

ABOUT CHARLESTON FURNITURE

Although many of the objects which expressed the wealth and taste of Charlestonians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were procured from sources overseas, a thriving cabinetmaking community evolved locally to suit the desires of wealthy patrons. In general, the majority of furniture produced in Charleston during the Colonial period is overtly British in design and execution and reflects the patron's desire for objects in the 'neat and plain' fashion. Earlier Colonial pieces, of which few remain, reflected the taste of the early Huguenots who were among the first settlers of Charleston and who were very powerful and influential. Although the ethnic strata of Charleston's society was rather diverse, the primary transmission of taste and aesthetic ideals followed the evolution of lines of commerce between Charleston and Great Britain.

Towards the end of the Colonial period, these British ideals began to be displaced by an Anglo-Germanic mode of expression which was introduced by continental artisans from Northern Germany. This gradual shift was primarily the result of changing patterns of immigration and economic and social factors which ultimately had the most profound impact on the British contingency within the cabinetmaking community. This shift came full circle in the early Federal period and although furniture produced in the late 1780's and after is radically different in terms of style and decoration, it does illustrate a retention of the high standards of execution and construction associated with the finest British shop traditions. These high standards remain throughout the Federal period in Charleston and are instructive in terms of regional differentiation as applied to interpretation.

Post-Revolutionary Charleston furniture exhibits a full assimilation of the Anglo-Germanic style in conjunction with vestigial British elements and the introduction of stylistic influence of Northern urban centers. This influence was partially transmitted along the lines of commerce associated with the burgeoning intracoastal trade that arose after the displacement of British domination. Other immigrant groups, such as the Scots-Irish, made their presence known by their interaction within the cabinetmaking community which resulted in new forms and methods of decoration. Indeed, the ethnic diversity, as it applies to furniture, that had been suppressed by a preference for British ideals throughout much of the Colonial period flourished during the Federal period.

Blockades, the Embargo of 1807, the Non-Intercourse Acts, and the War of 1812 resulted in an economic depression that destabilized the cabinetmaking community in Charleston. The Northern shops which were shipping vast amounts of furniture to Charleston, as well as to other

Southern ports, took advantage of the situation by increasing their control of the Charleston markets. In reaction to this, some Charleston cabinetmakers entered the cabinetwarehousing business on a limited basis by supplementing their own stock with Northern imports. By the third decade of the nineteenth century, New York cabinetwarehousing concerns dominated the upper class markets while the local cabinetmakers helped with the needs of the middle class.

The Rivers Collection offers the observer the opportunity to follow this tradition from the mid-eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century. For example, the preference of colonial Charlestonians for furnishings in the 'neat and plain' style is illustrated by the Watson family dressing table (#7), while the grandeur of the German school after the Revolution is expressed by the magnificent Neoclassical serpentine secretary press (#8). The influence of urban Northern styles is readily apparent in the Neoclassical card table exhibiting the 'lily-of-the-valley' paterae (#18), while the Stage top sideboard (#22) is the product of a shop whose master was most probably of Scottish extraction; interestingly, the inlays utilized on the sideboard are found in both Massachusetts (the neoclassical urns in the central tablets of both registers) and New York work (the leaves).

ABOUT CHARLESTON SILVER

The Rivers Collection contains many fine examples of silver produced by Charleston silversmiths. While a majority of the finest silver articles were imported to Charleston from the urban centers of Great Britain and Europe, a thriving community of silversmiths in Charleston produced a prodigious amount of very fine and sophisticated articles. The style and form of these pieces often reflected the prevailing style from across the Atlantic. The number of silversmiths practicing their art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in town attests to the strength of the market and the steady patronage of local clientele. For example, between the years 1771-1780 there were thirty silversmiths plying their trade in Charleston and by the second decade of the nineteenth century there were at least sixty-eight silversmiths working in the city.

Unfortunately, few of the finest pieces of Charleston silver have survived to the present day as the ravages of war, fire, and theft have taken their toll. The Collection represents the rare opportunity to see such an assemblage of Charleston-made silver pieces. Among the family heirlooms to be seen in The Rivers Collection are numerous pieces of both historical and aesthetic merit by an assortment of silversmiths working in different periods.

