

**THE ANTIQUES TRADE IN TRANSITION: COLLECTING AND DEALING
DECORATIVE ARTS OF THE OLD SOUTH**

by

Trent Rhodes

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of the Arts in American Material Culture

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the history of collecting and dealing pre-Civil War objects made in the “Old South”—Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. It focuses primarily on “high-style” furniture, while an effort has been made to include decorative arts of other mediums where possible. Part One situates the Southern antiques trade within the broader historical context of collecting and dealing antiques in the North. As Northern collectors and dealers were attracted to romantic fictions of the Old South, they capitalized on the regional economic imbalance, purchasing Southern objects for fractions of their value and exporting them to Northern markets. Throughout the period of Northern interest in Southern objects, African Americans were a primary source of their antique supply. Through a series of case studies, Part Two illuminates the history of the early antiques trade in the South, examining the role of a diverse set of dealers in developing the field including Morris and Charles Navis, Dianna Brown, J. Franklin Biggs, William O’Hagan, and Dewitt Thurmond Chatham. It also investigates the maturation of Southern collecting and the complex set of motivations that inspired individuals to begin purchasing objects made in the South. As these collectors and dealers were linked with one another by Southern antiques, issues of race, class, place, and identity were brought to the fore of the antiques trade.

INTRODUCTION

From the Centennial celebrations in 1876 to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts' landmark exhibition *Furniture of the Old South* in 1952, the early history of collecting and dealing Southern antiques represents a vibrant field that has largely been understudied. This thesis remedies the lack of representation in the literature by presenting a close look at the lives of those who made the antiques trade their profession and the individuals who collected Southern antiques. The motivations of these collectors and dealers were complex as they variously sought to assert their American identities, to profit financially from the antiques trade, and to construct fictionalized narratives of the pre-Civil War South. Throughout this study, I demonstrate how the field of decorative arts is indebted to the contributions made by African Americans, first and second generation Jewish and Irish Americans, and women, through their ownership of antiques, their participation in the trade, and their devotion to collecting and preserving history.

This study is divided into two parts, the first of which situates Southern decorative arts within the broader national context of collecting and dealing, demonstrating how the North relied on objects from the South to construct Colonial Revival interiors beginning in the 1890s. The exportation of these objects from the region began as Northerners were captivated by romantic notions of the Old South, a

fiction successfully introduced by authors of the Lost Cause. As Northern collectors bought Southern antiques during this early period, the 1890s to the early 1920s, these objects oftentimes retained their histories as being purchased in the South. Later, during the “golden decade” of antiques in the 1920s, dealers like Israel Sack and Joe Kindig facilitated the Northern movement of Southern decorative arts at an unprecedented scale. Ironically, it was during this period that decorative arts of the Old South lost much of their appeal to Northerners, and high end Southern objects soon began entering collections in New England and the Mid-Atlantic with attributions to cities like Philadelphia and New York. Dealers in this period, like their predecessors, relied heavily on objects owned by African Americans as they purchased antiques frequently at fractions of their worth.

Part Two shifts the focus to examine collecting and dealing decorative arts in the South, outlining the development of the field and profiling a number of important Southern collectors and dealers. By examining the biographies of these dealers, I document the diversity of the early antiques trade and demonstrate how objects have historically been used to construct American identities. This diverse group of dealers retailed antiques to Southern collectors, many of whom had benefited financially from the industrialization of the region. As these capitalists helped change the agrarian landscape of the South to one that more closely resembled the North, they sought objects to help construct fictive narratives of the Old South. While Southern collectors lagged behind their counterparts in the North by about thirty years, by the 1950s the

region became determined to reclaim their material culture as objects began returning to the South.

Throughout this study, I use the term “Old South” to refer to the geographic region that included Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, while also employing the term “South” to refer to the same region. Though contemporary scholarship has noted the porous boundaries that facilitated the movement of people and their objects, early scholarship, like Paul Burroughs’ *Southern Antiques* (1931), prioritized objects made in these five colonies.¹ Here, I return to Burroughs’ geographic understanding of the Old South, as his book forms the earliest scholarship on Southern decorative arts and the period with which this thesis is most concerned.

While the term “Old South” denotes a geographic region, it also refers to romanticized notions of the pre-Civil War South. The mythology of the Old South is closely related to the Lost Cause, which cast slavery as a benign institution in which African Americans were “loyal slaves” and beneficiaries of a paternalistic social hierarchy. The Lost Cause also sought to redefine traditional narratives of the Civil War, asserting that it was an issue of states’ rights rather than slavery and contending that the industrial resources of the Union outmatched the Confederacy from the

¹ An exception to this is the decorative arts of Kentucky, where an important network of collectors and dealers emerged in the early twentieth century. The ambiguity of the term “Old South” is evident in early decorative arts scholarship. By 1952, *Furniture of the Old South* had omitted objects made in Maryland from its study, with the decorative arts of Kentucky being considered in their stead.

beginning. By emphasizing the agrarian nature of the Southern landscape and constructing an alternative history of the institution of slavery, authors of the Lost Cause movement were able to appeal to Northerners and Southerners alike with romantic fictions of the Old South.

I rely on a number of important texts to inform my study of the Southern antiques trade. *The Antiquers* (1980) and *Out of the Attic: Inventing Antiques in Twentieth-Century New England* (2009) comprise two of the most important books on the American antiques field. Elizabeth Stillinger's *The Antiquers* profiles the lives of primarily Northern collectors, outlining the development of the field in New England and the Mid-Atlantic. Stillinger's groundbreaking work is one of the earliest to document the early history of collecting, and I rely on her text to inform my comparisons between collecting in the North and in the South. Briann Greenfield's *Out of the Attic* similarly does much to contribute to the scholarly body of literature on the subject. Greenfield is among the first scholars to study Northern antique dealers, including a thorough discussion of Jewish dealers in her book and documenting their contributions to the field of decorative arts. I rely heavily on Greenfield's analysis to inform my consideration of first and second generation Americans in the Southern antiques trade.²

² Elizabeth Stillinger, *The Antiquers* (New York: Knopf, 1980); Briann Greenfield, *Out of the Attic: Inventing Antiques in Twentieth-century New England* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).

Among the first to consider the trade in Southern decorative arts are Jonathan Prown, Luke Beckerdite, and Ron Hurst. Jonathan Prown's 1997 *American Furniture* article, "A 'Preponderance of Pineapples': The Problem of Southern Furniture" documents how decorative arts in the North began to be seen as normative by the 1920s. I utilize his analysis to inform my argument in Part One. Luke Beckerdite's "The Life and Legacy of Frank L. Horton: A Personal Recollection" is among the first to consider the significant role of early dealers in the development of the field, as he notes Frank Horton's beginnings as an antique dealer. For good reason, Beckerdite's article focuses on the contributions made by Horton and places him at the center of the field of Southern decorative arts. Ron Hurst's consideration of decorative arts of the region in "Southern Furniture Studies: Where We've Been, Where We're Going" traces the arc of the field of Southern decorative arts from the early twentieth century to the present. Collectively, these articles lay the groundwork for a more thorough study of the early network of collectors and dealers in the South.³ This thesis adds to

³ Jonathan Prown, "A 'Preponderance of Pineapples': The Problem with Southern Furniture," *American Furniture*, (1997), accessed August 5, 2017, <http://www.chipstone.org/article.php/262/American-Furniture-1997/A-%E2%80%9CPreponderance-of-Pineapples%E2%80%9D:-The-Problem-of-Southern-Furniture>; Luke Beckerdite, "The Life and Legacy of Frank L. Horton: A Personal Recollection," *American Furniture*, (2006), accessed August 28, 2017, <http://www.chipstone.org/article.php/557/American-Furniture-2006/The-Life-and-Legacy-of-Frank-L.-Horton:-A-Personal-Recollection>; Ronald L. Hurst, "Southern Furniture Studies: Where We've Been, Where We're Going," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts*, (2015), accessed September 10, 2017, <http://www.mesdajournal.org/2015/southern-furniture-studies-weve-been-were/>.

this body of literature by outlining the early history of collecting and dealing Southern decorative arts and contextualizing the field within a broader national narrative.

Through a discussion of the early Southern antiques trade, I demonstrate the power of objects to construct identities and document the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of the early field.

Part One

NORTHERNERS “DISCOVER” SOUTHERN ANTIQUES

Reflecting on his storied career in the trade, Virginia antiques dealer Charles Navis (1904 – 1967) estimated in his “measured judgement” that “a thousand extended-front Hepplewhite sideboards” had left homes in the Laurens, South Carolina, area, intended for collectors and dealers in Northern markets. The exodus of Southern objects was so common during the first half of the twentieth century that those in the antiques business referred to it as “the railroad North.”⁴ The memoirs of Fred Bishop Tuck (1869 – 1935), Maine’s first antique dealer, confirm the North’s overwhelming interest in Southern antiques during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Upon his arrival in Kennebunkport, Tuck recognized Maine’s fascination with the past, and he opened shop in the city in 1893. He quickly realized he was unable to meet his clients’ demands for antiques, writing that he had decided to “turn [his] attention to the southern states to search for antiques and keep in mind sideboards, for [he] had learned that there were many sideboards for sale south of the

⁴ Betty C. Coons, *Antique By-lines (Southern Vintage)* (Richmond, VA: Guild of the Valentine Museum, 1979), 49-50; While Navis’ estimate may initially seem inflated, Paul Burroughs similarly comments on the availability of sideboards in South Carolina, writing, “The quest for a Hepplewhite sideboard in South Carolina, where it was known they were to be found in abundance...”: Paul H. Burroughs, *Southern Antiques* (Richmond, VA: Garrett & Massie, Inc, 1931), v.

Mason and Dixon Line.”⁵ Tuck’s forays south to seek out objects for his shop—the first of which occurred in 1898—is one of the earliest documented examples of a practice that would continue for decades. Northern dealers like Tuck, Israel Sack, and Joe Kindig, Jr.; Southern dealers like William O’Hagan, J.F. Biggs, Dianna Brown, and Charles Navis; and a host of largely anonymous Southern “pickers” and “scouts” were responsible for the northern migration of early American decorative arts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶

Though a steady stream of objects trickled north in the Civil War and Reconstruction periods, the movement of material goods across the Mason-Dixon Line reemerged on a significant scale in the 1890s with the growth of Northern dealers’ interest in Southern antiques. The economic policies of the era had left many Southerners, black and white, impoverished and willing to sell family heirlooms.⁷ As

⁵ Fred Bishop Tuck and Dean A. Fales, *Antique Man’s Diary: the Memoirs of Fred Bishop Tuck* (Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House, 2001), 43-44. I want to thank Tom Savage for the recommendation of this source.

