A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN OF COLONIAL AMERICAN FURNITURE

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A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN OF
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CHAPTER I

PROBLEM AND PROCEDURE

Introduction

Although the genesis of Colonial American furniture cannot be established, historians affix the year of 1620 as the approximate time of its origin. However, it must be remembered that expedience governed the actions of Colonial America in its development of furniture. For over a century and a half the best Colonial American furniture was made from patterns developed in the countries of Western Europe for which England excelled.

Colonial America was unsound politically, economically and religiously; the aspects of individual security and safety were as far-fetched as the stars in the heavens. The people were forced to spend long hours at work and upon returning home in the evening were too tired to notice the drab conditions existing therein. What little furniture could be found in the homes was designed for usefulness and for that alone. As the ingenuity of the Colonial Americans became apparent and the economical situation improved, greater thought was given to the design and comfort in the construction of household furniture.

At the turn of the eighteenth century the conquest of the Eastern seaboard of North America had been completed by
England. The colonies had, with the aid of British troops, established a chain of English colonies from Maine to Florida. Fortunes had been made and America was no longer poor. Therefore, the demands on homes and furniture were enlarged and improved.

In America the magnitude of the developments and achievements in contemporary household furniture cannot be overlooked. America had enriched the homes of the world with the development of the rocking chair. In the rocking chair there is a unique piece of furniture designed and constructed upon the theory of strength, simplicity and usefulness. This piece of furniture has withstood the test of centuries and it is as sound today as it was in the genesis of American furniture making.

Statement of Problem

An attempt will be made in this study to arrange the furniture of Colonial America into a proper sequence relative to the developments and changes made in their design and construction. Also, this study will make an effort to

1. Establish and determine the different types of furniture used in the Colonial American homes from 1620 to 1775.

2. Show the correlation between the development of Colonial American furniture with the contemporary furniture used in the homes of England and Western Europe.
3. Compare the position of the cabinet-makers of Colonial America to their peers in England and Western Europe.

Procedure and Method

In Chapter I of this study the introduction, statement of problem, delimitations, definitions, procedure of study, and recent and related studies are given.

The impact of the political, religious, economical and geographical influences of the British Empire upon the Colonial American ideas, concepts and design of furniture are discussed in the second chapter of this paper. Direct emphasis is given to the reigns of the rulers of England during the British Colonial America era. Through the study of these reigns it becomes evident that each played an important role in the life of the colonies and in the development of their furniture. The religious, political and economic aspects are discussed to illustrate the trend in the thinking of the people of America and their basic differences with their mother country.

The elementary means of joinery are also discussed briefly in Chapter II with a breakdown of the various joints used. There are seven general classifications. It is of definite importance that these joints be reviewed since they are the same joints that were used by both English and American joiners. Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 present sketches of these joints.
The most important presentation in this chapter is the recognition of the colonial craftsmen as being Americans instead of Englishmen or otherwise. The establishment of such a distinction was absolutely essential before this study could progress.

The design and construction of chairs in Colonial America is presented in Chapter III. This area of furniture design is carried by their better known English periods because of each period's effect upon the individual cabinet-maker. Attention is also called to the development of the rocking chair although an extensive discussion is not presented at this time.

Stowage furniture produced by Colonial Americans is discussed in Chapter IV. The chest, chest-on-chest, cupboards, highboys, lowboys, secretaries, desk and chest-of-drawers are classified under this title. And, like all other Colonial American pieces, the predominant European influence is essentially English with a continental flavor. The best units of this type of furniture produced in America during the Anglo-American colonization was made of the Queen Anne, Chippendale and William and Mary styles.

However, regardless of the desire of the Colonial Americans to eliminate the tendency to use English pieces as models, time has proved that it was virtually impossible. Nevertheless, one of the unique designs in the history of American joinery
evolved from this nationalistic motivation. This was the development of the Block-front style of furniture produced by the Goddard-Townsend combination. Although this style is truly American, the fact remains that traces of the Chippendale influence are present and in some cases pronounced.

Chapter V is devoted to the discussion of the bed. In this era of furniture design little change took place from the earlier pieces produced in England. Nevertheless, the evolution of the trundle bed as well as the fieldbed originated in Colonial America. It is easy to understand why each type of bed was designed and the purpose it played in the owner's life. The fact that the people of the colonies were prone to desire practical utility in lieu of beauty and grace of lines in their furniture caused it to be designed for hard usage. Later, as the country grew, all of these desirable characteristics, including artistic beauty of design, became a part of the bed.

Another consideration expressed in the bed's role in the life of the colonies is the fact that the bedclothes and not the wooden bed structure were the prize possession of the family. Actually the bed-frame was, in many cases, a part of the structure of the house. Why this practice came about is vague but it offers an insight into the uncertainty of the frontier life and need of the family to remain mobile in case of Indian uprisings.
Tables, their design, change of styles and their uses are considered in Chapter VI of this study. The limited amount of information regarding this era in furniture design leaves much to be desired. However, the establishment of the various trends in table construction is substantiated regardless of these restrictions. The evolution of the table is presented because of its historical value and not to imply that it originated in Colonial America. Actually very little difference exists between the tables produced in England and those made in America. Nor did any great change take place in their construction as a direct result of the work produced by the American craftsmen, that is, with the exception of the famous "pie-crust" style of tables.

Throughout the study, pictures were used to project visually the entire piece of furniture, with emphasis placed on harmony, continuity and balance in its design and construction. In this manner each piece of furniture expresses its own importance in the history of Colonial furniture. The pictures were taken from various furniture encyclopedias, books and periodicals. However, direct attention is called to the extensive use of pictures taken from the recent work of Joseph Down entitled American Furniture. This was done because of the superior prints available in his book and not because the pictures could not have been taken from other sources.

The concluding chapter of this study is a summary.
Definition of Terms

Influence. Webster defines the term as follows: To have an effect upon the condition or development of; to modify or determine.

Ruler. One who rules or that which rules.

Furniture. Articles of convenience or decoration used to furnish a house, apartment, place of business or of accommodations.

Colonial furniture. Furniture made in the American colonies before the end of the Revolution, largely influenced by contemporary European styles as the Queen Anne and Georgian, but having some indigenous features such as greater variety in woods, often being made of maple, ash or cherry, and more extensive use of turnings.

Design. The arrangement of elements or details which make up a work or art. To plan and proportion the parts of a machine or structure that all requirements will be satisfactory.

Decorative motifs:

Acanthus leaf. A form of ornamentation thought to be studied from the leaves of the acanthus herb.

Baroque. A style of art and architecture from the period of Michael Angelo to the eighteenth century.

Grotesque.

Cabriole. A form of leg which curves outward from the structure which it supports, and then descends in
a tapering reverse curve, terminating in an ornamental foot.

*Frieze*. Decorative trimming.

*Japanned*. To cover with a coat of Japan, or some other hard brilliant varnish in the manner of the Japanese; to lacquer.

*Joinery*. Art or trade of a joiner.

*Joiner*. One whose occupation is to construct articles by joining pieces of wood.

*Marquetry*. Inlay work.

*Rococo*. A style of ornamental work developed in France and characterized by curved spatial forms, light and fantastic curved lines, often flowing, reversed or unsymmetrical.

*Rosette*. An ornament somewhat in the form of a roundel and filled with leafage.

*Molding or Moulding*. A plane or curved narrow surface, either sunk or projecting, used for decorating.

*Cresting*. The ornamental ridging of a roof or canopy. A final.

*Crown*. Imperial or regal power or dominion; sovereignty.

**Delimitations**

This study is limited to the development and construction of the furniture of Colonial America; and to the periods
in furniture design which have a direct effect upon the thinking and workmanship of the cabinet-makers of the Colonial period in America dating from 1620 to 1775.

The various periods of English and European furniture design which have a pronounced effect upon early American design and construction of furniture are: the Jacobean Period, the William and Mary period, the Cromwellian period, the Queen Anne period, and the Chippendale period.

Also the limitations placed upon the study of the rocking chair will be, with the exception of an introduction to the origin of the principle involved, taken from 1620 until the present date.

Sources of Data for the Study

All data used in this study were taken from furniture encyclopedias, books, magazines, newspapers, government periodicals and bulletins and unpublished material located in the libraries of North Texas State College, Denton, Texas; Texas State College for Women, Denton, Texas; Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, and Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas.

Recent Related Studies

"A Study of the Influence of Certain Rulers of France and England on the Design of Furniture from 1300 to 1830" by Sam M. Gantt, B. S., M. S., August, 1951, Denton, Texas,
was the most recent unpublished study of furniture design used in this study.

Material recently published and used in this study are Joseph Down's work entitled *American Furniture*, 1952, which is directly concerned with the Queen Anne and Chippendale periods of American furniture; and Albert Sack's book entitled *Fine Points of Furniture: Early American*, 1950, which covers all of the periods affecting the furniture discussed in this thesis.
CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, CONSTRUCTION AND DESIGN
OF COLONIAL AMERICAN FURNITURE

Since the study of Colonial American furniture is, in effect, the study of English furniture and its design, it becomes necessary to review the various historical events which were responsible for the taste of the English-speaking nation in the development of household furniture. In 1603, James I became king of the British Empire and reigned for twenty-two years, to be succeeded in 1625 by Charles I. Oliver Cromwell and his followers, in 1649, overthrew Charles I and reigned for a period of ten years. British subjects, upon growing tired of the Cromwellian rule, welcomed the return of the House of Tudor, under the leadership of Charles II, to the throne of England.

Charles II ruled from 1660 until James II took over the throne in 1685. However, in 1688 William and Mary were requested to return from the Netherlands to accept the throne of the British Empire. In 1702 Anne became Queen of England and ruled until 1714. During Queen Anne's reign Colonial America awakened to its rich resources, and the people of the colonies were becoming united politically. This unity continued to grow through the reigns of George I and II, and broke into a war for independence under the leadership of George III in 1776.
Historically, the study of the colonial period in America began in 1603 with the settling of Jamestown in the colony of Virginia. As the English ax sank into the trunks of American trees, a new man was born and a new nation was conceived. Later, the Scots, the Irish, the French, the Germans, the Jews, and the Swiss, as well as the Dutch were to join the ranks of the Americans. St. John Crevecoeur, a French savant who settled in the colonies, described the American, as a typical person, in the following manner:

He is an American, who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the government he obeys, and the new rank he holds...Americans are the western pilgrims, who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts, sciences, vigor, and industry which began long since in the east; they will finish the great circle... The American new man, who sets up new principles; he must therefore, entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labor, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence—This is America.

From the beginning these Americans, although under English rule, were not worried about the change of the crown of the British Empire. Neither were they too concerned that with these changes, new styles in dress, in furniture and in architecture would evolve. Needless to say, not all of these changes were good. However, they did produce furniture which, on the whole, was more graceful and a great

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deal stronger in construction. Simplicity became the measuring unit for the better cabinet-makers.

Inasmuch as the early people who settled in this country migrated from England, it is logical that they should build their furniture from designs found in their mother country. Actually this furniture, because of the length of time it took to cross the Atlantic Ocean, was approximately two years behind the fashion of Europe. However, in the beginning the furniture of colonial America was built from memory of pieces that the cabinet-maker had seen in his mother country.

The furniture of colonial America is grouped into two periods: (1) the Early American, which embraces the early Jacobean, Cromwellian, and Charles II furniture styles, and (2) the Colonial American, consisting of William and Mary, Queen Anne, Early Georgian, and Chippendale furniture styles.

