

# Almost Too Late

## An Annapolis Queen Anne Desk on Frame



In April 2022 a desk on frame came up for sale at The Potomack Company in Alexandria, Virginia. The Classic Art, Antiques, & Furniture catalog described the lot as a “Chippendale Mahogany Slant Front Bureau, 18th Century”. While not explicitly calling it English, the use of the word bureau to connote a desk form usually implies one of British origin, versus the American use of the same word typically referring to a chest of drawers. Additionally, the auction house was having a concurrent American Furniture sale in which the omission of this desk inferred its’ English origin. While its’ form is arguably more Queen Anne or George II than Chippendale, the cataloger seemed otherwise warranted in their description. Perhaps most telling was the desk’s relatively low estimate of \$300 to \$600, something more expected of a British version of the form rather than its’ much rarer American made counterpart.

The condition report read, “Stained, slant front separating, sides cracked, moldings nailed down and possibly replaced, back leg patched at top”; not overly pessimistic and credibly commensurate for a 250 plus year old piece of furniture. The three online images included one front view with the slant front lid down, one with it up, and a back view. The rear view showed a two-piece backboard that appeared to be of a courser, straight grain, indicative of the oak secondary wood seen in many British pieces. The graining of the frame’s back rail was stained and thus indiscernible. It was the feet that especially screamed English or Irish. There are plenty of American Queen Anne variations of “crooked”, Spanish, drake, trifold, and paintbrush feet, but none of such rudimentary provincial form. The combination of the unique step-down taper at the ankles, without the oft employed ring or bracelet, the lack of any fluting or reeding of the feet, and the boldly carved square foot pads with bullnose sides, undercut at the inside heels, seemed distinctly British. Sure enough, it probably was indeed a George II mahogany bureau.



CHIPPENDALE MAHOGANY SLANT FRONT BUREAU, 18TH CENTURY 40 X 29 X 19 In. (101.60 X 73.66 X 48.26 Cm.)  
[View catalog](#)

Sold: \$900.00  
 Estimate: \$300 - \$600

April 29, 2022 10:00 AM EDT  
 Alexandria, VA, US  
[Request more information](#)

**Additional Details**

Description:  
**CHIPPENDALE MAHOGANY SLANT FRONT BUREAU, 18TH CENTURY**  
 the hinged slant front over three drawers on a stand with scalloped apron on cabriole legs with pointed pad feet

Dimensions:  
 40 x 29 x 19 in. (101.60 x 73.66 x 48.26 cm.)

Condition:  
*Stained, slant front separating, sides cracked, moldings nailed down and possibly replaced, back leg patched at top*

Potomack catalogue entry showing “oak” backboards, “step-down” ankles, and George II square pad feet



Twelve either Irish or English George II examples:  
(all images from [www.liveauctioneers.com](http://www.liveauctioneers.com))



But something made me pause before scrolling on to the next lot. It was the overall form of the desk that had caught my attention. Without necessarily qualifying as a more diminutive ladies or child's desk, it was more compact and vertical than the Georgian examples I was familiar with. Simply put, this desk was more aesthetically successful than the typical "form follows function" design of so many English bureau on stands. The multiple knots visible in the wood of the apron and central drawer also caught my eye. Experience told me they were more indicative of walnut than mahogany. Could this desk actually be American, in a very George II style? I went ahead and requested images of the drawer construction and secondary woods. If they showed more oak secondary, thin sides, and smaller English dovetails, I could put the matter to rest.

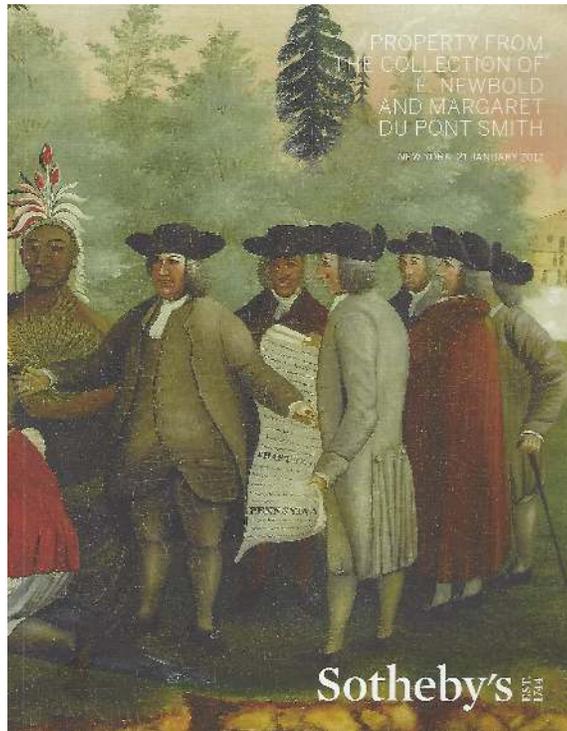
In the weeks following I really didn't give it much thought, figuring I would let the auction house's response or lack thereof be my destiny. Finally, I received an email about ten days before the sale. Instead of sending images of one of the three primary drawers, it was a single image of one of the four small drawers inside the desk's prospect section. The visible secondary wood was unquestionably poplar. Tulip poplar is a common American secondary wood, but the slender drawer sides implied the traditional use of thinner stock by English makers.

There is apparently 18th century documentation of American tulip poplar being exported to England and used in furniture. I personally know of one English Chippendale mahogany side table that does have poplar drawer sides, thinly cut; but as to whether or not it is English poplar versus American, I'm not sure. Either way, the use of poplar as a secondary wood in British furniture occurs with only a small fraction of the frequency with which oak, elm, beech, and deal (any softer conifer) are used. I thought about contacting the auction house for more details but didn't want to draw attention to what may be, albeit understandably, a mis-cataloged and rare American desk on frame. The best option would obviously be to go to the auction house and inspect things in person.

In the meantime, I immediately went to the image search on my computer in hopes of finding comparables online. I entered every version of the form I could think of: bureau, bureau on stand, bureau on frame, Queen Anne desk, George II desk, George II bureau, desk on stand, desk on frame, and so on. There weren't all that many examples out there, and expectedly, English examples outnumbered American twenty to one. Finally, I entered "Queen Anne walnut desk on stand" and got a hit. It wasn't just similar. It was the same desk, right there near the top of the page! The image was from a Sotheby's Americana sale back in January of 2017.