⁶ “Pickers” are individuals who purchase objects directly from owners and retail them to antique dealers, while “scouts” serve as brokers between owners and dealers, typically working on commission. In addition to the thousands of decorative arts that left the South, architectural interiors were another source of frequent interest for Northern antique dealers. For more information on the collecting of architectural fragments from Charleston, see Laura Burghardt, “The Movement of Architectural Elements within Charleston, South Carolina.” Master’s thesis, Clemson University, 2009.
https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1596&context=all_theses.

⁷ Joan E. Cashin, "Trophies of War: Material Culture in the Civil War Era." *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 3 (2011): 339-67,
<http://www.jstor.org.udel.idm.oclc.org/stable/26070139>.

Northern antique dealers capitalized on this economic imbalance, they initially sought for their clients Southern objects that spoke to a romanticized culture of an Anglo-Saxon Old South, a fiction successfully introduced by proponents of the Lost Cause ideology.⁸ This version of Southern history emphasized the aristocratic nature of the agrarian pre-Civil War South, in which plantation homes were abundant and slavery was a necessary institution that supposedly benefitted enslaved Africans. Southern men were cast as heroic war veterans, while Southern women were viewed as charming and hospitable.

By the 1920s, however, as Northern decorative arts were beginning to be seen as representative of an “American” style, the desirability of antiques made in the South began to wane. Southern objects soon began entering collections in the North with no records of their Southern origins.⁹ Ironically, while freights of decorative arts

⁸ For more on the Lost Cause movement see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Fitzhugh Brundage, *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁹ Jonathan Prown, "A 'Preponderance of Pineapples': The Problem with Southern Furniture," *American Furniture*, (1997), accessed August 5, 2017, <http://www.chipstone.org/article.php/262/American-Furniture-1997/A-%E2%80%9CPreponderance-of-Pineapples%E2%80%9D:-The-Problem-of-Southern-Furniture>; Antiques from the South oftentimes entered collections in the North prior to the 1920s with the indication that they were Southern. A 1905 advertisement describes a country estate for sale outside of Boston; the house was being sold with its furniture, which included an “antique southern sideboard,” “old chairs,” and “old mahogany bookcases.” *The Boston Daily Globe* (Boston, MA), Nov. 26, 1905. An advertisement

objects left Southern states from the 1890s to the 1920s, the scale was relatively small in comparison to the later period—the mid-1920s to the late-1940s—during which Northerners worked with an established network of Southern dealers to facilitate the transfer of thousands of Southern antiques to Northern markets.

As Northern dealers were lured south by the promise of affordable Americana, they oftentimes sought out African American communities in their search for antiques, purchasing objects that had been bought, inherited, or looted throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁰ The preponderance of early American objects owned by black Southerners led one author to note in 1926 that “the Negro has very often become the custodian of many things which contributed much to the glory of the Old South. . . .”¹¹ Though largely overlooked by scholars, African Americans were essential in preserving antiques and supplying the trade. Taking note of this, early antique guidebooks directed collectors and dealers to the homes of African Americans in Southern states. In *The Quest of the Antique*, Robert and Elizabeth Shackleton offer the advice:

in a New York newspaper in 1908 offers for sale, “A few genuine Southern antiques, Sheraton sideboard, &c.” *The Sun* (New York, NY), Mar. 5, 1908.

¹⁰ Paul Burroughs comments on African Americans purchasing antiques following the Civil War, writing, “Some of the furniture, its value unrecognized, its owners having yielded to indifference or necessity has been burnt at the woodpile for kindling, as being in the way, shoved off on some poor relative or servant, or taken up at vendues or sales by the negroes of the neighborhood.” Burroughs, *Southern Antiques*, 31.

¹¹ Newbell Niles Puckett, *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1926), 1.

But in the South, in spite of the extirpatory experiences of war added to the usual wear and tear of time, there are great numbers of fine pieces still to be found . . . And one must not confine his search only to houses of age or pretension. As with the man with the heirlooms in the cabin near the battlefield, there are things to be found in shabby places, the original houses having been destroyed; and in many a negro cabin there may be found some broken, almost worn-out, but still beautiful, specimen of attractive old furniture.¹²

In addition to casual collectors, the most seasoned antiques professionals—Paul Burroughs, Frank Horton, and Joe Kindig, among others—regularly purchased objects from African Americans.¹³ Many of these antiques, like an early stretcher table in the collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, now form the core of decorative arts collections across the country (Figure 1.1). The table, made of sweet gum wood with intricately turned legs, was fashioned in North Carolina around 1730. Frank Horton purchased the piece from Louise Ward, an African American woman from Enfield, South Carolina, who had inherited it from her father’s family.

The financial ties between black Southerners and dealers in the early antiques trade is documented by Fred Bishop Tuck, who relates his experience searching for objects in Virginia:

¹² Robert Shackleton and Elizabeth Shackleton, *The Quest of the Antique; Being Some Personal Experiences in the Finding of Old Furniture* (London: J. Milne, 1908), 197-198.

¹³ For accounts of white collectors and dealers purchasing antiques from African Americans, see Burroughs, *Southern Antiques*, 31-34; and Frank Horton, *Southern Antique Dealers*, (1988; Winston-Salem, NC: MESDA), Video.

Going into the country for a little ways and inquiring at an old house, the man in charge said, 'I think many of our old things are down at the Negroes' quarters. Possibly if you want to go over there you can pick up something.' So the next two or three days I spent exploring the Negroes' quarters. At almost every abode I was able to find something. I record one article as being quite numerous—a tilting swing mirror. This, varying in style and workmanship, was used to set on a bureau or on a dressing table; I remember buying fourteen in that neighborhood, all of different shapes and makes, many having no glass and much out of repair.¹⁴

Tuck's indication that he located objects at "almost every abode" demonstrates the prevalence of antiques owned by African Americans in the South. Slave narratives illuminate the financial necessity that precipitated the sale of these objects to dealers. Julia A. White, a former slave living in Little Rock, Arkansas, recounted in 1938, "I have about sold the last of the antiques. . . I had some beautiful things, but one by one have sold them to antique dealers to get something to help out with." White, like many African Americans in the South from the period, was afflicted by racist social and economic policies that left her impoverished, forced to sell family heirlooms to make ends meet. She laments, "How we living now? It's mighty poorly, please believe that."¹⁵

¹⁴ Tuck, *Antique Man's Diary*, 76.

¹⁵ Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 2, Arkansas, Part 7, Vaden-Young, (1936): 117, Manuscript/Mixed Material, Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn027/>. (Accessed January 06, 2018).

For many white dealers and collectors, black consumption of fine antiques inverted longstanding racial hierarchies.¹⁶ As earlier noted, Southern antiques were viewed by white authors as evidence of the former “glory of the Old South,” and ownership of these objects by African Americans following the Civil War evinced the decline of the social order upon which that glory was built. In nearly every account documenting black ownership of antiques, white authors note the allegedly poor condition of the objects as confirmation that blacks were unable to care for antiques properly or were unaware of their rarity. While the issue of condition was one that affected virtually all antiques in the South, these same writers rarely commented on the condition of objects owned by white Southerners, unless attributing their state to the maliciousness of General Sherman’s troops.¹⁷ White collectors and dealers, North and South, utilized the poor condition of antiques owned by blacks as justification to claim the material heritage of the Old South.

As Southern antiques were collected during this early period, they were stripped from their African American owners for fractions of their worth. In some

¹⁶ I want to thank Jennifer Van Horn for providing early feedback on this subject. For information on how African Americans deployed these objects to assert agency and subvert white supremacy, see Jennifer Van Horn, “‘The Dark Iconoclast’: African Americans’ Artistic Resistance in the Civil War South,” *The Art Bulletin* 99, no. 4 (2017), 129-162.

¹⁷ The poor state of Southern antiques is attributed to General Sherman’s “March to the Sea” by a number of authors, including Paul Burroughs and Fred Bishop Tuck. Burroughs, *Southern Antiques*, 33-34; Tuck, *Antique Man’s Diary*, 75.

instances, collectors boasted of their financial manipulations of black antique owners.

One Charlestonian proudly tells of the bargain she managed:

Going to the home of one of the negroes, who claimed to have some 'dog feet chairs,' I found one of the most beautiful pieces of old George III hallmarked silver I ever saw, a liquor stand of exquisite design and workmanship with only one of the bottles missing. I asked the mammy if she would sell this. She looked at me craftily and inquired how much I'd give her. I asked, with equal craft, how much she'd take. She informed me that she couldn't possibly take less than one dollar for it, as it had been one of her ma's 'weddin' presents.' If I hesitated it was only because of her absolute ignorance of its value and the audacity of the lie she had told. In the pause I made she lowered her price to seventy-five cents, and the bargain was closed.¹⁸

The author continued her article, published in the nationally circulating *House Beautiful*, by encouraging readers to seek antiques in African American communities, believing this added to the romance of the antique hunt.

The same author later described an instance in which an African American man zealously cared for the antiques that he had inherited from his former enslaver, as she sought to advance a narrative of the "benevolent master" and "loyal slave." After detailing the antiques in the man's possession, the author remarked that, "The old man still bestows the same care upon them that he did in slavery days, and every day sees him at work with wax and turpentine and his bare hands polishing the glassy surface

¹⁸ "Old Furniture in the South," *House Beautiful*, (1901): 229-30.

of his mahogany.”¹⁹ This account challenges the dominant narrative that antiques owned by black Southerners were almost always in poor condition, and it warrants a reconsideration of the role that African Americans played in the preservation of objects from the early South.

Due to their familiarity with fine antiques, African Americans in the South, like Charleston’s Dianna Brown, at times found success in the trade.²⁰ Tuck noted in his diary that he “came across a Negro who was trying to make a business, picking up antique furniture. I found he had been quite successful in collecting, and I purchased several stands and tables.”²¹ Black Southerners also played an integral role in the management of antique shops, finding employment as clerks, packers, salespeople, cabinetmakers, and upholsterers.²²

In the South, African Americans were a primary source of antiques as white collectors and dealers began to use objects to construct an Anglo-Saxon American history. As white owners later sought to distance themselves from African Americans, the histories of these objects have oftentimes been lost. Yet, as will be discussed in

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The life and work of Dianna Brown is outlined in Part Two.

²¹ Tuck, *Antique Man’s Diary*, 81.

²² I want to thank Alison Isenberg for her time in discussing the role of African Americans in the antiques trade. For more information, see her forthcoming book on the subject, “Second-Hand Cities: Race and Region in the Antique Americana Trade, from the Civil War to Urban Renewal.”

Part Two, African Americans played an integral role in the development of the antiques field in Charleston, where they located, studied, and retailed objects to collectors and other dealers.