The Jacobean style of English furniture conforms to straight lines with heavy proportions and presents a general effect of sturdy, durable and massive furniture. Ornamentation consisted of carvings with motifs of acorns, carved heads, channels, acanthus leaves, geometrical moldings, diamonds and lozenges. The underbracing was low and heavy, and block or bun feet were used wherever possible. The primary wood used during this period in furniture design was oak. Oil finishing was the most common type employed to preserve the wood.
The puritanical and severely plain characteristics of the furniture were inherited from the Cromwellian period in English history. It employed straight lines and it was constructed in a sturdy, square and simple manner. Many of the pieces were cumbersome. This was particularly true in the earlier pieces of that period. The use of decorative carvings, scrolls, and other artificial means of beautifying the furniture were limited. However, scratch-carving and flat-faced low relief carving were practiced to some extent and were quite successful. Also, in some cases, applied ornament was used to beautify the pieces, but it was so crude that it often marred rather than decorated the surfaces.

This style was based upon structure, design, and finish and was in keeping with the courts of England at that time. The legs and stretchers were straight and were often turned. This alleviated the rigid austerity of the pieces. The underbracing was low and the feet were usually block or bun design. Actually, the lines employed were taken from furniture of other periods in English joinery and cabinet-making, and were used to suit the pious views of the reigning religious concepts. The woods most commonly used in furniture making

\[2\] Franklin H. Gottshall, *How to Design Period Furniture*, p. 46.
were walnut, oak, and mahogany. The design of the individual pieces as a whole were, in themselves, an object of rare beauty.

America, being settled mostly by people of the Protestant faith, eagerly accepted the Cromwellian influence in furniture design. This was particularly true along the New England coast where the Puritans' colony was established. However, the people who settled in the western and southern colonies did not choose to copy this style except that of the kitchen furniture.

The Early American furniture has the simple, straight lines and proportions of Cromwellian and Jacobean periods in English furniture design. Capitalizing upon the many kinds of woods available, it is not uncommon to find two or more kinds of wood used on a single piece of furniture. Maple, cherry, oak, fruit-woods, birch, ash and pine were the woods that were most frequently used by the cabinet-makers of colonial America. The underbracing remained low and heavy and the legs were straight and often turned. It was not unusual to find pannelling and split balusters as ornamentation, with motifs of sun-flowers, scrolls, diamond shapes, circles, and pine tree designs employed in decorating the pieces.

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At the turn of the eighteenth century the conquest by England of the eastern seaboard of North America had been completed. The colonies had, with the aid of British troops, established a chain of English colonies from Maine to Florida. Fortunes had been made and America was no longer poor. Therefore, the furniture and politics were much more elaborate and pronounced.

William and Mary returned to England from the continent, and with them they brought ideas and designs foreign to the English taste. Dutch and French cabinet-makers were engaged to move to England to produce furniture for their court. As curves were introduced in furniture design, the carving which had prevailed in the enrichment of English furniture gradually disappeared. Basically the furniture was very beautiful and homelike, utilizing straight lines and proportions of medium weight. The underbracing was low, flat or curved, and the legs were straight, trumpet shaped, inverted cup at the top, eight-sided, or four-sided. The Dutch club-foot and the scroll inspired the use of the cabriole leg. Although the use of carvings to ornament the pieces was on its way out, motifs of acanthus leaf and cockle shell, as well as floral, Chinese and seaweed designs, are found on many of the works of this period. The use of walnut and ebony demanded the use of protective finishes of varnish, wax or oil. The William and Mary style was in great demand in the colony of New Amsterdam which was settled by the Dutch.
Although the reign of Queen Anne was short and some changes in style and design did take place, there seems little in the field of joinery that can be said for this period.

Fundamentally, the pieces of this era depend upon graceful-ness and beauty of wood rather than ornamentation for its appeal. The units used straight lines and the cyma curves with proportions of medium weight; and the use of under-bracing was disappearing by the peak of the era on most of the better designs of the Queen Anne furniture. Walnut was in vogue and veneers, marquetry, lacquer work and carvings were used as decorative measures. The shell was the prevailing design for carvings. The cabriole leg with feet of duck, pad, web, hoof, paw, bun and block design was used throughout the period.

As the reign of Queen Anne came to its close so did the end of the use of walnut wood as the most desirable kind for cabinet construction. The desirability of walnut did not recede but the demand for mahogany-built furniture exceeded that of walnut. This transition marks the beginning of the Early Georgian period in English and American furniture design and construction. Coasters were first used during this period. The lines in the pieces were both straight and curved with proportions that seemed heavy. Architectural designs were the mode for cabinet-makers to follow in designing their pieces. However, the furniture remained similar to
that of the Queen Anne period. Decorative carvings of scrolls, acanthus leaf, eagle heads, shell, lion head, and satyr masks were in fashion. The underbracing, while heavy and massive, was raised to accommodate the heavy cabriole legs with feet of ball-and-claw, paw, and hoof designs. The finish was usually oil or varnish.

Perhaps no man is better known for his design and styles of furniture, as used by the cabinet-makers of England and America, than Thomas Chippendale. Since the first Chippendale piece of furniture was produced in the seventeenth century, many changes have been made, but fundamentally they retain their Chippendale characteristics. To secure these characteristics, Chippendale tapped the rich lodes of European design, taking from it only that which he knew to be the best suited for his work. This habit of Mr. Chippendale reminds one of what Rudyard Kipling said in his memorable verse:

When 'Omer smote 'is bloomin' lyre,
He'd 'erd men sing by land an' sea;
An' what 'e thought he might require,
'e went and took the same as me.

The appearance of the Cabinet-Maker's Directory by Thomas Chippendale attested the conversion in design from other styles into the pure English styles to be a success.

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4 Orsborne, op. cit., p. 84.

The Chippendale furniture is rich, graceful and refined, utilizing both straight and curved lines to their utmost. Since the units were substantial in proportion, they were not heavy but a limited use of underbracing is frequently found depending upon the individual cabinet-maker’s own discretion. The cabriole, plain and straight, plain and fretted, and bamboo legs were used with the ball-and-claw, club, paw, scroll, and bracket feet. Broken pediment tops were found on cabinets and secretaries. Carvings were used as ornamentations with motifs of acanthus leaf, C-scrolls, shell, ribbons, Chinese frets, pagoda tops, and lattice work reaching its apex under the genius of the master craftsman, Thomas Chippendale.

The best furniture of English design used by American cabinet-makers was in the Chippendale styles. American cabinet-makers, in order to keep up with the trends of English furniture design, were forced to deviate from the famous works of the leading cabinetmakers of England and to use the basic concepts of design and construction that was used on the European continent meshed with new American ideas.

The Colonial American period furniture had no well defined characteristics such as simplify the understanding of the other periods, but embraced a broad mixture of English, Dutch, and French elements covering various styles, with a leaning truly American in its treatment.

6 Orsborne, op. cit., p. 108.

7 H. B. Dean, Modern American Period Furniture, p. 277.
The furniture of colonial America employed both straight and curved lines with proportions of medium weight and presented a refined and homelike appearance. The underbracing, construction and motifs varied according to the English model used to make the piece. Carving, veneering, and inlays were used as a medium of decorative display.

In many cases the cabinetmakers of colonial America were English trained. And, like their fellow craftsmen abroad, they employed oak and walnut in the construction of their finest work. Later, mahogany was used in the best furniture produced. Nevertheless, the American craftsmen were willing to make use of such native woods as ash, elm, maple, pine, and cedar as well as many woods which were easily obtained. These craftsmen developed, improved, and improvised on the contemporary English designs and created a style of their own which, in turn, resulted in the making of furniture that is lovelier, more exquisite, and finer than that produced in England for the homes of Colonial America.

Goddard of Rhode Island, and Savery, Randolph, and Costelow of Philadelphia designed furniture that is better than the peer of England's best masters in the field of furniture. After viewing pieces of furniture created by them it is impossible for one to doubt their ability and genius in furniture design and joinery. Their work is expressed by John Keats' statement that "A thing of beauty is
Broadsly speaking, there may be said to be four kinds of furniture: (1) ornate furniture of poor design; (2) simple furniture of poor design; (3) simple furniture of good design; and (4) ornate furniture of good design. Actually, the design of any piece of furniture can be affected only when the designer is fully aware of and properly considers the functions that the piece must perform, and is cognizant of the capabilities and limitations of the material which can be used in its construction. Basically, there are three divisions or phases in the designing of a structure and its enrichment. They are: (1) structural design; (2) contour enrichment; (3) surface enrichment.

There is no doubt that in the beginning the maker of a piece of furniture intended for it to be a masterpiece. True, it might not attain the recognition that the maker had in mind but there is a great deal of assurance, since it met the first requirement of any furniture—that of being useful and needed. Regardless of what colonial American cabinetmakers might have desired to do, they were forced to base their decisions regarding the major portion of their work upon the findings and experiences of their predecessors. The rank and file of the cabinetmakers in colonial America could

8 *Modern Priscilla Home Furnishing Book*, p. 94.

not afford to gamble with designs that were uncommon to the people of this country, hence they were compelled to yield, in part, many of their own designs to the credit of the prevailing English designs.

Structural design is the design of assembly of two or more pieces of material to complete a desired pattern or framework. Therefore, joinery is the structural design of cabinet-making. Edgar H. Hellas divided the various wood joints used in furniture-making into five major divisions which are (1) Butt joints, (2) housing joints, (3) halving joints, (4) dovetail joints, and (5) mortise-and-tenon joints. To these five divisions I have added the mitre joint. These joints are illustrated in Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 at the end of this chapter.

The simple butt joint is the crudest method of gluing two pieces of stock together. It can be done in many ways, depending upon the individual and the nature of the work he is doing. However, this is the poorest kind of construction, yet it is still one of the most common forms of joinery. Listed on the butt joint illustration plate are: the gain joint, the glue butt joint, the rabbeted butt, the tongue and groove, the spline keyed, and the doweled butt joint.

The housing joints are used in almost every type of wood construction. They can be used in conjunction with other

10Edgar H. Hellas, Craftwork in Wood, p. 81.
joints and are frequently found used in such a manner. The housing joints found in the illustrated plate in this study are: (1) rabbet, dado, dado and rabbet, dado, tongue and rabbet, and dovetail dado.

The halving joint is constantly found in many pieces of furniture and it is one of the best means of joining two pieces of wood together at right angles and cross-grain. When two pieces of wood cross each other they are usually joined by what is commonly known as a lap joint. Here one board is simply placed or lapped over the other and each has a portion cut away to allow the other to fill. The amount cut away is approximately one half the thickness of the wood. The kinds of halving joints illustrated in this paper are: cross-lap, middle-lap, end-lap, dovetail halving, end-lap with rabbet, beveled halving, checked, clogged, and forked.

One of the most useful joints designed is the mortise-and-tenon joint. This joint has many varieties and can be used in almost an unlimited manner in the construction of furniture. The joint is generally secured in various ways. The most natural way was to drive a square peg into a hole bored through the sides of the mortise and through the tenon also. The second manner of securing the joint was the principle of the wedge. The third method used is the keyed mortise-and-tenon which is found in most of the furniture of
colonial America. This method allowed the furniture to be taken down and stowed when the owner was moving his household.

Another method of securing the mortise-and-tenon was by the use of seasoned and green wood used together. Here the mortise was cut in the green wood and the tenon was made of seasoned wood. The green wood, upon becoming seasoned, will shrink and clamp tight on the seasoned tenon. Mortise-and-tenon joints illustrated in this study are: the blind mortise-and-tenon, the through mortise-and-tenon, the wedged mortise-and-tenon, the keyed mortise-and-tenon, the tusk tenon, the double mortise-and-tenon, the haunched mortise-and-tenon, the bare-faced tenon and the housed mortise-and-tenon.

