the visit in the next month because on June 30 Allen sold him "1 Mahogany Hall Clock case" for \$75.00.<sup>20</sup> In August, McCarthy informed Waters that he had shipped to Salem the three pieces of furniture Waters had bought. McCarthy also mentioned that he had made some purchases at the "Brown sale at Lincoln."<sup>21</sup>

Waters also continued to buy from Moulton during the spring and summer of 1877. In April he bought "one oak chest" for \$5.00, as well as an oak bureau, costing \$40.00. He bought two more oak chests costing \$33.00 and \$7.00, respectively, in May, and in July Waters bought "2 old chairs," "1 Brass Eagle," "3 Clock brasses (ornaments for top)," and a "Chinese bell," the cost of the entire lot coming to \$5.00.<sup>22</sup> Moulton's last letter for 1877 was written in September. He informed Waters that he had succeeded in securing the oak sideboard, but at a much higher price than he had expected. Moulton offered the sideboard to Waters for \$65.00.<sup>23</sup>

The following year Waters also purchased furniture from Moulton. One receipt for May, 1878, shows the collector buying "one old desk" for \$25.00, and an "oak chest" for \$2.00. On June 14 he bought an "oak chest" for \$8.00, a table for \$15.00, as well as four wine glasses, costing \$5.50.<sup>24</sup> There are no further descriptions of the furniture,

consequently, the exact objects that Waters bought in Lynn cannot be determined. However, on one page of a partially missing undated letter to Waters, Moulton asks if the collector would like to buy a large oak-paneled chest for \$8.00. This may be the chest for which Moulton received payment on June 14. The last line of Moulton's letter reveals how secretively he went about his furniture dealing. Moulton implored Waters to "please reply in a sealed envelope, as I do not wish my business to be known to my neighbors."<sup>25</sup> The reason for Moulton's circumspect nature is unknown.

Waters was asked by fellow collectors, mostly in his later years, if he would consider selling furniture in his collection. In 1878 he was approached by W. A. Bartlett, the brother of a man who had sold Waters a clock. Bartlett regretted that his brother had sold to Waters and asked if he might buy the clock back. He added that his brother "ought never to have gone out of the family. My brother sold it without giving any of us a chance to retain it."<sup>26</sup> The response to Bartlett's request is unrecorded, although Waters did occasionally sell pieces of his furniture.

Waters' antiquarian expertise was apparently known to a number of people by the late 1870's. He received a letter in February, 1878, requesting his aid. Mrs. L. T. Leiter, representing the state of Illinois, wrote Waters to ask if he would help her committee furnish a room "in the Washington Mansion at Mt. Vernon." She stated she wished to obtain "chairs, sofa, table, mirror, mantle piece, rug, old bits of china, and clock, esriture" for the room supposed to have been "Martha

Washington's morning or sitting room." Waters was asked if he could estimate the cost of the purchases and then procure the furnishings for the committee.<sup>27</sup> Waters' reply is not recorded but it is unlikely that his often acerbic nature lent itself to such a scheme.

In the early 1880's Waters began to receive requests for information for appointments to view his collection. He was asked in August, 1880, by James Eddy Mauran, an antiquarian residing in Newport, Rhode Island, if he would send Mauran a copy of his most recent Salem Gazette article on furniture. Mauran mentions he made copious notes on old furniture in his capacity as librarian of the Newport Historical Society. He adds that he will send Waters a copy of the most recent Mercury which contained an article on china imported into America.<sup>28</sup> While Mauran does not mention the title of Waters' article, it may be one entitled "Ancient Matters" that appeared in the Gazette on June 29, 1880. The article is a response to a previous comment made in the paper that describes a seventeenth-century "secretary" as made of mahogany. He requests that the author of the preceding comment about mahogany "furnish testimony in proof of the statement." Waters explains that in his many years of research, he has not encountered the use of mahogany in the seventeenth century and that he has "examined all the inventories found recorded in our [Essex County] Probate Registry, down to 1694, without finding mention made of desk or book-case." Waters further insures the readers that he is no idle amateur by stating:

I have seen as much of the Colonial furniture as anybody that I know in this country, and I am obliged to confess that nothing of the sort has ever fallen under my observation, except little

portable desks or escritoirs, about a foot or two square, the finest specimen of which, now in my possession was made of oak, with front and sides ornamented with one of the conventional patterns of the Elizabethan period, beautifully carved.<sup>29</sup>

Two years after his Salem Gazette article, Waters was asked by Robert Treat Paine, Jr., the Boston philanthropist, if he might "come down to Salem Monday early & find you & see your old furniture & get advice from you as to some for myself?"<sup>30</sup> A more direct request was received the following year when James Phinney Baxter, a collector from Portland, Maine, wrote stating that in Waters' absence he had had the pleasure of "visiting your home and inspecting the valuable relics therein." Baxter wrote that he was "much interested in the various things I saw, and must confess to a slight feeling of covetousness." In a postscript Baxter asked, "would you part with one of those chairs which came in the Angel Gabriel?"<sup>31</sup> Apparently, Waters would not because the chairs are now part of the Essex Institute collections (Figure 20).

Waters departed for England in the mid 1880's to pursue genealogical research. His trip was being sponsored by the New England Genealogical Society and in return he was expected to complete research for members of the Society. While Waters was in England, he received a letter from Dr. Irving Lyon (1840-1896), a Hartford collector (Figure 21). Lyon wrote Waters January 31, 1886:

I have been for some time past engaged in making rather careful studies of the furniture used in England during the seventeenth & eighteenth centuries. I have often thought of you, but have hesitated about writing, as I know your researches



Figure 20  
"Angel Gabriel" chairs at the Essex Institute



Figure 21  
Irving Lyon

were on other lines & then I expect to be in London in May & June of this year, & thought I would then see you.

He asked if Waters would research some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century inventories for him. The doctor mentioned that he knew of Waters' "fondness for furniture through Mr. James L. Little Jr. of Boston, & Mr. Moulton of Lynn." In closing, Lyon gave an indication of how important he viewed his furniture work as being: "I wish whether you entertain my purpose, or not, that you would kindly treat my letter as confidential, as others are now abroad studying furniture."<sup>32</sup>

Dr. Lyon was chief medical examiner for the Hartford Life and Annuity Insurance Company.<sup>33</sup> He began collecting furniture in 1877 and three years later he claims to have begun "a systematic study of furniture" that eleven years later resulted in the first book on colonial furniture entitled The Colonial Furniture of New England.<sup>34</sup> Lyon was born in Bedford, New York, and attended Lawrenceville Academy and Vermont Medical College. In 1866 he settled in Hartford, where he established his medical practice.<sup>35</sup> Lyon compiled an extensive furniture collection by 1891, much of which he illustrated in his book. The earliest illustrated piece of furniture he bought was a turned chair acquired in 1878 in Lebanon, Connecticut. Lyon also bought furniture outside of Connecticut, including a chest on frame and dressing table he purchased in Lynn, Massachusetts. These two pieces of furniture were probably purchased from James Moulton, since Moulton was a friend of Lyon's and, so far, the only known dealer in Lynn at this time. The author also purchased a bracket clock in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, in 1883.<sup>36</sup>

George T. Robinson, an English furniture historian, advised Lyon as early as 1888 to publish his notes on colonial furniture as "a large and rapidly increasing public would cordially wellcome it, for there is a largely increasing love of old home life manifesting itself alike in your country as in mine."<sup>37</sup> Robinson took the initiative and proceeded to contact the Harper Brothers and Putnam publishing firms in New York regarding a series of articles or book by Lyon on colonial furniture. While Putnam did not feel such a work would pay, Harper's was interested in examining Lyon's manuscript.<sup>38</sup> Lyon wrote Waters in September, 1888, explaining that he wished to send his manuscript to Harper's. He also asked Waters to write a letter on his behalf to assure Harper's that "besides being a lover & collector of old furniture I have been a careful student of it for many years, that the studies as the text will show have been very extensive," and that Lyon's illustrations were "very fine & very interesting."<sup>39</sup>

Harper's decided against publishing Lyon's manuscript early in 1889. Lyon was, however, given a letter of introduction to Houghton, Mifflin & Co. by a friend and editor for Harper's, Charles Dudley Warner of Hartford. Houghton, Mifflin & Co. read the manuscript but were reluctant to accept it because of the "necessarily limited demand for such books." Lyon, thwarted in his attempts to publish, decided to "let the matter of publishing rest for the present."<sup>40</sup>

Lyon continued to collect information for his book in 1890 and 1891. He noted in letters to Waters that he had visited Salem again to photograph the "carved oaken chair at the Essex Institute" and a clock

belonging to "Dr. Haddock" in Beverly. "Dr. Haddock" was Dr. Charles W. Haddock, not known to have been a collector, but who in the nineteenth century was the owner of the court cupboard dated 1680, now in the Winterthur Museum (Lyon, Figure 16).<sup>41</sup> In April, 1891, Lyon wrote Waters that he would "be ready for the publishers with my manuscript & illustrations soon after May 1st."<sup>42</sup>

George Curwen wrote Waters in October, 1892, that he had recently seen Lyon but admitted that he had not been very gracious. Lyon's book was published the year before, and apparently in the interim contact between Waters, Curwen, and Lyon had diminished. Curwen noted:

After all the assistance that he rec<sup>d</sup> from you and I not to make any acknowledgement in his book, or send us a copy, I thought it was outrageous. The one he recollected was an L.L.D. [Charles J. Hoadly] as you are an A.B., and A.M. I should have thought he could have ventured on you without compromising himself, I hear his book has sold very well.<sup>43</sup>

Lyon's book was well-received and as one reviewer jocosely noted, "if only those families who show with pride a bit of furniture that 'came over in the Mayflower' will purchase his volume, it will quickly be out of print. . . ."<sup>44</sup> The book was the first published volume by which individual collectors may be identified. Whether Lyon urged others in Hartford to collect is unknown. But by the 1880's, a small group of Lyon's friends--for the most part professional people--were collecting. Objects from their collections, as well as from the Waters' and Loring collections provided the basis for the furniture discussed and illustrated in the text (Figure 22).

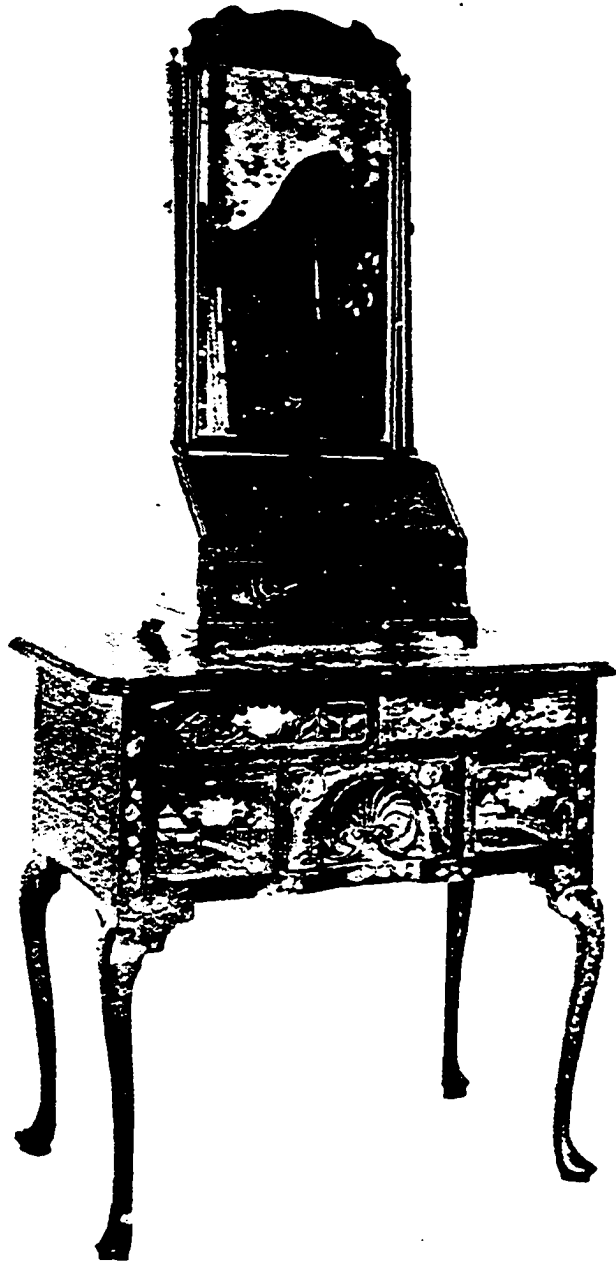


Figure 22  
Dressing table from the collection of George B. Loring

Horace S. Fuller (1835-1910), one of the Hartford collectors mentioned in Lyon's book, moved to Hartford in 1865 and in the late 1870's he was appointed the city medical examiner.<sup>45</sup> When and how he started collecting is unknown but Lyon's book illustrates a chest on frame and a desk, Figures 27 and 49, from Fuller's collection. The author notes that Fuller bought the chest on frame in Wethersfield a few years before, and the desk was bought in Glastonbury, Connecticut, in 1888.<sup>46</sup> Fuller also collected ceramics and his obituary states that he was a "pioneer in that line of antiquarian research." He gave his collection of porcelain and earthenware, "one of the best private collections in New England," to the Wadsworth Atheneum in 1905.<sup>47</sup> This collection was the earliest decorative arts bequest to the Atheneum.<sup>48</sup> Fuller is also credited with bringing two other ceramic collections to the Wadsworth Atheneum. Mrs. Stephen Terry of Hartford, a fellow collector, stated that she wished to give her collection to the Atheneum but would not do so unless Fuller did likewise. Fuller, in addition, personally persuaded Miss Louise Hatheway of Suffield to donate her ceramics collection to the Atheneum.<sup>49</sup>

Fuller's entire estate was inventoried and recorded in the Hartford newspaper at the time of his death. The list included a "six-leg highboy" valued at \$100.00 and "one duck foot writing desk" valued at \$75.00, presumably the two objects illustrated by Lyon. Two other pieces of furniture were valued at \$100.00: a "grandfather's inlaid hall clock,

brass hooks," and "one cherry scroll top highboy."<sup>50</sup> Fuller's estate was dispersed to his brother and sister and the present location of any of his furniture collection is unknown.

Another Hartford collector, William F. J. Boardman (1828-1912), was a banker and businessman, an amateur genealogist, and a member of the Connecticut, Topsfield (Massachusetts), and Ipswich (Massachusetts) Historical Societies.<sup>51</sup> He was collecting by 1891 when Lyon lists him as the owner of a slate top table.<sup>52</sup> While Lyon only mentions one piece of furniture from Boardman's collection, an obituary indicates that his house was a "show place":

He was a connoisseur in collecting antiques and made his home a house beautiful and enriched with furniture, paintings and other things and is doubtful if an individual in Hartford, has richer possessions along these lines.<sup>53</sup>

Boardman's interest in collecting was taken up by his son William Greenleaf Boardman (1855-1908). The younger Boardman was a friend of Henry Waters and in 1892 Waters sold him two chairs from his collection. In thanking Waters for allowing him to buy the chairs, Boardman asked about other furniture: "if you or your friends have any fine pieces that they are willing to part with I would be very much pleased to have you inform me of them, as I shall probably visit Salem again during the summer and would be pleased to add good pieces to my collection."<sup>54</sup> Two pieces of furniture from the Boardman collection are illustrated in Lyon. The first is a mid-eighteenth-century desk and



bookcase and the second is a roundabout chair.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, the younger Boardman died before his father and the location of both collections is unknown.