Though dealers regularly purchased antiques from black Southerners, they also canvassed old plantation homes for objects. While they were rebuffed in many instances, they oftentimes found luck with objects that had been relegated to barns, porches, and chicken coops as owners acquired new furniture.²³ Other pieces of higher quality were also frequently purchased, like a rare antique sideboard that Tuck acquired for the steep price of \$125.00 in 1898 outside of Petersburg, Virginia. In Emporia, Virginia, where Tuck spent a day visiting a number of homes, he was able to purchase a total of fourteen mahogany sideboards, which, he noted, “cost him an average of \$25.00 each.” His venture into the Southlands was good business, as he sold three of the sideboards to a dealer in Boston for a total of \$250.00, while he

²³ The contested reception Northern dealers received in the South was described by Joe Kindig III, who told of an incident his father had in the 1920s or 1930s. Kindig had visited the home of a woman who owned a rare print, *An Exact Prospect of Charlestown*, that was in poor condition. The protective glass on one side of the large frame had been broken, leaving half of the print exposed to fly specks and dirt that had accumulated over the years. Joe Kindig, Jr. told the woman that the print had been a valuable piece, but was worth little due to its condition. In response, the woman replied angrily, “*Your men* did that to it when they went through the house!” “*Your men*,” Joe Kindig III explained, were Union soldiers. Joe Kindig III in discussion with author, June 2017.

employed skilled cabinetmakers, who charged \$4.00 a day, to restore the others for his retail shop in Maine.²⁴

For many Southerners, the decision to sell family heirlooms to dealers was met with a profound sense of loss. In the decades following the Civil War, the furniture, silver, ceramics, and family portraits owned by the former plantation class helped white Southerners recall “the affluence and beauty of [their] past.” The Confederacy’s loss in the Civil War, followed by the economic policies of the Reconstruction era, forced white Southerners to part with objects that they held most dearly. One woman, concerned with the expense of her sister’s medical bills, sold a “precious old sofa” to a Northern dealer for forty dollars, a pittance of its worth. The “ancestral sofa” was intended for the woman’s niece, but after calling a “council of war - her three sisters, in consultation,” she decided to let go of the heirloom. The financial anxiety that accompanied life in the South for many is documented by Elizabeth Allston Pringle, who writes, “I have a very beautiful old wardrobe which I had never thought of selling, but at this time I was in one of my panics about money, the fear of not being able to pay up the accounts for the year’s expenses, my church dues and the taxes. I had nothing in the Bank. . . .”²⁵ Like African American owners of antiques, white

²⁴ Tuck, *Antique Man’s Diary*, 45, 49.

²⁵ Elizabeth Allston Pringle, “Peaceville Happenings, The Innocents at Home and the Furniture Fiend Abroad,” (Vincent P. Lannie Collection, The College of Charleston Library, 1914), 3-10. Pringle used the pseudonym “Patience Pennington.” Her most famous work is “A Woman Rice Planter,” published in 1914.

Southerners utilized prized household objects as a form of capital with which they could find relief, at least temporarily, from financial hardships.

Despite the bargains that could be had by purchasing objects out of private homes, Northern dealers in the early period also frequented more costly antique shops in the South. Writing in 1901, Fred Bishop Tuck details his experience antiquing in Charleston, South Carolina:

Make my second trip to the southland in search of old mahogany furniture, taking the Clyde Line Steamer bound to Charlestown, South Carolina. Find it very interesting looking through this old historic southern city; spend several days exploring same. Find one antique shop that had a good general stock, although the dealer told me that he could not keep many good pieces, as he was constantly shipping his best pieces to New York City.²⁶

He later notes how the owner of the antiques shop mentioned that he often sold pieces to Northerners restoring old plantation homes, further indicating the importance of the North in the early trade.

Tuck's account of Charleston, with the indication that he found it "very interesting looking through this historic southern city," suggests that his time in South Carolina was as much for pleasure as it was for business. Like many Northern tourists, antique dealers embraced Charleston's historicism and the romance of the city. Tuck's experiences in the South bear resemblance to those of tourists in the antebellum

²⁶ Tuck, *Antique Man's Diary*, 74. Tuck is likely referring to the antique shop of William O'Hagan.

period, as he sought out souvenirs that supposedly demonstrated Southern exceptionalism and the South's history of slavery.²⁷ On his tour of Charleston in 1901, he noted, "Going over to the old slave market, I tried very hard to purchase one of the standing stools used as a block, where the slaves were sold. This proved quite a problem and I came away unsuccessful."²⁸ Tuck's desire to purchase the slave blocks highlights how Northerners defined Southern culture into the early twentieth century, as they subscribed to romantic fictions of former plantation life.²⁹ Beginning in the 1920s, Charleston would come to embrace the lure it held for tourists, profiting handsomely on its colonial past, or at least mythic constructions of it.³⁰

As Northern and Southern dealers began to embrace the potential of the Northern market, wealthy industrialists from the Northeast flocked to Southern locales, where they purchased large plantation homes as winter resorts. They were attracted to Southern states in part as a result of a growing concern with "neurasthenia," or the "nervous exhaustion to which the fast-paced modern man and

²⁷ Eric W. Plaag, "'There Is an Abundance of Those Which Are Genuine': Northern Travelers and Souvenirs of the Antebellum South," in *Dixie Emporium: Tourism, Foodways, and Consumer Culture in the American South*, ed. Anthony J. Stanonis (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 26.

²⁸ Tuck, *Antique Man's Diary*, 75.

²⁹ Later, beginning in the 1920s, reproductions of slave badges were produced for Charleston's tourist market. See object MG 176 at the Charleston Museum.

³⁰ Stephanie E. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

woman were said to be susceptible,” the remedy for which was oftentimes sun and mountain air.³¹ While Northern resorts promised similar health benefits to vacationers, by the 1870s the South offered a more exclusive destination, one in which visitors could align themselves with the ruins of a supposed aristocratic past. As they purchased large plantations that could be outfitted for their hunting and equestrian needs, Northerners sought out Southern antiques to furnish their new abodes.

The desirability of Southern antiques to collectors from the Northeast was satirized in a 1922 article titled, “The Yankee Killer,” which appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* (Figure 1.2). A wealthy couple from Philadelphia, Dr. and Mrs. Hilyer, “had just bought and rejuvenated a pre-Revolution house in the river suburbs of Paignton. It was his whim to furnish it as far as possible with genuine antique furniture, bought in Paignton County. . . .” Marcus Farquhar, a Southerner whose family had been in the Carolinas since 1643 and boasted “that no Farquhar had ever been in trade,” saw an opportunity in the Philadelphians who had dared to venture into his hometown in South Carolina. Farquhar found it “fascinating—this scouring of the countryside for salable heirlooms” and decided to engage in “the thrill of Yankee baiting.”³²

³¹ Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 68.

³² Albert Payson Terhune, “The Yankee Killer,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, October 7, 1922, 12-13, 108-113.

Farquhar introduced himself to the couple and invited them to visit his colonial-era home, where he showed them a clock that he claimed was, “brought over from Shropshire by the first Marcus Farquhar in 1643. It has been in the family ever since. . . I refused an offer of twenty-one hundred dollars for this antique from a Yankee dealer last year. I do not sell to dealers.” Well-versed in furniture connoisseurship, Dr. Hilyer closely inspected the piece and at once exclaimed, “Hold on! . . . There’s a bad blunder somewhere. This is Sheraton, with all the earmarks of being the work of one of Tom Sheraton’s post-Georgian disciples.” Farquhar concurred, “It is a genuine Sheraton. Anyone who has studied Sheraton furniture can readily—” Hilyer interrupted the man, explaining that Sheraton was born in 1751. Sensing the doctor’s incredulity, Farquhar declared, “You have called me a liar, sir! . . . A liar and a cheat and a common trickster! Me—a Farquhar!” The challenge of his honor, Farquhar reasoned, could only be remedied in a duel. The residents of Paignton, upon hearing of Farquhar’s provocation, became incensed by the potential of losing the doctor’s capital for investments. One of the town’s prominent citizens pled with Hilyer: “His kind of Southerner has become as rare as the dodo bird. He’s not representative of the South or of Paignton or of anything at all, except his worthless self.” Dr. Hillyer was unsure of how to respond to Farquhar’s challenge, and at his wife’s request, their “antiques were shipped to Philadelphia in their wake. Their half-renovated house was put up for sale.” The dramatic saga concludes with Dr. Hilyer’s nephew visiting Paignton to chase Marcus Farquhar out of town, much to the

delight of Paignton's residents. Dr. and Mrs. Hilyer could return to the South and were sure to be greeted with "quite an ovation."³³

As "The Yankee Killer" elucidates, the expansive halls of Southern homes were filled with new residents as Northerners became captivated with idyllic images of colonial plantations and recognized the financial benefits of investing in Southern industries. But their interest in the South was not confined to their "carpetbagger" tendencies. Instead, it was informed in part by the national success of the Lost Cause ideology. As the belief system took hold, a romantic image of the Old South coalesced; plantation homes evinced the former gentility of the region, while the atrocities of slavery and memories of war were supplanted with idyllic pastoral landscapes. In effect, Southern-made antiques and plantation homes began to assume value as artifacts of an imagined homogeneous Anglo-Saxon past, fictions that Northerners readily embraced. Though the "Yankee baiting" Marcus Farquhar was cast as the villain in this scenario, the story importantly identifies the various ways in which many Southerners attempted to resist the colonization of their cultural heritage to little avail. As Northerners continued to flock to the South, dealers soon began opening winter antique shops in Southern resort towns like Aiken, South Carolina, a noted equestrian city.

Fred Bishop Tuck took notice of the unique Southern town, describing it as "a very popular resort, with many of its visitors coming from New York and vicinity."

³³ Ibid.