Near the end of the seventeenth century the dovetail joint made its appearance. At first it was crudely made and it was somewhat shabby. No glue or nails were needed to secure the joint and eventually it took over in the construction of corners, especially in the construction of drawers. The only improvement on this joint since its origin is in the number of pins and corresponding tails. Dovetail joints illustrated in this paper are: the through single dovetail, the through multiple dovetail, and the lap dovetail.

The miter joint is made by cutting the ends of two pieces of material at a given angle, usually forty-five degrees. The advantage of this joint in cabinet construction is that no
end grain shows and the joint is neat both inside and outside. Also it has made the practice of the use of mouldings supple and easy to accomplish. Its greatest drawbacks are its need of a solid base to which it can be secured and its inability to remain in state when the wood warps or shrinks. Miter joints shown in this study are: the simple miter, the doweled miter, the spline miter, the slip-feather miter, the stop miter, the double-tongue miter, the feather miter, the ledge and the strut miter.

As the structural design of any unit is being considered and the type of material to be used is selected the problem of contour design or contour enrichment is decided upon. That is as it should be; however, it is a known fact that many good pieces are ruined because of the cabinetmaker's ignorance of decorative contour design. In the field of cabinet making the splendor of contour enrichment was at its peak during the Queen Anne and Chippendale periods and since that time very little has been done with formal household furniture enrichment except in the works of Duncan Phyfe and the Goddard-Townsend furniture designs.

Actually, the part that contour enrichment plays in cabinetmaking is that of gay-deceiver. It lends grace to the piece when construction leaves a cumbersome appearance. It gives beauty to pieces that are lacking in natural beauty and assists in bringing out the innate beauty of the wood when it
is properly used. It plays with squares and circles and sets them in the same orbit to complete a whole. It hides defective lines and presents an optical illusion when the viewer chooses to see it as it was intended instead of how it is. It supplies force and strength when it is needed, yet it creates a fluid effect in line construction which is essential to the success of unity and harmony in furniture construction.

Alexander Speltz has this to say about decorative ornamentation:

Rightly understood, the conformation of an ornament should be in keeping with the form and structure of the object which it adorns, should be in complete subordination to it, and should never stifle or conceal it. As varied and as many-sided as it may be, still, the art of ornamentation is never an arbitrary one; besides depending on the form of the object, it is influenced also by the nature of the material of which the same is made, as well as by the style or manner in which natural objects are reproduced in ornamentation by different times. The art of ornamentation, therefore, stands in intimate relationship with material, purpose, form, and style. 11

Surface enrichment must be related to the structural contours but must not obscure the natural structure. Carving, inlay and painting or staining the surfaces are the three major means of surface ornamentation. The colonies of colonial America used each of these methods and in most cases they were successful. Although infrequently successful in

the eyes of a critic, there is no doubt that they enlighten the depressed image of the unit and make it a more congenial piece to have in the home.

Surface and contour enrichment both had restrictions placed upon their use in colonial America. For instance, in the Puritan sector the practice or ornamentation was frowned upon yet the beauty which this group of cabinetmakers created with contour designs and the use of paints and stains far surpassed the work of some of the best cabinet-makers of that time. The people of Philadelphia, Boston, and New York used some carving to a lesser degree and they recognized its value as a luxury rather than as a necessity. This practice may be found in the Wainscot and Brewster and later in the Philadelphia chairs.

Although most of the better carving done in colonial America was in relief, some of the earlier pieces, especially those found in the German sector of Pennsylvania, utilized the Gothic theory of decorative carving; and, since it was a rural community, it is not likely that master carvers lived there; hence, the more simple chip-carving prevailed.

It is generally believed that many of the early chests made in the rural section of New England, New York and Pennsylvania, were not finished by the varnish method. The slow oil system seems to be the only method known at that time; however, the possibility of a varnish finish being used is a practical one. Regardless of proof found in the inventory
of Benjamin Beech, who died at Durham, Connecticut, in 1712, which included "one varnish cuberd valued at 2 12 pounds: 10 shillings," it still remains to be seen if the method mentioned by Beech extended as far north as New York. Further information on the use of finishes on early colonial furniture is evident in the inventory of Charles Gillam, a joiner or carpenter, who lived in Saybrook, Connecticut. Here we find items of "colours, brushes, boxes and gums," and gums were the basis for varnish, and here it is believed, is the maker and decorator of a certain "guifford" chest.

Regardless of how the furniture of colonial America is viewed, there are four basic concepts which must be considered to draw a logical conclusion on its merits. They are: (1) although the furniture was based, for the most part, on designs produced in other countries, it still remained American because it was made in America. (2) The people who made the furniture in colonial America, although some were trained in England and other countries, were Americans by choice and not Europeans. (3) The mode of life was particularly adapted to the needs of the American

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12 Ester Stevens Brazer, Early American Decoration, p. 137.

13 Ibid., p. 137.
colonies, not the streets of London or Paris. (4) America was the melting pot for all kinds of people, each of whom was recognized and respected as an individual; therefore, his ideas will be of his own philosophy of life and the people around him.
Fig. 1--Butt joints

- Glue butt joint
- Rabbet butt joint
- Tongue and groove butt joint
- Spline (keyed) butt joint
- Doweled butt joint
Rabbet joint

Dado joint

Dado and rabbet joint

Dado, tongue and rabbet joint

Dovetail dado joint

Gain joint

Fig. 2—Housing joints
Cross-lap joint
Middle-lap joint
End-lap joint
Dovetail halving joint
End-lap with rabbet joint
Beveled halving joint
Checked joint
Clogged joint
Forked joint

Fig. 3--Halving joints
Fig. 3--Slip joint
Fig. 4--Through single dovetail joint
Fig. 5--Through multiple dovetail joint
Fig. 6--Lap dovetail joint

Fig. 4--Dovetail joints
Blind mortise-and-tenon joint
Through mortise-and-tenon joint
Wedged mortise-and-tenon joint
Dovetail mortise-and-tenon joint
Fox-tail tenon joint
Pinned mortise-and-tenon joint
Keyed mortise-and-tenon joint
Tusk tenon joint

Fig. 5—Mortise-and-tenon joints
Double mortise-and-tenon joint

Haunched mortise-and-tenon joint

Bare-face tenon joint

Housed mortise-and-tenon joint

Fig. 6—Mortise-and-tenon joints
Fig. 7—Miter joints

Miter joint  Doweled miter joint  Spline miter joint

Slip-feather miter joint  Stop miter joint  Double-tongue miter joint

Stretcher miter joint  Ledge and miter joint  Strut miter joint
CHAPTER III

CHAIRS

No other single piece of furniture reflects the changes in design, construction in cabinetmaking, as well as the changes in style and customs of the people, as the chairs. Actually the chair is the most characteristic of all periods in furniture design, yet it does not have the history that the chest and other pieces of household equipment possess.

Of all the Tudor style furniture produced in colonial America the Wainscot chair best characterizes the formal atmosphere existing at that time. The chair used the rectangular method of joiner, utilizing the vertical posts and heavy underbracings. Turning is the most frequently used method of decoration found on the front post. The rear post remained plain. A panel back is fitted into the post using the same panel construction as that found in the chest made during the same period. A few moldings and a little carving for surface enrichment was used. The styles and rails were often carved or molded and the arms were of solid pieces of wood cut to a curve for comfort. The construction joints were all mortise-and-tenon secured by the use of square or octagon pins driven through a round hole.

1 Charles Negal, American Furniture, 1650 to 1850., p.24.
The Wainscot chairs (See Figure 8) that were built in the American colonies were, for the most part, of English design. However, research establishes the use of Wainscot chairs of Scandinavian influence in colonial America. The carvings on the top rail and the arms differ from the English version in that the carved dragon is the principal mode of decorative carving. This art is almost exact in every respect to that found on the famous Norwegian potyial, illustrated by Frederich Litchfield in his Illustrated History of Furniture, with its construction dating around the tenth century. Proof of this type of chair having been made in colonial America is found in the color and cutting of the oak wood from which it is made. The exact time of its appearance in the New World cannot be established but it is generally accepted as being approximately the same time as the English variety. The English Wainscot design is illustrated in Figure 8.

Although the Wainscot chair is the more commonly known style of the Jacobean period, there are three other chairs that might be mentioned at this time. They are: (1) the Yorkshire, (2) the Derbyshire, and (3) the Carolean chair.

Arthur DeBles, Early American Furniture, p. 311.
Fig. 8—A Seventeenth Century English Wainscot Chair

With its elaborate carving, this is typical of the few fine pieces brought from England which, in a measure, served as models for some of the more elaborate pieces made in American during the Puritan period. This chair is credited with being made in England in 1630 and arrived in America about 1635.

It is elaborately carved with scrolls, foliage and flowers. The back legs were generally turned above the seat and show an excessive amount of variation with the top ending in a turned final. The front legs were either turned or carved and when they were carved, the legs could be set on any angle. "S" and "C" scrolls are often repeated and the Tudor Rose as well as the three-feather design of the Prince of Wales were in vogue. The seat should be caned but sometimes the back and seat were upholstered.

The chair belonging to this style, showing a strong Flemish influence, is illustrated in Figure 9.

There are two chairs, possibly a deviation of the Byzantine theme, that were made in America and named for two of its early citizens. They are the Carver Chair and the Brewster Chair. The Carver chair had four turned uprights with a small amount of ring turning. The front legs are absent of ornamental finishes other than that already indicated. The back is constructed with two finals across the top, set into the rear uprights about two inches apart. Another final is located approximately six inches above the seat. Three spindles of ring-and-ball turning are fixed into the upper and lower finals to form the back.

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4 Franklin H. Gottshall, How to Design Period Furniture, p. 66.
Fig. 9—A Carolean Chair.

In the lower section of the chair, two tiers of stretchers are found on both sides and the front. They are turned and are not decorated. The arms are plain and are fitted into the front and rear post in a socket manner. The seat may be of wood, rush or splint.

The Brewster chair is basically the same in construction as the Carver chair. The big difference lies in the more elaborate usage of the spindles. On the Brewster chair the back has two rows of vertical spindles with a turned stretcher between them. Both sides have three tiers of spindles, two tiers of which are below the seat. Each tier has four spindles. The front of the chair is set off with a single row of vertical spindles fixed into a turned stretcher and the seat. In all, the Brewster chair has thirty-six spindles. The baluster design is frequently used in the turning of the spindles.

The slat-backed chair, made both with and without arms, is the contemporary for the Carver and Brewster chairs. The upright of the slat-back was of approximately the same diameter as the Brewster and Carver chairs. The finals and ring turnings are a definite carry-over from the early chairs. Between the back post are set horizontal, carved slats worked out to a thin edge. They are mortised into the back post.

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6 Ormsbee, op. cit., p. 156.
In the earlier variety of the slat-back chairs the slats were broad and either three or four slats were used for each chair back. The number used was in relation to their varying widths. Also, the slat varied in width. Where the slat joins the back post, a quarter-circle is cut to accentuate the connection.

To form a sufficiently curved slat for the human back, the slats were either steamed or soaked until pliable. The arc of the curve varied from one and one-quarter inch in depth to an occasional two-inch depth. They were generally made of ash, oak, and other hardwoods. However, ash was the favorite wood of colonial craftsmen because of its abundance and its ease in turning on the foot-powered or water-powered laths.

The arms, at first, remained plain rounds, socketed into the front and rear uprights a short distance below the knob or button turnings that terminate the upper end of the front uprights. Nevertheless, the later chairs with arms, appear to have been flattened and elliptical or even shaped along the same style of the previous period. No noticeable changes are evident in the underbracing as it remained plain, and in most cases, feet were not used on this type of chair.