Most of the Hartford-area collectors of the 1870's and 1880's were professional people, but notable collections were formed by several craftsmen and one dealer. Walter Hosmer, an upholsterer with the Hartford cabinetmaking firm of Robbins and Winship, and his brother Albert, put together one of the most extensive furniture collections in Connecticut. The Hosmers lived in Wethersfield and were collecting by the 1880's. Lyon states that they bought a turned chair in Killingly, Connecticut, in 1889.<sup>56</sup> One of the most outstanding pieces of case furniture in the Hosmer collection was a blockfront desk, now at the Metropolitan Museum, signed by Benjamin Burnham and dated 1769.<sup>57</sup> A tall clock made by Benjamin Bagnall of Boston, and now in the Metropolitan Museum, also, was formerly in the Hosmer collection.<sup>58</sup> The "pagoda" design for the bonnet was restored by Hosmer after he consulted with Lyon.<sup>59</sup>

In 1891 Hosmer was in business in Hartford with two other craftsmen, Patrick Stevens and Edwin Simons.<sup>60</sup> The three craftsmen, for a few years, engaged in the business of dealing in and restoring antique furniture. Patrick Stevens (Figure 23) was a cabinetmaker who eventually went to work for Robbins and Winship after the firm of Simons, Stevens, and Hosmer was dissolved. Stevens is listed in the Hartford directories until 1907 when he moved to Long Island. Simons (1816-1896) was also a cabinetmaker and a collector. His obituary stated that:

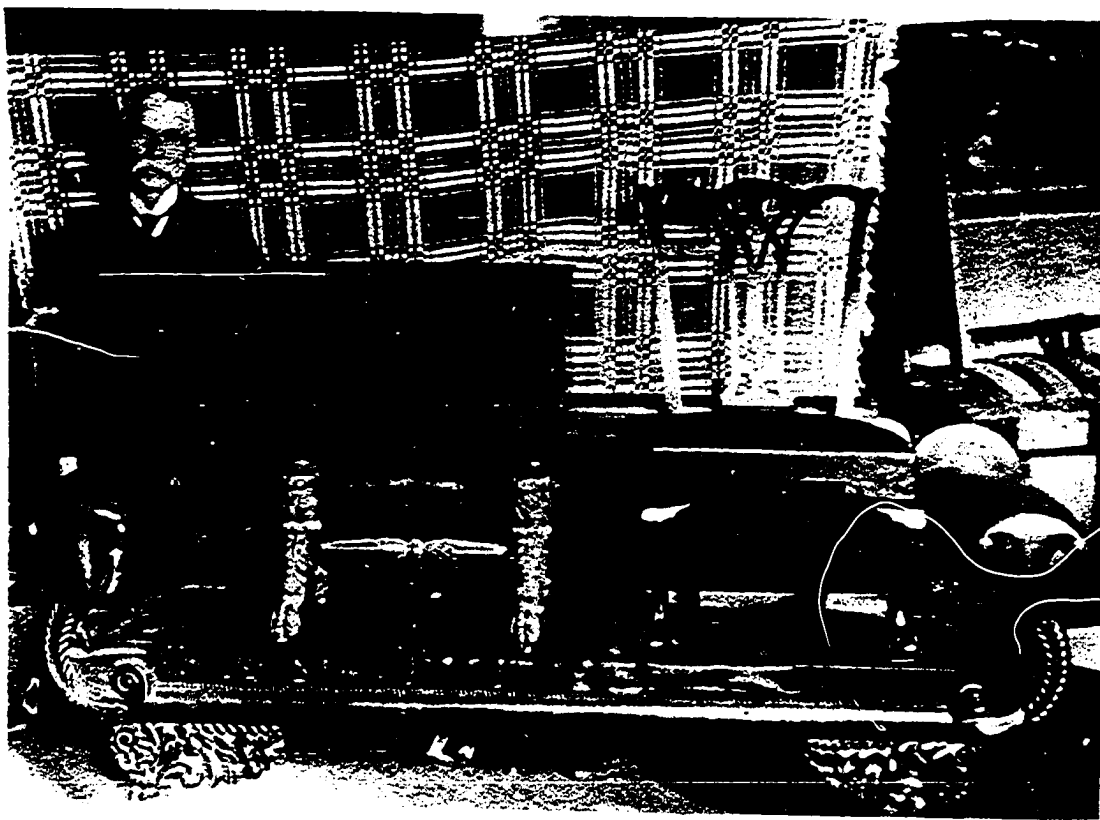


Figure 23  
Patrick Stevens

Mr. Simons was a recognized judge of the value and artistic merit of antique furniture and gained a reputation which was recognized throughout the state as a skillfull restorer of furniture and all kinds of antique woodwork. Articles of furniture which bear evidence of his skill are in possession of many of the best families in this city and other cities in the state.

Lyon spoke of Simons as an individual who knew enough to leave "a piece of antique furniture as it was originally made." He added that when "a Chiffondale or Sheridan chair came into his hands he always, in working upon it, retained the original lines."<sup>61</sup>

One eulogy to Simons said that "the recently aroused interest in antique furniture was largely due to him."<sup>62</sup> His collection included some outstanding examples of eighteenth-century furniture. One example is a painted high chest of drawers, now at the Metropolitan Museum, that Simons bought in Windsor, Connecticut (Lyon, Figure 36).<sup>63</sup>

William Meggat (1835-1919) of Wethersfield was a Connecticut antiques dealer, who supplied many of the Hartford area collectors in the 1890's (Figure 24). Meggat was a Scottish immigrant who came to America in 1859. In the 1860's he moved to Wethersfield and spent the next twenty years in the seed business. He decided about 1890, for unknown reasons, to convert his seed warehouse into a shop for refinishing and selling antique furniture. The exact duration of his business is unknown, although Hartford area collectors speak of visiting Meggat's shop throughout the 1890's.<sup>64</sup>

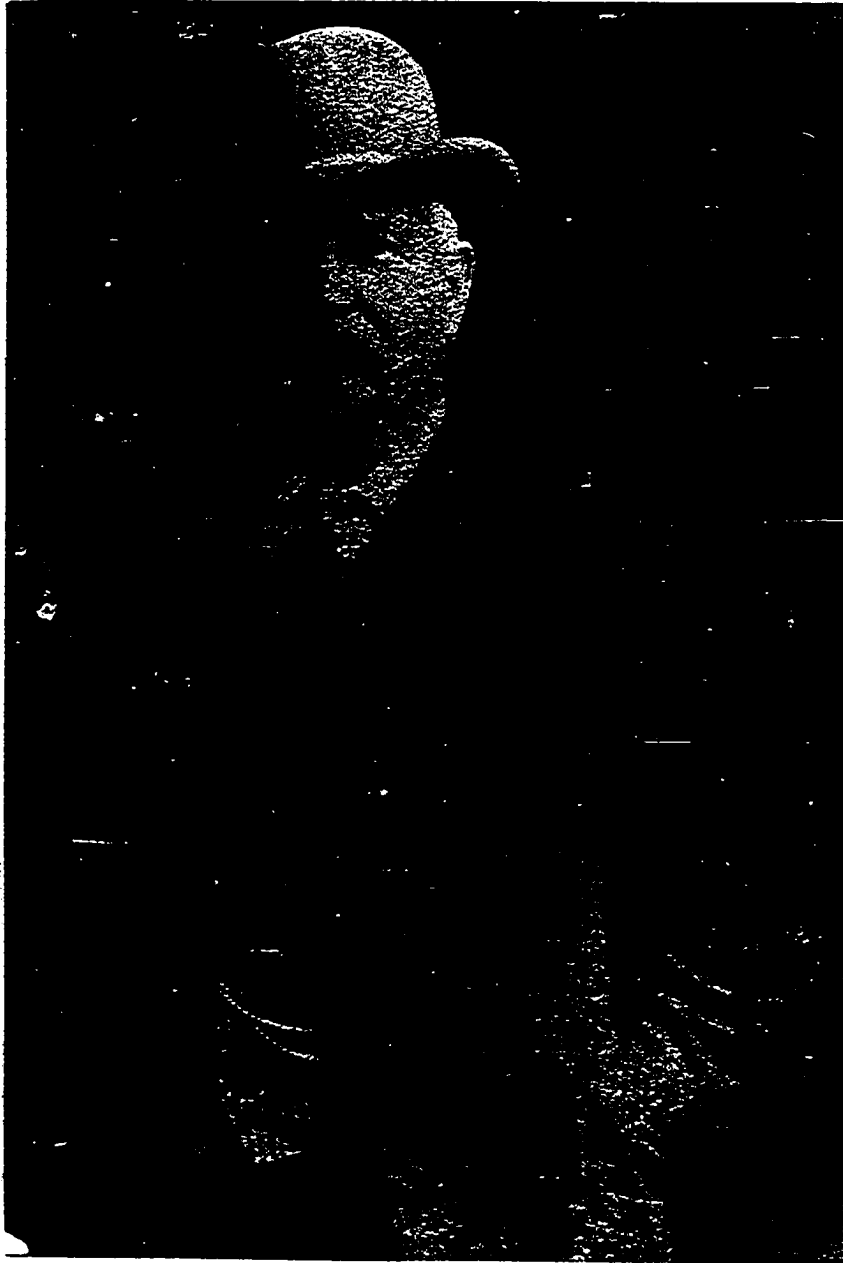


Figure 24  
William Meggat

It is not clear whether Meggat actually was a collector. Luke Vincent Lockwood (1872-1951) in his book Colonial Furniture in America (1901) includes photographs of a number of pieces of furniture that he lists as being owned by William Meggat. Some of the more important pieces of furniture mentioned were a William and Mary period leather side chair, a Chippendale period side chair with shells on the knees and crest rail, a Federal period sideboard with attached knife boxes, and a serpentine desk with ball-and-claw feet.<sup>65</sup> If there was a Meggat collection, and Lockwood was not simply illustrating furniture from Meggat's shop, it has long since been dispersed and is not known to his heirs.<sup>66</sup>

Horace Eugene Bolles (1838-1910) and George S. Palmer (1855-1934) (Figures 25 and 26) were several of the important collectors who began collecting American decorative arts objects in the 1880's and who later bought from Meggat. The two collectors were cousins and close friends of Henry Erving. The three collectors used to venture out together in search of furniture in the 1880's. At the time of Palmer's death, Erving recalled how Bolles and Palmer would call on him at his bank, the Connecticut River Banking Company, and they would set out:

on one occasion we all journeyed out to Prospect Avenue and spent the rest of the afternoon together, and we really had a great time. This was the only time that Bolles was ever in my house. I recall that they were beginning to buy. Bolles was often left with the early coarse Colonial stuff; he would buy whole lots and Palmer would take the mahogany and cherry off his hands--that was, as I recall, Palmer's stuff. Afterwards they bought, together, Walter Hosmer's collection, and that gave Bolles and Palmer a good start.<sup>67</sup>

Palmer, in a romantic mood, recounted the visit that he and Bolles made to the Hosmer house in Wethersfield:



Figure 25  
Eugene Bolles



Figure 26  
George Palmer

Admittance to the house was seldom granted and then most grudgingly. He [Walter Hosmer] had never been known to sell a piece except one to me sometime before; but that misstep was fatal to him. The thought suddenly struck me one day, buy his whole collection, and the next morning accompanied by my friend I was banging to and fro his disconnected door-pull. At length we were admitted and straightway began our attack by boldly stating that we wanted prices put upon everything in the house. We had come to purchase the whole. A fleeting smile, somewhat sad and almost ghastly (for his face is always very pale), spread over his countenance, but he made no direct refusal, which to us was a great encouragement.<sup>68</sup>

The two collectors returned triumphant: the Hosmer collection was theirs. Both Palmer and Bolles continued to collect in the 1890's, traveling around New England in search of furniture.

While much of the furniture that found its way into collectors' hands during the nineteenth century came from "pickers," individuals such as James Moulton, who dealt but did not have a shop, or direct from private homes, antique shops like Meggat's became exciting sources for improving collections. Both Erving and Lockwood mention in their reminiscences about Palmer their experiences at Meggat's. Erving stated that:

Palmer subsequently bought many things of Meggat of Wethersfield--that superb cabinet-top scrutoire of absolutely Chippendale features, with beautiful feet and a carved bust for a center finial. Meggat was very anxious to have me buy it, I could have bought the whole thing, and easily, for \$75 and Meggat would have been greatly pleased to have me do so, but I knew that I could never afford to have it repaired as it properly should be. I think Palmer told me subsequently that he had Patrick Stevens of Robbins do the work and it cost about \$600.<sup>69</sup>

The "cabinet-top scrutoire" described by Erving was eventually sold to the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 27). On the bottom of the drawer in the



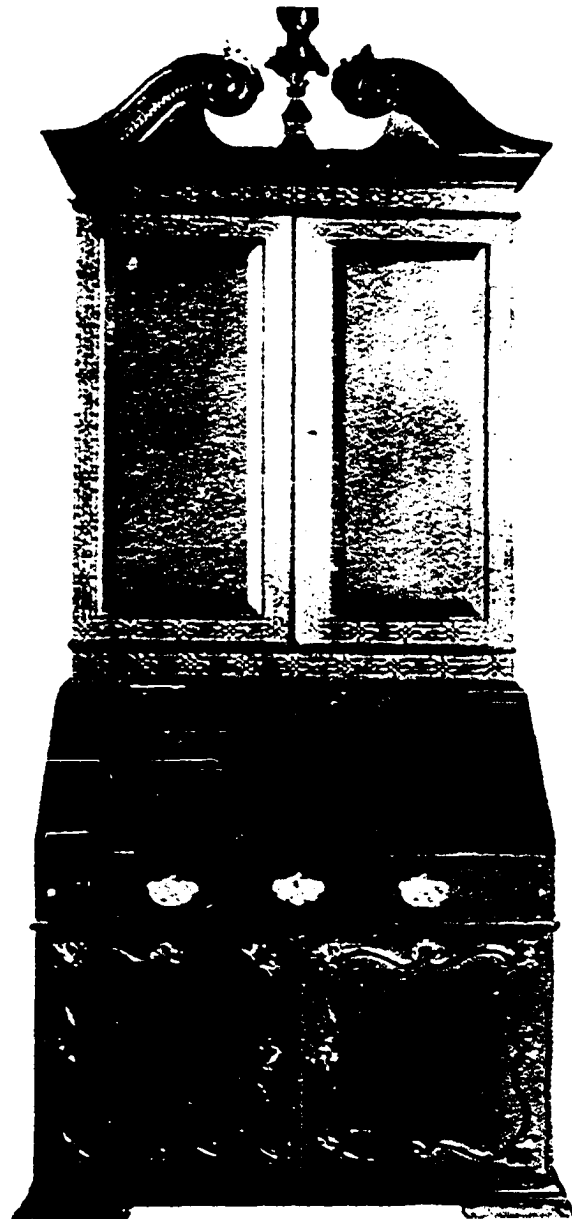


Figure 27  
Desk and bookcase formerly in the Palmer collection

desk section is a receipt from Robbins & Winship stating that nine hundred and ninety-four man hours have been put into its restoration, an ignoble distinction for any prized example of American craftsmanship (Figure 28). More important, the receipt exemplifies the attitude of many nineteenth-century collectors towards furniture "preservation."