After opening a winter store in Aiken, he remarked that he was able to offer, “a very interesting stock of the various Southern styles of furniture.”³⁴ Tuck’s shop evidently caught the attention of those vacationing in the area, as he was paid a visit one morning by a woman who rode into the store on horseback.³⁵ After dismounting, the woman expressed interest in a set of antique silver cups, but noted that she only wanted those with handles. She proceeded to string the silver cups on the horse’s reins, remarking in the process, “How much will this old junk cost me collectively?” Tuck and the woman agreed on the price of \$325.00, and after payment was exchanged, Tuck asked the woman: “To whom am I indebted for these purchases?” The woman replied, “My name is Mrs. Willie K. Vanderbilt, and I am very much pleased to meet you Mr. Tuck.”³⁶

A few days later Vanderbilt called on Tuck’s shop again, this time in search of furniture. Tuck remarked, “She, looking through my stock of old mahogany Southern pieces, and selecting a mahogany dressing table, a tilting swing inlaid mahogany mirror to set upon it, a pair of Hepplewhite inlaid knife boxes, and a pie-crust-top, ball-and-claw-foot mahogany table, remarked, ‘I think this will conclude my purchases for today.’”³⁷ Upon being asked where these items should be shipped, the

³⁴ Tuck, *Antique Man’s Diary*, 119.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Tuck, *Antique Man’s Diary*, 121.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

woman replied, “You will not have to crate them, but I shall expect you to wrap them very carefully and send them to the railroad station, where my private car will take my purchases home to New York. I think it is so interesting that my old furniture, purchased in Aiken, is now going home in my private car.”³⁸

Beginning in the 1890s, the northern movement of antiques was facilitated by railroads, as objects were transported hundreds of miles to eventually settle in the shops of dealers and homes of collectors in the Northeast. Betty C. Coons, an important early collector and dealer of Southern antiques, explains the route these objects often took:

Georgia seemed to be the beginning of the Piedmont route that included Greenville, Charlotte, and on up the line. A dozen or more towns became centers for assembling the furniture to be crated and transported by freight or occasionally by express. Eastern North Carolina had Elizabeth City, Edenton, Hertford and Rocky Mount. Toward the West, Blackstone in Virginia, Harrisonburg in the Valley, Charlottesville and Warrenton that were off the beaten tracks were other assembly spots. Richmond, Norfolk and Baltimore were often merely temporary lay-over places before the better quality pieces moved north. Some that were recorded as having been bought in Virginia were originally found further south and had no Virginia background.³⁹

Coons’ description helps elucidate the scale at which antique dealers were working and documents how antiques slowly shed their histories as they traveled north.

³⁸ Tuck, *Antique Man’s Diary*, 121-122.

³⁹ Coons, *Antique By-lines*, 50.

As the railroads facilitated the movement of the South's cultural heritage, Southern antiques slowly began to enter Northern collections with no traces of their origins, like an easy chair now in the collection of the Winterthur Museum (Figure 1.3). The mahogany chair, now covered in modern upholstery, features intricately carved acanthus leaves on the legs, which terminate in claw and ball feet. In March 1937, an *Antiques* article detailed the construction of the easy chair, stating that the "carving of the front legs and feet is of a higher order than New York workmanship often reveals." Nevertheless, the article concluded that the chair had originated in New York.⁴⁰ Recent scholarship by Brad Rauschenberg and John Bivins has established that the easy chair, in fact, was made in Charleston, South Carolina.⁴¹

The chair entered the Winterthur collection through a purchase from the New York antiques firm of Ginsburg & Levy, who had bought the chair in 1948 for \$2,500 from H.R. Colvin. In their account book, they note that the chair came from, "Lowndes, Northport, L.I.," referring to the collection of Stanley Howard Lowndes and his wife, Ada Lowndes.⁴² The obituary for Stanley H. Lowndes states that he was, "one of the wealthiest and most widely known oyster planters in the country." He sold his interests in a variety of oyster ventures for approximately \$7.5 million in 1910 and

⁴⁰ "The Skeleton Within," *Antiques Magazine*, March 1937, 143-144.

⁴¹ Bradford L. Rauschenberg and John Bivins, *The Furniture of Charleston 1680-1820* (Winston-Salem, NC: Old Salem Inc., 2003), 414-416.

⁴² Ginsburg & Levy purchased the chair at the Lowndes auction in 1935 and likely sold it to H.R. Colvin. It was then purchased back from Colvin in 1948.

was a “well-known collector of antiques and art treasures.” After Lowndes passed away in 1914, his wife cared for their collection of American and European decorative arts for a number of years before selling in a 1935 auction.⁴³ Marginalia next to the Metropolitan Museum’s copy indicates that the easy chair was purchased for \$240.00.⁴⁴ Though it is unclear how it entered the Lowndes collection, the Charleston easy chair demonstrates the malleability of Southern objects which, in some instances, fit seamlessly into the great collections of Americana in the Northeast, the objects’ origins unbeknownst to their owners.

By the 1920s, the Northern antiques market had entered a new stage in its development. The economic boom of the era, combined with the recognition of American decorative arts by important collecting institutions, brought higher prices for colonial-era objects. The Howard Reifsnyder auction in 1929 and the Philip Flayderman sale in 1930 bolstered the efforts of antique dealers, who were able to demand premium prices for their wares. As more Americans began to partake in the “antiques craze,” dealers like Joe Kindig, Jr. (1900 – 1971) sought alternative sources

⁴³ Ginsburg & Levy, Inc., *Sales Book*, December 1948, Downs Collection, Winterthur Museum; “Stanley H. Lowndes Dies of Apoplexy,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Brooklyn, New York), March 13, 1914; “Stanley H. Lowndes,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), March 14, 1914; *Stanley H. Lowndes Collection of American Furniture* (American Art Association, Anderson Galleries), 1935.

⁴⁴ Listed as lot number 1227 is a “Chippendale Carved Mahogany Upholstered Wing Chair, American, circa 1760.” Its description reads: “Commodious easy chair on cabriole front legs carved with acanthus and terminating in claw and ball feet, plain canted rear legs. Covered in worn machine-tapestry fabric.” “American Furniture,” American Art Association Anderson Galleries, 1935.

to satiate their clientele's demands. Like dealers a generation before him, Kindig looked to the South for objects, engaging with an established set of dealers with specialized knowledge in locating antiques from the region.⁴⁵

Kindig had an early advantage in dealing Southern objects, as his father, a mule trader, traveled to the South from Pennsylvania frequently. Kindig often accompanied him on these trips, and he soon sensed a business opportunity in Southern antiques. As Kindig traveled to Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, and South Carolina, he viewed the large number of objects the region afforded him at reasonable prices as an "apprenticeship to the antiques business."⁴⁶ Kindig was able to sell the antiques he purchased at high markups to antiquarians in Pennsylvania and New York, as well as to those in the South, like Frank Horton. In some instances, he retailed to collectors who were interested in the Colonial Revival aesthetic, but could not afford more costly wares from the Mid-Atlantic or New England.⁴⁷ Kindig would go on to author important texts on Southern ceramics and serve as a consultant for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts' 1952 exhibition, *Furniture of the Old South, 1640-1820*. He is perhaps best remembered, however, as one of Henry Francis du Pont's most trusted advisors and dealers. His influence remains apparent at Winterthur, from

⁴⁵ Israel Sack also spent time working in the South and was responsible for a large number of pieces moving North.

⁴⁶ Joe Kindig, III in discussion with author, June 2017.

⁴⁷ Frank Horton, *Southern Antique Dealers*, (1988; Winston-Salem, NC: MESDA), Video.

the smattering of Southern objects that du Pont seamlessly blended with antiques from the North to the Southern interior woodwork used throughout Winterthur.

Unlike dealers of the previous generation who purchased Southern antiques on a relatively small scale, Kindig was highly methodical and organized in his buying.

Joe Kindig III describes his father's methods:

The easiest way for him was to take an overnight boat from Baltimore down to Norfolk. He had made arrangements before with the dealers that he had now gotten to know. . . . A dealer would pick him up in Norfolk. That dealer—it might have been two months since he was in the South—in that two months time, the dealer in the Norfolk area would have canvassed his area trying to find objects. He would take Joe around to see the things that he had found. When they had finished their business, another dealer, say from the Petersburg area, would pick him up in their car and take him through the same routine that he had just gone through in Norfolk. And when he was finished he would be back at home.⁴⁸

The manner in which Kindig conducted his business allowed him to export Southern objects at an unprecedented scale, and his large customer base in both the North and South made Kindig a very successful businessman.

Though Kindig was integral in the development of the field of Southern decorative arts, a great deal of the region's material culture lost its context as a result of his business. One such item, a cellaret made in Winchester, Virginia, found a home in du Pont's Winterthur Museum (Figure 1.4). The mahogany cellaret, an oval form

⁴⁸ Joe Kindig, III in discussion with author, June 2017.

resting on four tapered legs with inlaid bellflowers, features a copper lining for chilling wine. The cellaret, purchased by Kindig in the 1930s, was likely shown to him by his scout in the Shenandoah Valley, Oscar Harry. Harry worked for a woolen mill in the 1930s, but sometime in the early 1940s he became the Superintendent of the Mount Hebron Cemetery in Winchester.⁴⁹ Harry used his position, and the access it provided him to many of the established families in the area, to supply goods to antique dealers and collectors. After Kindig purchased the piece in the 1930s, he advertised it in the February 1939 issue of *Antiques*, describing it as, “An American Hepplewhite mahogany wine cooler of Virginia origin, circa 1790.” Eventually, the Virginia origins of the piece were lost, replaced by museum curators with an attribution to Baltimore. Recent research on this object has affirmed Winchester as the place of origin.⁵⁰

Henry Francis du Pont placed the cellaret in the Baltimore Drinking Room, surrounded by handsome wallpaper depicting scenes from the Bay of Naples. The room, located on the floor the du Pont family used for entertaining, speaks to the wealth of Baltimore’s colonial past. The original context of the piece—made in the Southern Backcountry—was supplanted with an origin story that better suited du

⁴⁹ I am grateful to Nicholas Powers for calling my attention to the cellaret and for generously sharing his research on the subject with me. Nicholas Powers, email message to author, November 14, 2017.

⁵⁰ Rachel Asbury, “Object 1957.0698,” (Unpublished term paper, Winterthur Program in American Material Culture, 2016), 1; Advertisement by Joe Kindig, *Antiques Magazine*, February 1939, 1.

Pont's Colonial Revival vision, a fate that many Southern objects met from the 1920s on.

Though the fascination with the romanticized Old South had largely faded by the early 1950s, Northern interest in Southern-made objects continued. Around 1950, Joseph Downs, then curator at Winterthur, expressed his desire for a rare Charleston walnut dressing table, now in the collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (Figure 1.5). The dressing table features highly unusual scallop shells on all four legs, beneath which are carved four fleurs-de-lis. The culmination of this feat of Charleston workmanship is an indented carved shell on the center of the table front. The report Downs had requested on the piece from Charles Archibald MacLellan, the Canadian-born illustrator and antique dealer living in Wilmington, Delaware, described it as “really a hot piece, better than I thought.” The author continued their praise, stating, “I believe this is one of the most important American pieces of this period to turn up.” Unfortunately for Downs and Winterthur, the owner of the dressing table wished for it to stay in the South.⁵¹ The exodus of the region's material culture had subsided as a flurry of interest in Southern antiques emerged in the mid-twentieth-century. The cultural battle for the region's material culture had, for the time being, been put to rest.

