

JOHN SHAW, CABINETMAKER OF ANNAPOLIS

By LOUISE E. MAGRUDER

John Shaw, cabinetmaker of Annapolis, was introduced to me by telegram in the winter of 1930: "Please locate, read, and report fully anything of business interest in will of John Shaw, Annapolis, cabinetmaker, dying probably either in 1806 or twenty eight; also list tools or stock given on inventory; want deeds for shop on Church Street or elsewhere."

When the will was located in the office of the Anne Arundel County Register of Wills at the Annapolis Courthouse it was found that it had been made in September, 1826, and probated on 9 March 1829; and that it contained the sentence: "I give to my son George Shaw my mahogany bookcase which was made many years ago by myself." The inventory, account and account of sales were disappointing because they added little to the knowledge of his possessions; but the will is worth quoting at length:

I John Shaw of the City of Annapolis in the State of Maryland being in health of body and of sound and disposing mind, [etc.]

Item, I give and devise unto my son James Shaw and his heirs and assigns forever, all that Lot and parcel of ground with the buildings thereon lying on Doctor Street in the City of Annapolis and running forty one feet from Jacob H. Slemaker's House to the Courthouse fence then at right angles Seventy Seven feet until it intersects Temple Street then forty one feet with Temple Street then to the beginning on Doctor Street.

Item, I give and devise to my five children Mary Shaw, Elizabeth Franklin, Thomas Shaw, James Shaw and George Shaw and their heirs and assigns forever as Tenants in common and not as joint tenants all the rest and residue of my Real estate lying and being in the City of Annapolis or elsewhere. And it is my wish and desire that the house in which I now reside may not be sold out of the family, but that my son George Shaw occupy the same and that my said son George Shaw pay to my other children a reasonable rent for the same annually. It is also my wish and desire that my son George Shaw should have the use of the

Store House he now occupys together with the warehouse and book binders room attached to the same as long as he may think proper and that he pay a rent of one hundred dollars annually to my other children for the same.

Item, I give unto my daughter Mary Shaw my negress Deborah Tootell and her child Ann also the Bedstead and bedding complete and all the furniture generally used in her room.

Item, I give unto my daughter Elizabeth Franklin my negress Kitty Carroll.

Item, I give to my son Thomas Shaw my negro John said son Thomas to take possession of said negro immediately after my death, so that he should not be permitted to remain with the family or in Annapolis.

Item, I give unto my son George Shaw my negro James.

Item, I give unto my grandson John Franklin my negro Henry.

Item, I give to my son George Shaw my mahogany bookcase which was made many years ago by myself provided he gives in exchange to my Son in law Thomas Franklin the Bookcase now used by the said George and now in his possession.

Item, I give and bequeath to my five children before named all the rest and residue of my personal estate to be equally divided between them. And Lastly I do constitute and hereby appoint my sons Thomas Shaw, James Shaw and George Shaw executors of this my last will and Testament. In Witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal this 18th. day of September in the year of Our Lord 1826.

JOHN SHAW (seal)

Witnesses: Jonas Green, Jona. Weedon, Louis Gassaway.

On January 7, 1829, son-in-law Thomas Franklin was added to the executors named above in codicil and signed with his mark. The will was probated 9 March 1829, and on 17 March 1829 the executors, James Shaw, George Shaw and Thomas Franklin came to swear to the will. 12 March 1829 Thomas Shaw, of Frederick County, Maryland, refused to act as executor.¹

Shaw's obituary in the *Maryland Gazette*, March 5, 1829, is very interesting. It runs as follows:

COMMUNICATED—Departed this life on the morning of Thursday the 26th. ult. Mr. John Shaw, in the 83rd. year of his age. In noting the demise of this gentleman, justice to his memory requires that we should say something more of him than that he has finished his course upon earth. There were points in his character, which received the earnest approbation of good men while he lived, and which, though we shall

¹ Wills 40, folio 23-27, Register of Wills, Annapolis Courthouse.

barely mention the most prominent of them, deserve to be remembered and imitated, now he has disappeared from among us.