The desk had indeed been lot 6049 in Sotheby's sale #N09608, Property From The Collection Of E. Newbold And Margaret Du Pont Smith. It's likely I had at least subliminally remembered the image from five years prior. The description read, "Queen Anne Carved and Figured Walnut Slant-Front Desk-On-Frame, Pennsylvania, circa 1740; Description: Walnut Height 40 1/4 in. by Width 29 in. by Depth 19 1/2 in. lid replaced; Provenance: Joe Kindig, York, Pennsylvania". Its' estimate had been \$3,000 - \$5,000, and it had sold for \$13,750. The Smiths had put together a lifetime assemblage of American furniture and paintings. Much of the nucleus of their collection had been inherited from Peggy Smith's mother, Margaret W. Lewis Dupont. Peggy's father, Henry Belin DuPont, Jr., was a second cousin of Winterthur's Henry Francis DuPont.

Why had this desk come back up for auction after only 5 years? Who had owned it in the interim? Was the Alexandria auction house aware of the Sotheby's provenance? I assumed not. How accurate was Sotheby's description? There was no available condition report short of the



6048

**ROBERT SALMON (1775 - C. 1845)**

A STORM OFF THE COAST

oil on panel

1815

9¼ by 11½ in.

signed with the artist's initials *RS* and dated *1815* (lower right); also inscribed *No. 120/Painted by R. Salmon* on the reverse.

**PROVENANCE**

Acquired by the present owner before 1977.

**\$ 15,000-25,000**

6049

**QUEEN ANNE CARVED AND FIGURED WALNUT SLANT-FRONT DESK-ON-FRAME, PENNSYLVANIA, CIRCA 1740**

*lid replaced.*

Height 40¼ in. by Width 29 in. by Depth 19½ in.

**PROVENANCE**

Joe Kindig, York, Pennsylvania.

**\$ 3,000-5,000**

**\*Sold for \$13,750 including buyer's premium.**



PROPERTY FROM THE COLLECTION OF E. NEWBOLD AND MARGARET DU PONT SMITH

“lid replaced” mentioned. Was it American or English? Was it a chop-shop amalgam of period parts? Was it a legitimate period piece or a later bench-made reproduction, honestly or to deceive? Enough with the questions, it was time to inspect the damn thing!

When we entered the auction preview, I was relieved to see that the desk was in a far room with all of the English furniture, rather than included with the Americana to be sold in the following sale. They had featured it by centering it against a far wall. It was truly a beautiful desk, much prettier in the flesh, and despite all its’ idiosyncrasies, looking as American as could be! I was happy to see its’ view from the American furniture room was partially obstructed by other lots. But I don’t know who I was kidding, anyone willing to make the effort to attend the preview of one auction was certainly going to take the time to peruse the offerings of both. I was sure an Americana aficionado would discover it! You never really know a piece of furniture until you’ve examined it half a dozen times, but having only one shot at this, I tried to take my time. I couldn’t worry about others wondering as to why I was poring over a \$300 English “brown wood” desk.

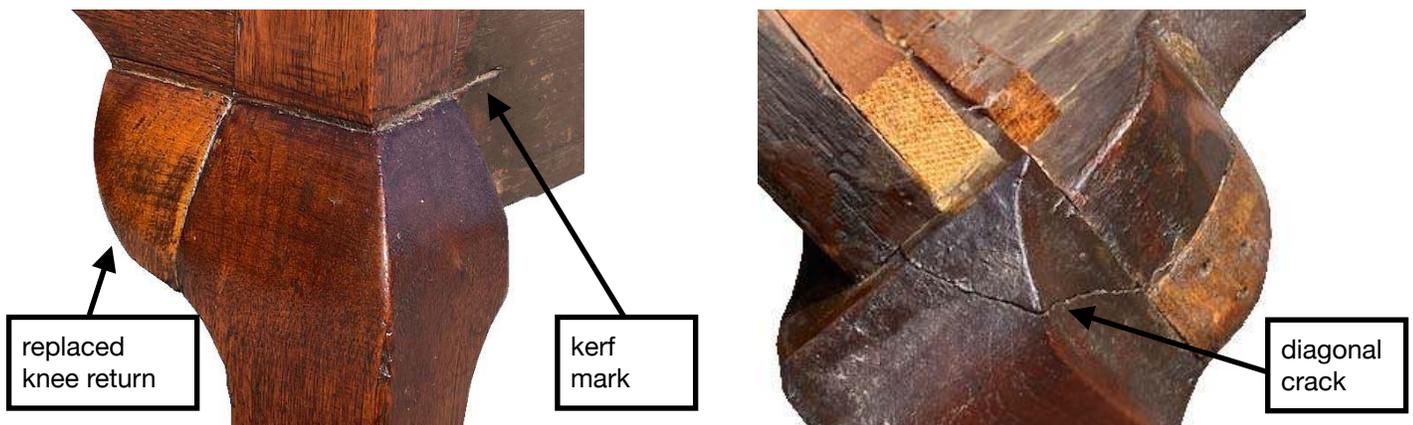
First and foremost, my suspicion regarding the knots in the graining had been correct. The primary wood is indeed eastern American black walnut, not mahogany. Sotheby’s description was correct. The two-piece backboard, with a vertical rabbeted seam, is American chestnut, not oak. While the two woods are almost identical visually, it is the short radial bands visible between the growth rings of oak that clearly differentiate it from its’ less dense hardwood cousin. The stained back rail of the frame is walnut. The four prospect drawers are composed of walnut fronts with tulip poplar sides and chestnut bottoms. The three walnut fronted primary drawers are constructed with all chestnut secondary wood. The frame’s two-piece chestnut top board is of identical thickness to, and joined with the same rabbeted seam as that of, the backboard. Rosehead nails secure the board flush to the top outer edges of the rails. A two-part molding is applied to the frame’s sides and front, forming the actual bed into which the upper section is inserted. Finally, the desk’s 7/8” thick bottom board, fully dovetailed into the case, is composed of three pieces of American cherry wood.



Several days later we were indeed successful in purchasing the desk for \$900. When picking it up the next day, curiosity got the best of us and my wife asked if there was any available provenance. We were told the desk’s consignor was the Joseph Brown III Revocable Living Trust. Mr. Brown was a real estate developer from nearby Frederick, Maryland who had actually died before the sale. Whether or not he had bought the desk directly from Sotheby’s or via a dealer we didn’t know, but it seemed highly unlikely there had been any other owners in that five year period. It was now time for its’ newest owners to take it home and go over things with a fine-tooth comb.

Concerning the condition of the desk, there were several observations that warranted careful investigation. The auction report mentioned “back leg patched at top”. Sure enough, there is a very evident 3” long x 1/4” square spline inserted into the upper outside corner of the back left leg stile, just below the molding. Much more disconcerting, however, was an issue not apparent in the online images. There are no pegs visible in the back right leg stile, the others all being double pegged on both sides. Could this mean that the leg is not original? I stood back and took a look. Usually, especially when one knows what they are looking for, something like a replaced leg is easily detected when carefully compared to the others. This one looked good though. Its’ curves, grain, distress from use, foot profile, color, and overall patina matched up well. Repair-wise, everything below the stile was original and sound. I examined the underside of the leg at the apron and noticed a 1” diagonal crack across the bottom inside corner of the stile, where it continues up vertically between the rails. Somewhere in the desk’s history both rear legs had suffered a blowout, likely as a result of the same event.

I had to determine where the cabriole leg transitioned into what was at least a partially replaced stile. There were no vertical and/or horizontal seams visible on either of the exposed stile facings, so I knew it wasn’t a typical Dutchman repair. The only option was that a two-sided walnut angle brace, fashioned with a seamless 90 degree corner, had been precisely inset over both sides of the stile to fortify and conceal the remaining damaged wood. The lack of any vertical lines and the two bottom seams being placed exactly at the corners between the stile and the top of the knee, along with careful grain selection and a little wax, perfectly camouflaged the repair. A horizontal kerf mark from removing damaged wood is slightly visible on the the back rail due to its’ bottom edge being lower than the repair seam. The side rail’s bottom edge was flush with the cross cut so no mark was made. However, the corresponding knee return is replaced. All other knee returns on the desk are original. While well intended, the probably redundant modern glue blocks applied to the frame’s four deep apron corners are likely additions rather than replacements.



The fact that the restorer chose not to install pegs is interesting. One could argue that short of the daunting task of lining them up exactly with the covered holes of the originals, introducing new holes would only further compromise the already tenuous substrate. And to introduce sham pegs, of perhaps 1/4” or less, purely for aesthetics, would also greatly reduce the strength of the new walnut corner brace. A repair that rectifies an issue, in the most thorough and meticulous manner, without contrived effort to hide the fact, is the definition of an “honest repair”. Above all, the craftsman who restored this leg felt compelled to keep as much of the original material as was feasible. I know of too many cases where well-intended restorers showed off their skill by needlessly replacing an entire leg. This concept of an “honest repair” neatly segues into the other significant restoration issue to be addressed.

In their condition report, Potomack listed “slant front separating” as their only reference to the lid. Sotheby’s description simply stated “lid replaced”. The only other condition report associated with the Sotheby’s sale was included on Invaluable’s website entry as “bottom and top 3/4 of fall front lid replaced”. Whether or not that was provided to Invaluable by Sotheby’s or an intermediary is not known. Any record of an actual Sotheby’s condition report, which are generally only provided upon request, could not be found.

invaluable



**Lot 6049: QUEEN ANNE CARVED AND FIGURED WALNUT SLANT  
-FRONT DESK-ON-FRAME, PENNSYLVANIA, CIRCA 1740 |**

**Condition Report**

Proper rear right leg with large patch, bottom and top 3/4 of fall front lid replaced.

In response to your inquiry, we are pleased to provide you with a general report of the condition of the property described above. Since we are not professional conservators or restorers, we urge you to consult with a restorer or conservator of your choice who will be better able to provide a detailed, professional report. Prospective buyers should inspect each lot to satisfy themselves as to condition and must understand that any statement made by Sotheby’s is merely a subjective qualified opinion. **NOTWITHSTANDING THIS REPORT OR ANY DISCUSSIONS CONCERNING CONDITION OF A LOT, ALL LOTS ARE OFFERED AND SOLD “AS IS” IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONDITIONS OF SALE PRINTED IN THE CATALOGUE.**

**Provenance**

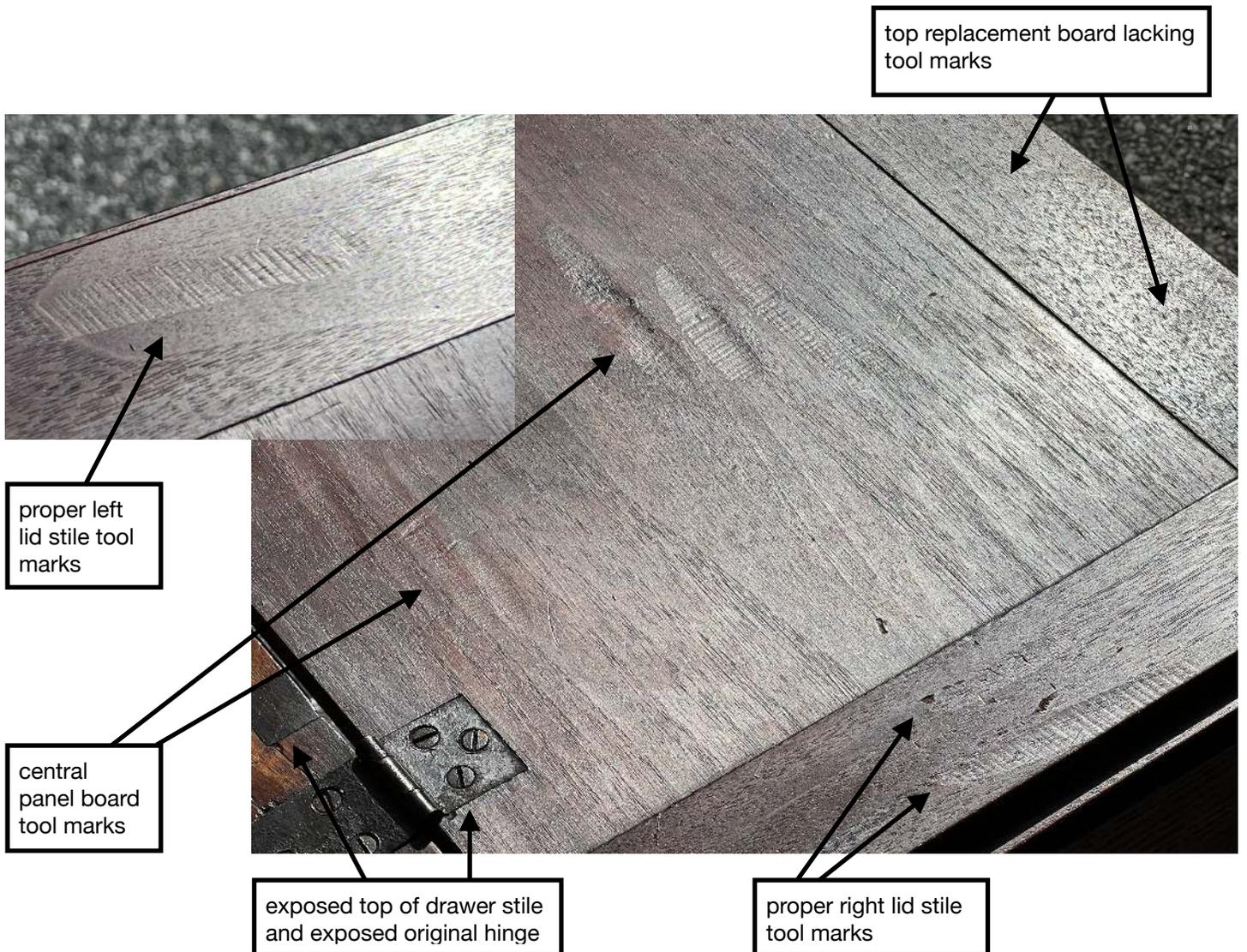
Joe Kindig, York, Pennsylvania.