⁵¹ Charles Archibald MacLellan to Joseph Downs, (Archives 28, Winterthur Archives, Winterthur Library), undated.



Figure 1.1 Table, 1720-1740, Northeastern North Carolina. Sweet gum with yellow pine; HOA: 26", WOA: 35-1/2", DOA: 29". Collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) at Old Salem Museums & Gardens, Acc. 2024.25, Society of Colonial Wars Purchase Fund.



Figure 1.2 Illustration from “The Yankee Killer,” The Saturday Evening Post, October 7, 1922.



Figure 1.3 Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, Easy chair, 1760-1775, Charleston, SC, Mahogany, Ash, Silk, Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont, 1958.0591



Figure 1.4 Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, Cellaret, 1790-1805, Winchester, VA,
Mahogany, Black walnut, Maple, Brass, Copper, Lead, Bequest of Henry
Francis du Pont, 1957.698



Figure 1.5 Dressing table possibly by William Carwithen, 1745-1750, Charleston, SC. Walnut with cypress and yellow pine; HOA: 31-5/8", WOA: 31-3/4", DOA: 21". Collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) at Old Salem Museums & Gardens, Acc. 2024.33, Gift of Frank L. Horton.

Part Two

SOUTHERNERS CLAIM THEIR ARTISTIC HERITAGE

As a result of Northern interest in Southern antiques and the financial difficulties of Southerners during the late nineteenth century, collecting developed more slowly in the South than it did in the North. From the Centennial celebrations to the turn of the century, collecting was sporadic at best, with local antiquarians gathering small collections of relics that were employed to reinforce mythical narratives of the pre-Civil War South. The greatest stimulus for collecting and dealing Southern antiques came in 1907 with the Jamestown Ter-Centennial Exposition, where colonial objects from throughout the nation were on display. The Exposition prompted a flurry of activity in the antiques field, as new dealers opened up shops throughout the South. The antiques trade continued to gain steam in the following decades, as antiquarians began seeking out objects with Southern histories and forming vast collections of important Americana. Throughout this period, collectors in the South relied on a group of dealers who were largely considered outsiders among the wealthy white Protestant elite. First and second generation Americans, Jews, and African Americans played an integral role in the development of the Southern antiques trade, as they supplied antiques to fuel the collecting habits of antiquarians throughout the country.

As a matter of public opinion, Southerners were largely ambivalent about the Philadelphia Centennial. Some declared it a “Yankee affair with which we ought to

have nothing to do,” while others felt that Southern states should “demand a place in the picture.”⁵² Regardless of their sentiments towards the nation’s Centennial, Southerners expressed a keen interest in history as they organized local and regional celebrations with unique Southern character. Charlotte, North Carolina, hosted the largest of these, the “Mecklenburg Centennial,” on May 20, 1875, which attracted an estimated 25,000 to 40,000 people.⁵³ The event commemorated the signing of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence—a document allegedly drafted a century prior—which declared North Carolina’s independence from Great Britain. The Mecklenburg Declaration notably predated the nation’s Declaration of Independence, which proponents of the Mecklenburg Centennial capitalized on as they declared, “As they are determined to write us as rebels we might as well set up our clear title to be old original rebels.”⁵⁴ Yet, as scholars have noted, the Mecklenburg Declaration, a document that was first published 44 years after its alleged signing, was likely conflated with the Mecklenburg Resolves, a set of demands similar to those issued throughout the Colonies prior to the nation’s Declaration of Independence.⁵⁵ Despite

⁵² *The Weekly State Chronical* (Raleigh, NC), March 8, 1884; *The Abbeville Press and Banner* (Abbeville, SC), October 27, 1875.

⁵³ The Mecklenburg Centennial was also referred to in period newspapers as the “Southern Centennial,” the “Charlotte Centennial,” and the “North Carolina Centennial.”

⁵⁴ *The Greensboro Patriot* (Greensboro, NC), April 28, 1875.

⁵⁵ Richard N. Current, “That Other Declaration: May 20, 1775-May 20, 1975,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 54, no. 2 (April 1977): 169-191.

its spurious nature, the Mecklenburg Declaration remains at the cornerstone of the state's identity. In 1885, North Carolina adopted a flag with "May 20, 1775" emblazoned on it, a date which remains on the state's flag today (Figure 2.1).

From its inception, the goals of the Mecklenburg Centennial differed from those of its counterpart in Philadelphia. The celebration sought to link the former Confederacy with the nation's earliest patriots, as Joseph E. Johnston, a Confederate General, was chosen to serve as Chief Marshal of the event. The national press took a critical view of the celebration, as one editorial stated, "They are determined to make their Mecklenburg Centennial the occasion for a grand confederate pow-wow, in which the 'lost cause' shall have free course, and be glorified beyond all other things in the world."⁵⁶ Despite this characterization, organizers of the Mecklenburg Centennial invited President Ulysses S. Grant and other Union veterans to attend. Though the celebration espoused the values of the Lost Cause and did little to attract national figures, many of whom declined their invitations, North Carolina newspapers declared that the event had done much to increase "fraternal feelings between the two sections" of the country.⁵⁷ For all of the pomp and circumstance surrounding the celebration of the Mecklenburg Declaration, few colonial objects were on display at the event. Yet the fervor for history that the Centennial celebrations demonstrated led

⁵⁶ *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye* (Burlington, IA), April 29, 1875.

⁵⁷ *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, North Carolina), May 27, 1875.

antiquarians from throughout the Old South to begin assembling and preserving relics, an effort that was initiated in the 1850s with the founding of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. Colonial objects that were associated with Civil War heroes were of considerable interest to Southern antiquarians, as collectors began constructing narratives of American history that reinforced their political viewpoints and harkened back to the pre-Civil War South.

After visiting a furniture and antique shop in Frederick, Maryland, in November 1885, the antiquarian Ariana Trail became determined to purchase for her daughter a desk and bookcase made in the city in the 1780s. The desk and bookcase, made of richly figured black walnut, features fluted quarter columns, a uniquely carved leaf and ball finial, and, most notably, ten secret compartments (Figure 2.2). Upon seeing the piece, Trail wrote to her son-in-law, Reverend John Harding, with a tone of urgency, imploring him to send \$18 “so that she can buy Barbara Fritchie’s secretary, a lovely antique genuine, & in perfect order.” Harding should send the money quickly, Trail pleaded, or risk the rare piece being “grabbed up by the rich Mrs. Buckler of Baltimore in a day or 2.” Trail wanted the piece not only for its aesthetic value, but also for its association with the Union Civil War heroine Barbara Fritchie, who was memorialized by the poet John Greenleaf Whittier for her alleged defiance of Stonewall Jackson. As Confederate troops marched through Frederick on their way to the battle of Antietam, they spotted an American flag draped from the window of a home, leading to an infamous exchange documented by Whittier in the poem bearing Barbara Fritchie’s name:

“Halt!”— the dust-brown ranks stood fast.
“Fire!”— out blazed the rifle-blast.

It shivered the window, pane and sash;
It rent the banner with seam and gash.

Quick, as it fell, from the broken staff.
Dame Barbara snatched the silken scarf;

She leaned far out on the window-sill,
And shook it forth with a royal will.

“Shoot, if you must, this old gray head,
but spare your country’s flag!,” she said.

Trail’s daughter later recounted her mother’s fondness for Barbara Fritchie, writing that Trails “used to say that ‘Aunt Barbara’ was the only person who had ever excited her envy.” Harding recognized the value of the piece to his mother-in-law and quickly arranged for the money to be sent. Yet, like the Mecklenburg Centennial, Ariana Trail’s purchase of the desk and bookcase memorialized an erroneous historical narrative; scholars today are in agreement that Fritchie did not likely wave the American flag in defiance of Confederate troops. But to the millions of individuals who read Whittier’s poem, Fritchie’s story spoke to the character of the Union. Trail’s purchase of the desk and bookcase is instructive in the ways in which objects were used to reinforce the politics of their owners following the Civil War. Though Ariana Trail was unique among her collecting peers in the South for her desire to purchase an object associated with a Unionist, she was joined by antiquarians who largely sought

out objects with connections to local, regional, and national historical figures, in addition to prizing family heirlooms.⁵⁸

The public's interest in colonial history was capitalized on by the first documented Southern antique dealer, William O'Hagan, who opened a shop in Charleston in 1878 and expanded his business significantly in the following decades. O'Hagan, an outsider among Charleston's white Protestant elite, was born in New York to Irish Catholic immigrants. During the early decades of his career, O'Hagan relied primarily on Northern collectors and dealers for business, while Southern antiquarians formed a smaller portion of his business. O'Hagan was joined in this first generation of Southern antique dealers by J. Franklin Biggs, a fellow New York Irishman. Biggs settled in Richmond, Virginia, and opened an antique shop in the city in 1890. In 1898, Fred Bishop Tuck described the furniture in Biggs' shop as, "... for the most part solid mahogany, [consisting] of two or three mahogany sideboards, several tables, and chairs."⁵⁹ By 1907, Biggs had expanded his offerings, billing himself as the "largest Dealer in this Class of Goods in Virginia" (Figure 2.3).⁶⁰ By the

⁵⁸ Ariana Trail to John Harding, Frederick, Maryland, November 21, 1885; John Greenleaf Whittier, "Barbara Fritchie, *Atlantic Monthly*, 1863; John Harding to Ariana Trail, Frederick, Maryland, November 23, 1885; Florence Trail, *A Memorial of Ariana McElfresh Trail* (Boston, MA: R.G. Badger, 1929), 72.

⁵⁹ Tuck, *Antique Man's Diary*, 44.

⁶⁰ Mary Abigail Burgess, *Sketches and views, points of interest, Richmond, Virginia; supplemented by sketches of Williamsburg, Jamestown, Yorktown. Description and map [of] historic battlefields* (Richmond, VA, 1907).

1910s the Biggs Antique Company had operated sales or satellite stores in eleven states throughout the country, capitalizing on the nation's fascination with the Old South. Biggs' advertising regularly described how his antiques were culled from old plantations in Virginia and the surrounding states. Biggs, like his employee H.C. Valentine, eventually began reproducing antique furniture and distributing it nationally. At the time of his death in 1932, Biggs left a sizeable estate of \$251,255 to his wife, as well as the couple's iconic Richmond home, Pratt's Castle (Figure 2.4).⁶¹ The castellated structure had escaped the destruction of the Civil War, eventually coming to represent Richmond's cosmopolitan status before it was torn down later in the century. The American antiques trade, with the profits it afforded dealers, allowed the son of an Irish immigrant from New York to own one of the Southern city's most fashionable homes.

