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XVII CENTURY ALTAR FRONTAL SHOWING VARIOUS SCENES RELATING TO THE MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES AND FISHES

INTERNATIONAL STUDIO

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MARCH 1931

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The cover reproduces a "Portrait of a Noble Lady" by Ambrosius Benson, Flemish school, about 1540; this painting was formerly in the Metz collection and that of the Marquis of Varese, Milan. Courtesy of Edouard Jonas

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PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY

INTERNATIONAL STUDIO, INC.

572 Madison Avenue, New York

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FRANKLIN COB, *President*; H. J. WHIGHAM, *Vice-President*; AUSTIN W. CLARK, *Treasurer*; K. R. WILLIAMS, *Secretary*; address 572 Madison Avenue, New York. Telephone: Wickersham 2-1800. Cable address: Natseu, New York. This issue is No. 406, Vol. XXVIII.

Subscription price is \$6.00 a year; single copy 75 cents. Postage to all other countries except Canada \$1.00 per year additional. Four weeks' notice is required to change address or start new subscriptions. Entered as second-class matter, March 1, 1897, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Advertising Offices: New York, 572 Madison Avenue; Chicago, 919 North Michigan Avenue; Detroit, General Motors Building; Boston, 126 Newbury Street; San Francisco, Hearst Building; Great Britain, 175 Piccadilly, W. 1, London; France, Belgium, and Spain, 66 Rue Trubout, Paris; Italy, Via Carducci 5, Milan; Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Czechoslovakia, Konradstrasse 4, Munich, Germany.

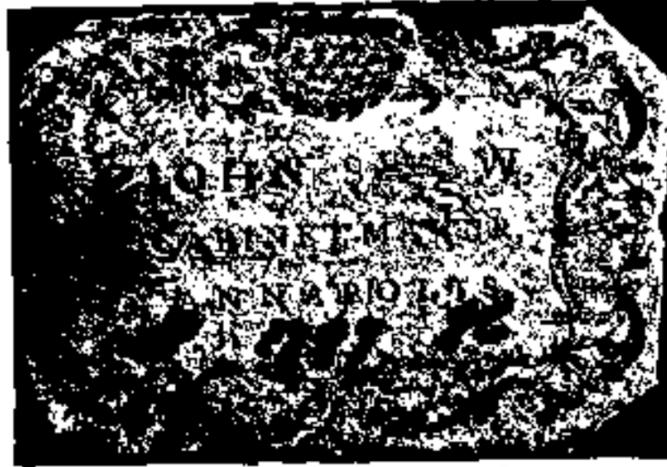
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JOHN SHAW, OF THE GREAT DAYS OF ANNAPOLIS

BY W. M. HORNOR, JR.*

THE LEADING SOUTHERN CABINETMAKER, WHO FLOURISHED IN THE CAPITAL OF MARYLAND IN THE LATE XVIII CENTURY, IS KNOWN THROUGH IMPORTANT LABELED PIECES

TODAY Annapolis is one of the most picturesque and historically interesting cities in America, yet it is not generally appreciated that the Colonial town was an important center of commerce, culture, art, fashion, and distinguished society, rarely equaled in the New World before the Revolution. From 1694, the year Annapolis was named the seat of the provincial government, making it the home of official life, there developed extensive mercantile enterprises which unaccountably relapsed until 1795, when one contemporary chronicler remarked that "the Annapolians have now but *one* square-rigged vessel belonging to their port." "Opulent men," according to a recognized authority, "built costly houses as their city dwellings, if, as was commonly the case, they had large plantations or manors, where they dwelt at other seasons, superintending Maryland's grand staple of that time—Tobacco. Tobacco from America became the smoke in the old world, but brought back very solid revenue, together with all the luxuries of life. Troops of slaves, docile as in the Orient, supplied service. The masters sat on carved chairs, at quaint tables, amid piles of ancestral silverware, and drank punch out of vast, costly bowls from Japan, or sipped Madeira, half a century old. At Annapolis they laid out the best race course in the Colonies and built certainly the first theatre." Not satisfied with these diversions there were assemblies every fortnight, dinners, "three or four times a week, a card party whenever possible, fox-hunting and private balls on every festival"; ample opportunity for a display of the latest styles in wearing apparel, personal finery, equipages, and house furnishings. Evidences of the citizens' cultivation and the splendor of the mansions is attested by some exquisite examples of Georgian architecture that are still standing and greatly admired. Those of Governor Ogle, Secretary Ridout, Charles Carroll, Judge Samuel Chase, Upton Scott, the Randalls,