The lid is composed of a wide horizontal board with two tongue and groove joined stiles or breadboard ends. The central board or panel is made of two parts, a larger 11 3/16” wide bottom board topped by a 2 11/16” top rail. The side stiles are both exactly 2 1/2” wide. The brass lock is a modern replacement stamped “BY BALL AND BALL WHITFORD PA”. The wrought iron hinges appear to be original to the desk and are held in place with a combination of machine-made and off-center slot screws. The cast brass keyhole escutcheon, held in place with iron rosehead nails, also appears to be original to the desk. It is identical to the original escutcheon and matching pull plates on the drawers below. The cast bails all appear to be original as well, with most of their cotter pins being replacements. The brasses are in all likelihood English imports.

There were essentially two methods of constructing breadboard lids on American Queen Anne slant front desks. One was the more literal execution of the term, where two narrower stiles were simply tongue and groove joined to the open grain ends of a larger central board. This accomplished two primary goals, to control warping and provide side-grain edges for easier molding and more attractive appearance. End grain was still exposed at the stile ends, but much less so. The other technique, more sophisticated and labor intensive, and as such perhaps more associated with later Chippendale desks, was to add a top rail of the same width as the sides that was mitred at the corners. This avoided any exposed end grain at the top edge. I imagine there might be a period example with a redundant non-mitred top rail somewhere, but if so, this desk is not it.

Not only does the lid’s top rail lack mitred ends, but it is notably wider than the stiles. Also, its’ actual thickness is slightly less than that of the stock used to make the sides, while being thicker than that of the central board below. Finally, and most telling, when examined carefully under raking light, the inside surfaces of both the large central board and the sides show clear signs of 18th century wood “dressing”, as evidenced by faint planing and “chatter” marks.

The top rail, or what I might now more accurately refer to as the lid's top replacement board, has no tool marks on either side and has undoubtedly passed through a modern joiner. It is anyone's guess as to why this replacement was made. Perhaps the lid's front edge was damaged from a fall, or possibly the original locking mechanism had a blowout or was purposely broken open for want of a lost key. It also might have been due to a natural checking of an originally one-piece central board, separating beyond what was considered acceptable and further exacerbated by the lock mortise? Regardless, it appears that a restorer once again chose to execute a neat "honest repair", refraining from replacing any more of the original material than necessary.



All evidence suggests that Sotheby's assertion of the lid being entirely replaced is incorrect. Invaluable's statement claiming "bottom and top 3/4 of fall front lid replaced" is open to several interpretations, none of which fully makes sense. For starters, if you add the bottom 3/4 to the top 3/4, you get 6/4 or one and a half lids! But the "3/4" must have come from somewhere. The ambiguous commentary might be the product of a garbled internet transcription intimating "bottom 3/4 of fall front lid original, top 1/4 of fall front lid replaced", more in keeping with the previously cited indications. The more likely scenario is that when the lid is lowered to the down position, and the observer is sitting at the desk, the bottom thus becomes the top. This supports the inspector's assumption that the "top" 3/4 of the lid was replaced, while the narrower horizontal "bottom" strip, including the original escutcheon, was salvaged. In reality, the exact opposite is the case, as the original escutcheon has been placed over a modern replacement lock and corresponding mortise, freshly cut into a new horizontal board of the required width.

Just to play devil's advocate, if the lid was actually a complete replacement due to the physical loss and absence of the original, how and why would the original front escutcheon plate have been retained? Conversely, if the desk front had been irreparably damaged rather than lost, would it literally have been to such a degree that none of the original material was salvageable, but for the escutcheon? Finally, inconsistent tool marks aside, why would a completely modern replacement employ a two-part center panel when wide enough stock for a single board was certainly available?

The condition report states "moldings nailed down and possibly replaced". By their very nature, waist moldings on two-piece case pieces are particularly susceptible to damage and loss over the years. It is always preferable that some original moldings remain, not only to retain historical integrity, but also to have an authentic profile template on which a replacement can be based. Fortunately, that is the case here. The wider top moldings on the frame's front and right side appear original based on their use of cut nails, nail hole oxidation, significant edge damage, and an overall older and distressed patina commensurate with 250 years. The corresponding left side is a modern replacement. Below these, the two cavetto side applications are 20th century replacements. The front strip does show areas of planing chatter and is likely older, but probably not original based on the lack of distress correlating with chipping of the edge above. Nails of various campaigns secure all the moldings. In the 2017 Sotheby's image, the lower right cavetto molding was missing. Based on its' similarities to that on the left, it is safe to assume that the right side's was probably present at the time but simply not put in place for the photograph. Finally, three of the four brass prospect drawer knobs show similar casting imperfections and wear, and are in all likelihood period and original. The fourth non-matching example, while possibly 19th century, is probably a later replacement.

The fact that this desk was made in America, around 1760 or so, is incontrovertible. The question as to which exact locale we might attribute that manufacture is a different matter. Ironically, the desk's earlier misattribution as English might well be the most significant clue in determining its' specific American origin. When comparing English and Maryland furniture, the old idiom concerning ducks comes to mind. If it looks like an English desk, walks like an English desk, and quacks like an English desk, but it isn't an English desk, then it's probably a Maryland desk. Despite a vexing paucity of documented Colonial Maryland furniture; careful examination of cultural and stylistic influences, structural characteristics, and materials employed, all support Annapolis, Maryland as the most likely provenance for this Queen Anne walnut desk on frame.

