The Chest of Drawers in America, 1635–1730
The Origins of the Joined Chest of Drawers

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SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH domestic furniture has so often become disassociated from its provenance that the history of various forms is not now easy to reconstruct. Unlike silver, furniture has no hallmarks to indicate where it was made and no maker’s marks to tell who made it. Only a few objects survive with carved or incised dates to tell when they were made. As a consequence, ideas about the origins of furniture forms that appeared in England during this period have generally been formulated from little more than educated guesses and genteel assumptions.

Few forms of furniture have suffered from this process more than the joined chest of drawers, which has been the loser in two ways: the educated guesses of respected writers on the subject have been taken as definitive statements and have forestalled further research, while the genteel assumptions have evoked an image of evolution observed, which seems to bring with it quasi-scientific legitimacy. The ring of authority echoes through the statements of a number of authors, both English and American, who have essentially repeated, without critical examination, the idea that the chest of drawers “evolved” sometime in the seventeenth century by adding to the chest form first one drawer and then another, and so on, and then removing the chest. Others have conveyed this notion by implication. Considering the popularity of this idea, evidence in abundance ought to be available to support it. In fact, English seventeenth-century joined chests with even a single long drawer or allusions to this form in documents are dishearteningly rare, and none have been discovered that predate the highly developed and beautifully crafted chests of drawers with doors made by London joiners during the reign of Charles I, through the Commonwealth period, and into the reign of Charles II (fig. 1). Further, if we were to base our concepts of the relationship of chests with drawers to chests of drawers on the documents that mention domestic furniture in America, chests of drawers occur earlier in the seventeenth century than chests with drawers—a fact that seems to indicate that if New England were considered alone the reverse of the old idea is true: the advantages of the chest of drawers could easily have suggested to English joiners that their joined chests might profit from having drawers added to them.

Another factor that has needlessly obscured our ideas about the history of English furniture in the seventeenth century has been the nearly universal failure of authors to distinguish between village and urban work. Current research, as well as consider-


2 The questions under consideration here are not affected by such chests with drawers as the one now in Southwark Cathedral, which was once owned by Hugh Offley and very likely predates 1589. See Edwards, Shorter Dictionary, p. 189 fig. 13. This chest is not part of the English joiner’s tradition. If it were made in London, a supposition which cannot as yet be demonstrated, it was made by a northern European, probably German, craftsman working there, and that craftsman was not properly a joiner, using panel-and-frame, mortise-and-tenon construction, but rather a woodworker who used the techniques of board construction, dovetailed joints, and veneer that would later be associated in England with cabinetmakers’ techniques. The drawers lined with a conifer rather than oak and bottom running
able surviving furniture, shows that the forms and ornament of earlier generations continued to be used in rural villages and provincial towns long after the style embodied in them had ceased to be fashionable in London. An example of this kind of error is to be seen in S. W. Wolsey and R. W. P. Luff, *Furniture in England*, where a cupboard with drawers and lift-up top of provincial origin is illustrated and its date estimated to be too early.³

Likewise, documentary evidence does not support the rather mystical notion that crude forms of the domestic chest of drawers developed spontaneously among joiners working in the traditions of rural or village England and the idea that must inevitably flow from it—that these forms were later adopted and refined in such major urban centers as London.⁴ The mania to be fashionable did not operate in that way during the seventeenth century. The eyes of the tastemakers of England at that time were firmly fastened on the Continent and not on the English countryside, and it is from the Continent

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that new stylistic ideas and new forms of furniture, already fully
devolved as a rule, were introduced into England. The idea that extant
joiners’ chests of
drawers with oak carcasses and rude carving could predate the
Continental-influenced, London-made
e examples with exotic veneers, fine joinery, brilli-
antly turned classical half spindles, and bone and
mother-of-pearl inlay simply cannot be taken
seriously.

Misconceptions about the way in which a joiner
made furniture have also muddled our ideas. The
facade of a “chest of drawers” illustrated by Wolsey
and Luff, for example, lacks a top rail—a construc-
tion that could never have been conceived by a
seventeenth-century joiner. This object appears to
have been made up from an old chest. A chest in
Helen Comstock’s American Furniture has under-
gone the same treatment. 5

None of the surviving chests of drawers can
presently be proved to predate the earliest example
of the London group, which bears the incised date
1647. 6 This elegant piece of furniture, with its tall
doors flanked by a range of drawers above and
below, is significant because it is dated, but it is
atypical of the usual form, which most often has two
decorated drawers in the upper case and three
drawers behind the ornamented doors of the lower
case, like the example illustrated in figure 1. This
form represents dual high points in the history of
English furniture. For one, it demonstrates the high
level of skill attained by London joiners in the gen-
eration before they were replaced by cabinetmakers
as the creators of the most fashionable furniture in
England; for another, it represents the innovation,
which occurred on English soil, of a new and endur-
ing form—the chest of drawers. The appearance of
a new form is sufficiently rare in the international
history of seventeenth-century furniture to require
celebration.

The word innovation seems more appropriate
than invention in this case because the form that was
adapted for the English chest of drawers with doors
has its immediate prototype in Continental furni-
ture—the so-called Zeeland kas (fig. 2). This type of

cupboard, well known in the Netherlands, is a con-
temporary of the chest of drawers but differs from
it in that it has only a single, small drawer hidden in
the ornamented frieze separating the upper and
lower sections. The large, decorated doors of both
sections conceal shelves. This particular Dutch ex-
ample is said to have been made around the middle
of the seventeenth century, but there can be little
doubt that kas in this style were made in the north-
er Netherlands somewhat earlier. A fully de-
veloped and richly carved Flemish-style kas from
the vicinity of Middleburg, for example, may well
be earlier, and in all likelihood, Flemish examples
predate those of Holland, just as French or Italian
examples probably predate those of Flanders. 7

The date at which drawers replaced shelves will
doubtless never be discovered. Yet the fact remains
that the joiner’s chest of drawers—with or without
doors—is an unknown form in surviving Continen-
tal furniture of the seventeenth century. In con-
trast, the large number of surviving English examples
implies that the process of transformation from
kas to chest of drawers occurred in England, pos-
sibly among the Dutch joiners who were most inti-
mate with the form and were present in London
early in the seventeenth century, but more likely
among their English neighbors, for reasons that
follow. 8

The earliest English chests of drawers with
doors are all roughly alike in form and size but may
be arranged into two distinctive types according
to their ornamentation. One group is primarily deco-
rated with moldings applied to the facade in
geometrical patterns. An outstanding example of
this type was owned by Col. Norman Colville in
1924, when it was illustrated but not discussed by
Margaret Jourdain (fig. 5). 6 Geometrical decoration
was common in Netherlandish joinery during the
second quarter of the seventeenth century, but the
particular style manifest in these English chests of

5 Wolsey and Luff, Furniture in England, fig. 20; Helen Com-
stock, American Furniture: A Complete Guide to Seventeenth, Eigh-
teneth, and Early Nineteenth Century Styles (New York: Viking Press,
1962), fig. 60.

6 See Margaret Jourdain, English Decoration and Furniture of
the Early Renaissance (1500-1650): An Account of Its Development
and Characteristic Forms (London: B. T. Batsford, 1924), p. 225
fig. 310. Edwards, Shorter Dictionary, p. 198 fig. 1, also illustrates
this piece of furniture but gives no precise date for its creation,
which suggests that he never saw it. I have examined examples
dated between 1652 and 1667.

7 T. H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, Catalogus van meubelen (Am-
dterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1952), no. 106. I am indebted to Prof.
Lunsingh Scheurleer for suggestions concerning the Zeeland
cupboards. For a French example with octagonal, decorated
panels, see John Glaog, Guide to Furniture Styles: English and
French, 1450 to 1850 (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972),
p. 74.

8 A list of 405 master craftsmen from northern Europe as
well as 72 journeymen and apprentices who were working in
London is to be found in Benno M. Forman, “Continental Furni-
ture Craftsmen in London: 1531–1625,” Furniture History 7

9 Jourdain, English Decoration, p. 226 fig. 311. Another is
illustrated in Herbert Cescinsky and Ernest R. Gribble, Early
English Furniture and Woodwork, vol. 2 (London: George Rout-
ledge and Sons, 1922), p. 87 fig. 117.
Fig. 2. Kas, Zeeland Province, the Netherlands, circa 1650. Walnut, oak, palisander, and ebony. (Kestner Museum, Hanover, West Germany.)

drawers is more closely akin to that being done in Holland than to that of Flanders. Indeed, the exact style is illustrated by two cupboards, said to be "holländische Schränke," in the Thaulow Museum, Kiel. One of these Continental cupboards has small, applied panels accented with turned columns that give the impression of a mannerist version of trompe l’oeil arches. Such arches are a common motif on the second and largest group of English chests of drawers, which differ from the purely geometrical style in that their facades are enriched with inlaid mother-of-pearl and bone. All the dated English examples are of this type. Both types have applied half spindles and exotic veneers. In the first type, the applied work is often a classical pedestal (fig. 4); in the second, the veneered panels are often octagonal in shape and frame a circular turned molding that is inset with keystones (see fig. 1). A third group of these chests of drawers has attributes of both of the purer groups (figs. 5, 6). None of them have carved ornament.

