



Fig. 1. Desk-and-bookcase probably made in the shop of Nathaniel Gould (1734–1781), Salem, Massachusetts, 1765–1781. Mahogany with white pine; height 96 1/8, width 44 1/8, depth 22 3/4 inches. Private collection; photograph by Gavin Ashworth, courtesy of C. L. Prickett Antiques, Yardley, Pennsylvania.



Bay State riches

ANXIOUS AND AWESTRUCK, I waited outside Wendell Garrett's office in the spring of 1971. He was the managing editor of

The Magazine ANTIQUES and I was a nervous twenty-three-year-old graduate student in the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture. He had agreed to meet me because of my interest in early Boston woodworkers. I had heard that he had combed the city's colonial newspapers for advertisements by artisans. Would he share any of his findings with an inexperienced amateur? As I entered Wendell's office, I didn't spot him at first. Stacks of books filled the room. Papers were everywhere. From behind the desk, in the midst of the disarray, Wendell extended a hand and greeted me with a welcoming hello. His demeanor immediately put me at ease. He was warm and friendly, and sincerely interested in my research. As we chatted, he pulled out a thick file of newspaper transcriptions and allowed me to copy whatever I wanted. Those copies still reside in a drawer of

my desk, and I smile whenever I glance at them. They remind me of Wendell's generous spirit and,

The Magazine ANTIQUES and Four Centuries of Massachusetts Furniture

By Brock Jobe



Fig. 2. Japanned high chest of drawers made by John Pimm (before 1704–1773) and possibly japanned by Robert Davis (d. 1739), Boston, 1735–1740. Soft maple, black walnut, white pine, and original brass hardware; height 85 ¼, width 42, depth 25 ¼ inches. *Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library, Winterthur, Delaware, gift of Henry Francis du Pont.*

Fig. 3. Detail of a blank receipt of upholsterer Samuel Grant (1705–1784), Boston, 1736. Engraving on laid paper, 4 ¾ by 6 ¾ inches. *Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.*

Fig. 4. Pier table probably by John (1738–1818) and Thomas Seymour (1771–1849) with carving by Thomas Wightman (1759–1827), Boston, 1800–1810. Mahogany with birch veneers, rosewood banding, white pine, cherry, and marble; height 30 ¾, width 40 ¼, depth 20 ¾ inches. *Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library, bequest of Henry Francis du Pont.*

just as importantly, confirm the longstanding commitment of *The Magazine ANTIQUES* to scholarship. No publication has done more to promote the study of Americana over the past century.

On the subject of Massachusetts furniture, a passion of mine, the magazine's contribution has been legendary. By my count, an astonishing 157 articles have appeared on the topic, beginning with "The Clocks of Simon Willard" in the second issue, published in February 1922. By far the most prolific contributor was Mabel Munson Swan, who, during a span of twenty-five years, from 1929 to 1954, wrote nearly twenty articles on Boston and Salem furniture. In her most memorable pieces she engaged in a spirited debate with the noted museum director Fiske Kimball over the accomplishments of Samuel McIntire of Salem. Kimball initially praised him as a maker and carver of furniture; Swan



questioned Kimball's assertions and supported her claims with evidence of her own. The controversy played out in the pages of the magazine during the

early 1930s, until finally in 1934, Swan published "McIntire Vindicated: Fresh Evidence of the Furniture Carvers of Salem," which remains a key source for defining McIntire's work.

In more recent years *The Magazine ANTIQUES* has broadened its purview. Treatments of Massachusetts furniture have considered such diverse themes as the role of immigrant craftsmen during the seventeenth century, the creation of colorful japanned furniture in the eighteenth, and the rise of the wicker furniture industry at the end of the nineteenth. For anyone wishing to learn more about Massachusetts furniture, the magazine remains the starting point. Its many sources yield a treasure trove of information.

Over the next two years *ANTIQUES* will once





Figs. 5, 5a. Desk-and-bookcase probably made by Nathan Lombard (1777–1847), Sturbridge or Sutton, Massachusetts, 1800–1805. Cherry with cherry veneer, mahogany veneer, light- and dark-wood inlay, white pine, basswood, and probably original brass hardware; height 92 1/2, width 42 1/2, depth 21 3/8 inches. *Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library, du Pont bequest.*

Fig. 6. Timepiece with works by Daniel Munroe (1775–1859) and case probably by William Munroe (1778–1861), Boston or Concord, Massachusetts, c. 1800. Mahogany with mahogany veneers, white pine, brass, gilded and painted glass, and painted iron dial. *Concord Museum, Massachusetts; photograph by David Bohl.*

again explore the rich variety of the state's furniture in several articles. The impetus is an unprecedented collaborative project, *Four Centuries of Massachusetts Furniture*, initiated by the Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library and the Massachusetts Historical Society. Uniting both organizations with the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, the Concord Museum, the Fuller Craft Museum, Historic Deerfield, Historic New England, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, North Bennet Street School, Old Sturbridge Village, and the Peabody Essex Museum, the project will present an ambitious schedule of landmark events beginning in March. Seven exhibitions, three symposiums, two major books, an online database of documented Boston furniture, enhanced cataloguing of Massachusetts furniture at two participating institutions, and dozens of public programs will provide a visual and intellectual feast. The results will rewrite the record of the Bay State's craft achievements.

