

# Baltimore Carved Bellflowers (and Paterae, Plumes, and Swags)

The study of American Federal furniture can be unavoidably assumptive. In a discipline traditionally challenged by a paucity of labeled work and minimal historical documentation, any and all efforts toward further academic knowledge are certainly laudable. But in our exuberance to embrace these new ideas, it is important to give due credence to the century of scholarship that precedes. We cannot cavalierly disregard those trite observations from the past, lest we risk throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. History rarely provides us with absolutes. It is more often the case that the passage of time results in an amalgam of sorts, where the interrelation of multiple factors precludes the neat, orderly outcome we pursue.



Figure 1; collection of the author

This Federal Baltimore carved mahogany side chair (Fig.1) was made in the early 1800s for merchant John Gamble Donnell (1752-1827) and his wife Ann Teackle Smith Donnell (1781-1862). It has descended directly to their great, great, great, great grandson, the author. During its' give or take 220 year history, the chair has likely not traveled more than 12 miles beyond the shop location of its' manufacture. By any measure, it ranks among the finest examples of the form. In the book Maryland Heritage (The Maryland Historical Society, 1976), William Voss Elder writes:

"This side chair of which there are numerous other examples, some in large surviving sets with armchairs, are in terms of design and carving perhaps Baltimore's most beautiful chairs in the classical revival style. It can be compared for regional differences with the Massachusetts McIntire side chair in this exhibition. This shield back is a different derivation from Plate 8 of Hepplewhite's *Guide*. The four Prince-of-Wales plumes, the top center patera and its flanking festoons of drapery, as well as the bellflowers on the top rail, are all carved with the utmost skill. More pronounced Baltimore characteristics are found in the wide, fully upholstered saddle seat and the molded front legs. A large set of such chairs was a part of the original furnishings of *Willow Brook*, a fine Adamesque-Federal house built on the outskirts of Baltimore in 1798."

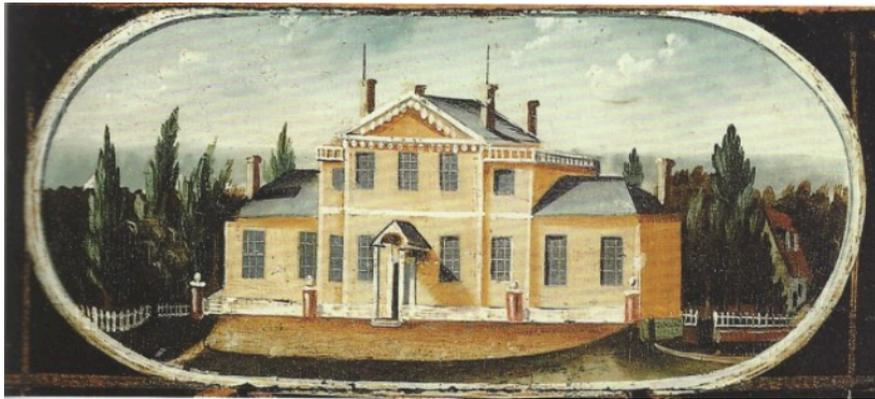


Figure 2; collection of the BMA, attributed to Francis Guy

While *Willow Brook* (Fig.2) was actually built by Ann Donnell's uncle, Thorowgood Smith (1744-1810), later to become second mayor of Baltimore, he never actually took up residency. Just as the house approached completion, Smith suffered severe financial losses when several of his ships were seized by the French in 1799. He was forced to declare bankruptcy and sold *Willow Brook* to his nephew-in-law in 1800.

Like most of their financial stature, the Donnells outfitted their country house with everything from simpler utilitarian furniture, to the most fashionable and up-to-date appointments available. Despite the passage of time, there still remain three sets of seating, all well known as original furnishings of *Willow Brook*. A group of four spindle-back fancy armchairs (Fig.3), likely remnants of a larger set, are now in the collection of Homewood Museum. All four are well documented as having been inherited as two pairs in parallel branches of Donnell-Stewart family descendants. Due to their less formal appearance and lightness of weight, they were perhaps used both in less formal rooms as well as even occasionally outdoors. In fact, their genericness of design and simpler paint decoration indicate that while possibly made in Baltimore, the chairs might just as well have been New England or New York imports.