In his introduction to the seminal 1968 exhibition catalogue Maryland Queen Anne and Chippendale Furniture of the Eighteenth Century, author William Voss Elder writes:

“...little interest has ever been centered on the identification and study of Maryland furniture of the Queen Anne and Chippendale periods. The proximity of Philadelphia as a source of cabinetmaking, a knowledge that much furniture in the South was imported from England, (and) a general overemphasis by collector and dealer alike on Philadelphia, Newport, and New England cabinetmaking, are a few of the beliefs and trends that have prevented a previous knowledge of Maryland cabinetmaking in the pre-Revolutionary period.

The time was almost too late to collect and identify furniture for an exhibition of this type. We have been able to locate a very few important examples of the Annapolis Chippendale style, even though there are scarcely a dozen pieces of furniture of greater or lesser quality that can be specifically connected with the great Georgian houses of Annapolis. The furniture has long since disappeared, and if it survives, the Annapolis provenance and possible manufacture have been lost.

It is obvious that in the frantic years of collecting in the first decades of this century, much furniture in the Queen Anne and Chippendale style left Maryland and assumed a new identity.”.

Sixteen years later, furniture scholar and Furniture in Maryland 1740-1940 author Gregory Weidman further expounded:

“Before discussing the key issue of the origin of furniture in Maryland from 1740-1790, one must first review the economic and cultural background of the area. As noted above, Maryland’s situation was very different from the town-based economy present in New England and most of the Middle Colonies. It was, during this early period, basically a Southern, agricultural, plantation-based economy with very close ties to England. Until the phenomenal growth of Baltimore at the end of the century, Maryland would remain primary rural. There were a number of small towns, essentially minor ports or market places, but only Annapolis and Baltimore grew to any size or importance before the Revolution.”.



Old Annapolis, Francis Street by Francis Blackwell

The degree to which English culture and style influenced Colonial Annapolis cannot be underestimated. In his essay Stephen Bordley of Colonial Annapolis, Joseph C. Morton quotes Englishman William Eddis's 1769 comment on Annapolis as "the Bath of America", noting, "There are few towns, of the same size, in any part of the British dominions, that can boast a more polished society.". Morton further observed, "The nabobs of Maryland's provincial capital readily accepted, and indeed assiduously imitated, the cultural leadership of London in literature, drama, architecture, dress, social customs, and values."

Admittedly, to say that it is simply the "Englishness" of the desk that makes it Maryland is an oversimplification. After all, virtually all Colonial American furniture design was of primarily English, less often Irish, occasionally German, and rarely French (Huguenot) origins. It is the high degree of adherence to that English style that sets Annapolis furniture apart. In today's antique furniture market, with most American examples being worth several times more than their British counterparts, it is important to recognize that the opposite was once the case. In 1765, an Annapolitan of means would typically order, perhaps through an agent or from the most recently arrived shipment published in the Gazette, the newest and most fashionable furniture from London. However, when funds, time, or priorities were short, a local cabinetmaker's abilities would have to suffice. Those early makers were often British born, and certainly trained in the English style. Compounded by their client's demand for the same, the resulting wares were often indistinguishable. It is only through the analysis of secondary woods and the occasional quirk of construction that we can deduce Maryland made from Georgian furniture.

The secondary woods of this black walnut desk are chestnut, poplar, and cherry. In his book, William Elder points out that yellow pine and poplar secondary woods predominate the Baltimore areas except Annapolis and Anne Arundel County. He continues that in Annapolis, black walnut was the preferred primary wood until the later availability of mahogany, with chestnut and cherry used as well. Elder's book includes a Maryland Queen Anne walnut dining table with chestnut secondary (item 24) and two Queen Anne cherry knee-hole desks, one with a strong Annapolis provenance (items 44 & 45). There also exists a later published group of Queen Anne seating that has been confidently attributed to Annapolis. All four known examples are of unadulterated George II design with only their yellow pine secondary and local histories setting them apart. A side chair has a history in the Sands family and remained in their ancestral home at 130 Prince George Street until 2010. An armchair, now in a private Annapolis collection, has a history in the family of Stephen Bordley, state attorney general from 1756 to 1763, who lived in the Bordley Randall House. A second armchair, was pictured in The Magazine Antiques in January of 1935 and was once part of the furnishings of Brice House in Annapolis. Gregory Weidman's analysis of pre-Federal Maryland furniture also points out that poplar, "perhaps the most frequently used" secondary wood was augmented by the use of local oak and chestnut, particularly where strength was important. Weidman's observation that yellow pine was "favored particularly by rural craftsman" might account for its' less frequent use in downtown Annapolis. Weidman summarizes, "A typical Maryland case piece might contain three or four secondary woods, although yellow pine or poplar were occasionally used exclusively."

Besides Maryland, there are essentially only two other possibilities as to where this desk might have originated: Rhode Island, based primarily on secondary wood usage, and Southeastern Pennsylvania, based primarily on form. While the pairing of tulip poplar and chestnut is well documented in Queen Anne furniture from the Ocean State, it is most often in concert with some other combination of white pine, cherry, maple, and red cedar. More to the point, the stylistic similarities between this desk and Rhode Island furniture of the same period are virtually nil.

Without poring over the obvious, when compared to documented Newport or Providence desks of similar form, the same Anglo-Irish design influences of our desk are nowhere to be seen. Or more precisely, New England's well established take or interpretation of said influences had long since obscured any commonality between the two.

Six attributed Rhode Island Queen Anne examples, four with regional slipper feet:  
(all images from [www.liveauctioneers.com](http://www.liveauctioneers.com))



In their 1997 auction catalogue Sotheby's attributed the desk to Pennsylvania, circa 1740. Their description also lists a provenance of Joe Kindig, York, Pennsylvania. While understandable at first glance, this attribution becomes more tenuous upon closer study. The use of chestnut and cherry secondary woods, numerable construction and design anomalies, and even the desk's provenance, all combine to reasonably rule out Pennsylvania as its' likely origin. There is a small group of strongly Scottish influenced "Nottingham" desks from Chester County that do employ some chestnut, but inconsistently and not in combination with cherry. Furthermore, most of these desks are of later Chippendale or Queen Anne/Chippendale transitional style at earliest. In her Winterthur thesis "Screwy Feet", Laura Keim Stutman cites three examples of Chester County walnut tall chests that integrate chestnut backboards with poplar drawer construction, but again, no cherry secondary. In the online essay [The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia, Furniture Making](#), author Lisa Minardi states, "Walnut, cherry, and maple were the primary native woods of choice, with tulip poplar, pine, cedar, and oak frequently used as secondary woods for drawer sides, bottoms, back boards, and the like." There is no mention of chestnut at all, and cherry only as a primary wood rather than secondary. All of this is not to say that chestnut was never used in Pennsylvania, but the frequency with which it was, was probably a fraction of its' already acknowledged sporadic use further south.

Twelve well attributed Pennsylvania Queen Anne desk on frame examples:  
(All images form [www.liveauctioneers.com](http://www.liveauctioneers.com))



Two rare examples of desks without loppers to support lid when down:  
(Hope Lodge desk image by author; British table top desk found on [www.liveauctioneers.com](http://www.liveauctioneers.com))



A walnut desk on frame in the collection of White Marsh/Hope Lodge; Spanish or “paintbrush” feet with ankle “bracelet” on two outer sides; lacking loppers, so side drawers are intended to support lid; New England looking “crescent” knee returns but probably Pennsylvania; based on color difference, knee returns could be later replacements; no molded edge to bottom of lid, different base molding profile, drawers with overlapping lips, two-board non-mitred lid centerboard, similar drawer layout below lid, additional drawer in base, similar side apron profile, different front apron profile (to accommodate drawer?), possibly one-board sides; secondary woods unknown



### British Mahogany Miniature Slant Front Writing Desk

Estimate \$400-\$600

19d 22h 35m 33s

\$200

Starting Bid

YOUR MAXIMUM BID:

SECURE

\$200

PLACE BID

1 bidder watching this item

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This desk has various detail and construction characteristics that are typically associated with George II furniture but rarely seen in other American Queen Anne examples. The use of chestnut for the drawer construction and especially the backboards is extremely rare. Most Maryland and Pennsylvania furniture used tulip poplar for this purpose. It is likely the result of an Annapolis maker's closest substitution for the oak secondary traditionally used in English case pieces, thus of course, part of the reasoning behind Potomack Auction's English attribution. The same can be said of the frame's chestnut top board. Not only is the use of hard grained wood for this purpose ubiquitous to England, but most American Queen Anne frames, including Pennsylvania, are standardly left open without a top board. There are also no lopers (pull-out lid supports) flanking the lower drawers. The absence of lopers is occasionally associated with more provincial country made lift-lid pieces, or sometimes smaller "table-top" portable desks where the top drawer(s) suffices. There is a group of Pennsylvania/Maryland full case desks whose upper flanking candle drawers double as lopers. But as of this writing, only one American drop-front desk on frame and an English table top desk, both without lopers have been identified. One might simply attribute this lack of lopers, intentional or not, as a result of the provincial nature of the desk's production, versus its' more meticulously made English based counterparts.

The drawer arrangement from which the lopers are absent is notable as well. Arbitrary as it might seem, the wide central drawer being flanked by two smaller drawers of equal height is a layout not commonly seen in Pennsylvania Queen Anne desk on frames. But a c.1765 Maryland dressing table, attributed to Charles Belt of Mount Pleasant in nearby Anne Arundel County, does have its' upper drawers arranged similarly.



attributed to Charles Belt, Anne Arundel County



The three primary drawers also differ in that while they have the typical Queen Anne quarter-round moulded edges, they lack the overlapping drawer lips found on most American examples of this time. It is not a question of *if* Pennsylvania makers ever made these earlier lipless drawers, they undoubtedly did, but when? Usually, coinciding with much earlier William and Mary construction. The fact that the maker employed this detail at such a late date is indicative, once again, of a more faithful *retardaire* compliance to earlier George II construction methods. In 1760s America the rare occurrences of Queen Anne drawers lacking lips were in all likelihood the product of a country maker, not up to speed with the newest Queen Anne/Chippendale transitional trends already established in the larger cities and towns.

Eleven more provincially attributed Mid-Atlantic (Pa., Md., Del. & Va.) Queen Anne examples:  
 (first image from Nutting, all others from [www.liveauctioneers.com](http://www.liveauctioneers.com))



634. QUEEN ANNE. APPLE WOOD. 1710-20. MET. MUS.



Zoom



Zoom



ca 1760 diminutive beautifully proportioned PA wal



Outstanding lower Rappahannoc River Valley, VA carved



Ahh, the feet. As discussed earlier in this essay, there are countless American Queen Anne variations of crooked, Spanish, drake, trifold, and paintbrush feet. But when one combines the stepped-down ankle, with no “bracelet” at all, in concert with the definitive George II “cushioned club” foot below, they will arrive at a, heretofore, unique form in American furniture. After searching the internet and flipping through countless books, there were more than a few “almosts” from both sides of the Atlantic, but all succumbed to having either a more embellished foot under a similar ankle, or an ankle “bracelet” of one sort or another, above a similar foot. There was, however, one relatively close American example found in Edgar G. Miller, Jr.’s American Antique Furniture, A Book For Amateurs. Miller was a businessman from Baltimore whose obsession with antiques led him to write one of the earliest reference books on American furniture. It was published in 1937, and while not tremendously academic in nature, the book contains thousands of images of early American (and some English) furniture. Miller drew on local Maryland collections as well as his own for many of the book’s entries.

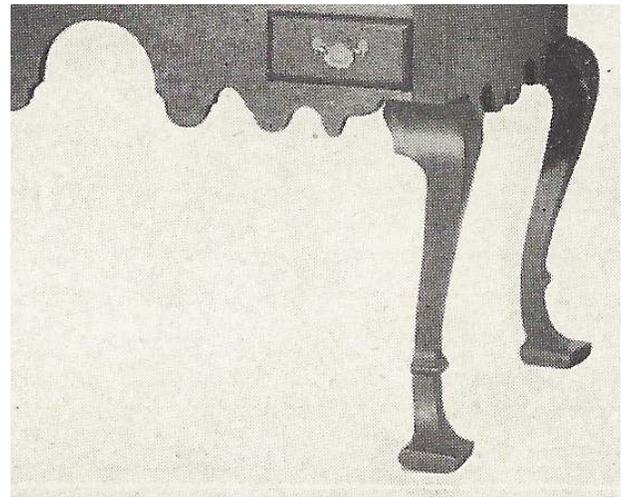
Item 645, from Miller’s own collection, is a Queen Anne high chest with uncanny similarities to our desk. While the image is not of the highest resolution, the feet do appear to be nearly identical and very possibly by the same hand. The lower case’s upper drawers follow the same format of two small drawers on either side of a longer central drawer, all of equal height. The arched profile of the front apron is also very similar in design, especially when considered to be adjusted for greater width. It appears that there are no overlapping drawer lips at either the case sides or the drawer blades, and similar to the desk, the drawers’ quarter-round edge molding is wider than most, furthering the likelihood that they lack lips. While the cast brasses are certainly different in profile, and have posts rather than cotter pins, they are stylistically contemporary to the desk’s and possibly imported from England as well. The high chest’s legs have knee spurs and bracelets carved at their ankles. Like the desk’s more rudimentary step-down cuts at the ankles, the bracelet embellishments are applied to only the out-facing leg surfaces, but are nonetheless significantly different. Perhaps an overeager carver reduced the desk legs’s ankles while neglecting to retain an allowance for standard bracelets. So too, might have impetuous design led to omission of the lopers. But, when all is said and done, it is probable that the exclusion of the ankle bracelets and lopers were fully intentional decisions made by the cabinetmaker.