It is possible that the differences between the two basic types of English chests of drawers may be accounted for by the fact that one style was made earlier than the other. It is equally possible that both began to appear in London at about the same time but were made by two different schools of joiners located in different sections of the city. We cannot know for sure. What can be shown without question, however, is the fact that the decorative techniques and motifs used on these chests of drawers were present in London before the earliest of the surviving examples was made. Inlaid mother-of-pearl and bone is common on the stocks of guns made there in the sixteenth century. The technique was practiced by the craftsman of uncommon skill who executed the stock of a matchlock made around 1580 for London Haberdasher’s Company and another for an equally famous petronel dated 1584, now in the National Museum, Copenhagen. Although the chests of drawers are inlaid in this manner, no workmanship of such fine quality was ever lavished upon them, which suggests that none of them could have been made as early as these weapons. Indeed, the inlay on the furniture is composed of much larger pieces of material, and the

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patterns are much looser. Similar coarsening can be observed in the inlay of later London guns, such as the snaphance from the armory of Gustave II Adolph of Sweden, made after 1611 but before 1632, now in the Livrustkamaren, Stockholm.\footnote{See Earl Firearms of Great Britain and Ireland from the Collection of Clay P. Bedford (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972), no. 102; and Howard L. Blackmore, Guns and Rifles of the World (London: B. T. Batsford, 1969), fig. 152. R. E. G. Kirk and Ernest F. Kirk, Returns of Aliens Dwelling in the City and Suburbs of London . . . Henry VIII to . . . James I, in Publications of the Huguenot Society 10, pts. 1–4 (Aberdeen, 1900–1908), list about fifty gunmakers and gunstock makers who were aliens. These men came from Holland, Germany, Flanders, and Burgundy. They are listed by their trades in the Kirks’ indexes. Blackmore, Guns and Rifles, fig. 153, and another, undated example at fig. 154.} The London-made hilt of a sword with a blade that bears the inscription “HOVNSLOE—1634” is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 7). By the time that this style of decoration appears on London furniture, the once vigorous floral forms that ornament the gunstocks have become abstracted to such an extent that they are scarcely recognizable. The decline in quality of execution suggests that the work was done by second- or third-generation craftsmen who were practicing a waning tradition by rote without any new infusion of vitality either in the imagery used or in the techniques of accomplishing it. Chests of drawers inlaid in this manner could logically have been made in a part of London where gunstock makers were available to do ornamental work, perhaps in East Smithfield, where alien craftsmen such as “Lambrecht Janssen, van Deventer” (immigrated 1581) or “Christophel Pin, van Gulick” (modern Júlich; immigrated 1607) lived, or by Jan Lambrecht[son?], who may have been Lambrecht Janssen’s son, or by “Jan Gonnell, hier gheboren” of alien parents. All of these men are listed in the Dutch Church records of 1617, and the trade of each is listed as bus en lay maker.\footnote{See Forman, “Continental Craftsmen,” pp. 114, 117; and Kirk and Kirk, Returns of Aliens, pt. 2 p. 145, pt. 3 pp. 161, 181. The Kirks list no fewer than eight alien gunstock makers between 1568 and 1625. I am indebted to Prof. Lunsingh Scheurleer for the information that bus is an archaic word for gun. See also, Oxford English Dictionary, 1933, s.v. “harquebus.”} It is equally possible that chests with this type of decoration were made in Southwark where the greatest number of immigrant craftsmen lived at that time.

The applied, Romanesque arch in deep perspective that figures prominently in the iconog-
Chest of Drawers

Fig. 7. Sword, Hounslow, Middlesex, England, dated 1634. Steel, wrought iron, wood, mother-of-pearl, and bone. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London.)

Fig. 8. Doorway from St. Helen's Church, Bishopsgate, London, England, dated 1633. (Photo, Benno M. Forman.)

The details of the bone-inlaid chests of drawers may be seen as an abstracted, central conceit on the panels of a door to St. Helen's Church, Bishopsgate, whose stone frame bears the date 1633 (fig. 8).13 The uprights of these chests are often decorated with turned half-spindles, applied so that they suggest engaged architectural columns. Others are decorated with engaged terms or pedestals in the classical manner. Since these decorative motifs are present in London in the 1630s, it is possible that chests of drawers with them were present there as well, an idea that the scarcity of craftsmen's accounts and inventories of this period in the Public Record Office and the records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury precludes our confirming.

The few published inventories of the English city and country aristocracy and gentry of the period 1610 to 1641 contain no chests of drawers among a group of individuals who could well have afforded them. The famous inventory of the earl of Northampton (d. 1614) itemizes numerous cupboards, some of very slight work, judging by their appraised valuations, but nothing suggestive of a chest of drawers, even under some other name. The residence of James Montague, the bishop of Winchester, contained no chest of drawers at the time of his death in 1618. The same may be said of Stondon House, the residence of Ralph Sadleir, near Ware, Hertfordshire. In this lavishly furnished home, inventoried in 1623, none of the enumerated “cupboards” can be identified as a chest of drawers. Nor are chests of drawers to be found in the exquisitely detailed inventories of Anne, viscountess of Dorchester, taken in January 1638/39, or even in so detailed a document as the 1641 inventory of the “new house” at Tat Hall, the residence of the countess of Arundel, located near Buckingham Palace. A “large Cubbard fashioned Indian Cabinet” was to be found in the parlor chamber there, and a “Cabinet of Artificial stone with Drawers” was in “Mr. Thomas Howard's bed-chamber,” but otherwise, nothing that we could construe to be a chest of drawers appears.14 The absence of chests of drawers in this sampling of inventories suggests two possibilities: either the English nobility of this period still kept their small textiles in chests or cupboards or in wardrobe rooms from which their servants fetched them, or


the chest of drawers did not exist prior to 1641. This last possibility, however, is precluded by references in the public documents of New England, which often fill in the gaps left by the scantier English records of the second quarter of the seventeenth century. A statement by one of the witnesses in a court case dating from 1636 provides an unequivocal reference to a chest of drawers that existed in Cambridge, Massachusetts, between 1638 and 1641. According to Sara Buck[n]ham, a former servant of Elizabeth Glover, her mistress had in her possession prior to 1641 "a Canopy bed with curtains, a chest of Drawers, of part of the Chest was filled with rich linen, a Dammeske Suite, several Diaper Suites, a fine hollen suit with a stech: with abundance of Flaxen Linnen for common use. In another part of the Chest of drawers tufl[e] tafety for Chairs and stooles." It is likely that this chest of drawers was brought from England by the Grovers when they emigrated from Sutton, Surrey, now a part of metropolitan London.15

The references to Mrs. Glover's chest of drawers give us no idea of its value. Not so is the second earliest mention of the form in New England, the 1642 inventory of William Swift of Sandwich, Massachusetts, which lists "a chest of drawers" valued at £1.0.0. Swift, who immigrated to Watertown, Massachusetts, from Bocking, Suffolk, around 1634, had lived in Sandwich since 1637.16 Whether Swift’s chest of drawers was made in England or America cannot be determined, but its moderate valuation suggests that if the chest of drawers with doors was a new and fashionable item in the mid 1630s, the less expensive version without doors must have been made very soon after the introduction of the more expensive type.

If, as the Oxford English Dictionary maintains, the phrases “case of drawers” and “chest of drawers” are synonymous, the earliest reference to this form so far found in an English document occurs in the inventory of James White, parish of St. Mary le Bow, London, taken August 12, 1643. White’s parlor contained “a case of drawers” of unspecified value. The furnishings of the room indicate that it was used for dining. This case of drawers predates by four years the earliest surviving example. The chamber used by the widow of Will Langhorne, Putney, Surrey, in 1655 contained a "chest of drawers" valued with a walnut chest and two carpets at £5.15.0. References to the form become common among London inventories from the mid 1660s onward. James Clement, a joiner who lived in the parish of Allhallows, Bread Street, had a chest of drawers, perhaps of his own making, “in the Great room 2 p[air] stairs high” on September 4, 1665. His household goods amounted to only £36.18.0.17

The chest of drawers is mentioned with fair frequency in the Commissary of London Inventories covering the years 1665 to 1667. James Allum of St. Sepulcher’s parish had “2 Chest of Drawers” valued at £4.0.0 in the bedchamber below the garret. His estate was worth £55.3.6. Aimé Galliwe, a widow living in St. Buttolph’s parish without Bishopsgate, had "in the Upp: Chambr . . . i chest of Drawers with certaine old clothes in it . . . £11 8/117. The total value of her estate was £63.15.0. Ambrose Andrews, a carver living in Whitechapel, had "one chest of drawers wth fifteen paire of she[e]ts and one odd sheet, 8 pair of pillowbeers, 7 table clothes, 4 dosen of napkins, 12 towells, one long damaske napkin, 9 shirts, 12 bands," all valued at £6.6.0 in an estate appraised at £137.12.4 on December 15, 1666.

