

# JOHN TOWNSEND

NEWPORT CABINETMAKER



THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

JOHN TOWNSEND



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NEWPORT CABINETMAKER

MORRISON H. HECKSCHER

with the assistance of Lori Zabar

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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Additional support has been provided by Stanley and Judith Zabar, Philip Holzer, and Alamo Rent A Car, Inc.

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## Director's Foreword

The first monographic exhibition of the work of an American cabinetmaker, Duncan Phyfe of New York, was mounted at the Metropolitan Museum in 1922. Another, of the New Yorker Honoré Lannuier, took place in 1998. And now, in good part because of the Museum's longstanding interest in the cabinetwork of colonial Newport—justly famous as exemplifying the very best of American design and craft—the Metropolitan is pleased to offer a third such exhibition.

The Museum first displayed the domestic arts of our forebears (mostly furniture and silver) at the landmark Hudson-Fulton Celebration exhibition of 1909, an experiment so successful that our American Wing grew directly out of it. Among the pieces of furniture on loan was a desk and bookcase with a block-and-shell carved front that was identified as from Newport and “the equal of the mother country while possessing an individuality of [its] own,” a judgment that has withstood the test of time. This desk and bookcase was one of a number of Newport pieces that the Museum purchased in succeeding years, furniture that had a worthy role in the American Wing when it opened in 1924. But the Newport school achieved real pride of place here in 1927 when the Metropolitan had the wisdom to purchase, from descendants of the original owner, three exceptionally fine pieces, each labeled and dated by John Townsend, a then little-known cabinetmaker. In 1928 Charles Over Cornelius, the Metropolitan's Associate Curator of Decorative Arts, published a brilliant essay on Townsend and established the signal importance of these three pieces. In each succeeding decade Cornelius's successors have made significant additions to the Metropolitan's Newport collection, and today it would be impossible to tell the Newport story at the highest level without recourse to its treasures. In 2001 the magnanimous promised gift of the Ann and Philip Holzer Collection included, among other Newport exemplars, a superb drop-leaf table of 1756, Townsend's earliest signed piece. And just this year the Museum was able to buy the superb Gardiner family chest-on-chest, bearing the label of John's cousin Thomas Townsend.

The first exhibition of Newport cabinetwork was held in Providence in 1927; others followed in Newport in 1936 (a part of the celebration of Rhode Island's tercentenary), 1953, and 1965. Now it is time for the genius of the Newport makers to be shared with a wider national and international audience. And there can be no more appropriate place for this than the Metropolitan, with its lengthy history of interest in Newport cabinetwork and its unsurpassed collection of examples made in Newport. We are grateful to Morrison H. Heckscher, Lawrence A. Fleischman Chairman of the American Wing, whose dedication and scholarship inform the exhibition and this publication.

The Metropolitan Museum is indebted to The Chilton Foundation for their generosity toward this exhibition; we particularly thank Richard Chilton for his personal and passionate interest in this project. We also extend our sincere gratitude to The Americana Foundation, whose contribution has been critical. We likewise thank Stanley and Judith Zabar, Philip Holzer, and Alamo Rent A Car, Inc. for their support. Finally, the Museum is ever grateful to The William Cullen Bryant Fellows for their kind assistance toward the realization of this publication.

Philippe de Montebello  
*Director*  
*The Metropolitan Museum of Art*



## Sponsor's Statement

The Chilton Foundation is honored to sponsor the exhibition "John Townsend: Newport Cabinetmaker" at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Through their support of this exhibition and their continued support of American decorative arts, The Chilton Foundation joins the American Wing in celebrating our national heritage and creative spirit.

The sophistication of form and precise craftsmanship that John Townsend brought to furniture production has earned him accolades as one of colonial America's leading craftsmen. The Chilton Foundation is pleased to play a part in the important work the Metropolitan Museum does in bringing historical context to such skilled craftsmen and the objects they created.

The exhibition "John Townsend: Newport Cabinetmaker" is a fine addition to the roster of exhibitions and acquisitions The Chilton Foundation has been fortunate to support since its inception in 1995. As patrons, The Chilton Foundation takes great pleasure in supporting museums, libraries, and art institutions in New York City and throughout the nation.

Along with its support of fine arts, The Chilton Foundation also supports the preservation of land, history, and culture as well as organizations that provide outstanding services and education to children and families.

The Chilton Foundation would like to thank Philippe de Montebello and his gifted staff at The Metropolitan Museum of Art for their continued devotion to American art, so evident in this magnificent exhibition highlighting the extraordinary work of John Townsend.

Richard L. Chilton, Jr.  
*President*  
*The Chilton Foundation*

# Sponsor's Statement

The Americana Foundation is honored to be a sponsor of “John Townsend: Newport Cabinetmaker,” a landmark exhibition that will allow scholars and interested citizens to view and learn about the work of one of colonial America’s preeminent craftsmen.

The Americana Foundation was established in 1962 by Adolph and Ginger Meyer, enthusiastic collectors of American decorative arts. The Meyer collection, which they began in the 1940s, contained several pieces attributed to the Townsend and Goddard families.

The Meyers’ love and appreciation for craftsmanship and beauty was rooted in Ginger’s exceptional taste and in Adolph’s early years as part of an immigrant family. His father was a cabinetmaker and craftsman who raised his children in a disciplined and principled environment. Adolph developed a strong work ethic, inspiring him to become the best at whatever he did.

Together, Adolph and Ginger sought the finest work of craftsmen who were themselves immigrants or whose forebears had come to America where they were able to share their regional expertise and vision as free artisans. Objects that were once in the Meyers’ collection and that embody their profound esteem for fine American furniture and decorative arts are now found in the White House, the State Department, and museums throughout the country.

The Americana Foundation supports educational and advocacy programs that address the preservation of American agriculture, the conservation of natural resources, and the protection and preservation of America’s heritage.

We thank the Metropolitan Museum staff for creating this exhibition, the accompanying publication, and the educational programs that will foster a greater understanding of the work of John Townsend and others from the Townsend-Goddard school.

Robert A. Janson  
*President*  
*The Americana Foundation*

# List of Lenders

## PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, cat. no. 27

The Chipstone Foundation, Fox Point, Wisconsin, cat. nos. 16 and 40

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The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia, cat. no. 20

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Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, Rhode Island, cat. no. 4

The RISD Museum, Providence, Rhode Island, cat. no. 31

Diplomatic Reception Rooms, State Department, Washington, D.C., cat. no. 17

Winterthur, An American Country Estate, Winterthur, Delaware, cat. nos. 24, 28, 33, 36, 42, and 48

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, cat. nos. 8 and 25

## PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

Mrs. Ralph E. Carpenter, Newport, Rhode Island, cat. no. 13

Philip Holzer, New York, New York, cat. no. 1

Mrs. George M. Kaufman, Norfolk, Virginia, cat. nos. 7, 9, and 38

Eric Noah, New York, New York, cat. nos. 2 and 45

Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Ritter, Virginia Beach, Virginia, cat. no. 34

Anonymous (8), cat. nos. 3, 10, 19, 29, 37, 41, and 48

# Acknowledgments

This book is dedicated to Ralph E. Carpenter who has been, ever since his trailblazing exhibition and catalogue of the arts and crafts of Newport in 1954, the unabashed pied piper of Newport furniture.

My first debt is to the late Charles F. Montgomery who, many years ago at the Winterthur Museum, opened my eyes to the glories of American furniture and introduced me to Ralph Carpenter and the late Joseph K. Ott, passionate collectors of the Rhode Island joiners, who shared with me their knowledge and enthusiasm.

For the opportunity to do an exhibition and book on John Townsend I am indebted to Philippe de Montebello, Director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, who immediately recognized that this colonial cabinetmaker's work was worthy of an exhibition at the Museum. My thanks also to Emily Kernan Rafferty, President, and Doralynn Pines, Mahrukh Tarapor, and Kent Lydecker, Associate Directors, for their encouragement and support. I thank Nina McN. Diefenbach and her able Development officers for securing funding for the project.

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All visitors to the Metropolitan's American Wing owe Philip Holzer a special debt for the exceptional generosity with which he has given, or promised to give, treasures from the collection of Newport furniture that he and his late wife Ann Holzer assembled over many years.

I am grateful to my stellar colleagues in the American Wing for their forbearance while I eschewed departmental obligations in favor of this labor of love: curators Kevin J. Avery, Carrie R. Barratt, Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, Amelia Peck, Frances G. Safford, Thayer Tolles, Beth Carver Wees, and H. Barbara Weinberg; administrative assistants Katie Banser, Jeanne Ko, Catherine Scandalis, and Karen Zimmerman. Elaine Bradson, Associate for Administration, in particular, cheerfully bore the brunt of my absences. Curator Peter M. Kenny, in addition to being the Administrator of the American Wing, was my sounding board and intellectual companion in trying to decode the Townsends and Goddards. Departmental Technicians Don E. Templeton, Gary Burnett, Sean Farrell, and Rob Davis moved massive mahogany furniture endlessly, always with aplomb. Over the years various graduate fellows, summer interns, and volunteers have helped with my research: Mary Ann Apicella (on the origins of the blockfront), John Stuart Gordon, Leslie Symington, and Matthew A. Thurlow. Special thanks go to James Epstein, summer intern in 1999, when I first conceived of the exhibition, for his well-ordered and prescient overview.

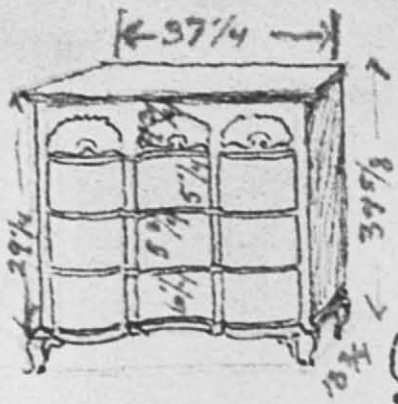
In the Museum I thank Jeffrey L. Daly and Jeremiah Gallay for the stately exhibition design and Connie Norkin for the elegant graphics. Barbara Bridgers and Susan Bresnan orchestrated the digital photography. Aileen K. Chuk and Robert Kuszek expertly managed the loans; Marijn Manuels and Rudolph W. Colban conserved furniture for photography and exhibition; Charlotte Hale captured elusive Townsend inscriptions on film; Elizabeth Hammer and Vivian Wick planned educational programs; and Egle Zygas managed press relations.

I am indebted to John P. O'Neill and his unrivaled editorial team for producing this most handsome volume, with particular thanks to Bruce Campbell for the design and to Douglas Malicki and Minjee Cho for their commitment to quality production. Here let me also add my thanks to the William Cullen Bryant Fellows of the American Wing, whose annual dues support publications on American Art at the Metropolitan. Without them this book would be but a pale shadow of what you now hold in your hand.

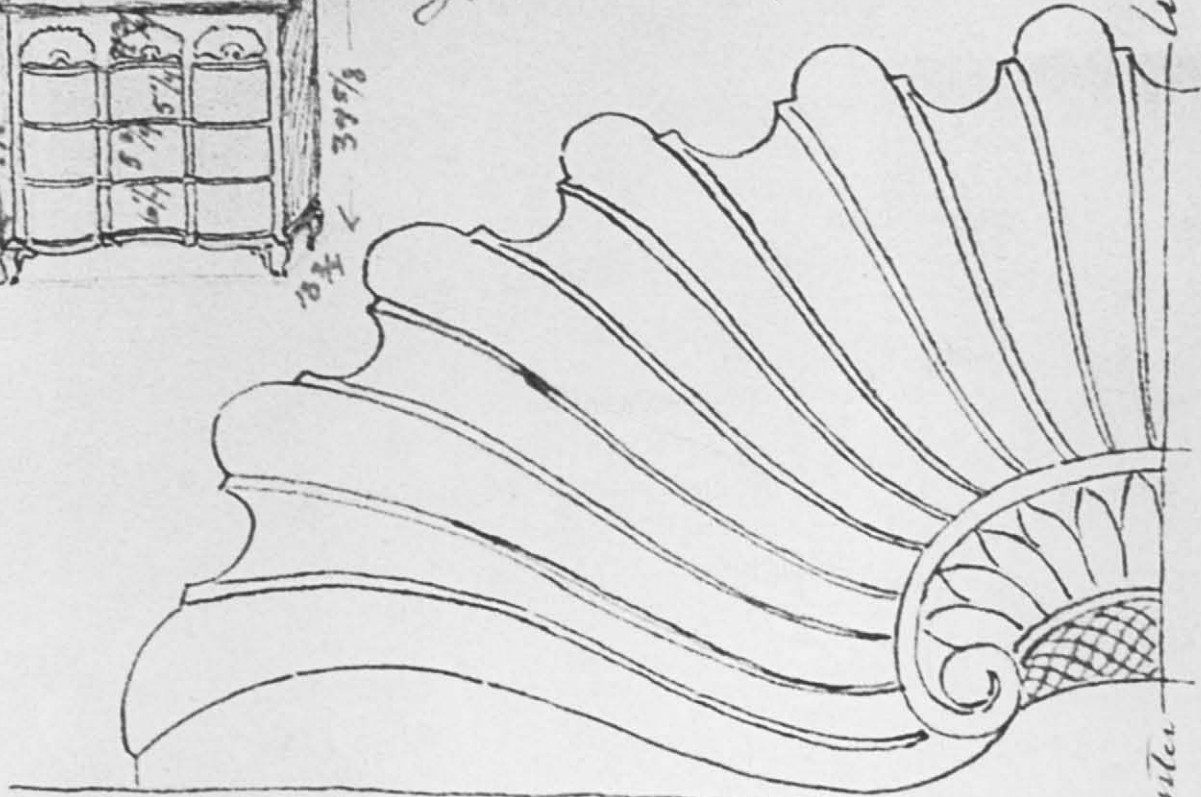
But my greatest personal and heartfelt thanks go to four people who have gone far beyond their professional mandate to make this book a reality and to endow it with whatever noteworthy qualities it may have: Barbara Glauber, indefatigable volunteer researcher in Newport, Providence, and New York; Bruce Schwarz, irrepressible Museum photographer, for a whole new way to look at furniture; Kathleen Howard, whose wisdom and editorial genius brought it all together; and Lori Zabar, my research assistant, who with immense patience and good humor has been the linchpin of this endeavor.

Morrison H. Heckscher  
*Lawrence A. Fleischman Chairman of the American Wing*  
*The Metropolitan Museum of Art*

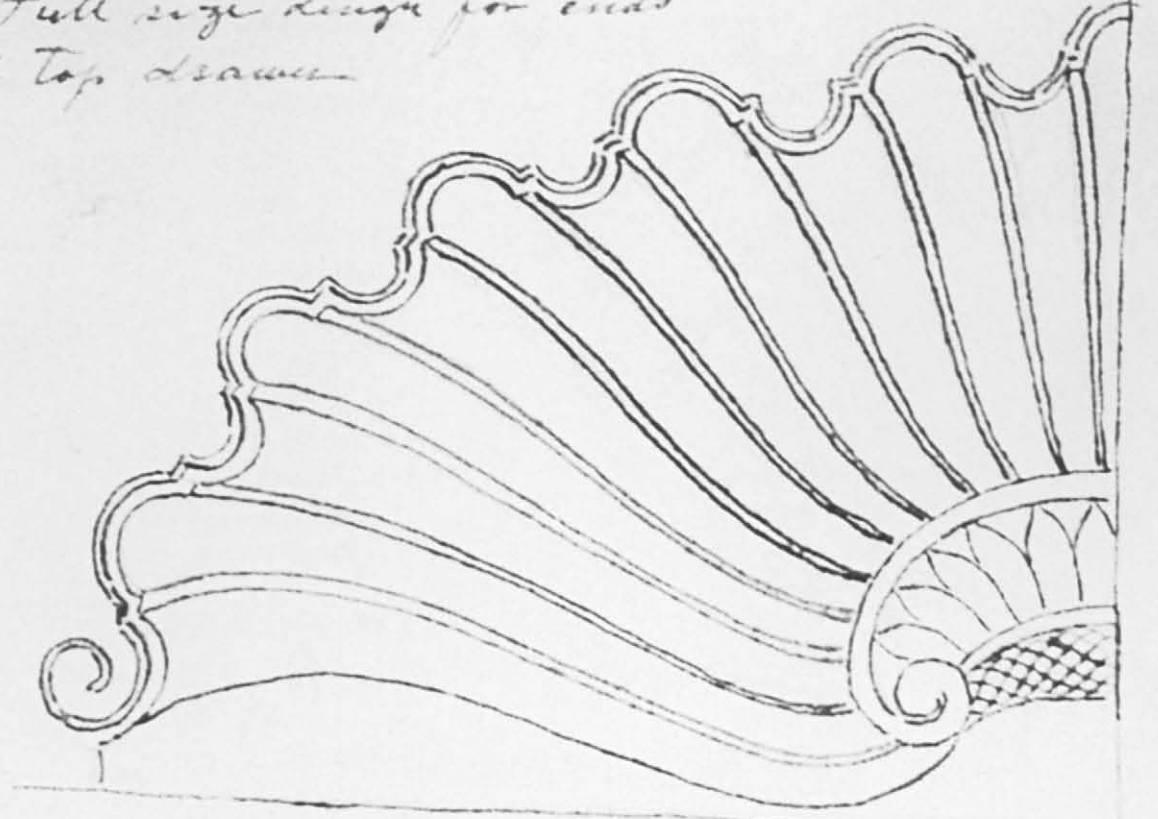
JOHN TOWNSEND



Bureau on the lines of  
 John Goddard.



Full size design for ends  
 of top drawer



For center of top drawer

## I. Newport Furniture: A View over Time

There never was a time when Newport totally forgot its famous eighteenth-century cabinetmakers, the Townsends and the Goddards. At first it was a matter of continuity, with a number of the family workshops carrying on well into the nineteenth century. For example, John Goddard's son Thomas lived and worked in his father's house and shop until his death in 1852. The younger Goddard would have been a firsthand source of information for Thomas Hornsby, whose column in the *Newport Daily Advertiser*, in December 1849, describing the city's historic furniture manufacturing business and its trade with New York and the West Indies, is probably the earliest written historical reflection.<sup>1</sup> A generation later, in 1884, in his *Reminiscences of Newport*, the antiquarian George Champlin Mason repeated Hornsby's observations but also made a number of his own, including specific recognition of the Townsends and the Goddards. Mason may have been responding to the fact that it wasn't so long since the last of the old school had died. "Abiel Spencer," he pointed out, "learned his trade as cabinetmaker of John Goddard. He had a little shop on the Point Bridge . . . dying in 1878 at an advanced age."<sup>2</sup>

That year also saw the establishment of George E. Vernon & Co., a firm which, among other things, specialized in the buying and selling and restoring of eighteenth-century Newport cabinetwork (it closed its doors only in 1967). Locally the furniture of the Townsends and Goddards had always been seen as more than just second-hand furniture. In 1883 Ellen Townsend, John Townsend's granddaughter, left a high chest and dining table (that came down to her, through her mother, from the Easton family) to the Newport Historical Society and a card table and silver and porcelains (from the Townsend family) to the Redwood Library in Newport.<sup>3</sup> Also in the latter institution is an elaborate illustrated daybook kept by Jonas Bergner, a Swedish-trained cabinetmaker and carver in the Vernon shop who is best remembered today for his invaluable documentation of Newport architecture.<sup>4</sup> In it he records how during the 1920s he studied the great case pieces that passed through the firm and attempted to distinguish the work of Goddard and Townsend. Let me quote one example (fig. 1):

It has been claimed that this dressing bureau was made by John Goddard, but, the heavy solid appearance of a Goddard piece of furniture is lacking in this bureau although it was made after the same pattern and with the same careful workmanship as was used by Mr. Goddard — John Townsend was a very good cabinet-maker and contemporary with John Goddard. He used the same patterns as Mr. Goddard did and it has even been suggested that he must have employed the same carver. Pieces of furniture now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art that are known to be made by Townsend would certainly pass for Goddards if it was not for Mr. Townsends labels,

Opposite: Jonas Bergner, drawing of chest of drawers with full-size shell details, Day Book, 1920–30, manuscript p. VII. Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, Rhode Island, Gift of Cynthia Mahoney and Sally Stockwell. Though Bergner associated the chest with John Goddard, the shells are executed in John Townsend's inimitable manner. The chest illustrated has not been located.



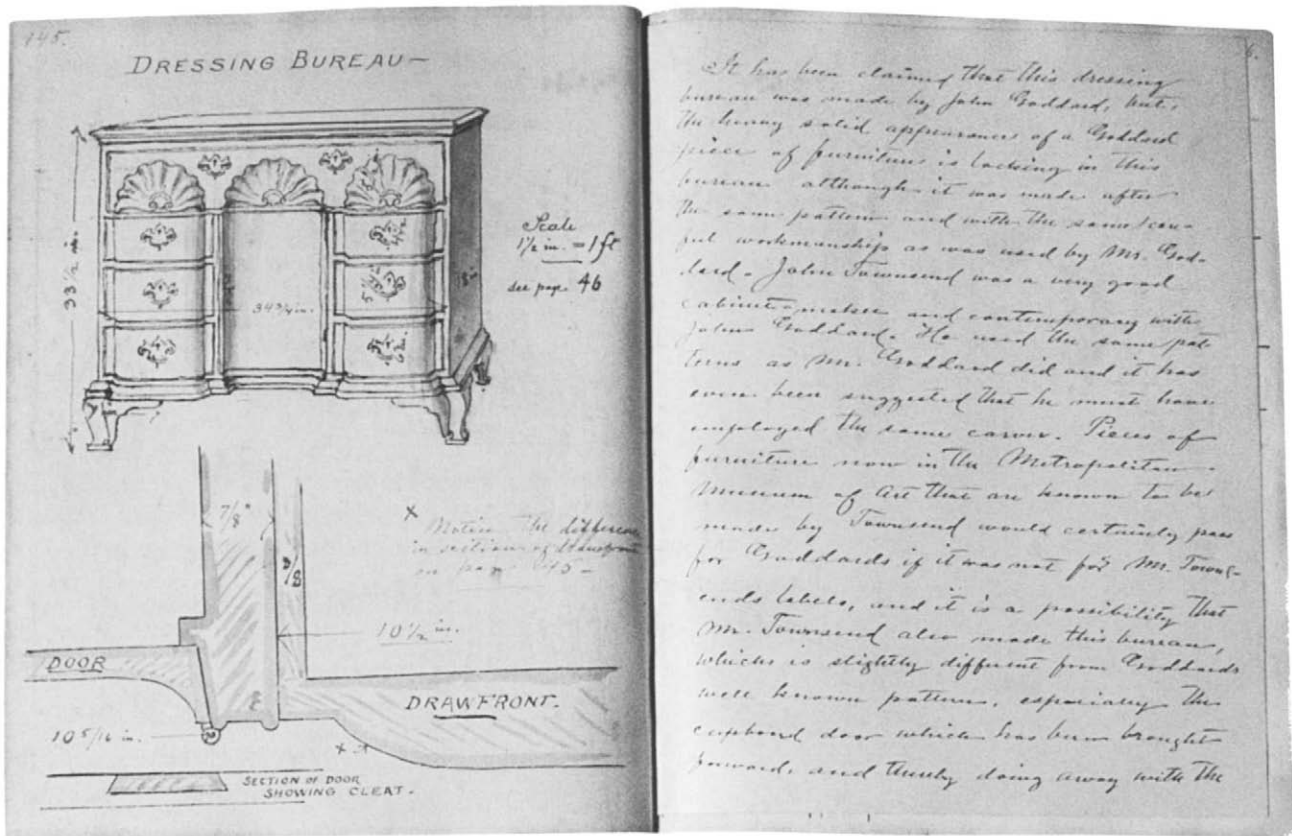


Fig. 1. Jonas Bergner, "Dressing Bureau," Day Book, 1920–30, manuscript, p. 144 and facing page of text. Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, Rhode Island, Gift of Cynthia Mahoney and Sally Stockwell



Fig. 2. "Block-front Writing-table, 1760–1770," 1902. Frances Clary Morse, *Furniture of the Olden Time* (New York, 1902), p. 122. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Thomas J. Watson Library

and it is a possibility that Mr. Townsend also made this bureau, which is slightly different from Goddard's well known patterns, especially the cupboard door which has been brought forward and thereby doing away with the kneehole and getting more room in the cupboard.<sup>5</sup>

Bergner was indeed correct in suggesting that the bureau in question might be by Townsend, but in doing so he was sixty years ahead of the published literature. Bergner also documented the histories of numerous pieces: how, for example, as early as 1874, one of the very rare two-shell desk and bookcases was purchased by Henry Audley Clark and shipped to Brooklyn.<sup>6</sup>

The Newport school of cabinetwork went virtually unmentioned in the early literature on American furniture, including even Irving Whittall Lyon's rigorously historical *Colonial Furniture of New England* (1891). But that began to change at the turn of the new century. Frances Clary Morse, in her *Furniture of the Olden Time* (1902), illustrated three block-and-shell pieces, claiming that all such work could be traced back to Newport, and probably to the same maker. She reported that on one of these pieces, a kneehole chest (fig. 2), there was, inside one of the drawers, a label with an illegible name followed by "Newport RI 176-." Today we can say that the chest in question, which was owned by the Shaw family of Wickford, Rhode Island, is altogether characteristic of John Townsend's work, even if the label is not.<sup>7</sup>

The scholar and collector Luke Vincent Lockwood (1872–1951) was the first to take Newport furniture seriously. In the one-volume first edition of his *Colonial Furniture in America*, in 1901, he shows a few block-and-shell case pieces with provenances in the Brown family of Providence and posits that they were probably made in Newport. In the two-volume second edition (1913), he illustrates six of the by now famous Rhode Island block-and-shell desk and bookcases, noting "it is thought that they were made in Newport by John Goddard."<sup>8</sup> And in the extensive supplements to the third edition (1926), he provides sketchy biographies of both John Goddard and John Townsend. He refers to a chest-on-chest with Townsend's label and the date 1767, and he illustrates a Massachusetts-type chest-on-chest containing a card that reads "John Townsend, Middletown, Conn."<sup>9</sup> which he says is similar to the preceding piece. The whereabouts of the two chests is unknown, but both appear entirely out of character for the Townsend we now know, and their labels and cards must be deemed suspect. Unfortunately, these pieces were Lockwood's benchmark for identifying John Townsend's work, and that doomed his effort to distinguish the master's style. His published references to the card with the Middletown, Connecticut, address introduced the belief (only proved erroneous by the meticulous researches of Houghton Bulkeley in 1960) that Townsend had spent time in central Connecticut, which in turn led Lockwood to attribute a number of Connecticut chests (see his fig. xxv) to him.