Lockwood also remembered Palmer in association with Meggat's shop. "My first memory of Mr. Palmer takes me to Mr. Meggat's where a very beautiful kettle-shaped high desk was priced at the peak of my experience in extravagance in 1893, at \$300.00, and that desk was purchased by Mr. George S. Palmer of Norwich."<sup>70</sup> Palmer owned two bombe, or kettle-shaped desks; one is now in the Metropolitan Museum and the other is in the Winterthur Museum.

Other dealers began to appear throughout New England in the 1870's and 1880's. One female porcelain collector wrote to Scribner's in 1877 telling where she did her collecting: "dealers in old articles, like Quigley and Sullivan, in Boston, always have it on hand, where one can generally find the genuine ware of fifty years ago, and Briggs annually imports it for his customers."<sup>71</sup> In Salem, Massachusetts, the first dealer in antique goods appeared in 1878. He was P. J. Hynes and carried "antique furniture, crockery and china ware."<sup>72</sup> Providence, Rhode Island, did not have its first dealer until 1882, when Walter Durfee, advertised that he specialized in English hall clocks and the first dealer in Newport was Sypher and Company in 1880 when they opened up a branch of their New York shop.<sup>73</sup>

[illegible]

Figure 28  
Label on drawer of the above

The first major books and articles dealing with the development of the decorative arts in America appeared in the late 1880's and early 1890's. While the most scholarly work was probably Lyon's book on colonial furniture, other books such as Frank E. Wallis' Old Colonial Architecture and Furniture (1887) also attracted attention to colonial interiors and their furnishings. Wallis, a New York architect, published a collection of drawings of different pieces of furniture, some from private collections, and interiors of architecturally important colonial houses. Henry F. Waters was one of the few individuals mentioned as an owner of particular pieces of furniture.

Century, Scribners, and Harpers Magazines each included a number of articles during the 1880's that dealt with colonial history, architecture, and social customs. A series of articles on colonial life by Edward Eggleston appeared in Century and they were perhaps the most influential articles in arousing curiosity about eighteenth-century life and its accouterments. One article, "The Colonists at Home," attempted to make nineteenth-century Americans more cognizant of colonial culture; it included drawings of an eighteenth-century tea set, a flax wheel, and a Windsor chair.<sup>74</sup>

Alice Morse Earle published China Collecting in America in 1892, the first scholarly book dealing solely with ceramic collecting in America. Mrs. Earle, an ardent collector of antiques, was originally from Worcester, Massachusetts. In 1874 she married and moved to Brooklyn.<sup>75</sup> She defended her attitude toward collecting in the opening pages of her book on ceramics, stating that it gave her:

insight into human nature, love of my native country, knowledge of her natural beauties, acquaintance with her old landmarks and historical localities, familiarity with her history, admiration of her noble military and naval heroes, and study of the ancient manners, customs, and traditions of her early inhabitants.

Mrs. Earle's book combined the history of ceramics in America with a guide to "china hunting." The author cautioned collectors to "not hurry prospective china sellers: bustling city ways annoy them, fluster them, and worry them, and in sheer bewilderment they say 'No' to get rid of you."<sup>76</sup>

Both Mrs. Earle's and Lyon's books expressed an inherent change of attitude toward colonial decorative arts objects from that of the previous decades. Until the 1890's, very few individuals appreciated colonial furniture and ceramics for their aesthetic merits. Only collectors active in the 1870's and 1880's were aware of the intrinsic beauty in colonial furnishings; the first people since the original owners to gain such satisfaction. Collecting enhanced the value of colonial relics, and, consequently, pioneer collectors like Waters, Erving, and Lyon were succeeded, in part, by individuals who collected because it was fashionable. One furniture dealer in 1890 recounted the recent metamorphosis in collecting:

a few years ago agents used to be sent all through the rural parts of New England to pick up superannuated furniture of every kind--such as was found astray in farm houses, village attics, country hotels and elsewhere, having been handed down from generation to generation in the families of long-resident natives. The latter were usually willing enough to part with the treasures, which were only valuable in the eyes of people of aesthetic tastes, and the dealer paid a mere song for the articles, reaping a big profit. But now the supply obtained in this way has been practically exhausted.

Now it is the fashion for rich Yankee people to have in their houses one or two apartments in the old colonial style, with floor and walls of dark oak, massive rafters, huge fireplace, mahogany furniture, and an occasional spinning wheel.<sup>77</sup>

Certainly, the revival of interest in colonial furniture helped spawn the furniture reproductions business. An article in The Decorator and Furnisher in 1889 indicates that designers were well aware of both the simple beauty in colonial furniture and the market for reproductions. Colonial furniture to the author had "stateliness without stiffness, ornamentation that was tasteful without being in excess, embodiment of ornament in natural as distinguished from extreme conventionalised forms, that drew upon the classic without being enslaved by it, and, above all presented a breadth and repose as delightful to the eye as it was grateful to the mind."<sup>78</sup>

Furniture dealers were beginning to realize, and capitalize upon, what individual collectors had enjoyed for the two previous decades. Early collectors, such as Palmer, realized what they found attractive in colonial furniture and expressed themselves: "In bringing together specimens of English and Colonial cabinet work and silver, the finest examples I have had the opportunity of buying. I have been moved by two purposes, one to furnish a home in a distinctive way, the other more serious and important, namely, to demonstrate the but imperfectly and recently realized artistic tastes of our forefathers."<sup>79</sup>

Palmer's words were echoed in deed by other collectors in the 1890's, and collecting began to receive more than casual attention by the general populace. Collecting became the fashion: the fashion of the wealthy who had both the time and the means by which to collect. Further, the acceptance of collecting as a pastime did, in time, make an even greater portion of the population take notice of the colonial revival movement. In the next fifteen years collecting, while remaining fashionable, succeeded in becoming genuinely popular.

## FOOTNOTES

### CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>The House Beautiful (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881), p. 187--hereafter cited as Cook.

<sup>2</sup>See Rodris Roth, "The Colonial Revival and Centennial Furniture," Art Quarterly, 27 No. 1 (1964), 57-81.

<sup>3</sup>Curtis, pp. 71, 72.

<sup>4</sup>General Egbert L. Viele, "The Knickerbockers of New York Two Centuries Ago," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 54, No. 319 (December, 1876), 35.

<sup>5</sup>See Martha J. Lamb, "Lyme," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 52 (February, 1876), 313-328, and R. H. Stoddard, "Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," Scribner's Monthly, 17 (November, 1878), 1-8.

<sup>6</sup>C. Wyllys Elliott, "'The Good Old Times' at Plymouth," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 54 (January, 1877), 185.

<sup>7</sup>Cook, pp. 79, 225.

<sup>8</sup>Cook, pp. 317, 318, 218.

<sup>9</sup>See William C. Prime, "Some Notes about Pottery and Porcelain," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 58 (February, 1874), 320-327.

<sup>10</sup>William C. Prime, Pottery and Porcelain (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), p. 5--hereafter cited as Prime.

<sup>11</sup>Prime, p. 420.

<sup>12</sup>Prime, p. 432.

<sup>13</sup>[Annie Slosson]. The China Hunters Club (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1878), pp. 119-120.

<sup>14</sup>Arthur Little, Early New England Interiors (Boston: A. Williams Company, 1878), unppd, leaf 28.



<sup>15</sup>Letter from William C. Burrage to Henry F. Waters, April 26, 1876, Waters, Box 28, Folder 6-1876-77.

<sup>16</sup>Letter from James T. Moulton to Henry F. Waters, September 23, 1876, Waters, Box 28, Folder 6-1876-77.

<sup>17</sup>Letter from James T. Moulton to Henry F. Waters, May 1, 1877, Waters, Box 28, Folder 6-1876-77.

<sup>18</sup>Letter from Julia P. Dabney to Henry F. Waters, May 7, 1877, Waters, Box 28, Folder 6-1876-77.

<sup>19</sup>Letter from John Allen to Henry F. Waters, May 14, 1877, Waters, Box 28, Folder 6-1876-77.

<sup>20</sup>Receipt from John Allen to H. F. Waters, June 30, 1877, Waters, Box 29, Folder 8-Bills and Receipts, 1857-1893.

<sup>21</sup>Letter from C[larence] McCarthy to Henry F. Waters, August 9, 1877, Waters, Box 28, Folder 6-1876-77.

<sup>22</sup>Bill to Henry F. Waters from James T. Moulton, April 13-July 28, 1877, Henry Fitz Gilbert Waters Papers, Box 9-Misc. Manuscripts, bills receipts and printed material--hereafter cited as Henry Waters, Box 9.

<sup>23</sup>Letter from James T. Moulton to Henry F. Waters, September 3, 1877, Waters, Box 29, Folder 8-Bills and Receipts, 1857-1893.

<sup>24</sup>Receipt to Henry F. Waters from James T. Moulton, May 12, 1878, Henry Waters, Box 9.

<sup>25</sup>Page of a letter from James T. Moulton to Henry F. Waters, n.d., Waters Papers, Box 28, Folder 9-Misc. papers, 1867-1889 and undated letters.

<sup>26</sup>Letter from W. A. Bartlett to Henry F. Waters, February 28, 1878, Waters, Box 28, Folder 7-1878-82.

<sup>27</sup>Letter from Mrs. L. T. Leiter to Henry F. Waters, February 14, 1878, Henry Fitz Gilbert Waters Papers, Box 4-Letters to H. F. Waters, I-R--hereafter cited as Henry Waters, Box 4.

<sup>28</sup>Letter from James Eddy Mauran to Henry F. Waters, August 4, 1880, Henry Waters, Box 4.

<sup>29</sup>Henry Fitz Gilbert Waters, "Ancient Matters," Salem Gazette, June 29, 1880, clipping in manuscript collection of the Essex Institute.

<sup>30</sup>Letter from R[obert] T[reat] Paine, Jr., to Henry F. Waters, June 23, 1882, Henry Waters, Box 4.

<sup>31</sup>Letter from James Phinney Baxter to Henry F. Waters, June 27, 1883, Henry Fitz Gilbert Waters Papers, Box 1-Letters to H. F. Waters, A-B--hereafter cited as Henry Waters, Box 1.

<sup>32</sup>Letter from Dr. Irving W. Lyon to Henry F. Waters, January 31, 1886, Henry Waters, Box 4.

<sup>33</sup>Letter from Dr. Irving W. Lyon to Henry F. Waters, June 17, 1887, Henry Waters, Box 4.

<sup>34</sup>Irving W. Lyon, The Colonial Furniture of New England (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1924), p. III--hereafter cited as Lyon.

<sup>35</sup>"Dr. Irving W. Lyon," Obituary Scrapbooks, Connecticut Historical Society, 26, 35--hereafter cited as "Lyon," Scrapbooks.

<sup>36</sup>Lyon, pp. 144, 83, 84, 239.

<sup>37</sup>Copy of letter from George T. Robinson to Irving Lyon, August 21, 1888, Henry Waters, Box 4.

<sup>38</sup>Copy of letter from George T. Robinson to Irving Lyon, August 28, 1888, Henry Waters, Box 4.

<sup>39</sup>Letter from Irving Lyon to Henry Waters, September 9, 1888, Henry Waters, Box 4.

<sup>40</sup>Letter from Irving Lyon to Henry Waters, February 8, 1889, Henry Waters, Box 4.

<sup>41</sup>Lyon, p. 47.

<sup>42</sup>Letter from Irving Lyon to Henry Waters, April 15, 1891, Henry Waters, Box 4.

<sup>43</sup>Letter from George R. Curwen to Henry Waters, October 20, 1892, Waters, Box 29, Folder 2.

<sup>44</sup>C. A. L. Richards, rev. of Colonial Furniture of New England by Irving W. Lyon, The Dial, 12 (March, 1892), 387.

<sup>45</sup>"Dr. H. S. Fuller," Obituary Scrapbooks, Connecticut Historical Society, 81, 78--hereafter cited as "Fuller."

<sup>46</sup>Lyon, p. 120.

<sup>47</sup>"Fuller," 78.

<sup>48</sup>Letter to the author from Henry Maynard, Curator of American Arts, Wadsworth Atheneum, March 22, 1872.

<sup>49</sup>"Fuller," 79.

<sup>50</sup>"Dr. Fuller's Estate," Obituary Scrapbooks, Connecticut Historical Society, 81, 81.

<sup>51</sup>"Boardman, William F. J.," Obituary Scrapbooks, Connecticut Historical Society, 88, 118--hereafter cited as "Boardman."

<sup>52</sup>Lyon, p. 204.

<sup>53</sup>"Boardman," 119.

<sup>54</sup>Letter from W[illiam] G. Boardman to H. F. Waters, April 1, 1892, Waters, Box 29, Folder 2.

<sup>55</sup>Lyon, pp. 123, 169.

<sup>56</sup>Lyon, p. 143.

<sup>57</sup>Lyon, p. 121.

<sup>58</sup>Lyon, p. 253.

<sup>59</sup>See the unpublished M. S., Notes by Eugen Bolles on his collection of furniture, Archives, Metropolitan Museum of Art, unppd, leaf 24.

<sup>60</sup>Elihu Geer, Geer's Hartford City Directory (Hartford: Hartford Steam Printing Company, 1891), 54, 327.

<sup>61</sup>"Simons," Obituary Scrapbooks, Connecticut Historical Society, 25, 100--hereafter cited as "Simons."

<sup>62</sup>"Simons," 100.

<sup>63</sup>Lyon, p. 87.

<sup>64</sup>Clipping entitled "William Meggat," sent to the author by John C. Willard, Wethersfield, Connecticut, February 15, 1973.

<sup>65</sup>Luke Vincent Lockwood, Colonial Furniture in America, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1951), pp. 52, 85, 200, 265.

<sup>66</sup>Letter to the author from Harriet S. Meggat, February 28, 1973.

<sup>67</sup>Norman Morrison Isham, "George Shepard Palmer," Walpole Society Notebook, 1934 (Boston: The Walpole Society, 1935), pp. 63-64, 62, 63--hereafter cited as Isham.

<sup>68</sup>George S. Palmer, "Reminiscences of a Collector," Proceedings of Connecticut Society of Colonial Wars, 2 (1909), 215--hereafter cited as Palmer.

- <sup>69</sup> Isham, pp. 63, 64.
- <sup>70</sup> Isham, p. 68.
- <sup>71</sup> "Blue India China," Scribner's Monthly, 14 (August, 1877), 565.
- <sup>72</sup> Sampson, Davenport & Co., Salem Directory (Salem: Sampson, Davenport & Co., 1878), 17, 307.
- <sup>73</sup> See The Providence and Rhode Island Register and Business Directory, 1880 (Providence, Rhode Island: Sampson, Murdock & Co., 1881), and The Newport Directory (Providence: J. A. and R. A. Reid, 1879).
- <sup>74</sup> Edward Eggleston, "Social Conditions in the Colonies," The Century Magazine, 28 (October, 1844), 848-871.
- <sup>75</sup> Wendell Garrett, "Earle, Alice Morse," in Notable American Women 1607-1950, ed. Edward T. James (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 542.
- <sup>76</sup> Alice Morse Earle, China Collecting in America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), pp. 2, 15.
- <sup>77</sup> "Antiquities Made to Order," Scientific American, February 15, 1890, p. 99.
- <sup>78</sup> James Carruthers, "Colonial Furniture," The Decorator and Furnisher, May, 1889, p. 53.
- <sup>79</sup> Palmer, 218-219.

