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The Examination and Identification of a Valley of Virginia Chest of Drawers and Its Conservation and Restoration

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An Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Lindenwood College in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Valuation Science

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the appraiser's considerations as a consultant in exploring options for the conservation and restoration of a Valley of Virginia walnut chest of drawers, circa 1800-1810. The physical characteristics of the chest of drawers and its "backcountry" styling are explored, and the chest's approximate age and place of origin are determined. Emphasis is placed on combining the personal property valuator's broad understanding of connoisseurship with a knowledge of the physical characteristics present in a specific object.

Development of a monetary value for the chest of drawers under consideration is not a primary function of this project and is not undertaken. Conclusions and recommendations for conservation and restoration of the chest of drawers are offered, with a special emphasis on the effect of conservation and restoration in light of the conservators' guiding principle of the "least intrusive method."

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INTRODUCTION

The Examination and Identification of a Valley of Virginia Chest of Drawers and Its Conservation and Restoration examines the appraiser's considerations as a consultant in exploring options for the conservation and restoration of a Valley of Virginia walnut chest of drawers, circa 1800-1810. The physical characteristics of the chest of drawers and its "backcountry" styling (Bridenbaugh 120) are explored, and the chest's approximate age and place of origin are determined. Emphasis is placed on combining the personal property valuator's broad understanding of connoisseurship with a knowledge of the physical characteristics present in a specific object.

In the second chapter related literature is examined and an overview of the research for this project is given. The third chapter of The Examination and Identification of a Valley of Virginia Chest of Drawers assesses the valuator's considerations as conflicts arise. Specifics on the identification and

description of the chest of drawers, including its technological and physical construction details, are discussed in chapter four. An examination and identification checklist also appears in this chapter. Black-and-white illustrations in the fourth chapter show the location and type of conservation efforts needed. The analysis in chapter five gives an overview of both the Coggin and Wakefield views on evaluating the condition of antiques and the effects of condition on value. Soucy's true value concept is reviewed. Development of a monetary value for the chest of drawers under consideration is not a primary function of this project and is not undertaken.

Conclusions and recommendations for conservation and restoration of the chest of drawers are offered in chapter five, with a special emphasis on the effect of conservation and restoration in light of the conservators' guiding principle of the "least intrusive method."

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The market comparison approach assumes the existence of sufficient data to make a value judgment. It intuitively confirms a museum-quality object, or an object of near museum quality; in either case there would be the assurance that enough similar pieces had been sold at auction or by prestigious dealers so as to make data available for comparative purposes. Museum-quality would include items of rarity and quality representing the finest craftsmanship, design, and raw materials. Not quite so rare, the second tier of objects are of lesser quality, craftsmanship, and design; these fall into the category of near museum quality. An object of commonality would be listed in price guides and found in lower-end antique shops and at auctions where values are readily available.

By design this chest of drawers, a Valley-of-Virginia piece from the early 1800s, does not lie within these parameters. Using this method, focus can be placed squarely on the object rather than on the search for value. This chest cannot be classified as museum quality nor is it in the category of near-

museum-quality, but slightly under this tier, and yet still above the level of commonality.

In the standard literature, Dr. Richard Rickert, in Appraisal and Valuation: An Interdisciplinary Approach,[1] addresses all appraisers, real and personal, and says he does not intend his suggestions to be a definitive program for object study but rather to provide insights for property examination for personal property valuators. He does convey ideas which can be useful in organizing the study of an object through "The Spectrum and Flow of Valuation Statements." He continues, "If your fundamental identification of the actual thing owned is not an accurate and sufficient description, we cannot distinguish it unmistakably from similar properties."[2]

This said, he presents a list of possible value-influencing characteristics which includes shape, volume, weight, clarity, utility, and function, along with aesthetic qualities.[3] Some of these aesthetic qualities are rarity, fashion, unity of the whole, uniqueness, and fineness of line.

Adjunct Professor Patricia Soucy, in her ground-breaking 1982 Master's thesis in valuation sciences entitled A Value Concept and Methodology, enhances Dr. Rickert's point when she asserts "an appraisal value

claim necessitates knowledge of the factual information and characteristics of the market, plus knowledge of the values and characteristics of the object."[4] Both of these studies have their roots in Henry Babcock's important work, "Appraisal Principles and Procedures."[5]

For the colonial period the coastal regions are well-documented. Carl Bridenbaugh's work coined the phrase "backcountry" for the area which runs west and south of Philadelphia through Frederick, Maryland; Warrenton and Staunton, Virginia; through Bethania, Old Salem, and Salisbury, North Carolina; to Camden, South Carolina at the end of the Great Philadelphia Plank Road. The road was the social and economic lifeline of the backcountry.

Scholarship in the areas of material culture and sociology is available but interest in the backcountry has experienced a new vigor and vitality. Backcountry furniture has not previously received the scholarly attention it so richly deserves. Connoisseurship in this area is woefully underrepresented as are studies delineating the style, craftsmanship, construction, and technology. There have been no definitive published studies; however there have been some museum shows. To find comparable literature it is necessary to turn to some generally accepted writings.

Of particular help was Nancy A. Smith's second revision of "Old Furniture, Understanding the Craftsman's Art, A Guide to Collection, Appreciation and Preservation."[6] The first part thoroughly reviews furniture-making techniques and systematically explains furniture woods, joints, hardware, finishes, and other essential furniture construction. In the second part Smith discusses "What Happens to Furniture with Time," and illustrates points of wear, shrinkage, repairs, and restorations as well as the ever-present fakes. This narrative, the best on the subject, is well-illustrated and has abundant photographs to clarify her points.

Running a close second in the literature, Thomas M. Voss' "Antique American Country Furniture: A Field Guide"[7] gives good insight into determining antique or fake, explaining what to look for, and includes a chapter on each type of furniture, including chests of drawers.

In a Field Guide to Early American Furniture,[8] Thomas H. Ormsby explains cabinetmakers' language, discusses the detection of genuine pieces, and provides information on chests of drawers and hardware. This is a reliable resource for types of furniture and dating.

Publications on Virginia furniture are scarce

because few studies have been done. For the "backcountry" type of furniture they are rare. An excellent article, "Piedmont Virginia Furniture, Product of Provincial Cabinetmakers,"[9] by Patricia A. Piorkowski, was prepared for an exhibit at the Lynchburg Virginia Fine Art Center in November 1982. It is one of the few museum presentations I've found.

In his noteworthy publication, Furniture Antiques Found in Virginia, A Book of Measured Drawings,[10] published in 1954, Ernest Carlyle Lynch, Jr. discusses a similar chest of drawers. It was seen and measured in Staunton, Virginia. This similarity suggested the idea to use computer-generated line drawings of the replacement feet and skirts on my chest.

In respect to conservation and restoration, the most important source has been the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, Inc. (AIC)[11] This organization stands alone in representation of the professionally aware conservator.

Robert F. McGriffin, Jr., offers the best presentation on "Furniture Care and Conservation."[12] In simple down-to-earth language McGriffin presents the technical aspects of conservation and restoration and coordinates these with the AIC Code of Ethics and

Standards of Practice.

There is little information on value estimation and there is not much literature on furniture produced in this region of Colonial America. There are no readily accessible standard sources of valuation results.

Then where do we look for guidance?

Valuators will look to existing standard literature in the discipline for guidance. Most of the standard references rely heavily upon the market data criteria approach as the central force in arriving at a value. This approach is mandatory in determining value.

1.Richard Rickert, "Appraisal and Valuation, An Interdisciplinary Approach," American Society of Appraisers (unpublished).

2.Rickert 10.

3.Vince Plescia 20.

4.Patricia C. Soucy, "A Value Concept and Methodology," thesis, Lindenwood College, 1982, 45.

5.Henry A. Babcock, "FASA Appraisals and Procedures," American Society of Appraisers, 1968.

6.Nancy Smith, Old Furniture: Understanding the Craftsman's Art, second edition (Boston: Little, Brown Co., 1991).

7.Thomas M. Voss, Antique American Country Furniture: A Field Guide (New York: Bonanza Books, 1978).

8.Thomas Ormsby, Field Guide to Early American Furniture (New York: Bonanza, 1951).

9.Patricia A. Piorkowski, "Piedmont Virginia Furniture, Product of Provincial Cabinetmakers," (Lynchburg, Virginia: Fine Arts Center, 1982).

10.Ernest Carlyle Lynch, Jr., Furniture Antiques Found in Virginia A Book of Measured Drawings (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1954).

11.American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, Inc., Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (Washington, D. C.: American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, Inc., 1991).

12.Robert F. McGriffin, Jr., "Furniture Care and Conservation" (New York: American Association for State and Local History, 1983).

Chapter III

Methods and Evaluation

In the past, appraisal, marketing, and conservation were separate fields, each going its own way without consultation or reference to the others, irrespective of the fact that they are inextricably intertwined.

Today we see the specialization of these tasks to an extent that there is no common language and no functional liaison between them . Each role--appraiser, marketer, and conservator--requires study, academic training, years of experience, and expertise. Does it matter that there is no commonality of language and procedures? In a very substantive sense, it does matter indeed.

The acceptance of a code of ethics and the principles of professional practice in the appraisal organizations and among the conservators and restorers provides an imperative to commence an interchange of ideas. There is a considerable need among these groups to begin some comparative discussions to enhance their professional relationships with each other and with the

market. There is very little literature on the scene to give direction and comfort to the various professionals working on a project. In the multitudinous literature I have reviewed there is an absence of realization of this need.

Frank Levy[1] discusses this by saying "one thing that would be very beneficial to the field would be to bring about better rapport between curators and museums and dealers." This could be expanded to include conservator and appraisers. The better we know each other and the trade procedures, the better we can serve our clients.

Professional societies are beginning to realize this. Fortunately most of these societies are relative newcomers to the professional business world and will be making a conscious effort to address these questions, and to set more urgent priorities aimed at overcoming them.

In the absence of directions or procedures directly related to the other professions, we in these fields need to look for similarities in our work and to always approach the subject with the utmost care and caution. In all situations, both the American Society

of Appraisers and the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works consider it unprofessional conduct to attempt to begin work on an object which is beyond the limit of one's education, competence, experience, or the parameters of one's professional designation.

In the final analysis, the future of an object, and the decisions affecting it, belongs to the client. Experience reveals in the general public few clients are in possession of sufficient knowledge to ask for the type of appraisal they need. It does not take long for the professional to discover the degree of confusion the client is experiencing. This situation is not just hypothetical, but one which is real and often experienced in the field.

To understand this, the valuator must take the client's perspective and consider the myriad questions which can coexist, all based on information received from professional advisors. Such questions include:

1.) Must a decision about the piece be made now? If not now, when?

2.) What needs to be done to preserve the piece? Should it be done immediately? Who will do the conservation?

3.) How much will preservation cost? Is it monetarily feasible? Can the work be done in stages? If so, what are the stages?

4.) What is the recommendation of the conservator? Is restoration needed? If so, how will it affect the value of the object now, in the intermediate future, and in the long run?

The decisions of the owner of the piece affect the work of the conservators, material culture specialists, museum curators, antique dealers, and others who may be involved in its evaluation. If sale is contemplated, in what market should it be placed and sold? Are there time constraints? Are there other costs and what are the conservation and restoration intervention considerations?

The appraisal question posed by the client is, essentially, "What is this walnut chest of drawers worth?" Straight to the bottom line! Naturally collateral questions will come into the client's mind:

Should the chest of drawers be sold? Should it be kept in the client's possession? For how long?

For the appraiser, basic questions arise: Does the client want to keep the piece or to sell it? What is the best way to maximize the client's expectation? Often the client doesn't know what is best and the appraiser must then assume the job of helping to bring some order and form to the client's thinking. Sometimes this can readily be determined. More often it requires a lot of research, thought, and patience on the part of the appraiser to begin to discern the actual facts in a case and even more time to prepare a recommendation to the client. The Valley of Virginia chest of drawers considered in this paper is owned by the author. This simplifies the decision-making since the owner is also the appraiser.

Each appraisal is as unique as the objects which bring clients and appraisers together, with specific properties and diverse circumstances. Yet all appraisals are similar in that they are motivated, at least in part, by the object's owner's desire to learn something about the value of the property in relative monetary terms. The purpose of the appraisal steers

the entire process even before the property is examined: method and theory begin to formulate the basic structural elements for the appraisal.

The client may ask what the appraiser's limits of responsibility are. Are all appraisers alike? Are there differing levels of understanding by appraisers in their appreciation and knowledge of conservation and restoration; are they in a position to actually help a client? Do they understand sales and markets? What are the specific considerations which could affect the recommended plan for the piece? Are there formal written limitations on an appraiser's recommendations?

In this paper, hypothetical projections of possible market behavior under varying circumstances and conditions will be presented, but throughout the whole exercise it must be known and remembered that an appraiser's primary function and responsibility is in placing value on a certain object, in a certain market, at a certain definable time.

Most of these conjectures go beyond the scope of the original appraisal question: "How much is this walnut chest of drawers worth?" But such is the law of the land in the appraisal field. Experience also

presents the client as a student standing in need of, and anxiously awaiting, education regarding the appraisal object. In other words, the appraiser is "lighting up the life" of the client with value options and alternatives which the client was unaware existed. The specialization of appraisal, marketing, and conservation has created a gulf in communications between these fields. Each role--appraiser, marketer, and conservator--requires study, academic training, years of experience, and expertise.

In the field the pragmatic problem usually revolves around the appraiser being asked, or led, or suggested to do things or to come up with answers that seem initially to be beyond the generally accepted limitation of the appraiser's responsibility, knowledge, skill, or experience. This in effect extends the appraiser into roles more complex than customarily expected.

The appraiser may feel uncertain or uncomfortable in this expanded role. Nevertheless, the appraiser is there. Feelings of conflict about the role are experienced by the appraiser. At the same time the

client finds his condition to be as difficult as the appraiser's.

Basically clients are sometimes not in a position to ask the proper questions to make an informed decision and fervently look to the appraiser to help make sense of the quagmire in which they find themselves. In short, to come to their rescue by analyzing the problem, formulating the definitive questions, and beginning the quest of sorting out and discovering the client's actual intentions.

The appraiser has several strong suits, including a strong knowledge of the market and a strong sense of connoisseurship. In a sense this is where the strength of the appraisal is valid only for the specific year, day, time, and market in which the object's value has been determined.

In addition, it is the appraiser's role to set values for a specific purpose and function. It can be for investment purposes, taxes, financing, sale, inventorying, or other like uses. A good appraiser is concerned with the price a property will bring not only for the sake of the seller but for the buyer as well.

The appraiser must do more than simply naming a value. The appraiser must go beyond this to solve the problem which occasioned the request for an appraisal. For instance, this encompasses the likelihood of sale and the reasonable authenticity of the property. The appraisal function and the appraisal purpose are the heart and soul of the appraisal and cannot be divorced from each other.

The appraiser must make clear to the owner of the property how values may be different to other owners and the concept of preciousness, worth, and its usefulness in attracting or commanding money.[2]

The appraiser has a single task: to place a considered estimated value on an object in a certain location, in an appropriate market, at a specific time. This is, of course, a dynamic condition with components that are constantly evolving and moving in unknown directions, and therefore this estimated value is useful only for that time period under consideration. The specific point in time is frozen by the appraiser in his estimated value of an object.

Appraisal theory and methodology cautions against anything which appears to by hypothetical. Doubtful

statements should be approached with great trepidation and always advisedly.