*Antiques*, which began publication in January 1922, provided a perfect forum for the blossoming interest in Newport furniture. From time to time, during the 1920s and 1930s, there was a lively public correspondence in the magazine about it and about the work of John Goddard in particular. New discoveries were exciting public events. The authors included Walter A. Dyer and Donald F. Bowen (both descendants of families that had commissioned costly Newport furniture) and Malcolm A. Norton and Charles Messer Stow, all egged on by the enthusiastic editor, Homer Eaton Keyes. Dyer's "John Goddard and His Block-Fronts" (May 1922) put the cabinetmaker on the map but depended for biographical information principally upon

the reminiscences — often fanciful, as in the claim that Goddard was English-born and apprenticed to Thomas Chippendale — of Mrs. William W. Covell, a lineal descendant of Goddard, and of Albert Goddard, his great-grandson. Norton's article, "More Light on the Block-front" (February 1923) suggested that the Newport block and shell originated in Connecticut.

The 1920s also saw museums begin to take a serious interest. In 1927, at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Norman M. Isham put on the first special exhibition of Rhode Island furniture. In an accompanying essay entitled "John Goddard and His Work," he assembled an impressive array of factual information about the cabinetmaker's life and was the first to publish the 1763 correspondence between Goddard and his client Moses Brown, chronicling the dynamic of their mutual dissatisfactions. Isham, a distinguished architectural historian and restoration architect, was attracted to the architectural character of the furniture and made a careful study of its molding profiles in his essay. No signed furniture was known, so Isham limited the exhibited furniture to pieces with histories of descent in the Brown family of Providence, Goddard's best clients.

Meanwhile, that same year, The Metropolitan Museum of Art had purchased, from descendants of the original owner, three extraordinary pieces of Newport furniture, each bearing an unquestionably authentic label of John Townsend. Two of them, a chest dated 1765 (fig. 3) and a clock dated 1789 (fig. 4), were photographed in 1927 in the home of the last family owner. The next year, 1928, Charles O. Cornelius, Associate Curator of Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan, published these pieces in a brilliant essay that incorporated many details about Townsend's life and



Fig. 3. Spence & Newhall photograph, block-and-shell chest in the home of Miss Clara Channing Allen, 57 Prospect Street, Northampton, Massachusetts, 1927. The chest is now in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (cat. no. 18). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

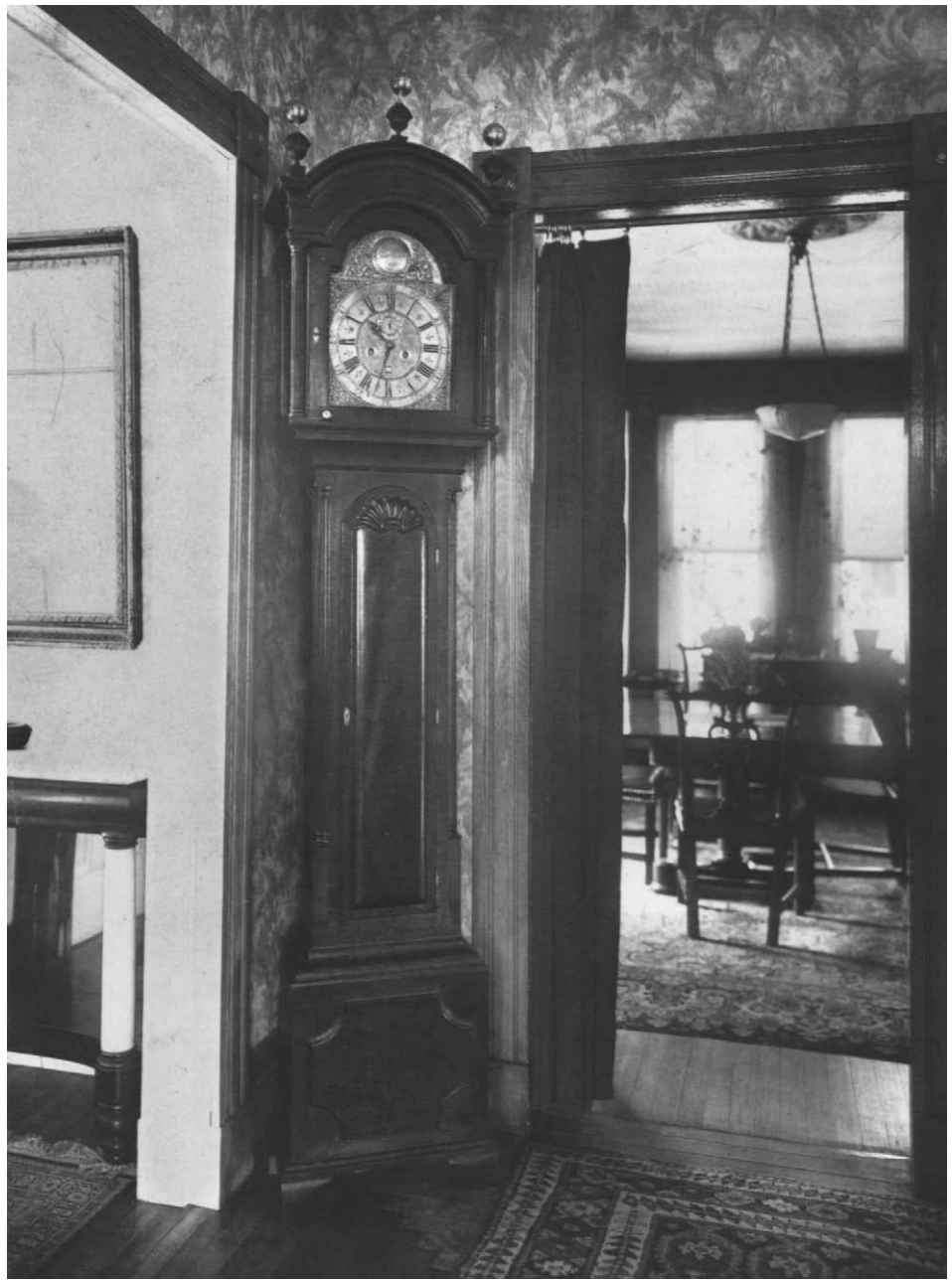


Fig. 4. Spence & Newhall photograph, tall clock in the home of Miss Clara Channing Allen, 57 Prospect Street, Northampton, Massachusetts, 1927. The clock is now in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (cat. no. 21). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Painted a clear picture of an exceptional craftsman and prominent citizen. Ironically, the journal in which Cornelius's piece appeared, the first volume of a new scholarly periodical, *Metropolitan Museum Studies*, was unknown in the field of Americana. What should have been the dramatic debut of one of the most important and best documented of eighteenth-century cabinetmakers went generally unremarked and had no noticeable corrective on the public infatuation with Goddard. And in what was probably the most widely disseminated of all books on American furniture, Wallace Nutting's *Furniture Treasury*, seventeen pages were devoted to the Newport school and to Goddard, less than one to Townsend. By including Goddard's defensive correspondence with the demanding Moses Brown in 1763 (first published by Isham in 1927), Nutting humanized him and prepared him for what became almost

cult status. This was in volume three, published in 1933; volumes one and two, published in 1928, represented Newport with just a handful of Rhode Island tables and desk and bookcases.

At the high-profile New York City auction of the Philip Flayderman Collection in January 1930, however, both Goddard and Townsend were represented by important documented pieces: Goddard's claw-foot tea table, which he made for Jabez Bowen in 1763, and John Townsend's pair of tapered-leg card tables dated 1794 and his stop-fluted-leg Pembroke table, all three of which bore his labels. This did no end of good for Townsend's reputation, introducing him as a maker of Neoclassical furniture, whether with inlaid decoration or stop-fluted. His historical rehabilitation was helped further by the 1937 publication by Homer Eaton Keyes of a group of pieces of furniture that had descended in the Townsend family and logically could be attributed to John. For the first time one saw pictures of cabriole-leg and claw-foot bedsteads and chairs associated with him.

The tercentenary of the founding of Rhode Island in 1936 was celebrated by exhibitions of Newport furniture at the Colony House in Newport and at the Rhode Island School of Design. Accompanying the latter, in the *Bulletin of the Rhode Island School of Design*, E. T. Casey described newly discovered pieces, including the Goddard family claw-foot tea table (which was to remain in the family until its sale at Sotheby's in January 2005), and published for the first time an 1802 receipted bill by John Townsend.

The publication, in 1941, of Edwin Hipkiss's majestic catalogue of the M. and M. Karolik Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was also the occasion for the unveiling of a newly discovered major player in the Newport cabinetmaking world. This was Edmund Townsend, cousin of John, whose sole known label is pasted on a fine four-shell bureau table that had recently been acquired by the Karoliks for the Museum. Hipkiss's book includes a thorough biographical study of Edmund, together with Maxim Karolik's own urbane and witty remarks about the superiority of the Newport school over all others.

It was only in 1946 that the milieu in which Goddard and Townsend worked, the fact that they were but the most prominent of a large body of craftsmen in Newport, was made clear. The occasion was a two-part series, "The Goddard and Townsend Joiners, I and II," in *Antiques*. Delving into public records and other archives, Mabel Munson Swan identified sixty-eight cabinetmakers, nineteen chairmakers, and six carvers active in Newport in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Among these she counted six Goddards and fourteen Townsends, from which she created the first tentative family tree. The number of men employed, and the evident similarity of all they produced, led her to recommend that for the time being undocumented furniture in the Newport style simply be attributed to the Townsend-Goddard group. In 1950 Mrs. Swan published another fact-filled article, this time about three of John Goddard's children who went into the cabinetmaking business—Townsend Goddard and the partnership of Stephen and Thomas Goddard.

The task of gathering further information about Rhode Island woodworkers, so ably begun by Swan, was taken up by Wendell D. Garrett, who later served as editor (1972–90) of *Antiques*. In that magazine he amended the Swan list (1958), published a comparable directory for Providence (1966), and supplied addenda to the Newport material (1968 and 1982), including an accurate family genealogy of all the Townsend-Goddard craftsmen.

In the immediate postwar era Joseph Downs, Curator of the American Wing at the Metropolitan from 1932 to 1949, championed the Newport school. In the summer of 1947 he mounted an exhibition at the Colony House (the 1739 State House) in Newport and shortly thereafter wrote "The Furniture of Goddard and Townsend" for *Antiques*. This was an astute recounting of the literature that had grown up around the long-standing interest in Newport furniture, which he illustrated with important and little-known pieces from the incomparable collection of Natalie Knowlton (Mrs. J. Insley) Blair. Downs was an advisor to the Preservation Society of Newport County on the restoration of the Nichols-Wanton-Hunter house, the finest surviving midcentury house in Newport, but owing to illness (he died in 1954), that responsibility devolved upon Ralph E. Carpenter, Jr., a passionate collector and preserver of all things to do with eighteenth-century Newport. Coeval with the restoration was an exhibition in the house, in the summer of 1953, of Newport furniture. Carpenter's catalogue of that show, *The Arts and Crafts of Newport Rhode Island, 1640-1820*, published in 1954 by the Preservation Society, was an elegant summation of all that had been learned to that time; and it put eighteenth-century Newport craftsmanship indelibly on the map. Carpenter was the first to prepare lists of the known documented pieces, the first to spell out the distinguishing characteristics of Townsend-Goddard furniture. It was a fitting complement to *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, by Antoinette Downing and Vincent Scully, which had been published by the Society in 1952. Subsequent loan exhibitions were mounted in the Hunter House in the summers of 1954 and 1955, and in the latter year Carpenter published his new discoveries in an article in *Antiques*. Who then could have guessed that Carpenter's active involvement in the study and promotion of Newport's eighteenth-century heritage would continue for another half century, culminating in 2004 in his founding of the Redwood Library Press.

The second great Rhode Island furniture show, "The John Brown House Loan Exhibition of Rhode Island Furniture" (Providence, 1965), was also mounted in conjunction with the opening of an important new house museum, this time in Providence where the Rhode Island Historical Society had just moved its library and collections out of the great brick mansion built by John Brown in 1785. The exhibition organizer, and the author of the accompanying catalogue, which illustrates a number of new discoveries, was Joseph K. Ott, an amateur historian and collector in Providence, and a man with a passion for documented furniture. In the years following, prior to his untimely death in 1994, Ott published a series of articles in *Antiques*, including one exclusively about signed pieces by John Townsend in his own collection. In articles in *Rhode Island History*, in 1969, he introduced the names of sixty-one newly discovered Rhode Island cabinetmakers, including eight from Newport; he illuminated patterns of patronage by publishing eighteen years of furniture purchases by the famous Newport doctor Isaac Senter (1753-1799), including a 1791 bill from John Townsend for a desk and bookcase. Ott's ground-breaking 1975 article about furniture exports from Providence and Newport, based upon Custom House copies of ship's manifests, which survive in quantity beginning only in the 1780s, anticipated a new interest in the business side of furniture history.

The stylistic source of the Newport block and shell, that most characteristically American furniture form, has been a matter of debate ever since Malcolm Norton (1923) claimed that it originated in New England serpentine-front chests, while Wallace Nutting (1928) held that it derived from Spanish-inspired cabinets in Havana.

In 1971 R. Peter Mooz demonstrated that the Boston block-front style preceded the Newport block and shell by a generation and was therefore the obvious inspiration for the latter.

A younger generation of scholars, notably Jeanne Vibert Sloane and Margaretta M. Lovell, undertook detailed and invaluable examinations of the Newport furniture trade, treating furniture as a commodity with a significant place in Newport's trade economy. Sloane (1987) chose the cabinetmaker John Cahoone, whose account book for the years 1749–60 survives but from whom no furniture is known, to be a case study of the very large export market, one in which the costly custom pieces of interest to earlier authors play only a small role. Lovell (1991) studied the business in a much broader sense, and from various contemporary academic perspectives. In the same publication she presented much the most comprehensive genealogy of the Townsend and Goddard families. The question of patronage is thoroughly explored in a 1973 case study, by Wendy Cooper, of the purchase of furniture by John Brown of Providence. She demonstrated that even the grandest of patrons purchased furniture from near (Newport) and far (Philadelphia), and from more than one shop.

Extraordinary as it may now seem, it wasn't until the early 1980s that a successful effort was made to identify the individual work of any of the Townsends and Goddards. In a landmark article, "Authenticating John Townsend's Later Tables" (*Antiques*, May 1981) Liza and Michael Moses convincingly argued that, based upon labeled examples, Townsend had a distinct, and readily recognizable, way of making his Neoclassical tables. The following year (*Antiques*, May 1982) they extended their study of Townsend's tables to include his earlier, cabriole-leg examples. And in that same issue Morrison Heckscher, following a parallel line of reasoning, demonstrated that Townsend's block-and-shell case furniture was also executed in a distinct and readily recognizable manner. Two years later, in conjunction with the New York dealers Israel Sack, Inc., Michael Moses published *Master Craftsmen of Newport: The Townsends and Goddards*. This comprehensive and lavishly illustrated tome, a monument to the author's energetic pursuit and thorough examination of every available piece of Newport furniture, established a multifaceted methodology for authenticating pieces to various makers. It has proved particularly useful in regard to the work of John Townsend.

In 1999, in conjunction with a symposium on Newport furniture at Christie's, New York, the Chipstone Foundation, under the editorship of Luke Beckerdite, devoted an entire issue of its journal, *American Furniture*, to Rhode Island, with a broad range of topics, some of which are relevant to the present study. There were detailed studies of specialized groups of Newport furniture, including Patricia Kane on baluster-turned tripod tables and Philip Zea on serpentine-fronted case furniture. Wendy Cooper and Tara Gleason convincingly reattributed a distinctive group of block-and-shell pieces from Newport to Providence. The importance of the export trade was demonstrated in a dramatic new way in John Bivins's study of Newport influence on North Carolina furniture. And a major portion of the accounts of Job Townsend, among the most important to survive from colonial Newport, were transcribed and interpreted by Martha Willoughby. (Though not acknowledged by name, Willoughby was also the author of a number of in-depth studies of individual pieces of Newport furniture, most notably documented pieces by John Townsend, which have appeared in Christie's auction catalogues.) Succeeding issues of *American Furniture* have included Luke Beckerdite's detailed study of the early furniture of Job and Christopher Townsend (2000), Brock Jobe's survey of the great Newport desk

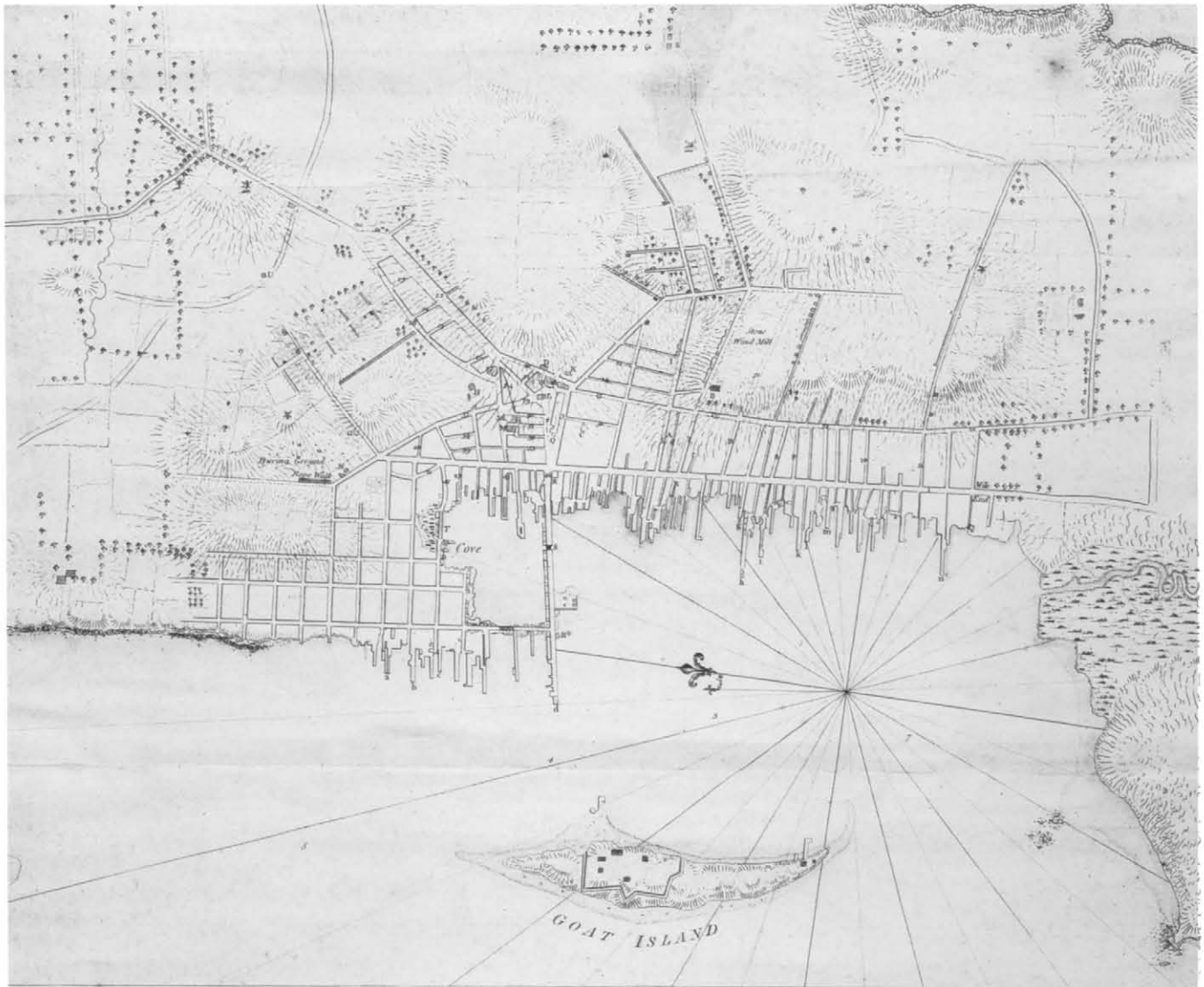
and bookcases (2001), and most recently Dennis Andrew Carr's publication of the cabinetmaker Benjamin Baker's account book (2004).

The story of the rich and varied literature on Newport furniture, briefly summarized here, has been fully and definitively told by Gerald W. R. Ward (1999). Meanwhile, new information, and new pieces, continue to be discovered. The ongoing survey, led by Patricia E. Kane, of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century cabinetmaker-related information in Rhode Island State and local archives, will provide a comprehensive factual underpinning for all future work.

The present volume, written in conjunction with an exhibition of the work of John Townsend at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, aspires to encapsulate in one volume the current state of knowledge about the Townsend and Goddard makers, and to provide, in particular, a catalogue of the documented oeuvre of John Townsend. By this means readers may judge for themselves the beauty and workmanship of furniture by this American craftsman.

1. "Newport, Past and Present," in the December 8, 1849, issue. The relevant text is quoted in Sloane 1987, p. 92.
2. Mason 1884, pp. 49–50. The full text is quoted in Carpenter 1954, p. 9.
3. These were treasured possessions, as she had brass labels giving their provenance affixed, front and center, to each of them. (See Appendix 5.)
4. The Newport Historical Society is home to the Jonas Bergner Collection of architectural photographs and drawings, a number of which are illustrated in Downing and Scully 1952 (rev. ed., 1967).
5. Jonas Bergner daybook, Redwood Library, unnumbered page tipped in between pp. 145 and 146. For an illustration of the piece, see cat. no. 28.
6. Bergner daybook, Redwood Library, pp. 39–42. The desk appears to be the one illustrated in Moses 1984, pl. 18.
7. The chest's shell carving is vintage John Townsend. The label, which is illustrated in Moses 1984, fig. 3.4, reads: "*Newport [Rho]de [Island] / Made By [-] Townse[-] / [1769]*". The lettering in brackets has been overwritten, and the maker's first name has been carefully cut out. Neither the order of the text nor the handwriting is identical to other John Townsend hand-written labels.
8. Lockwood 1913, vol. 1, pp. 246–53.
9. Lockwood 1926, vol. 1, p. 357 and p. 356, fig. XXIII.





*A PLAN*  
of the

TOWN OF NEWPORT.

in the  
*Province of Rhode Island.*

WHARVES.	PUBLIC BUILDINGS.	STREETS.		
a <i>Thomas.</i>	A <i>Trinity Church.</i>	1 <i>Thomas</i>	9 <i>Cannon</i>	24 <i>Clark's Lane.</i>
b <i>Wentons.</i>	B <i>Congregational Meeting House.</i>	2 <i>Lucas</i>	10 <i>Becker's</i>	25 <i>Bright D.*</i>
c <i>Clerys Ferry.</i>	C <i>Congregational D.*</i>	3 <i>Ana</i>	11 <i>Young</i>	26 <i>Ward D.*</i>
d <i>Long Wharf.</i>	D <i>Baptist D.*</i>	4 <i>Mary</i>	12 <i>South</i>	27 <i>Steele D.*</i>
e <i>Lopez's.</i>	E <i>Baptist D.*</i>	5 <i>Church</i>	13 <i>Spring</i>	28 <i>Tanners D.*</i>
f <i>Banisters.</i>	F <i>Sanctuary D.*</i>	6 <i>Frank Lane</i>	14 <i>High</i>	29 <i>Bridge</i>
g <i>Pratts.</i>	G <i>Baptist D.*</i>	7 <i>Mill</i>	15 <i>School</i>	30 <i>Westons Lane.</i>
h <i>Saylors.</i>	H <i>Friends D.*</i>	8 <i>King</i>	16 <i>Jews</i>	31 <i>Brown Lane.</i>
i <i>Mallones.</i>	I <i>Unitas Fratrum D.*</i>		17 <i>Gryffen</i>	32 <i>Puddle D.*</i>
k <i>Gardner's.</i>	K <i>Jews Synagogue.</i>		18 <i>Spring Lane</i>	33 <i>Trade D.*</i>
l <i>Redwoods.</i>	L <i>Court House.</i>		19 <i>Martin D.*</i>	34 <i>River D.*</i>
m <i>Hocams.</i>	M <i>Goal.</i>		20 <i>Bulls</i>	35 <i>Marlborough D.*</i>
n <i>Deerings.</i>	N <i>Olms &amp; Work House.</i>		21 <i>Bulls Gap</i>	36 <i>Coddington.</i>
	O <i>Redwood Library.</i>		22 <i>Broad</i>	37 <i>Farewell.</i>
	P <i>Donation for School, in Kings</i>		23 <i>School</i>	38 <i>Wentons.</i>
				39 <i>Sweeting.</i>
				40 <i>Sunford.</i>
				41 <i>Triangle.</i>
				42 <i>Shipwrights.</i>
				43 <i>Steele's Folly.</i>
				44 <i>Clarke.</i>
				45 <i>Marlborough Dock.</i>
				46 <i>Queen With.</i>
				47 <i>Billingsgate.</i>
				48 <i>Kings Dock.</i>
				49 <i>Page.</i>
				50 <i>Fudley.</i>
				51 <i>Belham.</i>
				52 <i>Banister.</i>

Scale of Four Thousand Feet.

## 2. Newport: Its Place in the History of American Furniture

A cornerstone of British mercantile policy was the discouragement of manufacturing of any sort in its colonies. It was inevitable, however, that the furniture industry would be established in America. There was a superabundance of wood, and except for very high-end goods, it was uneconomic to ship bulky furniture across the Atlantic. Everybody needed furniture in one form or another, and much was made. And much has survived: when furniture went out of fashion, it was relegated first to a back room and later to the attic. Its rehabilitation began with the antiquarian, interested in history and associations; it was then taken up by the collector, interested in style and aesthetics. Today furniture comprises far and away the largest body of man-made objects to survive from colonial America, and as such it offers a unique window on the past.<sup>1</sup>

The history of eighteenth-century American furniture is basically the story of a number of regional schools, or networks, of cabinetmakers, each with its own distinctive style. There was no capital city like London to set a single stylistic standard. The business of colonial cabinetmaking reflected the reality of a loose assemblage of independent, fractious, and competing colonies. Almost inevitably, at any given time the richest and most innovative city developed the newest and most fashionable cabinetwork. The resulting styles were an amalgam of local design preference and the influences of immigrant woodworkers, of imported pieces of furniture, and later in the century of illustrated pattern books. Throughout Boston's long hegemony as the dominant urban center of all New England — the leader in trade and wealth and population — the city was also the leader in matters of style and taste.

The furniture made in Boston during the first quarter of the eighteenth century, in what is popularly known as the William and Mary style, followed traditional English precedents rather closely. Chairs had narrow rectangular backs and turned legs; high chests had flat tops and elaborately turned legs, four across the front. Beginning about 1730, however, all that changed. During a period of unprecedented prosperity and creativity, a new look was needed for the furnishings of the handsome Palladian-style mansions of the new merchant princes (the most famous being that of Thomas Hancock, with its scrolled-pediment front door surround, built on Beacon Hill in 1737).