Figure 3; collection of Homewood Museum, photo by Andrew Nagl 2019

Willow Brook contained a beautiful Adamesque inspired oval room that was disassembled before the house was demolished in 1965 and is now installed at the Baltimore Museum of Art. A room such as this was undoubtedly reserved for the finest of furnishings. Two remaining survivors of a much fancier paint decorated Chinoiserie suite of furniture, probably from the shop of Thomas S. Renshaw, with their decoration possibly by John Barnhart, exemplify the epitome of the form. An armchair from this suite (Fig.4) has been in the collection of Winterthur since 1959, unfortunately lacking any family provenance. It was not until the late 1990s that the Baltimore Museum of Art purchased a card table (Fig.5) with identical gilt red and green Chinese motifs from a direct Donnell descendant, thus identifying the original owners of one of Baltimore's finest, if not unique suites of painted furniture.



Figure 4; collection of Winterthur



Figure 5; collection of the BMA



297

□ 297

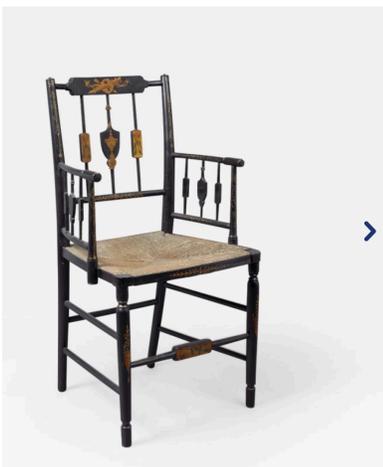
A Fine and Rare Set of Seven Painted and Decorated Rush-seat Dining Chairs, Southern New England or New York, circa 1810, comprising one armchair and six side chairs, the crestrail with panel decorated with a gilt torch encircled by a wreath above three upright splats decorated with a gilt urn flanked by panels decorated with arrows tied by ribbon, the uprights decorated with vines, ending in slightly vase-turned legs with a cross stretcher, the legs decorated with a cornucopia with a spray of wheat, the stretcher has a panel decorated with a gilt urn. *Some slight retouching to paint, and repair to two stiles.*

A closely related chair with similar urn motifs on the uprights is at Winterthur and illustrated in *American Furniture, The Federal Period*, New York 1966, p. 467, Fig. 488.

*Provenance:*

Rockwell Family, Rockwell Hall, Colebrook, Connecticut to Norton Family, distributed in 1915 to three sisters: Adalaide Talcott Emerson, D.E. Wheeler, and M.E. Lathrop, to the present owner.

\$14,000-18,000



LATE FEDERAL FANCY PAINTED ARM CHAIR

Offered by: Jeffrey Tillou Antiques

\$ 3,800

INQUIRE MAKE OFFER

Tear Sheet Save Add to Board Share

Description

Fancy gilt stencil decorated arm chair with rush seat.

More Information

Dimensions

Message from Seller:

Jeffrey Tillou Antiques was established in 1992. The three story historic building located "on the green" in Litchfield, features an extensive inventory of Americana



Feb 13, 2025

American Federal Style Stencil Painted Armchair

Auctions at Showplace

Sold: \$200

The third and final group of furniture documented as having been part of *Willow Brook's* original furnishings was a set of twelve shield back dining chairs from which the author's chair is a survivor. As of the late 1990s, a second single chair remained in the possession of a second Donnell descendant in Baltimore, while the remaining ten were purportedly owned by another descendant in Florida. In the early 1800s Baltimore's cabinetmaking trade was at its' apogee. There were in all likelihood several shops capable of producing chairs of this quality, both structurally and design-wise. But based on the relatively few survivors extant, it seems these exceptionally carved Donnell chairs, as well the three related examples to be discussed shortly, are all likely products of a single shop, or perhaps two. In either case, prudent enough to have employed one of Federal America's finest carvers.

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries there were itinerant carvers up and down the east coast who worked on both architectural embellishments as well as furniture, but any records of such are understandably hard to come by. Sumpter Priddy and Martha Vick mention several carvers to the south of Baltimore in their *Chipstone* article [The Work of Clotworthy Stephenson, William Hodgson, and Henry Ingle in Richmond, Virginia, 1787-1806](#). Upon inspection of this chair's carving, however, Sumpter Priddy feels confident it is not by the same hand as the Washington, D.C. chair making school he describes with Anne Steuart in their article [Seating Furniture from the District of Columbia, 1795-1820](#) (*Chipstone* 2010). Corresponding with the author, he goes on to say "From a design standpoint, the carved details on your chair are drawn with more imagination and refinement than on any of the DC chairs. With all due respect to my fine friends Messers Worthington, Ingle, and Waters, virtually all of the elements on your chair have finely attenuated proportions, long and lean, when compared to the DC chairs.". The one thing we do know is that the carving on this Donnell chair was second to none.