— George Williams, Estate Antiques

ABOUT THE RIVERS COLLECTION

In his groundbreaking book, *Charleston Furniture, 1700-1825*, E. Milby Burton, former director of the Charleston Museum, wrote:

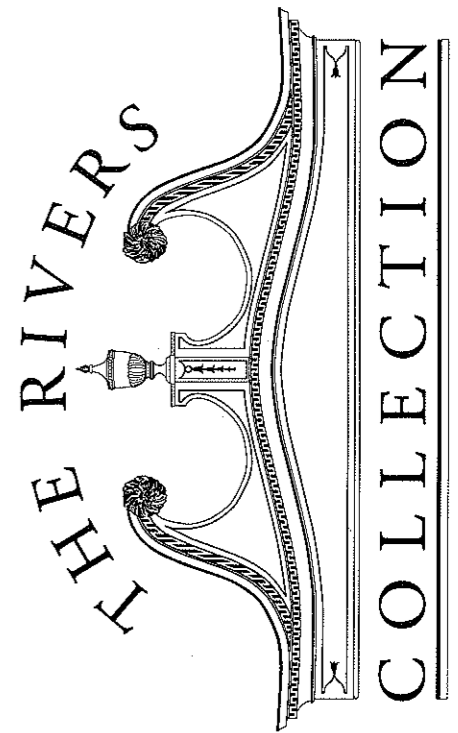
"The culture of any society, whether it be primitive or highly civilized, is unerringly revealed by the material things which the society needs and the degree of skill which it displays in producing or acquiring them."

By his application of this understanding to the material culture of the Low Country and Charleston in particular, Mr. Burton illustrated a depth of commitment to proper interpretation that went far beyond mere curiosity. Furthermore, his efforts focused on ensuring that objects of importance to this area remained in this area, where they could be properly understood within the broader context of the Low Country and its history.

In 1988, it came to the attention of Mr. John M. Rivers, Jr. that significant pieces of Charleston furniture and silver were being sold to individuals outside of the area. Instilled with the same spirit possessed by Mr. Burton, Mr. Rivers began his collection. Mr. Rivers, whose family has been in Charleston continuously since 1670, felt that a private individual should supplement the work of public museums in an effort to preserve the rich heritage of Charleston and the surrounding region.

Therefore, with the help of Tom Savage, former curator of the Historic Charleston Foundation; Jim and Harriet Pratt, owners of Estate Antiques; David Beckford, Master Restorer/owner of Beckford & Associates; Brad Rauschenberg, Director of Research at MESDA; Charlotte Crabtree, owner of Charleston Silver Vault; Kathleen Rivers, President of Kathleen Rivers Interior Design; and many others who are interested in preserving Charleston's historic culture, Mr. Rivers embarked upon the establishment of The Rivers Collection.

We invite you to enjoy the Collection which will be open to scholars and others that are particularly interested in Charleston's past.



13. Secretary with Bookcase • Charleston, S.C. • c. 1800

A monumental and appealing form, this particular example is one of the finest Charleston late Neoclassical pieces in existence. A related example is in the collection of the Charleston Museum.

The cornice is rather architectural in form and displays a skillful balance of molded, veneered, and inlaid work. It surmounts a bookcase with diamond glazed doors; the mullions are inlaid with lightwood and each corner exhibits inlaid quadrants. The interior consists of a fixed central shelf and two adjustable shelves. The bookcase rests on the desk portion which is separate from the lower stand. The desk is enclosed by a hampour lid and exhibits zebra-wood banding along the top edge and the quadrant portion of the sides. Its interior consists of six pigeonholes surmounting a single drawer centering four graduated drawers on either side. The drawers are veneered with a lightwood continuing the element of contrast so prevalent in this piece. The stand contains two crossbanded and veneered drawers which display inlaid brass escutcheons and octagonal brasses. The tops of the leg stiles exhibit masterfully inlaid urns that are the highlight of the piece. Stringing decorates the legs and terminates in a raised inlaid cuff.

14. China displayed in Secretary with Bookcase

The china is from Snee Farm, the Mount Pleasant home of Charles Colesworth Pinckney.

15. Mrs. Mazzyck, attributed to Thomas Wightman • c. 1850
This woman was Alexander Mazzyck's wife and was believed to have lived on Calhoun Street (with the possibility of having lived at 80 Alexander Street in the Mazzyck House). The Mazzyck family was in cotton factors.

16. Pembroke Table, Thomas Lee • working in Charleston 1804-1813

Pembroke table in the Hepplewhite style, signed by Lee and dated 1810, exhibiting a solid mahogany top with reeded edge which surmounts a veneered mahogany skirt with a single hidden drawer at one end. The tapered legs decorated with stringing which terminates in a cuff and inlaid rectangles with ovolo corners which enclose satinwood tozenges within satinwood diamonds. Charleston pieces which are signed and dated by their makers are exceedingly rare.