7 Charles O. Cornelius, Early American Furniture, p. 62.

The slat-back, ash seat chairs were made in New England and date back from the landing of the pilgrims at Plymouth Rock. As a rule, the older chairs had larger diameters from their uprights ranging from one and three quarters to two inches. Another point of interest is that in the older chairs the seats are nearer the floor than the later varieties. This is because the early pre-Victorian tables were twenty-six inches high instead of the present thirty inches. And, it must be remembered that the slat-back chair is a domesticated chair designed for comfort and use and this generally implied kitchen and bed-room usage. Most of the chairs of the slat-back origin found to-day were produced between 1720 and 1820, at which time the fancy chair of Sheraton and Hitchcock gained popularity.

The banister back chairs received their name, of course, from the treatment of the banisters to be used in the back of the chair. The chairs prevailed during the first half of the eighteenth century and followed the Dutch and Anglo-Dutch design. However, it was primarily an American achievement. In these chairs it is evident that their construction is governed by the desire for comfort and usefulness. They were produced in quantity as far south as Pennsylvania and possibly Virginia. Figure 10 illustrates this chair.

Ibid., p. 110.
The beauty of the banister back chair lies in its lines, construction and finish for decorative carving was not used on this type of chair. Nearly all of the early chairs had spindles turned on lathes and split to produce the banister for the chair backs. The shaping of the half round banisters were varied, but they generally complied with the ring-and-ball idea. They were made in both styles of side and arm chairs.

The front legs were turned in the same ring-and-ball style as the spindles to be split for banisters and were provided with feet of simple buttons, turnips, or an occasionally carved Spanish mode. The rear legs were usually square from the seat to the floor and did not have feet. The uprights of the rear legs were turned with the ring-and-ball and vase design except where the upper and lower cross pieces were mortised into them and there they remained square. The front and side stretchers were nearly always ornamentally turned. In the case where only one front cross member was used it was frequently turned in bold relief, ball, or melon elements, separated by a ring on the collar.

A stretcher was generally installed at the mid-point between the seat and the floor. The side stretchers were not so boldly turned as the front piece, and were, as a rule, of

DeBles, op. cit., p. 310.
simple vase design. There were two side stretchers per side. The back stretcher was plain. The arms had a graceful down-drawn curve from the back to the front and at the forward end they were frequently carved with the knuckle design. The seats were of rush or splint and the chair back had a carved cresting. The chairs were usually finished in colors of dark red, bottle-green and black. A straight grain wood was preferred in making this type of chair.

In the evolution of the design of these turned chairs there came into being many varieties. Each of these varieties differ in structure, design and finish, yet each complies with the desire for double comfort. Oliver Wendell Holmes' poem "Parson Turell's Legacy," describes this chair in its fullest degree:

Funny old chair, with seat like wedge,
Sharp behind and broad front edge,
One of the oldest of human things,
Turned all over with knobs and rings,
But heavy, and wide, and deep, and grand--
Fit for the worthies of the land--
Chief Justice Sewall a cause to try in,
Or Cotton Mather to sit--and lie--in, 12

With the approach of the William and Mary style of furniture in colonial America, an awakening in furniture design took place in the usage of furniture. The chairs of this period

11 Ormsbee, op. cit., p. 165.

12 Burl N. Osburn and Bernie B. Osburn, Measured Drawing of Early American Furniture, p. 7.
follow the Dutch trend and are closely copied from the other periods in furniture design. The frequently used high backs for chairs remained in vogue and the "X" type of stretchers made their contribution in joinery.

Where formerly the joiners had built not only furniture, but also wainscoting and the great wood roofs of halls and rooms, his place was taken by the man who made furniture only. The result of this specialization was immediate improvement in technical methods, more delicate construction, the expression of design in the terms of the greatest economy of material. The strains and stresses were studied and met in the construction of the piece without relying on the heaviness and solidity of the various members. Thus the vertical supports were reduced to a minimum, delicately turned or carved into curved forms. 13

Near the end of the banister back era and early in the period of English furniture known as the Queen Anne period, the fiddle-back chair made its appearance in the home. Odd as it may seem, the chair did not get its back design from the musical instrument for which it is named. Actually, upon a close examination, it becomes evident that this design was taken from the oriental vase style that was in vogue at that time.

Another odd quirk to this chair is the head of a bird on each side of the slat. This, and the fact that the splat did not resemble the fiddle, resulted in the piece being referred to as the "parrot-back" instead of the more commonly

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13 Cornelius, op. cit., p. 105.
used name of fiddle-back. The high back that enjoyed such a great success in the William and Mary period continued to appear in the Queen Anne reign. These backs, sometimes as much as forty-six inches from the floor, had a definite effect upon the construction of the chair. Later, the low back design took over in this period.

The chairs of the Queen Anne style were beautiful as well as pleasing and attention was given to comfort in their construction and design. The earliest chairs that were made in colonial America had the cabriole leg combined with the pad or Dutch feet. Located at the knee, where the legs join the seat frame, were bracket blocks which were used to furnish additional strength in the chair's construction. In many of the better pieces of furniture the back was curved to fit the spine of the person for whom it was made.

Seldom were stretchers used between the front legs, however, a central stretcher connected them on each side and served the same purpose. Although square rear legs were the most frequently used, some of the better units employed the cabriole leg in all four positions. However, when the square rear leg style was used, a stretcher was placed between the legs and a little higher than the side stretchers. All of the stretchers were turned in the popular vase shape.

Gottshall, op. cit., p. 102.
The splat's base, in the absence of any lower cross member, was mortised into the back element of the seat level. It was held at the top by a cross member formed like a yoke which had the upper side curved backward. This cross member sometimes had carved moldings of the cockle-head design on them. The chairs were usually of maple or walnut but an occasional chair of mahogany was produced.

The ingenious use of the curvilinear style in the wing chairs is unique to the furniture of the period. This curve was used on arm and side chairs where the high back styles were produced. The seats of the chairs vary with the arm and side chairs, respectively. The arm-chair seats were seventeen and one half inches deep, whereas the side-chair seats were fifteen and one half inches deep. The seat of the side chair frequently exceeded twenty-four inches in depth.\(^{15}\) The upholstery included velvets, tapestry, brocades, needle-work tapestry in "petit point" as well as glazed chintz or printed linen.

Of the many varieties of chairs produced during the Queen Anne period of furniture in colonial America the roundabout chair lived the shortest span. This chair was constructed to sit in a corner with the person seated in it straddling the front leg. It had a low back which curved

\(^{15}\) Gottshall, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
around to the sides flowing into the arm rest. All of this particular type of chair produced during this era had the cabriole leg. And quite frequently the knee was enriched with carving of the baroque shell motif. The use of the pad or Dutch feet was common; however, these feet were sometimes changed to the slipper feet, an offspring of the Dutch foot, and the web foot, a deviation of the pad foot.

As the Queen Anne era in furniture faded away, the style of Thomas Chippendale became the last word in furniture construction and design. Actually, the reign of Chippendale furniture is classified into three general styles. These styles are: (1) the Dutch style which is to a great extent, a continuation, with additional treatment in decorative ornamentation and improvements in general, of the Queen Anne style; (2) the Chinese style in which Mr. Chippendale expresses his genius in the fret-work, ornamentations and lace back designs; and (3) the French style which indicated the decadency of the furniture in the courts of England.

Perhaps the best link between the Queen Anne and Chippendale styles is found in the fiddle-back chair. This design, with the splat fiddle-back, the dipped curve of the

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16 Negal, op. cit., p. 45.

cresting flowing into the rear post is the most common
variety of Chippendale patterns found in America. The top
rail seems to continue into the splat, which is a result of
a mortise-and-tenon joint, and a carved shell is frequently
found on the center of the cresting. The finals of the top
rail ends are done in the same motif as that on the cresting.

Colonial America produced chairs of the Chippendale
theme as early as 1750. This is four years before Chippendale
published his famous "Director." Yet, odd as it may seem, the
City of Philadelphia which is so closely associated with the
American Chippendale period furniture did not start producing
the Chippendale pieces until 1760; some ten years after the
first known pieces of this style were made in America. A few
of the better known American cabinetmakers who worked in
Philadelphia are: William Savery, James Gillingham, Benjamin
Randolph, and Jonathan Gostelowe. New York credits Thomas
Ash, who did his best work in the Windsor style, with pro-
ducing some chairs of the Chippendale mode.

Some of the most distinguishing marks of the American
wooden back side chair of the Chippendale period are located
in the structural composition of the pieces. The side seat
rails are mortised through the back post with a wedge mortise-
and-tenon joint. Also many of the straight-leg side chairs

18 E. S. Holloway, The Practical Book of American Furniture
and Decoration, p. 58.
were braced with stretchers, which were of little use with the cabriole leg except on the larger arm chairs. The relative position to the time of the appearance of the straight-leg of the Chippendale styles comes after the cabriole leg. In the better pieces the plain surface of the lower rails and legs were often decorated with the fret carving in a Gothic or Chinese manner.

In the light of Mr. Chippendale's absorption of the Chinese design and its effect upon the furniture of colonial America, Thomas H. Ormsbee has this to say:

Comparatively few American pieces were made in the Chinese Chippendale mode, but in the design for his Chinese chairs is to be found the precedent for those American Chippendale chairs with sturdy square legs and plain stretchers.

Nevertheless, it is mandatory that the trends expressed by Chippendale in the field of Chinese styles should be examined to determine its effect on chair design.

Previously stated in this study is the fact that a possibility existed which would indicate that the fiddle-back of the Queen Anne reign may have gotten its concept from the

19 Cornelius, op. cit., p. 163.


21 Ormsbee, op. cit., p. 4.
oriental vase which was so popular at that time. And it is also a known fact that this same style was re-used by Chippendale in his earlier work. Whether Chippendale developed his taste for Chinese principles through this style is not known, but it is known that he utilized two additional ideas found in the design existing in China. They are: the interlace open work from the solid splat, and the fall-and-claw foot.

The interlace open-work (See Figure 10) idea led to the development of the famous "cupid's bow" which is used in the Chippendale chairs made in England and America as well. Also, the ball-and-claw, which signified the world power of England, was used in colonial American pieces. However, the ball-and-claw of the Philadelphia school was flat on the bottom, whereas, the one used in England was not.

Near the end of the Chippendale era the French flavor in furniture design was embraced by Chippendale. The effect which this particular style had on colonial America was little and in the most part the furniture was inferior to that of the earlier years. Generally, it was over-decorative and excessively ornamented. Structurally, it was lacking in strength although a beautiful line effect is achieved. Also the declining prestige of the British throne in the minds of the colonial Americans limited the acceptance of this style because of its English flavor. In fact, many of the pieces of
This is No. II of a set of twelve chairs which belonged to General Samuel Blachley Webb, of New York and Connecticut, an aide-de-camp to General Washington. General Webb married an heiress, Elizabeth Bancker, in 1779; history states she made the needlework chair seats before her marriage.

The slip seat of tulip wood rests upon a narrow square frame, similar to other New York chairs. The back rail is oak, as are the triangular seat braces. The original cover is crewelwork embroidery in rose, blue, and tan shades. Height 39 ½ inches. Width 21 inches. Depth 18 inches.

excellent English furniture was destroyed because of this feeling.

In studying the development of the Windsor chair in colonial America, it is logical to assume that the earlier chairs were duplications of the English Windsors. However, the colonial craftsmen were not satisfied with the massive construction of this chair, so they decided to make it to fit their own use. The results of this decision is probably one of the greatest decisions made in connection with the American furniture industry.