With that in mind, one speculative possibility has arisen. Ironically, it is in his book [Baltimore Painted Furniture 1800-1840](#), that William Elder mentions a possible carver of the chair. While pointing out the challenge of matching the plethora of early Nineteenth Century Baltimore cabinetmakers with documentation of their individual production, he notes that there was a carver by the name of Lachlan Phyfe located at "the prestigious address of 37 South Gay Street" from at least 1807 to 1808. Lachlan was none other than the brother of Duncan Phyfe and "later considered to be his best carver". Coincidentally, or maybe not so coincidentally, Thomas Renshaw, the likely maker of the Donnells' painted Chinoiserie furniture suite, used the same 37 South Gay Street address for his shop seven years later.

While chairs of such exceptional caliber and subsequent expense were certainly not made by the gross, it seems unrealistic to assume that at least some versions of differing styles by the same maker do not exist. William Elder did mention "numerous other examples, some in large surviving sets with armchairs". It seems more than likely that at least *some* other members of Baltimore's newly prosperous citizenry would have patronized the same shop. There are, in fact, three well documented, traditionally Baltimore attributed examples that have strong potential as being products of the same shop as the Donnell chair.



Figure 6; collection of Winterthur



Figure 7; BMA Today, 2019, Baltimore Museum of Art



Figure 8; <https://www.amazon.com/HistoricalFindings-Photo-Cathedral-Baltimore-Maryland/dp/B07CMDW877>

The first of these (Fig.6) is not only superlative in quality, certainly on par with the Donnell chair, but its' provenance connects it solidly to Baltimore. Likewise, its' first owners have both social and business alliances with contemporary John Donnell. Known as the Carroll-Harper chair, it has always been associated with Signer Charles Carroll of Carrollton (1737-1832). One of the wealthiest men in America, he provided homes for all three of his adult children: *Homewood* (for Charles Carroll Jr.), *Brooklawn* (for Mary Carroll Caton), and *Oakland* (for Catherine Carroll Harper), all just north of Baltimore. He also built all three their respective townhouses in the city proper.

Most scholarship suggests that the set from whence this chair came was actually owned by Catherine "Kitty" Carroll Harper and her husband Robert Goodloe Harper. Whether or not Charles Carroll actually bought the chairs for his daughter and son-in-law is a matter of conjecture. If not, he in all likelihood supplied the funds. Priddy and Steuart's research found that upon their marriage, "Over the next thirty years, Charles Carroll gave them at least \$343,957, which enabled them to build a home and acquire furnishings like the set of side chairs.....". The same authors also note that the Harpers "settled in Montgomery County, Maryland", a crucial rationale behind their attributing the chairs' manufacture to Henry Ingle of Washington, D.C.. However, this seems to be incorrect. Virtually every source available has the Harpers living the balance of their married life at *Oakland* (Fig.7), the country house Charles Carroll built for them north of Baltimore, as well as their townhome in the city (Fig.8). Robert Goodloe Harper's biography has him moving to the city shortly after the close of his Congressional career.

"After retiring from politics in 1801, Harper moved to Baltimore, Maryland, where he had been a de facto resident since 1799. On May 7, 1801, he married Catherine Carroll, daughter of the eminent Charles Carroll of Carrollton. Most of the family wealth remained in Catherine's name, and despite a successful law practice, Harper owed considerable debts throughout the rest of his life." (<https://www.scencyclopedia.org>, Carey M. Roberts)

Coincidentally, by 1804 Harper was on the board of directors of the Baltimore Water Company, along with fellow committee member John Donnell. He also represented Donnell in his 1817 Supreme Court suit against Commodore John Rodgers concerning the loss of Donnell's ship *Eleanor* during the War of 1812 (*A Ruse de Guerre Gone Wrong: The Sinking of the Eleanor*, Frederick C. Leiner, MHS, 2006). Robert Goodloe Harper was buried at Oakland and later reinterred at Green Mount Cemetery in Baltimore.