At the same time the alternatives presented by an hypothesis may be very beneficial to answering the appraisal question if the hypothesis has a good solid scientific base. Thus a proposition set forth as an explanation for a specified value may be asserted merely as a provisional conjecture to guide investigation, or as a working hypothesis, or as highly probable in light of established fact and understanding. Through inductive and deductive reasoning, and using a professional grasp of appraisal theory and methodology, an appraiser serves a client. Exposure to and experience in the ancillary fields of conservation and restoration; work and training in object study toward connoisseurship, museology, and curatorship; and knowledge of the ever-changing and expanding field of material culture are important parameters of the appraiser's worth to his or her client.

Once again we see that the appraiser is no longer only concerned with the simple question of the value of the object but instead is in the unenviable position of

involvement in a larger and expanded decision-making matrix. Other disciplines enter into the picture, with the constraints and limitations of their respective professions: the conservator, the curator, the dealer, and the client. All have a vested interest in the piece.

The appraiser is bound to a code of ethics and rules of conduct as set forth in the American Appraisal Foundation's Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice. According to these principles the appraiser cannot exceed the limits of connoisseurship or make recommendations outside the limits of his or her education and experience in the various property categories in which one practices; any limitation of expertise in relation to the subject property must be expressed to the client.

Each appraiser has some experience and knowledge in conservation and restoration as well as in economics. The principle thrust of the appraiser's education is to become highly skilled and knowledgeable in establishing estimated values. If an appraiser does not have the level of competence required to properly make a recommendation to the client, it is incumbent

approach makes the appraiser an objective observer and recorder of the valuation process and its formulation. The absence of interest in the ultimate disposition of the object permits special insights and an ability to let the mind range in selecting the best options.

The appraiser must know connoisseurship and value in certain markets and locations. The role of the appraiser is to help the client sort out needs and to offer estimated value judgments through a process of logical and orderly approaches to valuation questions. The strength of an estimated value lies in the soundness of its argument and substantiated facts used in arriving at the estimate of value. Thus value is always value estimated in a context.

1.Frank Levy, "Talk of the Trade," Antique Monthly April 1992.

2.Frederick M. Babcock. FASA, "A Look at Valuation Science." A Handbook on the Appraisal of Personal Property (Washington, D.C.: American Society of Appraisers, 1989)

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Historical Design

From around 1450 during the late Middle Ages, English furniture was always made of English oak, because of its fine quality, color, and strength. Many considered it the most beautiful furniture wood in the world. The surface was often bleached white with lime and then painted with tempera or oil paints in bright polychrome hues. Much furniture featuring this Gothic character survive today, including many painted and unpainted chests.

In this medieval period the principal piece of furniture was the chest which served as a travelling trunk, as storage, and for seating. These Gothic chests were of massive proportions and of plank construction. Later the front and back boards were shortened and the end planks formed the sides and feet.

By 1620 the chest had acquired interior drawers which were used for the safekeeping of money and valuables or could be found in the bedroom where it was storage for clothing and household linens, most often the owners' most valuable possessions.

Some chests began to feature lifting tops providing a place for blankets and other large items. Below were two smaller drawers.

Then around 1730 designs of four and five full-width drawers with plain bracket or short cabrioled legs began to be known as chests of drawers. Shortly a tall, narrow, one-piece chest known as a tallboy appeared.

The second half of the eighteenth century saw the chest of drawers appearing in reception rooms and followed French commodes and other contemporary designs displaying serpentine fronts and sides and reflecting both Gothic and Chinese influences. Sometimes a single piece would contain elements of both, forming a very satisfying unity of the whole. Plain chests were constructed of mahogany and mahogany veneers.

An important design element in France appeared in 1770, using a new method where the plinth was eliminated and the corner uprights were continued to the floor with a delicate outward curve at the foot base. Appearing with this new "French" foot was a shaped skirt or apron between the front leg and the side legs.[1]

There are two historical events that left their legacies to English and American furniture and decorative arts.

First is the restoration of Charles II to the throne of Great Britain from 1630 to 1685 after he spent years on the continent. While he was there he was introduced to the cultures of France and the Netherlands. He married a Portuguese princess, Catherine de Braganza, whose family was among the most wealthy and powerful on the continent.[2]

They amassed a vast collection of art works and furnishings which were truly royal and trendsetting. Through the influence of Catherine de Braganza the cabriole leg, the arched and pierced stretcher, and other elements of Queen Anne design began to appear.[3]

The court of Charles II became more cosmopolitan and, because of his exposure to continental styles, brought more of them into England and were transplanted to the New World.

The second event is the ascension to the English throne of William III, or William of Orange, Stadholder of the United Provinces of the Netherlands from 1672 to 1702 and King of England from 1689 to 1702, who ruled jointly with his wife Mary II. With them came Dutch and more continental influences.

These events in England and Europe influenced the colonies too, affecting their furniture styles. Religious persecution was at a high level, and there was a flight of Protestants such as the German

Platinate and Low Country people and the Huguenots from France. Many of these people were skilled craftsmen, furniture makers in particular. When these refugees settled in England, they introduced new techniques and types of furniture to the English.

English furniture makers began employing a new method which relied upon a fitted dovetail to frame chests, drawers, and other furniture members. Instead of having to rely upon the heavy frame and panels of oak they could begin to use lighter, thinner wood. This lightness was not only in the weight but in the more airy appearance of the furniture. This force also led, first in England and then in the colonies, to joiners acquiring a new name for those specializing in furniture: cabinetmakers.

Technology, and Construction

During the Middle Ages the chest had been the principal piece of household furniture. It soon became diversified in its usefulness, as we see in English examples, not only as a receptacle for clothing, money, plates, and other valuables, but also as a table or for seating, sometimes with a pillow covering it for greater comfort. At first the chests could be codified as joined chests, wainscot chests, and board chests.

There were spruce, oak, cypress, chip carved, and carved chests; there were chests with one or two drawers.

English inventories in very early times mentioned furniture made by a joiner as was wainscot furniture. They were found in the inventories of the colonies too. These joined chests and wainscot chests were of a high order relative to the crude board chests and plain seats of everyday usage. Until 1650 the appearance of the chest was rare. This changed radically after 1650 as evidenced by the number of examples which survive. The oldest carved and paneled chests in New England are believed to have been made without drawers underneath and without the black applied ornamentation found on later work. This is mentioned in Thomas H. Ormsby's Field Guide to Early American Furniture[4] when he specifically discusses the Ipswich Chest dated 1660 to 1680.

It was common in the last half of the eighteenth century to see chests with two drawers. The original chest of drawers was actually partly a chest and partly drawers. In fact some pieces were made to look like chests of drawers by breaking the face of the upper chest into panels resembling drawer fronts.

Around 1702 inventories began to show "old-fashioned" chests of drawers. Shortly thereafter glass

and crockery were placed on the tops on small elevated steps. These were tall chests of drawers mounted upon legs. The custom of putting glassware and cups on top lasted into the last quarter of the century. This arrangement was so popular it became fashionable to build special steps for better accommodation and easier display of these objects.

This early Queen Anne style was of Dutch and Flemish origin, introduced directly to the colonies without passing through England. In England the chest of drawers is called a tallboy. Though the term is sometimes used for American pieces the form is most often called a highboy. These were made from about 1730 until the close of the century. These pieces were japanned, veneered, or made of solid plain beautiful woods.

While most of the early furniture was made by unknown joiners, cabinetmakers began to sign and label their wares in the eighteenth century. The new lighter furniture demanded new techniques like glueblocks. Glue was also used to apply the increasingly exotic wood veneers over pine. The ornamentation was deeper carved; scroll carvings, inlay, and marquetry began to be seen.

During the first ninety years of American colonization acquiring the necessities of life was so

pressing that very little progress was made in furniture making and crafts. The most important and expensive belongings in the early colonial household were clothing, bedding, and other linens. To preserve them and protect them from theft, people stored them in locked chests. Chest design in the colonies advanced similarly to the chest's evolution in England. In the South, especially in the Chesapeake country and the low country, much furniture was imported from England. Acute labor shortages made the importation of furniture, decorative arts, and clothings cheaper than local production.

Until 1700 there was little excess wealth. This soon changed, however, as the colonies began to prosper from the sale of tobacco, pitch, grains, and cured pork. By 1700 there were about 220,000 people living in the colonies.

The colonies, except the most important workshops, were often twenty or more years behind England in design. Furniture design begins to reflect the mixed nationalities coming into the country during the latter part of the seventeenth century and by hundreds of thousands in the eighteenth century. There was a similar movement in the age-old strictures and distinctions in social classes. The American experience was beginning to show in the colonists' new

directions in furniture design. For the first time Englishmen, Scots, Scotch-Irish, Swiss, Germans, and Dutchmen began to acquire attitudes and tastes that became distinctly American. They were beginning to think of themselves as Americans rather than transplants from their native lands.

As the colonies prospered they imported more and more from the mother country. Each American style reflects that which was happening in England. But it is important to say the changes were all ten to twenty-five years later. The furniture of the eighteenth century was rarely signed and dated, and because of the portable nature of furniture it was always moved from house to house, owner to owner, making it very difficult to determine the origin of a piece.

Table 1

Furniture historians began to define the evolution of furniture during the period.

Period	Coast	Country
William and Mary	1690-1725	(1800)
Queen Anne	1725-1750	(1810)
Chippendale	1750-1785	(1820)
Federal	1785-1820	(1840 and later)

SOURCE: Thomas M. Voss, Antique American Furniture (Philadelphia: Bonanza, 1981) 109.

Before the William and Mary and Jacobean periods oak, which had reigned for years, began to be replaced by finer-grained woods such as maple, cherry, and walnut. Decorated surfaces were much in evidence. Decorated veneers, inlays, and marquetry can be traced to Dutch and French sources. A strong preference for Chinese work with lacquered surfaces, gilding, and caning developed.

Immediately after the American revolution there was an economic depression, though it was short-lived because the burgeoning population proved such a strong economic force that better days were bound to follow. At the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence there were fewer than four million people in the colonies. Of that figure, ninety percent were farmers. No paved roads could be found in the country until 1800.[5]

This momentum of economic growth was sustained, virtually force-fed, by the great waves of immigration. While Americans were beginning to frown upon importation of furniture in general, they nevertheless saw immigrants bringing not only their furniture but also their furniture-making skills with them. Most of these new Americans were from large furniture-making areas of Europe. The latest fashions were so popular

that American furniture craftsmen were challenged to keep up with them.

In 1807 President Jefferson himself was responsible for the Trade Embargo Act which stopped the flow of foreign furniture and foreign hardware into the United States. Fed by the immense waves of cabinetmakers immigrating into the country and by the active support and encouragement of the federal government, the American furniture business flourished. In regions where furniture-making was concentrated the craftsmen were very specialized workers: inlay artists, carvers, gilders, and upholsterers.

The end of the revolution and the advent of the Federal period created an explosive demand for the new furniture. Inlay is not a foolproof way to identify a piece of furniture, however, as furniture components were often ordered from a variety of far-off places.

The creation of the Union encouraged solidarity and organization among furniture-makers. True to form, furniture followed the lead of architecture in the Federal period. Houses had large windows, creating airy and spacious rooms to showcase the smaller scale and delicate proportions and detail of Federal period furniture. New prosperity and greater affluence began to fund larger homes, more entertaining, and more furniture.

Carcase

The carcase was a box-like frame of a case piece without the drawer and other elements such as applied molding. In chests, construction by simply butting and nailing the boards together is found in all periods. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries most chests were constructed by the rail and stile method. The bottoms may be nailed in place.

Drawers

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries dovetailing, rabetting, and nailing were used. Chests containing three to five drawers usually featured dovetailed tops, sides, and bottoms. Backboards were usually hand-planed, roughly finished, random width boards connected by tongue and groove. Chest backs were typically nailed in place. Backboards were often better finished on the inside of the chest of drawers than on the outside. The tops were formed in several ways. On some pieces, the tops usually did not overhang. Instead a decorative molding was applied with nails, pins, or brads. On the shorter pieces the tops may overhang and were nailed, pinned, screwed, or glued in place. On better pieces, there was sometimes a dovetailed sub-top below the actual top. Drawer separators were often open or blind dovetailed in place.

Legs and Feet and Drawers

Bracket feet are formed by the extension of the sides of the piece and often an added dovetailed front board. They may be made as a separate frame with mitered corners into which the carcase fits, "on frame" as some prefer to call it. Mitered feet often had reinforcing blocks placed behind the corner to strengthen the foot.

Drawer fronts of American furniture were usually made from a hard heavy wood, such as walnut, mahogany, cherry, or maple, while the sides, back, and bottom of the drawer were always made of an easily-worked secondary wood, such as pine or poplar. English ancestors would have used oak as a secondary wood or perhaps deal, another type of pine which is lighter in color with a wider grain and longer striations than American pine.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, American chests had drawers that were likely to have their fronts and backs dovetailed into the sides, although there are many examples which feature dovetailing on the front but rabbeting in the back. Many early eighteenth century drawers have only one large dovetail nailed through each end. During the middle of the century the number of dovetails increased until, by the nineteenth century, the necks of the

dovetails became so narrow and fine they would sometimes break. Dovetailed drawer bottoms were almost always chamfered or bend-edged, with the bottom fitting into rabbets or slats cut into inside edges of the drawer front and sides. Drawer bottom undersides were generally roughly finished and always showed a planing mark pattern.

Molding

Cock-beading is a typical applied molding associated with drawers. From head-on it looks like a narrow, slightly projecting half-round molding. Actually it is a thin flat piece of wood whose leading edge is rounded. It is found around some drawer fronts of William and Mary pieces which date to around 1690. Since it is an applied molding it can hide the dovetails that attach the drawer fronts to the sides, although its primary purpose on a drawer is to protect the edges of veneer. About 1735 cock-beaded drawers were abandoned for drawers with overhanging lipped front edges, which hid the opening around the edges of the veneer.

During the Chippendale period, 1755-1795, cock-beading was again used, but this time it was attached to the case around the drawer rather than to the drawer itself. Then, from about 1790, it was again applied around both veneered and solid drawer fronts. Cock-

beading is often imitated on country pieces with a simpler, run-in beading which does not project from the surface of the drawer front.

The tops of chests and chests of drawers and the fronts of lipped drawers often had a run-in thumbnail molding. The molding on tops and the rest of the carcase may also be applied, usually with pins or brads.

Veneer

Veneer is found on some of the best high-style furniture in all periods, hand-cut and sometimes over an eighth of an inch thick, although Queen Anne and Chippendale furnitures are more likely to be made of solid woods. Veneer was not a common feature of country furniture and was sometimes imitated with paint and incising.

In this section we have seen how the function of a chest in a home affected its design. We have looked at the history of chests, especially as they moved from the Old World to the New World, and how the economy of the fledgling United States affected the demand for furniture. Finally, we examined the physical details of construction of a chest.

1.John C. Rogers, English Furniture, revised edition (Feltham, England: Springs Books, 1959).

2.John Bowman Rogers, English Furniture (Great Britain: Spring Books, 1967).

3.John S. Bowman, American Furniture (Exeter, New York, 1985) 31.

4.Thomas Ormsby, Field Guide to Early American Furniture (New York: Bonanza, 1951) 177.

5.Bowman 62.

Chapter V

Analysis

Applied Models of Evaluation

The early stages of this mind-boggling project with research into the evolution of chests of drawers, a comparison of the appraiser's consultative role to the role of the conservator, and in the process the discovery of professional common ground, was followed by an exhaustive and definitive study of the physical characteristics of this Valley of Virginia walnut chest of drawers, circa 1800-1810.