The craftsmen's response was the introduction of the cabriole leg and the scroll pediment, each with its own elegant serpentine curve. The immediate sources, no doubt, were the stylish London imports ordered by the Massachusetts mercantile elite and the colony's royal governor. These shapes were but the most obvious features of a style that was based upon graceful and elegant forms. In *The Analysis of Beauty*

Opposite: Joseph Frederick Wallet Des Barres, cartographer and publisher, London, *A Plan of the Town of Newport in the Province of Rhode Island*, 1776, engraving. Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island, 2000.43.6



Fig. 5. Boston, high chest, 1730–40, walnut, walnut veneer, and white pine. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1909, 10.125.62



Fig. 6. Newport, high chest, 1760–70, mahogany, white pine, and chestnut. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Mrs. E. P. Moore, in memory of Rear Admiral E. P. Moore, USN, 1980, 1980.139

(London, 1753) William Hogarth coined the phrase “the line of beauty” to describe the S-shape, or serpentine curve, that epitomized this style—a style in which turning and carving were secondary to graceful form. Today this manner is popularly called “Queen Anne,” after the English prototypes in vogue during that monarch’s reign (1702–14). With this new, modern style the old flat-topped chests on turned legs with fussy and complex patterns seemed hopelessly outmoded.

During the 1740s Boston’s trade slackened, and its craftsmen became conservative, clinging to the existing styles and denying access to immigrants and new ideas. Thus the Queen Anne style introduced in Boston in the 1730s remained the dominant fashion, undergoing little change, throughout most of New England during the eighteenth century. The leadership void was filled by Philadelphia, which began its ascendancy in the 1750s and became the preeminent colonial city in the 1760s. The golden age of the Pennsylvania metropolis coincided with the popularization of



Fig. 7. Job Coit Sr. and Job Coit Jr., desk and bookcase, 1738, Boston, black walnut and white pine. Winterthur Museum, Delaware, Museum Purchase, 62.87



Fig. 8. Newport, desk and bookcase, 1760–90, mahogany, chestnut, white pine, yellow pine, and tulip poplar. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1915, 15.21.2

the Rococo—the modern or French taste characterized by playful naturalistic carving—through Thomas Chippendale’s highly influential pattern book, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker’s Director*, whose third edition (1762) was quickly imported by skilled and ambitious cabinetmakers and carvers who flourished in Philadelphia. During the 1760s and 1770s the best Philadelphia furniture sported carving the equal of that of the finest London shops. But the Revolution brought an end to this high-style fashion, and Washington’s inauguration in New York City in 1789 signaled that city’s future greatness and Philadelphia’s inevitable eclipse. It was in New York, from the beginning of the nineteenth century the unchallenged American entrepôt, that the nascent Neoclassical style in furniture would reach its apogee.

But what is Newport’s place in this picture? By reason of its proximity to Boston, Newport came inevitably within that city’s orbit. And because its time of mercantile glory did not begin until Boston’s was ending, Newport looked to Boston’s most



Fig. 9. Boston, bureau table, 1760–90, mahogany, white pine, and white oak. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Ella V. Dering, 1930, 30.44

creative moment for inspiration. From the very beginning, however, Rhode Island had renounced the Puritan leadership of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and had charted an independent course. Newporters were inclined to look more critically than other New Englanders at their powerful neighbor to the north, and this stance is evident in their furniture. A comparison of the work of Boston cabinetmakers of the 1730s with that of Newport makers of the 1750s and 1760s is immensely illuminating.

The earliest references to the new Boston cabriole style describe chairs with the “New fashion round seat” (1729) or with “horsebone feet & banist[er] backs” (1732).<sup>2</sup> The latter is depicted in John Smibert’s image of Mrs. Andrew Oliver (1732) and in Robert Feke’s portrait of Mrs. Feke (fig. 44). But the archetypal example of New England Queen Anne furniture is the scroll-pediment or bonnet-top high chest on cabriole legs. This combination was a new, and uniquely American, form. In England the chest-on-stand with flat top and six turned legs was entirely supplanted, early in the eighteenth century, by the chest-on-chest; in America, however, the chest-on-stand morphed into the most fashionable and long-lasting of all eighteenth-century case furniture: the bonnet-top high chest. This form was introduced in Boston in the early 1730s, in a classic, fully developed form that was either japanned (that is, painted in imitation of oriental lacquer) or veneered (the front with carefully chosen figured walnut and crossbanding, and the sides with star and line inlays) (fig. 5). The earliest documentary reference mentions William Randle’s “Japanning a Piddement Chest & Table” for the joiner Nathaniel Holmes in 1734.<sup>3</sup> The scroll pediment and the fluted pilasters flanking the drawers give the upper section a handsome architectural quality. Cabriole legs support the four corners of the frame. The front skirt is divided into



Fig. 10. Attributed to Edmund Townsend, bureau table, about 1765, mahogany, tulip poplar, and chestnut. The Erving and Joyce Wolf Collection, New York

three parts by two pendant turned drops, vestigial remains of the two inner front legs of the earlier six-turned-leg form. There are two drawers with large carved and gilded shells: one centered in the scroll pediment, the other in the central lower drawer. In 1733 the joiner Nathaniel Holmes paid his japanner William Randle for gilding two carved shells, undoubtedly for just such a high chest.<sup>4</sup>

And it was this high-chest form that was copied, more or less precisely, though usually in solid local woods like cherry or maple, through most of New England during the eighteenth century. Hundreds of examples survive; it must have been considered the perfect form, the essential status piece of storage furniture.

Except in Rhode Island. The Newport makers, faced with Boston's formula for one of the costliest and most prestigious pieces of cabinetwork, were not altogether impressed. They saw the central upper drawer as a maladroit solution to the span of bare wood in the pediment's tympanum, the gilt shell floating awkwardly above the stack of large drawers; they saw the three-part skirt, punctuated by pendants, as an irrelevant reminder of bygone turned legs. And, like the rest of New England, they knew that solid wood (their preference was mahogany from the West Indies), rather than veneers or paint, held up better in the New England climate. Alone of the New England regional cabinetmaking centers, Newport rationalized the design and tied its various elements together in a coherent whole.

The result was the canonical Rhode Island bonnet-top high chest of the 1760s and 1770s (fig. 6) (the earliest dated example is from 1759 [cat. no. 8]). Here the upper shell drawer has been replaced with two raised panels that imitate drawer fronts and conform to the shape of the pediment; the tripartite skirt division, with a shell in the

central drawer above, has given way to a fixed shell at the center of a gracefully scalloped skirt. The wood is a solid mahogany, in this instance that on the drawer fronts chosen for a distinctive overall grain pattern. The result is a perfectly integrated, and uniquely American, design—an example of the ability of the Newport joiners to demonstrate their independence of thought from the rest of New England.

By the late 1730s the Boston cabinetmakers themselves had come to realize that the decorative surfaces that were the rage on the most expensive Queen Anne case pieces did not stand up well to climatic rigors. But how to provide interest without veneered or painted surface decoration? The solution they fixed on was giving shape to the wood—introducing a rhythmic pattern of blocking across the front of case pieces. The earliest documented example is a desk and bookcase signed by Job Coit Senior and Junior and dated 1738 (fig. 7).<sup>5</sup> The front of the desk section, comprising the drawer fronts and the skirt molding below, is divided into three equal parts; it is sawed out so that panels within the outer parts project, or are blocked out, while a panel within the inner central part is recessed, or blocked in. This handsome design, which has no precise analogy elsewhere, deserves acknowledgment as a triumph of American design.<sup>6</sup> Like the scroll-top high chest, it was long and widely used throughout New England, often to fine effect. Such blocking appears repeatedly on chests, bureau tables, desks, the desk sections of desks and bookcases, and the lower parts of chests-on-chests; not being suited to pieces raised on high legs, it occurs only rarely on high chests or dressing tables.

Here again the Newport makers took the Boston innovation and transformed it into something altogether richer and more memorable. To the blocking they added the shell, thereby creating the signature feature, the emblem, of Newport furniture (fig. 8). (The earliest firmly datable example of the block and shell is from 1765 [cat. nos. 17, 18], nearly thirty years after the earliest plain blockfront in Boston.) On the desk section the blocking is continued up on the fall front, where boldly ribbed carved shells—applied to the outer or convex blockings and carved from the solid wood for the central or concave blocking—are added at the tops of the blocked units. On the bookcase section the paired mirror-image doors of the Boston model are replaced by three doors of equal width, which repeat the three-part block-and-shell formula. As on the high chest, two raised panels fill the space within the pediment.

The addition of the shell to the blockfront had a powerfully transformative effect on furniture design that is perhaps best illustrated in the bureau table or kneehole chest. On the Boston version (fig. 9) the blocking extends, without a break, to the overhanging top board, which is sawed out to conform to the shape of the blocking. This gives the piece a sense of informality, of lightness and movement. With the addition of the shell in the Newport manner (fig. 10), the upward thrust of the blocking is effectively terminated, allowing for the introduction of a cornice molding below the top board and consequently a much more tightly controlled, more architectural design. This may explain why in Newport furniture the block and shell is principally found on chests and bureau tables, only exceptionally on desks or desks and bookcases, and never on high chests or dressing tables.

Cabinetmaking in Newport came to a virtual halt with the advent of the Revolution and the British occupation in 1777. And when, with the return of peace, the city's mercantile economy failed to revive, it was clear that the golden age of the Newport joiners was over. The export of furniture, particularly to New York City, continued, but the making of high-end cabinet wares was significantly cut back.<sup>7</sup> In the postwar

years Townsend, Newport's greatest living cabinetmaker, would make some of his very finest works in the traditional block-and-shell style, one dating as late as 1792; he would, with his stop-fluted designs, introduce a unique precursor to Neoclassicism; and he would produce an outstanding local variant of tables in the Federal style. But Newport as a whole was no longer an important regional player in the joiners' business. The remaining Townsends and Goddards (and their heirs) did not adapt to the impending change from the small shop to the furniture factory.

1. Other even more important manufacturing industries of the time, notably iron foundries and ship-building, are today almost nonexistent.
2. See Jobe 1974, p. 42.
3. Quoted in Rhoades and Jobe 1974, p. 1088.
4. As described in Jobe 1974, p. 18.
5. See Evans 1974, pp. 213-22.
6. Shaped fronts are commonplace in eighteenth-century European and English work, but the sharp, staccato-like separation of the blocked portions of Boston work is virtually without precedent.
7. See Ott 1975a, pp. 135-41.





### 3. Eighteenth-Century Newport

Rhode Island came into existence in large part as a reaction to the Puritan theocracy of the mighty Massachusetts Bay Colony to its north. Roger Williams, the colony's founder, had immigrated to the Bay Colony from England in 1631 but, because of his relentless advocacy of religious freedom, was banished by the Puritans in 1635. The following year, welcomed by the Native Americans at the head of Narragansett Bay, Williams founded the settlement he gratefully named Providence. Other exiles from the Puritan north, following Williams's example, moved south and established themselves in 1638 at Portsmouth at the northern end of Aquidneck, the largest island in the bay, which they purchased and promptly renamed Rhode Island. A schism in that group caused a small party of men, led by William Coddington and including John Clarke and Nicholas Easton, to split off from Anne Hutchinson and her faction in 1639 and settle at the opposite end of the island, on the site of what was to become Newport. In 1644 Williams went to London and negotiated a parliamentary patent permitting the island communities of Newport and Portsmouth to unite with the mainland settlements of Providence and nearby Warwick (established 1642), forming a local government that would guarantee freedom of religion. This right, which would be so important to the colony's future success, was reaffirmed in the royal charter that Williams secured from Charles II in 1663. The official name of the settlement, according to this charter, was "Rhode Island and Providence Plantations."<sup>1</sup>

The dominant feature of the topography of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations was Narragansett Bay, some twenty-eight miles in length, with Providence at the northern extremity and Newport at the southern. The first reliable chart of the bay was prepared only in the 1770s by Charles Blaskowitz, the cartographer chosen to survey this portion of the coast when, in the aftermath of the French and Indian War, the British admiralty realized the need for accurate charts of the Atlantic coastline.<sup>2</sup> Blaskowitz's highly accomplished map (opposite) makes evident the strategic appeal of the site chosen for Newport. Two large islands subdivide the mouth of Narragansett Bay: Conanicut (now Conanicut) on the left and the much larger Rhode Island on the right. Nestled into a large and sheltered cove on the western side of Rhode Island, Newport is near the open sea but perfectly protected from it. At each end, north and south, the harbor is enclosed by points of land. Not far offshore, and forming a natural breakwater, is crescent-shaped Goat Island (fig. 14), its arms open to protect the harbor. (Proximity to the jagged shorelines of the bay would in time offer abundant hiding places for privateers.) All told, Newport was one of the finest natural ports on the East Coast.

Opposite: Charles Blaskowitz, cartographer, and William Faden, engraver and publisher, London, *A Topographical Chart of the Bay of Narragansett*, 1777, engraving. The Preservation Society of Newport County, Newport, Rhode Island. The Collection at Hunter House



Fig. 11. John Greenwood, *Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam*, 1758, oil on bed ticking. The Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Purchase, 256:1948

The combination of the colony's liberal religious policy and Newport's superb harbor and natural advantages attracted a diverse, ambitious, and energetic population—Sephardic Jews and Quakers as well as Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, and Presbyterians drawn from Europe as well as from the colonies to north and south—who would soon make Newport into the leading entrepôt of Narragansett Bay, indeed for a time during the 1760s and 1770s, one of the leading seaports in the American colonies.

Newporters had no choice but to make full use of the natural advantages of their port city. Rhode Island was a tiny colony and produced relatively little that was of commercial interest to its neighbors. In consequence, its merchants could only prosper as middlemen in the far-flung waterborne trade. The heart of Newport's mid-eighteenth-century commerce was the so-called triangle trade. Molasses, brought from the West Indies to Newport, was distilled into rum, which in turn was shipped to the west coast of Africa to be traded for slaves, who were taken to the Caribbean to work on the sugar plantations. Newport has the invidious distinction of having been the American port most actively involved with this slave trade. In the 1760s and early 1770s an annual average of at least eighteen ships sailed from Newport to Africa, more than from any other American port. A relatively small number of Africans were brought to Newport itself, where, during the eighteenth century, they numbered about fifteen percent of the population.<sup>3</sup>

The vitality of Newport's West Indies trade, and the enthusiasm of ambitious young men for it, is suggested by John Greenwood's engaging panoramic canvas *Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam* of 1758 (fig. 11).<sup>4</sup> This indoor bacchanalia depicts a group of sea captains in various states of intoxication far from home in Surinam. Tradition has it that, except for two Dutchmen, all the inebriates pictured hailed from Newport and included merchants with such well-known names as Wanton (in the center, his bald head about to be "baptized") and Malbone (at the right, his arms akimbo, learning to dance).<sup>5</sup> Surinam, on the north coast of South America between present-day Guyana and French Guiana and originally a settlement of the Dutch West



Fig. 12. American, *View of Newport*, about 1740, oil on panel. Alletta Morris Cooper, on extended loan to the Newport Art Museum and Art Association, Newport, Rhode Island

India Company, was a particularly important port of call for Newport traders during the French and Indian War (1756–63), when French ports were off limits.

There were, of course, many subsidiary markets in which the Newport traders were active as they sought to keep their ships full on every leg of every voyage. One of the more important ones, and the one most relevant to the present study, was the transport of mahogany from the Caribbean to Newport, where it was made into furniture for local sale or for export.

By about 1740 mariners approaching Newport would have seen, behind the bustling wharves, a well-established town with impressive public buildings and fine houses. The only surviving contemporary image of this colonial city (fig. 12) is a painted panel, originally part of the overmantel woodwork of a house on Mill Street in the heart of the old city. It is a panoramic bird's-eye view from the west, from above the protective battlements of Fort George on Goat Island. The principal public buildings are easily identified by their spires: from the left, the Friends Meeting House (1700), the Colony House (1739), the Second Congregational Church on Clarke Street (1735), Trinity Church (1726), and the First Congregational Church on Mill Street (1729).<sup>6</sup> Most sophisticated architecturally were Trinity Church and the Colony House, both designed by the carpenter Richard Munday (died 1739), an accomplished master in the Baroque manner of Sir Christopher Wren. The Redwood Library (1748–50) and the Touro Synagogue (1759–63), the masterpieces of Peter Harrison (1716–1775), the leading exponent in America of the Palladian style in architecture, had not yet been built. The mansions of the richest merchants lined Thames Street, that of Godfrey Malbone standing out because of the central cupola on the gambrel roof of the three-story structure. Religious freedom and prosperity and were there for all to see. At the north (left) side the low spit of land projecting into the harbor is Easton's Point, where most of Newport's craftsmen lived and plied their trades.

In 1759 the merchant Samuel Ward reported a total of 953 houses in Newport.<sup>7</sup> During the previous summer, Ezra Stiles (1727–1795), pastor of the Second Congregational Church (and later president of Yale College), surveyed the city on foot and

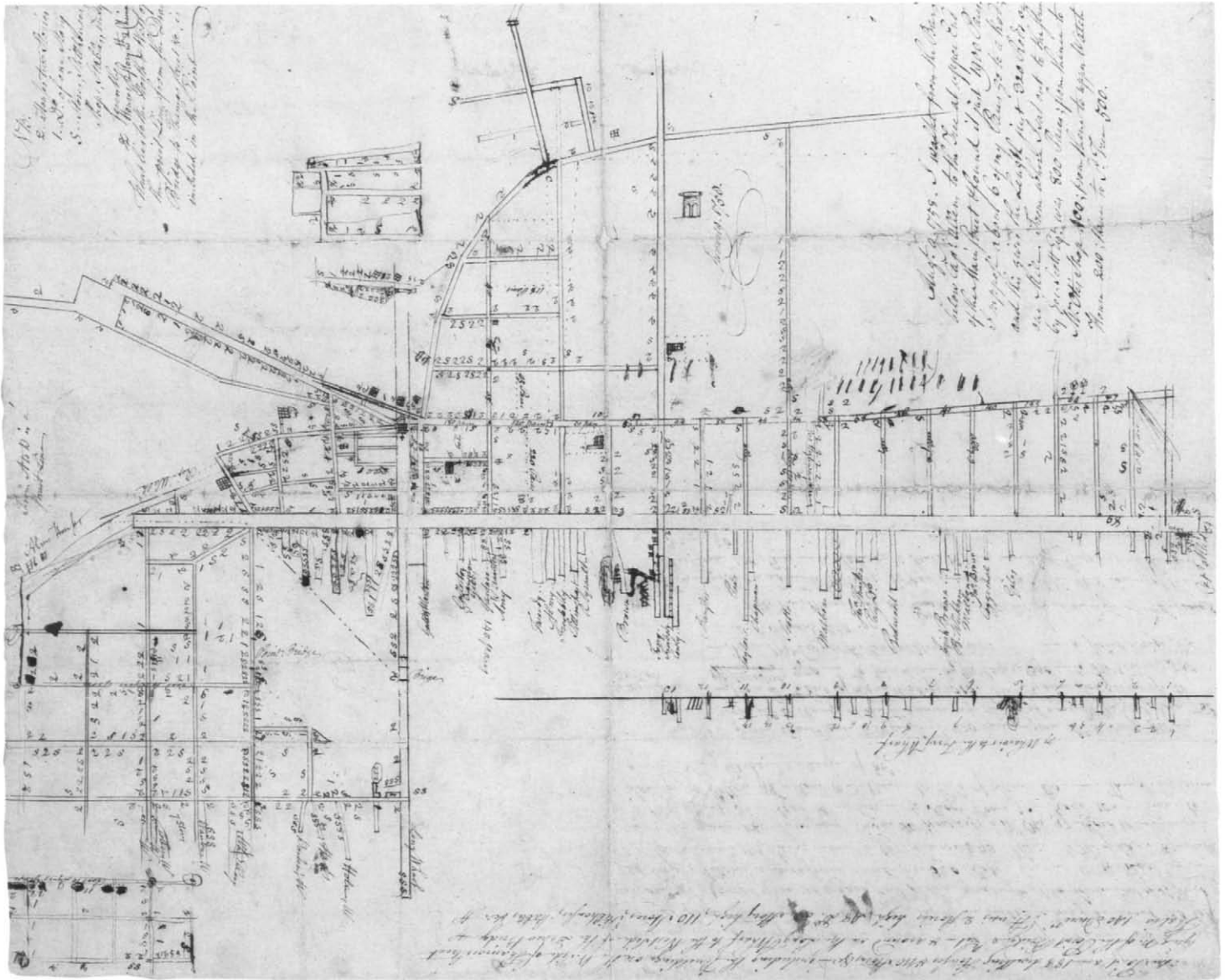


Fig. 13. Ezra Stiles, Map of Newport, August 1758, ink on paper. Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, Rhode Island

recorded every building on a rough-drawn, schematic plan (fig. 13). While no thing of beauty, his map reflects an orderly mind and a penchant for statistics. His handiwork is highly instructive about the city's physical fabric at the beginning of its most prosperous era. Stiles employed a code to describe each structure: the numeral 2 for houses with two stories, the numeral 1 for houses with one story, and the letter S for stores, shops, and stables. In the Easton's Point area alone he counted 140 houses with two stories, 48 with one, and 110 ancillary structures. He recorded how thoroughly built up certain streets were. For example, on Shipwright's (now Bridge) Street, where the cabinetmakers mostly lived, he noted 24 two-story houses, 7 one-story houses, and 15 or 16 stores and shops and stables.

Blaskowitz's much more refined map of the town (fig. 14), drawn in 1774 and published in London three years later (at the same time as his survey of Narragansett

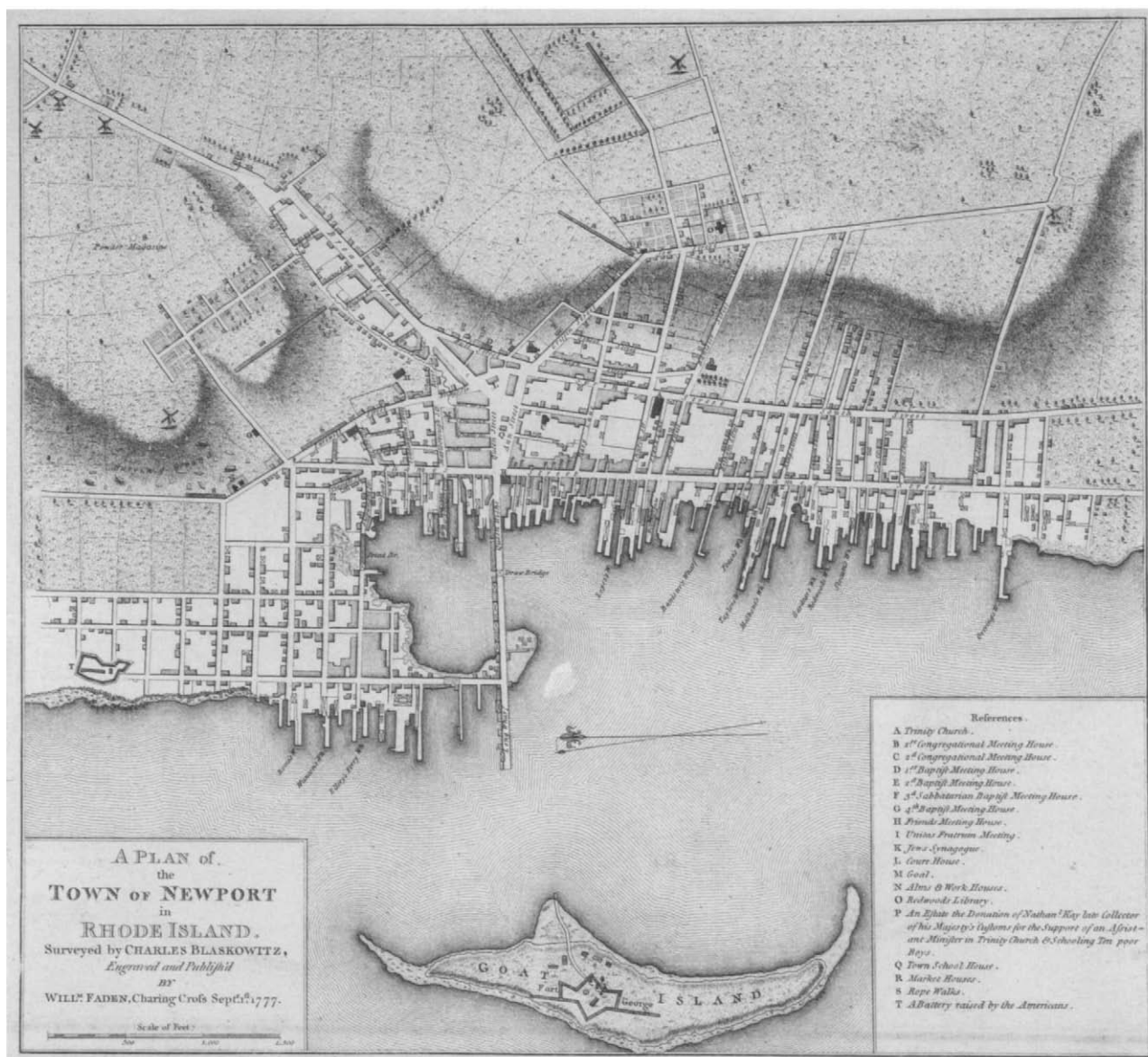


Fig. 14. Charles Blaskowitz, cartographer and William Faden, engraver and publisher, London, *A Plan of the Town of Newport in Rhode Island*, September 1, 1777, engraving. The Preservation Society of Newport County, The Collection at Hunter House

Bay), shows eighteenth-century Newport at the peak of its prosperity, just before the British occupation (1777–79) and the subsequent loss of nearly five hundred structures.<sup>8</sup> The city's main thoroughfare, Thames Street, runs along the waterfront, adjacent to the private wharves of the great merchant princes—Lopez, Banister, Malbone, and the like. Behind and parallel to it is Spring Street. To the north, at the left center on the map and just before the shore juts out as Easton's Point, is the Long Wharf, which traverses the cove before crossing the tip of the point and extending into open water toward Goat Island. Abutting the Long Wharf is Water (now Washington) Street, which runs along the western shore of the point, with more private wharves, including the largest of all, that of Colonel Joseph Wanton. Behind it, in an orderly grid, are the streets where many of the city's craftsmen lived and worked.