While exhibiting typical Baltimore regional construction attributes, the Carroll-Harper chair also displays the high quality of carving and strict adherence to Sheraton's and Hepplewhite's design books that sets these chairs apart (Fig.9). While Priddy and Steuart note that "the design of the Harper chairs differs significantly from that of other seating attributed to Henry Ingle", their nearly identical leg carving can be seen on a well attributed Baltimore cabriole sofa, its' back profile identical to two others with local provenances. All three sofas have the rear angled or "crook'd" feet associated with many Baltimore versions of the form. (Figs.10,11,&12)



Figure 9; author's Donnell chair on left, Winterthur's Carroll-Harper chair on right



Figure 6; collection of Winterthur

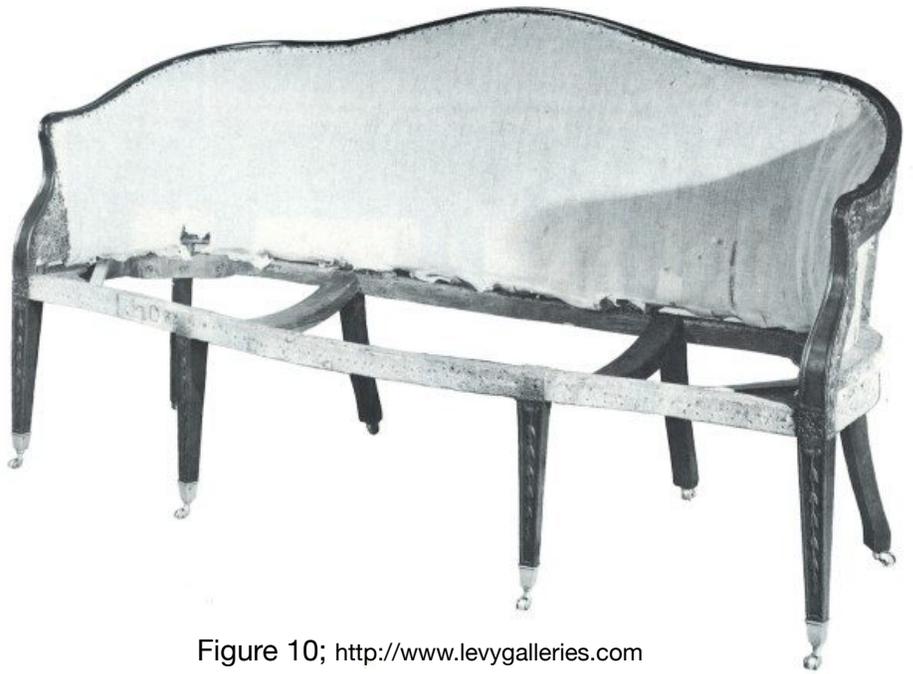


Figure 10; <http://www.levygalleries.com>



Carroll-Harper chair



Baltimore sofa



Figure 11; author's collection



Figure 12; [https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/hampton/exb/Furnishings/Federal/HAMP21432\\_sofa.html](https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/hampton/exb/Furnishings/Federal/HAMP21432_sofa.html)



Figure 13; collection of Maryland Center for History and Culture; photo by Gavin Ashworth

The second example is a chair with equally exceptional carving that has a history of ownership in another well established Baltimore family (Fig.13). In her book Furniture in Maryland 1740-1940, Gregory Weidman cites twentieth century ownership of a chair from this set as belonging to Mary Buchanan Coale Redwood, a direct descendant of William Hammond Dorsey (1764-1818). Weidman surmises "It is believed that this chair was originally owned by William Hammond Dorsey at his Georgetown house "The Oaks", built in 1800. Although he lived at "The Oaks" for only five years, it seems likely that he could have bought these chairs in Baltimore where his father, Col. John Dorsey had been a prosperous merchant and his brother Walter was a judge.". In addition to dating to the same general time of production as both the Carroll-Harper and Donnell chairs, a similar scenario of familial connection to Baltimore cannot be disregarded. While acknowledging that the Dorsey chair "differs significantly from that of other seating attributed to Henry Ingle", Priddy and Steuart note "Similarities also exist between the husks on the center banister of the Harper chairs and legs of the Dorsey chairs. Despite differences in design, the execution is identical. This is most apparent in the outlining, modeling, and shading of the leaves and modeling of the teardrop-shaped stems."

It would not be too assuming to say that even greater similarities exist between the actual legs of the Carroll-Harper chairs and the legs of the Dorsey chairs. So much so, that one might deduce they could be from the same shop, or certainly the same carver, along with the previously cited cabriole sofa (Fig.10). Also, while the Dorsey chair's meticulously carved back is somewhat restrained compared to the previous two (Donnell and Carroll-Harper), it is so, literally by design, as it also stringently follows Hepplewhite's *Guide*.