This [Columbian Exposition] is not a local affair. It is America putting its best foot forward, and a visit to these grounds stirs the national pride and kindles to a glow the patriotism of every citizen.<sup>1</sup>

--Editor's Study,  
Harper's New  
Monthly Magazine

### CHAPTER III

#### THE COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION TO THE FOUNDING OF THE WALPOLE SOCIETY

National expositions are only one method of measuring growth in the collecting movement, but they provide an index of how American taste changed in the seventeen years between the Centennial and the Columbian Exposition. Neither the Centennial nor the Columbian Exposition devoted much exhibition space to the display of colonial decorative arts objects. Both national extravaganzas measured America's technological and manufacturing growth, but emphasis on describing America's past received expanded attention at the Columbian Exposition. The New England states were, not surprisingly, leaders among the movement to display relics of the colonial period. While Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont devoted little or none of their exhibition space to the display of colonial relics,<sup>2</sup> Massachusetts and Rhode Island, as well as several non-New England states, joined Connecticut, the only state exhibitor of colonial relics at the Centennial, in offering the public glimpses of quasi-colonial furnishings and architecture in Chicago.

The Massachusetts pavilion at the Columbian Exposition was a modified reconstruction of the Hancock house, a Boston dwelling that had been torn down only thirty years before. The woodwork, decoration, and furnishings of several of the rooms were left to the Essex Institute,

whose members responded with enthusiasm. Mr. E. C. Hovey, the Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of World's Fair Managers, asked the Essex Institute to be responsible for the furnishing of the main reception room of the state building. The Institute's committee dealing with the World's Fair decided "to have the furniture illustrative of the period from the time of the first settlement of Salem until its commercial period at the beginning of the present century. . . ." Among the furniture exhibited was a court cupboard loaned by William C. Waters (Henry F. Waters' cousin), an oak table listed as "Massachusetts Bay Colony period," loaned by Mr. W. J. Stickney, a Salem antiques dealer, and "two high-backed oak chairs (Renaissance), loaned by Mr. and Mrs. J. T. Moulton, Lynn." The exhibition also included a number of pieces of ceramics of which over thirty examples were contributed by Stickney.<sup>3</sup>

Hovey had apparently turned to the Essex Institute only after having his request rejected by the Concord Antiquarian Society. In a letter from Hovey, dated May 28, 1892, addressed to the President of the Concord Antiquarian Society, the secretary stated "our Board is more than anxious to place some of these [Cummings Davis'] articles in the State Building to be erected at Chicago. I, personally, have visited a number of Historical Societies, but nowhere have seen such an interesting collection as there is in your building."<sup>4</sup>

The exterior of the Rhode Island pavilion was largely its contribution to the Exposition. One description of the building stated that "certain architectural features were introduced into the building with the intention of representing, or rather suggesting, some historic

and characteristic structures in Rhode Island."<sup>5</sup> The majority of the rooms were devoted to Rhode Island manufactures but one area of the house included a "colonial exhibit collected by Mrs. William Grosvenor." The exhibition included a number of historic articles such as an iron candlestick owned by Reverend David Avery and supposedly used by Washington, as well as candlesticks, and a tray and snuffers once belonging to Nathaniel Greene.<sup>6</sup>

The Connecticut State Building undoubtedly offered the most profound endorsement of the colonial spirit found at the Exposition. The building did not copy any existing Connecticut structure, but was "designed to represent a type of structure that was in great favor among well-to-do people in this state in colonial times. . . ."<sup>7</sup> Great effort and expense was spent on transporting portions of the interiors of Connecticut houses to the Exposition site. The extensive antique furnishings were acquired through loans from Connecticut residents. The romantic attitude of the contributors is represented in one description of the building's interior:

the Committee secured many interesting loans which served to make the interior attractive and homelike, the various articles being of such character as to aid in carrying out the original design. The Windsor and Charter Oak rooms were furnished as exhibits representing guest chambers of Colonial days. There were highpost bedsteads, surmounted by canopies which prevented attacks from marauding bands of Revolutionary mosquitoes; and high, fluffy feather beds covered with counterpanes wrought by gentle hands that rested from their labors long before the dawn of the present century; antique washstands, with washbowls and pitchers to match; old-fashioned chairs, in which people of a former generation could, possibly, have taken their case; mirrors that,



perchance, reflected the loveliness of many a dame or maiden of the long-ago; candlesticks and snuffers that served good purpose before the advent of those sisters of light, camphene and kerosene. . . .<sup>8</sup>

The rooms on the lower floor were treated with equal care and devotion (Figure 29).

The contributors of furnishings to the Connecticut building were not collectors but rather descendents and historical society wardens of Connecticut's heritage. Surprisingly, none of the major collectors of the Hartford area made contributions to the exhibition. Even in the 1890's, collectors were aware of the misfortune that might affect their collections should they be transported a long distance and placed on public display.<sup>9</sup>

Many of the relics contributed to the Connecticut pavilion would be scorned today as mere curiosities. Exhibited articles included a "bottle containing acorn from the Charter Oak, breastpin, carved from the Charter Oak . . .," and similar items, but in general the exhibition was more sophisticated in taste than the objects exhibited in the Connecticut cottage at Centennial. Among the decorative arts objects exhibited were an "old oaken chest, brought to America in 1682 by Thomas Robinson," a "brass and copper warming-pan, 1779, old Windsor chair, made and owned by the first Pastor of Cumminton, 1762, antique dining table, 1778 to 1800," and a "Windsor chair, 1795, made at first chair factory established in America."<sup>10</sup>

While it is impossible to determine the effect on the collecting movement by exhibitions of relics, their expanding number corresponds to



Figure 29  
Parlor of the Connecticut Pavilion at Columbian Exposition

the increase of collectors in the 1890's. Decorative arts subjects received increased attention in periodicals and books at this time. Several books originally published in England were printed in America in the 1890's. Among them was Frederick Litchfield's Illustrated History of Furniture, published in Boston in 1893, and "limited to an edition of two hundred copies for America."<sup>11</sup>

The first American photographic portfolio of colonial architecture and furniture, Colonial Architecture and Furniture, by E. E. Soderholtz, appeared two years after the American edition of Litchfield's book. Soderholtz's book was published by George Polley Company and in the introduction he confesses that "of the furniture there is hardly enough to make special mentions; suffice to say that the example shown are chiefly copies of Chippendale and Hepplewhite, and are in possession of the descendents of the original families."<sup>12</sup> While the majority of the plates are of architectural interior details a number are of furniture. The plates are scantily labeled, and only Plate XXVI includes information other than the town of origin. It has the caption "Curwen House, Salem, Massachusetts," and since George Curwen, the collector, was the only Curwen living in Salem in 1895 the photograph is most likely of his collection (Figure 30). The photograph is the only known picture of the Curwen collection before it was dispersed and shows an early-eighteenth-century leather chair, a Federal period, shield-back chair, a fire screen, and a collection of ceramics.

Alvan Crocker Nye's volume, Colonial Furniture, published in the same year as Soderholtz's photographic portfolio, emphasized a more



Figure 30  
George Curwen collection in Salem, Massachusetts

technical approach to colonial furnishings. His book is a collection of scale drawings of furniture from various sources. A court cupboard from the Waters' collection is included among the designs, but no other individual collectors are named. Nye's volume, while helpful to collectors because it illustrated various examples of colonial furniture, was directed more pointedly at the craftsman and the furniture designer.

Several decorative arts publications also appeared in 1896.

Harper's New Monthly Magazine published the first scholarly article on American metal ware, entitled "Old Silver." It was written by a Yale University professor, Theodore S. Woolsey (1852-1929), himself a collector. The article seems to have aroused considerably more attention from the viewpoint of later collectors than J. H. Buck's, Old Plate (1888), published by the Gorham Silver Company, probably because Woolsey conveyed to the readers a genuine love for his silver.<sup>13</sup>

The Polley Company issued its second photographic volume of New England architecture and furniture in 1896 when Newton Elwell published Colonial Furniture and Interiors. This collection of plates followed the same format as the one by Soderholtz and exhibited a similar naiveté in regard to colonial furniture. Nevertheless, Elwell possessed an appreciation of colonial furnishings and he noted in his introduction that, "many persons who are unable to furnish their homes in this way, strive to possess a few chairs or a table to keep in touch with the fashion, and it is a satisfaction to know that much of this fine old furniture has been preserved, however incongruous its present surroundings."<sup>14</sup> Elwell's purpose in compiling his volume was "to give

a comprehensive idea of colonial furnishings as they existed in the colonial period, and to show some of the many unique designs in furniture which may still be found in certain localities."<sup>15</sup> Like Soderholtz's portfolio many of the plates are of architectural exteriors, interiors, and doorways, but a substantial number of plates are of furniture. There is no discernible method to Elwell's grouping of furniture and examples of colonial furniture are intermingled with contemporary English or Continental furniture, as well as some late-nineteenth-century colonial revival creations. Plate XXXV, a group of chairs that are most likely latter-nineteenth-century machine-made examples, is accompanied by the caption "CHAIRS AT SALEM, MASS. These chairs have been in possession of one family 130 years." Amidst all the confusion are the earliest known photographs of the Waters' collection in Salem. Plate XLVII contains two photographs of a court cupboard (Figure 31) and a chest with applied turnings.

Throughout the 1890's the number of articles and books related to the decorative arts increased as did the number of historical societies. Their purpose was succinctly expressed in 1898 by the president of the Danvers Historical Society speaking on the 50th anniversary of the Essex Institute:

They [historical societies] seek and collect, from far and near, for safe keeping and profitable use, such memorials of the past or objects of nature, as shall be suitable for such institutions and shall best illustrate the manners and customs, the arts and industries, the thought and life, of generations gone. . . .<sup>16</sup>

By 1909 thirty more historical societies were added to the seventy-eight that had been formed by the time of the Columbian Exposition.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 31  
Waters collection in Salem, Massachusetts

A number of new individuals joined the collecting ranks in the 1890's. C. Alice Baker, one of the earliest serious female collectors of colonial decorative arts objects, began collecting in 1890 (Figure 32). Miss Baker, according to her life-long companion and biographer, Emma L. Coleman, moved from Cambridge to Deerfield, Massachusetts, where she decided to restore an eighteenth-century tavern. The dilapidated structure, built by one of Miss Baker's forbearers, she christened "Frery House." She proceeded to decorate the House with furnishings stored in the attic of her home in Cambridge. As Miss Coleman stated, "Miss Baker's love for old things was always very keen and the treasures she had kept in her Cambridge garret could now be placed."<sup>18</sup> Throughout the 1890's she also purchased various pieces of furniture from dealers in Boston, Newburyport, and other towns in New England.<sup>19</sup> By the time of her death in 1909, Miss Baker had furnished the tavern, and it eventually was opened to the public.

Both Henry Waters and George Curwen continued to collect in the 1890's and indirectly spurred others to the same pursuit. Curwen wrote Waters, who happened to be in London, in November, 1893, concerning a recent purchase:

Couldn't resist the temptation could you when you saw the old chair, cut glass jar and ginger jar. You know I can sympathize with you. People who have such tastes can't help it . . . A short time ago I went into Wm Lee's shop, he showed me a silver tea set he had bought for old silver, I asked him what he would sell it for, he said \$45, I told him I would give him 40, he said split the difference and call it \$42.50. I took him up and carried it home nobody knows of it so don't mention it to anyone.<sup>20</sup>





Figure 32  
Miss C. Alice Baker

The following year, just prior to Waters' return from England, Curwen wrote how envious he was of all Waters had collected in England. He stated "the silver would tempt me more than anything, you know I have always had a weakness that way. I am possessed now of over 700 ounces . . ."21 Curwen, like any ecstatic collector, enjoyed telling his friends of his purchases. In 1895 he wrote Waters about a William and Mary period desk he had recently bought. After fully describing his purchase he ended with "I should like to have you pass judgement on it."22

While some collectors like Waters became less active in the 1890's, others like George Palmer proceeded to enlarge their collections. Palmer began collecting on such a grand scale that he offered to buy entire collections as he had done with Walter Hosmer's. He wrote Waters in 1893 that after seeing "the frequent reference to your old Colonial furniture in Dr. Lyon's book," his curiosity was excited and he visited Henry Waters' brother Charles to examine it. He added:

the various pieces made a deep impression upon me and since that time I have thought a good deal about them. I, myself, am trying to get together fine specimens of eighteenth century furniture with the expectation that they may remain together in some public institution for the profit and pleasure of future generations. It seems to me that the old things which have come down to us from the first settlers in our country should be carefully gathered together and preserved in places where they may be studied advantageously by large numbers of people; and it has occurred to me that possibly you might be willing to part with a portion or the whole of your collection with the understanding that it was to be devoted to such public uses. There were some pieces of eighteenth century work in the house, notably a carved bedstead and a book-case secretary which are

especially suitable to include in the collection I am making. If you saw fit to dispose of these particular pieces I should be willing to give a very high price for them.<sup>23</sup>

Although, Waters' response to the letter is unrecorded, Palmer was unsuccessful in his attempts to obtain part or all of the collection.

One of the major collectors who became more active in the 1890's was Charles L. Pendleton (1849-1904), a Providence, Rhode Island, lawyer (Figure 33). After graduating from Yale College and Yale Law School, Pendleton set up practice in Providence, and also began collecting furniture, silver, ceramics, and paintings.<sup>24</sup> He dealt with the Providence cabinetmaker-antiques dealer, Rudolph Breitenstein. According to his grandson, Breitenstein "took a horse and wagon on buying trips once or twice a year as far as Philadelphia, sometimes into the south, and on his return would sell the great pieces to Pendleton."<sup>25</sup> While very little is known about Pendleton's collecting activities, he apparently was dealing himself by 1901. A bill exists, made out from Pendleton to R[udolph] H. Breitenstein, that records the latter as buying "one base to block front high case of drawers" for \$100. Pendleton credited Breitenstein \$60 for making "repairs to inlaid sofa," and, consequently, the bill was for only \$40. The heading "Bought of C. L. Pendleton" and "Fine Antique Furniture, Rare Old Porcelain, Oriental Rugs, and Decorative Works of Art" is printed on Breitenstein's bill.<sup>26</sup> Pendleton had compiled one of the most extensive decorative arts collections in New England at the time of his death in 1904. A few weeks before he died Pendleton decided to will his collection to the Rhode Island School of Design, if they would agree to build a colonial



Figure 33  
Charles L. Pendleton

revival house in which to display it.<sup>27</sup> His bequest set the precedent for the donation of decorative arts collections to museums and universities. In the same year, Luke Vincent Lockwood, a friend and fellow collector, wrote a volume describing Pendleton's collection. A number of illustrations of individual pieces of furniture in the collection are included as well as one photograph of the entrance hall (Figure 34).