Other inventories in this group suggest that in the mid 1660s, the chest of drawers was by no means a brand-new form. George Johnson of Step-


17 Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “case,” no. 7; Wills, no. 2112, Deanery of the Arches, Lambeth Palace Library, London. Documentary research reveals that the phrases seem to be roughly interchangeable, as items by either name fall into a similar value range, and both are called “large” or “small” from time to time. The nagging suspicion nonetheless remains that the actual objects differed in some way from each other that is not apparent in the verbal allusions, for a few inventories use both phrases to describe objects that are in the same room. For example, the inventory of Henry Shidefield, St. Peter’s parish, St. Paul’s Wharf, London, January 17, 1665, lists “In the Lodging Chamber . . . a chest of drawers, a case of drawers.” The inventory of Samuel Sex, joiner, St. Sepulcher’s parish, London, May 7, 1666, lists “In the Chamber . . . 4 Cases of drawers, 1 Chest of drawers.” Commissary of London Inventories, ms. 9174/2, London Guildhall Library. These inventories are contained in two boxes and consist of individual velum rolls, uncatalogued and in no particular order. I am indebted to Nancy Goyne Evans for calling them to my attention. Inventory of James Clement, Probate 2, no. 433A, Public Records Office, London; Wills, no. 389, Deantry of Arches.
ney, Middlesex, had “one old chest of drawers” on April 20, 1667, in an estate valued at only £31.5.0, and exactly one month later, James Russell of St. Buttolph’s had “an old chest of drawers” valued at the small sum of 5s. in an estate worth £162.6.8. Likewise, William Anderson, a tallow chandler in the parish of St. Catherine, “Creechurch” (Christchurch), died possessed of “an old Chest of drawers” valued along with “a chest with a drawer [the usual verbal formula for this form of furniture] and 2 ball to stand on” at 13s. in October 1665. His total inventory amounted to £63.6.7. Five additional chests of drawers among these inventories were valued at 8s., 10s., and £1.4.0 each and two at £1.1.0. These inventories clearly show that chests of drawers either were sufficiently popular in the mid-1660s to exist in a simpler and hence less expensive form than the inlaid examples or were noticeably old or “out of fashion,” although none are so described prior to 1667.18

The Chest of Drawers in New England

The second reference to a chest of drawers in a New England inventory occurs on February 23, 1643/44, when the estate of John Atwood, “Gentleman,” contained “a chest of Drawers” valued at £3.1.0 “in the Hall.” Atwood was a man of substance and had immigrated to Plymouth from London in 1636 to oversee the affairs of the Plymouth Company in the New World. The valuation of his chest of drawers is about right for a fine, London example. The third inventory reference occurs in the estate of John Simpson of Watertown, appraised on April 24, 1645, ten years after his arrival. This “chest of drawers” was valued at £1.15.0 and was in the lean-to of his house.19

The values of other early chests of drawers in the vicinity of Boston are fairly consistent. Thomas Coytmore of Charlestown owned one valued at £2.0.0 in July 1645, and William Ting, a wealthy merchant of Boston, had one valued at £2.1.0 in May 1653. It was located in his “Parloure.” Ting also owned an inexpensive example valued at 15s. An even less expensive example was valued at only 5s. when the inventory of Samuel Oliver was recorded that same year. In the chamber of the Reverend Nathaniel Rogers of Ipswich was a chest of drawers valued at £2.1.0 in 1655. Joiner Thomas Scottow of Boston owned one valued at £2.0.0 in 1660, merchant William Paddy (1658) one at £3.0.0, Capt. John Cullick (1662) one at £4.0.0, and the most expensive of all, Martha Coggan’s (1660) at £7.0.0. To put these values into perspective, prior to 1675 court cupboards were rarely appraised at more than £1.0.0, and the best presses were about £2.0.0. The average New England farmer or urban artisan could count himself fortunate if he earned an annual income of £7 or £8.20 Chests of drawers were not for every man.

Inventory references have a shortcoming for the student of American furniture history: they do not tell us whether an item originated in Europe or America. Fortunately, a surviving New England chest of drawers of the earliest type is preserved in the Mabel Brady Garvan Collection at Yale University (fig. 9). It is one of the most important pieces of American seventeenth-century furniture from both aesthetic and technological standpoints. Its facade is decorated with exotic woods—cedrela, rosewood, snakewood, and American black walnut—and its turnings are of the finest quality and are closely modeled on the pattern of those in figure 1.21 The pulls are of lignum vitae and are exquisitely turned. Microanalysis of the botanical structure of the wood from which this chest of drawers is made has confirmed its American origin.

To English connoisseurs, this chest of drawers may well seem so close to those illustrated by Margaret Jourdain and Herbert Cescinsky as to be English and not American. Insofar as it represents the continuation of the English joiners’ tradition in America, it is English, for it was made by Englishmen to suit an English taste. It was, however, made early in a long line of American case pieces, probably from a single joiner’s shop, which shows the gradual simplification of this style in America as time passed. Even closer to the English prototypes in its decorative vocabulary is the remaining part of what was once a chest with two drawers (figs. 10, 11). This important fragment was purchased in 1940 by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) and may well predate the Garvan chest of drawers. Microanalysis of the

18 Commissary Inventories, mss. 9174/1, 2.
19 Mayflower Descendants, 5:154; Savage, Genealogical Dictionary, 1:77; Suffolk County Probate Records, 2:43. Suffolk County Courthouse, Boston, Mass.
21 They are also virtually identical to the turnings on a fragment of a London chest of drawers with doors now made into a “livery” cupboard in the Country House Museum, Ipswich, Suffolk, England.
Fig. 9. Chest of drawers with doors, attributed to the Ralph Mason/Henry Messenger shops (joinery) and the Thomas Edsall shops (turned ornament), Boston, Mass., 1635-70. Red oak, white oak, red cedar, chestnut, black walnut, maple, lignum vitae, white pine, cedrela, rosewood, and snakewood (*Piratinera guianensis*); H. 48 3/4", W. 45 3/4", D. 25 3/4". (Yale University Art Gallery, Mabel Brady Garvan Collection.)

woods of which it is made has confirmed that it is of American origin: its facade is decorated with American red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) and black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), and its carcass is made of American red oak (*Quercus rubra*), a wood that is not native to Europe and was never commercially exported. Later examples of work from this shop or its successor include a five-drawer chest of drawers in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig. 12), and a chest, perhaps the latest of all, privately owned in Massachusetts (fig. 13).  

The phrase “chest of drawers with doors” has been used to distinguish the early form of the chest of drawers from the later examples that have no doors. It is taken from the 1699 inventory of the estate of Timothy Lindall, a merchant of Salem, Massachusetts, which lists “1 chest drawers with doors” valued at 20s. If he acquired it at the time of his marriage, it could have been in his possession since 1675, although he was of age in 1653. The form is again mentioned among the possessions of John Allen of Fairfield, Connecticut, whose inventory of January 23, 1725/26, lists “a chest of drawers with doors to it” valued in the inflated currency of the times at £3 15s. 0d. In 1758, the inventory of Elizabeth Rawle, “spinster and shopkeeper” of Philadelphia, listed the form as “1 oak low chest of drawers with folding doors,” which even at that late date—in the heyday of the high chest—was

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Fig. 10. Chest with two drawers, attributed to the Ralph Mason/Henry Messenger shops (joinery) and the Thomas Edsall shops (turned ornament), Boston, Mass., 1635–70. Black walnut, red oak, white pine, red cedar, and maple; H. 27", W. 47⅛", D. 21½". (Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.)

Fig. 11. Photographic reconstruction of the probable original appearance of the chest in figure 10. This reconstruction is possible because the base molding and turned feet of the chest in figure 9 provide precedents for those features. (Photo reconstruction: Robert Blair St. George.)
Fig. 12. Chest of drawers, attributed to the Ralph Mason/Henry Messenger shops (joinery) and the Thomas Edsall shops (turned ornament), Boston, Mass., 1635–70. Oak, cedrela, black walnut, cedar, and ebony; H. 51 ¼", W. 47 ½", D. 23 ½". (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Bequest of Charles Hitchcock Tyler.)

Fig. 13. Chest with one drawer, attributed to the Ralph Mason/Henry Messenger shops (joinery) and the Thomas Edsall shops (turned ornament), Boston, Mass., 1650–1700. Oak, pine, walnut, cedar, and maple; H. 31 ½", W. 46 ½", D. 20 ¼". (Collection of Bertram K. Little and Nina Fletcher Little: Photo, Richard Merrill.)

appraised at £1.1.0. It is certain that the chest of drawers with doors was merely called a “chest of drawers” by the vast majority of the people who mentioned it in the seventeenth century, and the high value assigned to it in an inventory is the only means by which it can be distinguished from the examples that had no doors.

Following the lead of English writers, American-furniture historians have generally assumed that furniture with applied geometrical moldings and half spindles was not made in New England until after the middle of the seventeenth century. This


24 See Forman, “Urban Aspects,” fig. 3.
thinking is consistent with the evidence provided by the dates that are incised on the surviving London chests of drawers, to which a few years for "provincial lag" has been added for good measure. To refine this thinking, however, we must first address the larger question of how stylistic ideas travel from one country to another.

Three possibilities immediately spring to mind. A chest of drawers like the example in figure 9 from the Garvan Collection could have been made from patterns or plans sent to America from England, or it could have been copied from an imported example, or it could have been made by a craftsman who had made this form in England and therefore worked in the style in which it is made and continued to do so after he immigrated to New England. The first hypothesis cannot possibly be demonstrated or even logically argued at this late date. The second is denied by the construction of the object, particularly the drawers, which are made in a manner that is demonstrably of London origin. This leaves the third hypothesis—the immigration of craftsmen—as the one to consider most seriously. If this hypothesis is correct, then Boston is the place to look for such craftsmen, for Boston alone in Massachusetts supported a school of London-trained furniture craftsmen.

If, as theory has previously held, the Garvan chest of drawers was made in the third quarter of the seventeenth century by an immigrant London joiner, then only one man, John Cunnable, could have brought the style to New England, because he is the only London joiner who immigrated to Boston between 1644 and 1673: none came during the period of the English civil war. Contemporary documents reveal that Cunnable had been in London in 1673, when he executed a note to one John Russell, but was firmly established in Boston in 1679, when James Young was apprenticed to him by the selectmen of Boston.29 Inasmuch as none of the London examples bears a date so late as the seventh decade of the seventeenth century, we may legitimately question the idea that the American example must date from that period. It seems illogical from both the historical and the commercial viewpoints to believe that a newly immigrated joiner entering an established and highly competitive artisan community would work in a style that was very likely passed in the mother country if his best recommendation to patrons was that he was newly arrived and capable of working in the currently fashionable, less heavy and ornate style.