### *Easton's Point*

The north end of Newport Harbor, beyond the Long Wharf and the Cove (now filled in), was known either as the Point, because of its southward facing spit of land, or as Easton's Point, the land having been acquired by Nicholas Easton, one of the city's original settlers, in 1639. That same year Easton built nearby, on present-day Farewell Street, what was then described as the first "English" house in Newport.<sup>9</sup> Little else happened to the Point lands until the early eighteenth century, when Easton's widow, Ann Easton Bull (she had later married Governor Henry Bull) bequeathed them to the Quaker congregation. In 1724 the lands were laid out and divided in an orderly grid, and allotments (or lots) were offered for sale, subject to an annual quitclaim rental.<sup>10</sup> Merchants and mariners (sea captains) acquired some of the waterfront lots on Water Street and free blacks some of the inland lots, but the area was particularly favored by artisans. Among the first purchasers were prominent Quaker craftsmen, including the shipwright Henry Goddard who acquired lot 26 on Water Street in 1716.<sup>11</sup> But a far larger presence on the Point was that of members of the Townsend family of cabinetmakers. Solomon's three sons — Solomon, Job, and Christopher — each purchased building lots there in the mid-1720s. Solomon, a mariner, acquired lot 146, at the corner of Second and Walnut Streets, upon which he built a three-bay, center chimney house (today identifiable as 51 Second Street).<sup>12</sup>

### *Bridge Street: The Townsend Landholdings*

The other Townsends, cabinetmakers all, were clustered together in three adjacent blocks on Bridge Street in the southwest quadrant of the Point (fig. 15). In the eighteenth century Bridge Street was the center of the cabinet trade. The street backed on the Cove, which offered direct water access for small vessels. On the Blaskowitz plan Bridge Street is still called by its former name, Shipwright Street, after the ship carpenters who first lived and worked there. As the Townsends began to die out, other joiners, among them Abiel Spencer and Walter Nichols, moved in. Nearby Elm Street was home to cabinetmakers as well, including Benjamin Baker and David Huntington.

The first of the Townsend family holdings was the block on the south side of Bridge Street, west of Second. Here, in 1725, two years after his marriage to Patience Easton, Christopher acquired, from the original Quaker proprietors, allotment 51, the corner lot, upon which he built the house and workshop where he was to dwell until his death. In 1733 he acquired the adjacent lots 45, 49, and 50, upon which he erected his workshop and stores and stable.<sup>13</sup> In the will he wrote in 1773 he left these properties to his son and namesake, Christopher Jr.

The second Townsend area was the block on the north side of Bridge Street, between Second and Third and extending north to Elm. Here in 1725 Job Townsend acquired lot 86 at the northwest corner of the intersection of Bridge and Third.<sup>14</sup> Construction of a house on the site was under way in 1729,<sup>15</sup> but the exact location of Job's workshop is not known. He left the house to his son and namesake, Job Jr.<sup>16</sup> In 1764, the year before his death, he gave the adjacent land to the north, probably lot 99 (now 14 Third Street), to his son Thomas who, in 1767, built a house thereon, where he lived until 1784, about the time he left off cabinetmaking to become an innkeeper.<sup>17</sup> In 1770–72 Edmund, Job's other cabinetmaker son, paid the quitrent jointly with Thomas for the lot upon which his father had built his house.<sup>18</sup> In 1795 Thomas purchased lot 87, on the northwest corner of Bridge and Third.

**Lot numbers** Townsend leaseholders  
(with year of purchase, where known)

<b>45, 49, 50</b>	Christopher, 1733; Christopher Jr.
<b>51</b>	Christopher, 1725; Christopher Jr.
<b>81, 82, 84, 85</b>	Christopher; John
<b>83</b>	John
<b>86</b>	Job 1725; Job Jr.
<b>87</b>	Thomas, 1795
<b>95</b>	John, 1771
<b>99(?)</b>	Thomas, 1764

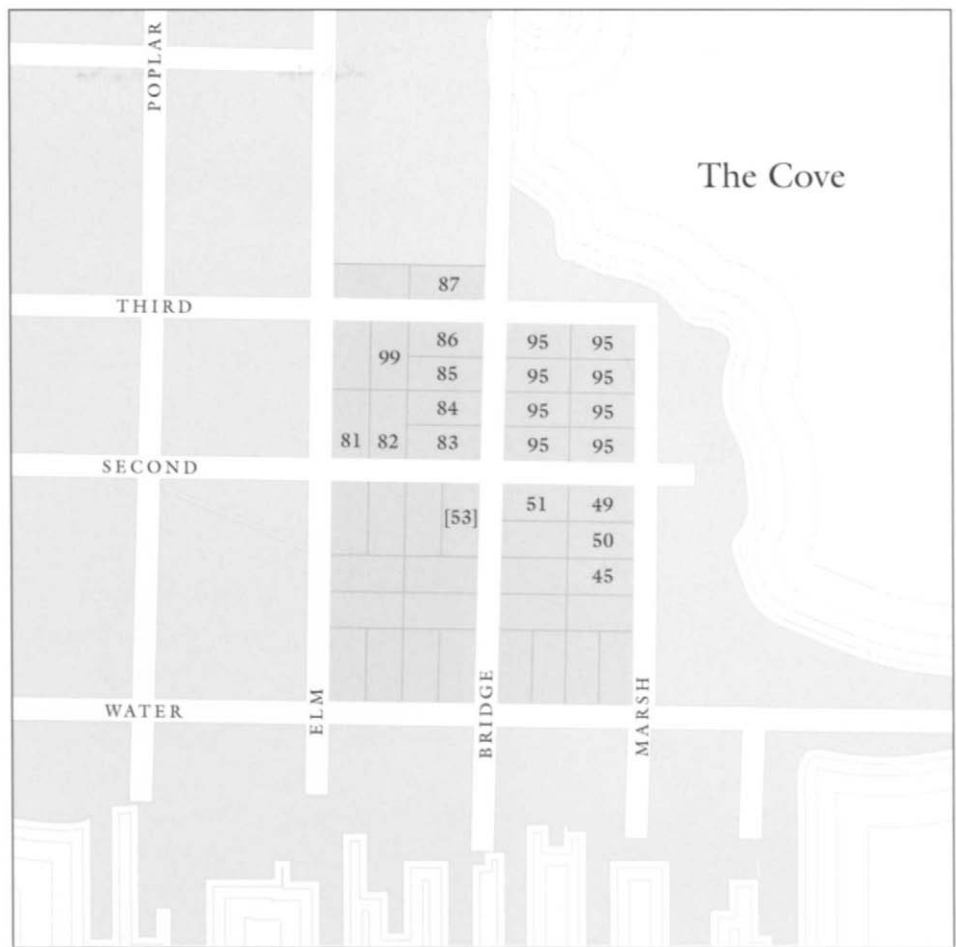


Fig. 15. Plan of Easton's Point showing Townsend family allotments. Adapted from "Map of the Cove," February 22, 1860, signed by Henry Jackson. Courtesy Mrs. Robert H. I. Goddard

Meanwhile, on the same block, but west of Job's house and extending to Second, Christopher had purchased most of the allotments facing Bridge and Second Streets. In 1773 these included numbers 81, 82, and 84, presumably among the six two-story houses and one single-story house facing Bridge Street that Ezra Stiles had recorded there in 1758. Christopher left all his real estate on this block to his son John. At some point John acquired lot 83, on the northwest corner of Bridge and Second, which, together with parts of lots 81 and 82, is where he was living when he made his will in 1805, in which he left it all to his son Charles F.<sup>19</sup> Lot 83 is probably where John lived most of his adult life. The building on lot 84 served as a sort of dower house, an indication of the strong sense of kinship within the family. In 1773, when it was occupied by his wife's cousin Sarah Cozzens, Christopher willed it to his son John, subject to a life estate for his daughter Mary Wanton; John in turn left it to his son John F., with a similar proviso for his own daughter Mary.

The third Townsend holding was lot 95, the entire block between Second and Third, on the south side of Bridge Street. Stiles's 1758 map showed nothing much there other than stores, shops, or stables. But it was here, in 1771, that John began to pay quitrent for land, formerly in the possession of Mary Nichols, an executor of Kendall Nichols.<sup>20</sup> In his will John, who by that time (1805) was living across the street, directed that this land be sold.





Fig. 16. William James Stillman, Bridge Street looking west, 1870, photograph. Newport Historical Society, Rhode Island, P393

An 1870 photograph of Bridge Street, looking west on the Cove side, from a point at about Third Street (fig. 16), shows a group of the buildings, most of which must have belonged to John Townsend. The photograph has been said to record “the Kendall Nichols House (demolished), the John Townsend House (No. 70) and his gambrel-roofed shop (now rebuilt), and the Christopher Townsend House.”<sup>21</sup> Christopher’s house is indeed visible at the far right, but otherwise this description seems implausible. Judging by the property he owned and the taxes he paid, John was the most successful member of the Townsend family, and in 1774 his household numbered ten people. On all counts he would have required something more substantial than the modest two-story center chimney house shown here. It is altogether more likely that the family lived across the street on lot 83, but that does not address the question of where the shop was located. Nor do we know the exact location of the “convenient dwelling House and Lot on the Street leading to the Ferry” (that is, Bridge Street), which he advertised to let in 1760 or of the “commodious Dwelling-House, lately occupied by Capt. George Nichols,” probably the same building, which he advertised in 1765.<sup>22</sup>

#### *The Townsend and Goddard Houses and Shops*

So much for the Townsend landholdings. What about the buildings thereon? The perfect surviving exemplar of an eighteenth-century Newport cabinetmaker’s home and workshop is that of Christopher Townsend at 74 Bridge Street (lot 51), on the first of the Townsend landholdings at the southwest corner of Bridge and Second Streets (fig. 17). (It survives in situ and wonderfully intact, thanks to its prescient purchase in 1960, in the face of urban renewal, by Mrs. William Holland Drury, mother of the present devoted owner, Mrs. Robert H. I. Goddard.) The two-story house has

a gable-on-hip roof, with fanlight windows in the ends of the diminutive gables taking the place of dormers. It was originally approximately thirty feet square, with three bays per side, but early on an extension was added at the rear. It is of a typical early-eighteenth-century Newport square-plan type, with a center chimney surrounded by three principal rooms, and the entry and staircase in the right corner (fig. 18). The living room retains its original paneled chimney wall, including a bolection molded fireplace surround, above which is a pair of arched cupboard doors. This is the house, these are the very rooms, in which John Townsend was born and raised. The workshop, some twelve by twenty feet in plan, adjoins the house on the right. It could have housed five or six workbenches, the numbers that appeared in the estate inventories of John Goddard and John Townsend, respectively.

Job's house, at the northwest corner of Third and Bridge Streets, has been demolished but must have been similar to Christopher's—probably a mirror image, since its relation to the street corner was reversed and the entry and staircase were on the left side rather than the right.<sup>23</sup>

In 1754 John Townsend engaged the house carpenters Henry Peckham and Wing Spooner, builders of Peter Harrison's design for the Redwood Library in 1748, to provide specifications for a new house for him (fig. 19).<sup>24</sup> The contract was never signed, and the house presumably never built, but the one-page document gives all the information that would have been necessary to frame the structure and complete the exterior. The cost was £1,000 to be paid one half in dry goods and one half in "Joyners Ware." A conjectural reconstruction based upon those written specifications is presented in fig. 20. The ground plan was to be thirty by thirty-eight feet. The shingled roof is described as "double Pitch'd" and to be "Cornished all round," which can only mean a gable-on-hip configuration. The walls were to be "Clapboarded with a Bead upon the Edge." The sash windows were to have nine-by-seven-inch panes or "lights": nineteen windows had twenty-four lights, or twelve panes over twelve panes; nine had eighteen lights, or nine over nine; two had twelve lights, or six over six; and the two dormers had twelve lights each. The front door, with an "O'Gea [ogee] head" was on the narrow southern elevation; the back door was on the long eastern elevation. This configuration presupposes a lot at the northwest corner of an intersection, like that of Job's at the corner of Third and Bridge Streets. Most likely it was intended for lot 49, then owned by Christopher Townsend, at the northwest corner of Marsh and Second. (The only other possibility is lot 53, at Second and Bridge, but it is the wrong shape). Indeed, the outside of the house John had hoped to build was, except for the addition of dormers, identical to that of his father; like the latter, John's would have had a center chimney plan with an entry and staircase in one corner and three rooms surrounding the chimney stack.

The Townsends must have been among the most prominent of the artisan class. Their enclave on Easton's Point confirms the family's position in the town: a compact but sizable presence on Bridge Street, the road to the ferry and doubtless the busiest street on the Point, with access to the waters of the Cove. Moreover, the close physical proximity in which the various members of this cabinetmaking clan lived and worked is evidence—much more compelling than the occasional surviving manuscript record—of the necessarily complex and intimate business relationships that must have existed between the various members of the family and their shops. It helps to explain why, with the towering exception of John Townsend, it is difficult to identify the work of the individual joiners.



Fig. 17. Christopher Townsend house and shop, 74 Bridge Street, late nineteenth century, photograph. Newport Historical Society, Rhode Island

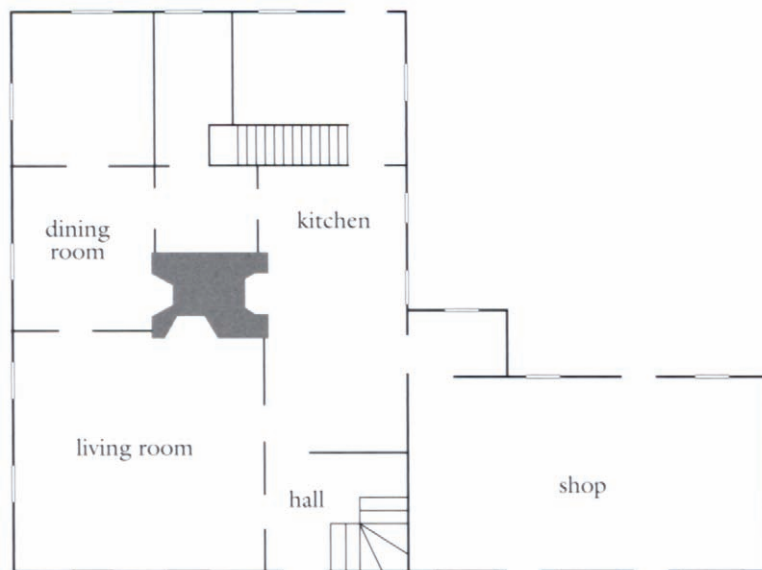


Fig. 18. Plan of Christopher Townsend house and shop. Adapted from plan drawn by Warren Oakley, pl. 95 in Downing and Scully 1967

Though John Goddard married into the Townsend family, his house and shop were located three blocks north of the Townsend family holdings, in an area of Water Street where members of the Goddard family had lived for two generations.<sup>25</sup> In 1748, the year he married Hannah Townsend, John purchased a waterfront lot at the corner of Water and Willow Streets upon which he built a two-story, center-chimney gambrel-roofed house, with a workshop connected at the back (fig. 21).<sup>26</sup> Like the Townsend houses described above, it has a square plan with a center chimney; it is, however, somewhat larger (four bays across the front instead of three), and the front entry and staircase, instead of being in a corner, lead directly toward the chimney block, allowing for an additional room at the right. When, in 1800, ownership of the house was transferred to sons Stephen and Thomas, it was grandly called the “Mansion House of our late Father.”<sup>27</sup> The

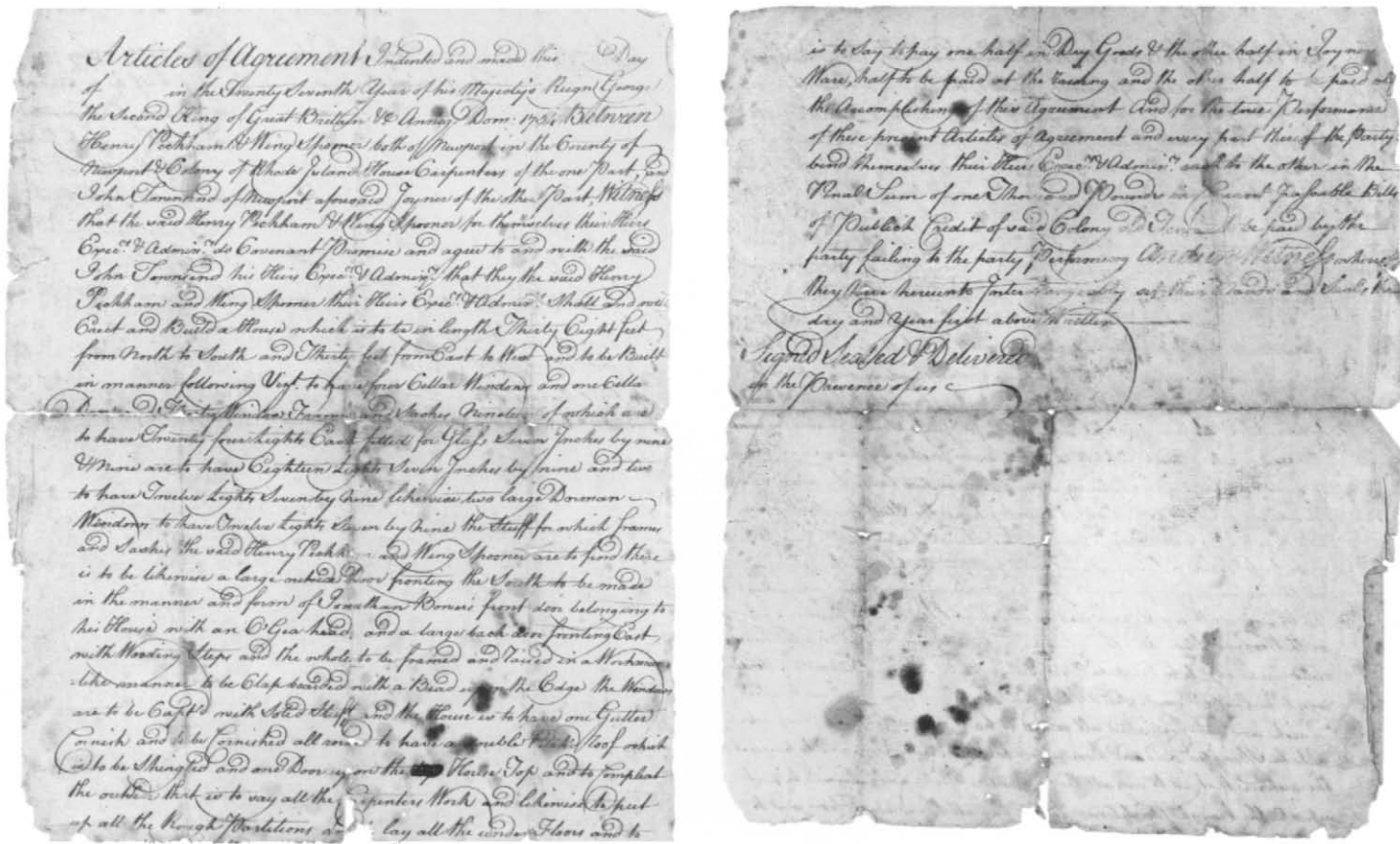


Fig. 19. Specifications for building John Townsend's house, 1754, manuscript. Newport Restoration Foundation, Newport, Rhode Island

building (which survives) was moved to 81 Second Street in 1870, the shop (later demolished) to Smith's Alley.

At its original location the Goddard house was just a few lots north of the Jonathan Nichols house (taken over in 1756 by the great merchant Colonel Joseph Wanton), today the finest surviving midcentury house in Newport (fig. 22). It is instructive to compare these two houses, the dwellings of a leading artisan and of a prominent merchant, one begun, the other remodeled in about the same year (1748).

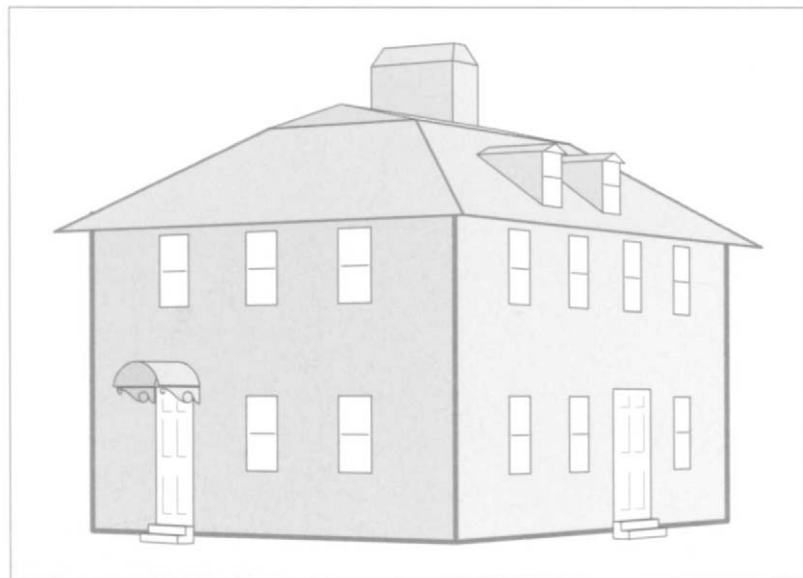


Fig. 20. Conjectural rendering based on specifications for John Townsend's house



Fig. 21. Jonas Bergner, John Goddard's house and workshop, 1895, watercolor. Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island



Fig. 22. Jonathan Nichols House, about 1954

The similarities are much greater than the differences. The one has a single central chimney and three simply fitted first-floor rooms, the other a center hall, two chimneys, and four richly paneled rooms. The differences are a matter of size and ornament. Both are the dwellings of self-reliant, public-spirited, and worthy Newport citizens. There is no more eloquent statement of the relative parity and equality between the leading craftsmen and the merchant elite in colonial Newport.

1. See James 1975.
2. For eighteenth-century charts of Rhode Island, see Sellers and Van Ee 1981, pp. 218–23.
3. For Newport's economy and the slave trade, see Crane 1992, pp. 11–33, 76–83.
4. Greenwood (1727–1792) was born in Boston and practiced his art in Surinam between 1752 and 1758, before moving to Amsterdam and later London. This painting, both in its exaggerated horizontality and its subject matter, is modeled after *A Midnight Modern Conversation*, a 1733 engraving by William Hogarth.
5. According to a manuscript record, by Edward A. Wild, June 6, 1878, formerly pasted to the back of the painting, and now in the files of the Saint Louis Art Museum.
6. The view has been variously dated: 1740 (because the Colony House [1739] is shown and the extended Long Wharf [1741] is not) or after 1760 (because Trinity's spire, which is depicted, fell in 1731 and was not rebuilt until 1760, and because the size of the city represents its maximum colonial growth).
7. Downing and Scully 1967, p. 35.
8. According to Downing and Scully 1967, p. 92.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 15. The house was burned by Native Americans three years later.
10. These sales were actually more like long-term leases: According to a notice in the *Newport Mercury*, March 15, 1775, "The possessors of the Point lots, that are indebted for quit-rent are desired to pay . . . if they do not pay before the next inferior court he [the appointed assessor] will be under necessity to demand their lots." Quoted in Cornelius 1928, p. 72, n. 2.
11. The lot numbers are all recorded in the deeds. Abstracts of deed records are at Newport Historical Society; for the Townsend and Goddard properties, see Downing and Scully 1967, p. 475, n. 76, and p. 477, nn. 75–80.
12. For a description and photograph of Solomon's house, see Stachiw 2001, pp. 89–90. The house is extant.
13. For lot 51, see Land Evidence, book 2, p. 86, NHS; for lots 49, 50, and 45, see book 10, p. 163.
14. Land Evidence, book 6, pp. 535–37, NHS.
15. See reference in the John Stevens account book to work on cellar walls, chimneys, and hearths; quoted in Downing and Scully 1967, p. 76.
16. *Ibid.* The street number for Job's house is listed variously as 19 Bridge (p. 6), 59 Bridge (p. 489), and 63 Bridge (pl. 96).
17. The date 1767 is painted on a rafter in the house on the site. See Downing and Scully 1967, p. 76.
18. Account book of the Proprietors of Easton Point, 1769–1861, MS 610, NHS.

19. Lot 84 was described in John Townsend's will as "fronting south on Bridge St, next to the shop of Peleg Cranston on the west, and an alley on the east."
20. According to Cornelius 1928, p. 76, n. 10.
21. The photograph is reproduced in Downing and Scully 1967, pl. 8 (bottom). The description quoted is taken from the caption. Elsewhere (p. 6) Downing and Scully note that the John Townsend at no. 70 was the grandson of the famous cabinetmaker.
22. *Newport Mercury*, September 23, 1760, p. 4; and October 14 and 28, 1765. In addition to his holdings on the Point, John had, at the time of writing his will (1805), a house and lot on Thames Street and two multiacre lots near the "Duck Manufactory" which he left to his sons Solomon and John F.
23. See Downing and Scully 1967, pl. 96, for an illustration of the staircase of the Job Townsend house.
24. The Peckham and Spooner contract descended in the Townsend family and was acquired by the Newport Restoration Foundation in 1969, together with a group of pieces of family furniture.
25. Henry Goddard paid rents on lot 26 beginning in 1716; his son Daniel later acquired lot 27.
26. Stachiw 2001, pp. 90–91, where a floor plan of the house and a view of it in its present location are illustrated.
27. Land Evidence, book 7, p. 167, quoted in Garrett 1972, p. 35.



## 4. The Townsend Family in Newport

The John Townsend who was born in Newport in 1733, and died there a successful and highly accomplished cabinetmaker seventy-seven years later, was a fifth-generation American and a third-generation resident of Newport. He was descended from a branch of the Townshends of Raynham Hall, Norfolk, in East Anglia, a family whose coat of arms — “three escallops argent” (three silver scallop shells) — is akin to the “block and shell,” the signature motif of the kind of Newport case furniture for which Townsend is renowned.<sup>1</sup> The first of this branch of the Townsend family to immigrate to America were three brothers: John I (died 1669), Richard (died 1671), and Henry (death date not known).<sup>2</sup> Henry was a Quaker, a member of the Religious Society of Friends, and so too, presumably, were his brothers. Their allegiance was divided between New York and Rhode Island, both colonies that encouraged freedom of religion. Henry, a miller, was in Flushing, on Long Island, by 1645, and then in Warwick, Rhode Island, before settling finally in Oyster Bay (Long Island) about 1656. Richard appears to have gone first to Warwick, then to Oyster Bay, then back to Warwick by 1663. John I arrived in Flushing sometime prior to 1645, moved to Warwick by 1649, and was back on Long Island before his death. The three Townsend brothers married three sisters — Ann, Deliverance, and Elizabeth Cole — from Rhode Island. The predominant family occupation appears to have been that of house carpenter. In Long Island in the mid-eighteenth century, the family included two carpenters, Daniel and John, and two joiners, Henry and Nicholas.<sup>3</sup>

John I's first wife was Elizabeth Cole. Their son and his namesake, John II (about 1630–1715), a house carpenter,<sup>4</sup> lived in Jericho, just south of Oyster Bay, and it was that John whose son Solomon was the progenitor of the Newport cabinetmakers. Solomon married Catherine Almy of Newport. Their sons Job (1699–1765), Christopher (1701–1787), and Solomon (dates unknown) were all born in Oyster Bay, prior to the family's permanent move to Newport in 1707. Solomon, the son and namesake, became a mariner.

The other two sons, Job and Christopher, became joiners and went on to found a family dynasty of cabinetmakers unrivaled in America in the number of men involved and in the quality of work produced. The lives of the two men have much in common. In addition to being close in age and sharing the same upbringing, they must have served their apprenticeships, about 1713–20 and 1715–22, respectively, with the same unidentified master, presumably a house carpenter like their grandfather. (In America, unlike in England, there was no formal guild system for the training of craftsmen, but it was customary for youngsters to serve apprenticeships of up to seven

Opposite: Attributed to John Stevens III, headstone of John Townsend, 1809, slate. Edward Street Burying Ground, Newport, Rhode Island



years, beginning at the age of about fourteen, which included living and working in their masters' houses.)