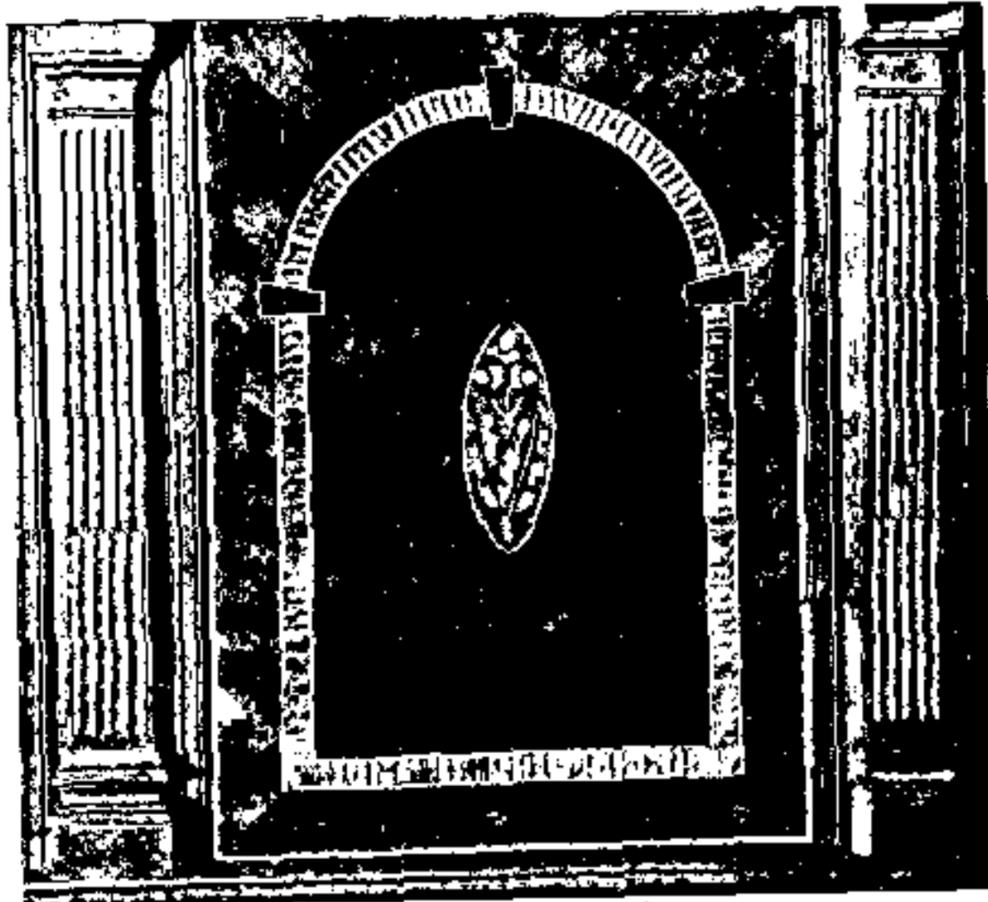
Courtesy of Mr. Edgar G. Miller, Jr.

FIG. 1. JOHN SHAW'S LABEL, BY THOMAS SPARROW

the one erected for William Hammond, but first occupied by Chief Justice Jeremiah Townley Chase, and others are worthy specimens of the comfortable way in which these and similar families lived. Besides the State House, 1772, with its lofty dome and pillared portico; the State Treasury, constructed late in the seventeenth century; and McDowell Hall, dating from the Revolutionary era, the main edifice of St. John's College (chartered in 1784 as a continuation of King William's School that was founded in 1696), all lend a lovely charm to the town that was "whimsically laid out, the streets verging from each other like rays from a center." The whole atmosphere remains essentially English Colonial, as may even be seen by the names of some of the principal thoroughfares—King George's, Prince George's, Hanover, Duke of Gloucester, Shipwright and Doctor, since Franklin.