17. Linen Press • Charleston, S.C. • c. 1775 - 1785

The highboys, which were popular in the Northeast during the late Colonial period did not appeal to Charlestonians; they desired the latest styles from abroad. This desire was met by the emergence of a common Chippendale form, the Linen Press, fashionable and versatile in any household.

A molded cornice, which is a separate unit, surmounts the upper case. Enclosed within the upper case are four graduated linen trays. The doors exhibit highly figured solid mahogany panels set within a molded framework and inlaid brass escutcheons. The drawers of the lower case are also solid mahogany and are decorated with brass escutcheons and mahogany cockbeating around their edges. The case rests upon bracket feet.

18. Neoclassical Card Table • Charleston, S.C. • c. 1790 - 1800

The solid mahogany molded top conforms to the shape of the skirt which is veneered with wonderfully striated mahogany and exhibits lightwood stringing consisting of a rectangle with ovolo corners set within a rectangle. The tapering legs are decorated with pictorial inlay, commonly referred to as 'illy-of-the-valley'. The stringing which decorates the legs supports a ring from which bellflowers descend. An interesting feature of the table is the presence of double rear swing legs. The presence of these results in not only a more appealing form when open, but also one which is easier to sit at. This would have been more costly for the patron.

This table is a study in the refinement of proportion, scale, and decoration.

19. Mazzyck Child, attributed to Thomas Wightman • c. 1850
This Alexander Mazzyck family child is believed to have lived on Calhoun Street (with the possibility of having lived at 80 Alexander Street in the Mazzyck House). His family was in cotton factors.

20. Chest on Chest • Charleston, S.C. • c. 1760 - 1780

This form enjoyed wide popularity in Charleston during the Colonial period and represents a direct influence of British style on the taste of Charlestonians. This example displays the initials of the original owner, Henry Ravenel, on the back of the piece. Descended directly from Ravenel through the Dwight family of Charleston.

The removable cornice consists of an ogee over Greek key over ogee and astragal molding profile. The frieze below, to which a pierced fret is attached, is part of the case. The upper case consists of a typical three over two three graduated drawer arrangement. The cockbeaded drawers are veneered with highly figured mahogany and retain ball and rosette pulls. The sides of the upper case display stop-fluted quarter columns terminating in a 'hamb's tongue' motif. The case rests within an ogee molding. The lower case exhibits three graduated drawers and plain sides in the typical Charleston fashion. The entire case rests on a bold bed molding and ogee bracket feet.

21. Embroidered Silk Picture • 1st Quarter of the 19th Century

This fine and rare example of the schoolgirl's art is notable for its spontaneity and its depiction of a classical interior. Although the exact source of the picture is unknown, the skill of the artisans is unquestionable. The common practice was for the picture to be sketched in ink onto the silk and painted by a professional artist; the embroidery would then be executed by a schoolgirl. Advertisements placed by artists such as portrait miniaturists during this period document their desire to execute such work for schools.

The fact that the piece is unfinished is unusual and allows one to see the preliminary drawing of the artist. For example, the modeling of the folds of the young girl's dress can be seen in the unfinished areas; the immediacy of the delineation is rather appealing.

The depiction of an interior is rare in this medium and this particular interior with its columns, archway, paneled and molded walls, and fashionable textiles and furnishings is extraordinary. However, the most fascinating aspect of this piece is to be found on the table—a map of South Carolina. The young girl holds a compass which points to Charleston District and the approximate location of Charleston. Whether or not she is acknowledging her place of residence or that of a relative (or perhaps future relative) has not been determined.