Both men began as house carpenters or housewrights but routinely described themselves as joiners or shop joiners — that is, working in a shop rather than, for example, on a building site. In 1723 Job is referred to as a house carpenter, but by 1725, when they bought lots on Bridge Street and proceeded to build nearly identical houses, both he and Christopher were listed as “joyners.”<sup>5</sup> And so (except in 1739 when Christopher was signed on as a “house joiner” for the construction of the Colony House<sup>6</sup>) they were styled throughout their lives: when Job died, his son Edmund referred to him as “Joiner”;<sup>7</sup> and in his will, Christopher described himself as “Shop-joiner.”

In 1729 the two brothers became “freemen,”<sup>8</sup> and by the mid-1730s they were well-established cabinetmakers, apparently doing very much the same kind of work but in separate shops. In 1734 both men were buying, concurrently and in more or less the same quantities, all sorts of furniture hardware from an as yet unidentified merchant.<sup>9</sup> The same pattern of purchases prevails in other accounts later in the decade (August 1736–March 1740).<sup>10</sup> The types of hardware point to a specialization in case furniture, particularly desks.<sup>11</sup> In 1738, in a letter to Abraham Redwood to justify the cost of a desk and bookcase he is making for him, Christopher mentions that “Brother Job, also sold one [a desk and bookcase] to our Collector [presumably the Customs Collector] for £59. I mention this that thou may know that I have not imposed on thee.”<sup>12</sup> In 1741 the brothers collaborated on an appraisal.<sup>13</sup> Doubtless there was occasional sibling rivalry, but the brothers must have cooperated on many an undertaking.

It is hard to identify the specific work of either man. Documented pieces are almost nonexistent, for each not much more than a single desk and bookcase. But both Job and Christopher had children and grandchildren who carried on the cabinetmaking business and, to a certain degree, must have developed separate shop traditions.

## THE JOB TOWNSEND SHOP TRADITION

### *Job Townsend (1699–1765)*

Job was an active and highly respected citizen of Newport. In June 1763, in the annual election of Town Officers, he was made Town Treasurer, a Viewer of Joiners Lumber, and a Clerk of the Markets, posts he presumably had held, off and on, for many years.<sup>14</sup> He died on January 18, 1765, and the January 21 *Newport Mercury* editorialized, “Last Saturday died, aged 66, Mr. JOB TOWNSEND, Town-Treasurer. He was remarkable for Honesty and Integrity, and his Death is deemed a public Loss.”<sup>15</sup> The only other eighteenth-century Newport cabinetmaker to receive such a contemporary public encomium was his son Edmund.

We know little about Job's life after the early years that have already been recounted. In 1737 there are two tantalizing vignettes of life in his workshop. The first is an advertisement in the *Boston Gazette* for July 4, 1737:

Ran away from his Master *Job Townsend* of *Newport* on *Rhode Island*, an Apprentice Boy about 19 Years of Age, named *Samuel Allin*, of middle Stature, dark curl'd Hair, dark gray Eyes, speaks quick and thick, and sputters in Talk, and has wrought at the Shop Joyners Trade some Years, he had on when he went away. . . . Whoever shall apprehend the abovesaid Runaway, and convey him to his aforesaid Master, shall have a Reward of *five Pounds New England Currency*, and all reasonable Charges paid thankfully by me *Job Townsend*, *Newport*, *July 4th 1737*.<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 23. Job Townsend, desk and bookcase, 1745–60, mahogany, chestnut, pine, and tulip. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island, Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth, 36.006



Fig. 24. Label on desk and bookcase (fig. 23), ink on paper

Whether or not young Sam Allen was ever apprehended is unknown, but his departure must have virtually coincided with his master taking on a new apprentice, fourteen-year-old John Goddard. Goddard minded his manners, worked hard, and following a tried and true eighteenth-century path to career advancement, ultimately married one of his master's daughters.

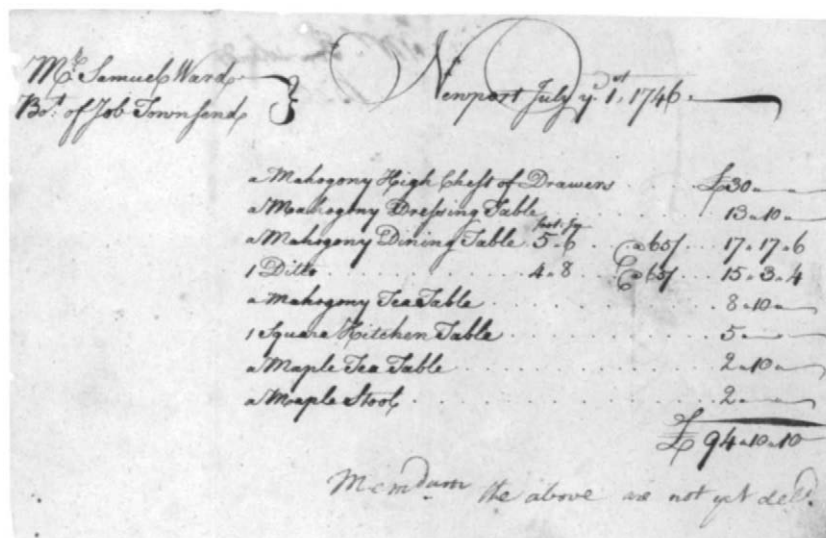
That same year, 1737, Job made the mistake of taking sides in a legal dispute—between another cabinetmaker, William Robinson, and his client, Sueton Grant—about an unfinished desk and bookcase. When Job offered to complete the piece, Robinson indignantly said, “Damn it what business have you with it—I know how to finish my own work myself.”<sup>17</sup>

We know of but one piece of furniture labeled by Job Townsend, a plain, flat-topped desk and bookcase (fig. 23). Originally it had a graceful scroll pediment rising above the round arched panels of the bookcase doors and would have looked worthy of its elegantly scripted label (fig. 24).<sup>18</sup> The only enrichment is inside, with the stacks of concave block-and-shell drawers, the triads of cubbyholes over a single convex blocked drawer, and the concave block-and-shell prospect door arranged in what would be the standard Newport layout for the next fifty years. The desk also sports the broad base molding and plain ogee bracket feet with a single cusp that are characteristic of Newport examples.

Fig. 25. Job Townsend, dressing table, 1746, mahogany, white pine, and poplar. Chipstone Foundation, Fox Point, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1978.1



Fig. 26. Bill of sale from Job Townsend to Mr. Samuel Ward, July 1, 1746, ink on paper. Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island



One other piece can be assigned, with reasonable assurance, to Job: a dressing table (fig. 25), which family tradition has long identified with one of the pieces listed in Job's bill to Samuel Ward in 1746 (fig. 26).<sup>19</sup> With its dainty pointed pad feet and scalloped front skirt with carved central shell, it too is a fine exemplar of Newport cabriole-leg furniture of the 1740s. These documented pieces are enough to show that Job was an early and accomplished proponent of the Queen Anne style in Newport, but he did not develop a recognizable personal style.

In December 1722 Job married Rebecca Casey who, over the next twenty years, bore him thirteen children, five of whom were later involved in the business. Job Jr. was born in 1726, Edmund in 1736, and Thomas in 1742. In addition, daughters Hannah and Susannah, born in 1727 and 1731, respectively, went on to marry the joiners John and James Goddard. Job's sons and the cabinetmakers who ultimately married two of his daughters were probably all apprenticed to him, and the result was a unified shop tradition in which it is difficult to distinguish the work of one maker from another.

While Job's will is not recorded, some accounts detailing the workings of his family workshop survive in a tattered volume in the Newport Historical Society.<sup>20</sup> It spans the years 1750–1801 — a window on the activities of multiple generations of Job Townsends — and is the sole extant record of the client-by-client and day-by-day operations of any of the Townsend and Goddard cabinet shops. The accounts are set up differently over time and appear to have been written by three different men. The years 1750–60 are in the form of a ledger, ordered by client names. This has been attributed, variously, to Job or to Job Jr., but a preponderance of the evidence points to the former.<sup>21</sup> The years 1762–78 are in the form of a daybook which documents the work of Job Jr. until his death on November 5, 1778; the years 1778–1801, also in the form of a daybook, are the work of Job E.<sup>22</sup> The existence of these accounts together in one volume demonstrates that Job's shop was carried on without interruption by his son Job Jr. and thereafter by his grandson Job E. Rather than go out on their own, they continued to work in the same shop. Indeed, the perceived ambiguity in the authorship of some of the accounts parallels the difficulty in differentiating the individual hands in this shop tradition. Only with John Goddard, who, after marrying into the family, was to set up shop independently, do we see a truly personal style, distinct from that of Job and his sons.

#### *Job Townsend Jr. (1726–1778)*

Job Jr. shared his father's name and occupation, but otherwise the two men seem to have had little in common. Whereas Senior was a prosperous craftsman who was held in high public esteem, Junior barely made ends meet, and his death went unremarked by his contemporaries.<sup>23</sup> He married Deborah Taylor in 1753, and his only son and heir Job E. Townsend (died 1829) was born in 1758. He inherited his father's shop, at the corner of Third and Bridge Streets, in 1764.<sup>24</sup> It seems that Job Jr. never escaped the shadow of John Goddard, four years his senior and a far more gifted artisan, who also apprenticed with Job Sr. when Job Jr. was a beginning apprentice to his father.

The daybook that Job Jr. kept from 1762 until his death in 1778 gives a comprehensive picture of the kinds of work done in his shop. He was much involved with repairing furniture and altering bedsteads, sharpening saws and putting brasses on case pieces, and making coffins and teaboard. Most of the new furniture he made consisted of desks (mahogany or maple) and drop-leaf tables of different sizes, the two staples of the Newport export furniture trade. There is, at the Milwaukee Art Museum, a simple Newport desk, maple but with a mahogany interior, that bears the signature of Job Townsend but has most recently been attributed to Job Jr.<sup>25</sup>

Job was also much given to turner's work: pillars, bedposts, table legs and tops, and numerous stands. He made few of the fine custom-order pieces for which the great Newport makers are famous. His most prosperous years were in the early 1760s, his most costly pieces a mahogany case of drawers for £315 in 1763,

and a large mahogany desk for £330 in 1767. The latter was a joint production with brother Edmund.<sup>26</sup>

### *Edmund Townsend (1736–1810)*

Edmund Townsend was born on January 13, 1736, ten years after Job Jr., but in the public eye he was seen as his father's true successor.<sup>27</sup> It was he who, in January 1765, aged but twenty-nine, "At a meeting of the Freeholders of the Town . . . was chosen Town Treasurer, in the Room of Mr. Job Townsend, deceased."<sup>28</sup> And it was he who the next month, in the *Newport Mercury* of February 11, 1765, placed a notice about the settlement of his father's estate. On November 30, 1811, two days after Edmund's own death, the same newspaper praised his lifetime of public service: "For nearly 39 years he was Town Treasurer of this Town: the duties of which office were always fulfilled with honor to himself, and to the advantage of the Town."<sup>29</sup>

We know few of the specifics of Edmund's career. The earliest record of his wood-working is a bill dated April 29, 1765, to the merchant Thomas Vernon, for a costly mahogany coffin for his wife.<sup>30</sup> At that time, thirteen-year-old James Goddard (son of his late brother-in-law James Goddard) was in Edmund's service as an apprentice. In due course, some of Edmund's own children—his four sons (Job E., James, Thomas, and Robert) all became cabinetmakers—joined the workforce. In the 1774 census his household consisted of two white males over sixteen and one under, four white females over sixteen, and three blacks. At that time he apparently had only one child and one resident employee (perhaps James Goddard, then twenty-two).

As mentioned earlier, an entry in his brother Job Jr.'s accounts, under the date February 28, 1767, records that Job and Edmund together made "a Large Mohogany Desk" for Nicholas Anderrese. The cost, £330, exceeded that of any other single object in the ledger, an indication that Edmund's help was needed for some part of such costly bespoke work. A plausible if unprovable hypothesis is that the desk was a block-and-shell piece for which Edmund carved the shells. On the other hand, an invoice of October 17, 1771, to Aaron Lopez for "One Red Cedar Desk & Bookcase with Casing . . . £13-8-6," shows that for Edmund, like everybody else, run-of-the-mill pieces for the export trade were his bread and butter.<sup>31</sup>

Edmund carried on with joinery work in the years after the Revolution. He is listed as a cabinetmaker on the bill of sale for a plot of land he sold in 1784.<sup>32</sup> He billed Christopher Champlin for "a Mahogany Urn Stand" in 1786 and for measuring fourteen mahogany logs containing 2,271 feet of sawn lumber the next year.<sup>33</sup> As late as June 1794 he was elected a "Surveyor of Joiner's Lumber."<sup>34</sup>

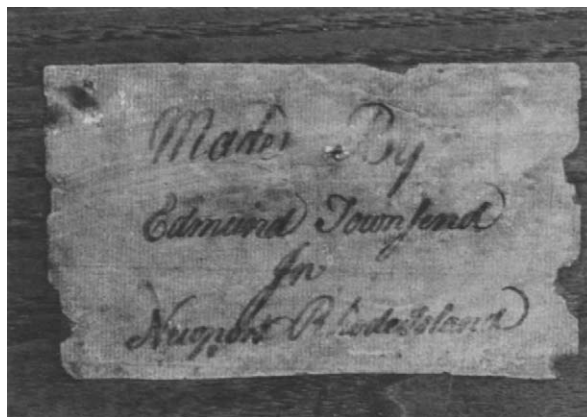
In the will he wrote on November 3, 1811, less than a month before his death, Edmund left the bulk of his household furniture to his wife for her lifetime and thence to his daughter Catherine. The exceptions were his two desks, for his sons Job and Thomas, and "One Mahogany Dining Table Claw feet" and "One Mahogany Breakfast Table with wings and fluted Legs" for Catherine directly. Such precise descriptions were rare at the time and indicate Edmund's keen interest in the pieces he had made and document that he owned both cabriole furniture and the later stop-fluted pieces. His inventory totaled \$1082.90, of which \$482.90 was the value of household furnishings.

Like his father, Edmund appears to have labeled only a single piece of furniture, a fully realized and finely executed four-shell bureau table (figs. 27, 28). Since its publication in 1941 as part of the Karolik Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,

Fig. 27. Edmund Townsend, bureau table, 1765–85, San Domingo mahogany, Cuban mahogany, whitewood, and chestnut. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, The M. and M. Karolik Collection of Eighteenth-Century American Arts no. 38; 41.579



Fig. 28. Label on kneehole chest (fig. 27), ink on paper



this chest has been the touchstone to identify the block-and-shell furniture of the Job Townsend shop tradition.<sup>35</sup> In fact, shells identical to those on this chest are found on a number of bureau tables showing considerable variety in construction, suggesting that one man — Edmund? — carved shells for various members of the Job Townsend workshop.

#### *Thomas Townsend (1742–1827)*

Thomas, the youngest of Job Townsend's sons, was six years younger than Edmund and sixteen years younger than Job Jr. We first hear of him in 1757, during the French and Indian War, as one of the "artificers employed by Mr. Shirley at Oswego" who were taken prisoner and carried to Quebec; subsequently sent to England, these skilled workers were finally, in response to a petition by their Newport neighbors,



Fig. 29. Thomas Townsend, chest-on-chest, 1772, mahogany, chestnut, tulip, and poplar. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Friends of the American Wing Fund, Mr. and Mrs. Robert G. Goelet Gift, Sansbury-Mills Fund, and Leigh Keno and The Hohmann Foundation Gifts, 2005, 2005.52

Fig. 30. Label on chest-on-chest (fig. 29), ink on paper



returned home.<sup>36</sup> Thomas's first wife, Mehitable, died in 1765 at the age of twenty-seven; that same year he married Mary Dyer, who lived until 1810. In 1767 he built a house on the lot on Third Street given him by his father. The only record of Thomas's pre-Revolutionary cabinetmaking activities is an invoice made out to a Captain James Card covering the period September 1767–October 1768, which records his having made a variety of mahogany and maple tables, presumably export items, and a coffin for a "Negro girl."<sup>37</sup> According to the 1774 census, Thomas's household consisted of two males and two females over sixteen and two males and three females under sixteen. Presumably, the second adult male was a resident journeyman who worked in the joiners shop. Thomas's tax bill was consistently smaller than Edmund's.<sup>38</sup> In May 1779, during the British occupation of Newport, Thomas was again taken prisoner. Although released, he was not allowed to return home and get back to work until the end of the occupation in 1780.<sup>39</sup> That May he is recorded as having paid his nephew Job E. for "staining and Pollishing a Desk."<sup>40</sup> The following year he billed the merchant Archimedes George for a cedar coffin for his wife.<sup>41</sup> Shortly thereafter he gave

up joinery to become an innkeeper, in which profession he achieved considerable local acclaim.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike his older brothers, Thomas had a lackluster career as a cabinetmaker. Thus it is altogether surprising to find that the one piece of furniture that can be documented to him — like Job and Edmund, Thomas is memorialized by a single labeled piece — is a chest-on-chest (fig. 29) in the classic Newport pattern, with filled-in circular openings in the scroll pediment, and of the very best quality. The story behind this chest, with its magnificent manuscript label (fig. 30), and Thomas's association with other members of the Job Townsend shop tradition has still to be told.<sup>43</sup>

### *John Goddard (1724–1785)*

John Goddard joins the Job Townsend shop tradition by virtue of having been apprenticed to Job and subsequently becoming his son-in-law. We know very little about his early years. He was born in Dartmouth, Massachusetts, on January 20, 1724, son of the eminent shipwright, housewright, and carpenter Daniel Goddard (1697–1764) and his wife Mary Tripp.<sup>44</sup> At about that time the family moved to Newport.<sup>45</sup> In 1745, at the age of twenty-one, John was made a freeman of the town.<sup>46</sup> That same year he made, and proudly signed and dated, a simple fall-front desk—a modest cabinetmaking debut that belied his future achievements.<sup>47</sup> In 1746 he married Hannah Townsend (1727–1804), a daughter of the joiner Job Townsend, and on the evidence of this marriage it has altogether logically been assumed that Goddard must have learned the trade in Job's shop. Since John Goddard was four years older than Job's eldest son and namesake, he would have had a commanding seniority among the younger men in the shop. In 1764 Goddard was elected to two public offices — as a viewer of joiners' lumber and as a justice of the peace — but these terms of office were not renewed. (John's brother James [1727–1757], who married Hannah's sister Susannah in 1750, died in 1757 before making a lasting mark in the craft.)

Documents linking John Goddard and his Townsend in-laws are scarce. That may be the happenstance of historical survival, but it is more likely an indication that he had gone out on his own, not in competition with Job, but in quest of the higher end of the business. In 1752–54 and again in 1767–68 Goddard's name appears in miscellaneous entries in the Job Townsend accounts, but only one of these references — concerning their jointly measuring nine thousand feet of mahogany in August 1767 — had a direct relationship to cabinetmaking.<sup>48</sup> On at least two occasions, in 1765 and 1769, Goddard teamed up with his brother-in-law Edmund Townsend to measure mahogany for Aaron Lopez.<sup>49</sup> And at Goddard's death Edmund was called upon to inventory his personal estate.

What seems incontrovertible is that the young Goddard had ambition and exceptional talent. He wasted little time in setting out to do the Townsend clan one better. Between 1747 and 1769, he sired a horde of children (sixteen to Job's thirteen), three of whom — Townsend, Stephen, and Thomas — would earn their livelihood as joiners.<sup>50</sup> In 1748 he purchased a lot on the corner of Water (now Washington) and Willow Streets, a desirable waterfront property just three blocks north of the Townsend enclave on Bridge Street, upon which he built a combined house and shop that was substantially larger than his master's (fig. 21). Already in that year he was making desks for the export trade — furniture commissioned by John Banister to be shipped in Banister vessels, some of which had been built by Goddard's father.<sup>51</sup>

By the mid-1750s John Goddard had introduced a distinctive personal style in his furniture: a bold and muscular version of the delicate, linear cabriole style associated



Fig. 31. John Goddard, marble-top pier table, 1755, mahogany, chestnut and maple. Private collection



Fig. 32. Bill of sale from John Goddard to Captain Anthony Low, 1755, ink on paper. Private collection



with his master and the prior generation. The key document is a marble-top pier table (fig. 31), with its bill of sale to Captain Anthony Low in 1755 (fig. 32). The boldly serpentine curves of skirt and leg are repeated on a small number of other Newport tables and chests, all with a French flavor.<sup>52</sup> An easy chair (fig. 33), with cabriole legs that could have come from Goddard's shop, is signed and dated "Gardner Junr/ Newport May/1758 W" (fig. 34).<sup>53</sup> Gardner Junior may refer to the man responsible for the chair's remarkable original upholstery.

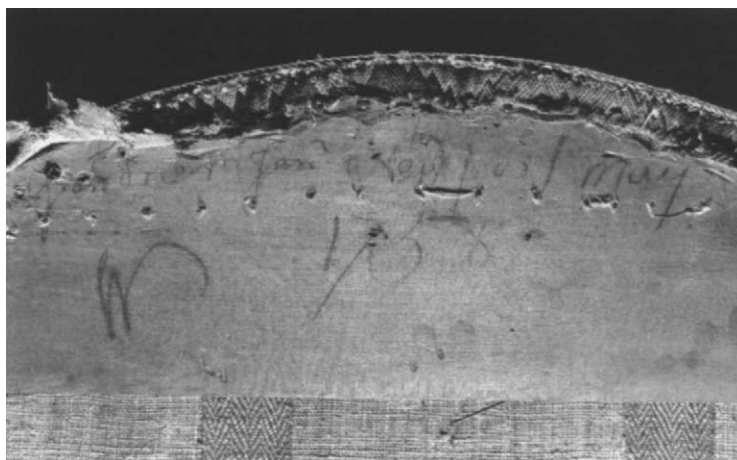
The 1760s and early 1770s were the high point of John Goddard's career. During that time his clientele included leading Newport merchants such as Aaron Lopez and Jabez Bowen, Christopher Champlin and James Atkinson. The "Mahogany Dining Table 4 foot—£4-4" and "Do Fly Tea Table—[£]3" enumerated in Goddard's 1774 bill to Atkinson have long been known and are among the key documented examples of Goddard's work.<sup>54</sup>

But most important was his association with the Brown brothers, fellow Quakers and the leading merchants of Providence. The relationship appears to have begun in 1760 with the commissioning, by the recently married John Brown (1736–1803), of a splendid suite of furniture for his new house on Water Street: a scalloped tea table, two corner chairs, two claw-foot tables, one tea table, and a dressing table.<sup>55</sup> The original bill (fig. 35) has recently been discovered in the Brown family papers.<sup>56</sup> The scalloped tea table and one of the corner chairs, among the most famous pieces

Fig. 33. Caleb Gardner, easy chair, 1758, walnut and maple. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. J. Insley Blair, 1950, 50.228.3



Fig. 34. Inscription on easy chair (fig. 33), graphite



of Newport furniture, survive in a house he built many years later, in 1786 (now the John Brown House of the Rhode Island Historical Society). The corner chairs are the fullest expression of Goddard's heavy Baroque style, first seen in the 1755 pier table. The 1760 scalloped tea table (fig. 36), identical to one Goddard made for Jabez Bowen in 1763, is the earliest known instance of the form, which is as close as Newport furniture ever got to the light and playful Rococo. The carving on the tea table's knees is similar in design to that on a high chest made the year before by John Townsend (cat. no. 8).

Fig. 35. Statement of account from John Goddard to John Brown, 1760, ink on paper. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island

1760/

John Brown of Providence to John Goddard D<sup>r</sup>

10 <sup>th</sup> 10 <sup>th</sup> 1760	To a Mahogany Scalloped Tea Table	£ 90 <sup>00</sup>	+
	To 2 D <sup>r</sup> Roundabout Chairs	£ 60 <sup>00</sup>	+
	To 2 D <sup>r</sup> Square Leaf & Clowfoot Tables	£ 40 <sup>00</sup>	+
12 <sup>th</sup> 1760	To D <sup>r</sup> Tea Table	£ 45 <sup>00</sup>	+
	To D <sup>r</sup> Compo Front Dressing Table	£ 25 <sup>00</sup>	+
	The above Recd:	£ 520 <sup>00</sup>	
	By Cash	£ 15 <sup>00</sup>	2
	By a Fashion Button	54 <sup>12</sup>	2
		£ 315 <sup>00</sup>	2

Rec<sup>d</sup> of John Brown Three Hundred Twenty Five Pounds  
Two Shillings in full of the above Recd:

N<sup>o</sup> B. 45 of the above Recd: is W<sup>o</sup> John Goddard  
Cant Smith an Nema under the Arm Brown

170  
475  
355  
150

Fig. 36. Attributed to John Goddard, scalloped tea table, 1763, mahogany and tulip poplar. Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, Gift of Henry Francis du Pont, 58.2148



John Brown's furniture took Providence by storm, and his siblings were quick to follow his lead. Brother Nicholas (1729–91) married in 1762, and shortly thereafter he too ordered furniture from Goddard. The evidence for this is hearsay, the irate comment by a third brother, Moses (1738–1836), in October 1763, when complaining to Goddard about not having received the furniture he had ordered for himself: "This you was to do, that is, Finish ye Work I wrote for ye first you did after my Brother's

Wife's furniture were done."<sup>57</sup> This anger had been triggered by Goddard's letter of June 20, 1763, in which he unwisely asked Moses to find out from Jabez Bowen, another client, about two "Case[s] of Drawers" he had ordered: "whither he means to have them different from what is common, as there is a sort which is called a Chest on Chest of Drawers & sweld. Front which are Costly as well as ornimental." This oft-quoted comment is one of the rare contemporary descriptions of furniture styles, here presumably referring to the block and shell.

In 1766 a West Indian client of Nicholas Brown and Co. had ordered an armchair of the best quality. It was late in delivery. In the draft of a letter to Mr. Bogman, the purchaser, to explain the delay, Nicholas wrote, "The Two Armd Chiar is not Done, we have it now making by the neatest workman in America, was in hoops to have it finished by this, but the Maker being Very Curious in Mahy. The Feet in Imitation of Eagles Claws & all the other parts in the Handsomest manner is the Reason of its not being Done."<sup>58</sup> If nothing else, this is proof that the Browns recognized Goddard's outstanding skill. At its best Goddard's furniture combines perfection with poetry.