Carroll-Harper chair



Baltimore sofa

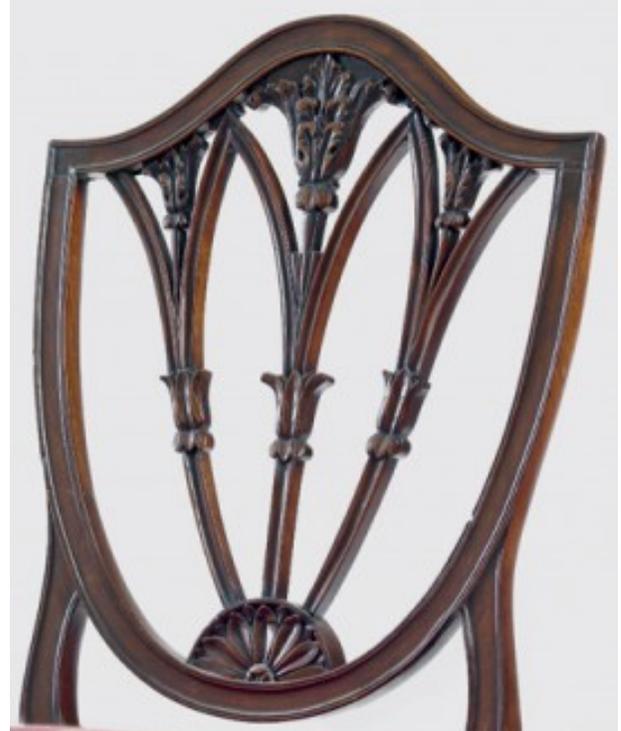


Dorsey chair

This side chair (below) in the collection of Historic Homewood in Baltimore has what appears to be an identical carved back to the Dorsey chair. Its' plain tapered legs, however, illustrate that makers offered less expensive alternatives, even to high-end clientele. MESDA owns an identical appearing chair, possibly from the same set as Homewood's, that they attribute to Alexandria, Virginia.



Historic Homewood Carroll Provenance chair



Dorsey chair



This side chair, associated with the Carroll family, may have been used as a dining or hall chair. The unique style of the shield-back carving on the chair indicates that it was likely produced in Baltimore. A few years ago, thanks to generous support from a longtime friend of Homewood Museum, this chair, along with its partner in the Homewood collection, got a second life. They received period-appropriate upholstery in a non-intrusive, museum best-practice manner, ensuring that the history of these chairs will be able to be preserved for many more generations of visitors. Additionally, one of the chairs was outfitted with a plexiglass window underneath the seat that allows viewers to better understand the construction methods that produced the chair (swipe to see).

Side chair, Baltimore, MD; c.1790-1810, mahogany and oak, Homewood Museum HH2017.19.1. Gift of Vernon and Lucy Wright to the Johns Hopkins University.

<https://jhu.catalogaccess.com/objects/106>



Figure 14; collection of Winterthur

The third and final chair attributed to the same Baltimore shop(s) as the Donnell example does not have as solid a provenance, but its' commonalities, from its' construction to the carving of its' swags, are considerable (Fig.14). In their Chipstone article, Priddy and Steuart attribute this Winterthur chair to Henry Ingle, despite the fact that they point out its' "carving is more elaborate than the finest of the chairs by his shop (i.e. the Carroll-Harper example)." Interestingly, Sumpter Priddy likewise feels the carved details on the Donnell chair "are drawn with more imagination and refinement than on any of the DC chairs.". Historic Williamsburg owns a side chair of identical design to Winterthur's which also is attributed to Henry Ingle, but the carving on its' example is not on par with Winterthur's and very possibly copied after. In his book American Furniture of the Federal Period, Charles Montgomery describes the Winterthur chair as "containing secondary woods normally used south of Philadelphia, but where it was made is impossible to say". Attribution-wise, "may be South Carolina" is mentioned as a possibility, but that is admittedly based entirely on its' pre-1931 provenance in that state. Montgomery goes on to compare the chair with the Baltimore attributed Carroll-Harper chair in his book, noting the similar carving on both chairs adheres to "English precedent". He also goes on to say that the "hollow seats and molded tapered legs of this chair are not normally found in Baltimore chairs.". William Elder, of course, conveyed the exact opposite in his preceding description concerning the Donnell chair. Indeed, the Winterthur example, as well as the Donnell, Carroll-Harper, and Dorsey chairs are not normal Baltimore chairs, but instead, amongst the best the city ever produced. As an aside, it is the author's experience that while "saddle" seats were rare everywhere in Federal America, Baltimore makers produced their fair share of "molded tapered" legs, as the transition from Chippendale to Federal they represented.