The program kicks off on March 6 with the Winterthur Furniture Forum. A talented mix of thirty curators, craftsmen, conservators, professors, and antiques dealers will present "New Perspectives on Boston Furniture, 1630–1860." Never before has there been such a comprehensive look at the city's furniture; happily, nearly all the conference findings will appear in a volume on Boston furniture to be published by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts. In addition, to coincide with the forum, Winterthur has mounted an exhibition of fifty of its finest pieces of Boston furniture (see Figs. 2, 4).

In the fall of 2013 *Four Centuries of Massachusetts Furniture* moves to New England for five exhibitions. The Massachusetts Historical Society will

mount a display of documented Boston furniture from private collections, supplemented with rarely seen items in the society's collection, including relevant paintings, prints, account books and ledgers, inventories, and trade cards (see Fig. 3). These touchstones to the past cover in microcosm several centuries of a rich and varied furniture-making tradition. The resulting display will extend the story of the city's importance into the twentieth century, when local cabinetmakers emphasized the colonial revival and other historical styles.

Exhibitions at Old Sturbridge Village and the Concord Museum will each explore the career of a prominent Federal-period artisan: Nathan Lombard in Sturbridge and William Munroe in Concord. With a vitality and charm that captures the eye even today, Lombard's intricately inlaid furniture stands apart from other rural traditions in Massachusetts of the early 1800s, displaying charismatic inlaid eagles, elaborate vines, and floral motifs, and unusual features like concave quarter-columns emboldened with ornament (Figs. 5, 5a). Raised in Brimfield, married in Sturbridge, and working in Sutton, Lombard's story is a local one, but much of his furniture is now widely scattered. This exhibition offers the opportunity for his pieces to return home to central Massachusetts and to share recent discoveries about his life and family.

The Concord Museum's exhibition relies on two remarkable survivals now in its collection—William Munroe's autobiography and his business accounts. In 1800, after completing his training in Dorchester and Roxbury near Boston, Munroe moved to Concord at the request of his brother Daniel, a clockmaker trained in the Roxbury shop of Simon Willard.



Equipped only with tools, a set of patterns, and three dollars in cash (which he loaned to Daniel), William began to make cases for his brother's clocks and timepieces (see Fig. 6). In addition, he crafted other fashionable forms, from fire screens to sideboards (see Fig. 9), for his family and neighbors as well as on contract to Boston retailers. Success did not come easily. His income varied from year to year and he continually pursued new ventures to supplement it. Finally, in 1819, he abandoned cabinetmaking altogether to become a pencil manufacturer. Acclaimed for making the "first wooden-cased graphite lead pencils manufactured in the United States," Munroe epitomizes the transition from craft to industry that came to define the nineteenth century.

A fourth exhibition, organized by Historic Deerfield, will take a fresh look at two centuries of furniture making in western Massachusetts.

Showcasing a wealth of objects, many of which are recent acquisitions (see Figs. 7, 8), the display will examine four historical threads, beginning with the famous "Hadley" chests of the late seventeenth century and the other early regional shop traditions that they obscured. A second theme will explore the emergence of the consumer revolution, through both local craftsmen and urban imports, on the shoulders of the elite "river god" families of the Connecticut River valley, who funded themselves through agricultural exports and munitions for the colonial wars. Next, the exhibition will consider the post-American Revolution rise of classicism that largely eclipsed the river gods, with new consumers and craftsmen who manifested different standards of taste and education as well as new trading partners developed through the Connecticut River's new canal system. A final section will turn to the nineteenth-century rise in wealth from burgeoning industry and technology—largely through the metalworking trades—that created yet another wave of consumers and craftsmen anxious to express their new-found wealth in modern ways. This richly textured tale of local history will come alive through a thought-provoking presentation of documented objects.

A fifth exhibition turns to a more contemporary theme. *MASS Made: Studio Furniture of the Bay State* at the Fuller Craft Museum will focus on the creative achievements of current furniture makers. Figures such as Judy McKie (Fig. 10) have long enjoyed international reputations, while other talented studio artists and woodworkers remain relatively unknown. Yet, their combined impact on the state is significant, and enhanced by the influence of two enduring educational programs: the North Bennet Street School, begun in Boston in 1885, continues to provide exceptional instruction in custom bench work, especially in reproducing traditional styles; more recently, in 1975, Boston University introduced its Program in Artisanry for all craft mediums, a program that continued in Boston for ten years



Fig. 7. Chest-on-frame probably by Benjamin Munn III (1738–1824), Deerfield, Massachusetts, c. 1786. Cherry with white pine; height 35 ½, width 36, depth 24 inches. *Historic Deerfield, Deerfield, Massachusetts, gift of Elizabeth Fuller.*

Fig. 8. High chest of drawers probably by Julius Barnard (1769–after 1820), Northampton, Massachusetts, c. 1795. Cherry with white pine; height 86 ½, width 40 ¼, depth 20 inches. The high chest was owned by Governor Caleb Strong (1745–1819), who lived in Northampton. *Historic Deerfield.*





Fig. 9. Miniature sideboard probably by William Munroe for a member of his family, Concord, 1800–1810. Mahogany with white pine and original brass hardware; height 13 7/8, width 21, depth 9 inches. An array of miniature silver covers the top of the sideboard. Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library, du Pont gift.

and then moved to southeastern Massachusetts, where it is now a part of the University of Massachusetts in Dartmouth.