Both the Goddard and Brown family names have long been associated with the monumental block-and-shell desks and bookcases which are among the great glories of Newport furniture. The strongest documentary evidence of Goddard's involvement is the inscription, on a secretary now at the Rhode Island School of Design, reading, "Made by John Goddard 1761 and repaired by Thomas Goddard his Son 1812." This attribution is plausible: Thomas certainly should have known what he was talking about. The desk is one of several that appear to be the product of one or more closely related shops. In a postscript to a letter to Nicholas Brown in 1766, Goddard writes: "I should be glad if thou or some of thy brothers and I could agree about a desk and bookcase which I have to dispose of."<sup>59</sup> It doesn't seem that they could, because the desks associated with the Brown family—each of the four brothers owned one—show an altogether different hand, or hands, from that evident in the signed piece.<sup>60</sup>

Goddard's superb custom furniture did not translate into great business success. He seems not to have been particularly good at either finance or management. In 1763, in response to Moses Brown's carping, he plaintively explained: "thou must have expected I should Engag'd work to keep my Boys Employ'd if it Should a little Retard thy work, for we must do so or we Should be out of Employment."<sup>61</sup> He was often late in delivering his wares, and it was a constant challenge for him to keep his workforce—at his death his shop had five workbenches—occupied.

Nor was Goddard's business immune to the devastation wrought by the British occupation of Newport which began in 1777. There were even rumors that Goddard was considering going off with the British. These were dispelled, in response to Moses Brown's query, by Thomas Robinson (Goddard's neighbor), who remarked that "his circumstances and that of his Family was a suffitiant bar to such a step."<sup>62</sup> Moses must have been reassured about Goddard's loyalty and over time offered a helping hand. During the summer of 1782 Goddard, in partnership with the cabinet-maker William Engs Jr., advertised in the *Providence Gazette* ready-finished as well as custom-order furniture "at their Shop on the wharf of Mr. Moses Brown." That was the last we hear of John Goddard prior to the announcement of his death in Newport on July 9, 1785. A notice in the *Newport Mercury* for August 28, 1786, declared the estate insolvent, a sad ending for a consummate craftsman.

## THE CHRISTOPHER TOWNSEND SHOP TRADITION

### *Christopher Townsend (1701–1787)*

Christopher Townsend married Patience Easton (1703–1789), a direct descendant of the original proprietors of Easton’s Point, in December 1723. He had made a good match that must have provided financial support to the young man as he started out. The couple’s first three children were girls, of whom only one, Mary (died 1782), is known by name; the next three were boys: John (1733–1809) and Jonathan (1745–1773) became cabinetmakers, and Christopher Jr. (1738–1809) became a clockmaker and engraver.

We have already seen that, by the mid-1730s, Christopher had a thriving cabinet shop, but that did not prevent him, in 1739, from assuming, as a “house joiner,” responsibility for the interior woodwork of the Colony House, designed by Richard Munday.<sup>63</sup> This must have been too prestigious an assignment—collaboration with leading housewrights, carpenters, and masons on Newport’s new town hall—to decline.

As a shop joiner, Christopher must have made a specialty of the desk-and-bookcase form. In addition to the one to Abraham Redwood’s specifications in 1738, he made one for merchant Isaac Stelle in 1746.<sup>64</sup> In the 1740s he was heavily involved in the export trade, particularly with New York, where his principal contact was the Quaker merchant Joshua Delaplaine. From time to time he traveled to New York.<sup>65</sup> In 1744 and 1745 Christopher supplied Delaplaine with both mahogany and maple desks for resale. In 1748, John Banister paid him £83–12–6 for “2 Cedar Desks, and Casing,” part of “Sundry Merchandise Ship’d on Board . . . the Sloop *Little Polly*, John Greene Master,” bound for Jamaica.<sup>66</sup> In 1762 he supplied Aaron Lopez with “one Superfine Curld Maple Desk in a Case” (the last phrase indicates that it was to be exported).<sup>67</sup> And in 1764 one Captain Peleg Bunker purchased from him a red cedar desk that he promised to pay for on his return from the West Indies.<sup>68</sup> And, of course, he made things other than just desks. In 1746 he was paid £61 for “one Case of Draws & one Tea Table of Mahogany Made for Mr. Thos. Moone of New York Mercht” (fig. 37).<sup>69</sup>

Christopher Townsend achieved considerable worldly success and left a much larger estate than did Job or other members of that branch of the family (some of these assets perhaps having come from his wife).<sup>70</sup> At his death, in addition to extensive real estate on Easton’s Point, the residual inventory of his possessions included

Fig. 37. Bill from Christopher Townsend to Thomas Moone of New York, March 20, 1746, ink on paper. Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island

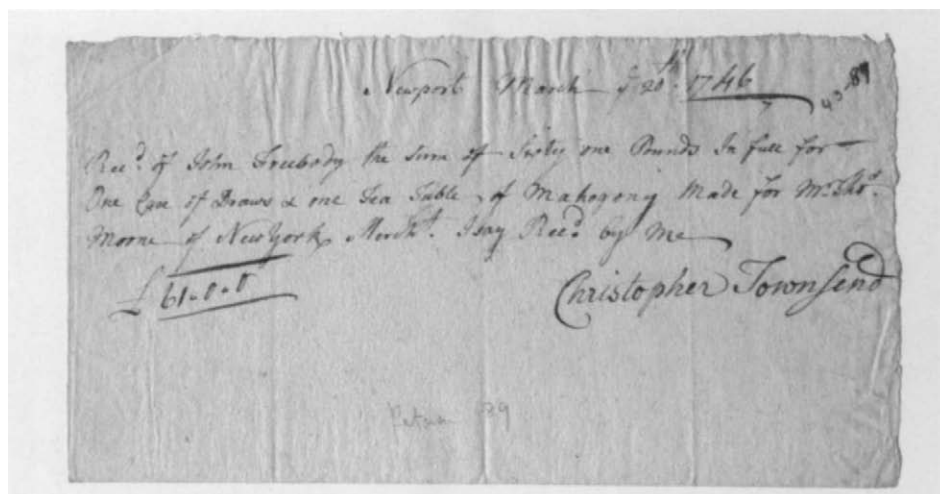


Fig. 38. Christopher Townsend, high chest, about 1750, walnut, mahogany, chestnut, white pine, and poplar. Private collection



Fig. 39. Inscription on high chest (fig. 38), graphite



financial instruments in the amount of £176 and possessions in the amount of £74. Specific bequests included considerable silver: two large and two regular porringers, a tankard, a cream pot, and one thousand Spanish milled silver dollars.

Christopher first wrote his will in 1773 (Appendix 3), a hearty seventy-two-year-old who had just been forcibly reminded of his own mortality by the untimely death, at the age of twenty-eight, of his son Jonathan. (All that we can glean of Jonathan's career as a cabinetmaker is that he made a large mahogany desk, which his father specified should go to his older brother Christopher Jr.) In the event, Christopher Sr. was to live another fourteen years. In 1786, after the death of his daughter Mary Wanton, he signed a codicil to his will redirecting the bequests that had been made to her. It was only in December 1787, at the age of eighty-seven, that he himself died.

Fig. 40. Christopher Townsend, desk and bookcase, about 1750, mahogany. Private collection



Fig. 41. Inscription on desk and bookcase (fig. 40), graphite

Christopher's furniture cannot be readily distinguished from that of his contemporaries. There are but two signed pieces, and they could hardly be more different. The first is a flat-top high chest with delicate cabriole legs ending in pointed pad feet (fig. 38), an absolutely characteristic example of the Newport Queen Anne style of the 1740s and very like the dressing table Job made for Samuel Ward in 1746 (fig. 25). On the bottom board of the upper case is Christopher's signature and the date 1748 (fig. 39), together with a later record of repair.<sup>71</sup>

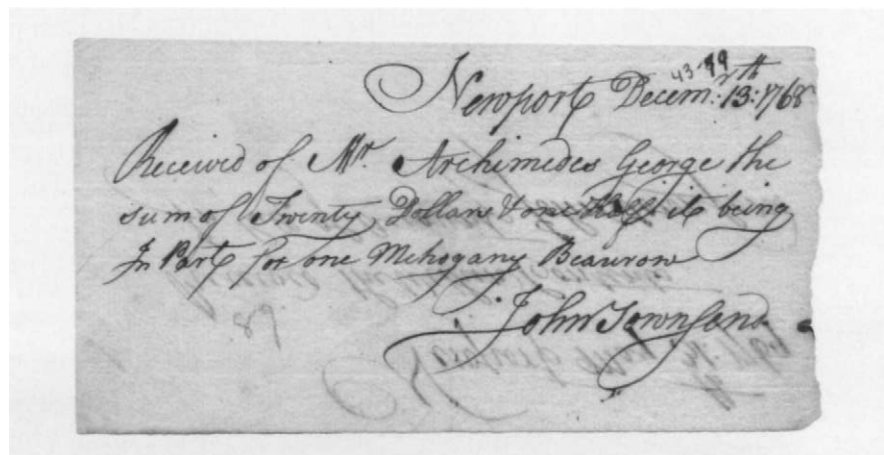
The second piece is altogether exceptional, a monumental desk and bookcase with a broken-arched pediment, two large shell doors, and silver hardware with the marks of Samuel Casey (about 1724–about 1780) of Newport; the secondary woods are all mahogany and the cabinetwork throughout displays the highest precision and refinement (fig. 40). “Made by Christopher Townsend” is written in pencil in large scale on the inside bottom of the uppermost large drawer (fig. 41). This piece is of an altogether different magnitude than the desks and bookcases routinely referred to in the records of either Christopher or Job. The elegance and precision of the workmanship and the proud declaration of authorship offer a foretaste of that of his more famous son John.

*John Townsend (1733–1809)*

In every ordinary sense John Townsend, like virtually all eighteenth-century American craftsmen, lived his life below the level of historical scrutiny. We have no pencil sketch, much less a portrait in oils, to show us what he looked like; no verbal description of him and no comments about him, by a contemporary. We have no diary, no letters, in which he might have written his thoughts and aspirations. We have only the most fragmentary of business records and the occasional reference to his holding public office. Indeed, the only documents that shed significant light on his life are the will he drew up in 1805 and the inventory of his estate that was prepared after his death four years later.<sup>72</sup> They show a man of considerable wealth, in real estate and in possessions; a man of method, meticulous in all his affairs, and precise in every detail; a man committed to his family; a man immensely proud of the furniture he made.

Indeed, the body of furniture — thirty-four pieces as of this writing — that John so methodically and proudly signed and dated over a period of forty-four years is the essential record of the man. This is the statement that he made for posterity and by which he must be judged. It is the altogether self-conscious record of a supremely accomplished master craftsman. All the pieces he identified as the work of his own

Fig. 42. Bill from John Townsend to Archimedes George, December 13, 1768, ink on paper. Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island





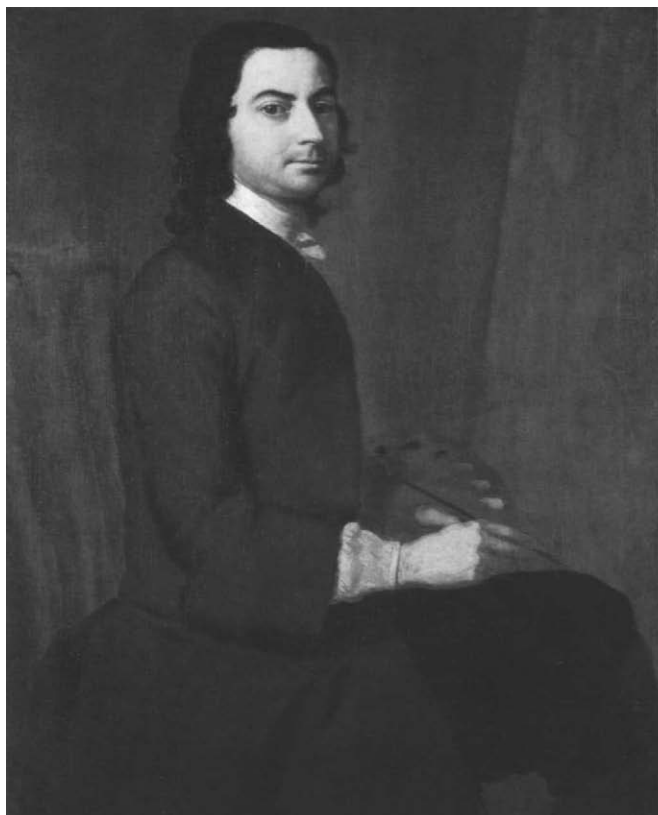


Fig. 43. Robert Feke, *Self-portrait*, about 1750–51, oil on canvas. Collection of the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island, Museum Painting Collection: 1947.4.1



Fig. 44. Robert Feke, *Mrs. Robert Feke*, about 1750–51, oil on canvas. Collection of the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island, Museum Painting Collection: 1947.4.2

hand have in common a fully developed form, a crispness and sharpness of design, a precision of execution, inside and out, and a preference for complex, labor-intensive methods of construction.<sup>73</sup> They are the work of a passionate perfectionist, constitutionally unable to cut corners or economize even in places that cannot be seen.

John Townsend was born on February 17, 1733,<sup>74</sup> the fourth child and first son of Christopher and Patience Easton Townsend. John doubtless followed the custom of apprenticeship in his father's shop, probably between about 1747 and 1754, when he came of age. He seems to have lost no time in setting up on his own, immediately engaging two housewrights to draft specifications for building him a house (fig. 19). On that document, which was never signed, he is already listed as "Joyner." In 1756, aged twenty-four, he proudly signed and dated a cabriole leg dining table (cat. no. 1), the first of the many masterful pieces he was so to document over a career spanning nearly fifty years. A rare instance of any surviving record of the manufacture of these special order pieces is Townsend's signed receipt for Mr. Archimedes George's partial payment for a mahogany bureau table (fig. 42).<sup>75</sup>

As the same time that Townsend was crafting custom orders, he was making generic cedar or maple furniture for the coastal trade. A telling illustration of this facet of every Newport cabinetmaker's life is Captain Peleg Bunker's 1764 agreement with John, dated just two weeks after he had made a similar arrangement with his father:

Newport Novembr. 15th. 1764. Received of John Townsend two red Cedar Desks in Cases @ One hundred & Seventy pounds old Tenor each & one maple Desk in Case @ fifty pounds also four Maple Tea Tables @ Twenty three pounds old Tenor Each in Cases also Fourteen Dolphin Cheeses @ Eight pounds after which

I promise to carry to the West Indies & their to dispose of to the best Advantage the Dangers of the Seas only excepted & remit the Neat [net] Proceeds thereof, in Molasses Coffee or Cotton Wool, unto said Townsend he allowing me one half of the profits that shall neat from the price of the said Goods it being in Lieu of Freight & Commissions. Peleg Bunker.<sup>76</sup>

On October 15, 1767, aged thirty-four, John married Philadelphia Feke (1743–1802), daughter of Robert Feke (1707–1752), the first American-born portrait painter of any note, and his wife Eleanor (1725–1804) (figs. 43, 44).<sup>77</sup> Feke had been born in Oyster Bay, Long Island, the same year that Solomon Townsend and his family, including six-year old Christopher, moved from that town to Newport.<sup>78</sup> Nothing is known about the artist's early years, but in 1741, in Boston, he painted his first major canvas, a portrait of Isaac Royall and his family. The next year he was in Newport, where he married Eleanor Cozzens, daughter of the Quaker Leonard Cozzens, Newport's leading tailor. Except for visits to Philadelphia in 1746 and Boston in 1748, he seems to have spent the decade in Newport, where he must have been acquainted with the Townsend clan. Some fifteen years after Feke's death, his daughter married the young cabinetmaker, but it is likely that he would have been comfortable in the Townsend household milieu.

Between 1769 and about 1785 John and Phila had six children. The first two were girls. Mary (1769–1856) was unmarried at the time of her father's death and inherited from him an extensive assemblage of family furniture, silver, and other household possessions. Sarah (1773–1803) died unmarried. The remaining four were boys, of whom at least three went to work in the family cabinet shop. John F.'s birth and death dates are not known, but he must have been the eldest. It was he who, in 1794, acknowledged payment of a bill due his father.<sup>79</sup> In 1804 he married Ann Easton, presumably a distant relative. In 1797 the second son, Solomon (about 1775–1821), acknowledged payment for cabinetwork on behalf of his father.<sup>80</sup> The third of John's sons was Christopher (1781–1801), who, if he served an apprenticeship in his father's shop, did not live to complete it. We know that Charles F. was born after 1784 because John, in the will he drew up in 1805, described him as not having reached the age of twenty-one.

His son Christopher's death at the age of twenty was a great blow to the sixty-eight-year-old John. It was then that he must have acquired a plot in the Edward Street Burying Ground in Newport and employed John Stevens III (1754–1817) of the renowned stonecutting shop of that name (established 1705 and still in business) to execute a simple slate headstone.<sup>81</sup> Christopher's stone was joined, in all-too-rapid succession, by those of his mother Philadelphia (Phila) in 1802 (fig. 45), his sister Sarah in 1803, and his grandmother Eleanor Feke in 1806. John himself died in 1809, and his headstone (p. 34), like all the others in the same row, simply gives his name, the year of his death, and his age. The capital letters spelling out the names of these five Townsends are carved in Caslon, the same font that was used on John's furniture labels.

In his early years John Townsend did not play much of a role in Newport public affairs. Twice, in 1765 and 1767, he was elected one of a dozen surveyors of highways. That was all. In 1777, early in the British occupation, Townsend and sixty-one other Newport citizens were briefly imprisoned on board the ship *Lord Sandwich* for refusing to sign a pledge of allegiance to the king. On October 27 Townsend and fellow Quaker Gideon Wanton petitioned General Robert Pigot, commander of His Majesty's Forces at Newport, for their release, claiming that "our desire was & still is

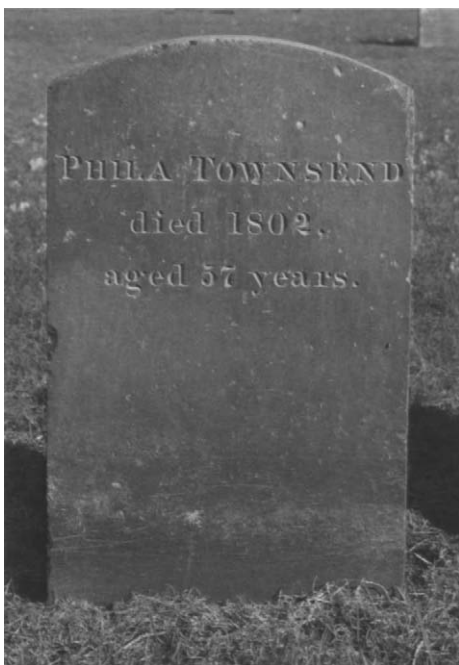


Fig. 45. Attributed to John Stevens III, headstone of Phila Townsend, 1802, slate. Edward Street Burying Ground, Newport, Rhode Island

so to conduct ourselves as becomes true subjects of this nation and consistant [sic] with the Religious principles we profess which is to be true to our King & live peaceable with all men.”<sup>82</sup> Three days later they were released. However, John’s devotion to king and country must have been sorely tested as he watched the very fabric of Newport being frayed during the three-year occupation.

With the arrival of the friendly French forces under General Rochambeau in 1780, everything changed, and John found himself drawn into public service. The Town Council resolved to celebrate the advent of the French with an illumination of the streets on July 12, and for this occasion they chose a committee, which included John Townsend, “to patrol the streets to prevent any damage arising from the fire and to preserve the peace of the town.” Townsend was also one of nearly sixty Newport citizens selected to billet the French officers in their own homes. His houseguest was navy captain De la Vicomte.<sup>83</sup>

John Townsend served as Town Treasurer between 1780 or 1781 and 1784.<sup>84</sup> The records of his administration do not survive, except for a copy of one of his entries, dated July 30 1781, which suggests a facility with numbers. It reads: “Agreeable to a Vote of this Town held this day I received five Orders of Mr. Samuel Freebody and Computed the Interest due thereon, Agreeable to the dates an[d] by said Vote Perfixed, And gave my Note in behalf of said Town as Town Treasurer for . . . £240-8-6 1/2./ A Copsy from my Book/John Townsend.”<sup>85</sup>

In those years of war and its aftermath, certainly more than when Job Townsend held the post, Town Treasurer was a burdensome position, one which was to cause John much anxiety. In February 1782, with the town penniless, “Mr. Samuel Carr of Exeter obtained a judgment and execution against Mr John Townsend of Newport as town treasurer of said town that the inability of said town was such that they could not raise money to discharge the same and the said town treasurer committed to gaol and there remains; and that detaining him was extremely detrimental to the town and of no advantage to said Carr. Therefore voted and recommended that the Sheriff liberate John Townsend as Town Treasurer and suffer him to go at large until the next session of the Assembly.”<sup>86</sup>

Over the following two years, because of Newport’s insolvency, Townsend was to spend a total of 122 days in prison. It was only in 1784 that the City Council awarded him £80 “in full satisfaction for his being impressed.”<sup>87</sup> Despite these war-related setbacks, all the evidence points to John Townsend having been a successful man of business. The taxes he paid were second only to those of his father.<sup>88</sup> At his death he had extensive landholdings; he left his daughter \$1200; and the objects listed in the inventory were valued at a total of \$1064.68.

The 1809 inventory of John’s estate (Appendix 4) listed six workbenches, but we know very little about who occupied them — that is, who, in addition to the master, was working in the shop. In the 1774 Newport census his household consisted of three males over the age of sixteen and one under, one female over sixteen and two under, and three black residents. The youngsters must have been Mary (aged five), Sarah (aged two), and John F. (birth date unknown). In addition to John, there were two unidentified adult males, who may have been live-in apprentices or journeymen.

In later years, of course, it is likely that John’s sons were employed in his shop. The sons would have begun as apprentices in the mid-1780s, after the dislocations of the war and with the introduction of furniture in the stop-fluted and Federal styles: assume that John F. was born about 1771, midway between Mary and Sarah, and that



Fig. 46. Benjamin Baker, tall clock case, 1772, mahogany. Old Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge, Massachusetts, 57.1.92

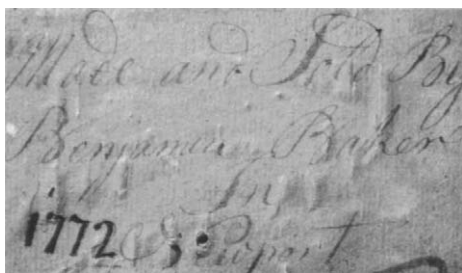


Fig. 47. Label on tall clock case (fig. 46), ink on paper

he began his apprenticeship, aged fourteen, about 1785; Solomon would have followed about 1789, Christopher in 1794, and Charles after 1798. The only proofs of their involvement are the two previously mentioned receipts of 1794 and 1797, signed by John Jr. (that is, John F.) and Solomon. We know nothing else about the children, except that at Solomon's death in 1821, his inventory listed "1 Chest Joiner's Tools."<sup>89</sup> The three resident blacks were documented in the 1774 census. One must assume that they were slaves. Some twenty-five percent of Newport families owned slaves, but only three percent had as many as three. Since Townsend did not operate a grand establishment like some of the merchant princes,<sup>90</sup> it is altogether plausible that one or more of them worked in the cabinet shop.

We do know, however, that a little-known cabinetmaker named Benjamin Baker (about 1735–1822), worked for Townsend. The pages devoted to him in Baker's surviving ledger records his making, during the second half of 1782, chair frames and coffins, as well as "conters [counters] & shelf in your shop."<sup>91</sup> Baker's association with John was probably of long standing. His name is written on one of the backboards of a bonnet-top high chest that has distinctive shell carving (the center of the shell is in the shape of a fleur-de-lis) modeled after that on a high chest signed by John in 1759 (cat. no. 8).<sup>92</sup> Baker is known to posterity by a single labeled object, a modest tall clock case (fig. 46). The neatly written label (fig. 47) gives Baker's name and the date 1772 and is similar to the manuscript labels favored by the Townsends. The case can be identified with an entry of the same year in Baker's ledger — "To [For a] mehoghenni Clock Case . . . [£]140-0-0" — for the clockmaker Thomas Claggett (about 1730–1797), son of William. Claggett signed a money-back warranty, to Abraham Brown, the clock's purchaser, which is also affixed to the clock case.<sup>93</sup> In June 1783 the sheriff seized Claggett's shop and put it up for sale at public auction "for the satisfaction of John Townsend of Newport, cabinetmaker,"<sup>94</sup> evidence that John Townsend himself must also have made cases for Claggett's clock movements.

Townsend's clientele can be identified in two ways: by documented objects that have provenances and by documentary references to his work for individuals. While a number of his documented pieces have traditional family histories (Appendix 5), identification of original owners is rarely certain. An exception is the block-and-shell chest Townsend made in 1792, on whose label is written "Sarah Slocums" and "November 20th 1792" (cat. no. 19). Given the presence of the owner's name and a specific date, a probable history can be developed: the piece was doubtless made for Sarah Slocum, the bans for whose marriage to Thomas Hammond were published on September 24, 1792.<sup>95</sup> In other instances, as for example the three labeled pieces that descended in the Champlin family until acquired by the Metropolitan Museum in 1927, there remain questions about who commissioned them. The pieces were made at different times over a period of twenty-five years and could have descended through various different lines to the last private owner (cat. nos. 18, 21, 32; figs. 3, 4).

The documentary record of John Townsend's clients currently consists of just thirteen names, including the United States Army (for coffins and close stools), three people who ordered only coffins, the clockmaker Thomas Claggett, and Peleg Bunker, a ship's captain whose only interest was venture cargo. The remaining group of seven demonstrates that Townsend's clientele included Anglicans (Christopher Champlin and Archimedes George) and Jews (Aaron Lopez), patriots (William Channing and Dr. Isaac Senter) and loyalists (Joseph Wanton). (All we know about Joseph Barker, the seventh man, is that he was a ship's captain.)

None of these men depended upon Townsend exclusively for all his cabinetmaking needs. For Captain Archimedes George, merchant mariner and a member of Trinity Church, John was the man to go to for costly custom furniture, but not for anything else. In December 1768 he paid Townsend \$20.50, “in Part for a Mahogany Beaurow” (fig. 42). Between 1767 and 1770 George purchased certain standard types of mahogany furniture—square tables, stand tables, and teaboards—from Job Townsend Jr; in 1771–1773 he turned to Samuel Vinson, a little-known maker, for repairs, for a bedstead, and for a mahogany desk. In 1781 he had Thomas Townsend make a coffin for his wife.

The most extensive record of furniture purchases for personal use in eighteenth-century Newport is the 1782–99 account book of Dr. Isaac Senter, surgeon general of Rhode Island, and president of the Society of the Cincinnati.<sup>96</sup> Senter was constantly buying new furniture, or having old furniture mended, throughout this period. The craftsman he employed most often was the cabinetmaker Walter Nichols. In addition, in the late 1780s, Joseph Vickery and Townsend Goddard each supplied pieces, among the most costly being two mahogany card tables, for £9-6-5, from Goddard. John Townsend’s name appears but once, in 1791, for a mahogany desk and bookcase at £22-4-0, nearly double the price of any other single piece in the accounts.