The distinguishing features of the Windsor chairs are readily seen upon a close examination of the basic construction of the piece. Nevertheless these features seem to give no clues as to the possible origin of the chair's design. Some authorities present the theory which establishes the chair's origin in the orient, and, in most cases it is generally accepted as true. The finding of chairs similar in construction and the existence of the highly civilized community found in China preceding that of Western Europe offers a basic element of proof for a working hypothesis on the genesis of this style of chair.

There are many tales pertaining to the discovery of the Windsor chair. However, research along this line fails to provide any positive proof of the chair's origin. It does, however, account for the name "Windsor" being given to the
chair by the English people. The particular story which relates any information is the one entitled "The King and the Peasant of Windsor Chair." Other tales relative to the Windsor chair are: Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, The King May Come the Cadger's Way, The King and the Hermit, The King and the Tanner of Tamworth, and The King and the Miller of Mansfield. The authors of these tales for the most part remain anonymous. In any event, the subjection to which the chair has been exposed in regard to its connection with the King of England, indicated that the chair was not used in the better homes of that time. In fact, it definitely points out that it was a product of the peasant class or the middle class. The ease and simplicity of construction, as well as the size and weight, perhaps account for this trend in the lower class homes.

There are many ways by which identification between the American Windsors and the English Windsors can be accomplished. A few of them are given at this time to illustrate the trend in the Windsor chair design in both England and in America. The English Windsor replaced the center spindles with an ornamental splat. This practice was seldom, if ever, used by colonial craftsmen. Whereas, the legs of the American Windsors rake or slop both fore and aft and to both sides, the

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English variety's legs had very little slope to the rear legs and the front legs remained perpendicular to the seat. The legs of the English chair are doweled into the seat at the extremities of the piece and do not pierce it; however, the American craftsmen placed the legs well in from the sides of the seat and ran the dowel all the way through it. Other characteristics worthy of mentioning are the location of the leg stretchers which are higher from the floor on the English chair than they are on the American variety. Also, the seat of the English chair is usually made of hardwood, whereas, the seat of the American chair is constructed of softwood.\(^{24}\)

The loop-back chairs are found in the side as well as the arm chair variety. However, they were sold in sets with the two arm chairs for the host and hostess and the remaining pieces being side chairs. The number of chairs per household depended upon the size of the family and the head of the house's income. This particular style is the most graceful of all Windsor chairs, yet the very element which makes it so beautiful is fundamental for its major weakness. This weakness is its lack of strength. In the later styles of the arm chair the loop is carried to the seat and the arms are set in at right angles to it. The chair is sometimes called the fiddle-string chair.

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The fan-back chair is obviously a variation of the earlier low-back chair. The chair, like the comb-back Windsor, originated in Philadelphia, but its popularity expanded rapidly south along the Atlantic seaboard and much throughout the New England states. In the New Jersey style, a tail piece was used for the vertical stretcher to tie into. Generally, the chairs have a curved or bow-shaped horizontal piece at the top with the spindles raked slightly in at the seat. The top piece extended beyond the spindles and its ears were often curved. The New England design used plain ears while the Philadelphia school chose to carve a scroll on the chair's ears.

The hoop-back Windsor, is, perhaps, the best known chair of this design. It was made in England as well as in colonial America and it assumed the lead in the design of the Windsor chair industry in Philadelphia immediately upon its appearance. It is possible that this is the chair Andrew Gautier, the first Windsor chair maker on record, advertised in the New York Gazette on April 18, 1765, as follows:

A large and neat assortment of Windsor chairs, made in the best and neatest manner, and well painted: Such as high back, low backed and saddle backed chairs and settees; fit for piazza or garden—children's dining and low chairs.

Thompson, op. cit., p. 69.
N. B. As the above Gautier intends to keep a large number of all sorts; all persons wanting such may depend on being supplied with any quantity—wholesale or retail—at reasonable rates. 26

The earlier comb-back chairs retained the three-piece back rail of the low-back design. The center portion of the rail was pieced to allow from seven to nine spindles to run through it to support the comb. While the upper rail in the earlier types of this chair were unchanged, the later ones allowed for the deletion in the number of spindles supporting the comb. About the same time that this innovation took place, the principle of the bent-wood back was established. The chair received its name because of the similarity of the chair's comb to the comb worn by the women in their hair. 27

Tradition places the low-back Windsor as the first of its make produced in America. There are many reasons for this assumption, yet the two that hold the most reliable proof are found in its construction and in the woods used therein.

The earliest Philadelphia Windsors were of the low-back design with a heavy U-shaped top rail. Generally, from ten to twelve plain spindles, about half an inch in diameter and slightly tapering, formed the back. At the front, two heavier, ornamentally turned spindles provided the uprights to support the rails, which sometimes had a centre-cresting and an outward curve at the extremes. The legs were well splayed,

26 Ormsbee, op. cit., p. 197.

27 Thompson, op. cit., p. 68.
and in turning were of the so-called blunt-arrow design terminating in a ball-like foot. The stretchers connecting the front and rear legs were simple in outline and marked with a bulbous turning in the centre. The cross-stretcher, on the other hand, was often elaborately turned and provided a major item of ornamentation. Well executed ball-and-ring turnings are characteristic of this centre brace. 28

In discussing the rocking chair, there is much speculation and very few facts that can be regarded as sound information. Who invented this delightful chair remains unknown, but it is known that the first so-called rocking chairs were converted side and arm chairs. On these chairs slats were cut in the bottom of the legs and then knife-edge rockers were inserted. Some chair legs were turned down to a dowel and inserted into holes bored into the rockers. 29

The first record of rockers being employed on any type of furniture in colonial America is found affixed to the cradle. The cradle was brought to this country on the Mayflower from Holland. However, records are available from that time on concerning the conversion of the various chairs into rocking chairs. In 1774, William Savery, in a handwritten bill, charged Mary Norris "to bottoming a rocking chair, one shilling ten pence." 30 Another record is found in

28 Ormsbee, op. cit., p. 119.


the account book of Thomas Smedley of Middletown, Pennsylvania as "1st. Mo. 1776 to a rocking chair for Andrew Hunter." Also, a cabinetmaker of Hadley, Massachusetts, Eliakin Smith, recorded in his account book a job of putting rockers on a chair in 1760 for C. F. Luther.

There is no doubt that the rocking chair was designed for people who preferred comfort to style and art. Contrary to the generally accepted idea of the public that the honorable Benjamin Franklin invented this chair, research provides only information supporting the ownership of such a chair by him. Actually, Francis Leiber's Letters to a Gentleman in Germany, a book which was published in Philadelphia in 1834, is the most reliable information on Benjamin Franklin's acquaintance with any rocking chair.

Between 1770 and 1780 many slat-back Pennsylvania chairs were converted into rocking chairs. They were also found in the banister-back style. The converting of rocking chairs with the fiddle-back, solid-back splat, are also found in limited numbers. However, around 1790, the Shakers at Lebanon had established a profitable chair industry. The Shaker rocker, lightly stained in cherry finish, exhibits simple slats, no elaborate trimmings, mushroom-shaped knobs.

where the legs joined the arms, and were usually made of maple wood.

Actually there are two kinds of rockers: those straight and arm chairs which were converted into rocking chairs, and those chairs especially designed to be rocking chairs. With this approach to the evolution of the rocking chair it becomes impossible to establish a concrete trend and set a definite time when the change from converted to designed rocking chairs took place. Mary L. Jackson established this evolution of the rocking chair in the following manner: (1) Pilgrim slat back (2) New England slat-back (3) Pennsylvania slat-back (4) Banister back (5) fiddle-shape solid back splats (6) Shaker back slats (7) painted Windsors (8) Boston rockers (9) walnut and rose rockers (10) Lincoln rockers (11) Sleepy Hollow rockers, and (12) the stationary rockers.

In view of the evolution of this chair, it is obvious that prior to 1800 very little, if any, work had been done in the design of the rocking chair purely for a rocking chair. Therefore, it is evident that the bulk of the chairs that were classified as rockers during the colonial period of America were first classified in another category. For instance, the Windsor rockers were first classified as Windsor chairs and the term "rocker" was applied upon the conversion to the rocking chair.

Ibid., p. 40.
CHAPTER IV

COLONIAL STOWAGE FURNITURE

As is well known, the style of the first furniture to reach the shores of the New World was that of the Jacobean period in English furniture design. Therefore, there is no doubt that it became the model for the cabinet-makers of the colonies to follow. And, in the light of the data available, it is also known that this type of furniture was the only useful piece that could meet the limited shipping accommodations of the early ships of the Mayflower class.

Time moves on and so do the ideas and styles of furniture design. William and Mary, Queen Anne and Chippendale styles all had a great effect upon the development of a contemporary American design in the field of stowage furniture. Although the chair offers the best record of infiltration of the English designs into the realm of American joinery, the development of the various pieces, such as the highboy, low-boy and secretaries, were almost pure in their English origin.

Generally, the construction of stowage furniture was of the most crude and simple medieval types. The pieces were rectangular in shape with stiles and rails. All of the structural members meet at right angles at the corners and were joined with a mortise-and-tenon joint. This particular method of joinery was uniquely adapted to the colonial home.
because of the ease in assembly and disassembly of the pieces for stowage or moving. Later, when solid boards were used in the construction, they were jointed at the corners with a form of a miter or blind dovetail joint.

To illustrate the construction and decorative procedures used during this period, two chests were used: the Pennsylvania spice chest (See Figure 11), which was made in New York and is of the most simple construction and decorative designs. Another chest is shown in Figure 12. This chest dates back to the late eighteenth century and was made in Newport, Rhode Island. Its horizontal drawers with the two upper drawers tri-sected and the two lower drawers enclosed in the cabinet with a bottom drawer exposed were all made of walnut wood.

Incidentally, the evolution of the chest, while slow, hastened the development of the cupboard for the colonial home. While most of the colonial cupboards were made an integral part of the architectural details of the house, a few of them were made in the Jacobean style. These cupboards reflect the Gothic influence of their respective periods. However, regardless of style, it is safe to say that the cupboards remained English in concept and design, and were only copied by the American craftsmen. Actually, they were so well constructed that the only difference in the English
The name "spice chest" is an old and apt description of a miniature chest holding innumerable small drawers. In 1737 the stock of Joseph Hibbard, "Joynner" in Derby, included two spice chests, one of sweet gum and one of walnut. Spices were rarities then, brought from the far Indies by sailing ships and, like tea and coffee, were safeguarded from children and household slaves by lock and key.

The half-round moldings that frame the inner drawers are survivals of the 17th century. The squared feet with an anklet follow the date of the Spanish foot, popular about 1700. The lining of the drawers is walnut, except for cedar bottoms. The dovetails are heavy, indicative of an early date.\(^1\) Height 27 1/2 inches. Width 16 1/2 inches. Depth 9 1/2 inches.

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\(^1\) Down, op. cit., p. 200.
Fig. 12—Mahogany Chest of Drawers. Newport, 1765-1775.

This kneehole chest of drawers (sometimes called a dressing table) ranks with the finest block-front examples of Newport origin.

The recessed center and the three-dimensional drawer fronts present a powerful contrast of light and shadow. The shells, with cross-hatched incising at their centers, are identical with the labelled work of John Townsend on a four-drawer chest made for the Slocum family. The cupboard is divided by a shelf.

Characteristic of Newport cabinet work are the two strips of ash mortised under the top and showing on the back edge of the top, the purpose of the strips being to prevent warping. The backboards are ash, and the drawers are lined with tulip wood. Height 34 1/2 inches. Width 36 3/4 inches. Depth 20 inches.