In searching for any damage present in this chest of drawers, the intricate details of design and construction must be located. The conservator can return the chest of drawers to a structurally sound state. Thoughtful execution of the conservation proposals can return the chest to its lustrous, like-new state, perhaps even better than new since it will still have a slowly-created patina and the distinguishing marks and mellowness achieved over two hundred years of faithful service.

By conscious effort a museum-quality object was not chosen for this project. That would have been easier to handle as there are recorded auction prices from international, national, and many regional auction houses. Rather than settle on such an "ordinaire" approach, a middle-of-the-road, second tier object was selected because so little is known or written on this level of object. A few publications that are useful to the appraiser. The Maine Antique Digest reports monthly the results of many eastern auctions and the offerings of specialty dealers. The Mid-Atlantic Monthly is also useful but the sale of objects in the same class as the Valley of Virginia chest studied here is usually not among those reported.

From middle America Bill and Karen Coggins have been publishing Eagles Americana Review from New Market, Maryland. From 1988 through 1990 this publication filled the void in appraisal information for dealers and regional auction houses. Eagles served the better middle level market for auctioneers, restorers, appraisers, and dealers as well as collectors.

The Coggins have developed a simple model that evaluates the "key features and condition" which affect value in this market and market value level. The key features are those elements of 'age, form, construction, style or surface that contributed significantly to auction price.'"[1] (See Table 2, page 41.)

There is a lot of art and judgment involved in value determinations; appraisal valuations do not have a purely scientific basis. The Coggins model does not define all the relationships among factors which are outside the realm of his useful model.

While this model does have plateaus of prices, most are under $25,000 and have graduated levels on the lower end. The reason for using this model in evaluating the chest is that it gives indications of how each factor affects price: The direction and the amplitude of the effect are most important. The magnitude of the monetary value of the piece is not substantial to the argument. Preserving AIC guidelines supercedes all other considerations.

In the study chest, key features and condition of low chests that reduce value include several missing or

replaced feet. This reduces the value by 25 percent. An argument could be made that the replacement feet are now over 130 years old and any future replacements could further diminish the total appearance of the piece.

Table 2

Key Features and Condition

Percent of Value Retained

Hardwood furniture

original surface 100%

lightly cleaned 90%

old (100 yr.) finish 80%

lightly refinished 70%

stripped of old finish 60%

stripped and sanded 50%

These are rough guidelines to be used with caution!

Features That Increase Value (Other Features Held Constant)

By as much as 25%

- *notched corner top (41 B)*

By as much as 50%

- *fluted chamfered corner (40 A)*

By as much as 75%

- *fluted quarter column (41 B)*

By as much as 100% or more

- *ball and claw foot (39 B)*

Condition — Restoration Factors That Reduce Value

By as much as 25%

- *top molding missing/replaced*
- *several drawer lips broken/replaced*
- *backboards missing/replaced*

By as much as 50%

- *several feet missing/replaced*
- *part of all feet missing/replaced*
- *one drawer missing/replaced*

By as much as 75% or more

- *two drawers missing/replaced*
- *top missing/replaced*
- *case cut/reduced in size*

SOURCE: Bill and Karen Coggin, "Key Features and Condition," Eagles (1991): vii.

THE EFFECT OF SURFACE ON VALUE

*The **Condition—Restoration Tables** in the FOCUS section provide rough estimates of how value is lowered by missing or replaced parts. Quality of surface plays an equally important role. The following table presents our estimates of how various conditions affecting surface might lower the value of any furniture type.*

PERCENT OF VALUE RETAINED

Hardwood furniture

original surface 100%

lightly cleaned 90%

old (100 yr.) finish 80%

lightly refinished 70%

stripped of old finish 60%

stripped and sanded 50%

Painted furniture

original surface 100%

lightly cleaned 90%

old (100 yr.) overpaint 80%

refinished 50%

Paint decorated furniture

original surface 100%

lightly cleaned 90%

significant paint loss 50%

refinished 25%

These are rough guidelines to be used with caution!

THE EFFECT OF SURFACE ON VALUE

*The **Condition—Restoration Tables** in the FOCUS section provide rough estimates of how value is lowered by missing or replaced parts. Quality of surface plays an equally important role. The following table presents our estimates of how various conditions affecting surface might lower the value of any furniture type.*

This chest does have several excellent features. First there is a key feature present in the fluted quarter round which could increase its value by as much as 75 percent. The figured-wood drawer fronts of this chest indicate that some percentage should be added to the value for the stripped walnut. Simple bracket foot chests in figured wood can bring more than $10,000. If there were a ball-and-claw foot the value of the chest would increase by 100 percent or more! Coggins' model would indicate that a bracket, ogee bracket, or ball-and-claw foot would greatly enhance the prospective value of the conserved and restored piece. In an historical sense there were very few ball-and-claw feet produced in the backcountry. From the falls of the James River in Richmond, Virginia, and west, the appearance of the ball-and-claw foot would have been stylistically unseemly since the bracket or ogee with bracket foot or a plain ogee foot with pads would have been stylistically more satisfying to Virginians and indeed to most southerners of the period.

With fluted quarter columns it can bring even more. The addition of the drop or apron skirt further enhances the value of the piece.

Other refinements to this analysis can be made through the introduction of the Wakefield Model[2] developed by Sir Humphrey Wakefield, Bart., a noted British authority.

Rather than use the broad percentages used by Coggins, Wakefield has slightly different Headings for Assessment. He uses a 100-point system.

Table 3

The Wakefield Model

1. A Reflection of Its Times
2. Decorative Detail
3. Technical Details of Tools and Age
4. Condition
5. Durability
6. Rarity
7. Investment Potentials
8. Art Quality

SOURCE: Sir Humphrey Wakefield, "Secrets of Great Furniture Revealed: The Cash Value of a Masterpiece Established," Connoisseur Magazine April 1984: 98.

Wakefield then has an "infallible guide of multipliers" which is a good economic term for the market standing.

While there have been many considerations in determining the intrinsic value of this chest of drawers, a simple conservative treatment is probably

best. That is, do nothing. Leave the chest as it is without restoration of the 130-year-old bracket feet. If replaced with ball-and-claw feet or with ogee bracket feet or with french feet, one would never be sure if the replacement was or was not like the original feet. What would be gained?

Albert Sack, in Fine Points of Furniture, provides a new kind of handbook for the collector and the antiquarian. He presents a thorough analysis of the various elements of design, decoration, craftsmanship, construction, and finish of early American furniture. He explains why superficially similar pieces of furniture of the same approximate age and scarcity, and possibly by the same maker, may vary considerably in desirability and worth. The principle criterion in analyzing furniture is that we need to understand that we are talking only about upper museum quality, when determining which is good, better, or best.

In this section we reviewed several models for determining the value of chests.

Physical Examination of Chest, with Photographs

Today it is difficult to conceive of the economic excitement which seized the South, as well as the

remainder of colonial America. In the South there was much disposable wealth from tobacco, pine, and other agricultural products. Amazing amounts of money were changing hands. Accompanying this prosperity was a wave of craftsmen, many from the northern colonies and many from the master craftsmen shops of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Evidence reveals these new immigrants produced work in the South comparable with the best made in any colony. Paul H. Burroughs[3] shows representative pieces which are not the museum and private collector type, but which are unique and excellent work by mostly unknown hands. He presents what is "typical, rather than the rare."[4] He wanted to present representative pieces which have merit in their own right and additionally discovered "the individual artist at work can often produce results unattainable in the shops of the more expert craftsmen."[5] Records indicate that Frederick, Maryland, and Warrenton, Harrisonburg, Staunton, and Charlottesville, Virginia were all settled by Germans, Scotch-Irish, and Scotch, and that their shops were frequent along the Great Philadelphia Wagon Road. "Many journeymen traveled back and forth in employment of their trade." He..."secured the names of more than seven hundred cabinetmakers in the South from 1737 to 1820."[6]

Queen Anne styling had hit its zenith and Chippendale became the principle influence on style. Throughout the period elements of Queen Anne styling could be seen in cabriole legs and in well-valenced triple-arched skirts. Examples both with and without pendants were found on Chippendale period lowboys and highboys.

Hepplewhite, with its clean, lighter feeling was in the style ascendancy as was the influence of the Adams brothers in lighter, brighter color and scale. Each large plantation would have its own journeyman or cabinetmaker or joiner who made furniture. Families were large in size, an economical necessity to insure an adequate supply of labor to build this new country. When this fact is coupled with the scarcity of labor and the immense appetite for workers needed to create and maintain this new land, labor became a large cost factor in the furniture-making process.

This need was ongoing and constant. The growth in households, in the standards of living, and in the presence of accumulated wealth led naturally to the need for more furniture.

This incessant need was reflected in the demand for designers. One of the master designers of furniture in Virginia was none other than Thomas Jefferson, whose travels in Europe during the time of

great classical architecture from 1784 to 1789 gave him a special appreciation and insight for the classical look. He greatly influenced the style of architecture and furniture in Virginia and the South. At Monticello Thomas Jefferson maintained his own furniture shop. It is said no detail was too small for his review.

Further south and east, at Clarksville, Virginia, Sir Peyton Skipworth built one of the South's most impressive plantation houses, Prestwould, 1790-1795. Today it is in untouched condition, having neither central heating or cooling. Much of the original furniture, made by slaves on their plantation using their own trees, has been returned to the National Historic Site to help it fulfill its function. Thanks to the meticulous written records of Lady Jane Skipwith and the house's later inhabitants who followed her lead in documentation for this remarkable home, we know that the house still retains its original wallpaper, which is considered to be among the finest in colonial America.

It is easy to see the influence of Chippendale in the furniture, as well as the influence of Hepplewhite and Sheraton styling. Each piece was created for a specific need and for a specific site. The case pieces have the look so admired by Virginians, handsome, well-designed in attractive local woods. Mostly Southern

black walnut and secondary woods of Southern white pine were used. A noticeable individuality in the pieces is evident.

Needless to say there was no mass production at this time in this part of the South. Each piece of furniture was custom-ordered, designed, and made to the customer's direction and purse. Tastes varied, as did the workmanship, styling, and woods.

In the backcountry, as in all other parts of the country, styles were made for many years after they were in the forefront of design novelty. During every style period, styles and elements of that style were retained for years, even longer in the backcountry.

With this historical perspective the study object presents a transitional style which becomes both less and more of a mystery. To consider these points and to have a fuller detailed explanation of the conservation functions, we will review many color plates of the chest.

Full View

Figures 1 and 2 present a chest of drawers of some substance, of plain line, and with a late Federal thin flat molding strip, above decorative Chippendale quarter-round reeded corners. If the corners had been simply champhered or champhered with flute or reed, the

quality of substance would have given a lesser impression of the excellence of its cabinetry.

Carcase

Top and molding

The plain flat molding may be attributed to the southerner's love for grace and simplicity in furniture in the late Federal period. An ordinary thumb-molded top would have eliminated one of the chest's of drawers distinctive features. The left-hand top molding was purposely removed to determine the originality of the molding and to determine if the molding could have been a replacement for a molded lip. This also made it possible to confirm the original finish. In addition, furniture-finishing nails with side-hammered L-shaped heads were used to secure the molding to the top. The separate moisture rings and some very light burns will remain because the original finish was shellac which does not resist water well. Permanent staining of the surface is evident. A professional cleaning and conservation finish will return the finish to its original mellow, lustrous glow. The separated boards, broken dovetail and the half-blind corner jointry can be readily observed. Dovetailing is late Federal and untouched. See figures 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