Pendleton commanded considerable respect in the field of decorative arts, although he "had never been prominent in public or political life [and] he belonged to no organizations of any sort."<sup>28</sup> Lockwood paid him the highest tribute:

I know of nobody who has had a better influence in the field of art than has he, and he can truly be called the father of art as applied to furniture in this country. There is hardly a collector here who has not received help and inspiration from Mr. Pendleton.<sup>29</sup>

While Irving Lyon and Henry Waters might dispute that claim, Pendleton was, nevertheless, one of the most significant collectors of the nineteenth century.

Lockwood, himself, was an important collector during the 1890's (Figure 35). He was a native of Brooklyn, New York, and became interested in collecting while he was a student at Trinity College, where he made his first purchase, a "highboy."<sup>30</sup> Like Waters and Potter, Lockwood grew up surrounded by a home filled with colonial decorative arts objects. After his marriage in 1895,<sup>31</sup> Lockwood claimed that he was a more avaricious collector out of economic urgency; he found that colonial furniture cost less than contemporary furniture. While living in



Figure 34  
Pendleton Collection in Providence, Rhode Island

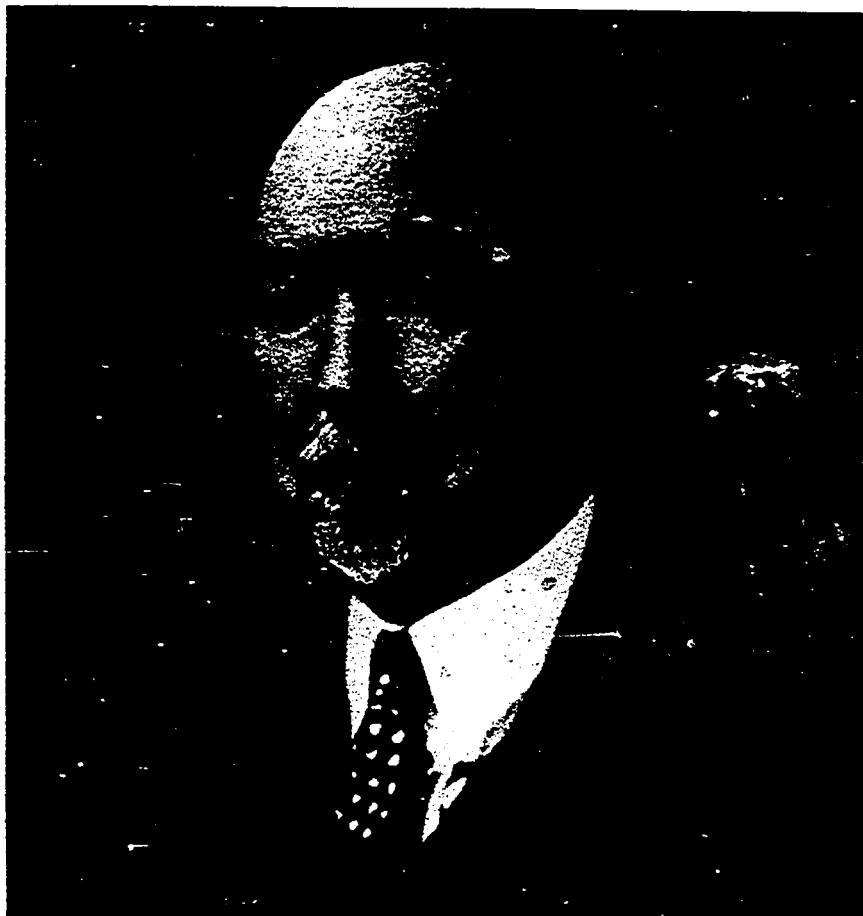


Figure 35  
Luke Vincent Lockwood

Greenwich, Connecticut, he maintained professional law offices in New York and eventually became senior partner of the firm of Hill, Lockwood, and Redfield.<sup>32</sup> Lockwood's contributions to the field include the authorship of Colonial Furniture In America in 1901. His book was one of the standard works for collectors in the first half of this century went through two further editions, and has been reprinted numerous times. Lockwood's collection was extensive and he illustrated his book with a number of personally owned examples. His collection was eventually sold at two Parke-Bernet auctions in 1942 and 1954. A number of unusual pieces of furniture were sold at the latter sale, including a matching block-front chest on chest and knee-hole dressing table, and the disputed "Nicholas Disbrowe" carved oak chest.

The Boston area continued to contribute an unusually large number of important collectors in the 1890's. Francis Hill Bigelow (1859-1933), a resident of Cambridge, was one of the most successful furniture and silver collectors living around Boston in the early 1900's. He was a merchant who retired in 1906 and devoted considerable time to collecting and writing about silver.<sup>33</sup> Bigelow became fascinated with colonial decorative arts objects at the Bunker Hill exhibition in 1875, but it was not until the 1890's that he began collecting.<sup>34</sup> While his specialty was silver, he did not limit himself to one field entirely and his house was decorated extensively with his purchases (Figure 36).

Bigelow was unusual in that he was not sensitive about lending portions of his collection for public display. He played an important role throughout the first decade of the twentieth century in allowing





Figure 36  
Francis Hill Bigelow collection in Cambridge, Massachusetts

museums to borrow his silver and furniture for their own exhibitions.

His collection also received considerable attention in various decorative arts publications such as Frances Clary Morse's Furniture of Olden Time (1902), the 1913 edition of Lockwood's Colonial Furniture in America, and John Ware Willard's Simon Willard and His Clocks (1911).

Like Waters and Pendleton, Bigelow helped to support his "habit" by occasionally selling decorative arts objects to other collectors and museums. In 1911 he wrote Lawrence Park, an art historian, that he was willing to let him have a silver tankard for two hundred and fifty dollars. He stated:

I would not let anyone else have it for this price, however, I think I could sell it to a rich acquaintance for \$350 or more, perhaps \$400, but I think you can hardly consider this the market value. However, there is no price on antiques.<sup>35</sup>

In 1923 Bigelow decided that most of his collection should be sold at auction. He wrote Park:

you will be interested to know (perhaps) that I am going to sell at auction in NY at the Anderson Galleries all my early furniture, i.e. earlier than Sheraton and some of the Sheraton duplicates! This is on January 17th. A catalogue will be sent to you in due course. I had become discouraged about the objects ever being kept together and going to a museum and so decided to take a chance and take the consequences. Whether bad or good! I have always hoped I would be at my own auction, so I shall now have the opportunity to attend.<sup>36</sup>

Bigelow apparently was thinking of his collection as Pendleton did, as a means to immortality. While his anticipated wish, to have a public

collection bear his name, did not come true, this type of thinking was not uncommon, and today the majority of important institutional furniture collections bear the name of a benefactor or previous owner.

William Whiting Nolen (1860-1923) was a lesser known Cambridge collector. Nolen, a native of Philadelphia, was a graduate of Harvard, class of 1884.<sup>37</sup> From the 1890's until the time of his death, he lived in Cambridge where he ran a tutoring school, and received the nickname "The Widow."<sup>38</sup> It was during this period that Nolen compiled his collection of furniture, ceramics, glass, and clocks. Nolen remained out of the mainstream of collecting camaraderie and kept to himself. In 1923 his collection was sold at Anderson Galleries in New York and among the furnishings were several "banjo clock" presentation pieces and a pair of Chippendale side chairs with a Washington family history.<sup>39</sup>

Several other Boston collectors of the same period were Dwight Blaney (1865-1944) and Hollis French (1868-1940). Blaney, an architect and an artist, was a multifaceted individual who had many interests, one of which was collecting decorative arts. He collected furniture of all periods as well as silver, pewter, glass, and paintings. His collecting reached such heights that he eventually filled to capacity four houses: in Boston, Weston, on Cape Cod, and on an island in Maine.<sup>40</sup> Like his contemporaries Blaney decorated each house in a style appropriate to the period of the building. Little is known about where Blaney did his buying although many of his purchases were exceptional and are illustrated in Morse's Furniture of the Olden Time. Included in his collection were a cabriole leg high chest with steps for ceramics and a mahogany Federal

period sideboard with ivory escutcheons and stringing.<sup>41</sup> Part of Blaney's collection was sold at a Boston auction in 1945 but much of the collection is still owned by descendants.

Hollis French, much like Bigelow had a special interest in American silver. A graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, class of 1889, French became an engineer and a "pioneer in the field of interior lighting." R. T. Haines Halsey, a New York collector and contemporary of French, recalled how enthusiastic the latter would get over each new purchase: "I remember how his eyes sparkled as he told of some acquisition in the line of American silver, the fascinations of which had caused him to transfer his interest from his previous hobby, our early furniture."<sup>42</sup> French was an important contributor of both silver and furniture to the most important display of colonial decorative arts held in the first quarter of the twentieth century: the Hudson-Fulton Exhibition of 1909. His loans to the Exhibition included a William and Mary style daybed and a child's high chair, as well as numerous pieces of silver.<sup>43</sup> French left much of his silver collection to the Cleveland Museum just prior to his death in 1940.<sup>44</sup>

French refers to Theodore Woolsey, the Connecticut collector, as the "dean" of American silver collectors.<sup>45</sup> He was the son of a president of Yale University, and received considerable recognition for an article on silver in Harper's. Eventually he became a professor of international law at Yale, while quietly pursuing his collecting in New Haven.<sup>46</sup>

George Dudley Seymour (1859-1945), although he started collecting in the previous decade, was one of the most prominent Connecticut collectors during the 1890's and early 1900's. Seymour moved to New Haven in 1883 after spending some time in Washington as a patent lawyer.<sup>47</sup> Gradually he began to amass a collection that consisted primarily of seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Connecticut furniture. Seymour's adoration of the colonial patriot, Nathan Hale, was known throughout Connecticut and he was largely responsible for making Hale remembered and revered. Hale's farm became Seymour's antiquarian domain and he entertained numerous visitors there, among them John Lafarge and John Singer Sargent.<sup>48</sup> Seymour was unusually fastidious in his collecting habits, and "Cousin George," as his peers affectionately called him, kept a notebook of his furniture purchases. Much of his collection was eventually left to the Connecticut Historical Society, along with sufficient endowment to have it displayed.

In 1958 the Society published a catalogue of Seymour's collection which included anecdotes from his notebook regarding individual pieces of furniture. Seymour relied almost exclusively on the Robbins brothers cabinetmaking firm in Hartford for repairs to and refinishing of the furniture he purchased. He was not always happy with the firm's work as he made clear when he recorded his feelings about a candle stand they repaired. Seymour wrote:

restored by Robbins Bros. who planed the top and mahoganized the whole piece. It should now be restored to its original appearance by having the present finish removed. . . . I have to admit that I have always felt sore against Robbins

Bros. for such a stupid and damaging job as was the 'putting in order' of this really good old turned-work table.<sup>49</sup>

Most of the furniture in Seymour's collection was acquired in Connecticut although he did purchase a chest in Brookline and a court cupboard in Concord, Massachusetts.<sup>50</sup> Wherever he bought a piece of furniture that needed repairs, he took it to Patrick Stevens, an employee of the Robbins firm. Unfortunately, for his furniture, Seymour continued to patronize the Robbins' and the majority of his collection suffered through the course of being "put in order" by Stevens.<sup>51</sup>

The increasing number of collectors in the 1890's brought a new demand for decorative arts publications. R. T. Haines Halsey's Early New York on Dark Blue Staffordshire Pottery was released in 1899 and two years later Lockwood's Colonial Furniture in America and Esther Singleton's Furniture of Our Forefathers were published. They were followed by Frances Clary Morse's Furniture of the Olden Time in 1902 and Mrs. N. Hudson Moore's The Old Furniture Book in 1903. The emphasis of each of the latter volumes was to acquaint the reader with various periods of furniture by briefly discussing the precedents for "colonial" furniture, using illustrations of furniture in various public and private collections. Scholarship was not the driving force behind the publication of these volumes, rather it was the intention of the author to familiarize the would-be collector with the aesthetic principles of each style of furniture from the Elizabethan period through the beginning of the nineteenth century. Unlike Irving Lyon neither of the latter authors had the interest nor spent the time establishing the exact

furniture terminology of a period or extensively utilizing the information provided by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century inventories. The salient quality of these volumes was their ability to attract the attention of numerous Americans and provide them with the information necessary to the appreciation of the development of colonial decorative arts.

Lockwood states succinctly in the preface to his book that his intention was to create a "trusty handbook" on colonial furniture and "to enable anyone at a glance to determine under what general style and date a piece of furniture falls."<sup>52</sup> Mrs. Moore added that with the "revival of interest in all 'antiques,' which is so widely spread at this time, any of us who chance to own an old piece of furniture feel an added degree of affection for it if we can give it an approximate date and assign it to a maker or a country."<sup>53</sup> The author was keenly aware that most Americans were in need of answers to very basic questions about colonial decorative arts.

Like Lockwood, Miss Morse's intention was to create a handbook for collectors. Miss Morse (1855-1933), a sister of Alice Morse Earle, and herself a collector, stated in her introduction how popular collecting had recently become:

not many years ago the collector of old furniture and china was jeered at, and one who would, even twenty years since, buy an old "high-boy" rather than a new black walnut chiffonier, was looked upon as "queer." All that is now changed. The chiffonier is banished for the high-boy, when the

belated collector can secure one, and the influence of antique furniture may be seen in the immense quantity of new furniture modelled after the antique designs. . . .<sup>54</sup>

A large portion of Miss Morse's own ceramic collection was sold at a New York auction in 1912.<sup>55</sup>

The "torch of antiquity" that was raised by Harper's and Scribner's in the 1890's was grasped in the early 1900's by other magazines. The articles, written to placate the desire for knowledge about colonial decorative arts, as well as suggestions on how to adapt colonial furnishings to twentieth-century surroundings, made an increasingly larger portion of American society aware of "antiques." In 1903, Country Life in America began featuring a column entitled "For the Country Home."<sup>56</sup> A pamphlet, "Quaint Colonial Things," that served as an introduction to colonial decorative arts was advertised, along with a desk in the stock of an antique dealer, and Singleton's The Furniture of Our Forefathers. Other magazines, including American Home, House Beautiful, and The Craftsman began calling attention to the revived interest in colonial furnishings. Most of the magazine articles accepted the collecting movement as a worthwhile facet to American life. On occasion, however, a writer would speak out against the casual and insincere collector. In a New England Magazine article written in 1903, the author noted the presence of the "very general fad which is fast enriching the dealers in antiquities and is making our modern homes mere museums of ill-sorted relics."<sup>57</sup> The author added that "anything ancient, however ugly, cracked, useless, frail past handling, is 'the thing.'"<sup>58</sup> The article made the point that while the



serious collector was attracted by only fine examples of colonial workmanship and places them in an appropriate setting should not be condemned. It was the casual collector who decorated haphazardly with an incoherent smattering of colonial furnishings that did so in an absence of taste. The author concluded that:

every one has seen the modern parlor which boasts for its centrepiece a spinning wheel, painted white and decorated with ribbons. You have also pitied the frieze of old blue plates hung around the up-to-date dining room. You have stumbled over sprawling, spidery-legged crickets planted in the middle of the chamber, and have suffered agonies while trying to repose on old-fashioned high-backed pew seats arranged as settles by the gas log fire. All this offends good taste.<sup>59</sup>

The more serious collector, not surprisingly, also disdained many of the same characteristics of the antiques movement, of which the author complained.

