



Wye Oak Desk

McMartin & Beggins Furniture Makers, Inc.

White oak, 2004

Length: 74", Width: 42", Height: 31"

Collection of the Maryland State Archives, MSA SC 1545-3268

When the Wye Oak fell during a thunderstorm on June 6, 2002, it was mourned throughout Maryland and the nation. It had stood for some 460 years on the Eastern Shore, witness to all of Maryland's colonial and post-colonial history. The tree was owned by a succession of private owners over the centuries and was purchased by the state in 1939. In 1941, the white oak was declared the Maryland State Tree, and the Wye Oak was long recognized as the largest white oak in the United States.



Wye Oak, by Marion Warren



Wye Oak, after falling, June 2002

As part of the process of preserving the remains of the tree, the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of General Services worked together to make sure that the wood was secured and thoroughly inventoried, including tagging and numbering each piece. Among the many suggestions made for how the wood should be used, one of the most frequently mentioned was that a significant piece of furniture should be created for the State House, including a legacy desk for all of Maryland's governors.

In the spring of 2003, two cabinetmakers from Saint Michaels, Jim McMartin and Jim Beggins were selected to design and construct the desk. McMartin and Beggins oversaw the milling of the wood at the state nursery in Preston taking care to select those pieces that promised to have the most highly figured surfaces. After drying for a year, construction of the desk began in 2004, designed in a classic pedestal style and using traditional joinery techniques, including hand-cut dovetails and mortise-and-tenon joints.



*Howe's Desk made from the Wye Oak
designed by McMartin & Beggins Furniture Makers*



Original design presented by McMartin & Beggins Jim McMartin selecting wood for milling

Finishing details include inset sheepskin leather writing surfaces, embossed with the Great Seal of Maryland, and a pull-out writing surface featuring the obverse of the Great Seal.



Jim Beggins applying veneers



Jim McMartin hand-cutting dovetail joints

The creation of the desk was initiated and overseen by the staff of the Maryland Commission on Artistic Property of the Maryland State Archives. Construction of the desk was paid for by private funds. It was unveiled by Governor Robert L. Ehrlich in 2004.



Governor Ehrlich and Henry Rosenberg unveil the Wye Oak desk in the rotunda of the State House on November 18, 2004.



Governor Larry Hogan and granddaughter Daniella Velez, March 2015.

Wye Oak Facts:

Location: Wye Oak State Park, Wye Mills, Talbot County

Date it fell: June 6, 2002

Age: 460 years

Height: 96 feet

Circumference of trunk: 32 feet

Diameter of trunk: 10 feet

Spread of crown: 119 feet; it covered one-third of an acre