Figure 1

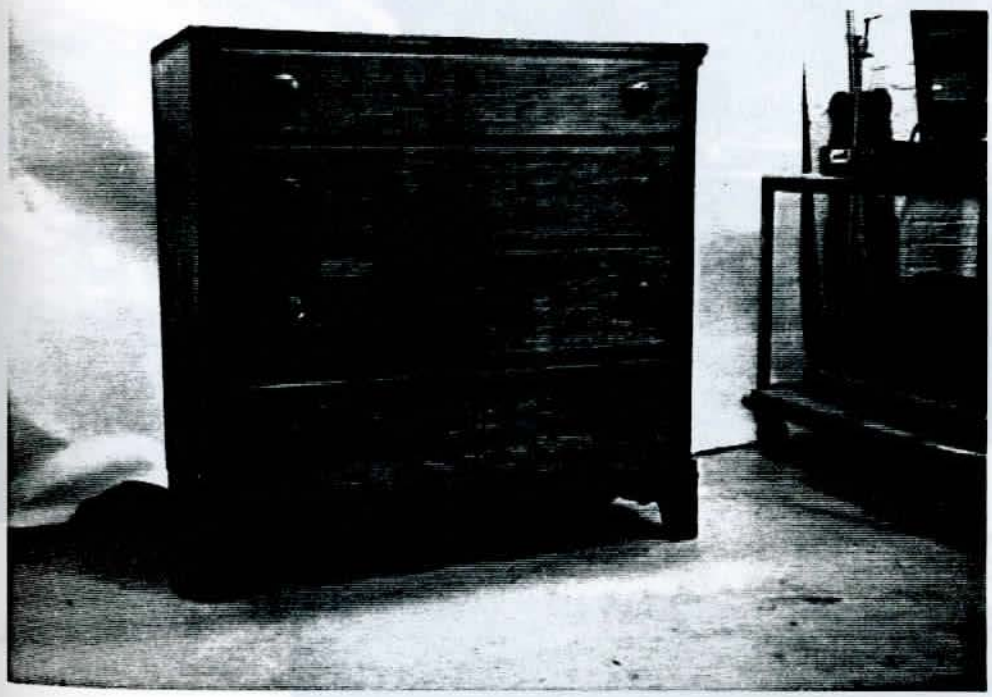


Figure 2

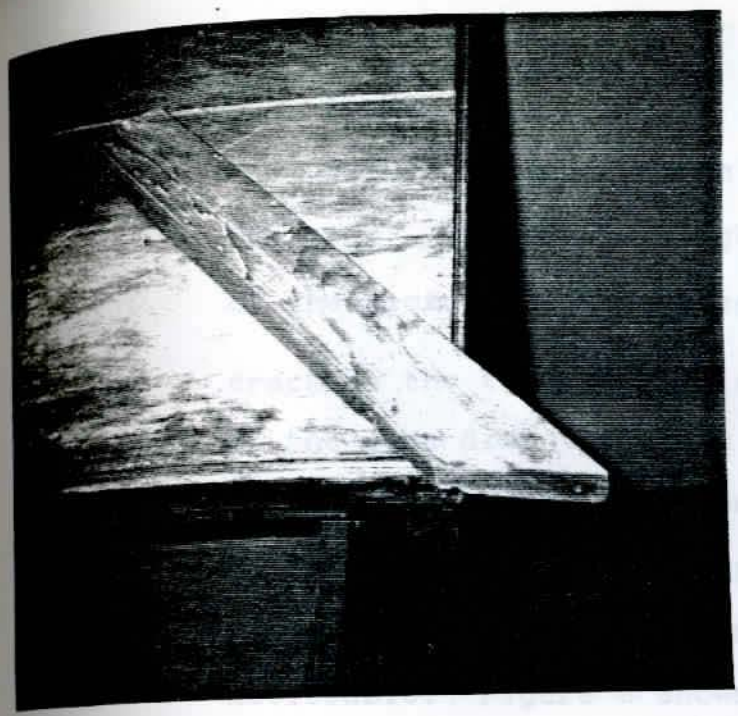


Figure 3

Figure 4

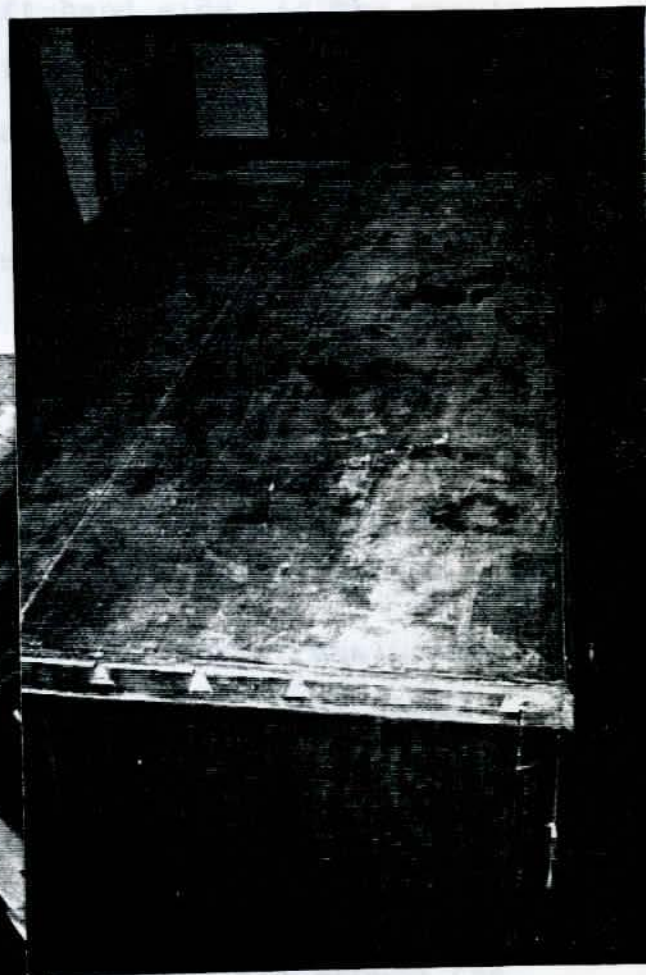


Figure 5

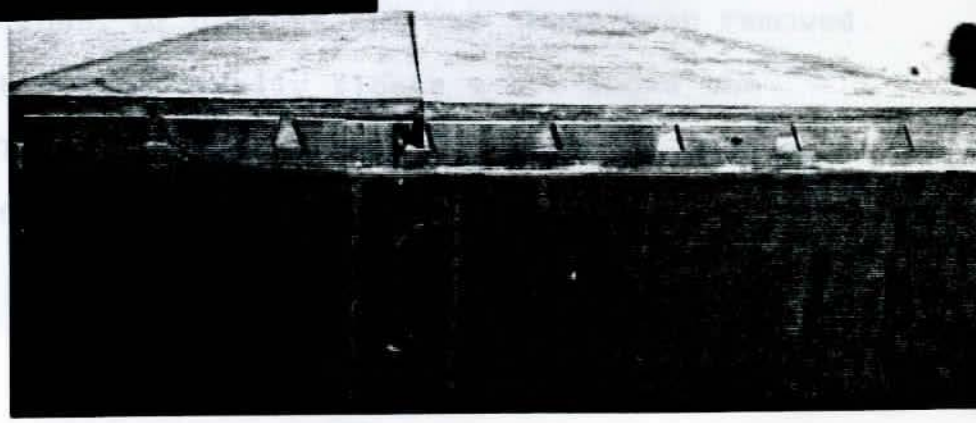


Figure 6

Sides

Figure 7 demonstrates the untouched condition of the side. The top is slightly lifting in the top part of the picture. This damage, related to the stress crack on the top and the left-hand side, is the result of the glue disintegrating from moisture. Wood tends to crack or split at its weakest point. The split at a joint is preferable to a split in the grain of the wood. In addition, this stress crack is not very noticeable. Figure 8 shows the parallel converging cracks on both sides and the top; these render the piece structurally unstable.

Note how the opaque color on the side feet and skirt is inconsistent with the tonal values on the case above. Time should have given it a more translucent character. Color crispness shows on the side after almost two hundred years of daily use. It is easy to see the deep wear of the yellow pine drawer glide behind the walnut solid front panels.

On figure 9 the molding is intact all around the top of the chest of drawers and has never been removed. Note that the top actually floats a bit above the molding. This is a clever design to provide another plane at no additional expense.

Figure 7

Figure 8

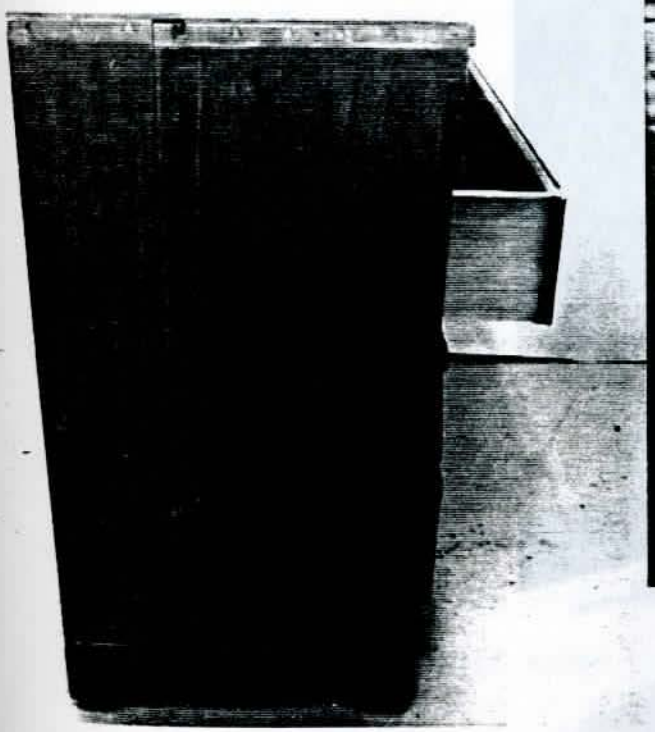


Figure 9

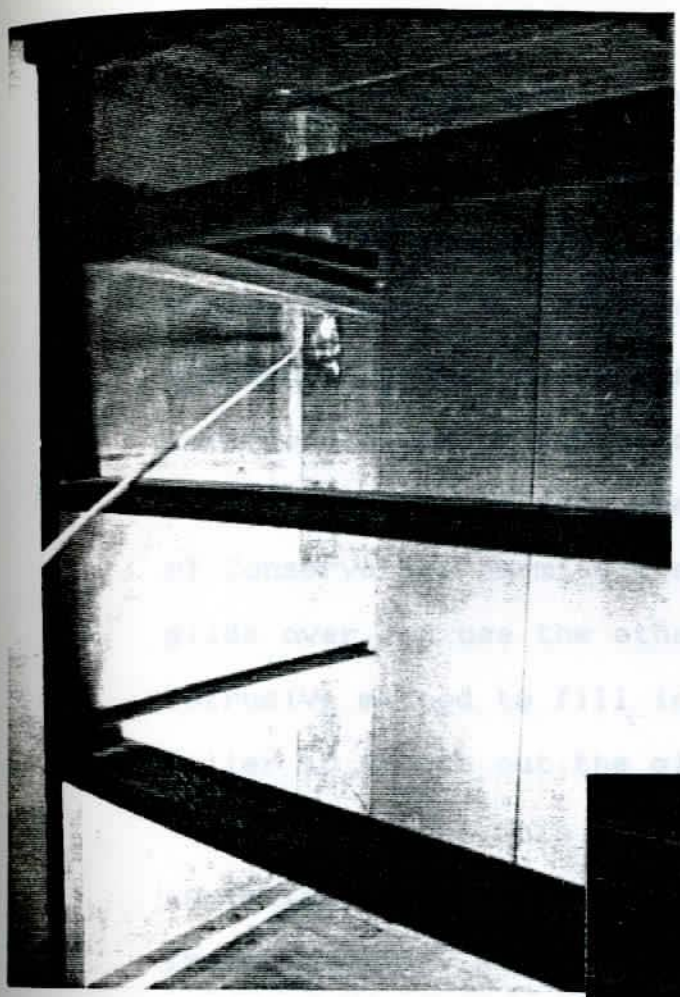


Figure 10

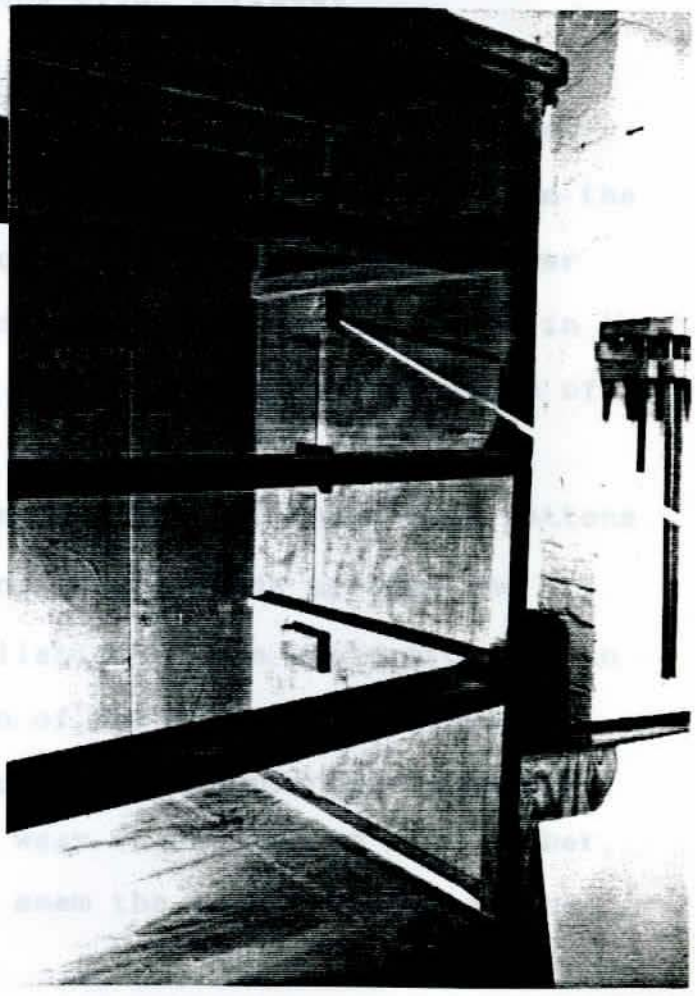


Figure 11

The lighted interior view of the carcase in figure 10, seen on page 54, highlights the left-hand side revealing where some of the glue blocks had been in place. Again note the plane marks on the upright side. The second drawer glide has fallen out and is available for reinstallation during conservation. The drawer glides are grooved from wear. The American Institute of Conservation permits its members to simply turn the glide over and use the other side or to use a less intrusive method to fill in with an approved grade of filler to smooth out the glide surface.

Sometimes a thin polyethylene membrane is installed on the glide surface for an easy, free-of-friction slide, although this has not been done on the study piece. The carcase bottom serves as a drawer glide for the fourth drawer. See the white line in the lower left to see the effect of two hundred years of constant usage.

The opposite side in figure 11 shows glue battens in place and the second drawer glide missing and available for reinstallation. This plate provides an excellent illustration of the slightly V-grooved vertically laid backboards. Hand-planing is easily discernable as is the wear on the bottom base member. On the sides it would seem the light streaks at the

cracks were from moisture entering over a considerable period of time.

Drawer rails

Figure 12 is helpful in examining the rails.

The unfinished area underneath the original lock mortise can be seen in figure 13. Large rose-head nails are visible. Remember that technically these nails were not manufactured after 1790. During an earlier conservation attempt batten supports were applied to strengthen and secure the stress cracks in the top and the batten support glue blocks in the upper center secured the side vertical stress crack. The AIC does not recommend this practice. There is a bead on the inside portion of the top rail, indicating that perhaps it had been made previously for another piece. This is a common practice found in hand-made furniture.

A close-up of the bead areas on the back of the underneath rail has rose-head nails visually present and nailed into the top. Figure 14 also reveals ghosts of missing batten supports that had been used to secure stress cracks. Except for the batten ghosts the entire interior carcase has the same color patination. Except for the batten glue blocks, the interior is untouched. It is not clear if the batten support in the corner and center are original to the piece or not. This will be further investigated during the conservation phase.

Another view of this section in figure 15 shows the first drawer rail with the lock tongue mortise.