22. Stage-Top Sideboard • Charleston, S.C. • c. 1790 - 1810

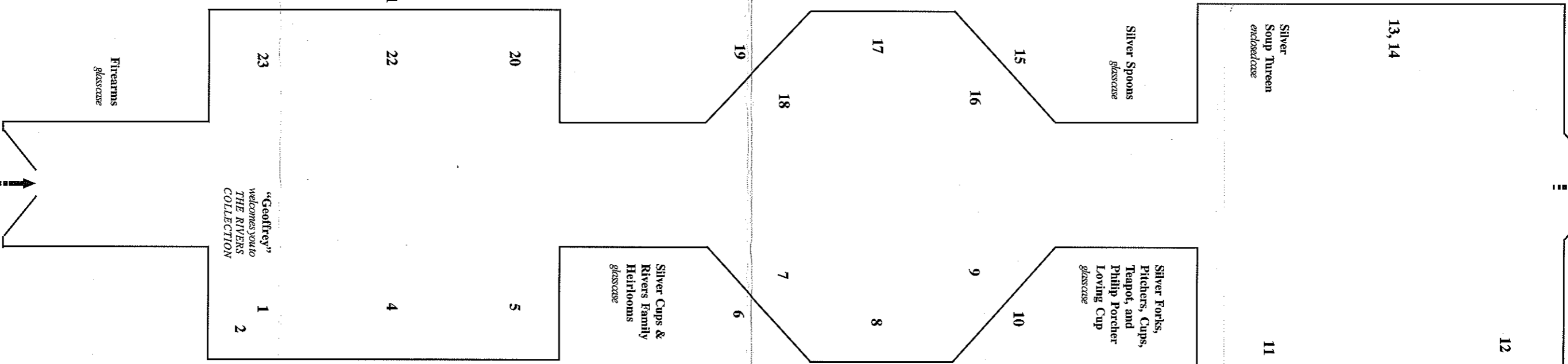
The upper register, or 'stage,' conforms to the lower case. The veneered bays display inlaid three-line diamonds and the areas that correspond to the leg stiles on the lower register exhibit inlaid patera. The central panel displays a background of satinwood; the oval within the three-line rectangle has a tinted green reserve displaying a Neoclassical urn containing foliage and flowers. This series of decoration is repeated on the upper part of the lower case. The lower portion of the case has veneered sections inlaid with three-line ovals. The entire case rests on six tapered legs with lightwood stringing descending into cuffs.

This sideboard is the finest extant example of a group of stage-top sideboards from Charleston. One unusual feature is the random placement of the pictorial patera with regards to the position of the top of the leaf.

23. Rivers Family Fall Front Desk • Charleston, S.C. • c. 1750-1760

Exhibiting an early drawer configuration with two over three graduated drawers. The drawers are solid mahogany and have flush thumb-nail molded edges. The case rests on bracket feet. The interior consists of four pigeonholes surmounting a single drawer over a ledger opening. This central configuration is flanked by three vertically graduated drawers. The diminutive size of this piece contrasts the other fall-front in the collection and represents the inherent variations in pieces which were often determined by the needs and desires of the patron. The quality of construction is commensurate with the high standard of Charleston Colonial cabinetwork.

TO ROOFTOP GARDEN



12. Earliest known Carbon Microphone from WJCSG Radio • c. 1938

11. Engraving of Charles Town • c. 1762

10. "Early Morning on the Ashley River Near Charleston" J.P. Whitehead painting, oil on canvas • c. 1892

9. Kettle Stand • Charleston, S.C. • c. 1750 - 1760

The kettle stand is a rarity in American furniture — this is the only known Charleston example. It would have been used in conjunction with a larger tea table of similar design and decoration. Its top is designed to tilt in order to facilitate its storage in other parts of the room when not in use.

The solid piecrust top surmounts a 'birdcage' with four turned columns. A spirally fluted and ring turned pedestal supports the top. The legs terminate in a padded foot and are decorated with well executed rocco carving on their knees. Carved gouges can be seen between each juncture of the legs and pedestal and serve to facilitate this transition and 'lighten' the overall feel of the stand.

8. Neoclassical Serpentine Secretary Press Charleston, S.C. • c. 1783 - 1790

The broken arch 'swelled' cornice with carved rosettes and Greek key molding centers a plumb inlaid with bellflowers descending from a ring with a carved vase above. Below the upper cornice is a veneered frieze decorated with stringing and bellflowers. The serpentine doors exhibit contrasting veneers, stringing and quarter fan inlays and enclose four linen trays above two veneered drawers. The case rests on bracket feet inlaid with stringing, vases and bellflowers and has canted corners with alternating panels of veneer and bellflowers descending from a loop. An inlaid and veneered central drop is suspended from the bottom of the case. The drawer configuration appears to be six graduated drawers with book matched mahogany veneer, three-line inlaid stringing, cross banding and cockbeaded edges. In actuality the top two drawers conceal a secretary which contains a one long over three short drawer configuration surmounting four pigeonholes with shaped valances flanking document drawers and a central prospect. The interior is also well veneered and inlaid.