Since inventories show that chests of drawers with and without doors were present in New England at least thirty-five years prior to 1673, it must follow that these forms and the style in which they were made were introduced into Massachusetts much earlier than we have previously believed. In fact, they must have been brought by craftsmen who immigrated before the civil war, which in turn means that the style was present in London prior to the Commonwealth period, despite the absence of dated examples.

It may seem that the attribution of the bone-inlaid chests of drawers with drawers to London craftsmen and the attribution of the American examples to Boston has been made rather blithely, for little more than circumstantial evidence appears in the inventories of both places to suggest this sequence of events. The objects themselves, however, contain the structural clue that has prompted these attributions. The drawers of the Garvan chest and the SPNEA chest (fig. 10), in contrast to those in all the joined furniture known to have been made elsewhere in Massachusetts before 1675, are held together with dovetails, as opposed to the usual, rural Anglo-American technique of nailing flush-cut drawer sides into rabbets planed into the sides of the drawer fronts. (The single exception is a group of so-called Hadley chests from the Connecticut River valley; they are of somewhat later date.) Dovetailed drawer construction is used in the earliest datable examples of seventeenth-century London joiners' work and is almost never found in demonstrably provincial schools. It can certainly be documented as being common in London prior to 1632 when a court decision specified that the joiners of London were entitled to use "the dovetail" in their work.30 Indeed, the fact that dovetails are present in both the London and the Boston examples is the structural feature that not only confirms their kinship but also suggests that the London examples were made by English joiners and not emigrés from the northern Netherlands, where late in the seventeenth century drawer sides continued to be rabbed to drawer fronts rather than being fastened with dovetails.

The early presence of London-trained joiners in Boston (and their conspicuous absence elsewhere) suggests that Boston was indeed the only place in


Massachusetts where furniture of London quality could have been made: while a clever craftsman can imitate the stylistic attributes of a piece of furniture, it is unlikely that he will also imitate the structural techniques used to realize them if he is habitually accustomed to using other, equally effective techniques. A craftsman who was trained to make drawers with rabbeted or butted drawer joints is not likely to suddenly make them with dovetails, since rabbeted and nailed joints in drawers hold together as well as dovetailed ones.

The first of the London joiners to arrive in Boston was Ralph Mason. According to the passenger list of the ship on which he came, Mason was from “St. Olives [Olave’s parish] Southwark.” He embarked with his wife at London on July 4, 1635. Mason was thirty-five years old at the time and was accompanied by minor sons who eventually followed him in the joiner’s trade. The second London joiner in Boston was John Davis, who emigrated, at age twenty-nine, on April 15, 1635. The records show that he was working at his trade there a decade later. The third joiner with London connections was Henry Messenger, who is noted in Boston early in 1641, when the birth of a son was recorded. How much earlier he had been there is unknown. The town records show that, like Mason’s, Messenger’s sons and grandsons practiced the furniture-making trades in Boston throughout the seventeenth century.

While the mere presence of London-trained joiners in Boston may not be sufficient evidence to permit attribution of this furniture to that town, the documented presence of London-trained turners there as well confirms the evidence of the surviving objects, for they are the product of not one craft as practiced in London, but two: joinery and turnery. By a quirk of history (the instrument of which Massachusetts was governed was a company charter, and a company has no power to charter other companies), furniture makers’ guilds were not established in Boston during the colonial period. The evidence of numerous lawsuits, however, shows that furniture craftsmen employed each other and that the guildlike specialization, separation of crafts, and interdependence of craftsmen that was common in urban England was perpetuated in urban America, just as if guilds had in fact existed.

This means that the London-style turning that appears on this group of case pieces had to be done by a London-trained turner or turners, since London joiners were prohibited by regulations from executing turned work.

At least two London turners have been identified in early Boston. One, Robert Windsor by name, like Mason, came from Southwark sometime before 1644, when his marriage was recorded in Boston. Most important to our understanding of the Anglo-American decorative arts is the fact that a second turner, Thomas Edsall, in all probability served as the medium by which the traditions of central-London turning were transplanted to Boston. Edsall left London for Boston on April 17, 1635, and arrived approximately two months later. Numerous references in the public records of Boston show that Edsall actively practiced his craft there almost to the time of his death in 1676 at the age of eighty-eight. By that time he had doubtless cast a long shadow in his adopted city. Edsall is important to history because the records reveal that he was not only journeyman turner. He was a mature, master craftsman, aged forty-seven when he immigrated, and further was the brother of one of London’s leading turners, Henry Edsall, upper warden of the Worshipful Company of Turners of London in 1655 and master of the company from May 23, 1661, to May 28, 1663.

Conclusions

The chest of drawers in seventeenth-century England did not enjoy its earliest popularity among urban aristocrats or the rural gentry, but instead can first be identified in middling London inventories. The conservation of space made possible by this furniture form commends it to an urban dweller, and fine and lesser examples appear almost simultaneously. It is appropriate that this new form should first appear in New England among transplanted Englishmen who either were accustomed to urban ways or were of the merchant aristocracy whose claims to status were based upon the success

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of their adventures in the New World. Their will to settle in the untried wilderness was bold for its time and is analogous to their use of the chest of drawers, which similarly represents a mild revolution in the way in which textiles and miscellaneous small objects were kept: in drawers as opposed to boxes, chests, and cupboards. Numerous inventory references to chests of drawers among the less affluent classes in both urban and rural England and America in the third quarter of the seventeenth century imply the need for easy access to a supply of current clothing, since items not in current use can easily be stored in less-accessible forms. Last, the profusion of references to the form suggests that it was rapidly disseminated.

Despite a reputation for religious convictions that might suggest the contrary, the successful harvest of New England’s natural bounty by the Puritans enabled them to rise a social level or two from the place they might have expected to occupy had they remained in England. In short, worldly success encouraged them to emulate the gentle class from which their ministers came rather than pay heed to the doom-laden sermons those same ministers preached. A chest of drawers could be acquired cheaply, but many of the examples mentioned in Massachusetts inventories were not cheap. Since the limited size of the form implies a limited expense, expensive examples obviously had qualities unrelated to increased size. Cost equals labor plus materials, and therefore expensive chests of drawers must have been made of unnecessarily fine materials or were excessively ornamented. It therefore follows that excessively expensive examples offered more than a mere place to store textiles; they were, in addition, objects to be admired, vehicles for show which vested their owners with status.

In the mid seventeenth century—a hundred years before Thomas Chippendale made current designs available to any craftsman who could afford to buy his book—ideas about how furniture should look could be transmitted by importing objects to be copied, a mode of transmission that is difficult to document since prototype and copy can seldom be brought together. Another means of transmitting forms of stylistic ideas that for now must be considered the most significant was the migration of craftsmen. The London origins of the chest of drawers with doors and the presence of London-trained furniture craftsmen in Boston show that the capacity to make this form in the style appropriate to it was present in Boston prior to 1640.

“Provincial lag” has often been invoked to account for the slow appearance of new styles in places “far off [from] the fountain of the English nation,” as Samuel Sewall in 1725 described the relationship of Boston to the land of his birth. Provincal lag aptly describes the tempo at which people of little means or conservative tastes or no tastes take up a new idea. But current research is now demonstrating that sweeping generalities do not cover every individual and that an affluent urban merchant class and an affluent country gentrty appeared in New England within the first generation of settlement. This class could afford new styles, it was part of their ethic to show their success (evidence of God’s favor), and they found craftsmen to make furniture for them that could pass for current on their social and economic level in London. In the process, they added a new member to the Atlantic community.

The Introduction of the High Chest of Drawers

The idea that dovetailed drawer construction was present in New England in the 1630s and was passed on as a technique from master to apprentice has the merit of suggesting possible solutions to some otherwise difficult problems. First, it explains the anomalous presence of the dovetail in a few pieces of oak furniture that stylistically seem to be fairly early but must be dated quite late if the dovetail did not appear in American furniture until around the beginning of the eighteenth century, as we have long believed. If this idea may be accepted, then it is no longer necessary to think that all oak furniture whose drawers were constructed with dovetails was made in the eighteenth century. Second, it relieves the strain of trying to rationalize the “sudden” appearance of the dovetail in early eighteenth-century American furniture without understanding how it could have evolved here. The dovetail could hardly have evolved simultaneously in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and Philadelphia: it is more probable that the technique was introduced into these areas, perhaps from a common source. Indeed, it seems likely that it was introduced into New England twice—first into Boston in the 1630s, whence it was undoubtedly disseminated elsewhere by apprentices and the movement of craftsmen. Its second introduction came with the arrival of a new generation of craftsmen in America near the beginning of the eighteenth century, after which time it became common. What appears to be

a virtually inexplicable instance of “evolution” when one looks only at the American furniture involved, instead becomes a more believable case of introduction by immigration, with dispersal occurring as the demand for cabinet wares increased as a consequence of the growth of New England’s population and prosperity in the eighteenth century.