Figure 12

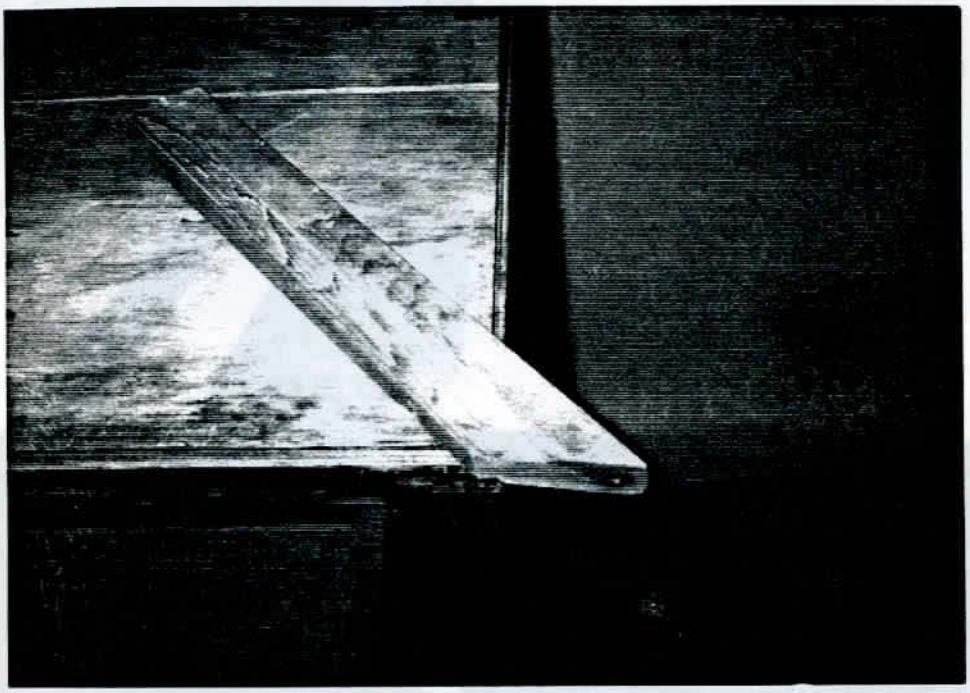


Figure 13

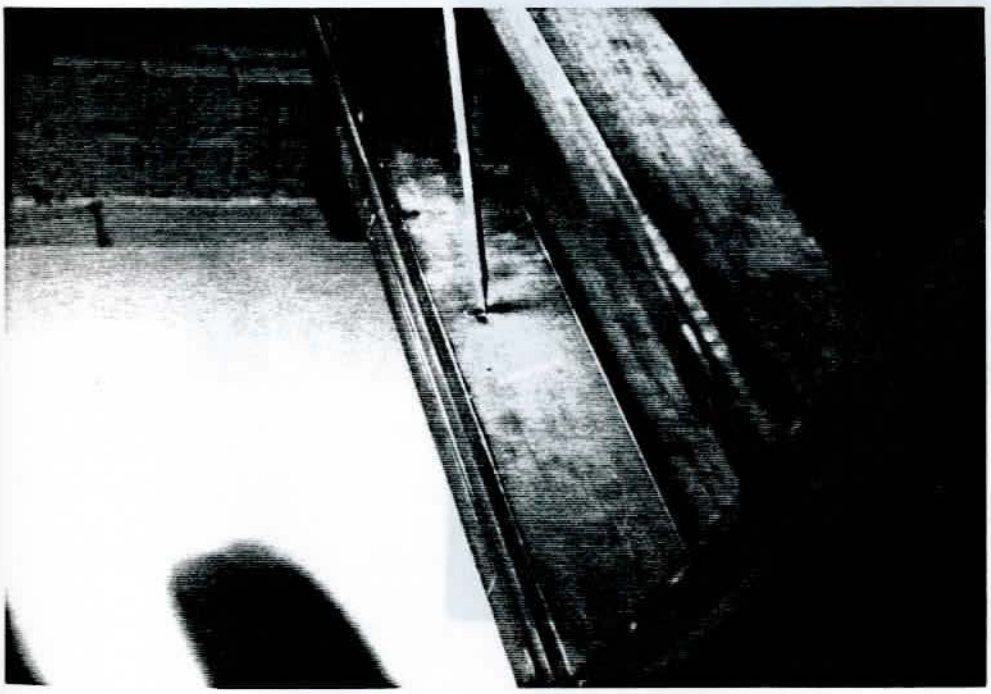


Figure 14

Figure 15

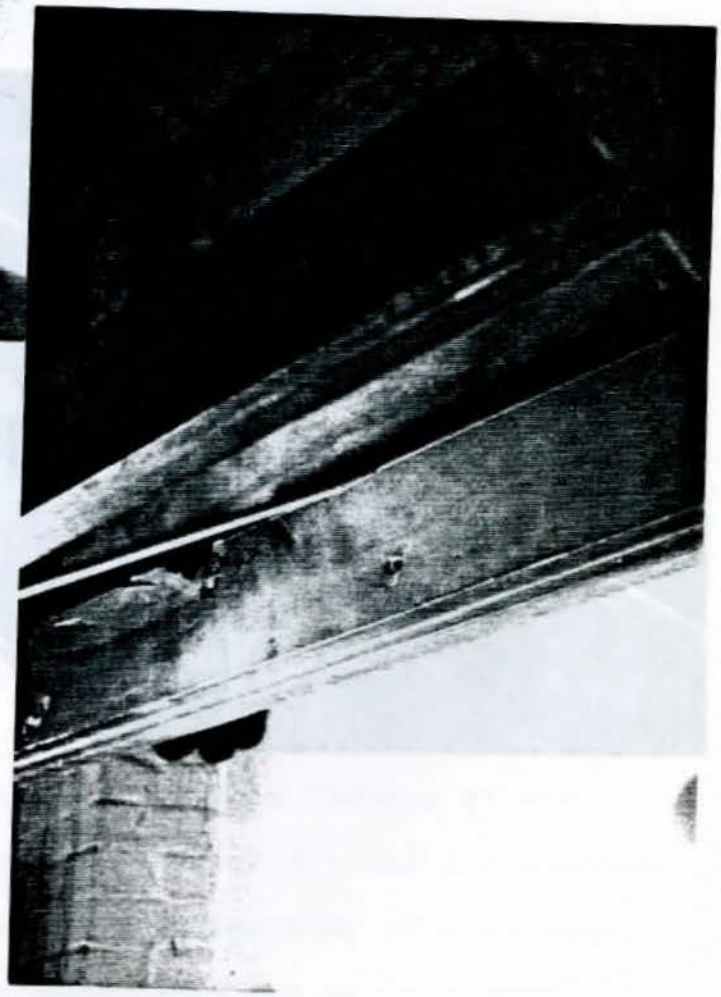
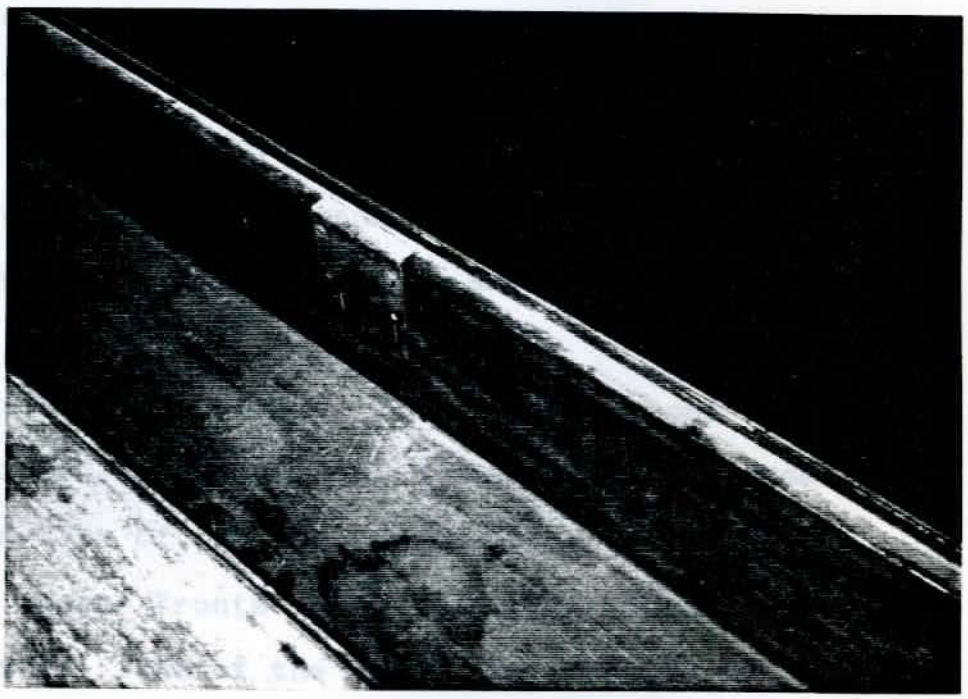


Figure 16

Figure 17



Drawers

Fronts

These can be seen in figures 1 and 2.

The use of overlapping lip-molding was introduced in America as early as 1760, was common by 1785, and continued to be one of the favorite drawer ornamentations into the nineteenth century. The fronts are fine-lapped dovetailed joinings.

Plate 16 gives a good look at the corner damage that can be sustained by this type of drawer. The drawers are numbers one and two from the top. Heavy corner damage is evident.

On the third drawer down, seen in the left side of figure 17, a round hole with black staining does not extend into the interior and is a natural depression in the walnut; it does not signify another handle hole ghost.

In figure 18 a front view of drawers one and two shows drawer lip damage. This image gives an excellent elevation view of the top rising above the molding.

The drawer fronts shown in figure 19 show how the architectural line of the top is interrupted by drawer corner damage. John Bivins, Adjunct Curator at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Art and a respected authority on furniture and a conservator of some note, feels that when damage interrupts the architectural

line in furniture, it should be restored to its normal plane.

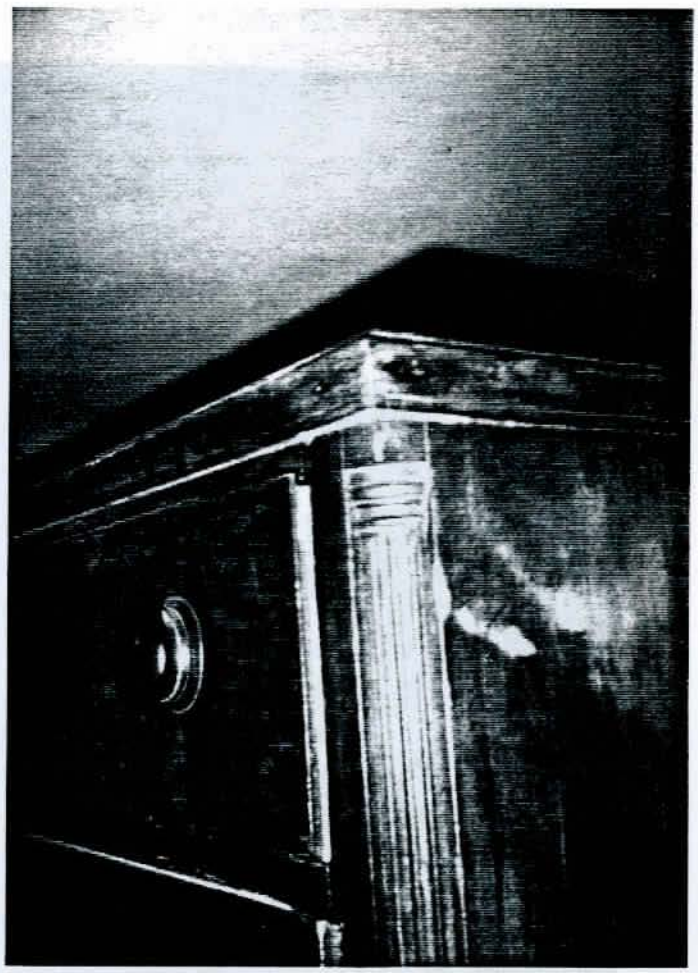


Figure 18

Figure 19

Figure 20 gives an overview of the complete second drawer. The hand planing is evident. Note the untouched clean yellow pine interiors.

Figure 21 shows the third drawer with its highly figured yellow pine bottom boards. This figure also shows the wear on the drawer sides which represents the constant use after the failure of the drawer glides.

Figure 22 gives a good indication of the excellent fine dovetailing. The color of walnut when compared to the pine is startling in color and fineness of the dovetailing.

Sides

The sides are seen in figures 23 and 24.

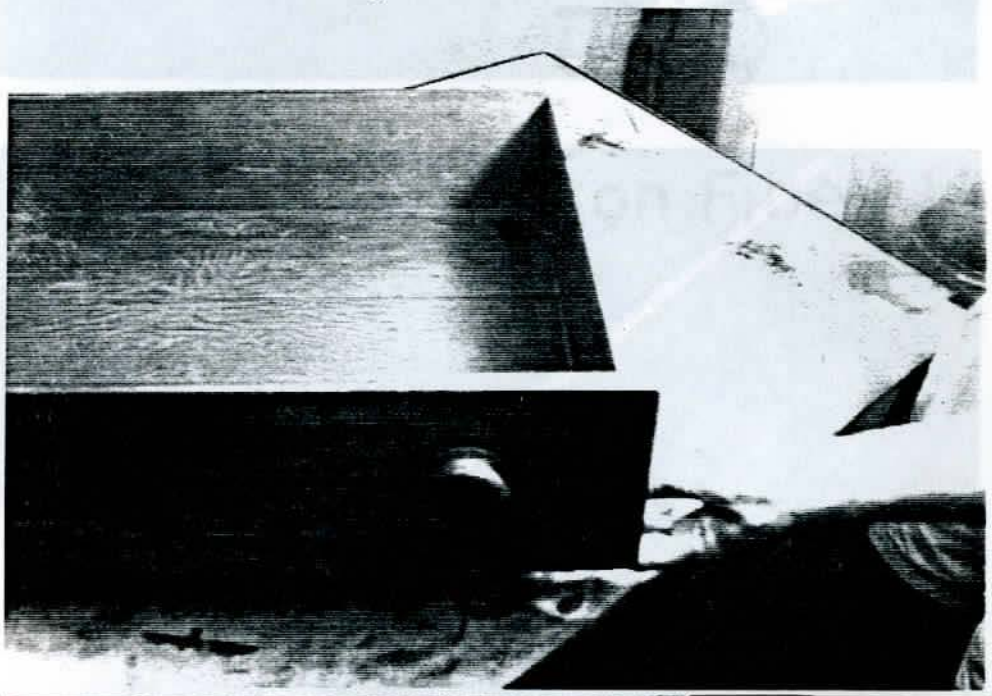
In addition to the dog-gnawed mushroom pull, figure 25 gives a good side view of the dovetailing and the very clean side of the lower drawer.

Figure 26 provides an excellent view of where the dovetailing is separating due to excess moisture and the resulting stress on the joint. At the lower end of the joint the drawer bottom can be seen seated in the lower rabetting and where it has pulled away from the drawer side. All four drawers are constructed in the same manner.

Figure 27 gives a closer view and a good display of the worn sides of the drawer and the wear on the drawer glides. It is readily seen that in a purely

physical sense the absence of the drawer glide edge in time would tend to cause structural distortions and other problems to the structural integrity of the whole piece.