With such a background, it is only natural that domestic furnishings should closely follow the prevailing English modes. Indeed, Mr. Eddis, an immigrant clergyman wrote during 1771, "The quick importation of fashion from the mother country is really astonishing. I am inclined to believe that a new fashion is adopted earlier by the polished and affluent American, than by many opulent persons in the great metropolis (London); nor are opportunities wanting to display superior elegance."

With the increasing difficulties, relations between England and her Colonies were rapidly becoming more strained, so that patriotic persons decreased their buying of British merchandise; and when the outbreak of hostilities occurred, very few foreign products drifted to American ports. Furniture was no exception, and suffered like the rest. However, the happening made but slight difference for the remarkably high state of cabinet and chairmaking prior to the Revolution in the larger cities especially of New England, New York and Pennsylvania is well known. The



Courtesy of the Misses Magruder

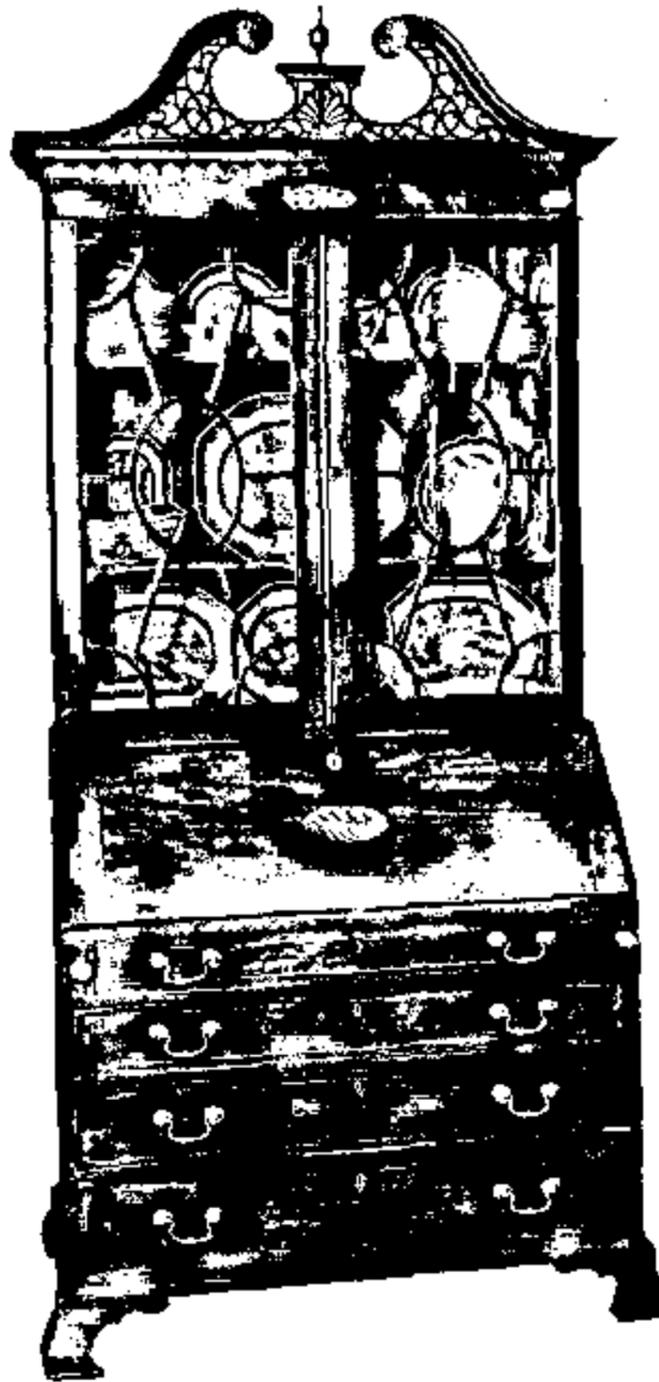
FIG. 2. INLAID DOOR OF SECRETARY (FIG. 3) FROM RANDALL FAMILY