Inventory descriptions during the second half of the seventeenth century do not greatly increase our knowledge of the form of the chest of drawers and its variations. Occasional early references, however, tell us a great deal about its role in the household and about its use, which was contingent upon the room in which it was located during this period. When it was in a chamber, usually a second-floor room used for sleeping, or in a parlor, it had things in it or on it appropriate to a bedroom. When it was in a hall, its use was totally different. William Paddy’s fine “chest of drawers” valued at £3.0.0 in 1658 was located in the hall of his Boston home. It was covered in the traditional manner of a cupboard, with a “cupboard cloth,” matching a “new suite [of] watchet Searg Curtains [and] valances,” all valued at £6.0.0. It contained no clothing but, as might be expected in a room used for dining and sleeping, was filled with sheets, tablecloths, towels, and “cases,” or slipcovers, for the leather-upholstered dining chairs. Similarly, the chest of drawers valued at £2.1.0 that stood in the hall of Deacon Thomas Lynde of Charlestown in 1671 was garnished in the manner of a cupboard and had “in plate thereon 26 ounces £7:16:00” and contained textiles appropriate to the room, as follows: “8 tables clothes, 4 dozen napkins, 8 pillowbeares [pillowcases] & a cupboard cloth, 16 towels and 10 pr. sheets.” In the hall of William Wardell of Boston was a “Chest of Drawers with 5 dra[wers] in it” valued at £2.0.0 in 1670. “A chest drawers carpet & cushion” valued at £1.0.0 appear in the 1675 inventory of Capt. Edward Hutchinson.30

The extraordinary inventory of Ursula Cutt of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, taken on August 7, 1694, is the only American “drawer-by-drawer” inventory of a chest of drawers that has thus far come to light. The chest contained the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Six pair rusty Suzzors</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pin quishing &amp; a Smale drawer in it</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont: 9 old Silver Thimbles, one English halfe Crowne</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve doz. of Silver &amp; gold brest Buttons</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Smale Silver Botkings, one silver Fagg [sic] &amp; a silver Spoon</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pair of aggett pendents</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tow remnents of Ribben, Stitching and Soweing Silk &amp; pins &amp;tc</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second drawer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Necklace of Smale Seed perle</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flower gold rings</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Knitt wascot motheaten</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine Neck handkershfs. at 15d. [per piece]</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Smale Canvas Table Cloth</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One ditto finer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Cambri Aprons &amp; five pare of Sleevs, &amp; old Caps &amp; pair old gloves</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therd drawer—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One peace kenting</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To a pcel of old wonre Linning two remnents of old Silk &amp; tow Smale</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rements Silver lace</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fowerth Drawer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pound &amp; halfe whyted Browne thred</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three pceis whyte Inch, one pc ½ whyte Tape</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To a smale pcell old Lining</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One looking glass</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flower earthen dishes, &amp; an old pewtr pott</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three pecs Course Kenting</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flower yds &amp; halfe ditto</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty One yds &amp; halfe of home Spunn woolling Cloth: 256d [per] yd. £2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six remnents of Course Lyncing Cont.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17lbs</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two pair Sheets</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two yds. broad Lyncing</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fwoer [?] yds red stuff. 1sp yd &amp; 1 yd wosted Camb[lette]</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six yds. portugal Lyncing</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One old Lyncing petticoat, One Cubbord Cloth[,] One smale Towell</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two yds whyte flaning</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Fustused holland Cloak wth silver Clasps</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One old red blanket for a child</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One broad Cloth petty Coat wth silver Lace</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One childs old Cloak Lyned wth blew Silk</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One yd ¼ Course Lyncing</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One hatt &amp; a brush</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One old paer boddyus</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One old blanket</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six pair rusty Suzzors | 8 |
One pin quishing & a Smale drawer in it | 8 |
Cont: 9 old Silver Thimbles, one English halfe Crowne | 8.6 |
Twelve doz. of Silver & gold brest Buttons | 6 |
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Therd drawer— | 1 |
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Three pceis whyte Inch, one pc ½ whyte Tape | 4 |
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One old paer boddyus | 1 |
One old blanket | 4 |
suggests that the drawers of this chest were graduated from top to bottom in increasing size. 31

The term “case of drawers” appears in both English and American inventories during the 1660s. That this form was identical to the chest of drawers at the time has been speculated upon but has not yet been incontrovertibly established. That it was distinct from a “chest of drawers” in the minds of some men who took inventories becomes clear when the two forms are listed separately in the same inventory. On May 7, 1666, for example, Samuel Sex, a joiner of St. Sepulcher's parish, Clerkenwell, London, possessed “4 cases of drawers, 1 Chest of Drawers,” and in the “Chamber one pair of stairs next the streete.” Likewise, the 1665 inventory of Henry Shidfeld of St. Peter’s parish, St. Paul’s Wharf, London, reveals in “the Lodgeing Chamber . . . a chest of drawers, a case of drawers.” The distinction could not have been based on slightness of value, since the chests of drawers ranged in value from 8s. or 10s. to £11.0.0, or necessarily on size, since the £6.0.0 inventory of Robert Ballard of St. Mary’s parish, Whitechapel, taken on January 31, 1665/66, contained a “Small case of drawers,” presumably so noted to distinguish it from a large case of drawers. 32

Another hypothesis is that “case” denoted board construction and that “cases of drawers” might have been cabinetmakers’ work, as opposed to joiners’ work. At this period, it is almost certainly not a high chest of drawers, but a few “low” chests of drawers of board construction that have survived. The phrase appears in both English and American inventories long before cabinetmakers’ chests of drawers were being made. For example, the inventory of the Reverend John Norton of Boston lists a “case of drawers” with £185.0.0 of “English[,] new English & Spanish money” in it on April 24, 1663. In the parlor of his home was a “chest of drawers.” Yet when the inventory of Capt. Daniel Fisher of Dedham was taken in 1683, he owned “a case of drawers” valued at £1.6.8—a very slight value for a new high chest—and “1 chest of drawers, 1 dressing box” valued together at £11.0.0. 33

Whatever the difference between the forms may have been during the early years of the chest of drawers in New England, the phrases are used interchangeably by the third decade of the eighteenth century. A classic example of the same piece of furniture referred to by both names occurs between the 1739 inventory of the estate of John Touzell, a merchant of Salem, Massachusetts, and the records of the vendue that liquidated it. When the inventory of Touzell’s “shop chamber” was taken on April 29, 1739, it contained “a box & Case Drawers.” At the vendue, held on the following June 1, Hannah Bray bought “Chest of Drawers & Box in Shop Chamber” for 10s. 34

The inventories of Boston do not contain a chest of drawers qualified by the word old until 1686, when one is listed in the estate of Thomas Thatcher, a Boston merchant. Thatcher also possessed a looking glass with an “olive frame”—the earliest mention in New England of the most fashionable wood used in late Stuart furniture. 35

The line of evolution of the English high chest of drawers, which served as the prototype of the American examples, is by no means as clear as it might superficially appear. It is no trick to elevate the chest of drawers, once it exists, onto a stand or frame, to enable the form to adapt to a new fashion. Doubtless this did occur among joiners in a provincial context 36 or among urban joiners who for one reason or another did not retrain themselves to execute cabinetwork in “the most fashionable taste.” But this obvious rationalization leaves two questions unanswered: where did the taste for this seemingly unnatural form come from, and why are there no Continental examples of the chest of drawers, in the English manner, in the second half of the seventeenth century? A possible answer is that the high chest of drawers, like the chest of drawers itself, was an innovation that occurred in England because a conflux of circumstances did not occur elsewhere.

The English high chest of drawers represents a

31 New Hampshire Provincial Probate Records, 3:33–34, New Hampshire State Archives, Concord. I am indebted to Richard M. Candee for calling this material to my attention and for permission to publish his transcription of it.
33 For “low” chests, see, for example, Wallace Nutting, Furniture of the Pilgrim Century (2d ed.; Framingham, Mass.: Old America Co., 1924), no. 93. Suffolk County Probate Records, 4:158, 139, 14:157.
34 Jacob Pudatore account book, manuscript collection, Essex Institute, Salem, Mass. This unpaginated manuscript also contains entries of John Touzell.
35 Suffolk County Probate Records, 9:287.
strong emphasis on one of the two strains of cabinetmaking that appeared in continental Europe in the sixteenth century. One strain, represented by the Parisian and Amsterdam ebony cabinets on stand (fig. 14), occurred on the Continent at the time when cabinetmaking was an infant art in England and not widely practiced. The other strain is typified by the practice of putting imported Oriental or southern European cabinets on stands that were made in northern Europe. This practice received its impetus with the return of English aristocrats from the Continent at the end of the Commonwealth and gained a further infusion of strength upon the accession of William and Mary, with their Netherlandish habits, to the English throne. The fashion for such cabinets is present in England in the second quarter of the seventeenth century and is typified by the "cabinet of Artificial stone with Drawers" among the extraordinary collection of exotic furniture and Italian paintings that the earl of Arundel had in Tart Hall in 1641, although that particular cabinet was not placed upon a stand or frame. The examples that have survived most often in the museums of France, the Netherlands, Germany, and England are Oriental lacquered cabinets on elaborately carved and gilt or varnished silver-leaf stands of Western origin (fig. 15). Such cabinets are rare now and were probably rare when they were new. Certainly they were expensive and available only to the wealthiest classes.

Oriental lacquerwork was probably imported into northern Europe long before any of the literary references to it were published. It was greatly admired, and as Athanasius Kircher wrote in 1655, the best came from the Province of Chekiang... [which] produceth... that Gum which they call Cie, distilling from Trees... Of this they make that Varnish wherewith they so dress their

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37 See Lunsingh Scheurleer, Catalogus, no. 434, pl. 58.
houses, that... within they far exceed all Europe for splendour, everything therein being so transparent that you can look no where but as in a mirrour each opposite object is represented, and being tempered with divers Colours, and beautified with Birds, flowers, and Dragons, the several Effigies of Gods and Goddesses and other Figures drawn to the life, at once abundantly delight and cause admiration in the beholders. This Gum they gather, and make of it whatsoever colour they please, but the gold colour is the best, and next the most Black.  