Figure 20



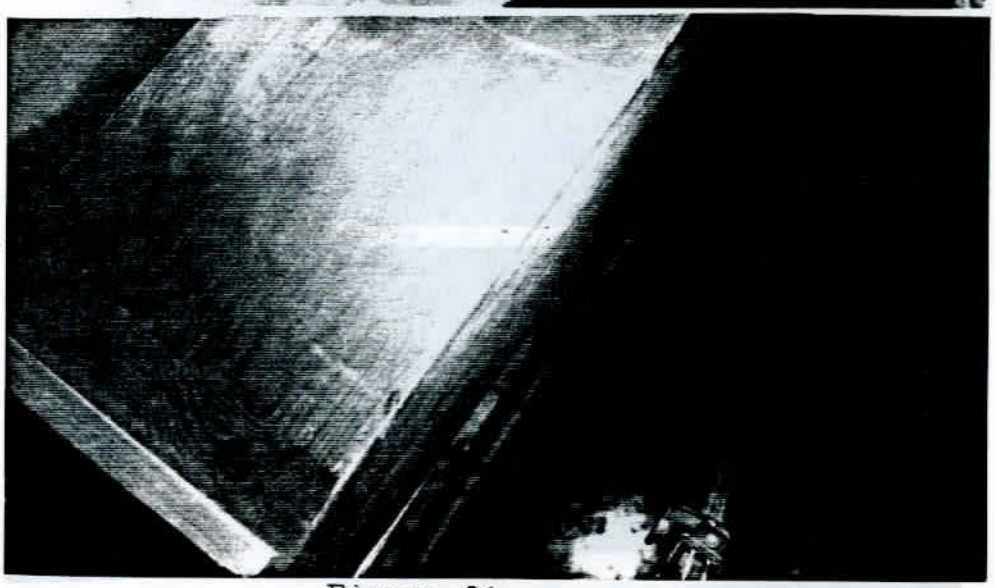


Figure 21

Figure 22

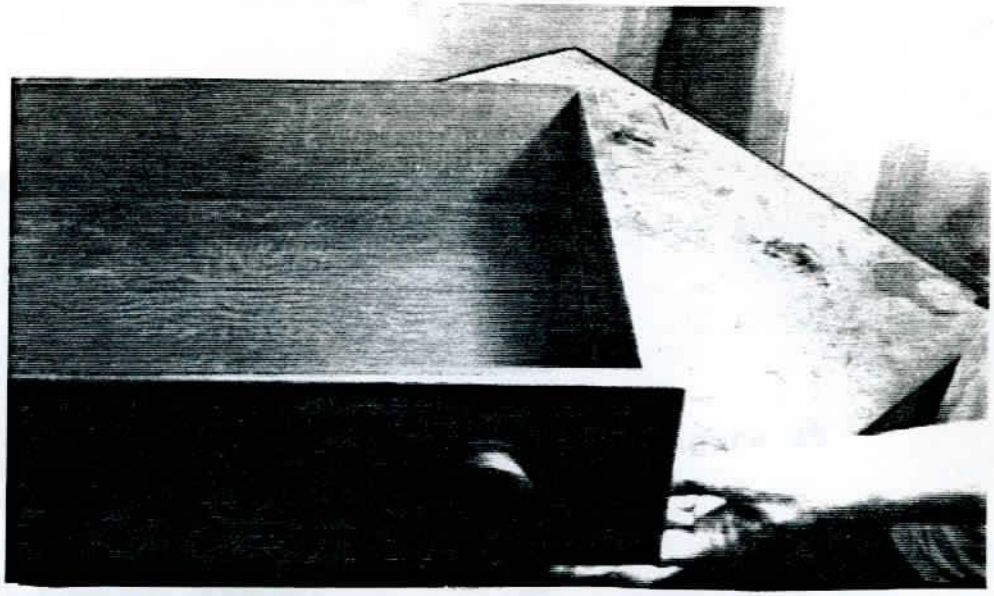


Figure 23

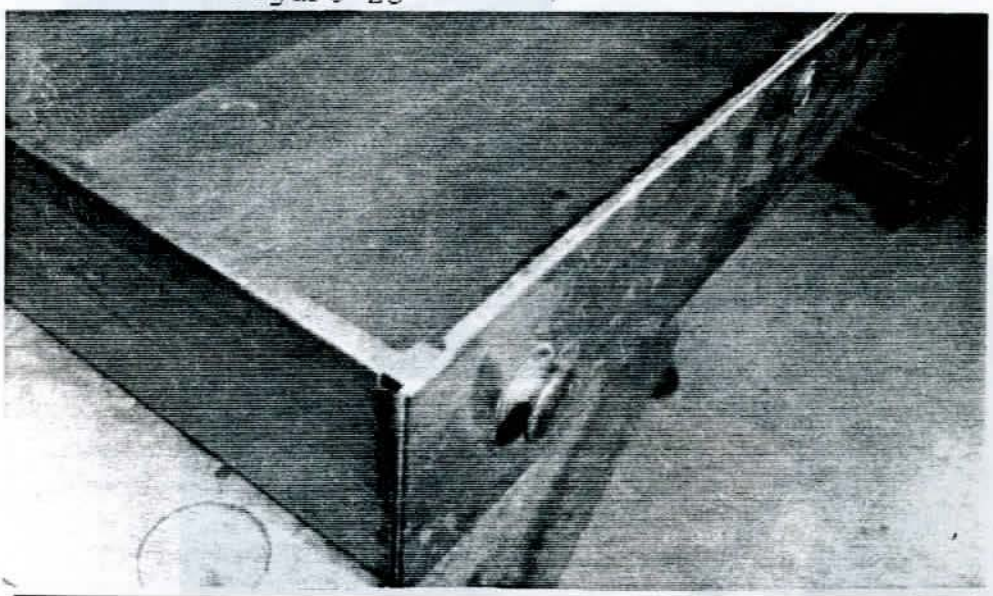


Figure 24

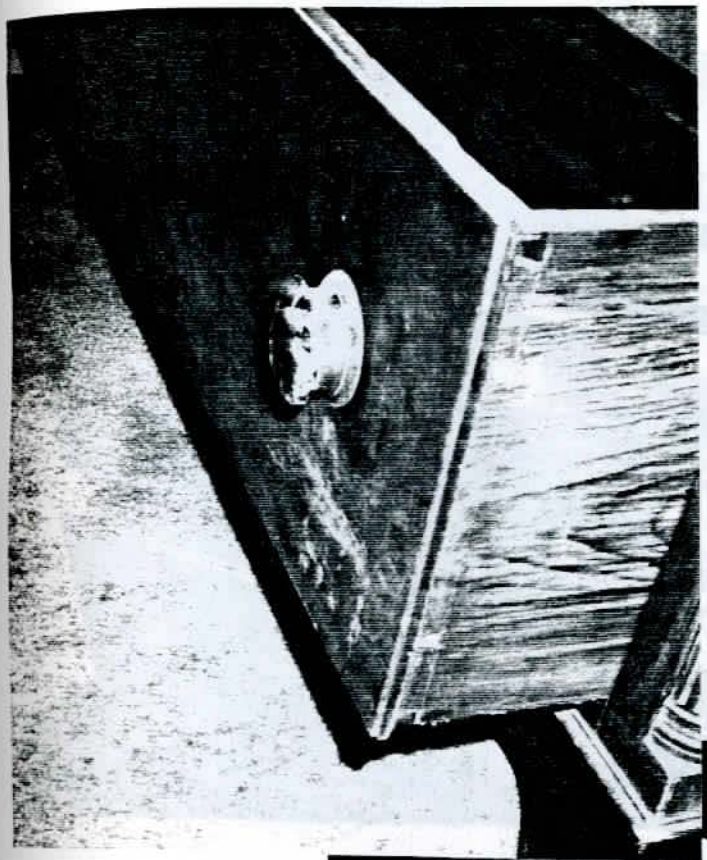


Figure 25

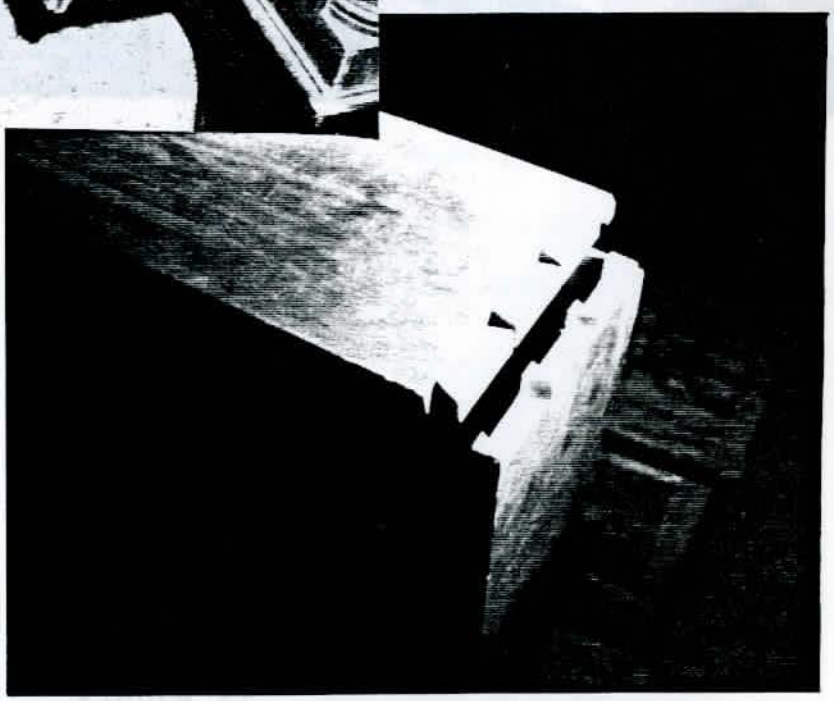


Figure 26

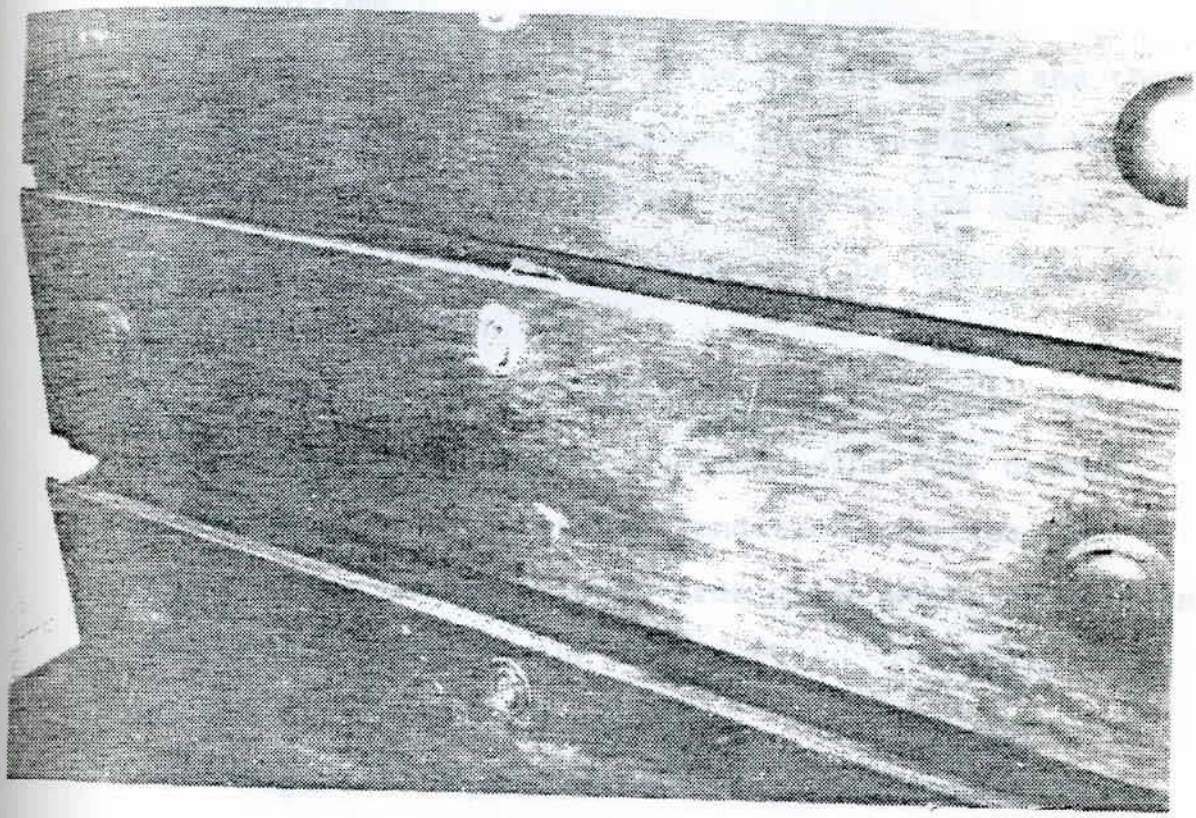


Figure 27

Bottoms

Figure 28 shows the large bottom drawer and the bottom side with its chamfered three sides and the nailed back. The squiggling on the bottom may be a signature and further analysis will be needed to make this determination.

Figure 29 gives a good indication of the two yellow pine board drawer bottoms. The four drawer interiors are in untouched condition. Notice the champhering the work lower side glide wear, as well as the bottom dragging the drawer rail. The small lines of the hand plane are visible.

Figure 30 shows another view of the same drawer showing areas of much wear. When analyzing this wear remember that we are trying to determine and confirm the chest's age and relative authenticity. Both factors seem confirmed.

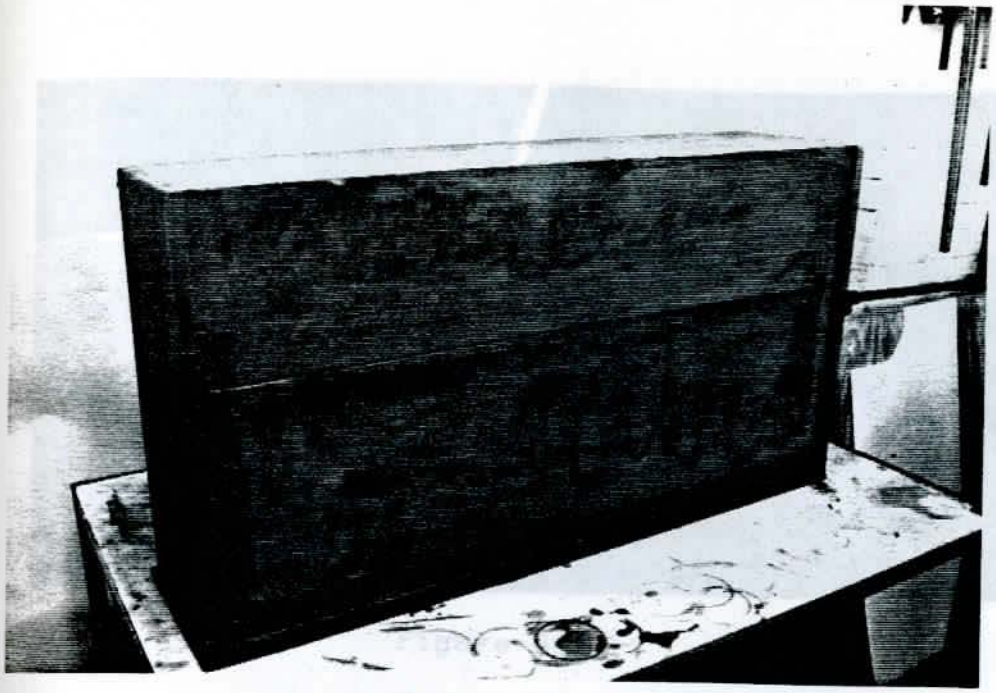
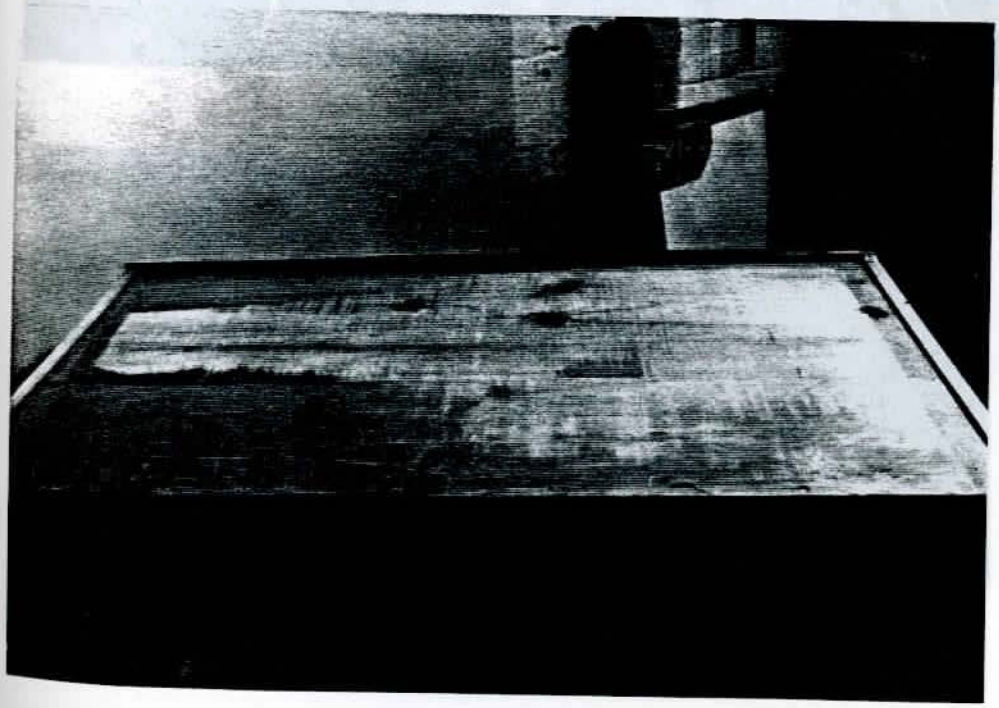