2 Down, op. cit., p. 175.
and American works is found in the grain and in the color of the wood used.

With the two kinds of cupboards, namely the press and court cupboards, being used in the American homes, it is likely that they were changed to suit the individual rather than to suit the masses. Although both cupboards used the horizontal division of the piece, they differ from there on. The court cupboard has its upper section set in from the leading edge of its horizontal separator and two posts are placed at each end to support the overlapping top of the piece. The lower half of the cupboard was composed of open shelves. These types of cupboards were first used to set cups and drinking vessels in, which would sparkle when light played upon them, but through an evolution in household furniture they were split into the cabinets and the kitchen cupboards as we know them to-day.

Regardless of what kind of cupboards were made, the cabinetmakers displayed a wide range of knowledge in their selection of decorative motifs for the various pieces. Carving of all sorts, moldings, turned post, ebonized appliques, brackets, drops, billeted moldings and panels were all used to their best advantage.

While the cupboards and cabinets are closely related, they belong to two distinctive groups of stowage furniture.

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Cornelius, op. cit., p. 57.
Whereas, the cupboard remained relatively in its original form, the cabinet demanded the best in furniture design and construction. In this realm of furniture design, American craftsmen copied the best of the English pieces and through an innovation of their own they became known as American. This is particularly true in the highboys, lowboys and chest-on-chest pieces made in Philadelphia.

Both the highboys and the lowboys appeared for the first time in suites during the William and Mary era of furniture design. However, the appearance of the flat-top lowboy leads to the belief that they were designed especially as a dining room piece. Also at this time there was a sharp break in the cabinet construction. The extensive use of the panel style construction and the rail plans of the Jacobean era disappeared and the dovetail method of joinery became the vogue. Most of the feet applied to the pieces were dowelled at the corners and brass handles and drops as well as brass key-hole guards were frequently used. Beauty was attained by finishes which presented the grain structure of the wood at its best. Veneer woods of walnut, butternut and ash were in great demand for their highly decorative grain.

To Nicholas Disbowe of Hartford, Connecticut, goes the credit of making the first chest in the New World. His carved

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4 Ormsbee, op. cit., p. 63.
oaken chest is marked: "Mary Ally's Chest Cutte and joined by Mich. Dishowe." Another early cabinetmaker of the colonial era is Samuel MacIntire of whom records are available but, unfortunately, none of his work remains intact. Also there were numerous schools of furniture design located in the various states and cities. These locations and their personnel have already been discussed in this paper.

Possibly the most famous chests made in the colonial era of North American were found in the Connecticut and Hardly chest. These chests were of Jacobean design and frequently utilized a three-panel front which was decorated by carving the "tulip and sunflower" pattern upon them. Also bosses and half spindles of ebonized maple wood were added for additional ornamentation. Although no definite proof exists signifying that these chests were dowery chests, all indications point out that they were made for girls who were yet too young for marriage.  

On the whole, the decoration of the chest and other pieces of this period in furniture making in colonial America is even more characteristic of the Tudor or Jacobean style of English furniture. The mechanical method of using molding for ornamenting are essential to this period. These profiles were run on the board with a hand-plane whose knife is cut to the

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5 Nagel, op. cit., p. 23.
desired shape and are of two general styles. These styles are those that are run on the flat side of the stiles and rails and those that are found on the edges of the stiles and rails enframing panels. These moldings do not miter at the corners. The lower rail is seldom molded but is beveled to give the same effect. On the more simple chest the bevel takes the place of the edge molding on both stile and rails.

Holland and France had the greater effect upon English design in this style of furniture, so naturally they had the same or similar effect upon that of American design. Also, Italy gave some creative incentive to the English, which, in turn, was capitalized upon by the American craftsmen. Therefore, the highboys of the William and Mary period were fundamentally the same as those in England. They were supported upon a frame-work with legs numbering as many as four in four in front and two behind. The legs were usually connected with serpentine stretchers fitted into a pleasing pattern which crossed in the center. Often the stretchers followed the legs with a receding curve between the front and rear legs. The legs were usually turned and were of very fine craftsmanship. The most popular designs for the legs were the vase, trumpet, cup and bell turnings.

The transition to the Queene Anne from the William and Mary styles is found basically in their height and depth of

Cornelius, op. cit., p. 46.
the drawers. First, the framework's bulbous turned feet were replaced with short turned legs and button-like feet. Although in the earlier pieces of the Queen Anne period the front and side rails were planed, later, units transformed them into a skirt. A short cabriole leg utilizing a pad foot was used in this transformation. Some of these pieces had three tiers of drawers with each drawer being deeper as it descended. The cornice moldings were more intricate and a quarter-round lap was used to conceal the space between the drawers. While the craftsmen of colonial America followed the highboy trend, the joiners in England continued to make the lowboy and chest-on-chest with little regard to the highboy.

By 1727 the naive characteristics of the William and Mary furniture were combined with the more elaborate Queen Anne stylings. The repeated use of the "S" curve found in the William and Mary and Jacobean modes combined with the cabriole legs resulted in a unique gracefulness heretofore unknown in the realm of furniture design. The rigid austerity of the Queen Anne era brought about solid wood construction in lieu of the various veneered woods used in the earlier part of the century. However, the pieces of this fashion retained the regal appearance which was so rich in craftsmanship.

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7 Nagel, op. cit., p. 34.
Thomas Chippendale, in designing the best in English furniture, did not overlook the possibilities of stowage furniture. Although most of his great work is found in the design of the many chairs bearing his name, a few highboys, as well as lowboys and secretaries were produced by him. This is particularly true in the early Queen Anne lowboys of English oak. On this piece such details as the scroll apron, delicate cabriole legs, fanxe brasses and other means of ornamentation were employed. This design was produced in colonial America when the peak of ornate cabinetmaking was in full swing.

The Chippendale highboy met with favor in America. With cabriole legs and a top with scrolled pediment, it is essentially a very distinguished piece. There are simple ones with little or no ornament except for the moldings. The other extreme, however, is seen in the Philadelphia highboys. These beautiful units had legs in almost every manner with carvings upon the knees. A low center drawer and apron carved with fretwork about the waist was common in these pieces. Scrolled pediment with carved leaves as the volutes, and delicate urns or other finals at the corners were also marks of distinction. Usually in the center of the scrolled pediment some elaborate motif occurs. These are found throughout New England.

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8 Cornelius, op. cit., p. 165.
The lowboy of the various periods in furniture design is basically the same as that of the highboy. The lowboys are narrower and lower than the lower part of the highboys. Their flat top makes it possible for them to be used to set things on them or to write on them. Actually, they are simply a small chest, placed upon legs to raise the top to a higher level, making it a utility piece of furniture. Strange as it is, the English proceeded to produce the lowboy instead of the highboys which were in so great demand. In colonial America, New England excelled in the construction of the lowboy but Philadelphia added to it the ornamental splendor of Chippendale, which makes it a piece of rare beauty.

A few chest-on-chest or chest of drawers were constructed in America during the colonial period in American colonial history. For an illustration, see Figure 13. Comparable to the high chest of drawers, but apparently made in fewer numbers, the double chest in several instances was carved in the richest manner of the Philadelphia rococo style. The central theme here is a lamb and her ewe, a variant of Aesop's fables employed by Philadelphia carvers (the dog and the meat on the mantel of the Powel house ballroom, the fox and the grapes on the Howe-Steel high chest, and the two pigeons on the Pompadour highboy and lowboy in the American Wing). In every case the lower body is plain, save for the traditional fluted quarter columns at the corners that serve as a foil
Fig. 13—Double chest or chest-on-chest.
Height 7 feet, 2 inches. Width 42 7/8 inches
Depth 22 3/4 inches.
for the carving above. On this double chest the plainness is compensated by the fine Cuban branch grained mahogany veneered to the drawer fronts. The drawers are lined with oak, and the bottoms are of white cedar. The chests that were built were ideal in their usefulness. Occasionally, the chest-on-chest or chest of drawers appeared with a scroll or bonnet-top. This appearance is a result of the architectural influence dominated by the English wall furniture. These features are seen on many of the highboys, although the flat-top variety still remained in production.

The chest-on-chest, that is, a chest of drawers supporting an upper section like the upper part of the highboys, in this treatment, has an outstanding resemblance to the highboy. The corners of the upper portions are occasionally flanked by pilasters. The cornice may or may not be topped by a pediment either broken or scrolled. The lower position is usually very simple and it rests upon dwarf cabriole or bracket feet.

With the development of the many designs of furniture in England it is obvious that the same action was taking place in the colony of the British Empire. In America the greatest piece of stowage furniture to come from a colonial craftsman was the block-front design of John Goddard.

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9 Down, op. cit., p. 184.
Authorities agree that this design is the most handsome of all American productions. However, there are a few critics who contend that it is of Spanish or Dutch origin. If this contention could be answered in either the negative or positive, all of the misunderstanding would be eliminated. Unfortunately, this cannot be done; so, the only contention that could be used to express the development would be that since all units of the house are furniture they all have the same origin. That the designs of Europe and Asia had a great effect upon the development of the block-front design cannot be denied, but to say that it is the work of another country is treason as far as furniture design and construction is concerned.

The block-front design is noteworthy of a master architect. The execution required to produce this piece of work was no less than that of a master craftsman. After Goddard and Townsend (See Figure 14) had set the style, the other New England cabinetmakers took it up. Possibly the only reason the best furniture was found in the block-front trend is because only the very best craftsmen attempted to produce it. Even in the up-states of New Hampshire and Massachusetts it is considered "fine" furniture, which is much better than the "good" furniture of the eighteenth century.

As to the style of the block-front furniture, it was carried to the highest peak of perfection. The working of
Fig. 14—Desk and bookcase. Mahogany. Boston, 1770-1785

The richness of Chippendale furniture in Philadelphia is taken for granted; far rarer is comparable carving of Boston origin. In this desk and bookcase the style is epitomized by the scrolled pediment, the rococo carving, the fluted pilasters, the Chinese frets, and the hairy claw feet. All of these rare features appear on a double chest signed by John Cogswell, cabinet-maker, of Middle Street, Boston, and make plausible the attribution of this desk to him. Height 95 ¼ inches. Width 45½ inches. Depth 22 5/8 inches.

Down, op. cit., p. 288.
the front by carving working the facade of the piece so that it presented a series of alternating outjutting and depressed surfaces, is in itself, a masterpiece. The corners were nicely rounded and finished at terminals with finely carved sunburst or rayed demi-lune elements.  

Whereas the New England block-front adhered to the Goddard and Townsend school of design, the Philadelphia school chose to develop the serpentine front. Here the straight front was supplanted by a delicate curve repeating itself from side to side. Sometimes the curve was carried on the drawer fronts only and the top one was given perpendicular rounding. This was done to have it conform with the upper edge and produce a straight line. While this was done, the bottom edge of the drawer was curved to meet and match the outline of those directly below it.  

The degree of ornamentation was not limited to the use of the claw-and-ball foot on the cabriole leg in the block-front furniture. In the New England school, of which John Goddard was a member, the outer blocks were adorned with rayed or fluted shells carved in relief, whereas the center depression was done in the reverse shell manner. On this particular type, as well as in the serpentine front style of


12 Ormsbee, op. cit., p. 71.
furniture, the bracket feet were often employed. Here the outer sides of the feet were cut away in molding forms instead of remaining flat. The drawers utilized a simple cockle molding as ornamentation. However, some pieces were further treated by a small shell carving placed on the pendant at the bottom of the cross-members. Also the front corners of certain chests were chamfered or reeded as well as treated with quarter-rounds. The moldings used at the top and bottom of the body of the pieces were the results of a combination of curves. These curves were boldly and elaborately done and expressed the beauty of the reverse curve.