In the period following the restoration of the Stuart monarchy, cabinets on stands, totally of English manufacture, began to appear. Some are japanned, in imitation of Oriental lacquerwork; others are veneered. A fine matched pair of the latter with scroll legs and covered with “seaweed” marquetry is to be seen at Chatsworth. A handsome escritoire, with twist-turned legs and carved feet—clearly derived from forms made in the Netherlands and probably executed by a Dutch-trained craftsman working in London—is presently on display at Ham House (figs. 16, 17). It is identified in the 1676 inventory of the duke of Lauderdale. The escritoire is veneered with the so-called oyster marquetry, which is composed of the limbs of trees sawn diagonally in sections, like slices of salami, and glued to a carcass of inferior wood, usually a conifer. Oyster marquetry is a simple way to produce an effective surface that contains the varied colors of heartwood and sapwood and has the added advantage of utilizing pieces of expensive wood that would otherwise be too small to use effectively.

Clearly such cabinets are a notch down the cost scale from lacquered examples on gilt stands and would therefore be available to a broader group of customers. But they are still, for the most part, far from being common pieces of furniture. The next step in the popularization of the fashion resulted in the removal of the cabinet doors and a reduction in the number of drawers in the upper section as well as the enlargement of the whole form. In this form it became essentially a chest of drawers on frame, a very utilitarian piece of furniture and a popular one, in the sense of being relatively inexpensive and hence available to anyone who needed a new chest of drawers and wanted to have it in the newest style. As such, the form represents an evolution in style from the cabinet but fulfills the function of the already popular chest of drawers.

It is in this form and for this social level that the high chest of drawers was first made in New England in the last decade of the seventeenth century. On the basis of surviving English examples, it appears fairly certain that cabinetmakers who catered to a clientele of moderate means continued to elaborate the chest on frame into a somewhat larger form properly known as the high chest of drawers (fig. 18). The fact that the new style in high chests and a cabinetmaker appeared in New England at about the same time is no coincidence, for his talents were necessary for the production of a piece of furniture in a new style, abruptly different from anything made in Boston prior to that time, both technically and aesthetically. Yet, so sluggishly does the human vocabulary move in response to change that it is difficult to identify the new form from the verbal descriptions in inventories of estates.

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Since new furniture forms are always expensive when they are introduced, the valuations placed on high chests of drawers in the last decade of the seventeenth century do not tell us much because the chest of drawers with doors in the older style was just as expensive. Nor were high chests at first distinguished by the adjective high, as they later came to be. The “Chest of Drawers & frame” valued at £4.0.0 in the inventory of Thomas Scudder, taken in Boston February 12, 1690/91, appears to be the earliest unambiguous reference to this form yet found. The high chest of drawers may occasionally be recognized in the earliest inventories by the fact that it is mentioned in conjunction with a dressing table, although that form was not at first identified by a qualifying adjective either. Such is the case with what may be the second mention of the form in Boston, in the inventory of Thomas Pemberton, proved on November 30, 1693. In the “chamber” of Pemberton’s home was a “chest of drawers and table” valued at the astounding sum of £8.0.0. Pemberton also owned six cane chairs valued at £5.2.0, further evidence that his home contained furniture in the new style.40

On May 10, 1695, when the furnishings of Capt. Andrew Crane of London and Marblehead were appraised, “an olive wood Case of Draws and table” valued at £8.0.0 were listed in his inventory.41 Crane, who had lived in Massachusetts only seven years, had furnished his home with the finest London furniture. Possibly also of London make was the “olive [wood] Chest Draws” valued at £3.1.0 in the inventory of Hezekiah Usher of Boston, appraised on July 30, 1697. Only nine months later, the inventory of John Banks of Boston contained “1 Jappan Table & a Chest of draws” valued at £6.1.0. A hall chamber, used for sleeping by Charles Chauncey, a Boston merchant, contained “1 chest of Drawers . . . black walnut, 1 table to ditto” valued with a looking glass and two sconces at

40 Suffolk County Probate Records, 8:191, 13:304-5.
The presence of these high chests in the inventories of the Boston area—where they were most likely first made in New England—does not guarantee that they were in fact made there. Many of them could have been of English manufacture, as were undoubtedly the ones owned by Craye.

Boston cabinetmakers' work in the 1680s could perhaps have originated in the shop of the shadowy John Clarke, a cabinetmaker who was admitted as an inhabitant of Boston on October 31, 1681, and of whom nothing else is known. But that which appears in the inventories of the late 1690s was more likely the work of John Brocas, who purchased land in Boston on May 11, 1666, and is the first cabinetmaker known to have immigrated to Boston for whom there is a continuity of references indicating permanent residence. Brocas was a kinsman of Benjamin Woodbridge and had a shop on Union Street in 1708 which was destroyed in a fire in February 1737. He died in 1740, by which year, according to his shop inventory, he was still pursuing his trade. The inventory indicates that he made desks and desks and bookcases and that he possessed a stock of brass handles and escutcheon plates worth £35.13.11 as well as "sundry veneers" valued at £9.0.0. Nothing in the inventory indicates that Brocas was capable of executing turned wood.46

Brocas is the only man who could have trained the second, third, and fourth cabinetmakers known to have worked in the Boston area: John Damon, Jr. (b. 1679), of Charlestown; George Thomas (b. March 16, 1684), a native Bostonian; and Thomas's cousin John Maverick (b. 1687). Damon could have been working as early as 1700, and without doubt, Brocas and these three probable apprentices account for the appearance of Boston William and Mary furniture for almost twenty years, since no new strain could have been introduced into the town until William Howell appeared there in 1714. Howell could have worked no longer than the three years between his arrival and his death, in 1717.47

Coincidentally, in the same year that Howell immigrated, an important new cabinetmaker from London, William Price, arrived in Boston and quickly became the most important furniture craftsman in the town. For one thing, Price was a communicant of the Church of England and must have immediately acquired the trade of the small but influential circle who attended King's Chapel, where he was paid "for work about the Organ" in 1714. An elegant signed example of Price's work in London dated 1713, the year before he settled in Boston, has come to light (figs. 19, 20) and is the only piece of furniture made by a craftsman before he immigrated to America so far identified.48

The present owner of this example is not known, and the piece has not been located. From the photograph, however, it appears that the bracket feet are a different color than the rest of the carcass, which suggests that it originally may have had ball feet. In its present form, the desk may be taken as a moderately stylish piece of London furniture of the second decade of the eighteenth century. Its double-arched pediment is more suggestive of the "Queen Anne" style as it was practiced in America than the usual flat head of the Boston William and Mary style, and while such a pediment is fairly rare in American furniture, a few examples with this feature were made. Notable among them is the unique cabinet with doors upon bureau with secretary drawer, stylistically the earliest example of this type of drawer in American furniture, now in

46 Suffolk County Probate Records, 11:343. The numerous references to "olive wood" furniture in inventories taken when the William and Mary style was emerging in New England are significant when contrasted with the fact that no references have been found that mention "burl maple" veneer—the most popular veneer on surviving American furniture of this period. Only one piece of olive-wood case furniture unquestionably of American origin, a desk at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, has been identified. See Lockwood, Colonial Furniture, fig. 240. The desk has white-pine secondary wood and is stylistically related to Massachusetts examples. Olive-wood veneer has been found in only one American craftsman's inventory, that of Charles Plumley, Philadelphia, who died in 1708. If the olive wood that is referred to in the inventories is true olive wood, Olea, it was imported from Europe, as the tree is not indigenous to eastern North America, where only botanically related shrubs of this genus are found. Charles Sprague Sargent, Manual of the Trees of North America, vol. 2 (1922; 2d ed., New York: Dover Publications, 1965), p. 843. Maple is the usual veneer used on New England furniture; walnut is a close second but generally appears to be a later choice. Buri ash is occasionally found. The references to olive wood could mean either that the furniture was all of English manufacture or that olive wood became the generic term for veneer on furniture in the practice of inventory takers. Suffolk County Probate Records, 14:11, 17:440, 441.


the Warner House, Portsmouth, New Hampshire. A related walnut desk and bookcase, with white-pine interiors, purchased in Massachusetts, is owned by David Stockwell, Wilmington, Delaware. A similar desk and bookcase with tulipwood drawer linings is in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. An American japanned high chest, exhibiting many features of the japanning found on the Price desk, is in the collection of Historic Deerfield, Deerfield, Massachusetts.46

While veneering onto pine seems to be the most natural thing for an American cabinetmaker to do, a good argument can be made that the practice had been common in England for a decade or more before the first craftsman making cabinetwork in America left his native land. Many London examples of early cabinetmakers' work are veneered onto deal (fir or pine), as the craftsmen who made them there were accustomed to do in Holland. Moreover, the construction of the drawers of American examples is almost identical to those made in London. A case in point (although numerous others could be cited) is represented by the dressing table now on display at one of the museums in the borough of Ipswich, Suffolk, England (fig. 21). This dressing table is a classic example of the sort of fine, but not great, furniture being made in urban England at the turn of the eighteenth century. It was not made for royalty or even for the merchant aristocracy, but rather for the middling trade that wished to be fashionable. The deal carcass is veneered with a good grade of walnut. The drawer sides are fas-


Chest of Drawers

tened to the drawer fronts, also of deal, so that the dovetails of the sides project through the fronts and the end grain is covered with veneer (fig. 22). The top edges of the drawer sides are lower than those of the drawer fronts to prevent binding as the wood expands and contracts with changes in atmospheric conditions. The drawer fronts are rabbed on their bottom edges to accept the drawer bottom, and the bottom is nailed upward into the bottoms of the drawer fronts and sides. The side margins of the drawer bottoms have applied strips on which the drawer slides. As has been done with the drawer in figure 23, these strips are almost invariably replaced at some point due to wear. The only substantial differences between this drawer and the usual American drawer of the same quality in this period are that the grain of the wood of the bottom boards of the English example run laterally (from side to side), while on the American examples the grain of the bottoms runs from front to rear, and that the quality of the conifer in the English example is not as good as that used in the American examples.