Of the four chairs discussed, this Winterthur example (Fig.14) and the Donnell chair certainly have more in common with each other than their two counterparts. Both have "H" stretchers with the rear cross member higher than the rest, diagonal "English" corner braces, trapezoidal concave "saddle" seats (the Winterthur example's front rail is serpentine as well.), tapered moulded front legs, double beaded crest rails and stiles, mahogany primary with tulip polar secondary wood, and superbly carved backs derived rather precisely from Hepplewhite's *Guide*, plates 6 and 8 respectively. While the carved elements of each chair obviously differ in design and form, the same meticulous technique with which each is rendered is apparent. Similarities in the carved paterae, curtain swags, and bellflowers or husks are particularly notable. The bellflower chains on all four chairs are composed of symmetrical three-petal flowers, with the central petal of each being delineated and textured by an elliptical convex notch. In every case, be it on a leg, back splat, or crest rail, the graduated chain of flaring tripartite husks always terminates with a smaller, more stylized, flatly carved bellflower composed of one, two, or three elliptical overlapping petals.

After examining the bellflower chains on the crest rail of the Donnell chair, Sumpter Priddy noted that the tendrils in-between were not the slightly tapered "teardrop stems" he attributes to the Ingle school. The reasons for this could be several. Firstly, vagaries of medium, artistic license, and variation within an individual carver's body of work preclude the requirement of any singular *identical* technique in proposing an attribution. The Carroll-Harper and Dorsey chairs, for instance, both of which Priddy and Steuart attribute to Ingle, have entirely different spade feet transitions. Also, the narrowness of the Donnell chair's crest rail provides a carving field more confined than the wider leg facings or splats on the others. Finally, on a chair that Sumpter Priddy describes as "outstanding in workmanship and design", the visual prominence of the crest rail, being the highest point of a chair, might well justify the best and most resolved carving possible. Another bellflower "inconsistency" is evident in the four Carroll-Harper front leg facings. Each has only one teardrop stem from which the chain hangs, with no tendrils between the flowers below, unlike all other cases including the Levy Baltimore sofa (Fig.10).



Winterthur chair



Donnell chair



Winterthur chair



Donnell chair



This Baltimore attributed armchair, while not as sophisticated as those discussed, has a similarly carved patera, "H" stretchers, and tapered molded legs.

# CHRISTIE'S

< LIVE AUCTION 21026 IMPORTANT AMERICANA

Property of a Private Collection

## THE MAJOR GENERAL ISAAC RIDGEWAY TRIMBLE FEDERAL CARVED AND FIGURED MAHOGANY ARMCHAIR

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, CIRCA 1800

Price realised  
USD 5,292

Estimate  
USD 5,000 – USD 10,000

Closed: 20 Jan 2023

### DETAILS

THE MAJOR GENERAL ISAAC RIDGEWAY TRIMBLE FEDERAL CARVED AND FIGURED MAHOGANY ARMCHAIR  
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, CIRCA 1800  
39 1/2 in. high

### PROVENANCE

Major General Isaac Ridgeway Trimble of "Ravenshurst"  
Thence by descent  
Mrs. Isaac Ridgeway Trimble, Sr.  
Sotheby's, New York, 25 January 2013, lot 459

### LITERATURE

Baltimore Museum of Art, *Baltimore Furniture: The Work of Baltimore and Annapolis Cabinetmakers from 1760-1810* (Baltimore, 1947), p. 102, no. 65.

### EXHIBITED

Baltimore, Maryland, Baltimore Museum of Art, *Baltimore Furniture: The Work of Baltimore and Annapolis Cabinetmakers from 1760-1810*, 21 February-6 April 1947.



Two, more “middle of the line” Baltimore chairs have similar carved bellflower chains. The shield back example includes the concave notch in the central petals, the “teardrop stems”, and the overlapping, less refined petals composing the terminating bellflower. It is similar enough that it could even be a more affordable model from the “Donnell chair” shop, or at least by the same carver. While the oval back has less refined carving, it does terminate in a single, more stylized elliptical petal as seen on the Carroll-Harper and Dorsey chairs as well as the Levy sofa. All evidence that, like the D.C. regional shops, even other Baltimore makers wanted to get in on a good thing.



**Fig. 6,** *Christies Auction, Sept. 2017*



**Fig. 5,** *Alex Cooper Auctions, March 2018*

Seating Furniture from the District of Columbia, 1795–1820 is a well researched and valuable essay identifying an important school of Southern Federal seating production. However, in its' authors' justifiable zeal to define and/or add credence to this group, the article's inclusion of what has historically been regarded as the city of Baltimore's finest carved Federal chairs was perhaps over encompassing. In their thesis, the authors themselves pause to reconcile the superiority of these three examples in comparison to the balance of the D.C. attributed chairs.