Figure 28

Figure 29



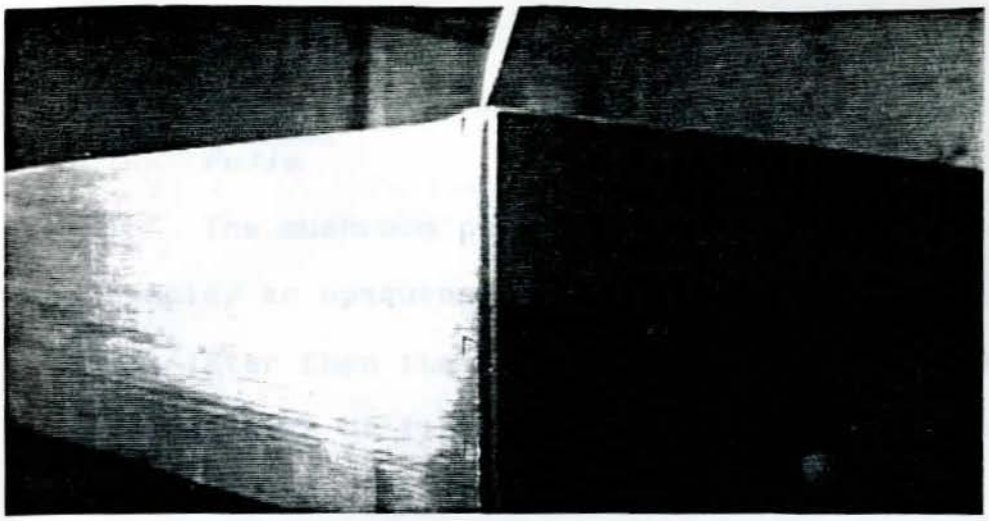
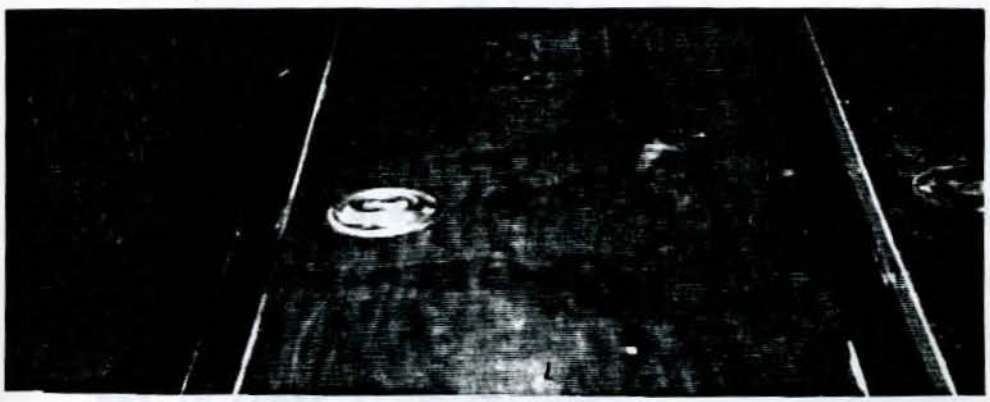


Figure 30

Figure 31



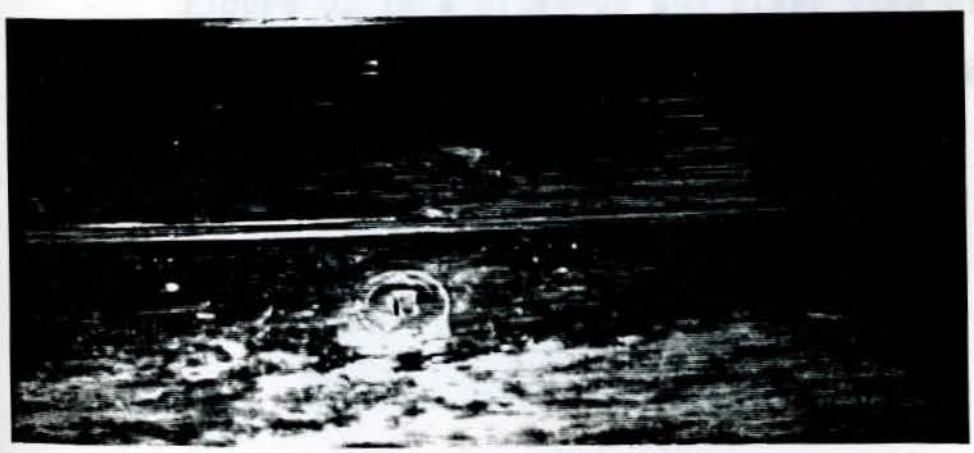


Figure 32

Pulls

The mushroom pulls, such as the one in figure 25, display an opaqueness which would tend to indicate an age later than that of the drawer front. There seems to be years of fingernail abrasions around the mushroom knobs.

The opaqueness of the wooden mushroom knobs in figure 25 is an indication that they are replacements of unknown age. Finger oil stains suggest the originals were of a similar design and shape.

Escutcheons and locks

The handmade punched-brass escutcheons illustrated in figure 31 are original. This indicates that the one removed has never been disturbed. The undulating quality of the hand planing is present but difficult to see in these illustrations.

Figure 32 is a close-up and clear view of the escutcheon ghost and the surrounding area. This tends to indicate this is the original escutcheon.

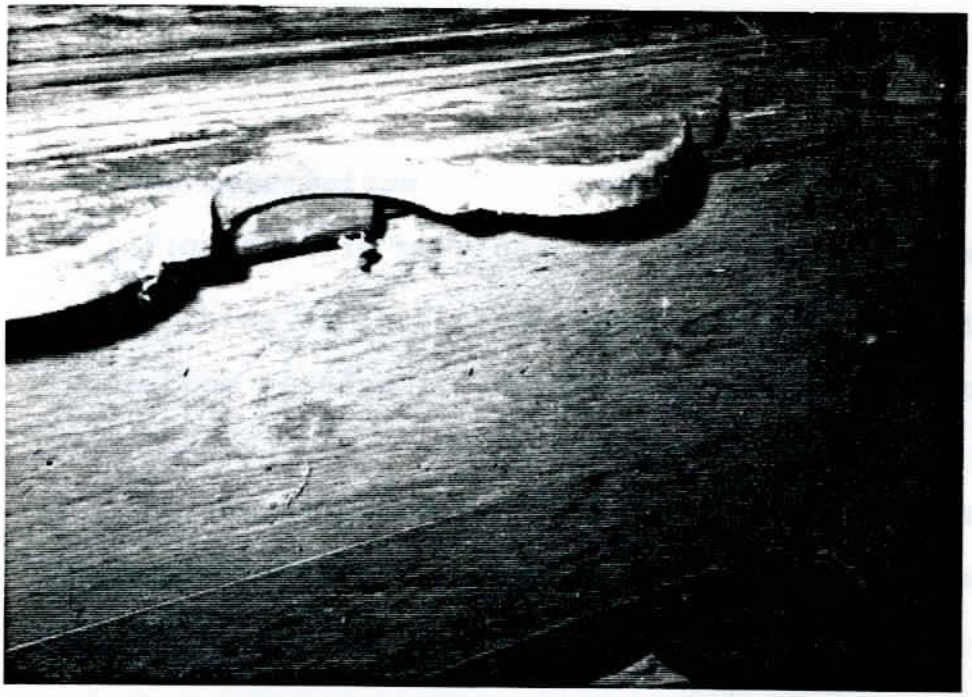


Figure 33

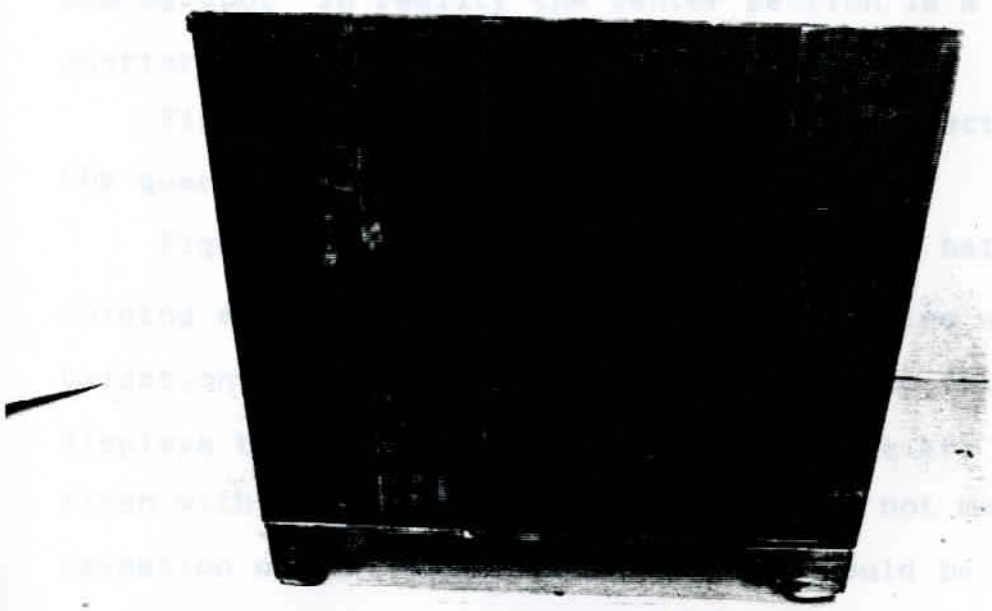


Figure 34

Carcase Bottom

Figure 33 is very dark but an excellent display of the blocking of the front skirt. It has a "rightness." The bottom retains its original flyspecks and cobwebs.

Back

Figure 34 indicates that the backing is laid vertically and is tongue-and-grooved. The oxidation is uniform on the carcase back and bottom to which it is attached with small nails. The boards terminate on top of the molding frame.

Molding Strip Frame

Figure 35 gives an exterior view of the molding strip frame; however, it appears flat in the photograph. In reality the center section is a quarter-round element.

Figure 36 shows a view with better perspective and the quarter round is easily visible.

Figure 37 is a good illustration of the half round molding strip frame. Note how this integrates with the oxidation of the upper carcase. In addition this displays the fact that the replacement feet are not flush with the molding frame, and it does not match the oxidation on the replacement feet. It would be in order to note that the side skirt was cut from the board after it was stained. No smudges are seen that

would show this was stained after it was placed on the chest of drawers.

Figure 38 gives a good view of the back foot which is in bad condition and very worn. This foot does not bear the weight of the chest of drawers. This task is performed in this instance by the replacement blocking. Both appear new with a definite absence of color on the inside back foot. There are several ghosts which could indicate the replacement foot is not as long as the original. There are missing triangular support blockings for the feet and skirt. This also occurs on the opposite side.

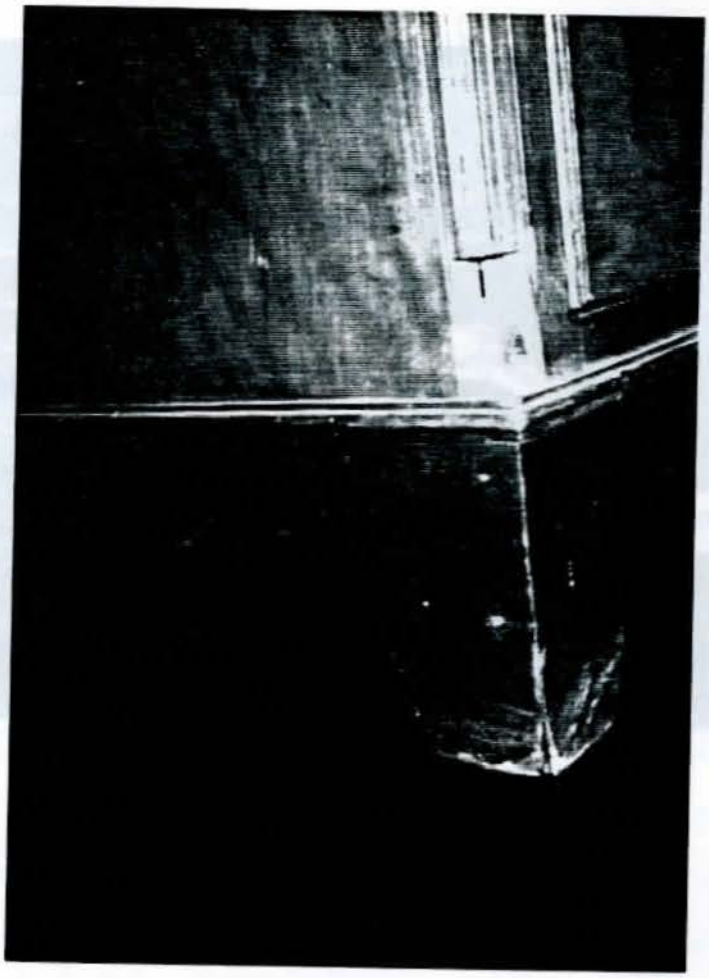


Figure 36

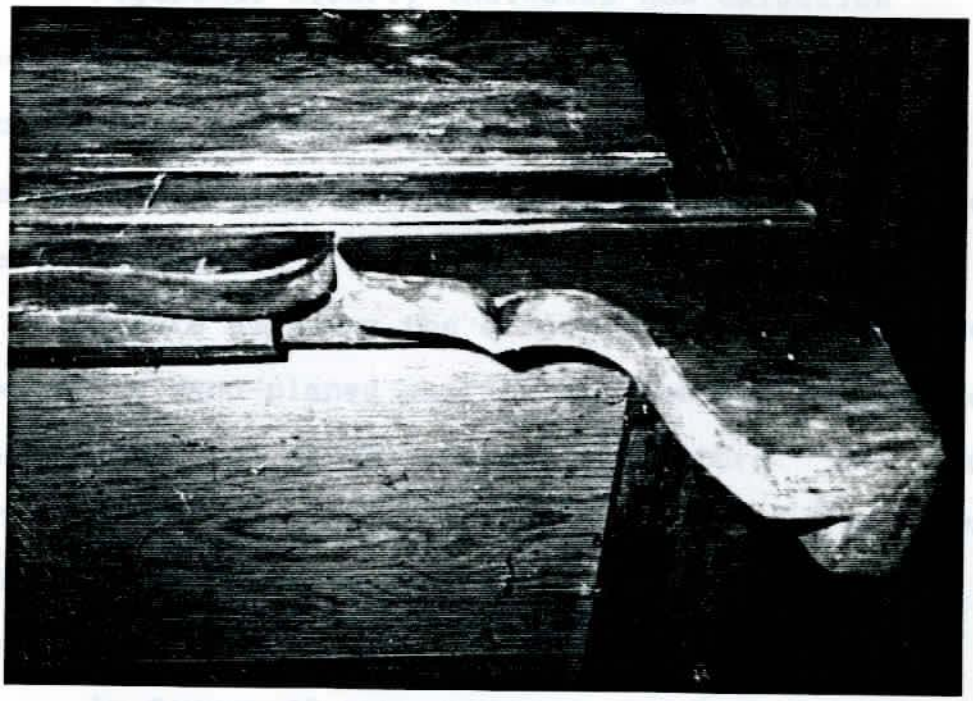


Figure 37

Missing foot supports at the ghost line of the side in figure 39 are quite evident. Notice the raw quality of the replacement back foot and side skirt. Also note the great portions of the back foot that are missing. The ghost line also suggests that the wood of the original feet was thicker and longer than that of the replacements.

Figure 40 clearly indicates how oxidation variations on the front right foot do not show the color patination of the front skirt. The foot and support blocking and the triangular foot skirt blocking are missing.

Figure 41 shows the original skirt on the left with its hand-planed surface and the replacement leg, which does not match in color or texture. The carcase bottom, the molding strip, and the blocking all have individual oxidation characteristics.

Front Skirt

In figure 42 some concerns are highlighted. The front skirt is about 1/2-inch thick and is attached to the case frame with nails. A well-marked difference in the color on the bracket feet and the skirt and side feet and skirts contain band-saw marks circa 1860-1875.

The close-up in figure 43 makes the story whole when comparing the patination differences in the front skirt and the feet and skirts.

Figure 44 shows the left lower corner bottom molding is a small half-round projecting out from the center of the molding frame that also projects out from the whole piece. This gives a quality look to the lower case.

Figure 42 gives a good view of the front and side bracket feet edges which are sharply mitered and do not

conform to the skirt front. The difference is so obvious the side skirts and feet have an alien air. Note that the new side replacements are not on the same line with the old skirt, which is flush with the molding frame. What should be done? That is the question.

Figures 42 and 43 give different perspectives on the lower case lines. The differences become marked and believable.

Figure 41 gives an excellent view of the original front skirt and its support blocking.