Four Centuries of Massachusetts Furniture concludes at the Peabody Essex Museum in 2014 with the first retrospective look at the furniture produced in the shop of Nathaniel Gould, the preeminent cabinetmaker in Salem during the mid-eighteenth century. Kemble Widmer and Joyce King's discovery of Gould's account books dramatically changed

our understanding of Salem furniture and made it possible to attribute much of the town's grandest pre-Revolutionary War furniture to this highly skilled artisan (see Fig. 1). In addition to mounting the exhibition, the Peabody Essex Museum will publish a comprehensive analysis of Gould's shop records and furniture.

Never before have so many august institutions in the Northeast joined forces to study, publish, display, and promote a single topic in the field of

Fig. 10. Glass Top Table with Dogs #11 made by Judy Kensley McKie (1944–), Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984. Walnut, ash, and glass; height 34, width 60, depth 18 inches. Fuller Craft Museum, Brockton, Massachusetts, museum commission with funds provided by a Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities New Works Grant.



American art. For me, this is an especially memorable experience. More than forty years ago, while still a student in the Winterthur Program, I delivered my first lecture at a conference on eighteenth-century Boston furniture at the headquarters of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, one of the participants in the current project. Much like that first meeting with Wendell Garrett, I was awed by those in the room: Richard Randall, Dean Fales, Jonathan Fairbanks, and Walter Muir Whitehill—all legends in my mind. I rose to speak, looked down at my printed remarks, and began to read. Too nervous to look up, I continued to read. Finally I took a glance at the audience and there was Walter Muir Whitehill—sound asleep. I did survive the moment and eventually had the honor of editing the book that arose from the conference. *Four Centuries of Massachusetts Furniture* has provided a rare opportunity to return to a subject that I love, but this time working in collaboration with so many others to share a remarkable story.

In the field of American furniture history, arguably no state has left a more remarkable legacy than Massachusetts—from the earliest products of newly arrived immigrants in the 1620s and 1630s to the outstanding work of present-day studio furniture makers. The overall output is staggering. During the past four hundred years, people working in wood have fashioned millions of pieces of furniture in the state. Yet the account of this output has only been told in bits and pieces. No one has looked critically at the big picture. The combined efforts of these eleven institutions will yield a richer and more meaningful record of four centuries of Massachusetts furniture.

The author is grateful to the following for their assistance in the preparation of this article: Jonathan Fairbanks, Christie Jackson, Joshua Lane, Gerald Ward, Patricia Warner, David Wood, and Philip Zea.

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Four Centuries of Massachusetts Furniture

Four Centuries of Massachusetts Furniture is a collaborative venture of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts; the Concord Museum; the Fuller Craft Museum; Historic Deerfield; Historic New England; Massachusetts Historical Society; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; North Bennet Street School; Old Sturbridge Village; Peabody Essex Museum; and Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library. The website <http://fourcenturies.org/> will highlight an abundance of consortium activities, including:

Conferences and Programs:

The Sewell C. Biggs Winterthur Furniture Forum: "New Perspectives on Boston Furniture, 1630–1860," March 6–8, 2013, Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library, Winterthur, Delaware

Collectors' Forum: "Delightfully Designed: Massachusetts Decorated Furniture," October 19, 2013, Old Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge, Massachusetts

Boston Furniture Workshops, October 26 and November 2, 2013, Historic New England Collections and Conservation Center, Haverhill, Massachusetts

Exhibitions

Boston Furniture at Winterthur, to October 6, 2013, Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library

Furniture Masterworks: Tradition & Innovation in Western Massachusetts, September 28, 2013–ongoing, Historic Deerfield, Deerfield, Massachusetts

The Cabinetmaker and the Carver: Boston Furniture from Private Collections, October 4, 2013–January 17, 2014, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston

MASS Made: Contemporary Studio Furniture of the Bay State, October 6, 2013–February 16, 2014, Fuller Craft Museum, Brockton, Massachusetts

The Best Workman in the Shop: Cabinetmaker William Munroe of Concord, October 11, 2013–March 23, 2014, Concord Museum, Concord, Massachusetts

Delightfully Designed—The Furniture and Life of Nathan Lombard, October 19, 2013–May 4, 2014, Old Sturbridge Village

The Furniture of Nathaniel Gould, 1734–1781, Fall 2014, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts