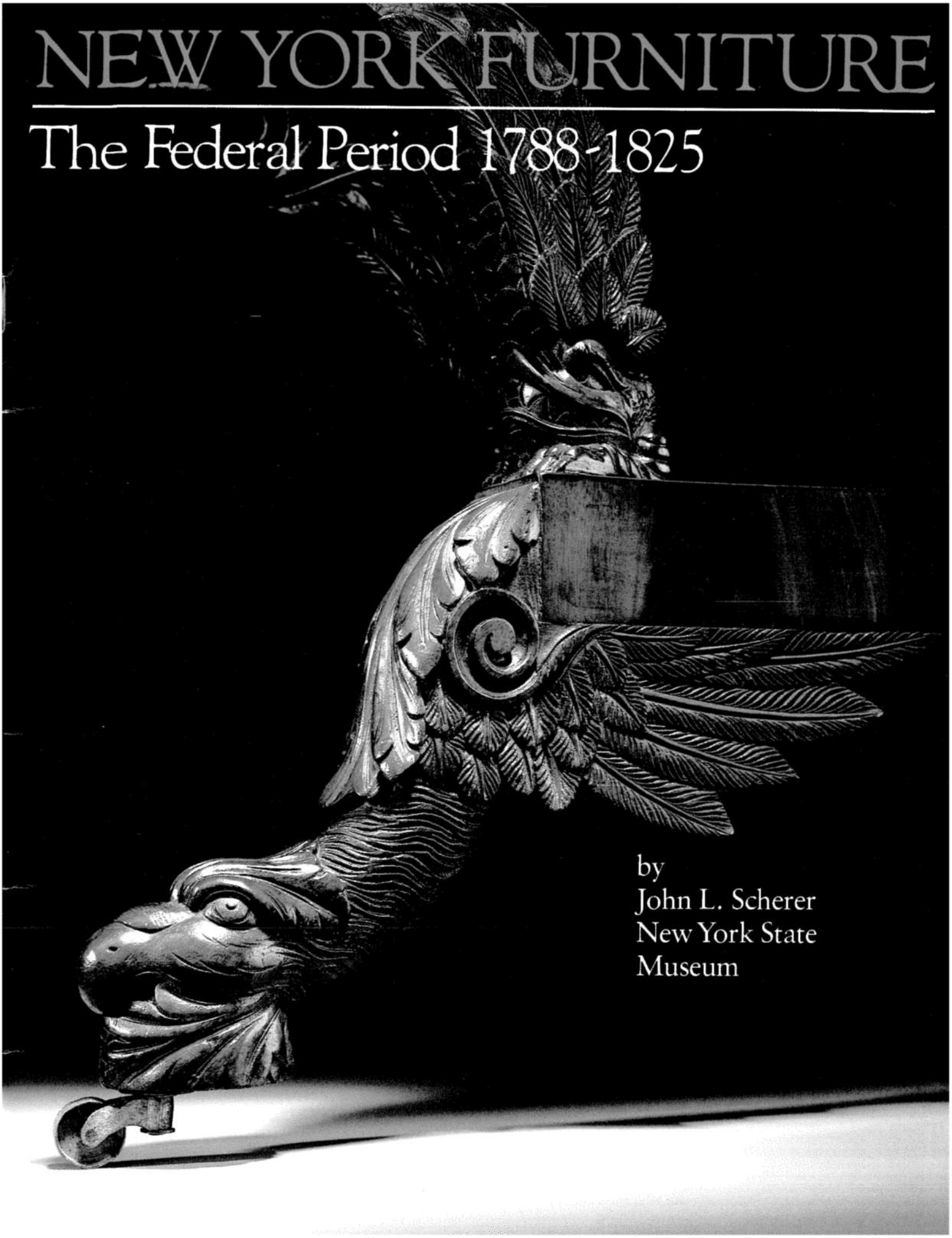
# NEW YORK FURNITURE

## The Federal Period 1788-1825



by
John L. Scherer
New York State
Museum

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**Cover photograph:**
Detail of a classical card table, c.1820. Attributed to Michael Allison. See page 26.


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The State Education Department
New York State Museum
Albany, New York



ISBN 1-55557-180-8

# Acknowledgements

The completion of this catalog involved the welcome assistance of Museum staff. John Yost, Museum photographer, tirelessly provided the photographs of furniture needed for the catalog. Curtis Fretz and Emil Schaller, from the Museum restoration shop, employed their fine craft to make the furniture look its best. Joelean Dearstyne, my colleague in Research and Collections, deserves a special thanks for her generous support in preparing this publication. Finally, I wish to thank Paul Scudiere, Director of Research and Collections, for his encouragement.

Funding for this catalog was provided by the Wunsch Foundation and the New York State Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution chaired by Hon. Sol Wachtler, Chief Judge of the State of New York. Eric Martin Wunsch and the Wunsch Americana Foundation, Inc. deserve special praise. Without their endless assistance and support for the Museum's Decorative Arts Collection, neither this catalog nor the exhibit would have been possible. Over half of the items in the exhibit and those illustrated in this catalog were donated to the Museum by the Wunsch Americana Foundation, Inc. No Museum could have a better friend and advisor.

# Bicentennial 1788-1988

This catalog and the exhibition NEW YORK FURNITURE, The Federal Period 1788-1825 salutes the two hundredth anniversary of New York's ratification of the United States Constitution. On July 26, 1788, New York became the eleventh state to ratify the document. The Constitution had gone into effect in June, when New Hampshire became the ninth state to approve it. With ratification of the Constitution, the thirteen states became one nation, and the Federal period began.

When makers of the Constitution were deliberating in Philadelphia during the summer of 1787, they were inspired by the political philosophy of classical Greece and Rome. As the Constitution circulated among the states for ratification, both supporters and opponents of the document engaged in lengthy debates that appeared in the press. Using pseudonyms such as "Cato," "Brutus," and "Publius," they extolled the virtues of those early republics and expressed admiration for their dedication to broad citizen participation. Esteemed for their democratic frameworks of government, the ancient city-states fostered imitation that found expression not only in politics but in the decorative arts and in architecture.

Furniture shown in this catalog and in the exhibition was culled from the collections of the New York State Museum. New York cabinetmakers played an important part in the history of this period. They made a large set of chairs for Federal Hall in New York City. These chairs graced the room when George Washington took his oath of office as the first president of the United States. Thomas Burling of New York made chairs for Mount Vernon, and Alexander Hamilton commissioned a New York cabinetmaker to make a set of chairs for The Grange, his New York City residence. Duncan Phyfe produced furniture for many of the major political figures of the Federal period. The fine craftsmanship of Federal furniture and the excellence of its design express the exuberance and pride sweeping through the new nation at that time.

# Introduction

On July 23, 1788, New York City celebrated the adoption of the United States Constitution with a massive parade. Supporters of the document also hoped that the event would favorably influence the delegates at the New York Ratifying Convention, still locked in stalemate at Poughkeepsie. A large contingent of cabinetmakers, led by Robert Carter, joined the parade. Jacob Smith marched at the head of the chairmakers. The red and green cockades they wore in their hats were emblematic of their trade.

This parade also ushered in the Federal period, the exciting 37 years that followed the establishment of the new nation. Pride and prosperity were abroad in the land, as citizens of the new nation looked with confidence to a promising future. The United States was still an agricultural nation, but with ratification of the constitution and the unification of the 13 colonies, American interest in manufacture and trade was on the upswing. New York cabinetmakers were eager to take advantage of the growing opportunities.

**Origin of Federal Styles**

Although Americans had freed themselves politically, they were not ready for artistic independence. Like painters and architects of that time, they turned to England and France for inspiration. Federal furniture traces its origins to two British architects, Robert Adam and James Adam. Their book, *Works in Architecture* (1773-1779), depicts designs derived from the neoclassical style, a favorite of Louis XVI. A reaction against the elaborate rococo style of earlier eighteenth century European architecture, neoclassicism was influenced by Europe's and America's infatuation with archeological discoveries of Greek and Roman antiquities.

The Adams' architectural designs were transformed into styles for furniture in books published by Thomas Shearer (1788), George Hepplewhite (1788), and Thomas Sheraton (1793-1794 and 1803). American as well as British cabinetmakers adopted the styles promoted in these books. Characterized by light, delicate forms and straight or elliptical lines, these styles were referred to as Hepplewhite and Sheraton. They became a hallmark of early Federal period furniture.

The late Federal style in America was influenced by the tastes of both the English Regency and the French Empire. These furniture styles, which are reflected in Sheraton's later designs (published in 1812) were characterized by Greco-Roman archaeological forms, including klysmos and curule chairs and animal supports.

Although inspired by French and British models, American Federal furniture has a character of its own. In addition to being simpler versions of more sophisticated, European styles, American furniture of this period reflects the mood of the new nation. Symbolizing a sense of pride, the eagle appears in inlays and is carved into finials and supports. Cornucopia carved and stencilled on the furniture signify abundance and prosperity.

Furniture with new purposes inspired new forms. They include:

- Sideboards, used in the dining room as servers and for storage.
- Pier tables, to be placed in the pier, the area between two windows.
- Butler's desks, a chest of drawers with a secretary drawer containing writing surface and pigeon holes.
- Tambour desks, where the writing surface and pigeon holes can be hidden by a sliding screen.
- Sleigh beds, with scrolled head and foot boards and deep sides resembling a sleigh.
- Tables designed specifically for drawing, writing, and other special purposes.

**Tastemakers**

Leadership in the design and production of furniture moved from Philadelphia to New York during the Federal period. This was partly because New York, with its flourishing port, assumed leadership in many areas of trade and commerce at that time. In 1805, in search of a new business location, William Johnson of New Jersey indicated that New York was "the London of America" and would "take the lead of business to any other place in the United States."[1] That same year, the first cabinetmakers' directory for New York City was published in the city directory. In his introduction, the editor stated that "this curious and useful mechanical art is brought to a very great perfection in this city. The furniture daily offered for sale equals, in point of elegance, any ever imported from Europe, and is scarcely equaled in any other city in America."[2] Trends introduced in New York City rapidly spread Upstate, and before long, cabinetmakers throughout the new nation were imitating them.

Generally, furniture made during the Federal period was made to order, and New York cabinetmakers had regular clients. To facilitate this practice and to establish a standard for pricing, several price guides for New York furniture were issued. These cabinetmakers' and journeymen's price books were manuscripts or printed lists of prices for the making of furniture at rates sought by journeymen or agreed upon by masters. Such price books are valuable resources, because they not only provide a retail price, but also give full descriptions of furniture made by New York cabinetmakers during the Federal era. Often these descriptions provide options and embellishments which could be had at an extra charge.

Although much furniture was still custom-made, cabinetmakers began to warehouse ready-made furniture for immediate sales. Furniture at showrooms and warehouses was advertised as readily available. Cabinetmakers shipped their goods to all sections of the United States and as far away as Africa and the Caribbean. As the port of New York became the busiest in the nation, New York cabinetmakers pressed the advantage.

Perhaps the most famous of New York's fine furniture craftsmen of the Federal period was Duncan Phyfe. Many of his competitors copied his interpretation of English Regency forms. Some of New York's wealthiest families ordered his furniture. To accommodate them and his other customers, Phyfe employed a large number of workmen.

Charles-Honoré Lannuier, an important contemporary of Duncan Phyfe's, was a French emigrant. His cabinetry epitomized the finest French Empire style. He, too, enjoyed a wealthy clientele and made ornate furniture for the best of New York society. Unfortunately, Lannuier died at age forty in 1819.

Although the shops of the well known cabinetmakers determined high style, others imitated and added their own interpretations. Eventually cabinetmakers in Upstate towns and villages who picked up New York City styles rendered their own versions. Using local woods, this furniture evokes the spirit of the time with a dash of country charm.

As trends in New York State furniture moved Upstate, they also spread across the country. New York remained in the forefront of furniture design and production until the end of the nineteenth century, when the Midwest took the lead.

Throughout the Federal period, cabinetmaking was learned through apprenticeship. Excellence depended on the skill and artistry of individuals. With the Industrial Revolution in the 1830s, cabinetmaking began to change from a craft to an industry of power machines and mass production. However, New York cabinetmakers such as Duncan Phyfe and Michael Allison continued the tradition of finely crafted furniture beyond the Federal period and into the mid-nineteenth century.

[1] Johnson, William, "A Young Man's Journal of 1800-1813 (William Johnson of Newton, New Jersey)," in *New Jersey Historical Society Proceedings,* vol. 8 (1923) as quoted in *Nineteenth Century America* (New York City: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970), p. xii.

[2] Longworth, Daniel, ed., *American Almanack, New York Register and City Directory for the Thirteenth Year of American Independence* (New York City: the compiler, 1805-06), p. iii.

# Transition 1788-1795

The young nation was receptive to new ideas, and furniture styles began changing almost immediately after the Constitution was adopted. Inspiration for these changes came mainly from London, where, during the 1760s, Robert Adam's neoclassical architectural designs fomented a revolution in taste.

This style incorporated classical ornament and emphasized linear relationships. British cabinetmakers adapted these architectural styles to furniture.

Although these new styles became evident in post-Revolutionary New York furniture, the earlier Chippendale style, characterized by its bold proportions and rococo carving, prevailed until the late 1700s. Transitional pieces combined elements of both styles, melding Chippendale shapes with classical decorative motifs. The opulence and the ornate carving of early Chippendale became more refined with an understated richness and simplicity. Lightness and movability, important elements of the new British furniture, were also evident in transitional pieces. Thus, elements of the new British styles were added gradually but steadily to New York furniture.

## Side Chair, c.1788

*New York City*
Mahogany and Ash
36¾" x 22" x 19¾"

This transitional side chair displays characteristics of both the Chippendale and the newer Hepplewhite styles. The back and splat of the chair typify Hepplewhite, yet the extension of the splat to the seat rail, and the moldings and the massiveness of the legs and back rely heavily on Chippendale styling.

The chair is one of a set of four from the State Museum's collections. Made for Federal Hall in New York City, these four chairs (and a matching arm chair now at the New-York Historical Society) were used at Washington's inauguration April 30, 1789.

Gift of Wunsch Americana Foundation

*The Magazine Antiques* (May 1938), page 250.

## Sideboard, c.1790

*Thomas Burling, (w. 1769-1802)*
*New York City*
Mahogany, Tulip Poplar and Pine
38½" x 61½" x 27½"

The sideboard, introduced c.1785, was a new form for the Federal Period. Specific rooms were designated for dining only after the American Revolution. Specialized furniture such as the sideboard, for serving food and storing elegant dining materials, was then designed. By the height of the Federal Period, no dining room was complete without a sideboard.

The early example shown here displays features of both the Chippendale and Hepplewhite styles. The squareness of the top portion and the original bail handles indicate a Chippendale influence, while the tapered legs, which end in spade feet, represent the newer Hepplewhite style of the late eighteenth century. Thomas Burling, whose label is fastened to the inside of the center door, was one of New York City's leading cabinetmakers of the eighteenth century. He advertised as being "at the Sign of the Chair" on 36 Beekman Street, an address he maintained from 1773 to 1793. Burling's ability as a cabinetmaker was widely respected. He made a desk for George Washington when the President was living on Cherry Street, New York City, and in 1790, Washington paid Burling 7 pounds for two armchairs.

Gottesman, Rita Susswein, *The Arts and Crafts in New York, 1726-1776* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1938), no. 111. Gottesman, 1777-1799, no. 342-344. *The Magazine Antiques* (May 1936), pages 189-191.

## Pole Screen, c.1795

*New York City*
Mahogany, 55" x 15¾"

In addition to softening the glare of light and screening the face from the heat of the fireplace, fire screens also provided a prominent place for the display of needlework and ornamental painting. This adjustable pole screen displays later versions of earlier trends. It is an unmistakable product of the Chippendale era, but the delicacy of the legs and snake feet, as well as the turnings, are consonant with the more refined styles of the late 1700s. The tensely-arched cabriole legs and elongated snake feet characterize the New York version of this style. The urn-shaped finial is a typical Federal symbol.

Gift of Wunsch Americana Foundation

# Country Furniture 1788-1825

Conservative New York cabinetmakers continued to use designs that originated in the early eighteenth century. Country cabinetmakers, in particular, adhered to old styles. Nevertheless, new trends appeared in subtle ways. Windsor chairs made with rectangular or square backs and bamboo-shaped turnings reflected Sheraton styling. Painted furniture continued to be popular but country cabinetmakers began decorating blanket chests with classical motifs instead of the earlier rococo scrolls. Furthermore, the lightness of the new style was evident.

## Side Chair, c.1795

*Jacob Smith (w. 1787-1812)*
*New York City*
Maple, 39" x 17¾" x 14¼"

Slat-back or ladder-back chairs were popular during both eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The bulbous finials and turnip-shaped feet of this chair indicate an earlier date. Most country or informal furniture was painted. This chair retains its original gray paint. Stamped on the protruding leg shafts is the name of the maker, Jacob Smith, who is listed in the New York City Business Directories as a "Turner and rush-bottomed chair maker" from 1787 to 1795. He was at one time the president of the New York City Chairmakers' Guild and participated in the Federal Procession in New York City on July 23, 1788 in honor of the ratification of the United States Constitution. In fact, Jacob Smith and a Mr. Dow headed the group of 60 rush chairmakers who wore red and green cockades in their hats, emblems of their trade. The chair was owned by the Crounse and Severson families of Altamont, clear evidence that furniture made in New York City found its way Upstate.

Gottesman, 1777-1799, no. 335. *Antiques* (May 1981), pages 1,116, 1,136. Provenance provided by Roger Keenholts, Historian, Town of Guilderland.

## Blanket Chest, 1823

*Schoharie County*
Pine, 20" x 42¾" x 17¼"

A number of early nineteenth century blanket chests found in Schoharie County are decorated with a wreath design encircling the initials of the original owner. These chests were all probably decorated by the same person. The wreath motif illustrates the classical influence prevalent throughout the Federal period. Painted and decorated furniture is a part of the German tradition of the Palatines who settled in the Mohawk and Schoharie Valleys during the early eighteenth century. The chest is painted red, white and yellow on a blue ground. The wreath encircles the initials "BZ" and the date "1823." "J. W. Lawyer, Cape Vincent, N.Y." is written on the bottom. The chest was made for Betsey Zimmer of Gallupville, the daughter of John Joost and Magdelina Warner Zimmer. Betsey was born October 1, 1808 and married Phillip Snyder March 13, 1830. The chest was inherited by their daughter, Mary, who married John W. Lawyer. The top and base moldings are replaced.

Records of the Schoharie Reformed Church and the Cady Papers, Schoharie County Historical Society.

## Blanket Chest, c.1820

*Schoharie County*
Pine, 18¼" x 39½" x 18"

The mottled blue-green color and the decorative motifs on this chest are similar to other chests with documented histories of Schoharie County ownership. The center decoration resembles the New York State Arms with Liberty and Justice on either side of a shield bearing the initials I.F.C., perhaps the owner of the chest. Perched on top of the shield is the American eagle, the ubiquitous symbol of the Federal era. Painted and decorated dower chests were a strong part of the German tradition of the early Palatine settlers of Schoharie County. The decoration is the most impressive aspect of these chests. During the early part of the nineteenth century, this decoration, usually done by a professional ornamental painter, became more and more colorful and elaborate. Other popular motifs found on Schoharie chests include urns filled with colorful flowers, owner's initials encircled in a wreath, geometric designs and large bold floral designs. Often a border of leaves frames the front panel of the chest and the owner's initials or name is generally a part of the central decoration.

DeJulio, Mary Antoine, *German Folk Arts of New York State,* (Albany: Albany Institute of History and Art, 1985)

## Side Chair, c.1805

*Charles Marsh (w. 1799-1810)*
*New York City*
Maple, 34½" x 18" x 19"

Windsor chairs, probably the most common type of American seating during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, could be found in virtually every room of the house as well as on porches and in the garden. The curved backs and seats of earlier Windsor chairs were replaced with Federal style square backs and straight lines. The bamboo-shaped turnings of this chair's legs and stretchers and the flair to the back are trends of the Federal period. These elements are also found on fancy chairs of the Sheraton period. Windsors and fancy chairs were almost always painted. Red, green, brown, and cream were the most popular colors.

The paper label of Charles Marsh is affixed to the bottom of the seat. Marsh was located at 75 John Street, New York City (the address given on this label), from 1799 to 1810. Identical chairs by Marsh are at the Winterthur Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

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# Hepplewhite 1790-1815

George Hepplewhite (d. 1786), British cabinetmaker, favored classical motifs using exotic veneers and inlays. A linear quality and decorative bands dominate his designs.

Hepplewhite furniture features square, tapered legs, often ending in spade feet. Shields, ovals, and hearts form the backs of his chairs. Case pieces stand on flaring bracket feet.

Decorative motifs include swags, shells, medallions, urns, wheat ears, and feathers. The eagle, a favorite American motif, alluded to classicism and patriotism.

The designs of George Hepplewhite were derived from Robert Adam's (1728-1792), and became popular with the London publication of Hepplewhite's design book *The Cabinetmaker's and Upholsterer's Guide,* 1788. This book had a tremendous influence on New York City cabinetmakers who made their own variations on this fashionable English style.

## Tall Case Clock, c.1810

*Wood and Taylor*
*Florida*
Inlaid Mahogany and Pine
94" x 20½" x 10"

The shape of the case with its high-pitched, narrow, swan-neck pediment and French feet is typical of Hepplewhite clocks made in New York and northern New Jersey. The entire front of this clock case has four types of stringing and a variety of shells, stars, pinwheels, and urns all inlaid with satinwood, ebony, rosewood, boxwood, mahogany and dyed wood. It has a painted neoclassical dial and eight-day brass works. The case bears the manuscript label located inside behind the pendulum of Wood and Taylor, Florida, Orange County, New York. These cabinetmakers, possibly Robert Wood and James S. or Jacob Taylor were from New York City but fled a smallpox epidemic during the early 1800s and settled in Florida. Roy Vail, a collector from Warwick, N.Y. who researched these cabinetmakers, saw a Florida store ledger (c.1810) listing brass hinges purchased by Wood and Taylor for clocks.

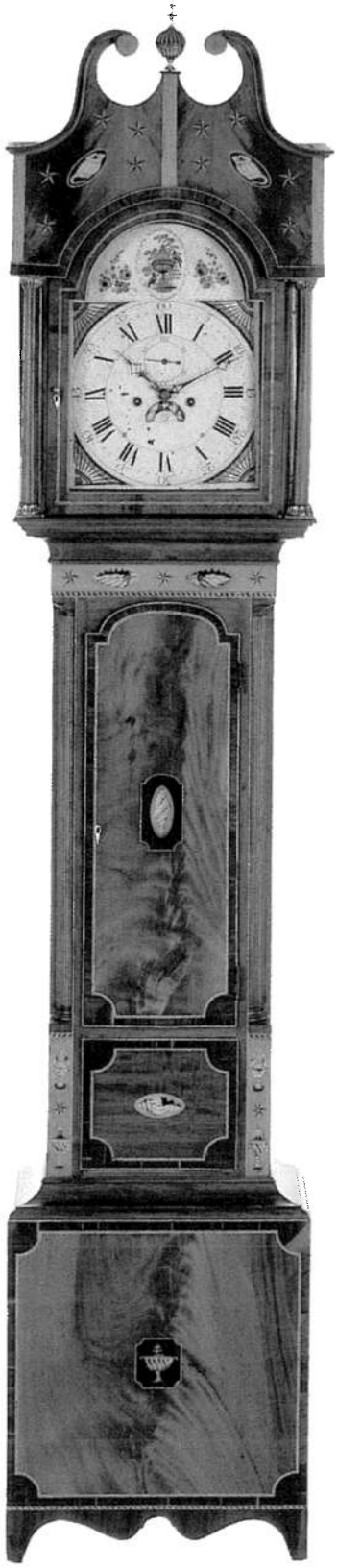
## Side Chair, c.1800

*New York City*
Inlaid Mahogany and Maple
38" x 21½" x 20¾"

This shield-back chair with banisters divided into three splats centering a fan, has inlaid festoons of husks, floral sprays, and a fan inlaid at the base of the back. Details of this type are typical of New York furniture of the Federal period. One of a large set originally owned by Elizabeth Schuyler and Alexander Hamilton, this chair was used at "The Grange," their New York City home. It descended in the family.

Gift of Wunsch Americana Foundation

Provenance provided by Sotheby Parke Bernet, New York City. A similar chair is illustrated in Montgomery, *Federal Furniture,* no. 55.



## Chest of Drawers, c.1812

*Richard Allison (1780-1825)*
*New York City*
Mahogany, Pine, Tulip Poplar, and Mahogany Veneer
46" x 45" x 20½"

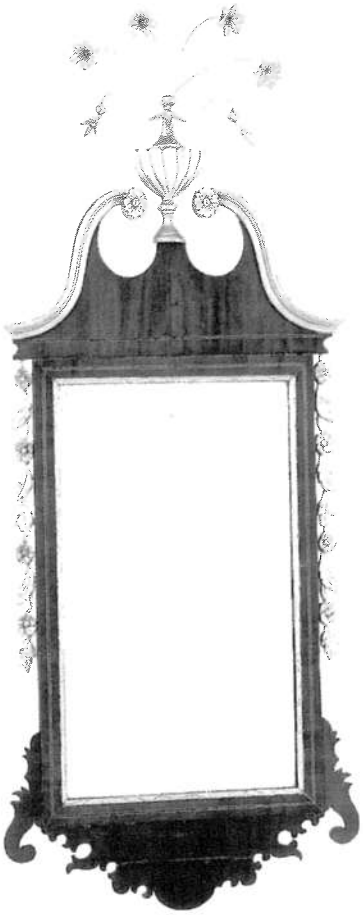
This chest, labeled by Richard Allison, displays a configuration found on many of his chests: a row of small drawers surmounts the deep top drawer; the flame-grained mahogany veneers on the deep top drawer consist of a central double-arrow motif separating two rectangular panels with lunette corners, which in turn are flanked by half of the double-arrow motif. The chest also has the following characteristics of Federal period New York furniture:

- A straight front.
- An oblong top.
- Three graduated drawers surmounted by a deep top drawer.
- Figured mahogany veneers on the drawers.
- Cross-banded mahogany veneers on the rails, on the edges of the sides, and on the edge of the overhanging top.
- French splayed feet connected to a draped apron, divided at the center by a hollow-arch motif.

The pulls replace the original oval brasses.

Richard Allison was the brother of Michael Allison (1773-1855), another important New York cabinetmaker whose career spanned almost 50 years, 1800-1847. Richard is listed as a cabinetmaker in the New York City Business Directories for 1806-1814. He was located at 58 Vesey Street, the address shown on this label, from 1807-1812. His brother, Michael, was at 42 and 44 Vesey Street during these same years. Labeled furniture by Richard is much rarer than that by his brother.

Flannery, Margo C. "Richard Allison and the New York City Federal Style," *The Magazine Antiques* (May 1973), pp. 995-1,001.



## Looking Glass, c.1790

*New York or Albany*
Mahogany and Pine
55" x 22½" x 2½"

This mirror shows the persistence of the earlier Chippendale style though it is modified by the classical influence. The scrolled pediment has a greater delicacy than the Chippendale form. The scrolls rise almost vertically to frame an Adam urn holding wired flowers and ears of wheat. This looking glass with its attenuated swan-neck pediment is typical of mirrors with histories of New York or Hudson Valley ownership. Common features include stylized, gilded, composition leaves and flowers strung on a wire down either side, and gilt urn finials with gay posies or ears of wheat on wire stems.

Gift of Wunsch Americana Foundation

## Work Table, c.1795

*Andrew Anderson (w. 1792-1810)*
*New York City*
Inlaid Mahogany, Pine, and Mahogany Veneer
30½" x 25" x 14¼"

What is known today as four-legged stands, candlestands or occasional tables were standard varieties of "work tables" in the Federal Period. They were listed in the cabinetmakers price books of the 1790s as square, oval or with canted corners. Delicate in detail as well as proportion, these tables complemented the classically styled tables, chairs and sofas found in Federal rooms. This work table has astragal ends, a feature found primarily in New York City and Philadelphia. An "Astragal End Work Table" is first listed in *The New York Revised Prices for Manufacturing Cabinet and Chair Work* for 1810, but the form was probably being made earlier. A paper label in the top drawer indicates that Andrew Anderson, 50 Beekman Street, New York City made this piece. Anderson advertised in the *Weekly Museum* on April 5, 1800 for a journeyman cabinetmaker and an apprentice to his cabinetmaking business. He also indicated that he had for sale a general assortment of the most fashionable furniture.

Hascoe Family Foundation

Gottesman, Rita Susswein *The Arts and Crafts In New York 1800-1804* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1965), No. 321.

## Side Chair, c.1800

*New York City*
Mahogany and Maple
37½" x 21½" x 19"

This shield-back chair with Prince-of-Wales feathers and carved drapery is one of three types made during the 1790s and early 1800s. A popular design among New Yorkers, it appears on the labels of Elbert Anderson, a New York City cabinetmaker. Another type of New York shield-back chair features banisters divided into three splats centering on a fan; a third type is characterized by four carved ribs.

Wunsch Americana Foundation

## Pembroke Table, c. 1800

*New York City*
Inlaid Mahogany, Tulip Poplar, and Mahogany Veneer
30" x 32" x 38"

Pembroke tables, used for breakfast, tea, cards, writing, and other activities, are about the size of a card table or smaller. Two drop leaves with one or two wooden flaps or brackets hinged to the frame on either side swing out to support the leaves. New York was the major producer of pembroke tables. The leaves of many New York pembroke tables feature ovolo corners. On the table seen here, dark-light wood stringing runs along the edge of the top forming a concentric oval. This type of inlay and the use of tulip poplar as a secondary wood indicate a New York origin for this table.

Gift of Wunsch Americana Foundation

## Chest of Drawers, 1807

*J. B. Sylvester, Coxsackie*
Mahogany, Pine, and Mahogany Veneer
38½" x 45¼" x 21¾"

The delicate French feet, serpentine skirt, and the use of figured veneers and inlays are indicative of Hepplewhite styling. The hollow-center serpentine outlined skirt with French feet characterize New York chests of drawers of this period. The oval-patterned mahogany veneers on the drawer fronts contrast with the vertical grain of the surrounding veneers. The oval brasses also characterize Hepplewhite. The oval was an important decorative motif during the Federal period. Stencilled on the back of the chest is "Made and Sold by J. B. Sylvester, Coxsackie, N.Y. July 1807."

# Sheraton 1800-1820

The furniture of Thomas Sheraton (1751-1806) is characterized by square forms, verticality and round, often reeded legs. Like Hepplewhite, Sheraton was influenced by Robert Adam's architectural styles. Sheraton's designs became popular in England with the publication of *The Cabinet-Maker's and Upholsterer's Drawing Book,* issued from 1791-1794. New York cabinetmakers were influenced by Sheraton as well as Hepplewhite, and frequently mixed elements of both. When such a blend makes it difficult to ascribe a specific style, the general term Federal is used. Square-back chairs, spade feet, carved urns, drapery and feathers and clover-leaf table tops all typify Sheraton styling.

## Secretary, c.1810

*New York City*
Mahogany, Pine, and Mahogany Veneer
66" x 36½" x 23"

By 1800, the slant-top desk had become old fashioned and was infrequently made except in rural areas. The new emphasis on education and the increasing number of girls' schools prompted new forms to provide facilities for writing. Sheraton depicts several designs that are feminine in appearance and small in scale. These include a "Drawing and Writing Table" and a "Ladies Writing Table." The reeded legs and turned feet on this small secretary reflect Thomas Sheraton's designs. The urn-shaped finials are typical Federal motifs. The front of the secretary drops to form the writing surface and to reveal the interior which is well fitted with three small drawers across the bottom and many pigeon holes. The original black leather remains on the writing surface; the drawer has its original stamped brass pulls. The secretary was used at "Willow Pond," the Lehman Estate at Tarrytown, N.Y.

## Side Chair, c.1810

*New York City*
Mahogany
37" x 22" x 19¼"

The most common style of surviving New York chair features a square back with center banister of an angular urn, carved feathers, and drapery set between vertical colonnettes. The legs were usually reeded. An additional charge was made for shaping the spade feet. The source for this style appears in the 1794 edition of Sheraton's *Drawing Book*. Listed as a "Square Back Chair No. IV" in *The New York Book of Prices for Cabinet and Chair Work,* 1802, it was priced at 19 shillings and 6 pence. Another popular style of New York square-back chair featured three urn splats, and a third had four turned colonnettes fanned out at the top to form Gothic arches.

Gift of Wunsch Americana Foundation

## Sideboard, c.1810

*Possibly Duncan Phyfe (1768-1854)*
*New York City*
Mahogany and Tulip Poplar
57½" x 73 3/8" x 25½"

Sideboards, which express American love of ostentation and plenty, were defined in Sheraton's book of designs. Knife and spoon cases and silver plate displayed on them indicated the owner's place in society. The sideboard, introduced at the beginning of the Federal period, was found in a majority of homes by the end of the period. Although made throughout the eastern seaboard, the very finest sideboards were made in New York. The stop fluting of the columns and the fine carving imply the work of Duncan Phyfe.

Partial Gift of Wunsch Foundation

## Drum Table, c.1815

*Attributed to Duncan Phyfe (1768-1854), New York City*
Mahogany, Tulip Poplar, and Mahogany Veneer
29" x 25 ½"

This Sheraton carved mahogany drum table is a rare object. The New York masterpiece was created by Duncan Phyfe, whose career spanned the first half of the nineteenth century. Phyfe came to Albany from Scotland with his widowed mother in 1784. By 1792 he had moved to New York City where he set up his famous cabinetmaking shop. He retired from business in 1847. Note the circular case with richly figured veneered top and crossbanded border supported by a turned pedestal with an acanthus-carved urn in a crosshatched background. Four outsplayed acanthus-carved legs terminate in hairy paw feet. The table descended in an East Hampton, Long Island family.

Partial Gift of the Wunsch Foundation

Provenance provided by Israel Sack Inc., New York City.

## Side Chair, c.1805

*Attributed to Slover and Taylor (1802-1805), New York City*
Mahogany
37" x 21½" x 18"

*The New York Book of Prices for Cabinet and Chair Work* for 1802 describes this style of chair as a "Square Back Chair No. II with five gothic arches and four turned columns." Many variants of this style occur.

The chair shown here is attributed to Slover and Taylor because an identical chair bears their label. Abraham Slover was a New York City cabinetmaker from 1792-1801. In 1802, he formed a partnership with Jacob B. Taylor at 94 Broad Street. The partnership was dissolved in 1805. Slover and Taylor evidently purchased some unfinished furniture from other cabinetmakers. Invoices covering the years 1802-1805 from Fenwick Lyell, a New York City cabinet and chairmaker, charge Slover and Taylor for 12 mahogany chair frames. This indicates that cabinetmakers may have added to their stock by purchasing furniture from fellow cabinetmakers.

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For additional information on Slover and Taylor see *The Magazine Antiques* (October 1961), pp. 350-51.

## Card Table, c.1820

*New York City*
Mahogany and Mahogany Veneer
30" x 36¼" x 18"

Card games such as whist, loo, faro, and quadrille were very popular among early nineteenth century men and women. This is one of four types of New York card tables made during the Federal period. The other three forms were square, circular, and tripod. The top of this pedestal table has canted corners and swivels 90° when the top opens. The pendants or drops at the corners are usual features found on other New York pedestal tables, and are vestiges of the legs found on earlier card tables. Its carved pineapple, centered within a shaped base, is a familiar symbol of the Federal period. The four leaf-carved sabre legs end in carved paw feet reflecting the popularity of the taste for Greek styling.

Hascoe Family Foundation

## Pembroke Table, c.1815

*New York City*
Mahogany
28½" x 36" x 22½"

This table's double elliptic leaves, reeded legs with a concave neck and ring above, and the turned feet with brass tips reflect the New York Sheraton style. New York City cabinetmakers George Woodruff (w. 1808-1816) and Duncan Phyfe (w. 1792-1847) made similar tables.

## Chamber Table, c.1830

*William Wilmot (1790-1849)*
*Unadilla*
Cherry, Pine, and Birdseye Maple and Mahogany Veneers
41" x 37" x 31¼"

Chamber tables, often misidentified as serving tables, were used as dressing tables in bedrooms. The influence of Thomas Sheraton's designs was still strong in Upstate rural areas after the Federal period ended. The spiral turnings of the legs, and the ring-and-vase-shaped turnings of the feet are late Federal characteristics. This piece, including its finely scalloped backsplash, is made of cherry with a curly maple front and drawers banded with mahogany veneer. The original Sandwich glass knobs are still intact. Stenciled on the bottom of one of the drawers is "Wm. Wilmot, cabinetmaker, Unadilla N.Y." William Wilmot was born in Danbury, Connecticut in 1790 and, in 1810, moved to Unadilla, Otsego County, where he became the town's first cabinetmaker. He died in 1849, but was succeeded by Daniel W., his son. A year after his father's death, Daniel's business boasted a capital of $500 with 500 feet of cherry and other lumber worth $50, an inventory of $1,000 worth of furniture and two employees paid $50 a month.

Federal Census, 1850

# Fancy Furniture 1800-1850

The neoclassical styling of Sheraton and Hepplewhite furniture, with their flat surfaces and emphasis on two-dimensional decoration, provided a natural basis for painted decoration. Called fancy furniture, this painted furniture became extremely fashionable in England, a trend that was quickly followed in the United States. The most elegant fancy chairs were made in New York State, where vast numbers of painted chairs were produced. Most Sheraton painted chairs were composed of factory-made, turned parts. Then an artist decorated the chair.

Fancy furniture was popular from 1800 to the 1860s, but it became so common after 1820, it was considered cottage furniture rather than high style.

## Side Chair, c.1820

*Possibly Thomas Ash (w. 1815-1824), New York City*
Maple, 33¼" x 18" x 16"

More fancy chairs were made in New York City than in any other place. This fancy chair has an orange-red ground, with black and gold decoration. Polychromed landscapes appear on the top splat and front seat rail. Each chair in the set depicts a different scene. Note the reeded legs, typical of the Sheraton style. The chair is from a set of ten.

In 1815, Thomas Ash advertised that he was carrying on the chair manufacturing business of his father (the late William Ash), at 33 John Street. He added that "he has already in employ a number of the very best and most tasteful workmen, and is ready to receive orders."* He also says that he has "on hand, an assortment of Chairs, both Fancy and Windsor, of the newest fashions, and suited for domestic use or the foreign market."*

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* *Longworth's New York City Directory for 1815.*

## Dressing Table, c.1815

*New York State*
Maple and Pine
32½" x 35½" x 17¾"

Dressing tables were introduced during the Federal era to replace the lowboy, popular during the eighteenth century as a dressing or toilet table. Fancy furniture was often painted in beige or ivory and ornamented in color. This table is decorated with moss roses in the panels. The legs show the bamboo influence popular at this time. In Sheraton's *Cabinet Dictionary,* 1803, he refers to Bamboo or Bamboe, a kind of Indian reed, used in the East for chairs and imitated in England by turning beech in the same form and making chairs and other furniture in this fashion.

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## Settee, c.1805

*Albany or New York City*
Birch and Cherry
35 1/8" x 73½" x 19¼"

This four-chair-back settee with Gothic arches and caned seat is painted white and decorated with garlands and streamers in blue and gold. Eight matching side chairs are also in the State Museum's collections. The chairs and settee are variants of a "Square Back Chair," a popular New York chair style, referred to in *The New York Book of Prices for Cabinet and Chair Work.* The complete set of furniture, which includes a matching settee and two other chairs now at the Winterthur Museum, originally was owned by New York Governor Joseph C. Yates and Anna Elizabeth DeLancey Yates of Schenectady and Albany. The furniture descended in the Yates family.

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See Montgomery, Charles *Federal Furniture*, no. 4, 63-64, 235 for additional pieces from this set.

# Classical 1810-1825

While New England, Philadelphia and Baltimore made and enjoyed Hepplewhite and Sheraton furniture, New York became a trendsetter. Two outstanding cabinetmakers set the style.

Duncan Phyfe led the way. His classical design was based on French Directoire and Empire forms transmitted by the English. Influenced by archaeological excavation in Greece and Rome, the elements of the new style were often copied directly from ancient forms such as klysmos and curule chairs, tripod stands, and other forms found on ancient vases. Winged and caryatid supports, lions'-paws, palmettes, lotus leaves, griffins, and rams'-heads were favorite motifs. This new style was spread by Phyfe's employees when they went to work for other cabinetmakers or started their own shops.

Charles-Honoré Lannuier was another outstanding New York cabinetmaker who also worked in a classical style. He came from France in 1803, and until his untimely death in 1819, he made furniture with a decidedly French accent. His style was characterized by ormolu mounts and appliques, brass inlay and marble columns and tops on pier tables. Scrolls, curves and solidness replaced the slender straight lines of the earlier neoclassicism.

**Secretary, c. 1815**

*Possibly Duncan Phyfe (1768-1854)*
*New York City*
Mahogany, Mahogany and Satinwood Veneers
77¼" x 36" x 22"

Although Duncan Phyfe's output was large, few labeled pieces survive. This secretary bears the quality and characteristic of this master craftsman's style: figured mahogany veneers; moldings around drawers and edges; a beautifully finished satinwood interior of drawers and pigeonholes; twisted flutes on the legs; and lion's-paw feet. The two short drawers of the lower section feature cut glass pulls, and the small satinwood door within the fitted interior is veneered with a mahogany astragal panel.

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See plate 20 in *19th Century America, Furniture and Other Decorative Arts.* (New York City: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970)

## Pier Table, c.1815

*Attributed to Charles-Honoré Lannuier (1779-1819)*
*New York City*
Mahogany, Pine, and Mahogany Veneer
37" x 42" x 18"

This type of table was designed to be placed in a pier, the space between two windows. Influenced by the Empire style, the pier table was introduced during the late Federal period, probably by Charles-Honoré Lannuier. He served his apprenticeship in France and by 1805, was established in Broad Street, New York with a large and influential clientele. The lyre-shaped mounts, seen on this pier table, are typical of Lannuier's style.

## Sofa, c.1825

*New York City*
Mahogany, Pine, and Mahogany Veneer
33" x 90" x 26"

This Grecian sofa with "S" scroll arms displays fine reeding and carved eagle's-claw feet sprouting eagle's-wings. The cornucopia is another popular decorative element carved on the feet of Grecian sofas.

The eagle and the cornucopia symbolized nationalism and abundance in a period of peace and plenty. This was the era when the Erie Canal opened the way to the produce of western farmlands.

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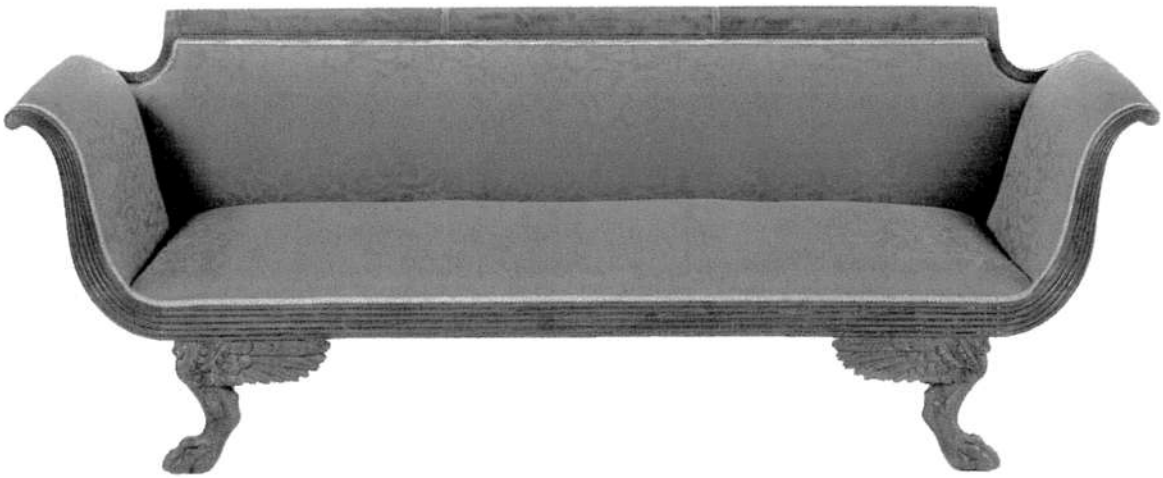

## Side Chair, c.1810

*Attributed to Duncan Phyfe (1768-1854), New York City*
Mahogany
33¼" x 18" x 16¼"

In 1805, in his *Cabinet-Maker, Upholsterer, and General Artists Encyclopedia,* Sheraton published a full-page illustration of a chair adapted from the Greek klysmos, a form known to students of antiquity. Sheraton added a stay rail, filled in the back, and recommended it for the parlor. Shortly after, it was introduced in New York. Favored by New York cabinetmakers and made famous by Duncan Phyfe, it became one of the main chair styles of the century. Embodying Grecian influences, the style was a forerunner of the Empire style. The carved cornucopia on the crest, a motif used frequently in the late Federal period, symbolizes the abundance and prosperity of the time. The fine reeding, the acanthus-carved sabre legs, and the carved dog's-paw feet indicate the craftsmanship of Duncan Phyfe.

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## Library Table, c.1820

*New York City*
Inlaid Mahogany and Mahogany Veneer
30" x 29" x 21¾"

According to Thomas Sheraton, ladies used tables such as this for drawing, writing or reading. The inlaid shell in the center of the top, the string inlay around the drawer front, and the lion's-head drawer pulls are period details that underscore the quality of this table. Lyres on a cheval base support the table. *The New York Book of Prices for Manufacturing Cabinet and Chair Work* (1817) depicts designs for lyres and suggests that strings may be brass or ebony. A popular decorative motif in classical New York furniture, the lyre also appears on the backs of chairs.

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## Side Chair, c.1810

*Attributed to Duncan Phyfe (1768-1854), New York City*
Mahogany
32¼" x 19½" x 17"

The cross, or lattice back, the ogee scroll back, and the lyre and the harp, combined with Grecian front and rear legs became the standard for New York chair design. The lattice design on the back of this chair was popular in New York. Its elements are clearly set forth in the New York book of prices for 1810 used by most, if not all New York cabinetmakers. Five reeds with a ribbon tied in a bowknot are crisply carved on the beaded sunken panel of the crest. The fine carving and reeding of the legs seen here is often found on many chairs documented as Phyfe's work or attributed to him.