Lot 115: *English Georgian Mahogany End Table, Ca. 18th C., H 27" W 24" Depth 16"*



A George II oak side table, circa 1750, the rectangular





645 (UPPER) MR. EDGAR G. MILLER, JR.

The feet of No. 645, somewhat resembling a form of Spanish feet,<sup>8</sup> are of an unusual type; and above each foot is a molding which is sometimes called a "bracelet",<sup>9</sup> although it does not surround the leg, being on the two outer sides only. The legs are not round, but almost rectangular. About 1720-1730.

On several highboys here shown the club feet are "cushioned", that is, there is a wooden "cushion", or "shoe", under, and a part of, each foot as a protection against breakage.<sup>10</sup> Examples are in Nos. 638-642.

Nothing is known regarding the ownership of the desk previous to Joe Kindig selling it to Margaret Du Pont Smith, or possibly her mother earlier in the Twentieth Century. The fact that Kindig owned it, however, might go a long way toward surmising its' origin as being from Maryland. Trent Rhodes' 2018 Winterthur thesis was titled The Antiques Trade in Transition: Collecting and Dealing Decorative Arts of the Old South. In it, Joe Kindig is referred to multiple times, most having to do with his procuring of Southern antiques. The author mentions the early years of American collecting, "Later, during the "golden decade" of antiques in the 1920s, dealers like Israel Sack and Joe Kindig facilitated the Northern movement of Southern decorative arts at an unprecedented scale." He later continues, "As more Americans began to partake in the "antiques craze," dealers like Joe Kindig, Jr. (1900 – 1971) sought alternative sources to satiate their clientele's demands. Like dealers a generation before him, Kindig looked to the South for objects, engaging with an established set of dealers with specialized knowledge in locating antiques from the region." It is no secret that Kindig's location in York, Pennsylvania, just north of the Maryland border, afforded him the advantageous position of quite literally being the gate keeper for furniture heading north. All part and parcel of Bill Elder's earlier comment, "It is obvious that in the frantic years of collecting in the first decades of this century, much furniture in the Queen Anne and Chippendale style left Maryland and assumed a new identity.". With bated breath, granddaughter Jennifer Kindig was indeed contacted in an effort to see if there might be any additional information on the desk, perhaps in some old file box of index cards....somewhere, but as of this writing, to no avail.

William Elder lists only fifteen cabinetmakers known to have been working in Annapolis before 1770, a time after which George II/Queen Anne style furniture would be comfortably out of vogue. Charles Belt, who died in 1775 and lived in nearby Anne Arundel County, in all likelihood produced furniture for Annapolis patrons before 1770 as well. If one eliminates all of the architects (William Buckland), chair-makers, joiners, "wire workers", primarily "European Goods" retailers, stucco workers, wheel-makers, turners, and those known to be active only after 1765, the list winnows down to only six individuals. They are John Anderson (1746-1759), Gamaliel Butler (1752-1756), Robert Hainsney (1762), Richard Harsnip (prior to 1762), John Pennington (prior to 1750), and Andrew White (1761). While Charles Belt (prior to 1775) should probably be included, we know that the dressing table attributed to him and mentioned earlier in this essay has very little in common with the desk except, of course, for their similar drawer layouts. There is no information available on Hainsney, Harsnip, or White. We do know, however, that Anderson, Butler, and Pennington were all English-born and trained cabinet makers. Pennington's advertisement in the Maryland Gazette, July 18, 1750 gives notice that he is moving back to his "native Country" and all individuals who either owe him money or to whom he is indebted, should settle immediately. We don't know for how long he worked in Annapolis before returning to England in 1750. John Anderson advertised the availability of desks in his Gazette notice of 1746. According to Elder's book, he worked for at least thirteen years before his death. Gamaliel Butler's advertisement of 1754 mentions the availability of "Cabinet Work, such as Desk, Escrutores, etc.". But Butler's Annapolis career was a relatively short four years before his death in 1756, not a lot of time to produce a large body of work.

The definition of an *escritoire* in 18th century Britain and America varied greatly to some and was overly inclusive to others, all compounded by the fact that there might have been a dozen different spellings of the word. Meriam-Webster defines it as "**escritoire** noun: *a writing table or desk; specifically: secretary*". In his essay Musings on a Scottish-Irish Desk Form in Colonial Virginia: The Scrutoire, Sumpter Priddy examines four mid-18th century Tidewater attributed secretary cabinets, comparing them to their Scottish/Irish antecedents.