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initial beginning of the Annapolis craftsmen is yet something of a mystery, but judging from the advertisement of John Anderson dated 1746, wherein he terms himself a "Cabinet-maker and Carver, late from Liverpool," he for one was most desirous of supplying "Chairs, Tables, Desks, Bureaus, Dressing Tables, Clock-cases, and all kinds of furniture which is made of Wood, Belonging to a House, in the neatest, cheapest, and newest mode." Anderson died in 1759, but of the mere handful that are understood to exist through their notifications in *The Maryland Gazette*, William Slicer, "Cabinet and Chair-Maker at Mr. James Cannan's, a little below the Market-House, in Annapolis Takes this Method to inform the Public, that he makes and sells the following Articles, all constructed in the most neat and fashionable Manner, viz. Desks, Book-Cases, Escritoirs, Bureaus, Card, Chamber, Parlour, and Tea-Tables; Easy Arm, Parlour and Chamber Chairs; Corner Settees, Clock-Cases, Couches, Dumb-Waiters, Tea Boards, Bottle Boards and Bedsteads &c...". It is quite evident that there was sufficient activity of a superior nature in this field of endeavor for John Shaw and his partner Alexander Chisholm, possibly as leaders of the trade, to import from London in May, 1773, for their own use, and also for sale

among the local handicraftsmen, "a neat and general assortment of Joiners and Cabinetmakers tools," while two years after they offered, still as "cabinet and chair makers, in Church-street, Annapolis . . . A Quantity of mahogany, in logs, plank, and boards, and a variety of looking-glasses in mahogany frames. They likewise do various kinds of turner's work." Under date of November 13, 1776, "The partnership of SHAW and CHISHOLM; cabinet-makers in Annapolis, being now dissolved, those persons who are indebted to them in company are requested to settle the same, as soon as possible, with JOHN SHAW, at the house lately occupied by the company, or with ARCHIBALD CHISHOLM, at the house lately possessed by Mr. Charles Peale in Church-street, where each party intends carrying on their business of cabinet and chair making as formerly." (Peale was none other than the renowned painter who returned to Annapolis from London in 1774 for two years.)

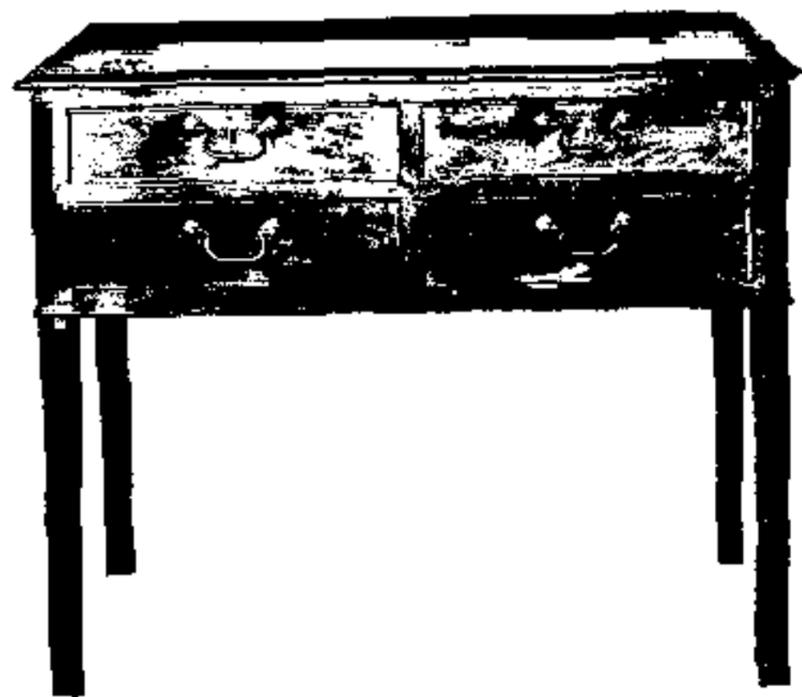
John Shaw is the only individual whose mobiliary output is thus far tangibly connected with Annapolis, so it must necessarily be expected that in the enthusiasm of discovering important labeled pieces erroneous opinions will be voiced on all sides. The inexperienced now eagerly claim that Shaw, or his apprentices, fabricated