In 1904 the Louisiana Purchase Exposition was held in St. Louis, and as in the Columbian Exposition, the interest in colonial decorative arts made its presence felt. A great number of the state buildings were either copies or modifications of extant colonial dwellings. The Massachusetts pavilion was adapted from the state capitol and the Longfellow home in Cambridge, while New Hampshire reproduced the Salisbury home of Daniel Webster.<sup>60</sup> Some of the pavilions included exhibitions of colonial furnishings. Connecticut repeated the theme of a colonial parlor, that it had done at the Columbian Exposition (Figure 37). The exhibitions, in general, were carried off with a greater understanding of colonial interior decoration and it is evident that the increasing

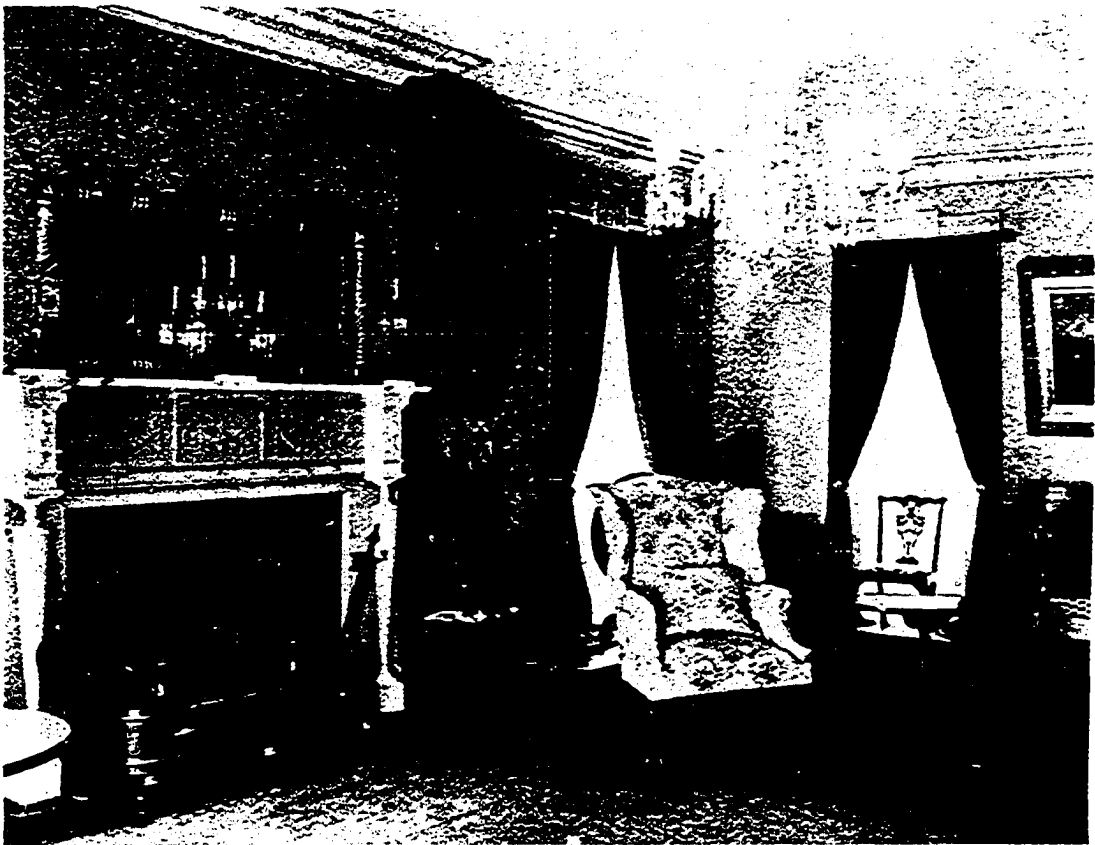


Figure 37  
Parlor of the Connecticut Pavilion at the  
Louisiana Purchase Exposition

interest in collecting made the arrangements of colonial furnishings more accurate and explainable to visitors.

Exhibitions, in the early 1900's began to play a greater role in bringing collectors into contact with displays of colonial silver and furniture. In 1906, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, after the prompting of Francis Bigelow and R. T. Haines Halsey, organized an exhibition of colonial silver.<sup>61</sup> Bigelow was helped in his arrangement of the exhibition by John H. Buck, curator of metal work at the Metropolitan Museum.<sup>62</sup> The exhibition was believed by the Fine Arts Museum to be "the earliest endeavor to bring together a series of this sort."<sup>63</sup> While the number of visitors to the exhibition is unknown, the exhibition lasted throughout the summer of 1906 and, undoubtedly, furthered the general interest in collecting colonial silver. Bigelow mentions in his book Historic Silver of the Colonies and Its Makers (1917) that the exhibition prompted E. Alfred Jones, an Englishman who later wrote the book The Old Silver of American Churches (1913), to visit America and research its silver.<sup>64</sup>

In the next few years, interest in collecting began to snowball. An exhibition of colonial silver was held at the Jamestown Ter-Centennial Exposition (1907), "period" rooms were organized at the Essex Institute (1908), and numerous books and articles on colonial furnishings and collecting appeared in popular periodicals. The Hudson-Fulton Celebration, held in New York in 1909, was the major collecting event of the first decade of the twentieth century. The Celebration, which involved several New York city museums, was thought to have been seen by the

"greatest number of human beings that ever got together on this hemisphere," outside of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and the coronation of King Edward.<sup>65</sup> As part of its contribution to the Celebration, the Metropolitan Museum held an exhibition of what they called the "industrial arts," that embraced the period "from the earliest Colonial times in New England and New Amsterdam to about the time of Fulton's death, namely 1815."<sup>66</sup> Henry Watson Kent, the Secretary of the Metropolitan, was one of the individuals responsible for organizing the exhibition. Collectors from all over New England, as well as New York City, contributed enough paintings, silver, and furniture to fill several exhibition galleries (Figure 38).

Most of the important New England collectors were represented in the exhibition, although R. T. Haines Halsey, the New York collector, contributed the largest number of objects to the exhibition. Furniture lenders included Bigelow, Blaney, Morse, Lockwood, and French, as well as Irving W. Lyon's son Irving P. Lyon, who had inherited his father's collection. Woolsey and French contributed silver from their collections, as did Halsey and Palmer. Palmer, and his cousin, Bolles, also loaned a great number of the pieces of furniture exhibited. Before the end of the exhibition Bolles had decided to sell the Metropolitan a large portion of his collection of furniture, numbering over four hundred pieces. While the furniture did not go on display for several years, it was received in the Museum Bulletin with appropriate accolades. The Bulletin spoke of the "great intrinsic value" to the collection and of its "significance in the history of our American art,



Figure 38  
American decorative arts gallery at the Hudson-Fulton Celebration

and the conservation of it."<sup>67</sup>

The Hudson-Fulton exhibition provided not only the forum for the building of a great collection of American decorative Arts at the Metropolitan but also for the establishment of the Walpole Society in America. Three collectors, Bolles, Lockwood, and Kent, met at the Union Club in Boston in 1910 and decided to form a group, for the purpose of, in Kent's words, "sharing enthusiasms, exchanging views, and so increasing the knowledge of the arts of our early days."<sup>68</sup> A list of names were proposed for membership in their society, which was to be known as the Walpole Society in memory of Horace Walpole, the "one whose turn of mind and methods of collecting were similar to those of our collectors."<sup>69</sup> All but four of the twenty-one individuals invited to join the Society accepted and in addition to the founders they included: Bigelow, Blaney, Erving, French, Halsey, Palmer, and Woolsey.<sup>70</sup> In 1913 a photograph on an excursion was taken of members of the Walpole Society (Figure 39). Other prominent New England collectors invited to join were Richard Canfield (1855-1914) and Charles Hitchcock Tyler (1863-1931). Canfield, undoubtedly the most flamboyant early member of the Society, was a native of New Bedford, Massachusetts, who grew up in Rhode Island. He acquired a passion for gambling, after spending several summers working in resort hotels, and organized a gambling house in Providence that lasted for five or six years before being closed by the police. After a brief term in the Cranston, Rhode Island, jail, Canfield set up gambling organizations in New York City and Saratoga Springs. Eventually his gambling holdings



Figure 39  
The Walpole Society on an excursion in 1913

gave way to public pressure and he became one of the biggest "operators" on Wall Street. Throughout this period, Canfield, "a man of culture and refinement," collected ceramics, paintings, and furniture.<sup>71</sup>

Canfield collected some of his furniture in Providence, where he associated with his two boyhood friends, Pendleton and Marsden Perry (1850-1935), to whom Canfield's collection was eventually sold.<sup>72</sup> One of the more impressive pieces of furniture in his collection was a desk and bookcase in the Newport style exhibited at the Hudson-Fulton Celebration.<sup>73</sup> Canfield at one point went through a period where he became friendly with James McNeill Whistler, collecting his paintings, and having his portrait painted, the last completed by the artist.<sup>74</sup> Canfield's death was as spectacular as his life and he died in 1914 after a fall in a New York subway entrance.<sup>75</sup>

Charles Tyler, of Boston, a law partner of Eugene Bolles, was also invited to join the Society in 1910. While Tyler's collection was so large that he had examples of furniture from the seventeenth century up through the middle of the nineteenth century, he had a special interest in early pieces of furniture of oak and pine.<sup>76</sup> Tyler also collected silver and French reminiscences that he remembered being at the former's house in Boston and examining his collection. Tyler "placed on the table a sweetmeat box and standing salt which took our breath away."<sup>77</sup> At the time of his death, Tyler left his entire collection, both silver and furniture, to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.



Some of the more important furniture gifts included a japanned high chest, a "Hadley" chest, and a Federal period desk and bookcase.<sup>78</sup>

The Walpole Society was, as Henry Erving expressed it to his fellow members in 1935,

to all of us the beginning of congenial and new friendships and the cementing of the old. There usually comes the desire to perpetuate and distribute the good in ones hobbies, and information and knowledge can certainly be classed among the things which are good. The benefits, and certainly happiness, we have each-- I think-- derived from the association, have made the inauguration and maintenance of the Society one of the most worth while things of life.<sup>79</sup>

The Society provided a common outlet for collectors to exchange information, participate in journeys to historic sites or individual collections, and to sponsor the publication of worthwhile projects in the decorative arts. Almost immediately committees were formed to prepare for publication "glossaries of terms used in collecting furniture, silver and ceramics."<sup>80</sup>

In the years after the formation of the Society, collecting grew to such a scale that "antiques" became a ubiquitous term. Collecting had become an accepted, if not always understood, part of American society. Different classes of collectors, while they had always existed, began to make their distinctive presence felt. A number of authors began to direct their writings, not to the Walpole Society members or collectors of similar sophistication, but rather to "the initiated." This trend had its beginnings in the works of Soderholtz, Elwell, Moore, and others and spread so quickly that by 1920 numerous

books were available to provide readers with a romantic introduction to the decorative arts. A major factor in the success of these volumes was the great numbers of photographs included in them. Readers desired to see pictures of private collections and colonial houses. The author who could combine the greatest number of interesting photographs with an alluring manner of writing was assured of success. Spurred on by the works of author-collectors numerous enthusiasts set off on their Quest of the Quaint.<sup>81</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

### CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>"Editor's Study," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 86 (February 1893), 477.

<sup>2</sup>See E. M. Shaw, "New Hampshire at the World's Fair," The New England Magazine, 10 (April 1894), 135-148; Charles P. Mattocks, "Maine at the World's Fair," The New England Magazine, 10 (May 1894), 295-309; and H. H. McIntyre, "Vermont at the World's Fair," The New England Magazine, 10 (March 1894), 3-14.

<sup>3</sup>Salem at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893 (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1893), pp. 21, 28, 29.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from E. C. Hovey to George M. Brooks, May 28, 1892. Concord Antiquarian Society Manuscript Collection.

<sup>5</sup>John C. Wyman, "Rhode Island at the World's Fair," The New England Magazine, 10 (1893), 427--hereafter cited as Wyman.

<sup>6</sup>Wyman, 433.

<sup>7</sup>Connecticut at the World's Fair (Hartford: Case, Lockwood, and Brainard Co., 1898), p. 44--hereafter cited as CWF.

<sup>8</sup>CWF, p. 46.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 265, 266, 267.

<sup>11</sup>Frederick Litchfield, Illustrated History of Furniture (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1893), title p., versa.

<sup>12</sup>E. E. Soderholtz, Colonial Architecture and Furniture (Boston: George H. Polley and Co., 1895), unppd., leaf 2.

<sup>13</sup>Theodore S. Woolsey, "Old Silver," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 93 (September 1896), 577-586.

<sup>14</sup>Newton Elwell, Colonial Furniture and Interiors (Boston: George H. Polley and Co., 1896), unppd., introduction--hereafter cited as Elwell.

<sup>15</sup>Elwell, introduction.

<sup>16</sup>The First Half-Century of the Essex Institute Commemorated at Salem, March First and Second 1898 (Salem, Massachusetts: The Essex Institute, 1898), p. 36.

<sup>17</sup>Directory, Historical Societies and Agencies in the United States and Canada, 1969-1970, ed. Martin LaGodna (Nashville, Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 1969), pp. 13-15, 31-39, 52-53, 78-79, 85-86.

<sup>18</sup>Emma L. Coleman, "Frary House, Deerfield, Massachusetts," Old-Time New England, 23 (January 1933), 92.

<sup>19</sup>See the unpublished M. S. "Frary House," by Emma L. Coleman, Manuscript collection of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Deerfield, Massachusetts.

<sup>20</sup>Letter from George Curwen to Henry F. Waters, November 13, 1893. Waters, Box 29, Folder 2.

<sup>21</sup>Letter from George Curwen to Henry F. Waters, May 8, 1894. Waters, Box 29, Folder 3.

<sup>22</sup>Letter from George Curwen to Henry F. Waters, October 10, 1895. Waters, Box 29, Folder 3.

<sup>23</sup>Letter from George S. Palmer to Henry F. Waters, December 8, 1893. Waters, Box 29, Folder 2.

<sup>24</sup>"Charles L. Pendleton," Providence Journal, June 27, 1904. Clipping File of the Rhode Island Historical Society--hereafter cited as Pendleton.

<sup>25</sup>Statement by William Breitenstein attached to framed receipt from Charles Pendleton to Rudolph Breitenstein, Private Collection.

<sup>26</sup>Receipt from Charles Pendleton to Rudolph Breitenstein, March 24, 1901, Private Collection.

<sup>27</sup>Pendleton.

<sup>28</sup>Pendleton. The statement is incorrect Pendleton was a member of the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1896-1904.

<sup>29</sup>"Tributes to C. L. Pendleton," Providence Journal, June 29, 1904. Clipping File of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

30"Luke Vincent Lockwood," American Collector, 27 June, 1935, p. 7.