This figure, 41, also provides an unusual view of the original front skirt with its central concave cyma curve flanked by two convex cyma curves tapering to the feet on each side. Stylistically it is not likely that the piece originally had Hepplewhite French splay feet, for the front skirt would then have featured a central convex half-moon probably inlaid with a shell or fan and simpler curves.

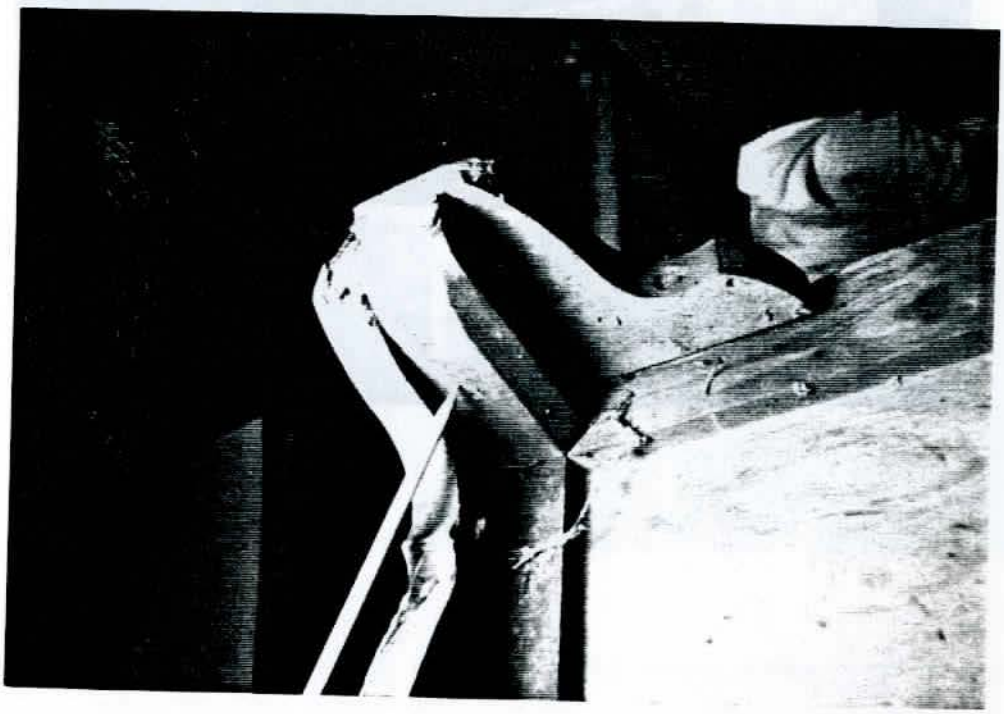


Figure 38

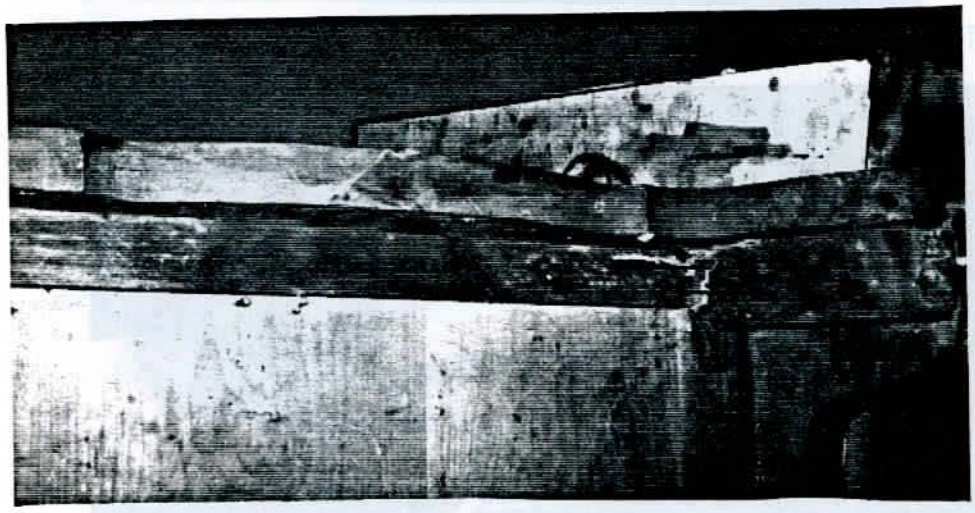
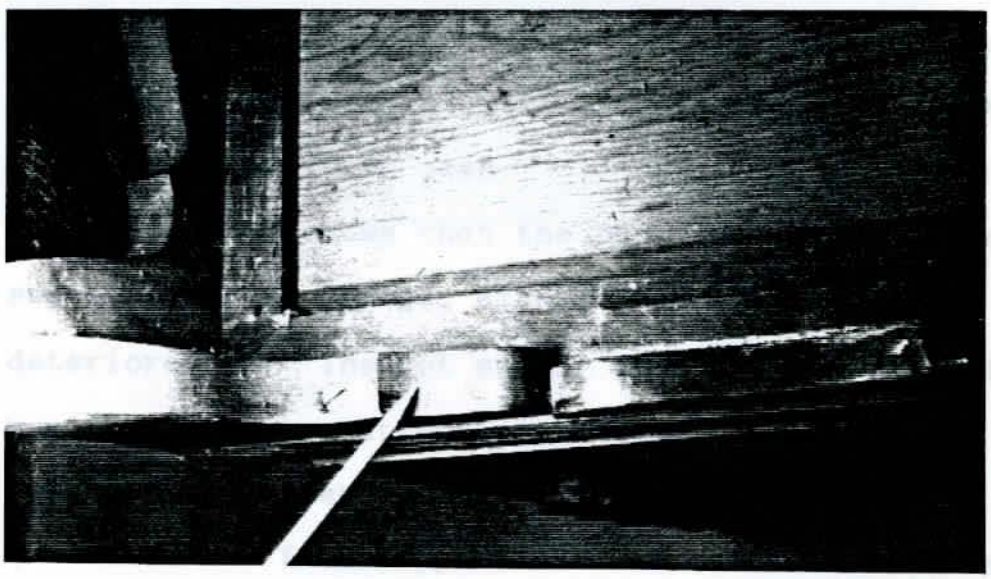


Figure 39

Figure 40

Figure 41



Over 2,500 photographs were examined at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Art to document any examples of this style skirt combined with the flat top molding with the quarter round corners. No examples were found, and none were found in furniture books for Chester or Lancaster counties, Pennsylvania, furniture.

There were no references to this combination in any of the Virginia furniture books.

Blocking

In figure 42 the front and side foot blocking appears somewhat new compared to the other interior features. This is estimated to have been added about 1860 because of the screws and the saw marks on the feet and skirts. It can be readily seen how the walnut molding frame is attached to the bottom of the carcase. The small half-round bead is an integral part of the design for the lower case.

Figure 45 shows that the back foot bracket has sustained great damage, either from great wear or deterioration. The hot summer heat and the very high humidity is devastating to furniture. This damage is typical to southern furniture.

The back foot support block matches in color and design. The light shadow might indicate a longer and thicker back foot was there with a corner support block. There should be triangular blocks in addition to the corner blocks to support the side and foot and corner skirts.

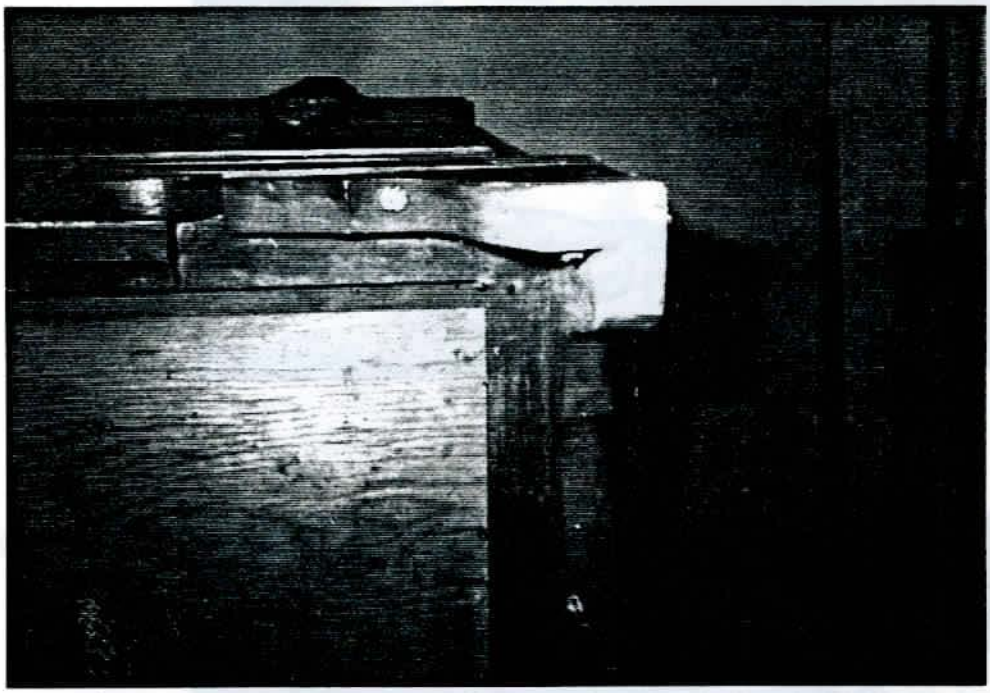


Figure 42

Figure 43

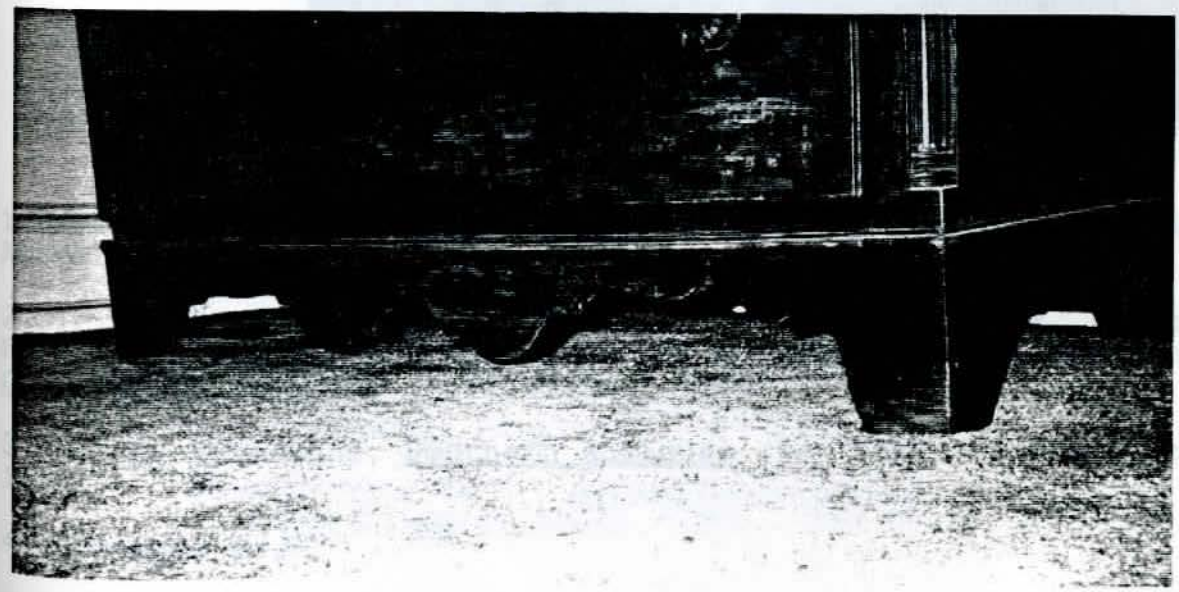


Figure 44

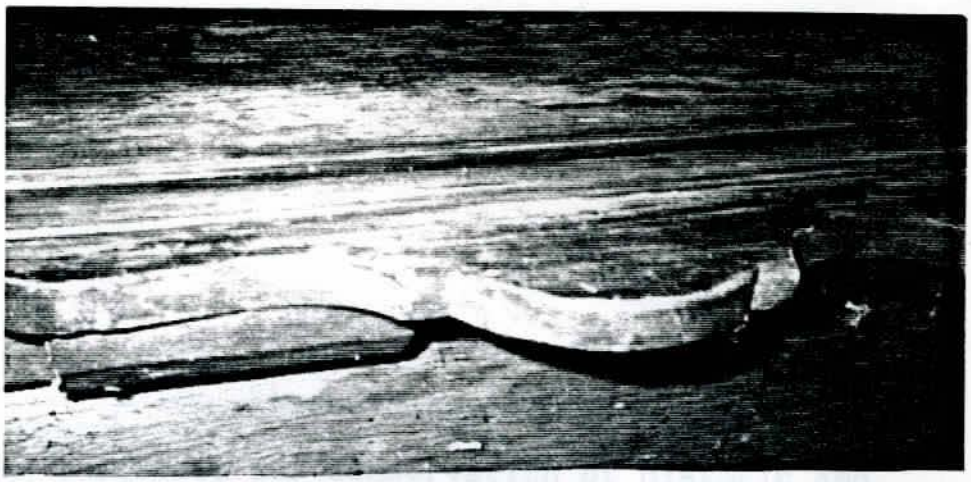
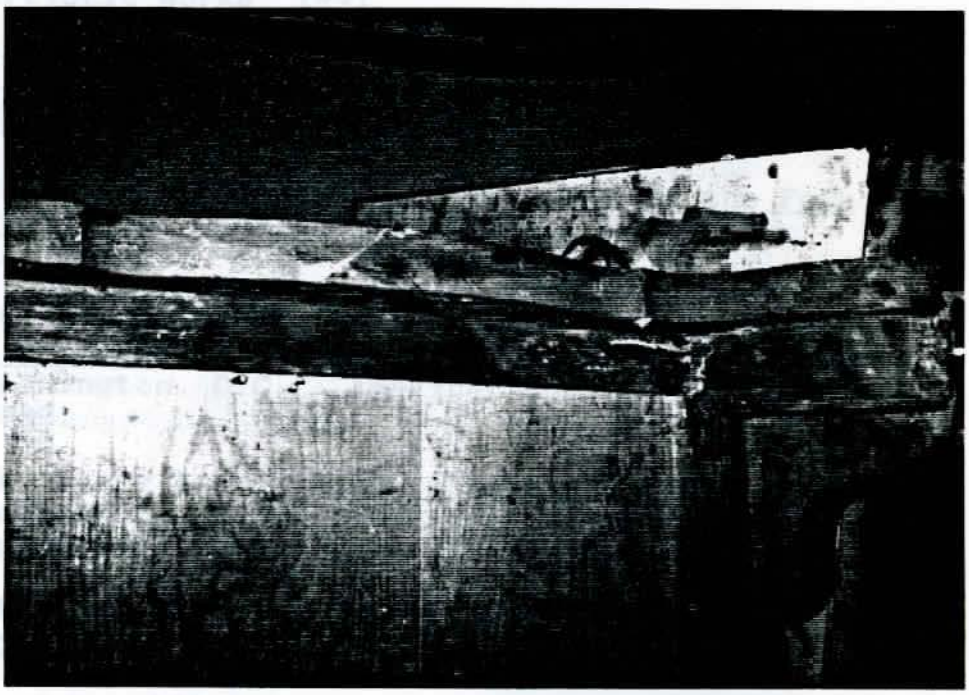


Figure 45



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2.Sir Humphrey Wakefield, Bart., "Secrets of Great Furniture Revealed: II. The Cash Value of a Masterpiece Established," Connoisseur Magazine April 1984: 94-99.

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4.Burroughs iv.

5.Burroughs 7.

6.Burroughs 8-9.

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