In 1807, Baltimore was on its' way to becoming the second largest city in the nation. It was a city of immense wealth, created by its' new turn of the century merchant class who sought only the best and most recent English inspired furniture. Washington, D.C. was still a fledgling city, primarily of politicians, and no small part of their job was to look the part. Baltimore was only 38 miles to the north for those who could afford procurement of the best and newest. Otherwise, chair makers like the Ingles saw the opportunity to fill a new local demand. In doing so, emulating the desired styles coming out of Baltimore was no small part of their repertoire.

In 1800, the nine-year-old District of Columbia was anything but a major urban center. At the core of its one hundred square miles was Washington, an embryonic town of fewer than three thousand people. Just up the Potomac River lay the older city of Georgetown, recently annexed into the District from the state of Maryland and home to perhaps thirty-five hundred souls, while a few miles downstream was Alexandria, acquired from Virginia together with its population of some four thousand. Despite its status as the nation's capital, in reality the District was a loosely associated group of three moderately sized towns widely separated by open farmland, swamps, and the Potomac River. By contrast, Baltimore, only forty miles away, had already mushroomed into a city of more than twenty-six thousand and would grow to nearly fifty thousand within ten years. Maryland's principal seaport, Baltimore was firmly ensconced as the region's dominant economic and cultural force. That Baltimore furniture makers of the early national period regarded Washington, Georgetown, and Alexandria as growth markets, is documented by a number of advertisements. In 1792, Baltimore carver-gilder and cabinetmaker William Farris notified the public that orders for his wares could be placed with "Messrs. Thomas & James Irvine, Alexandria." Twelve years later, "Cabinet Maker" John B. Taylor advertised that he had opened a shop in Alexandria where he had "received from the manufactory of Coleman & Taylor, Baltimore." And in 1805, Finlay and Cook, makers of "FANCY JAPAN & GILT FURNITURE," commenced business on Alexandria's King Street. Finlay was almost certainly associated with the Baltimore fancy chairmakers of the same name.

Historic+Williamsburg; <http://emuseum.history.org/view/objects/asitem/search@/20/title-+asc?t:state:flow=5392fe7e-226b-++43eb-922a-b77895e3b7ff>

All four chairs as they appeared in Baltimore Furniture  
1760-1810:



62. CHAIR

Mahogany

Shield back with three splats, the center one decorated with Prince of Wales plumes and festoons extending from a central patera. Bellflowers carved along top rail. Saddle seat.

Lent by MRS. WILLIAM D. POULTNEY

. 99 .



59. CHAIR

Mahogany

Shield back. The three splats are carved with acanthus leaves at top. Carved half-patera at base of splats. Serpentine seat upholstered over frame. The legs are carved with typical half-rosettes with bellflower drops attached, comparable to those on nos. 7 and 58. Spade feet.

From "The Oaks" (now Dumbarton Oaks), Georgetown, home of William Hammond Dorsey (1764-1818).

Lent by THE MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY FROM THE REDWOOD COLLECTION

. 96 .



58. CHAIR

Mahogany

Shield back combining details from designs of two chair backs in Sheraton's "Drawing Book." Carving of the finest quality. Five splats. Prince of Wales feather motif (with five feathers) at the top of the center splat with carved bellflowers below. Festoons of drapery. Acanthus leaf carving at base of splats. Swell-front to seat. Upholstered half over frame. The lower half of the frame consists of molded top edge, crossbanding, and line inlay across base. Carved floral motif on stiles. On two sides of the fore-legs are recessed panels carved with half-rosettes to which bellflower drops are attached. Spade feet. Belongs to the same set as card table no. 7.

The history of this chair can be traced back to Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the original owner. His daughter, Mrs. Robert Goodloe Harper, left it to her daughter, Miss Emily Harper. From the Harpers it came to the Pennington family, the present owner having been a Miss Pennington.

Lent by MRS. DOROTHEA HARPER PENNINGTON NELSON

. 95 .



65. ARM CHAIR

Mahogany

Wheel back. Pierced slats fan out to rail from an elaborately carved patera in the center. Compare the piercing of these slats with that on nos. 52, 54 and 60. Seat upholstered over frame. Molded legs.

The first known owner of this piece was Major General Isaac Ridgeway Trimble of "Ravenshurst." It has remained in the family since his time.

Lent by MRS. ISAAC RIDGWAY TRIMBLE, SR.

. 102 .