31William Mitchell van Winkle, "Luke Vincent Lockwood," Walpole Society Notebook, 1951 [Portland, Maine]. Printed for the Society, 1952, p. 57.

32"Lockwood, Luke Vincent," National Cyclopedia of American Biography (1941)--hereafter cited as NCAB.

33"Bigelow, Francis," Who Was Who in America, I (1942).

34Sale catalogue, Colonial Furniture, the Superb Collection of Mr. Francis Hill Bigelow of Cambridge, Mass. No. 1795, introduction.

35Letter from Francis Bigelow to Lawrence Park, September 28, 1911. Park Correspondence, Manuscript collection of the American Antiquarian Society--hereafter cited as Park.

36Letter from Francis Bigelow to Lawrence Park, December 11, 1923, Park.

37"The Nolen Collection," The Antiquarian, 1 (November 1923), 13--hereafter cited as Nolen.

38Nolen, 13.

39Sale catalogue, The Collection of the Late William Whiting Nolen of Cambridge, Mass. (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1923), No. 1766, p. 158.

40Henry Watson Kent, "Dwight Blaney," Walpole Society Notebook, 1945 [Portland, Maine]. Printed for the Society, 1946, p. 28.

41Morse, pp. 25, 109.

42R. T. Haines Halsey, "Hollis French: Walpolean," Walpole Society Notebook, 1940 [Windham, Connecticut]. Printed for the Society, 1941, pp. 60-51--hereafter cited as Halsey.

43The Hudson-Fulton Celebration, Catalogue of an Exhibition held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Vol. II (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1909), pp. 56, 61, 89-137.

44Halsey, p. 60.

45Hollis French, A List of Early American Silversmiths and Their Marks [New York]. Printed for the Society, 1917, p. VIII.

46"Theodore Salisbury Woolsey," Walpole Society Notebook, 1929 [Topsfield, Massachusetts]. Printed for the Society, p. 25.

<sup>47</sup>Theodore Sizer, "George Dudley Seymour," Walpole Society Notebook, 1945 [Portland, Maine]. Printed for the Society, 1945, p. 33--hereafter cited as Sizer.

<sup>48</sup>Sizer, p. 36.

<sup>49</sup>George Dudley Seymour's Furniture Collection (Hartford: The Connecticut Historical Society, 1958), p. 129--hereafter cited as Seymour.

<sup>50</sup>Seymour, pp. 18, 42.

<sup>51</sup>Seymour, pp. 6, 18, 29, 40, 42, [45], 52, 60, 67, [73], 81, 85, 98, 112, 129, 130, 136.

<sup>52</sup>Lockwood, p. V.

<sup>53</sup>N. Hudson Moore, The Old Furniture Book (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1903), p. 1.

<sup>54</sup>Morse, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup>See Catalogue of Historical China and Other Objects Collected by Miss Frances Clary Morse (New York: American Art Association, 1912), No. [40].

<sup>56</sup>"For the Country House," Country Life in America, 4 (August 1903), 242.

<sup>57</sup>Abbie Farwell Brown, "The Beauty of Antiquity," The New England Magazine, 28 (May 1903), 280--hereafter cited as A. F. Brown.

<sup>58</sup>A. F. Brown, 280-281.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 283.

<sup>60</sup>Glimpses of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition and City of St. Louis (Chicago: Laird and Lee, 1904), unppd., leaves 24, 40.

<sup>61</sup>Francis Hill Bigelow, Historic Silver of the Colonies and its Makers (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1941), p. 2--hereafter cited as Bigelow.

<sup>62</sup>"Exhibition of Early American Silver," Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin, 4 (June 1906), 23--hereafter cited as Silver.

<sup>63</sup>Silver, 23.

<sup>64</sup>Bigelow, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup>Frank Marshall White, "The Hudson-Fulton Celebration," The Outlook, 93 (October 23, 1909), 375.

<sup>66</sup>The Hudson-Fulton Celebration, Catalogue of an Exhibition held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in 2 vols. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1909), 2, p. IX--hereafter cited as Hudson-Fulton.

<sup>67</sup>"The Bolles Collection," Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 5 (January 1910), 14.

<sup>68</sup>Henry Watson Kent, "The Walpole Society, 1910-1935," Twenty-fifth Anniversary Meeting of the Walpole Society [Boston]. Printed for the Society, 1936, p. 21--hereafter cited as Kent.

<sup>69</sup>Kent, p. 21.

<sup>70</sup>The remaining original members were: Edwin A. Barker, Thomas B. Clarke, George W. Curtis, John C. Dana, Henry H. Flagler, Albert H. Pitkin, Arthur J. Parsons, Frederick B. Platt, and Frederick S. Wait. The majority of these individuals were non-New England members.

<sup>71</sup>E[dna] Y[ost] Canfield, Richard DAB (1958).

<sup>72</sup>Clarence Saunders Brigham, "Reminiscences of Early Members," Walpole Society Notebook, 1935 [Providence]. Printed for the Society, 1936, p. 20--hereafter cited as Brigham.

<sup>73</sup>Hudson-Fulton, p. 68.

<sup>74</sup>Henry W. Kent, "Dick Canfield," Walpole Society Notebook, 1944 [Portland, Maine]. Printed for the Society, 1945, p. 37.

<sup>75</sup>Brigham, p. 21.

<sup>76</sup>C[harles] C[hauncy] N[ash], "Charles Hitchcock Tyler," Walpole Society Notebook, 1932 [Topsfield, Massachusetts]. Printed for the Society, 1933, p. 31.

<sup>77</sup>Hollis French, "Charles Hitchcock Tyler," Walpole Society Notebook, 1931 [Topsfield, Massachusetts]. Printed for the Society, 1932, p. 32.

<sup>78</sup>"The Charles Hitchcock Tyler Memorial Exhibition," Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts, 30 (December 1932), 82, 83, 86.

<sup>79</sup>Henry Wood Erving, "Random Recollections," Twenty-fifth Anniversary Meeting of the Walpole Society [Boston]. Printed for the Society, 1936, pp. 42-43.

<sup>80</sup>Kent, p. 24.

<sup>81</sup>Virginia Robie, The Quest of the Quaint (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1916), pp. 1-2.



"All things colonial, whether house or accessory, are distinctive, and to the designers and craftsmen of that period the world owes a debt that no amount of tribute can ever wholly repay. Colonial is synonymous of the best, and objects created during its influence are always of a higher degree of perfection than the best of other periods. Looking about for a reason for this, we are confronted with the realization that time was carefully planned and carefully finished, craftsman giving to their output the best their brains could devise, and allowing no reason, however urgent, to interfere with the completion of a certain object as they had originally planned it to be. Therein lies the real reason of the superiority of things colonial."

Mary Harrod Northend, 1912<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### MARY HARROD NORTHEND AND THE POPULARIZATION OF COLLECTING

The spirit of the collecting movement has undoubtedly received more eloquent endorsements than the author quoted here, Mary Harrod Northend (1850-1926) (Figure 40), but certainly by no more dedicated and enthusiastic a follower. The words are the concluding paragraph to her first book, published in 1912. Miss Northend's credo, in a modified form, was the standard borne by the evergrowing band of American decorative arts collectors that emerged in the late-nineteenth century. Unlike many of her connoisseurship-minded peers, however, Miss Northend's attitude toward the "colonial" was less constricted, and her writings were directed at those individuals with an undeveloped curiosity for American decorative arts. The result of her writings, coordinated with legions of photographs, was the awakening of the collecting consciousness, previously experienced by only a select coterie, at a popular level in American society. While Miss Northend's books and articles are simply a portion of the colonial-oriented material that prospered at this time, their significance is insured by the use of an unprecedented and unsurpassed collection of photographs of decorative arts objects and colonial interiors.



Figure 40  
Mary Harrod Northend

Miss Northend did not begin her writing career until her fifty-fifth year when she published an article in a national magazine.<sup>2</sup> Her entire life was spent in Salem, Massachusetts, where she had been born May 10, 1850, the daughter of a successful Essex County lawyer, William Dummer Northend. As a child Miss Northend suffered from a serious illness, though its character was never disclosed, and throughout later life she claimed that she never experienced one completely "well" day.<sup>3</sup> While her father, a member of the Essex Institute and author, obviously had some bearing on Miss Northend's career she maintained that her literary life was an accident. She labeled her first attempt at writing "a bit of doggerel for a social occasion,"<sup>4</sup> and it probably was, but from this inauspicious beginning poured a stream of more than one hundred and eighty-five articles. In addition, Miss Northend completed ten books related to the colonial dwelling, its furnishings, or its surroundings.

Miss Northend's articles and books might never have received national attention had she not been given access to Salem houses and the opportunity to photograph the decorative arts collections they contained. A contemporary description of her activities by one Boston columnist states

Miss Northend has had an exceptional opportunity to obtain photographs and descriptions of Salem art treasures. Doors have swung open for her which would have remained obdurately closed, no matter how loudly an outsider might hammer against them. As a result she has many photographs among her stock of 30,000 which could not be duplicated by any one else, . . .<sup>5</sup>

These photographs set Miss Northend apart from her contemporaries. Her ability to photograph collections of colonial objects and discuss them in print brought previously unseen collections to the attention of readers of numerous periodicals, as well as the audience that bought her books. After she began writing for a national audience in 1905, she began to use photographs of local houses and their interiors. She was perplexed why so many of her friends and acquaintances allowed her to photograph their personal possessions and stated that:

the friends of my home town, Salem are responsible for much of my success. Had they not opened their homes I would have seen nothing and why they should have done it is beyond me, for I was new in the game and it was new to them, having their most prized possessions photographed.<sup>6</sup>

The eagerness of many Salem residents to assist the author was probably a positive result of her acceptance in Salem society, as she was a descendent of the Wheelwrights and Harrods of Newburyport and the Longfellows and Lowells of Salem.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the origin of her accessibility to Salem homes, Miss Northend was able to profit from her advantageous position. At the outset of her photographic career Miss Northend stalked her prey with the aid of her own "Kodak."<sup>8</sup> The phrase "new in the game" that Miss Northend so aptly used to describe her modest literary talents, however, is also applicable to her initial attempts at photography (Figure 41). Miss Northend was quick to realize that her forte was molding words and pictures into article form, not photography, and she hired a professional photographer to provide her illustrative material.<sup>9</sup> Traveling from house to house, the author set about recording for posterity the personal collections of



Figure 41  
Miss Northend's early attempt at photographing furniture

her North Shore friends. Her photographs included numerous interiors, such as the Timothy Dexter house, the Pierce-Nichols house, and the Indian Hill farm of Ben: Perley Poore (see Figures 5 and 6), as well as individual objects of silver, furniture, pewter, etc.

In her earliest articles, Miss Northend established the tone for the remainder of her writing career. Her attitude towards colonial objects paralleled that of other authors of the early-twentieth century, and she romanticized about colonial life and exalted its crafts. A general understanding of the topic was viewed as healthy, but scholarship was not her overriding concern. The historical material for her articles was usually gleaned from other sources, to which she added flowery verse and the all-important photographs.

Miss Northend's first articles that included some discussion of the decorative arts appeared in American Homes and Gardens.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the years 1913 and 1914 the magazine featured a series of articles discussing colonial chairs, clocks, four-poster beds, as well as comparable topics. An article entitled "Early Chairs" (April, 1913) is largely composed of general information on the history of chairs but made illuminating because of the use of her own pictures.<sup>11</sup>

Like her predecessors, Elwell and Soderholtz, Miss Northend found it easier to tack a caption on to a photograph and forget it than refer to the photograph in the text and try to discuss it. While she might have spent her life using the same Chippendale chair or drinking from the same porcelain tea cup, she found herself unable to grasp the

subtle distinctions that different style periods presented. For example, of the first four chairs illustrated in her article "Early Chairs" two have confusing captions. Both chairs appear to date from the nineteenth century, yet their labels read "early slat-back chair" and "early Dutch chair."<sup>12</sup> In Miss Northend's application of the word, "early" assumes the accordion definition that allows it to cover the entire colonial period, as well as the first fifty years of the Republic.

Another important distinction Miss Northend's writings and pictures represent is a lack of attachment for the American-made object. While there was a definite quaintness to owning objects made by or attributed to local craftsmen, it was equally acceptable to possess the finer examples of English furniture. One of Miss Northend's acquaintances and fellow author, Walter A. Dyer, divulges his opinion with regard to assembling an American or English furniture collection in a 1906 article:

Look for Georgian bookcases, tea-tables, Hepplewhite and Sheraton sideboards and Adam pier tables. They are among the handsomest pieces to be had.

Don't scorn American Colonial pieces. They have their own peculiar merits. Buy them from individual owners wherever you run across them.<sup>13</sup>

Dyer's statement typifies the attitude inherent in Miss Northend's writings. Both authors urged the acceptance of all objects used in the colonial period, rather than only objects of colonial manufacture.

As Miss Northend's writings and pictures were intended for the interested but uninitiated collector, they enhanced the acceptability and desirability of American decorative arts. Collecting as presented by



Miss Northend and accepted by her readers was in part stimulated by "current fashion." In the first decade of the twentieth century, a number of different convictions regarding home decoration were competing with each other for attention in popular magazines. The quaintness of the colonial interior was intermingled with the Inglenook and the Venetian court. Readers were encouraged to decorate their homes in an eclectic fashion, but advised to cluster together stylistically related groups of furniture.<sup>14</sup>

With this philosophy swirling before the American public, Mary Northend set about to convert to the colonial ethos the non-believers. Her friends, including Henry Waters' brother, Charles, and the Misses Nichols (Pierce-Nichols house), opened their homes to the flash of the camera. They were credited with such bylines as, "some of the finest of these old chests are shown in the Waters collection at Salem."<sup>15</sup> A long and impressive list of families also received bylines in Miss Northend's books and articles. Miss Northend acknowledged in the preface of her first book the assistance of twenty North Shore families who allowed their possessions to be photographed.<sup>16</sup> The vast majority of these individuals were personal friends of Miss Northend and had inherited their treasured possessions. Consequently, their belongings, with a few notable exceptions, had not previously been pictured in periodicals or books.

Miss Northend photographed some objects that are now well known to the devotees of American antiques. Several examples from the Waters collection, such as a seventeenth-century toilet stand inscribed with

the initials "S A H" (Figure 42), now at the Art Institute of Chicago, and a Federal period four-poster bed (Figure 43), now at the Metropolitan Museum, appear as standard furniture references in such publications as Lure of the Antique (1910) by Dyer.<sup>17</sup> Several other examples that Miss Northend photographed are parts of sets of furniture that are today members of important American decorative arts collections. Two examples are the Federal period shield-back chair, owned by Charles R. Waters, of which an example is now in the Winterthur Collection (See Charles Montgomery, Federal Furniture, Figure 19), and a Federal period square-back armchair, one of a set owned by the Misses Nichols, but now also in the Winterthur Collection (See Montgomery, Figure 23).

Miss Northend even took time to glorify her families own "collection" of decorative arts objects. Included among these illustrations are a four-poster bed, now owned by a descendent, as well as an Empire period couch also owned by a descendent.<sup>18</sup> One of the most intriguing objects in the Northend collection was a Chippendale period side chair with hairypaw feet (Figure 44). Unfortunately, this particular chair was sold by Miss Northend's sister in 1929 for one hundred and fifty dollars.<sup>19</sup> An identical example, however, is found in the collection of the Winterthur Museum (See Joseph Downs, American Furniture, Queen Anne and Chippendale Periods, Figure 151) and is marked Number VII of a set.