Courtesy of the Misses Magruder

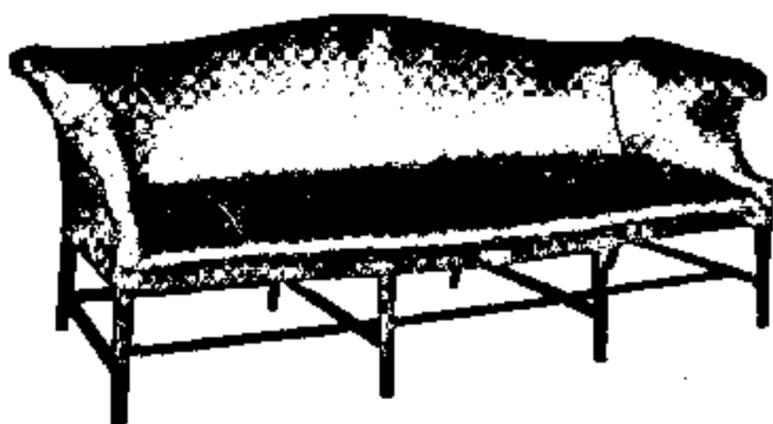


Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. James Bordley, Jr.



St. John's Museum; courtesy of Dr. Henry J. Berkley

FIG. 3. SECRETARY WITH LABEL, 1797. FIG. 4. CELLARETTE LABELED INSIDE LID. FIG. 5. DRESSING TABLE FROM CHARLES CARROLL'S HOME



Courtesy of Mr. Hollyday S. Meeds, Jr.

FIG. 6. ROLL-ARM SOFA WITH SHAW'S ADVERTISEMENT, 1791

practically every article of furniture indigenous to Baltimore, Annapolis, or even Maryland in general which exhibits certain imaginary characteristics, while the more academic, who should possess some degree of genuine knowledge, have asserted that the subject of this account never produced, by his own labor, a single item of furniture, but solely imported his wares. Existing evidence shows conclusively that John Shaw was a cabinet and chairmaker for at least a quarter of a century before the majority of his accredited samples were conceived. There is apparently no documentary proof for the belief that his occupation was that of a merchant, rather than an artificer, and in each advertisement located in *The Maryland Gazette* between 1773 and 1794, he and his associate are referred to as cabinet and chairmakers, mentioning upon one occasion only, the importation of "Joiners and Cabinetmakers tools," while on December 23, 1793, he advertised "FOR SALE, a few LOOKING GLASSES, in gilt and mahogany frames, TEA CADDIES, MAHOGANY KNIFE CASES, BACK-GAMMON TABLES, and a well toned PIANO-FORTE. Complete sets of PIANO-FORTE STRINGS, GERMAN FLUTES of the first quality, a variety of SONGS and DUETS, for the voice and harpsichord, from all the favourite operas, &c. Tutors for the Piano-forte, Guittar, German Flute, and Violin," which cannot by any stretch of the imagination be classed as a stock of furniture, but were in all likelihood accessories consigned from outside sources. Further, Shaw's label, which was designed and engraved by Thomas Sparrow, an Annapolis goldsmith and one of the earliest American engravers, distinctly affirms his vocation, but if additional authoritative data be required, his will, dated 1828, should appease any doubt that might arise, for he bequeaths to his son George Shaw, "my mahogany book case which was made many years ago by myself." This secretary could easily have been similar to that pictured in Fig. 3, and was, with the exception of the grandfather clock, the highest valued of all the family household possessions. Itemized statements during the Post-Revolutionary period reveal his various commissions for the State of Maryland, and his services as armorer for a number of years following the War of Independence. John Shaw charged to making



Courtesy of Mrs. Miles White, Jr.

FIG. 7. CARD TABLE LABELED ON SWINGING LEG

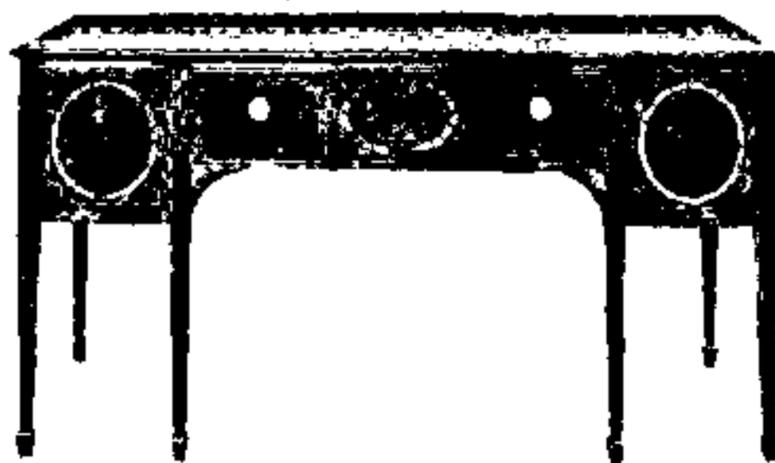
"2 Tables for the Bar of the House of Delegates," "2 pine Tables for the Committee rooms at the Stadt house," "4 Mahogany Rulers for the Auditors office," "taking Down the pictures & window curtains in the Stadt house," "6 Spitting Boxes for the Senate," "a Coffin for an Old Soldier," "putting Divisions in a bookcase & a lock on a desk in the Aud' office," and "4 months & 18 Days Salary as Armourer @ £50 pr Annum"; the total amount exceeding five hundred pounds, between 1780 and 1785.