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## Card Table, c.1820

*Attributed to Michael Allison (1773-1855), New York City*
Mahogany and Pine with Mahogany Veneer
31" x 38" x 18½"

This intricately carved table has acanthus-leaf and scroll-carved legs terminating with dragons'-heads on a shelf supported by feet carved in the shape of an eagle's head. Its attribution is based on a virtually identical card table in a private collection bearing the label of Michael Allison. A detail of this table appears on the cover.

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## Card Table, c.1820

*New York City*
Mahogany and Mahogany Veneer
29" x 36¼" x 17½"

During the late Federal period, the legs and bases of tables began to reflect the taste of the French Empire style. The introduction of the platform base marked a great change. It was composed of a square or oblong boxed abacus section with concave sides and chamfered corners over four legs. Four colonnettes with spiral turnings and ribbed urns support the table. This became more popular than the pillar on Greek-carved legs. The legs on the platform remained curved, with a definite projection at the top, but later were changed to the acanthus-carved lions'-hocks seen here. The canted corners of the swivel top are frequently found in New York furniture.

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# Federal Revival 1876-1895

The interest in America's past generated by the Centennial of American Independence and the exhibits at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia also created a market for copies of earlier furniture styles. Several New York cabinetmakers revived the Federal style. The most noteworthy of these was Ernest Hagen (1830-1913) of New York City who copied many of Duncan Phyfe's original designs.

Many of these late nineteenth century cabinetmakers also restored or remade antique Federal furniture, and it is often difficult to distinguish a genuine antique piece from a later copy. Revival furniture has different proportions, shallower carving, and more modern construction techniques than the originals.

**Card Table, c.1885**

*Ernest Hagen (1830-1913)*
*New York City*
Mahogany and Mahogany Veneer
30" x 39¼" x 19¼"

Duncan Phyfe is known today largely through the efforts of Ernest Hagen. Recognizing the high quality of Phyfe's furniture, Hagen identified some of Phyfe's best work and copied it. This swivel-top card table bearing Hagen's label is an example.

Ernest Hagen was engaged in many activities. He supplied all kinds of furnishings for the households of well-known New Yorkers. He repaired and renovated furniture, did upholstering, made window and bed draperies, sold antiques, and crated and moved household gear. The major portion of the furniture Hagen made was in the popular styles of the 1880s, but many of Hagen's customers already had Phyfe furniture in their homes and required new furniture to match what they already owned.

Gift of Wunsch Foundation

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# Glossary*

*acanthus-leaf decoration*—decoration resembling the thick scalloped leaves of the acanthus plant used in classical architecture and adapted as motif in furniture.

*astragal*—a narrow half-round molding.

*banding*—a narrow border of contrasting inlay of veneer, often framing a drawer front.

*banister*—a vase-turned, columnal element usually used to support a stair rail. Adapted as motif in furniture design when split in two and used in a vertical series on a chair back.

*cabriole leg*—an S-shaped leg, with outcurving knee and incurving ankle, based on the shape of an animal's leg; usually terminating in a pad foot in the Queen Anne Period, and claw-and-ball foot in the Chippendale period.

*canted*—term describing an angled or oblique element.

*caryatid*—a draped female figure supporting an entablature or table top.

*chamfered*—having a flat area made by cutting away a corner or edge formed by two surfaces at right angles to each other; beveled.

*curule legs*—x-shaped legs based on Roman chair design, used on Federal and other classically inspired furnishings.

*drop*—wooden decorative element, often urn-or bell-shaped, hanging from the skirt of a table or seat rail of a chair.

*finial*—a small wooden or metal decorative element, usually affixed to the top of a pediment or atop a stile or other vertical members. It is turned, carved or cast, most frequently in the form of a flame or urn.

*fluting*—a series of narrow grooves, usually vertical, used in ancient architecture on columns; later used in Europe and America to decorate classically inspired furniture; the reverse of reeding.

*French foot*—a simple outswept bracket foot; often found on case furniture in combination with a valanced skirt.

*graduated*—becoming progressively smaller or larger.

*inlay*—design made of small pieces of contrasting colored wood or other materials set into recesses carved out of a solid surface.

*klysmos*—ancient Greek chair form characterized by a broad top rail and curved stiles and legs; revived in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

*lattice*—open framework made of crisscrossed wood or metal strips, often in a diamond pattern.

*lunette*—the figure or shape of a crescent moon.

*molding*—continuous strip of wood, of rounded or more complex profile, used as a decorative relief band.

*mount*—a pull, escutcheon, or other decorative element applied to furniture.

*ogee*—a molding with an S-shaped profile or a pointed arch having on each side a reversed curve near the apex.

*ormolu*—bronze or brass to which a thin layer of gold has been applied, popular in rococo and neoclassical styles for furniture mounts.

*paw foot*—foot carved to resemble an animal paw, usually a lion's.

*pigeonhole*—an open-fronted storage unit in the well of a desk or secretary.

*pediment*—the triangular or curved cresting above a piece of furniture, doorway, or building; called a broken pediment when the sides do not meet at a point.

*rail*—horizontal structural component usually connecting the stiles across the back of a chair or sofa and also framing a seat.

*reeding*—thin convex moldings, usually vertical, used to decorate round legs and bedposts on classical-style furniture, the reverse of fluting.

*saber leg*—classically inspired leg curving sharply outward and generally tapered.

*scroll*—a spiral form resembling a partially rolled scroll of paper.

*serpentine*—contour of a wavy surface, particularly one having a convex center flanked by concave ends.

*skirt*—the bottom, independent element of a case piece, plain or shaped and running between two vertical members; also called an apron.

*snake foot*—narrow elongated foot swelling slightly upward before pointed end; found on Queen Anne, Chippendale, and some Federal tripod base tables.

*spade foot*—tapered rectangular foot commonly found on Hepplewhite and Sheraton pieces.

*splat*—flat vertical element in the center of a chair back.

*stile*—vertical structural member usually framing the back of a chair or sofa; often called a post if turned.

*stretcher*—turned rod, or plain or cutout slat, used to reinforce legs.

*stringing*—narrow strip or strips of decorative inlay; frequently used to outline drawers and usually in light-colored wood.

*turned*—shaped on a lathe; the wood rotates around a horizontal axis and is shaped by fixed chisels.

*veneer*—a thin layer of wood that is glued or nailed to the surface of a thicker piece for decoration and contrast; typically an expensive, attractive wood is applied to a common wood, such as pine.

* Adapted from *The Knopf Collectors' Guides to American Antiques* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

Catalog design: Rich Kraham Design Unit