The general outline suggested here is not supposed to be a neat and comprehensive explanation of the introduction of cabinetwork into New England, and, indeed, it still poses a number of questions. What is suggested here is one strand of an intertwined string of events. Other strands are just as involved as the complexity of life itself in a vital community. One aspect of the picture that the above model does not explain is an important group of chests of drawers on stand with scroll legs. The most famous example of the group is a pine chest of drawers with maple legs presently on display at the Winslow House, Marshfield, Massachusetts (fig. 24). This chest bears a painted inscription on its backboards which reads "Made By Edmund Titcomb." Titcomb was a joiner in Newbury, Massachusetts (December 9, 1682–1723). How a rural joiner came to make this unusual example of the American chest on stand with scroll legs is something of a mystery. Obviously he did not make it before John Brocas was at work in Boston, but a related example in the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, illustrated in Wallace Nutting’s Furniture of the Pilgrim Century, is the exception that proves the rule: it has an upper carcass of oak made of joined rather than board construction.48 Another such example is at the Lyman Allyn Museum, New London, Connecticut. It would be

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logical to think that both of these joined examples predate the board-construction example signed by Titcomb and that they may even have been made by him or by his master. But logic does not always answer the questions we can ask of an object, particularly when we know that both urban and rural joiners continued to make furniture during the period when cabinetmaking first became popular in America.

Clearly the inspiration for the scroll legs of these three objects came from somewhere, perhaps from a piece of English furniture in Massachusetts that cannot now be identified. It does not seem to have been derived from any of the existing Boston examples.

The power of fashion is often alluded to in writings on the decorative arts to the point where it may seem to occupy too much prominence in the minds of authors, perhaps excluding more important ideas. But the William and Mary–style high chest of drawers as a form is an important example of the power of fashion. Once this form became entrenched in stylish New England furniture, it was widely copied, and examples in all degrees of quality with many different types of decoration have survived. Indeed, the form continued to evolve in this country, with changes of ornament, well into the eighth decade of the eighteenth century, whereas it passed out of fashion in England in the 1730s. The high chest in America was fashionable to such an extent that it virtually crowded out of existence the four- or five-drawer chest of drawers of the seventeenth century. Almost every veneered example of what purports to be a “low chest of drawers” or a “bureau” of New England origin in the William and Mary style turns out upon examination to be a high-chest top that later had ball feet added to it, although some examples appear to have been so altered quite early; perhaps the flimsy legs of their original bottom carcasses were broken, or perhaps the two carcasses became separated in the settlement of inheritances.
Summary

The chest of drawers developed in London during the early second quarter of the seventeenth century by the addition of drawers to a cupboard form known in Holland as the Zeeland kas. The form seems to have first enjoyed popularity among the upper middle classes of London society and was peculiarly suited to the storage needs of people dwelling in urban houses and among people who did not have a large number of domestic servants who could manage textiles stored on shelves in wardrobes. Within a generation, the form had become simplified and inexpensive and is found in estates of small monetary value in the 1660s. The earliest examples, both with and without doors covering the drawers, were made in two separate cases, which made them easy to move up and down the narrow, winding stairways of urban housing.

The earliest examples listed in American probate inventories are generally of high value, and some of them may have been made in Boston in the 1640s by craftsmen from London who settled there. The earliest documentary reference to the form in England or America is found in a court case that refers to the 1638-41 period. Subsequent early inventory references show the form to have been popular among the urban merchant class in America, further heightening the possibility that it was not at first an item of fashion among the English aristocracy.

By 1686, references to “old” chests of drawers began to appear, and they were shortly followed by the appearance of high chests of drawers, virtually all the surviving examples of which are made in the cabinetmaker’s fashion, not in the joiner’s manner.

From 1695 until 1713, the cabinetmaking trade in Boston, as established by English immigrant John...
Brocas, was disseminated by three native-born cabinetmakers, John Damon, Jr., George Thomas, and John Maverick. No stylistic change can be traced to a new infusion of talent into that community until 1713 or 1714, when William Howell and William Price arrived.

The Chest of Drawers in Pennsylvania

When Pennsylvania was first settled by Englishmen in 1682, joiners were still the major producers of case furniture in rural England. In this same period, however, cabinetmakers' furniture was becoming popular in London. Since craftsmen from both rural and urban England were among the first settlers in Philadelphia, it is understandable that chests of drawers with joined frames as well as those made of boards were made there from the very beginning.

References such as the one to “an Oak Chest of Drawers” valued at 15s. in the inventory of James Claypoole, a Philadelphia merchant who died in September 1687, and to “1 Case of Drawers (of oake) £2” in the parlor of Elizabeth Fishbourne of Chester in 1709 show that joined chests of drawers were present in the colony and owned by the first settlers, but surviving examples have not been identified. Only one joined chest of drawers in the applied-moldings style has been attributed to Philadelphia, and its frame is made of walnut, not oak (fig. 25).

The possibility that even board-constructed chests of drawers were made in Philadelphia quite early is suggested by the fact that the first four immigrant woodworking craftsmen capable of making case furniture—Abraham Coffin, John Fellows, Abraham Hooper, and John Valecott—are all referred to by the title “cabinetmaker” in the ships' passenger lists of 1682, although two of them, Fellows and Hooper, are referred to as joiners in the inventories of their estates. John Tibbye, a London “joiner,” was a first purchaser in 1681 and served on a petit jury in 1682. John Maddock and Richard Clone, both joiners from Cheshire, arrived in Philadelphia in 1683. Whether these documented references signify differences in the work of these craftsmen is, at the present time, a moot point.

Judging from the frequent mention of escritoires, cabinets, and chests of drawers in the inventories of Pennsylvania prior to 1710, the cabinetmakers and joiners of that growing province produced a large amount of furniture. Since so many inventories of Philadelphia craftsmen and their suppliers have survived, it is very nearly possible to reconstruct the development of Philadelphia case furniture during this period from the documents alone. Listed in an account of goods at William Penn's residence, Pennsbury Manor, taken on December 2, 1687, and rediscovered in 1960, are “poplar,” and “deale” boards, poplar being the common term used for “tulip poplar,” or tulipwood (Liriodendron tulipifera)—a North American wood previously unfamiliar to Englishmen since it did not grow in Europe—and deale being a common term for almost any conifer. In the “Joyners Roume,” distinguished from “the Carpenters Room,” was “1 paper boock of dutch draughts”—the first reference to a pattern book in America—perhaps used by the “Dutchman joiner and carpenter” Penn brought over to work at Pennsbury Manor in 1685. The presence of tulipwood and deal suggests that these woods, common in Pennsylvania furniture throughout the colonial period, were already in use. The “deale” might have been like the “red cedar boards” worth 10s. and “red cedar pieces more” valued at 9s. in the inventory of John Tibby, a joiner who died in 1688.

The 1694 inventory of John Fellows, who was referred to as a “Cabennett Maker” when he immigrated in 1682, contains “one case of drawers partly made” valued at £1.0.0. Fellows's inventory is the earliest detailed document that shows what the interior of a Philadelphia craftsman's shop was like. It contains no veneer, weights, or clamps to suggest that he was capable of doing elaborate cabinetmaking, and, in fact, Fellows is referred to at the head of the document as a “joiner,” an appellation that went unchallenged by Abraham Hooper, also a joiner, who took the inventory. Fellows was equipped to do turning, as the listing of “a p[ar]cell turning tools” valued at 7s. and “3 turning chissells and one leathe” worth £2.0.0 demonstrates. He also

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48 Philadelphia Wills, 1687–34B, 1709–141. A joined chest of drawers on frame in the collection of Col. and Mrs. Miodrag Blagojevich may also have been made in Philadelphia.


Fig. 25. Chest of drawers, Philadelphia, Pa., 1690–1710. Walnut; H. 44", W. 45 1/2", D. 23 1/4". (Philadelphia Museum of Art, J. Stogdell Stokes Fund.)

possessed a considerable stock of wood, including "240 foot wall-nutt plank £1:15:0; 754 foot pyne boards £3" and "350 foot of oak boards £1:8:0," as well as "4 sutes [sets] of locks for chests of drawers £1:8:0" and "a pair cell of brass-work for drawers £1:4:0." While there is no evidence that Fellowes was a cabinetmaker in the fullest sense of the word, like most joiners he made coffins, as the listing of "12 pair Coffin Handles £1:4:0" in his inventory indicates.51 Unless seventeenth-century coffins differed from those of the eighteenth century, they were of board construction and were not dovetailed.