Quite recently an eminent museum director has said that Shaw, not being a professional cabinetmaker, brought all the furniture bearing his label from Europe, and still others have averred that Shaw was absolutely not an artisan. Heretofore these little paper notifications have unqualifiedly convinced, to the entire satisfaction of the public, the identity of the maker, the location of the shop, and when the object was made. Now however, with this spectacular and highly valuable "find," innumerable questions will naturally be forthcoming. For instance: is it American, or English? From what part of England did this furniture come? Admittedly it all has a distinct English feeling. Did Shaw employ a

different label on his American pieces, or did they remain unmarked? To the sensible, the answer should be obvious. Yet, why should not the students of furniture and their fabricators realize that Shaw may have received orders to import selected articles for household utility from the mother country, and he would surely reproduce them so accurately and carefully as to defy detection of local construction if this were desired? Or perhaps a wealthy patron, having purchased a card table in London, upon his return, might wish a duplicate, so one would be acquired from Shaw. In this way, as well as from drawings published by the great masters, Sheraton, Hepplewhite, Manwaring

and others, it was a matter of course to be able to ascertain the styles considered popular in each season, more especially in time of war or self-imposed embargo.

It is true the examples illustrated are typically English in design, structural details and actually in certain cases the lumber. In spite of this, is there anyone willing to assert and prove with logical reasoning why John Shaw could not