A similarly complex picture can be drawn from the extensive accounts of the great merchant Aaron Lopez (1731–1782). Constant Bailey and Benjamin Peabody routinely supplied him with ready-made furniture for the coastal trade, and in 1762 Christopher Townsend provided something special for export: “one Superfine Curld Maple Desk in a Case.” But during the 1760s he also did business with both John Townsend and John Goddard, ordering routine as well as custom work. Of the latter type, Townsend supplied eight mahogany chairs, at £40 each, in 1764, and twelve mahogany chairs and two mahogany tables, for a total of £608-12-00 in 1769.

The pieces of furniture John Townsend so carefully signed, and almost always dated, consist of a limited repertoire of elaborate and costly forms: four pieces with cabriole legs and claw feet (one high chest, one dining table, and two card tables), seven block-and-shell case pieces (one document chest, one desk, two tall clocks and three four-drawer chests), four stop-fluted pieces (one card and three Pembroke tables), and eleven inlaid tapered leg Federal-style tables (two dining, four Pembroke, and five card). This list demonstrates that John specialized in certain forms and over time adapted to changing fashions. Through his precise documentation Townsend exhibited a self-conscious sense of his own place in the history of cabinetmaking that is unique in the annals of American cabinetmakers. This group of exceptional pieces is examined in detail in the catalogue section of this publication.

Some idea of what else was made in John’s shop can be gleaned from a summary of all the known documentary references, mostly rather generic descriptions of items for the West Indies trade. In 1764 he made cedar and maple desks and desks and bookcases, a square maple table, a large teaboard, and mahogany chairs; in 1768, a mahogany bureau; in 1769, mahogany chairs and tables; in 1773, bottle boards and a large mahogany waiter; in 1774, a “Plain Fire Screen” and “Mahogany Card Table and Lincing”; in 1781, close stools; in 1781, 1791, 1794, and 1797, coffins; and in 1791 and 1802, mahogany desks and bookcases. The inventory taken upon his death in 1809 indicates he was at work on two easy-chair frames, chairs of walnut and mahogany, and bedposts of mahogany and cherry. He did not identify these mostly mundane pieces for posterity, nor can we do so today.

But what about other forms, for which there are neither signed examples nor documentary references? On the basis of the history of descent in his family and/or parallels in style and construction with documented examples, we can attribute a small number of cabriole-leg chairs (side and easy), bedsteads, and scallop-sided card and tea tables to his shop. What cannot, at this time, be associated with his shop are dressing tables, pier or slab tables, fly or tripod tables or stands, stop-fluted chairs, or Federal-style case furniture of any kind.

1. I want to thank Bernard Levy for having first brought this intriguing correlation to my attention.
2. Lovell 1991, pp. 54 and 55, in four genealogical charts, provides the most complete published genealogical tables of this branch of the Townsend family. Except where otherwise noted, the genealogical information given hereafter is from this source.
3. Failey 1976, pp. 192, 288.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
5. 1723: documents relating to Job's sale of land owned by his father in Oyster Bay; 1725: deed for Job's purchase of house on Easton's Point. Land Evidence, book 2, p. 86, NHS. See also Carpenter 1954, pp. 10–11.
6. Downing and Scully 1967, p. 63.
7. *Newport Mercury*, February 11, 1765, p. 3.
8. Garrett 1972, p. 38.
9. MS 703, NHS. Swan 1946, p. 230, describes it as an unidentified ledger. Moses 1984, p. 65, attributes it to Solomon Townsend but without explanation; he extensively excerpts it in appendix A-7, pp. 349–52.
10. Moses 1984, p. 65, attributes these accounts to Stephen Ayrault, and he gives extensive excerpts from them in his appendices A-8 (Christopher Townsend), p. 352, and A-9 (Job Townsend), pp. 352–54.
11. Moses 1984, p. 65, estimates that in 1737 Christopher purchased enough hardware to outfit nineteen desks, five high chests, three bureaus, and two tables.
12. Christopher Townsend to Abraham Redwood, February 4, 1738, MS 93–96, NHS.
13. Bjerkoec 1957, pp. 213–15.
14. Reported in the *Newport Mercury*, June 13, 1763, p. 3. Records of Job's earlier office holdings have not been found.
15. Reported in the *Newport Mercury*, January 21, 1765, p. 3.
16. Quoted in Garrett 1972, p. 38.
17. The full quotation is “Job Townsend of Newport testifieth that some time in the year 1737 he had some discord with Sueton Grant about a Desk & Bookcase that he had a making at William Robinson of Newport (Deceased), & said Sueton Grant said that said Robinson had used him very ill & that he had let him have Timber or Stuff & that he was to make a bookcase & Desk for it & that he could not get him to Finish it & I told him ye said Grant that I would Taulk to said Robinson about it & persuade said Robinson to finish it & if he would not finish it he would Sew him & get me to make one for him & after some time said Grant told me he was so Poor that he would get nothing if he did Sew him — would have me take it to finish — accordingly I went to said Robinson told him what Mr Grant & I was Taulking about Finishing said Desk & he made answer & said ‘Damn it what business have you with it — I know how to finish my own work myself.’” Archival record of lawsuit brought against Samuel Rhodes, Newport shopkeeper, by Sueton Grant, merchant. Quoted in Swan 1946, p. 230.
18. Monkhouse and Michie 1986, pp. 94–96, describe the desk and bookcase's condition and illustrate a similar but intact example.
19. Rodriguez Roque 1984, p. 38. The bill is in box 1, folder 49, Ward Family Papers, RIHS.
20. MS vol. 504, NHS.
21. Moses 1984, p. 248, attributes the 1750–60 accounts to Job Sr. Sloane 1987, p. 120, n. 19, and Willoughby 1999, p. 116, n. 1, attribute the ledger to Job Jr. The evidence in favor of Job Sr.'s authorship of the 1750–60 accounts is the following: the timespan is appropriate; the penmanship and the layout of the pages differ from those of the 1762–78 accounts, which are unquestionably by Job Jr.; it is unlikely that Job Jr. would, in an entry in 1752, make a loan to John Goddard, his elder by three years. In addition, the furniture appearing in the accounts of the 1750s includes many more high chests and chests of drawers than do the later accounts.
22. The 1750–60 ledger is transcribed in Willoughby 1999, pp. 121–133; the 1762–78 daybook is transcribed on pp. 133–61. The last entry of the latter (p. 141 in the ledger), referring to the sharpening of a saw on April 7, was followed, in Job E.'s hand, by “Job Townsend Died November the 5 1778 at 10 Clock in the morning.” Moses 1984 excerpted these same accounts in his appendices A-5 and A-6 (pp. 346–49).
23. Job Jr.'s taxes were negligible. In 1760 he paid nine shillings in taxes compared to his father's £2. But when on his own in 1767 he had no ratables at all compared to his brother Edmund who had £34. And in 1772 he paid two shillings compared to Edmund's fourteen.
24. According to Downing and Scully 1967, p. 76.
25. Brock Jobe in Jobe et al. 1991, pp. 126–30, no. 46, where fully described and interpreted, claims it the work of Job Sr. Willoughby 1999, pp. 113–14, attributes it to Job Jr. on the basis of the

- similarity of the signature to Job's accounts. The desk is also illustrated in Moses 1984, p. 257, fig. 6.3.
26. July 17, 1763: "Kathrine Gould Dt. to a Mohogony Case of Drawers [£]315," p. 77 in Job Townsend's daybook; and February 28, 1767: "Nicholas Anderrese Dt. to Job & Edmund Townsend To a Large Mohogony Desk [£]330," p. 96 (transcribed in Willoughby 1999, pp. 136, 144). Willoughby 1999, pp. 112–13, suggests that a three-shell chest bearing a faint chalk inscription that may read Job Townsend is the one in the accounts.
  27. The essential biographical facts about Edmund Townsend were first given in Karolik 1941, pp. 353–55.
  28. *Newport Mercury*, January 28, 1765 (quoted in Garrett 1972, pp. 39–40). Even earlier, in 1762 at age twenty-six, Edmund was chosen to administer an estate, that of a Captain John James.
  29. Unless Edmund relinquished the office to John Townsend for half a dozen years during and right after the war, it is hard to reconcile this claim of thirty-nine years as treasurer with the known fact of John Townsend's service in that public office in the early 1780s.
  30. "1765 Mr. Thos Vernon To Edmund Townsend Dr/April 29 To a Mahogony Coffin for your wife/6 Handles & 12 Screws [?] [£]70—/Newport July 29th 1765/Recd. The Contents in full for my Master Edmd Townsend/James Goddard." Bill of sale, box 43, folder 14, NHS; illustrated in Moses 1984, fig. 6.9.
  31. The invoice is in box 13, folder 10, p. 11, Aaron Lopez Papers, AJHS.
  32. To William Borden, August 12, 1784. See Karolik 1941, p. 354.
  33. Bills of sale, box 43, folders 13 and 14, NHS.
  34. *Newport Mercury*, June 10, 1794.
  35. Hipkiss 1941, pp. 68–69, no. 38. Another block-and-shell bureau table bears what may be Edmund's signature in chalk on the bottom board. See Moses 1984, figs. 6.11, 7.7.
  36. Swan 1946, p. 230.
  37. MSS 1140, folder 4, RIHS.
  38. In 1772 Thomas paid ten shillings to Edmund's fourteen and in 1775 six shillings eleven pence to Edmund's nine shillings three pence.
  39. Swan 1946, p. 230.
  40. The desk was for Ichapod Potter. Job E. Townsend daybook, p. 157, MS 504, NHS.
  41. Bill of sale, box 43, folder 14, NHS.
  42. According to Turner 1891; reprinted in *Newport Mercury*, October 2, 1915, p. 305.
  43. The name Thomas Townsend, inscribed in graphite on the underside of a drawer divider, has recently been discovered by Thomas Gentle on a block-and-shell bureau table of the Edmund Townsend type, at the U.S. Department of State. The piece is illustrated in Conger and Itsell 1991, pp. 134–35, no. 52.
  44. Daniel Goddard was one of Newport's leading shipbuilders. In 1747 John Banister paid him £4338–3–9 for the "Hull and Extra Work" of the ship *Patience*, which was fitted out by the joiners Nathaniel Langley and James Pitman and the carver William Allen. See John Banister daybook, vol. 1, 1746–50, MSS 919, RIHS.
  45. Garrett 1972, p. 34.
  46. There was more than one John Goddard in midcentury Newport, and published references to a ship captain in 1743, to high taxes paid in 1760, and to the hiring out of "a Negro boy" to Aaron Lopez in 1767 all appear to refer to other men bearing the same name.
  47. The desk, which is signed "Made by John Goddard of/Newport on Rhoadisland in Newengland/ in the year of our Lord 1745," is catalogued in Rodriguez Roque 1984, pp. 56–59, no. 26.
  48. Job Townsend daybook, p. 97, MS 504, NHS. The Goddard references appear in the transcription in Willoughby 1999, pp. 123, 144, 146.
  49. Series 2, box 12, folder 10, Aaron Lopez Papers, AJHS.
  50. The Goddard family bible, quoted in Swan 1950, p. 448, lists all of John Goddard's children by name and date of birth: Daniel 1747, Solomon 1748, Townsend 1750, Mary 1752, Rebecca 1754, John 1755, Catharine 1757, John II 1758, Job 1760, Henry 1761, Henry II 1762, Stephen 1764, Thomas 1765, Benjamin 1766, Edmond 1767, and Susanna 1769.
  51. John Banister daybook, vol. 1, 1746–50, p. 288, MSS 919, RIHS.
  52. This group of pieces has been thoroughly examined in Zea 1999.
  53. See Heckscher 1985, pp. 122–24, 366, no. 72.
  54. Illustrated in Carpenter 1954, nos. 9, 79, and in Moses 1984, figs. 4.6, 4.7.
  55. John Brown's activities as a patron are expertly recounted in Cooper 1973.
  56. My thanks to Leslie Keno, of Sotheby's, for sharing this discovery prior to its publication in the catalogue for the January 22, 2005, sale.
  57. Moses Brown to John Goddard, October 10, 1763, box 1c, folder 5, Moses Brown Papers, RIHS.
  58. Draft dated June 20, 1766, box 357, folder 7, Brown Family Business Papers, John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.
  59. John Goddard to Nicholas Brown, October 3, 1766, box 357, folder 6, Brown Family Business Papers, John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.
  60. That owned by John is at Yale; that by Nicholas is in a private collection; that by Joseph (now attributed to Providence) at the Rhode Island Historical Society; and that by Moses was lost in a fire. For the complex story of the six-shell desk and bookcases, see Jobe 2001.
  61. John Goddard to Moses Brown, October 12, 1763, box 1c, folder 5, Moses Brown Papers, RIHS.

62. Quoted in Isham 1927, p. 17.
63. Downing and Scully 1967, p. 63. Beckerdite 2000, pp. 3–10, hypothesizes that Townsend may have previously worked on the interior of Trinity Church (1715–30) and the Sabbatarian Meeting House (1725–30).
64. “Sept. 1746 By one Desk and Book Case [£]65”. Isaac Stelle ledger, 1741–64, p. 24, MS 496, NHS.
65. In 1740 Delaplaine wrote Newport Quaker Samuel Holmes, “hoping this may find thee in better health than Christopher Townsend infomed us thou wast in when he left those parts.” Quoted in Beckerdite 2000, p. 29, n. 13. Beckerdite believes that the visits were related to attendance at the New York Men’s Monthly Meeting.
66. John Banister daybook, vol. 1, 1746–50, p. 270, MSS 919, RIHS.
67. Box 13, folder 2, p. 11, Aaron Lopez Papers, AJHS.
68. Public Notary Records C#00481, vol. 7, 1758–69, pp. 649–50, Rhode Island State Archives, Providence, Rhode Island.
69. Bill of sale, box 43, folder 13, NHS.
70. In 1760 Christopher paid £2 in taxes, the same as his brother Job and son John. In 1767 he had rateable property valued at £150, compared to son John who had £105 and John Goddard who had none.
71. The high chest has been widely published, beginning in 1961 (*Antiques* 79 [May 1961], pp. 450–51). The signature and the date 1748 appear to have been written at that time and not by the restorer Taylor (?) who added his name in 1786. The upper and lower sections appear to belong together even though they were clearly once separated.
72. Newport Probate Records, vol. 4, pp. 600, 625.
73. With the exception of a plain fall-front desk, with a printed label, that has just come to light. Sotheby’s, New York, January 21, 2005, lot 1193.
74. Friends’ Records of Births and Deaths, 1638–1812, p. 79, Ms vol. 822, NHS. See also Cornelius 1928, p. 72.
75. Receipt, box 43, folder 13, NHS.
76. Public Notary Records C#00481, vol. 7, 1758–69, p. 649, Rhode Island State Archives, Providence, Rhode Island.
77. The portraits were inherited by John and Phila Townsend and descended through their son Solomon and the Bullock and Sayles families. Provenance, prepared by Paul Nicholson, in files of the RIHS.
78. Smith 1946, p. 19, claims that one of Robert’s ancestors had married a Townsend of Oyster Bay.
79. “September 29, 1794. Samuel Freebody to John Townsend Dr/To a Mahogany Coffin for your son £3-15- . . . /Received payment in behalf of my Father/John Townsend, Jr.” Box 43, folder 13, NHS.
80. “The estate of Oliver Dursee to John Townsend Dr . . . 1798 Septemr 5th/To a Mahogany Coffin for himself [£]14- /Receiv’d the above in full in behalf of m Father Solomon Townsend.” Box 43, folder 14, NHS.
81. My thanks to Robert Emlen for this attribution.
82. MSS vol. 15, p. 451, RIHS.
83. A complete list of the billeted officers is given in Simpson 1983, pp. 61–63.
84. The *Newport Mercury* for June 8, 1782, published the results of the annual election of town officers held on June 4, which included John Townsend as Town Treasurer.
85. Box 43, folder 13, NHS.
86. Quoted in Swan 1946, p. 295.
87. Town and Council Records, 1780–1802, entry for July 1, 1784, NHS.
88. In 1760, aged twenty-eight, he paid the same taxes as his father and uncle; in 1767 the amount of his ratables (£105) was second only to that of his father (£150); and thereafter he paid between two and three times the amount paid by Edmund Townsend, his nearest cabinetmaking competitor. See also note 70.
89. Quoted in Garrett 1968, p. 393.
90. Crane 1992, p. 58. According to the 1774 census, of 1590 families in Newport, 460 had slaves: 222 had one slave, 89 had two, and 55 had three.
91. For Baker, see Carr 2004, where the account book (MS 1904, NHS) is transcribed in full.
92. The high chest, now owned by the Newport Restoration Foundation, is illustrated in Carr 2004, p. 46, where a dressing table, at the Preservation Society of Newport County, with a recently discovered Baker signature, is also illustrated. Moses 1984, fig. 3.110. Another Baker inscription has recently been discovered on a cabriole-leg dressing table also owned by the Newport Restoration Foundation.
93. For the full story of this clock, see Cheney and Zea 1992, pp. 14–15, 81, 163.
94. Land Evidence, book 2, pp. 344–45, Town Hall, Newport, quoted in Swan 1946, p. 295.
95. See Christie’s, New York, sale cat., June 18, 1998, lot 151.
96. Ott 1969. A chronology of all Senter’s purchases is given on pp. 8–9.





## 5. Observations on John Townsend's Cabinetwork

### SIGNATURES AND LABELS

Between 1756 and 1800 John Townsend signed his name to more than thirty pieces of furniture of his own making (thirty-four pieces at the last count, including two new discoveries in 2004); to twenty-four of these he added the date of manufacture.<sup>1</sup> These signatures—either inscribed on the wood itself or written or printed on a paper label—document a remarkable body of work, securing for John Townsend a special place in the history of American cabinetmaking. And this is precisely what Townsend intended. It has been suggested that the labels were simply advertisements, mostly placed on furniture destined for the West Indies or points between, to promote the shop's business.<sup>2</sup> Nothing could be farther from reality. The signed examples are, virtually without exception, pieces of the highest quality, not generic objects for the export trade. And Townsend's habit of adding the date suggests an acute historical awareness. These labels document the joiner's legacy.

John Townsend was the only Rhode Island joiner to make a lifelong, albeit sporadic, habit of marking his work. For all the other members of the Townsend clan it seems to have been some sort of rite of passage to sign a single masterwork and then leave all other pieces unsigned. John signed his pieces in two ways, the early ones in pencil (graphite) on the wood itself; the late ones with paper labels, either handwritten or printed in ink. (Perhaps we should think of them as autographs.) The former method must have been inspired by his father's signature, written large on the center bottom of the uppermost of the large drawers of a magnificent desk and bookcase (fig. 41).

The first piece John is known to have signed, when he was but twenty-four, is a large and handsome claw-foot dining table (cat. no. 1): on the underside of the fixed top board he wrote, in a bold but hardly refined script, "John Townsend/1756". He also wrote his name, as well as other indecipherable words, on the side rails. In these



Fig. 51. John Townsend, graphite inscription on card table, 1762 (cat. no. 2)

Opposite: underside, John Townsend, circular card table, 1796 (cat. no. 42)



Fig. 52. John Townsend, handwritten label, 1765, ink on paper (cat. no. 18)



Fig. 53. John Townsend, example of first printed label, 1786, ink on paper (cat. no. 32)

early years Townsend was experimenting with how best to declare his authorship of exceptional objects. Thus he signed a claw-foot card table (cat. no. 2) twice: “John Townsend 1762” on the medial brace (fig. 51) and (to be sure a future viewer would know whence he came?), “John Townsend Newport 1762” on the back rail. Again, on what may be his first block-and-shell case piece, a document cabinet of about 1760 (cat. no. 16), he signed his name twice, on the bottom board and on the side of one drawer. But it was in 1759 that Townsend gave his bravura performance. He treated the bottom of one of the large drawers of a high chest as if it were an oversize sheet of paper. On it he wrote, with a great flourish and youthful bravado, but now in a highly refined hand: “No. 28/Made By/John Townsend/Newport/1759” (cat. no. 8). These early pieces show John’s already strong sense of his own exceptional talents and his compelling need to declare his authorship of certain pieces.

In 1765 John Townsend chose a significantly different way to document two magnificent block-and-shell pieces (fig. 52): he pasted elegant paper labels, written in a neat copperplate hand, on the drawer bottoms. The placement and the message derive from his 1759 high chest, but the paper label seems to have been inspired by the example of his uncle Job. There is a desk and bookcase, stylistically datable to the 1750s, that bears, inside the prospect door, a neat rectangular paper label upon which is written, in an elegant copperplate hand, “Made by Job Townsend in Newport” (fig. no. 24). This is the only known label by Job and is the earliest of the copperplate-style examples found on Newport furniture. Its rectangular shape, simple line border, and large copperplate script follow the engraved nameplates attached by William Claggett (1696–1749), Newport’s leading clockmaker, to the brass dials of many of his tall clocks. Claggett, who was born in Wales, came to Boston about 1708, and moved to Newport in 1716 where he achieved prominence as a merchant and author as well as clockmaker.<sup>3</sup> In 1734 Claggett bought tools (files and chisels) from the same source that supplied Job with furniture hardware, including in 1737 of clock case hinges.<sup>4</sup> Claggett lived at 16 Bridge Street, just a few doors east of the Townsend enclave, and it is altogether plausible that Job would model his single “advertisement” upon that of his distinguished and slightly older neighbor.

Job’s two younger sons, Edmund and Thomas, are also each known for a single piece of furniture with a similar, formal ink-scripted paper label: Edmund’s centered



Fig. 54. John Townsend, example of second version of printed label, 1797, ink on paper (cat. no. 45)

inside the top drawer of a four-shell bureau table of the best sort (fig. 28), Thomas's centered inside the top drawer of the lower section of a chest-on-chest, also of the best sort (fig. 30). It is tempting to believe that each of these labels, proclaiming the maker and his place of work, was meant to memorialize the craftsman's coming of age and completing his apprenticeship with a masterwork. But the facts do not bear it out. Edmund reached his majority in 1757, which predates by eight years his first documented block-and-shell piece. Thomas turned twenty-one in 1763, but the chest-on-chest in question is dated 1772. The specific occasions for these formal statements remain obscure.<sup>5</sup> An even more significant unanswered question, however, is why John was never to use such a label again; why, with one possible exception, it would be more than twenty years before he signed anything else at all.<sup>6</sup>

John must have stopped making household furniture with the British occupation of 1777, only to begin again sometime during the mid-1780s. He then regularized his identification system by acquiring paper labels with a printed text, which he pasted on certain of his pieces. These first printed labels read: "MADE BY/JOHN TOWNSEND/NEWPORT." The typeface is Caslon, a font designed in 1734. Each line was set in type which was then fixed.<sup>7</sup> Seven pieces bearing the identical letterpress label are known. Of these, three are block-and-shell case pieces carrying on the Baroque furniture fashions of the 1760s, and four are tables with straight stop-fluted legs in an early iteration of the emerging Neoclassical style. The labels on the former are dated 1789, 1792, and 1793. That on one of the latter (cat. no. 32; fig. 53) is dated 1786 and has a double line border, added in ink, a feature also found on one other table (cat. no. 35). These labels are eloquent evidence that Townsend continued to make his traditional product line even as he accommodated changing fashions.

By 1793, apparently in concert with his earliest furniture in the fully developed Federal style, John started using a second version of the printed-paper label. It reads "MADE BY/JOHN TOWNSEND,/NEWPORT."; several elements distinguish it from the earlier version: the "B" of "by" is enlarged (that is, capitalized); there is a comma after "Townsend" and a period after "Newport"; and the "S" in "Townsend" is slightly raised. Thirteen examples of this label are known, ten of which bear manuscript dates, added by John himself, ranging from 1793 to 1797 (fig. 54).<sup>8</sup> In different impressions there is considerable variation in the spacing between the lines.

Two other pieces of furniture, both recognizable as the products of John's shop, bear markings of a different kind. A plain-front Newport desk, a type made in great numbers for export, bears the block letters "I T," chiseled into the bottom board.<sup>9</sup> On the inside of the back rail of the second, a Federal Pembroke table (cat. no. 46), are chiseled the same initials and the date 179[-] (the last digit has been cut away), together with a large flowing *A*, a favorite lettering code of John's. Presumably these are among John's latest works.<sup>10</sup>

Lockwood mentioned the existence of labeled pieces in 1926, and in 1928 Cornelius illustrated two of them, both of the first printed variety. Ormsbee, in 1930, was probably the first to illustrate the second printed variety.<sup>11</sup> It is an indication of the high regard in which John Townsend's work is held that his printed labels have, over the last fifty years, inspired a number of modern copies. The first fake Townsend label was published in 1939: a copy of the second printed label type pasted on the back of one of the drawers of a typical Massachusetts block-front chest of drawers.<sup>12</sup> An identical label is pasted to the backboard of a looking glass that has been long considered a part of the Townsend oeuvre.<sup>13</sup> On the replica labels, the lettering is more even, there is no period after Newport, and there is a dark stain bordering the sheet of paper.<sup>14</sup>

## WOODS

### *Primary woods*

Mahogany was the wood of choice for John Townsend and the other great Newport cabinetmakers. For all their best, bespoke, pieces they used it joyously, extravagantly, and seemingly without regard to economy. After all, it was the perfect material: easily sawn and carved but strong and stable and, most important of all, rich in color and texture. It is no surprise that all of John's signed or labeled pieces are of this wondrous wood.