In summing up the design and construction of stowage furniture in colonial America, the only sure thing about it is that there was such a type of furniture. However, to attempt to classify each into its particular category is useless because of the generality of each piece. Nevertheless it can be typed into a relative sound grouping by using the English furniture era as its divisions. The practice of adding the geographical location of the place in which it was constructed was done to assist in identifying the pieces.

13 Ibid., p. 73.
CHAPTER V

BEDS

Four corners to my bed,
Four angels at my head,
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on. 1

The bed, unlike the chair, fails to appeal to the individual furniture designer. In fact, the entire concern for the bed at all is summed up in the above quotation, which is an old rhyme by an unknown author.

The exact form of the beds of the early colonial period is problematical. It is evident that they were, however, of the crudest form and were usually built-in as a part of the architectural details of the house. Investigation of the inventories of some of the early homes include such items as mattresses filled with rush, cushions, pillows and many other pieces of furniture. Nevertheless, the bed was never mentioned. These facts indicate that the possibility of bunks being used as beds is not far-fetched, but is rather a logical deduction upon the available information. Also, in view of the limited records and in light of the habit and conditions

1Osburn, op. cit., p. 51.

of the frontier life, it is probable that mats were spread on the floor for beds.

American beds made during the seventeenth century have all but disappeared, making a first-hand study of them impossible. However, by studying the various styles prevailing in England, some creditable information can be obtained. For instance, the size and weight of the English beds did not encourage their shipment from England to America except in special cases. Therefore, this restriction forced the colonial craftsmen to design and build beds to suit their individual taste. These tastes, of course, were based upon the similar pieces seen in the mother country, which was, in this case the Jacobean style.

Beds of the Jacobean style which were made in America often consisted of frames with rope or cross-slats to support the mattress. The mattress was usually stuffed with straw, rush, moss, cornhusks or occasionally with feathers. The framework included bedsteads which formed posts for a top rail to tie into and over which a curtain was draped. These curtains were to protect one from the cold and as a secondary measure to offer some element of privacy. And, strange as it may seem, the bed clothes and not the beds were the important pieces of the families' possessions. See Figure 15, canopy bed.  

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3 Negal, op. cit., p. 27.
Few American four-post beds of the Queen Anne period are known today. This example, the canopy bed in Figure 15, is an exceptionally fine one. The wood is maple, and all four posts are alike, having bold cabriole legs and deeply cut pad feet. Usually, only the foot posts of American beds are shaped and carved. The headboard and rails are likewise of maple, a wood often favored by Job Townsend, the first of the famous cabinet-making family.

The bed hangings and spread are contemporary. They are of homespun linen embroidered in crewels, chiefly in shades of rose, blue, green, and yellow. The strapwork trellis pattern of the spread is rarely seen in American crewel work. The embroidery is an exceptionally fine example of New England work. The bedspread was originally owned by Thomas Hancock in Boston and later by his nephew and heir, the patriot John Hancock.

Bed posts built in colonial America were simple when compared to those produced in England during the same period. So perfect were they, however, that for over two hundred years little or no change was made in their basic design. In fact, the octagon-sided post with its taper could easily have been used by the Pilgrims or could have been found in the better homes of the middle nineteenth century. Usually all four posts

4 Down, op. cit., p. 1.
Fig. 15—Maple bed. Rhode Island, 1735-1750. Height 8 feet. Width 4 feet, 11½ inches. Length 6 feet, 8 inches.
were identical in design, a practice which later was deviated from by the makers of the Chippendale bed post. 5

Joiners of southern New England and Pennsylvania, the furniture belt of the New World, continued to use the Jacobean designed beds during the influx of the William and Mary styles of furniture in colonial America. The post and rails were geometric in shape with a stretcher between the two head and the two foot posts. Often the head post also supported a simple headboard. Most of the bed-rooms in the colonial homes used this style of furniture. However, in the better homes, the master bed room had a tall poster bed, but in the lesser important rooms of the house the low poster beds of a simple structure were used.

Figure 16 shows a walnut bed used in Philadelphia in 1750-1760.

Low beds of double size were almost unknown in the eighteenth century; oak ones remain which date before 1700. This form possibly found a welcome use in warm weather, when hangings were gladly dispensed with. Here the bold cabriole legs and club-shaped rear feet match the tall-post bed. The headboard is of walnut instead of softwood, which in a tall-post bed often was covered by the back curtains. 7

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5 Wallace Nutting, Furniture of the Pilgrim Century 1620-1720, p. 323.
6 Ormsbee, op. cit., p. 111. 7 Down, op. cit., p. 5.
Fig. 16--Walnut bed. Philadelphia, 1750-1760. Height 30 ½ inches. Width 4 feet, 10 inches. Length 6 feet, 6 inches.
The low poster bed's foot posts extended an inch or so above the upper surface of the rail, while the headpost extended from eight to twelve inches higher to accommodate a head board. These beds fitted so well in the second floor rooms of the colonial homes, with their low sloping roofs, that they became known as "under-eaves beds."

A baby-per-year became the accepted custom of colonial families; therefore, this custom created a demand for cradles and other children's beds. The cradles were usually paneled on the side with rockers added. Later, the hood was also added at the upper end. The framework was either mortised or dovetailed at the corners and the sides often flared out.

As the child grew or an addition to the ever-growing family made its appearance, the one using the cradle was graduated to the trundle-bed. This bed was especially designed to economize floor space by fitting it under the large bed during the day and pulling it out for the children at night. The bed was of the most simple construction, having four posts and a wooden frame with holes in it to interlace the ropes for the suspension of the mattress. It frequently had wooden wheels set in a slot cut in the bottom of the post.  

This facilitated the moving of the bed about the room.

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8 Urmsbee, op. cit., p. 111.

During the Revolutionary War the enlisted men were forced to provide their own bedding from the surrounding area. The field officers, however, rated the now famous field bed. This bed is the product of the colonial craftsmen, and it had posts from five to six feet high with the upper portion designed and turned. The vase shape was the design most frequently used. Where the earlier beds were square below the rail, the later styles were turned. The headboard remained, in most instances, simple. The curve of the canopy was either the well-sprung flat arch or the double curve which duplicated itself from the head to the foot posts.

Although the development of the bed is difficult to trace, a change occurred near the middle of the eighteenth century that is worthy of note. This change was the elimination of the curtain or heavy draperies exposing the bed post to the eye. This encouraged Thomas Chippendale to display his technique on the bed post both above and below the rail. However, it is below the rail where his ideas displayed his ability to design decorative motifs. Here he used the cabriole legs with the ball-and-claw foot, also the Chinese foot. See Figure 17. On the post he designed charming motifs and the testers were shaped to blend with his other pieces of bedroom furniture. The testers were either painted or carved, but the headboard remained low and plain.

Fig. 17—Cherry bed. Connecticut, 1770-1785.
Height 7 feet, 2 inches. Width 4 feet, 9 1/2 inches.
Length 6 feet, 8 inches.
The bed pillars illustrated in design books are faintly echoed in the posts of this shapely and unusual bed from the school of cabinet-makers that included Hartford, Middletown, and New Britain. The square, Chinese Chippendale legs, nicely fluted and chamfered stand on double-tiered Marlborough feet are all distinctive characteristics. The tall posts to carry the tester frame and curtains are turned in perfect proportions. On the top inside edge of the rails wooden pegs are fixed for roping.

The old French cotton hangings are printed in blue with whimsical chinoiserie figures and scenes well suited in date and character to the bed. The spread is blue silk damask, early eighteenth century.

\footnote{Down, op. cit., p. 7.}
CHAPTER VI

TABLES

The artistic craftsmanship found in the colonial chair and the other pieces of household furniture is not completely lacking in the construction of the table. Ordinarily, the table was neglected for the other pieces of furniture, and it was of a secondary importance when regarded with the value of the tableware. Today, however, this particular piece of colonial furniture is one of the most outstanding units of colonial workmanship and it still retains its original design.

In the study of the development of the table there are three general classifications used. These units are: (1) refectory tables, (2) server or console tables, and (3) the occasional or game tables.

Dining tables produced in colonial America were, at first, planks laid across trestles. Later, the tops were secured to the trestle, as in the trestle-top tables of the Jacobean style furniture, with a long stretcher running from each trestle to the other and secured on the outboard side of the end trestles with a keyed mortise-and-tenon joint. These particular types of tables were of unique importance to the colonial craftsman. That is, in the making of this kind of table, the trestles were frequently elaborately carved with the
open Gothic Windsor designs; and also the long stretcher provided ample surface for decorative details. The top of the tables was smooth and highly polished.

Although, for the most part, the tables were crudely constructed with the most medieval joinery methods, they still remained a delightfully fitted table about which many social obligations were conducted. The stretchers, whose main purpose is to strengthen the piece’s construction, also served as a very comfortable foot-rest. However, this kind of table gave way to the more practical constructed framework tables.

The framework table received its name because of the manner in which it was constructed. A plain top was incidental when compared to the underframing of the table. Actually the table usually consisted of four legs with stretchers connecting all of the legs together. These legs varied in forms, sizes and designs. The spiral design and the inverted vase design were the most popular, and were most often made of oak with an occasional use of mahogany and walnut—such as are found in the later models.

There are two general pieces of framing, as is easily understood, these being the series of stretchers already mentioned and the underframing. The underframing is fitted into the legs of the table by various means and it is often level with the top of the leg. To this framework the top of the table is secured. Not only does the underframing perform a
necessary division of the table's structural members but it also furnishes an here-to-fore unknown area for decorative ornamentation. The underframing of the tables were often relieved of their severe straight lines by the utilization of a series of curves cut into their under edges. Actually, when this is accomplished, the decorative theory employed makes the piece appear regal while the lower stretcher gives the unit strength without destroying the beauty expressed by the underframing.

The refectory tables varied in size and type. The larger tables were the trestle tables and the smaller tables were the framework tables. Both were rectangular in shape. The frame tables were frequently found in the taverns of colonial America. These tables evolved into the four-legged affair, often referred to as the tavern table, with one or more drawers built into it. Nevertheless, these tables retained their basic design throughout the entire colonial era of North America. Perhaps the association of England's glorious past with the English colonies in the New World was the main reason for the eventful changes found in any furniture design at this time. At any rate, all of these tables built during the colonial period retained their rare Anglo-Saxon charm and warmth as well as the nobility and splendor that are associated with this type of furnishings.

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One of the many popular table designs to find its origin during the Jacobean period of furniture design is the folding table. This table had a number of designs with the oval-top, gate-leg and the butterfly top principle being the more widely used arrangements. The tables could seat any number of guests, depending upon the size and number of legs employed in its construction. They were made of oak, pine, maple, walnut and the various other fruit woods found in North America during the early colonial era of the United States. See Figure 18.

"From England, the Virginians take every article for convenience or ornament which they use, their own manufactures not being worth mentioning." These words of a French traveler in Virginia suggest the different economy of North and South, the scattered craftsmen, and the lack of regional "schools" of design.

Seventeenth-century features of this table (Figure 18) are the turned stretchers and the heavy top, straight-edged, with ruled joints. The short drawers at either end are likewise early in construction, built of hard pine and walnut, with side runners to slide upon. The stout turnings and thick pad feet are unfamiliar shapes in northern furniture. The shape of the legs is the latest evidence to date the table in the Queen Anne period.  

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2 Down, op. cit., p. 303.
Fig. 18—Walnut Breakfast Table. Probably Virginia, 1710-1725. Height 27½ inches. Width (open) 49 inches. Depth 43½ inches.
The gate-leg table, often referred to as the "hundred leg" or the "centipede table," displays a unique usage of furniture construction which prevailed during the early period of English-American history. Obviously, the names of the tables given above are used purely as descriptive measures and do not imply that a hundred legs were used to the table or that it belonged to the insect family. Although the exact proof of the table's origin is obscure, however, the turning of the legs offer the best identification available as to its designers. This means of recognition indicates that the first ideas for the gate-leg tables are found in the Dutch styles; and also that the table made its appearance in England in the middle of the seventeenth century and was readily accepted as household furniture.