Not all the objects photographed by Miss Northend have made their way to the Winterthur Collection or the Metropolitan Museum. In fact, Miss Northend's inability to distinguish a colonial object from a



Figure 42  
Seventeenth-century toilet stand formerly in the Waters collection



Figure 43  
Federal period four-poster bed formerly in the Waters collection



Figure 44  
Chippendale period side chair formerly in the Northend collection

quasi-colonial object becomes readily apparent when examining a greater percentage of her captions. For example, in Colonial Homes and Their Furnishings, she included on the same page two high chests (Figure 45). The high chest on the right, titled "six legged high chest of drawers, about 1705," appears to be a perfectly acceptable example of an eighteenth-century William and Mary high chest. The chest on the left, however, entitled "chest of drawers, 1710," is obviously not what Miss Northend would claim it to be. It is an eighteenth-century high chest to which new legs in the style of 1830 have been added and on which the brasses are replacements.

Often Miss Northend utilized photographs to emphasize what could be done to redecorate an interior. Her volume, Remodeled Farm-houses (1915), gave impetus to the individual who wished to refurbish a colonial house. More important, perhaps, were the interior shots of the remodeled houses that showed how one could redecorate with colonial furniture. These pictures were further encouragement to the individual who, in 1915, was beginning to suffer from the addiction of collecting.

Miss Northend stated that her own interest in collecting and writing about collecting "was commenced at first through ill health and the desire for occupation," or in the words of one of her descendents out of "economic necessity."<sup>20</sup> Miss Northend's true love was photography of colonial furniture and dwellings, but she found that to maintain an income, she had to write. In one contemporary biographical sketch Miss Northend is described as saying that

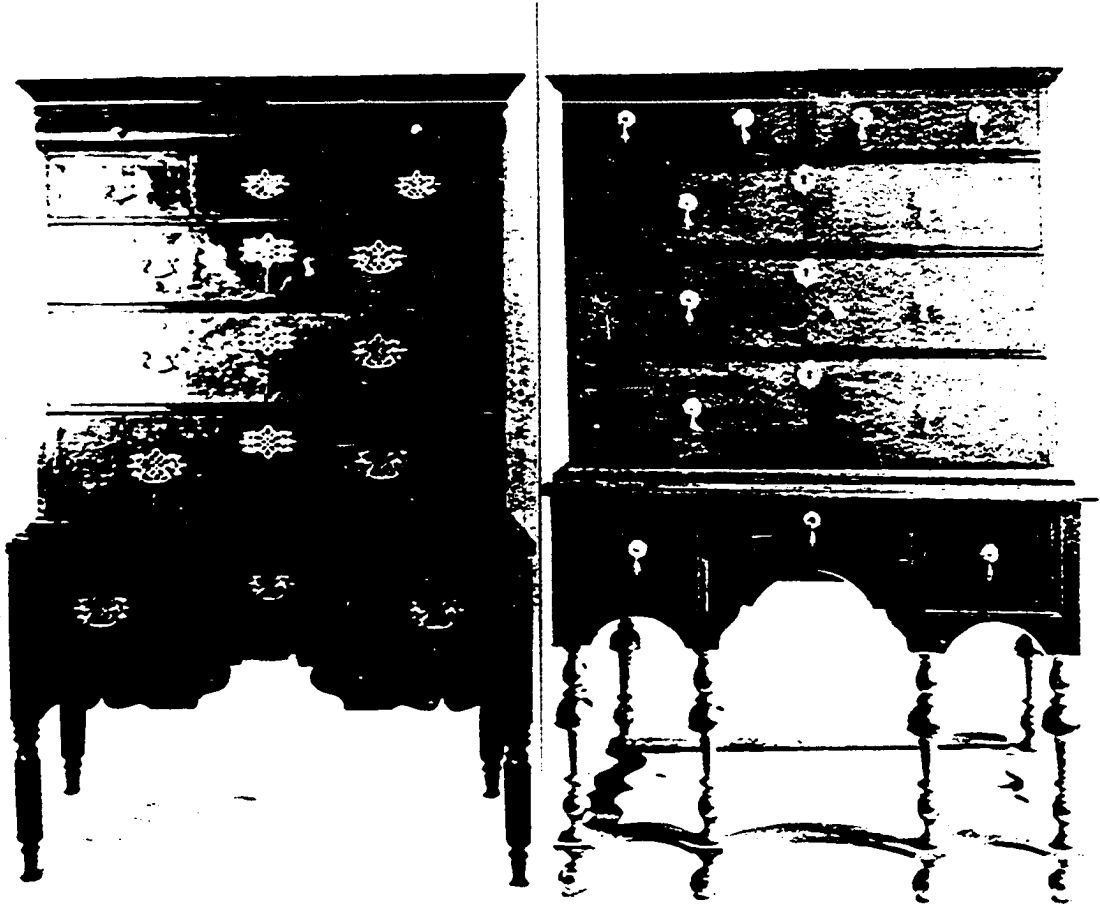


Figure 45  
Two high chests illustrated in Colonial Homes and Their Furnishings

she maintains that magazines and newspapers have whims as well as people, and one particular line must be followed carefully, if one would be successful. One year, elaborate gardens and houses are in demand, while the next year the hand swings backward and practical things such as small houses, back-door<sup>21</sup> gardens, and 'before and after' views, are used.

For this reason a great number of Miss Northend's articles deal with the country bungalow or how to hide the radiator. The obvious result was that Miss Northend produced a vast number of articles that dealt with the colonial ethos but lacked the scholarly insight of her contemporaries, like Bigelow and French. For this reason one must point to her pictorial record (of which less than 5,000 of her actual negatives remain of over 30,000)<sup>22</sup> as the achievement of her career.

Eight of Miss Northend's ten books deal directly with some aspect of the colonial ethos. Approximately one fifth of her articles describe some aspect of the colonial house, their furnishings, their restoration, or the surrounding area. Following the habit of many of her contemporaries, Miss Northend would submit chapters of a forthcoming book with little or no change, to a national magazine publisher. By this method, a common practice today, she received payment for the article as well as payment for the same material in the form of book royalties.<sup>23</sup>

Her most important book in terms of American decorative arts collecting was the first, Colonial Homes and Their Furnishings. The volume encompassed various decorative arts topics examining in seventeen chapters such topics as glass, clocks, chairs, tables, and four-poster bedsteads. The book came on the heels of Dyer's Lure of the



Antique. While the treatment of the material in both books is generally handled in similar fashion, Dyer was indebted "to Miss Mary H. Northend, for permission to make use of her collection of photographs."<sup>24</sup> Few of the photographs in the two volumes overlap but, ironically, Dyer's book contains the superior selection of photographs.

As early as 1905, when Moore used a Northend photograph for the frontispiece of the Collector's Manual (Figure 46), other authors turned to Miss Northend for photographs. Dyer used them repeatedly in both his books and his articles, as did Gardner Tealle in the Pleasures of Collecting (1920). Photographic bylines to Miss Northend were almost a standard procedure in colonial decorative arts articles and books during the first two decades of this century.

The effect of Miss Northend's photographs on collectors is difficult to assess. What can be determined, however, is that her articles, books, and photographs were vehicles in a larger parade of writings that stimulated the expansion of collecting from those who created comprehensive collections to the person with small amounts of money to invest and cursory knowledge of the subject.

The small collector had little hope of amassing any culturally significant objects. But the ability to decorate a room, or a portion of a room in the colonial spirit within his grasp. It was people like Northend, Dyer, and Robert Shackleton (1860-1923), with his wife, author of Quest of the Colonial (1907) and Charm of the Antique (1913), who convinced many Americans that collecting was acceptable.



Figure 46  
Frontispiece from N. Hudson Moore's, The Collector's Manual

As Miss Northend repeated numerous times, the spirit of the environment was important. While she applauded the collection of authentic colonial objects, she did not condemn collecting reproductions if they were aesthetically successful. She considered this decision a matter of personal taste. Her greatest pleasure was the realization that the taste for objects in the colonial mode was being revived. She once stated:

today (1912) colonial influence is again dominant, and it is a relief to note that in modern homes it is usurping in favor its hitherto prized successors. It is only to be hoped that its influence will be lasting, for surely of all types, it is the most worthy of emulation.<sup>25</sup>

In all her writings Miss Northend promulgated the revival of the hand-made object and its concept of beauty. Speaking degradingly of the later nineteenth-century styles she said:

later-day artisans sacrificed quality to quantity; they complied with the demand of public opinion, and as that demand became more urgent, carelessness of detail became more marked. The simplicity of the colonial era gave way to the highly decorative and often ugly ornamentation characteristic of late nineteenth-century manufacture, and it was not until a few craftsmen found courage to revive colonial features that the beauty of that type of construction was truly appreciated.<sup>26</sup>

Through her pictures Miss Northend attempted to convey to others the beauty that she found in colonial furniture. For this reason discrimination between colonial and colonial revival was not essential. Even though her writings create the impression that everything of which she wrote was "of the period," she betrays herself by glorifying the emergence of the quasi-colonial taste.

Unlike her contemporaries Miss Northend seldom wrote directly about collecting and collectors. But among the photographs in her collection are several examples that show Miss Northend and her friends in the pose of ferreting out colonial treasures (Figure 47). She would picture her friends collections but infrequently directed herself to their reasons for collecting. She wrote on one occasion:

The collector may collect from varied motives. Some love old things merely because they are old; others care to have only articles that are beautiful, whether old or new, and still others are interested in anything, beautiful or ugly, which forms a link in the history of an industry, a nation or the human race. The character of a collection depends upon the motive that actuates the collector. Sometimes, as he learns more about the subject, he may broaden or restrict the scope of his collection.<sup>27</sup>

In the last years of Miss Northend's life, her writing decreased and it is difficult to determine what photographs were taken after 1920. During her last six years Miss Northend wrote less frequently about the decorative arts, the only major exception being her volume on American Glass (1926). Although it presents no startling discoveries, the book is significant to Miss Northend's career because it is the one time she examines a group of decorative arts objects in detail.

Until the 1920's, few decorative arts topics, other than furniture, silver, and ceramics, were the subject of any lengthy studies. Miss Northend's book on glass is evidence of a national change in the collecting movement. At the same time articles and books of a scholarly nature, at least more scholarly than their predecessors, began to be written. In January, 1922, Antiques magazine published its first issue



Figure 47  
Miss Northend and friends in search of antiques

and two years later the Metropolitan Museum opened the American Wing. The collecting movement had taken another step toward becoming an integral part of American society. Collectors began independently gathering up objects in the nineteenth century, while concurrently suffering the askance looks of others. In the 1890's other individuals, mostly professional people, joined other collectors in their hobby and very quickly collecting became fashionable. As a greater percentage of the population in the early 1900's was made aware of collecting through books, periodicals, exhibitions, and antique emporiums, collecting became popular. Then in the 1920's the collecting movement constantly gained maturity, and demanded through the museums, and more generally the preservation movement, more scholarly attention. At this time individuals like Miss Northend reminded American decorative arts collectors that regardless of their specific interest they possessed common ground in an appreciation of hand-crafted beauty. Moreover, she defended collecting as an art:

to surround one self with articles of dignity and grace, beautiful in coloring and in design the sweet of their contours suggesting the drift of snow under the wind or the ripples along the ocean beach,--their purity and simplicity of line inevitably bringing to mind something of those dominant traits which we believe to be truly typical of American character in that period to which the objects themselves belong,--surely this is no unworthy ambition. Its effect upon the collector himself cannot fail to be a beneficent one; while at the same time he is affording an opportunity for education in beauty and joy in its contemplation as to many others as well.<sup>28</sup>

Mary Northend's pronouncement is a succinct expression of the drive that turned the first collectors away from massed produced products of the 1860's and 1870's, and which continues to provide members for the collecting movement today.

## FOOTNOTES

### CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup>Colonial Homes and Their Furnishings (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1912), pp. 236-237--hereafter cited as Colonial Homes.

<sup>2</sup>See Mary Harrod Northend, "Historic Salem," The New England Magazine, 31 (January 1905), 507-523.

<sup>3</sup>"Hampered by Illness, Work Has Made Her Well," Boston Sunday Herald, 25 August, 1912, n.pag., Clipping file of the Essex Institute Manuscript Collection--hereafter cited as "Hampered by Illness."

<sup>4</sup>"Hampered by Illness," n.pag.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., n.pag.

<sup>6</sup>"Mary H. Northend, Noted Authoress of Salem Dies," Salem Evening News, 17 December, 1926, n.pag., Clipping file of the Essex Institute Manuscript Collection--hereafter cited as "MHN."

<sup>7</sup>Charles Arthur Higgins, "Mary Harrod Northend," Massachusetts Magazine, 8 (1915), 25--hereafter cited as Higgins.

<sup>8</sup>Higgins, 24.

<sup>9</sup>Letter from Mary H. Northend to William Endicott, October 20, 1913. Personal File of the Society For the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA).

<sup>10</sup>See Mary H. Northend, "Colonial House at Portsmouth," American Homes and Gardens, 6 (June 1909), 234-238, and Mary H. Northend, "Colonial Fireplaces and Fire Irons," American Homes and Gardens, 6 (December 1909), 488-492.

<sup>11</sup>Mary H. Northend, "Early Chairs," American Homes and Gardens, 10 (April 1913), 137-139--hereafter cited as "Early Chairs."

<sup>12</sup>"Early Chairs," 137.

<sup>13</sup>Walter A. Dyer, "The Truth About Antique Furniture," Country Life in America, 9 (April 1906), 708.



<sup>14</sup>See H. S. Adams, "Antique Furniture in the Home," Country Life in America, 15 November, 1911, p. 28.

<sup>15</sup>Colonial Homes, p. 108.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., preface.

<sup>17</sup>See Walter A. Dyer, Lure of the Antique (New York: Century Co., 1910), p. 110--hereafter cited as Dyer.

<sup>18</sup>The four-poster bed is in the collection of Mr. Francis Benjamin, Atlanta, Georgia, and the couch is in the collection of Mr. Edwin Benjamin, Bala-Cynwyd, Pennsylvania.

<sup>19</sup>Interview with Edwin Benjamin, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 24, 1972.

<sup>20</sup>Interview with Edwin Benjamin, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 24, 1972.

<sup>21</sup>Higgins, 25.

<sup>22</sup>Letter from Mary H. Northend to William Summer Appleton, July 11, 1922. Personal file of SPNEA.

<sup>23</sup>One article "Old Pewter," Country Life in America (February 1913), was written by Miss Northend under the pseudonym of Helen N. Harrod. The same article was published as the chapter on pewter in Colonial Homes and Their Furnishings.

<sup>24</sup>Dyer, acknowledgment.

<sup>25</sup>Colonial Homes, p. 237.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Mary Harrod Northend, American Glass (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1935), p. 183.

<sup>28</sup>Unpublished M. S. of an article by Mary Harrod Northend, "Hunting for Antiques," Mary Harrod Northend Correspondence, p. 16, Manuscript Collection of the SPNEA.

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