Mr. Shaw was not only one of the oldest and most respectable inhabitants of this city, but, until disqualified for active life by age, and its concomitant infirmities, was one of the most useful of them. In the gallant and arduous struggle for our independence, he espoused the cause of freedom, and filled the then truly responsible and difficult station of armourer to the state. In that office he acquitted himself completely to the satisfaction of the public as was shewn by his having been continued in it many years after that struggle had successfully terminated. He was gifted by nature with strength, as well as fortitude of mind, and possessed a degree of self control which rarely permitted the calmness of temper, for which he was remarkable, to be disturbed. Thus happily constituted he pursued his way, content in the conscious rectitude of his heart, and the just aim of his actions. Notwithstanding his earthly existence had been protracted, by Divine Providence, to a term beyond that allotted to most men, his whole conduct remained free from reproach, and he descended into the grave, survived by a fair and unblemished reputation, and in peace with the human family. He was not afraid to die! A life characterised by industry, temperance, strict integrity and punctual attention, to religious duty had stripped death of its terrors, and prepared him for that awful event. To conclude—he was a good man, who lived sincerely beloved by his family and deservedly esteemed by his fellow citizens and has, we trust, passed from this world of care, to partake of the joys promised to the righteous.

The publication of the information about the bookcase precipitated me into the controversy that was taking place between New York and Philadelphia "authorities" as to whether John Shaw was, really, a cabinetmaker or just a seller and importer of furniture. Being bewildered by the technical discussions that followed, I decided to go into the question from the angle I could understand, by putting together public records made at the time in Annapolis which are still available.

The tombstone in the family lot at St. Anne's Cemetery on Northwest Street, Annapolis is still in good condition. The inscription thereon reads: "Here Lie the Remains of Mr. John Shaw who was born in the City of Glasgow on the 25th. of April O. S. 1745 and died in the city of Annapolis on 26th. January 1829 In the 84th. year of his age." This lets us know he was about twenty five years old when we find in Judgments 62, DD # 18, 1771 to 1772, folio 430, at the Hall of Records, Annapolis, the convincing item: "26 April 1770 John Shaw, cabinet maker against Thomas Sparrow, struck off, defendant paying the cost."

The word cabinetmaker clearly separates this John Shaw from that other John Shaw, Surgeon, Living on Lot 102 on East Street between King George and Prince George Streets whose wife, born Ruth Worthington, administered on his estate in 1775.

On 23 February 1773 the *Maryland Gazette* printed an advertisement: "Joshua Collins musical instrument Maker and Tuner from Manchester begs leave to acquaint the Public, that he has commenced the said branches of business, at Messrs. SHAW AND CHISHOLM'S Cabinet Shop;" and on 27 May 1773: "Just Imported from London, and to be sold by Shaw and Chisholm, Cabinet and Chaitmakers, in Church Street, near the dock, a neat and general assortment of Joiners and Cabinet makers tools."

It is probable that John Shaw lived over his shop on "Church Street near the dock" for some years. On 24 May 1784 David Long, planter, of Queen Anne's County, Maryland, sold to

JOHN SHAW, Cabinetmaker of the City of Annapolis for £510 current money Lott 73 in Annapolis begin[ning] 100 feet from place where a stake formerly stood in Church Street being the end of the first course of the lot as expressed in deeds of conveyance made by George Johnson to Sewell Long in August 1751 and being also the beginning of the 2nd course of the said lot and the aforesaid beginning of the part now sold being the place from whence a division fence begins and runs across the said lot to the Stadthouse Circle running thence the aforesaid 2nd course of the lott bounding on Church Street until it reaches the Lott now occupied by Mary Johnson the distance of 105½ feet then north 26 degrees east 105 feet to the Stadt house Circle then by and with said Circle until intersected by a northern 26 degrees east course running with the division fence aforesaid from the aforesaid beginning of the part now sold together with all Improvements.²

In the *Maryland Gazette*, 26 August 1784, we find:

Archibald Chisholm, To be sold at Public Sale 25 Sept. at the house where the subscriber now lives a variety of household furniture consisting of beds, bedsteads, tables & chairs, a second hand spinnet in good order, a very good handmill; a small collection of valuable books & sundry other articles. At same time will be sold, if not sold before, a neat riding chair & harness & a very elegant new mahogany framed billiard table, with 3 sets of new balls, tacks & cues complete. The sale to begin at 10 o'clock. N. B. I want a healthy boy about 14 or 15 years of age, of a good character, as an apprentice to the cabinet-making business. A. C.

² Anne Arundel County Deeds NH # 2, folio 20, Hall of Records, Annapolis.

Again, in the *Maryland Gazette* for several issues beginning 8 November 1784:

Just Imported & to be sold at the house of JOHN SHAW, opposite the south end of the Stadt-house a great variety of looking glasses, teachests, billiard balls, pictures framed & glazed, maps of North-America, divided according to the preliminary articles, signed at Versailles 20 January 1783, in which are particularly described the boundaries of United States General Atlas describing the whole Universe being a complete & new collection of the most approved maps extant engraved in the best manner on 52 copper plates, corrected with the greatest care and augmented from the latest discoveries down to 1782. SHAW & CHISHOLM.