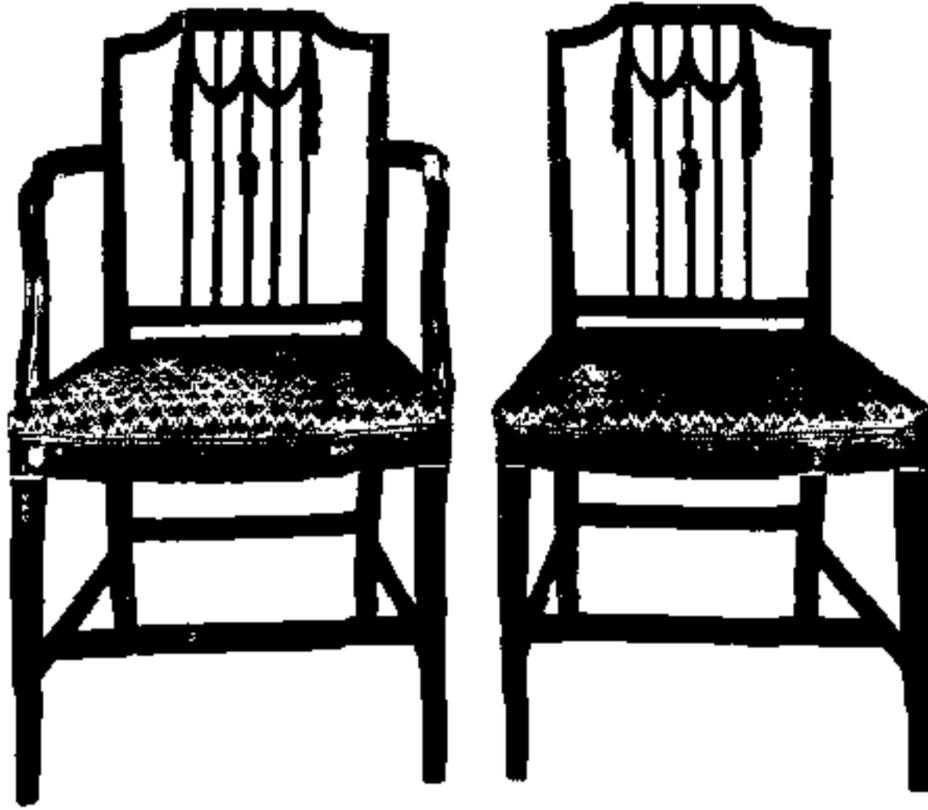


Courtesy of Mr. Blunbarrd Randall

FIG. 8. SIDEBOARD MADE IN 1797, WITH SAME LABEL AS FIG. 3

have, or did not make every furniture exemplification here pictured? It must have been customary then, as now, that a foreign innovation attracting attention, was forthwith copied for display in the showroom, hence it is extremely difficult to say that a particular chair or sofa or secretary, however related to London patterns, could not reasonably have emanated from Liverpool, Dublin, Philadelphia or Annapolis.

Numerous well founded, but particularly limited observations upon the structural methods, usual stylistic tendencies and prevailing materials, forming the basis of discrimination between furniture of domestic and European manufacture, are liberally expounded, but it must be remembered that everyone of these precepts is subject for the exception that proves the rule. Gradually the old theories are being displaced by less antiquated contentions which enable a fuller understanding. Every lyre-back chair ever found in America of any beauty (and how many of British ancestry?), is unhesitatingly credited to Duncan Phyfe, yet in 1794, before Phyfe is veritably known to have been conversant with this classic motif for cabinetware, a gentleman who dined