Despite the activity in dealing Southern antiques during the late nineteenth century, Southern collecting during this period remained sporadic until the first decade of the twentieth century. The Southern economy had begun to recover from the loss of their enslaved labor force and the economic destruction of the Civil War and Reconstruction. As the landscape around them was rapidly being industrialized, Southerners began assembling small collections of decorative arts. Fred Bishop Tuck noted in 1901 that in Savannah, Georgia, "I find no antique shops here, but there is considerable interest in collecting antiques by the home people, the large and heavily

⁶¹ *The News Leader* (Staunton, VA), March 5, 1932.

built furniture prevailing, which does not suit my Northern trade.”⁶² Antiquarians throughout the South began to see their preservation efforts come to fruition with the 1907 Jamestown Exposition, the importance of which cannot be understated for Southern collectors and dealers. The event was deemed “a magnificent failure” by the press due to the numerous issues it encountered—only one third of construction was finished by the time it opened—yet it activated a sense of history in the region and precipitated a flurry of activity in the antiques trade. Writing on North Carolina’s involvement in the Jamestown Exposition, one woman described:

The various original thirteen States differ widely in the possession of a genuine historic appreciation. Massachusetts awoke long ago, and now has no equal for vigilance in protecting her treasures. Virginia, due largely to circumstances, slumbered many years longer, but now rivals her sister New England State. Others are lethargic, but heard the bugle call to duty sounded at [the] Jamestown Exposition. North Carolina, like Rip Van Winkle of old, has been aroused from an apparently comatose state . . .⁶³

Nearly three million people attended the Exposition, a number that paled in comparison to the Chicago World’s Fair and the Philadelphia Centennial, yet it prompted a reexamination of Southern history and a determination to begin preserving it. As Sam Margolin has documented, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia

⁶² Tuck, *Antique Man’s Diary*, 76.

⁶³ Mary Hilliard Hinton, *The North Carolina Historical Exhibit at the Jamestown Ter-Centennial Exposition*, (Richmond, VA, 1908), 8.

Antiquities, a group comprised primarily of women, worked diligently to restore the historic Jamestown site, which they referred to as the “modern Pompeii.”⁶⁴

Like many states exhibiting at the Jamestown Exposition, North Carolina brought a host of relics for display (Figure 2.5). These objects were primarily associated with historical individuals, though some regard was also paid to the objects’ aesthetic merits. North Carolina adapted their exhibit for a national audience, as they incorporated antiques and fine art that held broad popular appeal while avoiding overt references to the Confederacy or the Lost Cause. The objects featured in the exhibit at times held only tenuous links to North Carolina, but they nevertheless would have appealed to the wide array of visitors that flocked to the Jamestown Exposition. The description for a chair from Mount Vernon that was displayed in North Carolina’s exhibit illuminates how the objects selected would have provoked broad interest: “The chair from Mount Vernon suggested many scenes through which it passed, in which General and Mrs. Washington were ever the ideal host and hostess of the days that have passed away forever.”⁶⁵ The Colonial Revival sentiments at Jamestown did much to advance the efforts of antiquarians in the South as the exhibition simultaneously sought to appeal to a national audience.

⁶⁴ Sam Margolin, “‘A Magnificent Failure’: Ceramic Souvenirs of the 1907 Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition” in *Ceramics in America* (2008), ed. Robert Hunter. Milwaukee: Chipstone Foundation, 2008.

⁶⁵ Hinton, *The North Carolina Historical Exhibit*, 16.

If the spate of collecting activity that occurred in the years following the Jamestown Exposition is any indicator, the event was anything but a “magnificent failure.” The Exposition prompted the South to reexamine their past, as collectors and dealers helped propel the field of Southern decorative arts to a new stage in its development. The effect of the Exposition was felt almost immediately, as Morris Navis, the father of legendary antique dealer Charles Navis, entered the antiques market in 1907. Similarly, the illustrious J.K. Beard, a former feather dealer, joined the trade in Richmond in 1908. As the profession attracted more attention, the prices for goods began to escalate. Fred Bishop Tuck noted that between the years of 1912 and 1914, dealers struggled with prices that individuals were demanding for their heirlooms in both the North and the South. As the field began to assume a more formalized structure with a broader network, Dianna Brown (1860 – 1949), an African American woman in Charleston, South Carolina, began competing for business in the male-dominated trade.

Brown was the first African American woman in South Carolina to enter the antiques trade and one of the earliest Southern women in the field. Born into slavery in Darlington County, South Carolina, in 1860, Brown moved to Charleston after her marriage in 1878. Her husband, Jason Brown, operated a livery and undertaking business in Charleston until his death in 1926. The Brown family was considered by many to be among the city’s elite African American community, and Jason Brown’s livery stable was described as a “very prosperous” business. Together the couple had ten children, and they used their financial success to educate them at the Avery

Normal Institute, a prestigious school for African Americans that counted a number of illustrious civic and business leaders among its graduates.⁶⁶

Though Dianna Brown was listed in the 1880 census as “Keeping House,” later records indicate that she assisted her husband in his business, where she likely developed her entrepreneurial skills. The couple made their home at 62 Queen Street in Charleston’s French Quarter, a block from the shop of the city’s pre-eminent antique dealer, William O’Hagan (Figure 2.6). Brown recognized O’Hagan’s success, and in 1913 at the age of 53, she entered the antiques business during a period when her husband’s stables were likely suffering due to the popularity of the automobile. Her work as an African American woman in the antiques trade was so rare that the Works Progress Administration issued a report documenting her business in 1936 (See Appendix A).⁶⁷

Brown spent the first seven years of her involvement in the trade working as a scout, where she was able to locate and sell antiques “of the rarest kind.” In this role, she engaged with “. . .white people of the Southern Aristocracy who did not want their

⁶⁶ *Oral History with Julia Craft DeCosta*, Interviewed by Edmund Lee Drago and Eugene Hunt, September 11, 1980. Avery Research Center Oral History Collection, of the Avery Research Center at the College of Charleston. Online: <http://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:23392> (Accessed February 12, 2018).

⁶⁷ Augustus Ladson, “Negro Interest in Charleston,” WPA Federal Writers Project on African American Life in South Carolina, April 9, 1936. Online: <http://digital.tcl.sc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/wpafwp/id/2187> (Accessed: February 24, 2018).

names exposed as connected with this business.”⁶⁸ Though Brown undoubtedly experienced systemic racism in the era of Jim Crow, she used her race as an advantage, largely operating outside of the purview of the owners’ white neighbors and relatives. Brown found enough success in the field as a scout that she acquired a business license in 1920 and opened her shop, “Brown Antiques,” to the public. Though she never carried a large stock of furniture, she was always able to secure quality antiques for her customers.⁶⁹ Brown developed a national reputation, and tourists to the historic city flocked to her shop as they searched for Southern antiques. In addition to her shop in Charleston, Brown recognized the potential of the Aiken, South Carolina, market, making regular visits to the resort town during the winters, where she sold antiques to Northern collectors and dealers. By 1940, Dianna Brown had entered a new stage of her career. In addition to working full-time at the age of 80, she also began employing at least one individual in her shop. At the time of Brown’s death in 1949, her obituary was printed in *The New York Age*, an influential African American newspaper with a national distribution.⁷⁰

Dianna Brown was among the first women in the field, joined later by a cast of largely well-to-do white women like Dewitt Thurmond Chatham, Margaret Cannon and her daughter Betty Coons, Will Theus, Eleanor Hume Offutt, Theo Taliaferro,

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Coons, *Antique By-Lines*, 34.

⁷⁰ *New York Age* (New York, NY), January 29, 1949.

Pattie Anderson, Bessie Brockwell, Eunice Chambers, and Roberta C. Nicholson, among others. In a time when women had limited professional opportunities, the antiques trade allowed them to assume leadership positions and exercise their skills without male oversight. These women were likely encouraged by the shifting cultural norms that advocated for women to join the paid labor force. In 1893, Etta M. Taylor penned *A Practical Business Guide for American Women of All Conditions and Ages, Who Want to Make Money But Do Not Know How*. Reacting against the relegation of women to the domestic sphere, Taylor writes, “Let it again be declared that any honest work that a woman can do with profit is proper work for women.” She suggests that women take up the business of dealing second hand furniture, noting that it “requires not great capital, either in buying stock or for rent.”⁷¹ Yet, even as these pioneering women started their own businesses, they often kept their professional activities quiet during the early years of the American antiques trade. Betty Coons, writing on the nature of the field, explains, “Some of these scouts, especially the women, felt they could not afford to have their names associated with the trade world.”⁷² Yet by the late 1920s, Southern women had become fully entrenched in the antiques trade, regularly

⁷¹ Etta M. Taylor, Taylor, *How: a practical business guide for American women of all conditions and ages who want to make money but do not know how* (Minneapolis, MN: E.M. Taylor, 1893), 67. For more information on women in the trade, see Jeanne Schinto, “‘Miss Edgerton’s Ye Olde Colonial Shoppe,’ or Women in the Trade,” Online: <http://www.jeanneschinto.com/uploads/3/1/1/8/31182983/edgerton-2.pdf> (Accessed: March 13, 2018).

⁷² Coons, *Antique By-Lines*, 36.

publicizing their sales in *Antiques* alongside male dealers. Their path was forged by African American women like Dianna Brown, who recognized the potential of the field early on.

The longstanding association of women with the concept of the home allowed women to transition into careers in antiques and interior decoration, as both women and men capitalized on depictions of the home to sell antiques. J.K. Beard regularly included photographs of Drewery Mansion outside of Richmond, Virginia, in his advertisements, conjuring up romantic visions of the Old South. In an advertisement from 1925, Beard writes, "Typical of Old Virginia, redolent of the romance of plantation days is the Drewery Mansion, just outside of Richmond. I have filled the place with early furniture of the South—most of it is for sale...." Similarly, Theo Taliaferro and Frank Horton included a large photo of their house, Kinderton, in a 1945 advertisement in *Antiques*. The idea of the home was closely associated with the American antiques trade, as objects' value as relics gave way to their aesthetic merit during the twentieth century. Writing in 1913, Elsie de Wolfe advocated in *The House in Good Taste* for homeowners to consider antique reproductions when decorating their homes; to have a fashionable, tasteful home was to have furniture that at least appeared to be antique. For her part, Dianna Brown imparted notions of good taste and

entrepreneurship to her daughter, Ruth Brown, who was the sole proprietor of an interior decorating business in Charleston during the 1930s.⁷³

As women found work in the antiques trade, they also began to play an integral role in collecting Southern decorative arts in the 1920s and 1930s. Betty Coons writes, “Women seem more plentiful as early collectors in that antique world I first remember.”⁷⁴ Among this early group of women were three sisters: Margaret Thurmond Kavanaugh, Martha Thurmond Chatham, and Dewitt Thurmond Chatham.⁷⁵ The Thurmond sisters, daughters of a railroad magnate who themselves married wealthy industrialists, were of particular importance in developing an appreciation for history in North Carolina, where, as previously noted, Dewitt Thurmond Chatham worked as an antique dealer and the three sisters became important early collectors. Dewitt Thurmond Chatham and her husband, Paul Chatham, began purchasing important Southern objects as early as 1903, many of which are now at MESDA.⁷⁶ Like her collecting predecessors, Chatham prized pieces

⁷³ Advertisement by J.K. Beard, *Antiques Magazine*, October 1925, 227; Advertisement by Theo Taliaferro and Frank Horton, *Antiques Magazine*, November 1941, 314; Elsie De Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste* (New York, NY: Rizzoli, 1913).