The firm of Shaw & Chisholm was not dissolved without some difficulties. Chisholm brought suit against John Shaw Cabinetmaker, to recover the sum of £200. He exhibited Shaw's bond dated 26 July 1790 concerning a lot of ground on Cornhill Street leased of Charles Wallace, Esqr.³ There is also on record an indenture dated 25 November 1794 "between Archibald Chisholm of City of Annapolis, cabinetmaker, and John Shaw, of same place, cabinetmaker; Whereas Charles Wallace by indenture of lease 25 June 1770 leased to Thomas Hewitt a lot of ground in Annapolis for 99 years begining at William Corie's lot . . . down Cornhill Street, until it intersects East Stteet," which Hewitt assigned 2 November 1775 to John Shaw & Archibald Chisholm, said Chisholm for £34/15 sold to said Shaw the premises for the residue of the term.⁴

The services now rendered by morticians were part of the activities of cabinetmakers in earlier times. From Chancery Paper 4357 at the Land Office of Maryland it appears that John Shaw 14 Sept. 1794 furnished a "coffin for a child inside lynced £1/2/, cash paid the sexton 7/62" and Chancery Paper 3620 shows he was in charge 10 April 1795 of a funeral costing £19/12/6. There were "a raised top coffin with black cloth lined and shrouded £12/10, a case for ditto 17/6; use of the pall and hearse £2/5; making a shroud 22/6; paid the sexton 22/6; to making hatbands and superintending funeral £1/5." For the funeral of the relict July, 1811, he furnished "a black coffin with raised top lined and shrouded £4/10, a case for ditto £1/2/6; to use of pall and hearse £2/5; to making hatbands and sending tickets out 15/, total

³ Court Proceedings, Anne Arundel County, 1792.

⁴ Deeds, Anne Arundel County NH # 7, folio 342.

£8/12/6." On 13 October 1800 Thomas Jennings, administrator of Thomas Jennings, Esqr., late of Anne Arundel County deceased, swore to paying "John Shaw on account of funeral expenses."⁵

Various apprentices were bound to Shaw:

15 August 1798. Washington Tuck 17 years old 22 March 1798 is bound to John Shaw to be taught trade of a cabinet maker & joiner [Shaw agrees] to find him in sufficient meat, drink, washing, lodging & cloathing & to cause him to be taught reading, writing & arithmetic as far as the rule of three & at the expiration of his servitude to pay him his freedom dues agreeably to Act of Assembly;⁶

19 May 1800. Henry Lusby 17 years old July 1800 his mother present in Court is bound to John Shaw to learn the trade of cabinet maker;⁷

9 April 1806. This Indenture witnesseth that Jonathan Weedon son of the late Richard Weedon hath put himself, with the consent of his uncle & guardian Richard Weedon, Jr., voluntarily & of his free will & accord apprentice to John Shaw cabinetmaker, carpenter & joiner in the City of Annapolis from this date for 6 years 5 months 20 days and until he arrives at 21 years which will happen on 22 September 1811.⁸

It will be remembered that Jonathan Weedon was one of the witnesses to the will of John Shaw on 18 September 1826.

Of course there are many records which show John Shaw engaging in all sorts of activities. These records quoted are to show that Shaw was a cabinetmaker, not just a business man. If further evidence is needed, here is Shaw's letter to General Smallwood:

June 24th, 1789.
Annapolis,

Sir

The Chairs you sent to be repair^d had been done ever since the second week after they came here. I saw Lazar the packet man Some time ago who promised to call for them the first time he was going to Potowmack but he has not don it yet—Your sideboard table is done all but the top, for which I have sent to philadelphia for the Best peice of mahogany that can be got to make it of—I shall be glad you would send to the glass man about the bottles as I expect to finish the table very soon I shall esteem it as a particular favour if [you] will be so kind as to send up the ballance of your Accompt as I am very much distressed for want of cash at present I am Sir your Excelenceys most obed^t & much oblig^d Humble^t Serv^t

John Shaw⁹

⁵ Administration Accounts 89, 1797-1802, Folio 350, Hall of Records, Annapolis.

⁶ Proceedings Court 1797-1805. Orphans Court, Anne Arundel County, folio 31.

⁷ *Ibid.*, folio 92.

⁸ A. A. Co., Index to Record of Receipts, 1896-20, JG 2, folio 197.

⁹ Chancery Papers 1819, Land Office, Annapolis.