7. Watson Family Queen Anne Dressing Table Charleston, S.C. • c. 1750

Dressing tables were a popular form in Charleston prior to the Revolution. They were based on British prototypes and satisfied the Charlestonians' desire for 'neat and plain' furniture. This particular example exhibits a solid mahogany molded top surmounting a conforming skirt with a single drawer which extends along the entire front. The drawer retains its original 'bawking' brasses and has a flush thumbnail molded edge. The tops of the legs are squared with a bead at the edge; below the skirt the legs are turned and terminate in delicate claw and ball feet.

Descended in the Watson family of Ridge Spring and Columbia, South Carolina.

6. "17th Regiment of the South Carolina Militia" Watercolor by A. Grimwald • 1861

5. Secretary - Bookcase • Charleston, S.C. • c. 1790 - 1810

The cornice consists of an ogee molding above a cove molding surmounting a veneered frieze. The solid mahogany panels of the doors are well figured and exhibit a three-line inlaid rectangle with ovolo corners; they enclose three adjustable shelves. The panels are set within a solid mortise and tenon framework which displays lightwood stringing; an astragal molding delineates the central convergence of the doors. The lower case exhibits a secretary drawer surmounting three graduated drawers. As for the lower case, the face of the secretary drawers exhibits three-line ovals set upon a mirrored, veneered reserve; the central portion displays a veneered diamond which the ovals overlap. The interior consists of a one large over two small drawer over four pigeonholes configuration which flanks a pair of flush veneered document drawers and a well figured and veneered prospect door concealing a hidden valance drawer above and a single drawer below. The lower drawers are veneered and decorated with lightwood stringing in the form of a rectangle with ovolo corners. The piece rests on well shaped bracket feet and retains its original brass.

4. Bureau Table • Charleston, S.C. • c. 1750-1765

A diminutive bureau table, often referred to as a 'kneehole' desk, exhibiting the refinement and restraint which is typical of Charleston furniture in the Colonial period. The solid mahogany top surmounts the case and has a molded edge cut from the solid. The cockbeading of this example is applied to the case rather than the drawer, a variation from the norm. A single thin top drawer surmounts a recessed area and two bays of graduated drawers. The door to the recessed compartment consists of a chamfered and molded solid mahogany panel set within a mortise-and-tenon framework. A decorative bead can be seen along the perimeter of the door. The entire case rests on a molded base above ogee bracket feet. An example which is nearly identical in design, size, and detail is in the collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

3. Mazzyck Child, attributed to Thomas Wightman • c. 1800

This Alexander Mazzyck family child is believed to have lived on Calhoun Street (with the possibility of having lived at 80 Alexander Street in the Mazzyck House). Her family was in cotton factors.

2. Bracket Clock by Joshua Lockwood • working 1756-1781

Joshua Lockwood came to Charleston around 1724, settling in present day Orangeburg and becoming a well-to-do landowner. He apparently had a son of the same name who went to London, learning the clock and watch trade. Returning to Charleston in 1757, he set up business as a clock and watch maker and repairman on Elliott Street, later moving to One Broad Street.

This bracket clock, signed *Jos^a Lockwood Charles Town*, has a black lacquer case with pyramidal top with brass carrying handle, brass face with brass chapter ring, gilded chased spandrels, Roman numerals with Arabic minute markings, a spring alarm with Arabic numerals, and an ornately scrolled back plate with pendulum bob catch. The upper corners are glass providing a visual lightness and emphasizing the shape. The sides of the case have a glass filled circle above a rectangular glass filled panel with a concave top, allowing the clock movement to be seen. The primary wood is white oak (black lacquer) and the secondary woods are yellow poplar (door) and birch (lower frame).

1. Fall Front Desk • Charleston, S.C. • c. 1755 - 1760

The proportions and scale of this piece are truly monumental. The desk has a blocked serpentine interior with pigeon holes and drawers flanking a central prospect door which exhibits a well figured solid mahogany panel with an arched top. The interior of the prospect contains two hidden drawers which appear to be carved valances, two pigeonholes with shaped dividers, and two blocked serpentine drawers. The carved valances follow the orientation of the lower registers on both the interior and exterior. The pigeon hole dividers are well shaped. The case exhibits four graduated drawers with flush thumbnail molding and original rocco brasses; it rests on ogee bracket feet. The entire piece is composed of Cuban mahogany which was desirable for its color and density. The construction details of this piece follow the highest level of British cabinet making and are typical of early Charleston furniture.

The desk descended in the Middleton family.

SELF-GUIDED TOUR OF
THE RIVERS COLLECTION