Other items in Fellowes's shop show the kinds of furniture that he was capable of making. The fact that the shop contained "Stuff [wood] partlie wrought for an oval table" suggests that he was working on a drop-leaf table, which could easily have had turned legs. Two chests were also "partlie made" along with a box and "one dozen chair frames," the latter valued at 7s. each. The listing of "Dressing box locks" indicates that he made this form, and eight "2/3d. bedscrews" suggest that he made bedsteads. The inclusion of "2 lbs. of Bees-wax" valued at 1s. 8d. and the total absence of varnishes, shellacs, or paints suggest that he finished his walnut furniture by waxing it.52

The inventory of James Chick, a joiner, was recorded on October 8, 1699, and contained unitemized woods and tools, but it also mentioned "Sundry parcells of wallnutt plank and boards at Brandywine Creek supposed to be worth £15," a useful reference to where at least one Philadelphia joiner got his walnut.53

In that same year, Jonathan Dickinson, a Philadelphia merchant who owned two plantations in

51 Hornor, Blue Book, p. 3; Philadelphia Wills, 1694–104B.
52 Philadelphia Wills, 1694–104B.
53 Philadelphia Wills, 1699–228.
Jamaica, imported mahogany from them to Philadelphia. According to his account books, he sold planks of that wood to Abraham Hooper, a joiner, who bequeathed to his wife "one Mehogany Case of Drawers...which is in her Roome," on December 20, 1706. Dickinson’s own inventory, taken on July 20, 1722, is filled with mahogany furniture, none of which has been recognized in modern times. Two "Mohogany Planks 9½ feet at 16d." per foot turned up in the estate of Charles Plumley in 1708, as did "3 inch hard ditto 48 feet at 6d." In November 1711, mahogany, pine, red-cedar, poplar, cherry, and pear-tree boards all appeared in the inventory of William Till. The mahogany was valued at 6d. per foot, while the cedar, at slightly less than 3d. per foot, was more valuable than the walnut at slightly less than 2d. per foot. The pine, at a penny a foot, was the least expensive of all. Among Till’s household goods was a walnut “Chest of Draws & hatt Case of pine Blackt" valued together at £3.0.0, as well as “a Table and Dressing box & looking glass" appraised at £1.10.0. In his shop were “Locks, Drops, Scuttleons [escutcheons], Coffin handles, hinges &c’’ to the value of £20.0.0.45

In a survey of cabinet hardware in Philadelphia accounts of this period, Cathryn McElroy discovered “a parcel of brass drops (34 in all) & 6 [of] iron" worth 9s.6d. in 1699. In the inventory of shopkeeper Margaret Beardsley, taken in that same year, are “32 Drops for Drawers, 2 dozen Bell Drops all 4/4 [and] 6 Brass Escutcheons at 2d ea 1/.” In the inventory of James Fox, a wealthy merchant, she found among the shop goods a more descriptive list that contains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4½ dozen wrought drops</td>
<td>2/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2½ dozen plain ditto</td>
<td>2/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4½ dozen drawer rings</td>
<td>2/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 dozen scutcheon</td>
<td>2/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sets of chest drawer locks</td>
<td>7/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 set ditto</td>
<td>2/6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both of these references clearly describe the characteristic William and Mary single drop pulls, the plates (or rings) that went behind them, and keyhole escutcheons on Philadelphia furniture about 1700. By 1708, when the inventory of Charles Plumley was taken, time and fashion had moved so swiftly that Hooper, who carefully itemized the estate, referred to thirty-five “scutcheons” and thirty “Damnified [damaged or corroded] drops” as “old-fashioned.”46

From the mid 1690s onward, walnut chests of drawers are mentioned in the Philadelphia County inventories. In a study of non-German Philadelphia inventories between the years 1682 and 1710, Ruth Matzkin Knapp noted sixty-nine chests of drawers of unspecified character, two of oak, two of cedar, one of olive wood, and only seven of walnut, although the majority of the unspecified ones were probably of that wood. From this fairly large group, only two examples, identical to each other, are documented with assurance to Philadelphia. The chest of drawers illustrated as figure 26 bears the chalk inscription “William Beake 1717—” on the inside of its right side panel. The sole biographical reference to William Beakes is the fact that he witnessed the will of joiner William Till in 1711. Beakes is said by Hornor to have been Till’s apprentice, although that assertion cannot be documented at the present time.46

The Beakes chest, made of black walnut with drawer linings of a yellow pine of the *taeda* species, has a joined frame. The transition between the frame and the feather-edged panels set into the frame is accentuated by applied moldings of a rather ornate profile, although the facade is very simple, relieved only by half-round moldings applied to the dividers between the drawers. A significant feature of this chest of drawers and many of the stylistically later Philadelphia examples is the molding applied to the case directly beneath the top board.

The same conditions that obscure the date at which the high chest of drawers appeared in New England prevail in the inventories of Pennsylvania. Indeed, an additional complication appears in the middle colonies because of the popularity of a type of chest of drawers that was common there with seven or eight drawers in one carcass. This type is somewhat taller than the four-drawer examples and is sometimes elevated by being placed on a low frame. To further confuse the matter, this type is referred to in the Benjamin Lehman price list of 1786 as a "low chest of drawers.”47 Although the


usual examples have bracket feet or short cabriole legs, the possibility that they were made in the William and Mary style cannot be discounted.

Perhaps the "stand chest of drawers" valued at the high price of £3,0.0 in the "Great Chamber" of Margaret Beardsley in 1699 was a high chest. Even more likely, the "walnut Chest of Drawers" valued at £8.0.0 in the inventory of John Hunt, on December 20, 1708, was of that type and was probably of American manufacture. Clearly, the "Standing Chest of Drawers" valued at £3,10.0 in the estate of Joseph Fisher of Dublin, Philadelphia County, in 1717 was a high chest of drawers or a chest of drawers on frame, in contrast to an "old Chest of Drawers" appraised with a table at £2.15.0. How much these chests antedated the preceding inventory listings is not certain. The appearance of "a body of a Paire of Chists of Drawers" among the unfinished work in the shop of Henry Frogley, a joiner, on December 24, 1723, may be interpreted to mean either a chest on chest or a chest of drawers made in two smaller cases for ease of moving.58

A comparison of the documents relating to Philadelphia furniture making between 1682 and 1725 with those of New England reveals several important differences, a major one being the use of the words joiner and cabinetmaker. Cabinetmaker is liberally sprinkled through the documents of Boston from 1696 onward but is not found in the Philadelphia records other than those few instances in 1682 when men, later called joiners, declared their profession as cabinetmakers prior to departure from England. Not until May 20, 1717, was a craftsman called a cabinetmaker in the Philadelphia records. Indeed, as late as 1783, when the Occupation

Tax List for Philadelphia was drawn up, Thomas Affleck, John Gillingham, William Savery, and Daniel Trotter were all listed as joiners. The best William and Mary furniture of Boston differs noticeably from that of Philadelphia. Boston case furniture is veneered with burl maple and with walnut cross banding around the drawer fronts, while Philadelphia work is invariably solid walnut. In fact, veneered case furniture is unknown in Philadelphia before the introduction of the Queen Anne style. The reasons for these differences inspire a host of speculation. Did verbal conservatism on the part of the predominantly Quaker Philadelphia craftsmen promote the use of the term joiner? Was the term cabinetmaker frowned on in Philadelphia for the same reasons that caused Batty Langley to speak of cabinetmakers as "spurious indocible chips expelled by the joiners" in 1740? Was walnut so plentiful in Pennsylvania and so rare in New England that what we consider fine Philadelphia furniture today was made of relatively cheap materials in the early eighteenth century? Certainly far less labor is involved in making solid drawer fronts than veneered ones. Were solid drawer fronts considered more durable or more attractive?

And what about the taste of the customer? Is the often-repeated maxim of Quaker desires in furniture and furnishings—"Of the Best Sort but Plain"—reflected in the furniture that permits the William and Mary style in Philadelphia to be characterized as the age of walnut, while that of Boston reflects a different aesthetic, albeit the forms are the same?

For each generalization that can be drawn to simplify the complex realities of a society's attributes, exceptions can be adduced to disprove it. If early Philadelphia was as conservative as we would like to believe, how can the taste for mahogany furniture as early as 1699 be explained, when that wood did not appear in a fashionable Boston inventory until the estate of Elizabeth Pitts was proved on May 11, 1726? And yet, if the Congregationalists of Boston were conservative, why did they buy expensive and showy chests of drawers?

Perhaps the reasons for differences between these two cultural areas are inherent in the different histories. In New England, case furniture was made only by joiners for forty-five years before Englishmen settled in Pennsylvania. Insofar as the decorative arts are concerned, the citizens of Philadelphia had no long tradition of joiners' work before the first furniture craftsmen came, and each artisan could begin making current styles from the moment he arrived, according to his ability and idea of those styles. William Penn, although a Quaker, was a cultivated gentleman and established a country seat appropriate to his station, as the inventory of his sumptuous home and its furnishings attests. He set a genteel tone for his colony from the outset, while those who would be worldly in Boston always had to overcome a certain Puritan distrust of luxury.

Perhaps the differences were simply caused by the fact that the craftsmen who worked in Philadelphia came from places in Europe where work was done in a way different from that followed in the places from which the craftsmen who established Boston's cabinetmaking style came. Certainly two traditions of furniture making—those of the Welsh Quakers and of the German Pietists, not yet clearly disentangled from each other—were present in Pennsylvania but were not represented in New England. The forms and techniques that these craftsmen introduced found their way within a generation through the hands of particularly ingenious craftsmen into what we think of as Philadelphia's "high-style" furniture, as apprentices from English families trained with German masters and vice versa. Compared with Philadelphia's rather open society, where all men were brothers in Quakerism, Boston's society was bifurcated toward the end of the seventeenth century, by the superposition of a Church of England aristocracy upon the tradition of Congregationalism that had reigned supreme for half a century. Moreover, dispersal of styles and migration of craftsmen into the newly settled countryside of Pennsylvania was made easier by the richness of the land. While the farmers of the Massachusetts countryside were tied to the merchants of Boston only by economic ties and often suffered as a result of fluctuating demand, the Quakers of rural Pennsylvania not only had healthy economic ties with Philadelphia but also were spiritually focused on it as a result of the yearly meeting.

All of these elements, clearly present in the two societies in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, must have influenced the development of furniture in these two very different communities and resulted in the startlingly distinct furniture produced in each of them in the half century that followed.