The most common type of the gate-leg table has, for its center portion, an oval top resting on a frame. The usual four legs are found secured to the center portion of the table. These legs are often turned and rest on the floor. They are inter-joined, sides and ends, by stretchers. The gate-leg is secured approximately one third of the distance along the length of the stretcher and another leg is fitted, with its lower end terminating in a square section of the same stretcher. The upper end is fitted into the table frame. From the short leg, thus in place, reach two connecting pieces, each of which is joined at their outer ends to another leg. This leg swings
freely on the short leg, which is loosely doweled into the stretcher, and acts as the gate-leg's post.

It was not unusual for a single table of the gate-leg variety to have as many as six, eight, ten or twelve legs. However, the six and eight leg tables were in the greatest demand. Many patterns are found in the designs of turnings used on the legs. The baluster, knobs, spirals, string of bulbs and an occasional use of plain square, round, or octagon leg were the most popular styles. Limited use of the Spanish foot existed but the simple ball foot was the most commonly employed design used for the feet of the tables.

Oak, the most common of all Jacobean cabinet woods, was used extensively by the English craftsmen to produce the gate-leg tables. Later, during the Queen Anne period of English furniture, walnut was used with great success. However, walnut was soon set aside for the mahogany woods during the early Georgian era. In colonial America other woods, as well as ash, walnut and mahogany, were used successfully in the construction of tables. These woods were: pine, maple and cherry, with rare uses of cedar and cypress being found in some of the pieces of the Southern colonies.

In viewing the development of the gate-leg table, it is evident that the structural design was somewhat limited to

3 Frank Farrington, "Centipedes and Butterflies," Hobbies (July, 1945), p. 34.
uniformity and compactness of the woods and the needs for which the table was made. For instance, stretchers were mandatory in the gables constructed in order that the gate-leg principle could be used; and also, at the same time, in order to give an additional needed strength to the piece. It is also of great importance that only the best craftsmen in cabinetmaking could produce a gate-leg table worthy of the furniture of that time. The intricate design in joinery is greatly displayed in its most revealing form in the gate-leg table structural masterpiece. Actually, except in the various uses of the different woods found in the cabinetmakers' shops, the table top design and the decorative motifs were static.

From the true gate-leg, drop-leaf tables come the better known butterfly tables. These tables remained relatively small in size but became large in demand. The major reason for the restriction as to the table's size was because of the supports that swung from the inner-section side frame and side stretchers, which hold up the leaf of the table. On this particular table design the legs were usually spaced further apart at the floor than they were at the top or where they fitted into the underframing. Flat stretchers were used in connecting the legs together. The wing-shaped leaf supports were often made of solid wood and were doweled into the underside of the top and the upper edge of the lower stretcher.
Relatively speaking, the butterfly table used the same construction methods as the simple stool. They frequently had a wedge-shaped drawer (See Figure 19) with overlapping edges on the front. The legs were turned, with square sections at the top where they were joined to the frame and at the bottom where the stretchers were doweled into them. Simple turning often served as the feet for the legs. These tables were first made in colonial America about 1700 and almost all of the American hardwoods were used in their construction.

New York furniture in the Queen Anne style often has a distinctive slipper foot not unlike a modern platform shoe. It was carved on case pieces, chairs, and tables. Its stout simplicity recommends it for hard usage, unlike the fragile wafer-like feet often favored in New England. The thumb-molding of the leaf joint is here extended to almost a circle. The underframing is chestnut, and the drawer lining is tulipwood.

Contemporary with the gate-leg table and closely akin to the butterfly table is the tavern table. This particular table was executed in a number of forms in colonial America. The earliest of these forms, it seems, was the simple frame and board-top variety of tables. This table used the same construction as the frame refectory table previously discussed in this chapter.

4 Down, op. cit., p. 318.
Fig. 19—Walnut dining table. New Work, 1730-1750. Height 28 3/4 inches. Width (open) 65 inches. Depth 54 inches.
Although the William and Mary style brought nothing to colonial America in the field design, a sharp break in the contemporary methods of table construction appeared during the reign of Queen Anne period furniture. See Figure 20 for an illustration of a Queen Anne table. This change proved to be the initial force which led to the beautiful tables of that time. The disappearance of the stretchers in the construction of the tables also opened a new field in the development of the structural aspects of table design. The straight, post-like legs were set aside for the nicely curved cabriole legs that terminated in the simple pad feet. This innovation in table design can easily be found in the better built chairs of the Queen Anne period. Also, whereas the English pieces of this design utilized much decorative motifs, the American counterpart remained simple in its presentation.\(^5\)

Like the Queen Anne era in furniture design, the Chippen-dale period also produced a great change in table design. The main center column with three bracing feet supporting a circular-shape top was the result of this change. However, tables of all sorts to suit the customs of the day, drop-leaf tables, single or in sets, were still produced for dining tables. The larger tables of this period usually used the cabriole leg with the bell-and-claw feet which Thomas Chippen-dale used so well. The skirtings were either plain or cut to

\(^5\) Ormsbee, op. cit., p. 90.
Fig. 20—Mahogany tea table. Philadelphia, 1760-1775. Height 29 1/4 inches. Diameter 33 1/8 inches.
silhouette of curves. Also the earlier gate-leg tables still remained in vogue. However, the long dining tables usually had three sections of which the middle section was rectangular and the two end sections were rounded with one straight end to fit against the center section, thus giving the table an oval shape.

Tripod-based tables with revolving, scallop-edged tops, were among the most popular forms of the Chippendale period in Philadelphia. Varying from the plain to the ultimate in rich carving, none ever seems to be without grace in its mass of line. This example, in development stands between a simpler version. The well-planned and spaciously disposed carving of the base includes the Garrya elliptica, or pendant husk pattern, that became the signature of classical revival ornament in the years after the Revolution. The piecrust edge, carved from the solid top, displays an unusual profile, its inner edge having a convex molding instead of a concave curve at its base.

Perhaps no other piece of colonial furniture displays the skill and craftsmanship as is found in the construction of the table, especially the "piecrust" variety. Just where this delightful piece of furniture originated or who the designer

6 Cornelius, op. cit., p. 171.

7 Down, op. cit., p. 318.
was is yet unknown. Possibly the lack of a comprehensive study on the history of the table would bring to light more knowledge in this field. Nevertheless, no amount of study can take from the colonial craftsmen their fame in the production of the "piecrust" table.

In Philadelphia, it is believed, the best of the pie crust styled tables existed. This is perhaps because of the beautiful pieces still existing which were made by Benjamin Randolph of the city. The artistic beauty found in the Philadelphia furniture indicates the degree of perfection to which the colonial joiners had aspired.

On the pie crust tables the tops were attached to the underbody by a pair of cleats running across the under side of the top. Infrequently, there appeared at the upper end of the supporting column a square box into which fitted the cleats and provided a hinged top. It was often referred to as a bird cage for its obvious, if remote, resemblance to a bird cage. The center support varied in design as well as the three feet employed with its use of tables of this type. The tables also utilized a three-prong wrought iron piece, fitted into place by screws, to strengthen the construction of the piece.

The pie crust table appeared in many designs, yet each design followed the rule of repeating design. The scroll

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8 Ormsbee, op. cit., p. 95.
molding, a simple curve, and a plain line produce the most fashionable patterns. This pattern was repeated until a series of eight was completed. However, they were often repeated as many as ten, twelve, or even larger numbers, depending upon the individual's taste.

Occasional tables of every period in English furniture design were produced by craftsmen of colonial America. Actually, these tables were, for the most part, merely small models of the tables already existing at that time. These tables were used for almost everything imaginable. For instance, the pie crust table was used for serving tea, as a place for a flower arrangement, and also as an incidental table. When the table was not in use it could be set aside out of the way until needed.

The card table is another variety of the occasional table. The card table with a double top is a product of the Chipendale period of furniture, and met with great success in colonial America. In this type of table the single leaf was the same size as the table top and was hinged to the top. This allowed the leaf to lie flat upon the table when folded or to be swung over to increase the seating capacity about the table. It is noted that these tables were found south of New York and hardly existed in the New England colonies because of their views on gambling.
The Townsend-Goddard group produced some very fine tea tables during the colonial period of North America. They used the oblong tray-top shaped by curves after their block-front manner found on their secretaries and chest of drawers. The cabriole legs were ornamented with carvings at both knees and feet. The apron conformed to the block shaping of the top which had its outer edge framed with a varied and raised molding. This molding often consisted of nicely executed cyma curves.

In view of the many varieties of tables, it is impossible to state that colonial American craftsmen produced any great change in their designs. Actually, they copied from others what they wanted and treated it in a manner strictly American. Also, their workmanship in joinery is of the highest quality and is unquestionably as good as any work found in England during the same period. Therefore, by their superb craftsmanship they did much to assist in the development of the table found in the contemporary homes of colonial America.

9 Ormsbee, op. cit., p. 92.
CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY

In this study it was found that the American furniture of the Colonial Period is correlated with the English design in construction, but it is not identical with it. The furniture of Colonial America was built along practical lines for utilitarian purposes in the pioneer homes of that day. For example, it had to be of simple design and construction to enable it to be moved from one section of the country to another as the pioneer families trekked westward.

The correlation between the development of Colonial American furniture and the contemporary furniture used in the homes of England and Western Europe is revealed by the use the American colonists made of the English furniture as models which they followed.

The study revealed that the cabinet-makers of Colonial America ranked as equals with those of England and Western Europe.

This study further shows that there developed among the American cabinet-makers some distinct characteristics of furniture which came from colonial craftsmen's interpretations of the English and Western European furniture designs. First, the procedure of joinery remained relatively the same
as those in England. Second, the uses of the various woods peculiar to the North American continent enlarged the possibilities for the cabinet-makers and thus increased their potential output. Third, the furniture in the different sections of the country usually reflected the religious, economic, and political concepts of that area.

In the early colonial period the economic concept was predominant because money was a scarce article. As the country became more settled and richer, the religious and political concepts were in ascendancy. For example, the Puritan colonies retained their simplicity of design and construction in their furniture, although they were financially able to produce more ornate pieces; whereas, the Southern Colonies, not restricted by conservative religious ideals, allowed their imagination free play in designing furniture and produced a very ornate and decorative style. The South also imported complete household furnishings from England. In the western or frontier sections of the country, the furniture remained of basic construction and style. The primary requisite for furniture was that it be useful, and not necessarily ornate.

From this study it is apparent that the Windsor chair has more American characteristics in style and design than any other chair. Although there were chairs of design equal in craftsmanship, no other chair has had as great a use as
Another adaptation of the Windsor chair by American craftsmen is the rocking chair.

The beds in Colonial America were considered an integral part of the house in an architectural sense; therefore, more attention was given to the bedding than to the actual construction of the bed itself.

Tables in the American Colonial homes remained almost pure English, with the exception of the pie-crust design. The American pie-crust table is possibly the greatest contribution of American craftsmen in table design.

The various pieces of stowage furniture remained fundamentally English; however, the block front furniture is a very distinct American contribution to stowage furniture. The basic difference between stowage furniture in England and in Colonial America is found in the depth and number of drawers.

As a result of this study the writer would recommend that a further study of the rocking chair be made. It would be a fruitful and interesting piece of research, although the literature available on this subject is quite limited, particularly before 1800.
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