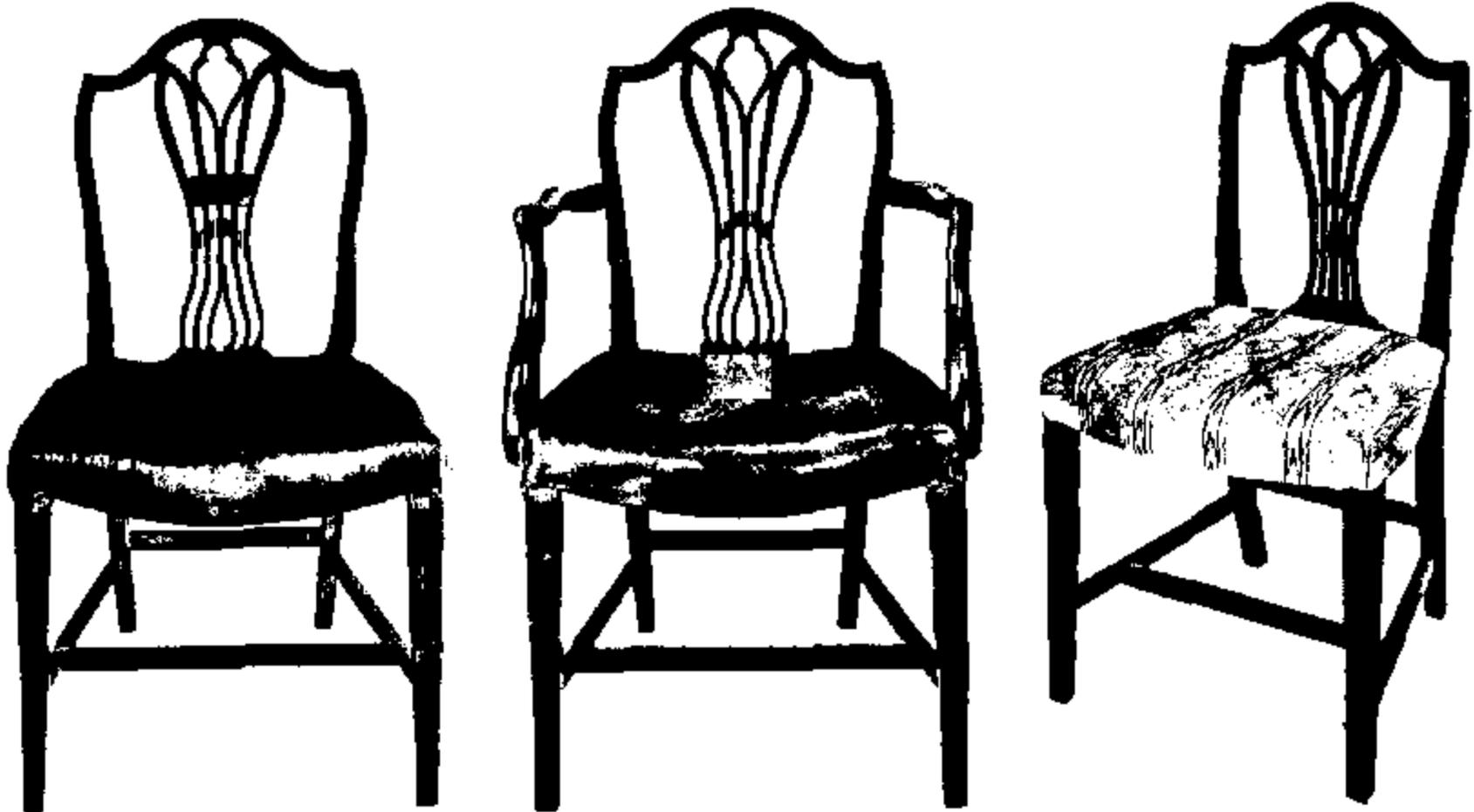
Courtesy of Dr. J. Hull Pleasants

FIG. 9. MORE URBANE CHAIRS CLOSELY RESEMBLING SHAW PIECES

in Philadelphia with the celebrated Mrs. William Bingham described her home in this vein: "I found a magnificent house and gardens in the best English style, with elegant and even superb furniture. The chairs of the drawing-room were from Seddons, in London, of the newest taste—the backs in form of a lyre." Until recently the shield-back molded-leg Hepplewhite chairs *without stretchers* were always classified as positively English, but with the unique uncovering and first publication in *International Studio*, June, 1930, of two of the

original set of eight made by Jacob Wayne in the Quaker City in June, 1796, hoards of previously accepted English models, together with those having the spade foot or splayed supports, are now unchallenged American productions. This demonstrates the fallacy of drawing conclusions too rapidly.

There is no consistent thought in holding to the opinion that any element in the known Shaw examples could not have been, or at least never was constructed on this side of the Atlantic. The author makes no pretensions that John Shaw, or in fact any cabinet or chairmaker of the day personally elaborated the fruits of their (Continued on page 80)



Courtesy of Maryland Historical Society

Courtesy of the Misses McGruder

Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Wm. A. Wirth

FIG. 10. FROM MARYLAND SENATE CHAMBER; FIG. 11. MATCHING ARM CHAIR; FIG. 12. SIDE CHAIR BEARING SHAW'S LABEL, 1793



Courtesy of Les Archives Photographiques

MANET'S "LA DAME AUX EVANTAILS," NOW IN THE LOUVRE

JOHN SHAW OF ANNAPOLIS

(Continued from page 47)

shops for there were many ambitious artists attached to the larger establishments as well as numbers of independent carvers who pursued the calling, ornamenting wood for the architect and cabinet maker alike. At Annapolis there were just such men; Henry Crouch, "Carver, from London, Now living in Annapolis Makes any sort of Carv'd Work for Houses and ships . . .", and the famous Hercules Courtenay, "Carver and Gilder, from London," who is plausibly suggested as the decorator of the Benjamin Randolph "sample chairs," which were for years claimed to be of English inception because of the close rendition of elaborate details from Thomas Chippendale's book, and since the stump rear leg is so rarely encountered in America. The exquisite scroll-board on the handsome secretary could very easily have been carried to completion by certain of the French or British carvers who emigrated to the Colonies. The molded feet too are decidedly at variance from the usual

Colonial adaptations, but let it be understood that an Annapolis craftsman would have experienced no trouble whatsoever in bringing forth their contour, than the shape more frequently found. The lower fret, inlay upon the lid and interior door, are analogous to the designs hitherto seen on authentic Philadelphia and New Jersey work.

Collectors will hesitate in proclaiming the Hepplewhite chairs, Figs. 10, 11, and 12, American, principally because of the sweep seat. Forgetting for the moment all prejudicial rudiments, does it not seem rather unnatural to voice such a dissension, when this identical form was so popular for years in the British Isles? Likewise there is little logic in the assertion that the sofa, Fig. 6, is alien just because the back is not so good, not quite so sweeping, as the American! Yes, it looks like the proper time to form a new foundation for our knowledge and a new estimation of the value of our hackneyed arguments.