⁷⁴ Coons, *Antique By-Lines*, 36.

⁷⁵ I want to thank Tom Gray for supplying information on the Thurmond sisters and Hanes family.

⁷⁶ It is unclear when Dewitt Thurmond Chatham began dealing antiques, as she never publicly advertised her business and is not listed on census records as an antique dealer.

with strong links to regional historical narratives as she scoured the Carolinas. Among her purchases was a walnut gateleg table upon which the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence was allegedly signed (Figure 2.7). The purchase of the table, with the history it evoked, linked the Chatham family with the nation's earliest patriots.

For all of their interest in history, the Thurmond sisters did much to inspire the next generation of antiquarians, as one of Dewitt Thurmond Chatham's best clients was her nephew-in-law, textile manufacturer Ralph P. Hanes and his wife, Dewitt Chatham Hanes, who began collecting antiques in the 1920s. Ralph P. Hanes and his wife were described as "knowledgeable antique collectors who, for the most part, avoided the smart shops and the famous dealers in their quest for fine, preferably Southern furnishings...."⁷⁷ As their collection grew, the Hanes family commissioned the New York architect Julian Peabody to construct a Colonial Revival home in Winston-Salem in 1929, while Sister Parrish later helped with the interiors. Ralph P. Hanes and his wife were integral in the network of Southern collectors that developed in the 1920s and 1930s, which included J. Pope Nash, Mrs. Gabriel Cannon, Mrs. J.G. Hayes, Mrs. E.M. Crutchfield, and Mrs. Walter Griffin. Many of these collectors employed their skills in connoisseurship as they sought antiques of Southern origins, a development from earlier modes of collecting.

As Southern antiquarians assembled vast collections of decorative arts in the 1920s and 1930s, more dealers began opening shops in the South. Charles Navis was

⁷⁷ Rita Reif, *Treasure Rooms of America's Mansions, Manors and Houses* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970), 290.

among them, eventually settling in Richmond, Virginia, where he opened an antique store in 1930. Navis would become one of the most highly regarded among a coterie of distinguished Southern antique dealers. Yet Navis's beginnings—like those of many Southern dealers who preceded him—were quite humble. He was born to Morris and Lena Navyasky, who had immigrated from Kovno, Lithuania, to the United States in 1892. The couple settled among their Jewish peers in the tenement housing of New York's Lower East Side. Following the many immigrants before them who sought to assimilate to American life, the couple changed their surname to Navis. Morris Navis found work as a frame maker in Manhattan, but the couple soon decided to leave their crowded neighborhood for the comforts of Virginia. They settled in Norfolk where a Jewish community, then numbering about 1,200 people, had thrived since the eighteenth century. Morris Navis opened a furniture store in Norfolk, a business that found success as the Jewish population in the city swelled to 7,800 people by 1927. In addition to selling new furniture, Morris Navis sought out American antiques, traveling initially by horse and wagon to small towns throughout the Chesapeake region in search of Americana. Like the great antique dealer Israel Sack, a fellow Jewish immigrant from Kovno, Lithuania, Navis used his skills as a cabinetmaker to restore pieces he had located, eventually retailing them in his furniture store.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Harold Sack and Max Wilk, *American Treasure Hunt: The Legacy of Israel Sack* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1986).

Raised in this thriving entrepreneurial immigrant community and enveloped in the material world of early America, Charles Navis ventured into the business in 1930. In Richmond, the 26 year old would compete with established dealers like J.K. Beard and H.C. Valentine. Yet Navis was well-prepared for this role. In addition to learning the trade from his father, he had spent time in North Carolina apprenticing with Dewitt Thurmond Chatham. Navis bought and sold antiques from throughout the Old South, eventually becoming one of the foremost experts on Southern decorative arts. Navis would handle some of the most exemplary Southern furniture pieces, which he retailed to both Northern and Southern parties. Among the thousands of objects Navis handled was a pair of South Carolina side tables fashioned of mahogany, satinwood, and rosewood, which found a home in the Du Pont Family Dining Room at Winterthur (Figure 2.8). In addition to selling to Northern parties throughout much of his career, Navis also cultivated relationships with Southern collectors. At the time of his death in 1967, Navis was the subject of a rare retrospective exhibition, *Charles Navis: Tastemaker*, at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. In the catalog accompanying the exhibition, the authors concluded their biography of Navis with high praise: “His life wrote a chapter in the annals of American arts and crafts.” Navis, the son of Jewish immigrants, had established himself as one of the leading interpreters of the South’s history and culture.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ *Charles Navis: Tastemaker* (Richmond, VA: *The Antiquarian Society of Richmond and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, 1967).

Morris and Charles Navis were just two of many Jewish antique dealers south of the Mason-Dixon Line. They were joined by Jacob Harris and Henry Levin of Baltimore, Habrien Schapiro of Norfolk, Frank Roth of Richmond, Jack Patla, Henry Neu, George Birlant, Harris Livingstain, and Herman Schindler of Charleston, and Abraham Miller of Martinsburg, West Virginia, among others. When E. Milby Burton, the director of the Charleston Museum, authored the groundbreaking book *Charleston Furniture* in 1955, he thanked eight antique dealers for sharing their knowledge of the city's furniture. Of these eight individuals, five were born to Jewish immigrants from Russia.⁸⁰

As cultural historian Briann Greenfield has documented, the antiques trade provided an avenue for entrepreneurship that was unmatched by other professions in the early twentieth-century. The retail trades were especially favored by Jewish immigrants who opened shops throughout the South. Oftentimes beginning their careers as street peddlers, Jewish men saved their earnings to invest in future business opportunities. For many, the antiques trade was the pinnacle of these successive businesses, as they utilized their entrepreneurial skills and participated in the consumerism that defined the era. Additionally, entry to the field required little capital

⁸⁰ E. Milby Burton, *Charleston Furniture, 1700-1825* (Charleston, SC: The Charleston Museum, 1955).

and overhead, while a large base of customers allowed for potentially profitable businesses at all levels of the field.⁸¹

Yet the antiques profession, unlike other entrepreneurial ventures practiced by recent immigrants, allowed new Americans to become arbiters of the country's history and culture.⁸² Objects became active agents in the process of assimilation, functioning as demonstrations of their owners' knowledge of American history, its legacy of craftsmanship, and their own commitment to adopting the cultural practices of the United States. First and second generation Americans like William O'Hagan, J.F. Biggs, and Morris and Charles Navis became ambassadors of the Old South, a culture socially and geographically removed from the foreign cities from which they or their parents emigrated.

As Jewish dealers harnessed the power of antiques, they oftentimes experienced anti-Semitism from collectors and owners of antiques. In 1914, Elizabeth Allston Pringle, a noted author and daughter of a former governor of South Carolina, penned an essay titled, "The Innocents at Home, and the Furniture Fiend Abroad." In it, she describes how a Jewish man, William Alput, visited the homes of several

⁸¹ Briann Greenfield, *Out of the Attic: Inventing Antiques in Twentieth-century New England* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).

⁸² Ibid.

women in the community, her own included, in search of antiques.⁸³ The “very stout, sleek looking man with plaid suit and showy watch chain” spoke in “broken English,” as he described how the woman he purchased antiques for “luv teengs wid ole heestorie.” After hearing the low price he had paid for her neighbor’s furniture, Pringle, writing under the pseudonym Patience Pennington, demanded that he leave her property. Alput returned the next day, and he and Pringle came to a resolution for him to buy a number of pieces. Pringle later remarked about the man, “I had never been brought in contact with such a creature” and lamented that, “No one who did not know the place, and did not know me could understand what [my furniture] was to me.”⁸⁴ As with African American ownership of Southern antiques, Jewish ownership of these objects subverted the supremacy of white Southerners whose ancestry dated back to the country’s origins. Pringle’s story not only documents the anti-Semitic sentiments levied at Jewish dealers, but also demonstrates her underlying dissatisfaction of having to rely on an immigrant for income. As this cultural exchange provoked racial and ethnic tensions, objects became a central point of contention among individuals who vied to harness their power.

⁸³ “William Alput” likely refers to William Alpert, a Russian-born Jewish furniture dealer who lived in Boston. Alpert died in Maine at age fifty-four when the truck he was driving collided with a train. He was likely canvassing for antiques.

⁸⁴ Elizabeth Allston Pringle, “Peaceville Happenings, The Innocents at Home and the Furniture Fiend Abroad,” (Vincent P. Lannie Collection, The College of Charleston Library, 1914), 1-14.

Collecting institutions similarly deployed American antiques as instruments with which to shape the identities of immigrants. With the conclusion of World War I in 1918 and the unprecedented immigration throughout the period, foreigners were viewed as a provocation to American culture. The Metropolitan Museum of Art responded to the country's influx of immigrants with the opening of its American Wing in 1924, the same year Congress substantially curtailed immigration. Designed by museum curators as pedagogical tools, the displays in the American Wing were to convey to viewers the honesty and simplicity of colonial furniture, qualities that allegedly spoke to the character of the country's founding fathers. As the ethos of the 1920s encouraged nationalist sentiments of early collectors and institutions, colonial objects came to evince the vitality of the American spirit. Just as first and second generation Americans recognized the power of colonial objects to express identity, so too did museums activate these objects to shape the identities of others.⁸⁵

Through the first half of the twentieth century, collectors and dealers formed a complex commercial and social network that was built on cooperation and competition. As objects of the Old South passed through the hands of Irish Catholic, African American, and Jewish dealers, their temporary owners became the de facto experts on the region's material legacy and active participants in a cultural exchange that transcended racial, economic, and geographic borders. The contest for ownership of Southern antiques was not simply one about objects, but was also a battle over

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Stillinger, *The Antiquers* (New York: Knopf, 1980).

Southern identity and the right to use objects of the Old South to construct and reinforce historical narratives.