There is strong evidence to suggest that some of the seating out of D.C. quite literally copied Baltimore versions rather than being based on the same design books. MESDA's database records a privately owned chair similar in design to the Dorsey chair that is attributed to the "Alexandria Shield Back Chair Group". Notable differences are that it has oak rails instead of tulip poplar and the carving, while more than proficient, is not by the same hand as the Baltimore samples and notably shallower. This is particularly evident in the semi-circular patera wedge at the base of the splat.

A more illustrative example is a "possibly Joseph Ingle banister from an urn-back chair" in the collection of the Alexandria Archeological Museum. Its' form alone can lead to no other conclusion. It is unquestionably a competent maker's attempt at emulating one of the secondary splats from a Baltimore heart back chair. Heart back chairs were not included in either Hepplewhite's or Sheraton's books. But once again, the carving's quality and differing leaf configuration belie a Baltimore origin. As was probably the case up in Baltimore as well, the more basic leaf carving of the splat capital was likely carried out in-house by the maker himself, rather than an outside master artisan hired specifically for the task. The tell is in the layout of the leaves themselves. In all Baltimore examples (both carved and inlaid for that matter), and up until now without exception, the format is of a central leaf, overlapping symmetrically placed ancillary leafage on either side. Whereas, the Alexandria maker decided to place a *pair* of leaves in the center, which then abuts leaves on either side rather than overlapping them. Whether the maker was simply unconcerned about his accuracy, or perhaps wanted to integrate his own "signature" into the chair is anyone's guess.



MESDA database





[www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com)



[www.sothebys.com](http://www.sothebys.com)



Courtesy, Alexandra Archaeology Museum; photo Christian Meade

We will probably never know who exactly made these chairs. It might have been one shop with a qualified in-house carver. It might have been several shops sharing the skills of one carver. And it might have been several shops using more than one carver, but if so, they were certainly well versed with each others' work. Before we somewhat cavalierly attribute the production of these historically Baltimore masterpieces to a secondary market such as Washington, D.C. and it's environs, perhaps we should re-examine the rationale for doing so.



---

Hepplewhite Chairs as Made in America: No. 1, probably made in Baltimore, is almost an exact copy of a chair on Plate 7 of the Guide; No. 2 is an unusual form of the shield-back chair and bears the label of John Shaw, Annapolis, Md.; No. 3, a typical chair with heart-shaped back; No. 4, a Philadelphia-made chair with shield-shaped back; and No. 5, a Boston chair employing the Prince of Wales feathers in the oval back.

---



**From:** Sumpter Priddy III <SumpterPriddy@sumpterpriddy.com>  
**Subject:** Re: John Donnell side chair  
**Date:** March 14, 2011 11:31:09 AM EDT  
**To:** Tim Naylor <ntique4001@comcast.net>

---

It's included in the article as a probably DC chair. I kept trying to tie the family who owned it to Congress, but didn't have any luck.

Sumpter,

Take a look at #106 in Montgomery's book. I know they're plenty of inconsistencies but.....the bellflowers are similar with the concave relief to the central pedal, they're connected by "straight stems", legs are molded, saddle seat (and serpentine on #106), and the folds of the drapery swags look very similar, especially where they hang on the sides at their bitter ends. The carved medallion even looks like it has a similar leaf layout but round instead of oval. I bet you're going to tell me that since the publishing of that book, #106 has pretty much been accepted as Philadelphia?! Just some fun food for thought, if you didn't already know about it. -Tim N.

On Mar 10, 2011, at 8:20 PM, Sumpter Priddy III wrote:

Hello, Tim:

These are exceptional chairs, by any standard, and are absolutely lovely. I'd seen the pictures in the 47 catalog, but haven't ever stood in front of one, and though they are outstanding in workmanship and design, can find nothing to connect them to DC chairs. Not surprisingly, those short, triple pointed husks also appear in Philadelphia examples. The other form of husk--with two short and one long component--appear on a lot of the Philadelphia racquet back chairs. Similarly, the long, straight stems (not tear-drop shaped) that separates the husks in the crest show up in a couple of Philadelphia chairs, though I'd need to go digging to cite some sources. In short, I suspect these chairs are Philadelphia in origin.

From a design standpoint, the carved details on your chair are drawn with more imagination and refinement than on any of the DC chairs. With all due respect to my fine friends Messers Worthington, Ingle and Waters, virtually all of the elements on your chair have finely attenuated proportions, long and lean, when compared to the DC chairs.

I had the flu right after my lecture and am now trying to catch up and get myself to the Charleson show, so this is necessarily short, but will look forward to continuing this discussion later.

Best

Sumpter