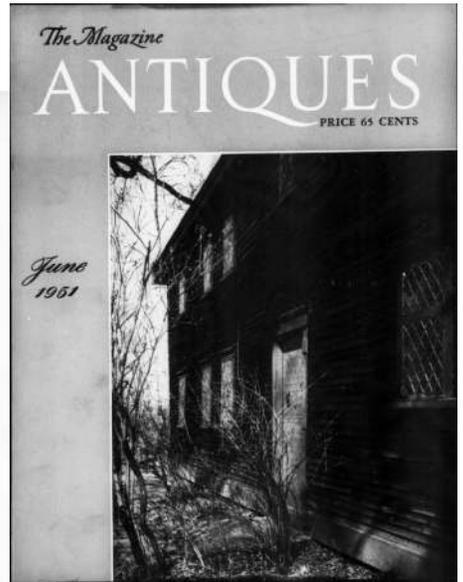
These larger “architectural” forms all have in common pairs of upper doors concealing an interior fall-board and writing compartment. Echoing Butler’s *Gazette* notice, Priddy mentions, “However, desks and scrutoire sometimes appeared in an inventory side by side, or in adjoining rooms, indicating that the inventory-takers distinguished the forms from one another.”. In trying to differentiate between the two, he continues, “Such early escrutoire existed contemporaneously with “desks,” a name used to designate a piece of furniture for writing and storage that appears to have differed most obviously in having a slanted front.”. The fact of the matter is, there will never be a concise differentiating of the two forms. One can only guess as to what Gamaliel Butler’s definition of “Escrutores” was. Remembering where most British furniture forms and nomenclature originated, 18th Century France’s *secrétaire* and *écritoire* differ in that the former was used for organizing and secreting items, while the latter was primarily for writing. Sure enough, many French *escrutores* are indeed a slant-fronted case with drop-down writing surface, usually above a single horizontal row of drawers over open legs, integral or as a frame. Marie Antoinette had a “*Marqueterie Escritoire*” of this exact form, now at the South Kensington Museum. Might the same form be what Butler was referring to in 1754 Annapolis? As far as his definition of “Desk” goes, perhaps it referred to essentially the same slant front top, but over a solid case of drawers for accommodating greater storage.

**GAMALIEL BUTLER,**  
*Living in East-Street, near the Dock, in Annapolis,*  
**HAVING** engaged a very good  
Workman in the **CABINET-WAY,**  
hereby gives Notice to all Gentlemen and Others,  
that he will supply them with all Sorts of Cabinet-  
Work, such as Desks, Escrutores, Tables, Chairs,  
Bedsteads, &c. &c. in a vety neat Manner, and  
at the cheapest Rates, by  
*Their humble Servant,*  
*Gamaliel Butler.*



Eight well attributed mid-18th century Annapolis Queen Anne examples, the two desks admittedly Queen Anne/Chippendale transitional; all also adhere closely to George II designs:





A Pennsylvania walnut Queen Anne desk-on-frame of small size, (only 26" wide) and unusually graceful proportions. C-1740.

*Joe Kindig, Jr. & Son*

325 West Market Street • York, Pennsylvania  
ONE OF THE FINEST STOCKS OF AMERICAN ANTIQUES

Three American desks with candle drawer lopers, and a Maryland desk with chestnut backboards and similar in a way, but very different in others, feet:  
(first three from [www.bidsquare.com](http://www.bidsquare.com), bottom from [www.sothebys.com](http://www.sothebys.com))



Very Rare Queen Anne Walnut 'Octorara'  
Slant-Front Desk, Chester County,  
Pennsylvania or Frederick County, Maryland,  
Circa 1745

Auction Closed  
January 19, 04:11 PM EST

Estimate  
10,000 - 15,000 USD

Lot Sold  
8,190 USD



#### Lot Details

##### Description

Very Rare Queen Anne Walnut 'Octorara' Slant-Front Desk  
Chester County, Pennsylvania or Frederick County, Maryland  
Circa 1745

In prospect cupboard is a removable grain-painted poplar floor board under which are three removable secret drawers. Lower most section of center drop and applied molding at rear of top restored.  
Height 43 1/2 in. by Width 37 1/4 in. by Depth 21 in.

##### Condition Report

Secondary woods: chestnut and poplar. Bales and key in drawer. Lock and hinges replaced. Veneer, bale handles, hinges interior of door. Hardware replaced.

Early Philadelphia “crooked” feet are similar, but with no stepped down ankle or bulbous pad feet.



This circa 1735 cherry crooked-foot dressing table retains its original brasses and an old finish, has scratch beading, and has replaced drops that are based on a dressing table with original drops by John Head. Only one other dressing table is known from this shop. It was \$39,500 from Philip Bradley.

A Pennsylvania, or very possibly Maryland desk, based on its’ lack of quarter columns, with chestnut drawer secondary wood.



A high style George II leg with a true, albeit highly embellished, stepped down ankle. Very likely similar to what our “poor man’s” version was stylistically based upon?



Just when I thought I could put things to bed, at least for the time being, up comes this “Long Island” desk on frame at Pook & Pook Auctions in January of 2026. For what it’s worth, it did come out of a Pennsylvania collection. While I can’t conjecture as to why the consignor or auction house assigned it a Long Island attribution, one can only assume who ever was in charge certainly didn’t think it was a product of Pennsylvania. Based on its’ nearly identical overall design, there is little doubt it is either from the same shop or, if not, the hand of a very closely allied maker. But without getting into a whole diatribe, suffice it to say, there are multiple differences, some more nuanced than others, in design, construction, and woods employed. Compounding this is the fact that the desk has undergone restoration, some of which can be gleaned from the condition report below. The most salient inconsistencies are the applied William & Mary double beading on the front edges, the centered “original” holes on the lower drawers (possibly indicative of W&M drop-pulls), the veneered fall front, the notably less severe cyma curve to the cabriole legs, and the stepped-up ankles leading down to the feet, versus the stepped-down on ours. It does appear that in addition to tulip poplar, cherry and perhaps white pine are the other secondary woods. Based on the images available, I was unable to discern the use of any chestnut secondary, but it could be in there somewhere. Stylistically, it is almost the perfect transitional William & Mary-to-Queen Anne complement, to our transitional Queen Anne-to-Chippendale form. In the end, while it is certainly nice to have such a close comparable from the same shop, I’m not sure its’ existence provides any real additional bearing one way or the other on the hypothesis of an Annapolis origin.



**Lot 378**  
**Long Island, New York Queen Anne**  
**walnut desk on frame**



Pook & Pook Inc

16d 16h 01m

Starting Bid **\$500**

0 Bids



Live

Americana | Session Two | Lots 341-680

By Pook & Pook Inc | Jan 15, 2026 | Set Reminder

View Full Catalog (340)

Lot Description

**Long Island, New York Queen Anne walnut desk on frame, ca. 1740**, the slant lid opening to a fitted interior, over a frame with bold mid molding, over scalloped skirt with incised C-scroll, supported by cabriole legs and square stocking pad feet, 39 1/2" h., 25" w. Provenance: The lifelong Collection of Stanley R. and Andrea K. Hollenbaugh, East Berlin, Pennsylvania.

378	Desk	Patch to top at lock. Fall front veneered. Lip repair to top edge of front. Brasses replaced. One drawer replaced. One drawer with replaced bottom. Mid molding probably replaced. Repaired break to front leg at knee. Scroll carving on base likely a later addition.
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