Figure 2.1 Flag of North Carolina, 1885-Present. Image in the Public Domain.



Figure 2.2 Desk and bookcase attributed to Conrad Doll (1721-1783), 1780-1790, Frederick, MD. Walnut with tulip poplar; HOA: 96-1/2", WOA: 45", DOA: 21-7/8". Collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) at Old Salem Museums & Gardens, Acc. 3985, Museum Purchase Fund.



The Antique Shop of J. F. BIGGS

521 E. Main Street.

The Largest Dealer in this Class of Goods in Virginia.
 Old Mahogany Furniture, Old Brass, Cut Glass, Copper
 Plate, Old China, Engravings, Paintings, etc. : : : :

LARGEST STOCK. FINEST GOODS. LOWEST PRICES.

Special attention given to packing all
 goods sent out of city.

J. F. BIGGS, Telephone 1527.
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA.

Figure 2.3 Advertisement by J. Franklin Biggs in *Sketches and views, points of interest, Richmond, Virginia; supplemented by sketches of Williamsburg, Jamestown, Yorktown. Description and map [of] historic battlefields*, 1907: 95.



Figure 2.4 Pratt's Castle, 324 South Fourth Street, Richmond, Independent City, VA.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.
20540 USA <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>

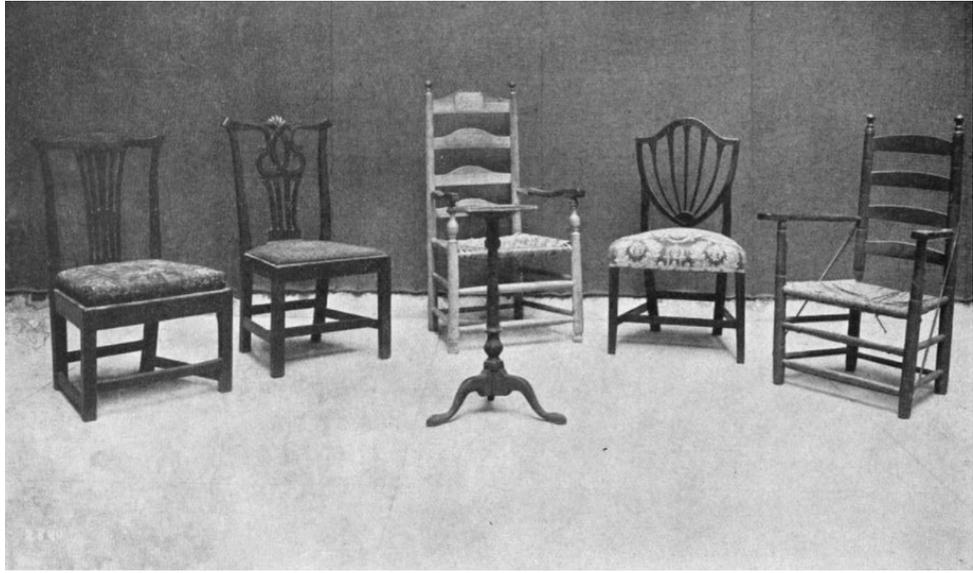


Figure 2.5 A Selection of Furniture at the North Carolina Exhibit in *The North Carolina Historical Exhibit at the Jamestown Ter-Centennial Exposition*, 1908: 21.



Figure 2.6 The former home and antique shop of Dianna Brown, 62 Queen Street, Charleston, South Carolina. Courtesy, Robert Leath.



Figure 2.7 Table, 1720-1740, Cecil Co., MD. Walnut with yellow pine; HOA: 29", WOA: 46-1/2", DOA: 25-1/4" (closed) 46-1/4" (open). Collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) at Old Salem Museums & Gardens, Acc. 5900, MESDA Purchase Fund.



Figure 2.8 Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, Side table, 1790-1810, South Carolina, Mahogany, Satinwood, Rosewood, Hard pine, Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont, 1957.852.1

CONCLUSION

On May 14, 1951, Joe Kindig wrote Albert Barnes—the noted collector of Impressionist art and American decorative arts—asking if Barnes would be interested in selling pieces from his collection of North Carolina Moravian ceramics. Working on behalf of a customer, likely Frank L. Horton, Kindig made the suggestion: “This being nice spring weather, why don’t you just put some of your North Carolina pottery in your car and drive up here[?]” Barnes replied expeditiously to Kindig’s overture: “If I go to York—and I always like to—it will not be to sell you my North Carolina pottery, but to pull your whiskers for making such a proposal. I never knew how good American pottery could be until I [saw] the North Carolina kind . . .”⁸⁶

Barnes’ quote testifies to the North’s historic reliance on Southern decorative arts to form large swaths of their collections of early American objects. Many of these objects were purchased from both black and white Southerners who were forced to sell heirlooms to make ends meet. Yet Kindig’s work on behalf of Frank Horton also illuminates how the value of Southern decorative arts was beginning to shift during the mid-twentieth-century. Though dealers like Kindig were in part responsible for the

⁸⁶ Joseph Kindig to Albert Barnes, May 14, 1951. Albert C. Barnes Correspondence, Barnes Foundation Archives; Albert Barnes to Joseph Kindig, May 15, 1951. Albert C. Barnes Correspondence, Barnes Foundation Archives.

exodus of Southern antiques in earlier decades, they were soon facilitating the return of many of these objects to the South by the 1950s. This change in the field was in part fueled by the lack of representation of Southern decorative arts during the 1949 Williamsburg Antiques Forum and the subsequent exhibition at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, *Furniture of the Old South, 1640-1820*.⁸⁷ As the exhibition brought to Richmond objects that had been scattered throughout the East Coast, it helped develop a more cohesive community of scholars, collectors, and dealers, of which Frank Horton was an important part.

The landmark exhibition also did much to dispel the romantic fictions of the Old South that had characterized the efforts of both Northern and Southern collectors and dealers in the early decades of the century. Writing in the exhibition catalog, Marshall B. Davidson described how the Old South had “become a popular stereotype used to evoke visions of an aristocracy of great slave-owning planters living graciously in white pillared mansions, to suggest the perfume of magnolias and the music of mocking-birds in the moonlight. Such enchanting impressions of the early South are, to be sure, part of the historical record. But they are only a gloss of the full

⁸⁷ It is at the 1949 Antiques Forum that Joseph Downs remarked, “...little of artistic merit was made south of Baltimore.” This quote was later told to Frank Horton, who was not in attendance, by Betty Coons. Penelope Niven, *Frank L. Horton and the Roads to MESDA* (Winston-Salem, NC: Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 2001), 99.

story.”⁸⁸ Davidson’s quote obliquely references how decorative arts of the region had historically been used to construct mythic Anglo-Saxon histories of the South, an interpretation that eventually gave way to the appreciation of Southern objects for their aesthetic merit.

Even as the burgeoning field re-examined the past, those involved in the making of *Furniture of the Old South* were decidedly focused on the future. Frank Horton, inspired by the exhibition and determined to demonstrate the artistic excellence of Southern decorative arts, founded in 1965 the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, nearly four hundred miles south of Baltimore. Horton’s path was forged by the legions of pioneering collectors and dealers who came before him. The efforts of the Chatham and Hanes families in Winston-Salem advanced the field significantly as they applied their connoisseurial skills to furniture of the South. Yet it was also the efforts of a pioneering set of dealers, many of whom have been overlooked in the historical record, that helped establish the field of Southern decorative arts. First and second generation Irish Americans, Jews, African Americans, and women, among others, served as early ambassadors of Southern history and culture, as they supplied collectors and dealers throughout the country with antique objects made in the South.

⁸⁸ Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, *Southern furniture, 1640-1820: a loan exhibition presented in Richmond at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, January 21-March 1, 1952, under the sponsorship of the magazine Antiques, Colonial Williamsburg [and] the Virginia Museum* (The Magazine Antiques, 1952), 4.

The objects that passed through their hands bear only traces of their ownership today, yet these very objects were central in the cultural battle that was waged for decades over the decorative arts of the Old South, as issues of race, class, place, and identity reared themselves in the antiques trade.

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Appendix A

TRANSCRIPTION OF WPA REPORT ON DIANNA BROWN

Appendix A is a transcription of a 1936 Works Progress Administration report that details Dianna Brown's career as an antique dealer.⁸⁹

Project # 1885
Charleston County
Augustus Ladson
Class III
S-260-S-264_N

No. Words: 310

NEGRO INTEREST IN CHARLESTON

There is in Charleston an unusual Negro woman, and one just like her is not to be found in any other city or town in the Palmetto State. This person is (Mrs.) Diana (sic) Brown. This statement is made after having made written inquiries to some fifteen cities and large towns in this state. (A)

If there is one Negro woman that tourists seek to see when they are in America's most historic city, it is "Diana". During the winter sometimes she goes to Aiken, South Carolina, another tourists' center, and winter resort. (A)1

⁸⁹ Augustus Ladson, "Negro Interest in Charleston," WPA Federal Writers Project on African American Life in South Carolina, April 9, 1936. Online: <http://digital.tcl.sc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/wpafwp/id/2187> (Accessed: February 24, 2018).

Diana Brown lives at 62 Queen Street. She is the first Negro woman in Charleston to have ventured into the antique business. At first she sold privately for white people of the Southern Aristocracy who did not want their names exposed as connected with this business. Then, finding that she could make a living at it, took out a license in 1920, and sold to the public. Her antiques are of the rarest kind. During her twenty-three (sic) years in business, Diana is known, she said, throughout America.

Whenever she is asked the history of a piece of antique, she replies, "I don't give history of anything, unless I know to whom I am talking". In other words, the tourist must make himself, (herself) known beforehand. To complete strangers she says, "...but my guarantee is whatever you buy from me is old".

Before going into her present business, Diana Brown assisted her husband who kept a livery stable which kept some of the very ancient carriages in which the aristocratic white people of Charleston used to enjoy such a delightful ride to church, joy-riding, and often to business. This was during the "horse-and-buggy days".

Diana Brown is now over seventy years of age; and she carries on her antique business and meets her customers daily.

SOURCE

(A)....Personal information gathered from other people in down-town Charleston who know Dianna Brown. This is a check on the information Dianna gave me herself.

Gathered by Augustus Ladson.

(A)1....Information collected from Dianna Brown personally by Augustus Ladson, 43
Vanderhorst Street Charleston, S.C.

Appendix B

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 **Gary Albert** <galbert@oldsalem.org> Apr 4 (12 days ago) ★ ↩

to me ▾

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Gary

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to Robert ▾

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Thanks!

 **Robert Leath** <rleath@oldsalem.org> Apr 3 (13 days ago) ★ ↩

to me ▾

Of course, no problem.

Sent from my iPhone

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April 3, 2018

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