The singular importance of mahogany to the Newport joiners is signaled in their wills. Christopher Townsend (1773) left his son John "all my Mahogany and other Shop Joiner Stock."<sup>15</sup> John Goddard (1785) left his wife "all my Stock of Mahogany and other stuff to be worked up."<sup>16</sup> The other woods were not worth naming. A cabinetmaker's supply of seasoned mahogany was his most important physical business asset. During much of the second half of the century, each year the Town of Newport elected a number of men as "Viewers of Joiners Lumber," tacit acknowledgment of the importance of the industry and the need to verify the quantity and quality of imports. Among the viewers in 1764 were Job Townsend Jr. and his brother-in-law John Goddard.<sup>17</sup> In February 1769 Goddard and another brother-in-law, Edmund Townsend, measured 18,409 feet of mahogany for the great merchant Aaron Lopez;<sup>18</sup> in 1787 Edmund measured fourteen mahogany logs, comprising 2,271 feet, for Christopher Champlin (eight years later the latter was elected a viewer).<sup>19</sup>

Mahogany, which came exclusively from the West Indies, was readily available in Newport by the mid-1740s, but it was very costly compared to native New England hardwoods. In 1745 Christopher Townsend supplied New York merchant Joshua Delaplaine with two desks, one of mahogany for £6-5-0, the other of maple for £2-5-0.<sup>20</sup> In 1746 Job Townsend sold Samuel Ward two tea tables, one of mahogany for £8-10-0, the other of maple for £2-10-0.<sup>21</sup> In 1762 Job charged £240 for a mahogany desk and £80 for a maple one.<sup>22</sup> The price differential was less pronounced in Providence, where in 1756 a stand table could be had in mahogany for £22, in black

walnut for £18, and in maple for £15.<sup>23</sup> The lower price of Providence mahogany may indicate that it was not of the highest grade. The densest, darkest, and heaviest mahogany came from San Domingo and Cuba and Jamaica, and was known as San Domingo or Island mahogany (*Swietenia mahogany*). It commanded a steep premium over the softer wood, lighter in color and in weight, from the Gulf of Honduras, known as Bay or Honduras mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*).<sup>24</sup>

The logistics and the magnitude of the mahogany industry are suggested by a letter of April 24, 1764, from one William Cahoon to Captain Oliver King Warner of the ship *Britannia*, about his “Order from my Logwood Works in Irish Creek in the Bay of Honduras the full amount of One hundred Tons of unshifted Logwood which Quantit was Cutt by your Negro Man Named Newport & there lies Ready for you or your Order, And for the taking of which this shall be your Sufficient Authority.”<sup>25</sup>

For his best pieces John Townsend preferred the more costly Island mahogany. In some of them the wood has such distinctive grain patterns that it may be identifiable time after time in his work. For example, an allover “shredded wheat” pattern is noticeable on the splat-back of a chair (cat. no. 13), the skirt of a card table (cat. no. 2), and the skirt of a high chest (cat. no. 10). Are these pieces all from one log? Again, there are several pieces associated with John Goddard all made of a dense purplish wood often including a section of lighter sapwood.<sup>26</sup>

While they did not deem woods other than mahogany worthy of mention in their wills, the Newport cabinetmakers kept supplies of native hardwoods for their less expensive work. The materials of choice for venture cargo furniture were maple and red cedar. Of the many desks and tables recorded in the John Cahoon account book (1749–60), all those made of cedar and two thirds of those of maple were for export.<sup>27</sup> The latter were sometimes stained to look like mahogany. A desk (Milwaukee Art Center) bearing Job Townsend’s signature is of maple, originally stained, with a mahogany writing interior.

Even the John Townsend shop fashioned less expensive, ready-made furniture from cheaper materials as speculative pieces for the export market. In 1763–64, in addition to eight mahogany chairs (£320), John sold Aaron Lopez a maple chest (£40); that same year he sold Captain Peleg Bunker, for shipment to the West Indies, “2 red cedar desks in cases” at £170 each, a “maple desk” for £50, and four maple tea tables at £23 each.<sup>28</sup> At his death John’s estate included, in addition to much mahogany furniture, sixteen black walnut chairs or chair frames, four cherry tree bed posts, and fifty feet of cherry tree.

### *Secondary woods*

Secondary, or interior, woods were all locally available species. The Newport makers favored soft maple, chestnut, tulip poplar, and white pine. John Townsend used them all, for the most part being rigorously consistent about what wood he used where. From the beginning John employed soft maple (*Acer saccharinum*) in constructing the frames of tables. On his earliest documented piece, the 1756 dining table (cat. no. 1), he experimented with red oak (*Quercus borealis*) for the inner frame and cross-braces, together with soft maple for the outer, swing rails. Thereafter, in the framing (rails and braces) of almost every table he signed or labeled over the next forty years, he used maple exclusively. The only exceptions are the outer back rails of two pairs of 1794 card tables (cat. nos. 40, 41), which are mahogany, and the front rails of his round card and dining tables (cat. nos. 42–44), which are laminated white pine with a

mahogany veneer. In his case pieces, by contrast, maple plays only a minor role. It is not present at all in the early works (1759–65), and in the later ones its use is limited to the subtops of chests and bureau tables, which are, in effect, large versions of the cross-braces of tables.

The soft maple employed by Townsend and others in Newport has the distinction of being the only wood used in eighteenth-century American furniture that was consistently subject to insect infestation. The visual evidence is an all-over pattern of small round holes. Particularly extensive instances of this are found in three of John Townsend's autograph tables (cat. nos. 1, 3, 32).

John's first and most consistent use of chestnut (*Castanea dentate*), beginning in 1762 (cat. no. 2), was for his distinctive finely cut and beveled glue blocks. The only exceptions to this rule are the vertical corner blocks of mahogany on some Federal tables (cat. no. 41). He also preferred chestnut for drawer bottoms and for the slides or runners for drawers in tables. In his later work he sometimes used chestnut for the back and bottom boards of chests, desks, and clocks.

John Townsend made extensive use of that characteristic American secondary wood, tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), employing it exclusively on occasion. For the two masterworks of 1765, the block-and-shell desk and chest (cat. nos. 17, 18), he employed tulip poplar, for back and bottom boards in tandem with white pine. Thereafter, that wood appears principally as drawer linings (sides and back), in conjunction with chestnut bottoms. In comparison to other Newport makers, his use of the ubiquitous New England white pine (*Pinus strobes*) was sparing, more frequent in his early case pieces than in the later ones. He preferred it to chestnut for the bottom boards of chests and desks.

## HARDWARE

The eighteenth-century cabinetmaker used furniture hardware made of iron or brass: hinges for the folding tops of tables, the fall fronts of desks, and the doors of tall clocks; handles and knobs to open drawers, large and small; locks to secure drawers and doors; screws, nails, and brads as fasteners; and, of course, the highly polished ornamental brass plates, behind drawer handles and in front of keyholes, that commanded pride of place on the facades of great case furniture. The "handles" and "scutcheons" played an important supporting role in the visual effect of pieces fashioned of unrelieved dark mahogany. They provided highlights, a respite from a monochrome palate. And John Townsend, with his refined design sensibilities, must have considered the choice and placement of them very carefully.

Except for his purchases of hinges, nails, and sundries from the merchant Samuel Fowler in 1786/87,<sup>29</sup> when and from whom John Townsend acquired his furniture hardware is not recorded. However, his relationships with his suppliers were probably not much different from those of his father and uncle, Christopher and Job, back in the 1730s. One of their sources was an unidentified merchant whose account book for 1733/34 documents how each of the Townsends, several times a month on an as-needed basis, would purchase anything from "5 oz. Brads 6/3" (Christopher on August 27) to "8 handles 9/4, 5 scutcheons 4/2, 6 brass knobs 2/4, 1 pair hinges 20, 1 lock 4/9, 1 dozen screws 8, 1 small scutcheon 4, 1 small lock" (Job on September 11).<sup>30</sup> The latter, totaling £2-1-7, was the full complement of hardware to fit out a fall-front desk. Between 1736 and 1740 the brothers followed a similar pattern of hardware

purchases from Henry Ayrault.<sup>31</sup> In his will Christopher left John “all my Desk furniture which shall remain after the said New desks which I have by me shall be finished.”

In his choice of ornamental brass hardware, as in his furniture design, John Townsend demonstrated a stylistic development over time. Virtually all hardware was imported from England, and in the early years of his career the selection from which he could make his choice must have been quite limited. By the 1760s, however, colonial merchants could browse through the trade catalogues of the Birmingham hardware manufacturers, with engraved illustrations of all manner of metalwork, and order what they thought would sell locally.<sup>32</sup>

There are too few examples to discern a pattern in the brasses chosen for John’s earliest case pieces, the handful that can be dated between about 1759 and 1765. The brasses on the 1759 high chest (cat. no. 8) and the 1765 block-and-shell desk (cat. no. 17) are replacements, leaving but two autograph examples with their original hardware. Those on the first, the document chest (cat. no. 16), are small, generic early variants of Rococo designs, not unlike those on the Metropolitan’s unsigned early bureau table (cat. no. 23). Those on the second, the 1765 chest (cat. no. 18), are somewhat larger and later in style. The tightly contained scrolls and curves seem particularly well suited to the compact design of the piece, but John never again used that model.<sup>33</sup> This escutcheon pattern, however, appears consistently on bureau tables associated with the Edmund Townsend shop (fig. 10).

At some point, probably in the late 1760s, Townsend made a conscious decision about which types of brasses belonged on which types of furniture. He selected two Rococo escutcheon patterns, both large and boldly scalloped. The first, distinguished by a stepped-pyramid motif in the top center, was used almost exclusively on his flat-front case pieces: on all the high chests (cat. nos. 9, 10), on all but one of the chest-on-chests, and on seven of the thirteen flat-front desks currently assigned to him.<sup>34</sup> This model is also found, not infrequently, on Boston-made furniture of the 1770s and 1780s. The second pattern, also large and boldly scalloped with a complex scrolled outline, was the choice for a whole series of John’s great four-shell bureau tables (cat. nos. 24–27). The scallop design can be distinguished from similar available patterns solely by the flat edges pierced by circular openings that flank the top center; this element matches matches an illustration (plate 72, no. 493) in a Birmingham trade catalogue (fig. 55).

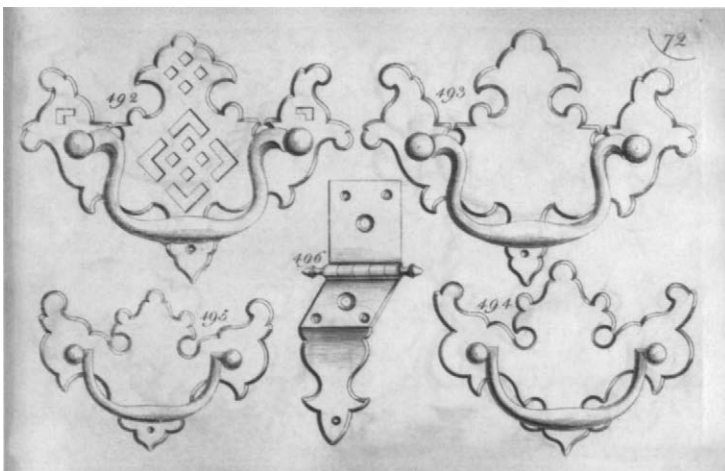


Fig. 55. Furniture hardware, *Sample Book of Brass Ornaments for Furniture*. Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts

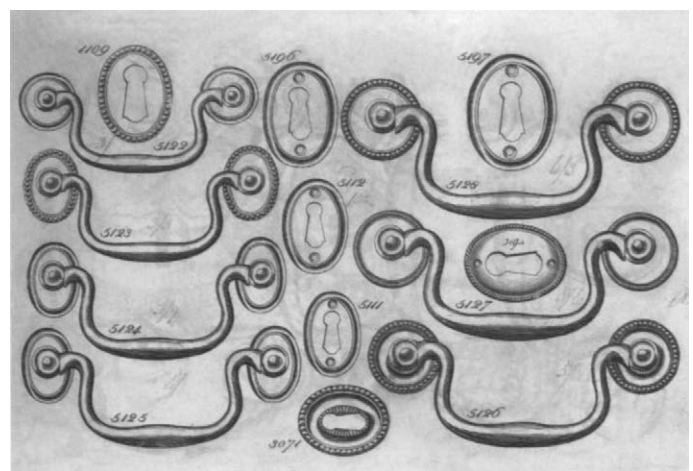


Fig. 56. Furniture hardware, *Sample Book of Domestic Hardware*. Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts



The illustration to its left, no. 492, matches the brasses on a desk bearing John Goddard's name.<sup>35</sup> That two designs on the same page should both match hardware on Newport pieces suggests that this particular catalogue was available to a Newport merchant.

Sometime in the late 1780s, after the resumption of trade with England and the introduction of a Neoclassical sensibility, John stopped using a single large Rococo escutcheon plate, turning instead to pairs of small circular brass rings, one encircling each handle post (cat. nos. 32–35, 38–41). These he used on all his stop-fluted and Federal style tables, as well as on some block-and-shell chests, chest-on-chests, and desks. (Unlike the florid Rococo escutcheons, these never went out of fashion and most survive in situ.) This popular pattern appeared, with minor variations, in a number of hardware trade catalogues, among them fig. 56.

John Townsend is not known to have commissioned custom hardware, but his father did. For a particularly grand desk and bookcase (fig. 40), he turned to Samuel Casey (about 1724–about 1780) of Newport for silver hardware. In his will George Champlin (died 1809) left his wife's niece Ruth Channing, "all my household furniture of every kind except my Mahogany Desk with Silver furniture," which he left instead to his wife's nephew Edward Hazard.<sup>36</sup>

## CONSTRUCTION

John Townsend made furniture and ran a cabinet shop for virtually the entire second half of the eighteenth century. During that time he successfully adapted to dramatically changing times — politically (American independence), economically (Newport's precipitous decline as a mercantile hub), and stylistically (Neoclassicism's supplanting of the Baroque in furniture design). But his shop practices and methods of construction remained remarkably constant. Much of what he did was standard eighteenth-century practice and customary in Newport, habits presumably learned in his father's shop. In a number of respects, however, he devised his own idiosyncratic construction methods, which are tantamount to a signature.

The essential qualities of all of Townsend's work are neatness and refinement, precision and elegance, and fastidious attention to detail and finish. These are as evident in the interior as on the exterior of every piece that we can identify. He seems to have sought perfection compulsively; his hallmarks, especially on his labeled pieces, are elegant, labor-intensive, internal refinements that are often not visible to the user.

Townsend, of course, employed traditional joinery techniques, including the mortise and tenon, the dovetail, the glue block, and the screw and the nail. Mortise-and-tenon construction was standard practice for joining boards at right angles to each other: legs and rails on tables and chairs and rails and stiles on door frames. One element distinguishes Townsend's everyday mortise-and-tenon work from that of other craftsmen: the use of unusually small bore ( $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{1}{3}$  inch), perfectly round wooden pins to secure the components. This practice is evident in the juncture of stiles and crest rail on his chairs (cat. no. 11–13), the legs and rails of stop-fluted tables (for example, cat. no. 32), and the stiles and rails of a tall clock door (cat. no. 21).

Some of Townsend's finest documented pieces testify to his delight in finding new ways of using the mortise and tenon. On the 1789 tall clock, for example, he used double tenons to join the top rail of the principal door to its stiles and triple tenons in each corner of the pedestal front to link the stiles and rails (fig. 57). The latter example,

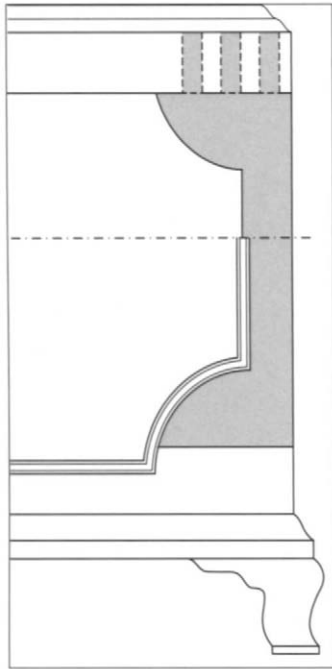


Fig. 57. Detail showing triple-tenon construction in pedestal of John Townsend, tall clock, 1789 (cat. no. 21)

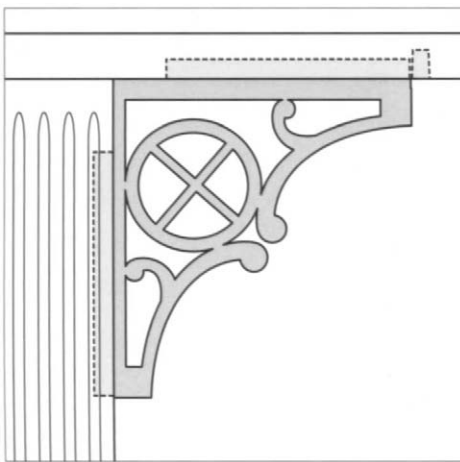


Fig. 58. Detail showing mortise-and-tenon construction of pierced bracket in John Townsend, card table, 1786 (cat. no. 32)

invisible to the naked eye, may be the height of Townsend's compulsion. On the 1786 card table, however, he used the mortise and tenon to secure openwork corner brackets, an innovation that is repeated in all his other stop-fluted tables. By cutting mortises in both leg and underside of skirt rail and by cutting away the back edges of the bracket to form tenons, he gave structural purpose to what had hitherto been simply a decorative adjunct (fig. 58).

Dovetail construction was standard practice for joining at a right angle boards whose grain runs in the same direction: the tops and bottoms of case pieces to the sides and the sides of drawers to the fronts and backs. These joins cannot be used to identify individual hands, since one of the first skills every apprentice joiner learned was cutting neat, tight dovetails. If there is a way to distinguish Townsend's dovetails, however, it is probably by the woods with which he constructed his drawers. He liked to use extra thick mahogany stock for drawer fronts, with dovetails that are correspondingly large and well formed. For drawer sides he favored tulip poplar whose smooth, even grain could be cut with great precision.

It is in character for John Townsend to take the glue block, one of the most mundane elements of the art of joinery, and make it into something altogether distinctive and elegant in its own right. Glue blocks served to reinforce various joints in a multitude of ways: on tables at the juncture of leg and rail or of top board and rail and on chests at the juncture of top board and subtop or of bottom board and ogee bracket feet. For many of these uses Townsend came up with standardized chestnut blocks. Each block is approximately 1¼ inches square in section and between 4 and 6 inches long. The longitudinal edge is boldly beveled, and the exposed surfaces are neatly scraped. He arranged these neatly and symmetrically, whether it be under a chest top or a table top. On rare occasions, in the 1789 tall clock (cat. no. 21), for example, he did something out of the ordinary and shaped continuous four-foot-long corner glue blocks behind the quarter columns, then screwing the blocks to the flanking front and side boards.

Like his peers, Townsend used screws and nails where nothing else would do: screws with rounded heads to secure table tops and chest tops; nails, of the rose head variety on the earlier pieces, to secure back boards, drawer bottoms, and drawer runners.

John Townsend made a specialty of tables, and the eighteen examples made between 1756 and 1797 and bearing his name all exhibit a framing system (first identified in Michael Moses's landmark 1981 article in *Antiques*) that appears to be unique to his shop.

The basic frame for a table with a stationary top consists of four rails and four legs, mortised and tenoned together, the top attached by screws or glue blocks. For a table with drop leaves a second, outer rail is attached to each long side, half fixed in place, half hinged to support a swing leg (on a dining table) or a flap support (on a Pembroke table). This is the traditional system to which Townsend added a new form of reinforcement: a web of cross-braces, tying together the two sides of the table (cat. nos. 1, 32, 33, 41, 43). Each brace is a thin, battenlike piece of maple laid at right angles to the side rails and dovetailed to them. There are usually three braces on top and two on the bottom. Screws through the top braces secure the top board. These braces ensured that the table frame would not twist or come apart; they also served to support the drawer runners of card or Pembroke tables with drawers.

Townsend's inspiration for these braces appears to have been a series of cabriole-leg dining tables, attributed to John Goddard, with three top cross-braces, the outer

two extending through the side rails and then screwed to the top board (see, for example, Moses 1984, fig. 5.14b). On his earliest known table, the 1756 cabriole-leg dining table, Townsend dovetailed the top braces to the rails and added bottom rails, conceptually completing the bracing system he would use thereafter. For cabriole-leg card and tea tables, with their boldly sawed-out skirts, only a single wide medial brace was possible (cat. no. 2). However, when it came to the straight-sided tables with stop-fluted or tapered legs of the late 1780s and 1790s, Townsend's distinctive structural framework became thoroughly standardized.

John Townsend was also a large producer of case furniture, which has its own structural norms. The seven examples signed by John Townsend demonstrate that early on he developed certain idiosyncratic construction techniques that he would use throughout his career. These principally have to do with the tops of chests and the bracket feet and drawers of chests and desks.

In Newport, unlike in Boston, chests of drawers and bureau tables were built with two tops: a subtop dovetailed to the two sideboards and a finished mahogany top attached to it. Sometimes the subtop is a single board but more often, and always in the work of John Townsend, it is two maple planks, each about six inches wide, one dovetailed in place at the front and the other at the rear. On John's earliest dated example, the 1765 chest (cat. no. 18), the top is secured with screws through the subtop; on the chests of the 1790s, and on all but one of a series of great bureau tables (cat. nos. 23–27), the back of the top is secured with a pair of bow-tie maple fasteners to the subtop. The uppermost backboard overlaps the bottom half of the fasteners, locking them in place.

The bracket feet on all of Townsend's case pieces are constructed in a manner that is unique to his workshop. In the usual practice three glue blocks reinforce the front and side brackets: a vertical block, square in section and the full height of the feet, flanked by horizontal blocks. John started with the horizontal blocks, mitered together and glued to the bottom board, and then supported them on a stubby corner block (cat. nos. 18, 19). The glue blocks, always of chestnut, conform to the shape of the brackets and are beautifully beveled and finished. It is unclear, however, why he used this unusual method, which made the feet of his pieces even more prone to splitting than those of his contemporaries.

Important factors in constructing a drawer are the attachment of the bottom board and the provision of elements on which the drawer rides. The generally accepted method was to slide the drawer bottom into a rabbet along the lower inside edge of each drawer side, with a strip added at the bottom of the side rail to reinforce the runner. John Townsend consistently chose a simpler, more direct approach. He rabbeted the inside bottom edge of the drawer front and then laid the bottom board over the drawer frame and nailed it in place. On large drawers he glued and nailed runner strips onto the bottom board. One of the advantages of this system was that the runner strips could be easily replaced when worn out.

In the work of John Townsend we find a rare and wonderful confluence: a large body of signed and dated works, all of the highest quality, which exhibit a notable consistency in design and construction even as they display a clear stylistic progression. There may be few surviving records to tell who worked in his shop or how he managed it, but the pieces themselves are eloquent proof that Townsend was an overpowering artisanal personality and that he maintained full artistic and craft control over his workshop.

1. Perhaps the earliest of John Townsend's signatures is on a floor board from his father's Bridge Street house, probably written while he was still living there. The other eighteenth-century American cabinetmakers who are known for the number of their signed pieces are Benjamin Frothingham of Charlestown, Massachusetts, and William Savery of Philadelphia.
2. For example, Lovell 1991, p. 44.
3. For Claggett, see Champlin 1974, pp. 157–90.
4. He purchased clock hinges on March 12, June 9, and October 27, 1737. See Moses 1984, appendix A–9, pp. 352–53.
5. There is one more example of a Newport joiner's use of a label in a copperplate hand, albeit not quite so neat as those of the Townsends: Benjamin Baker's label on a tall clock dated 1772.
6. The possible exception is a fragmentary label on a John Townsend-type bureau table (see fig. 2 and chapter 1, note 7).
7. I am indebted to Bruce Campbell for identifying the type face and method of printing.
8. The label of the chest at Colonial Williamsburg has been published variously as 1790 (Moses 1984, pl. 13) and 1794 (Headley 1999, p. 30), but in fact the last digit of the date is indecipherable (cat. no. 20).
9. John Walton advertisement, *Antiques* 94 (July 1968), p. 37.
10. The word "thousand" is written in pencil on an inside board on each of two pieces of furniture assignable to John Townsend's shop (a high chest [cat. no. 10] and a bureau table [Jill Wayne Pratt advertisement, *Antiques* 140 (September 1991), p. 268]) and has understandably been interpreted as "Townsend." In neither placement nor penmanship do they relate to Townsend's known inscriptions; it may be that they are the notations of an orthographically challenged member of the Townsend family.
11. Ormsbee 1930, pl. XX. The label illustrated is that on the Slocum chest (cat. no. 20).
12. In 1939, when the chest, then in the collection of Albert Wine, was on exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (see Norman-Wilcox 1939, p. 284); published again when for sale by Israel Sack, Inc., in "Shop Talk," *Antiques* 61 (January 1952), p. 16. The chest was sold yet again at Northeast Auctions, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, August 1–3, 2003, lot 793.
13. The looking glass, at Winterthur, was purchased in 1956. See Richards and Evans 1997, pp. 461–62, no. 212. I am indebted to Wendy Cooper, Mark Anderson, and John Krill for their assistance in assessing the piece. A third example of the bogus label, pasted upside down on the back rail of a Boston Neoclassical card table, has recently surfaced in the trade.
14. More recently, the quality of the replication has gone down. At a California auction, April 26, 1997, a fake block-and-shell bureau table bore a John Townsend label that was nothing more than a Xerox of an illustration in Moses 1984, fig. 3.7. See Hewett 1997, pp. 28–30A.
15. Newport Probate, vol. 2, pp. 239–41.
16. Newport Probate, vol. 1, pp. 266–67.
17. *Newport Mercury*, June 11, 1764.
18. Series 2, box 12, folder 10, Lopez Papers, AJHS.
19. "Newport June 6th 1787/Mr Christopher Champlin/I have Measured 14 Loggs of Mahagony belonging to Mr Munford & Co. containg Two Thousand Two Hundred Seventy one feet after Ducting the Saw Scafe [?]/Edmund Townsend." Box 43, folder 14, NHS. See also *Newport Mercury*, June 10, 1794, quoted in Karolik 1941, p. 354.
20. Account between Delaplaine and Townsend, February 13, 1745 (New-York Historical Society), quoted in Johnson 1964, appendix 1).
21. Box 1, folder 49, Ward Family Papers, RIHS.
22. Job Townsend daybook, MS 504, NHS, transcribed in Willoughby 1999, pp. 133–34.
23. Providence Joiners Price List, reproduced in Moses 1984, appendix B–2, p. 357.
24. For a succinct account of the American use of mahogany, see Montgomery 1966, p. 28.
25. Folder Y, James Card, MSS 1140, RIHS.
26. For example, the John Brown corner chair (Moses 1984, fig. 5.25) and the marble-top commode (Moses 1984, fig. 1.29).
27. See Sloane 1987.
28. Public Notary Records, C 000481, vol. 7, 1758–69, p. 649, Rhode Island State Archives, Providence, Rhode Island.
29. Samuel Fowler account book, p. 121, petty ledger no. 1553, NHS.
30. Quoted in Moses 1984, appendix A–7, p. 351. From the daybook of an unidentified merchant, MS 703, NHS. According to Lovell 1991, p. 52, n. 29, misidentified as Solomon Townsend. Excerpts published in Moses 1984, appendix A–7, pp. 349–52, where it is attributed to Solomon Townsend.
31. Henry Ayrault account ledger, 1736–43, MS 361, NHS (as identified by Lovell 1991, p. 52, n. 29). Christopher Townsend's purchases are excerpted in Moses 1984, appendix A–8, p. 352; Job's purchases in appendix A–9, pp. 352–54. Presumably this is the same Mr. Ayrault from whom John Goddard requested miscellaneous furniture hardware in an undated order. Box 43, folder 13, NHS. Moses calculated that Christopher's brass purchases were sufficient to furnish nineteen desks, five high chests, three bureaus, and two tables.
32. For an example of furniture hardware catalogues used in America, see Hummel 1964, pp. 188–97.
33. The brasses of this pattern on the John Townsend high chest at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (illustrated in Hipkiss 1941, pp. 56–57, no. 32), are replacements.
34. The exception among chest-on-chests is the one at the Rhode Island School of Design with Neoclassical drawer pulls (see cat. no. 31). Of the hardware on the other desks, three are restorations, two have pierced escutcheons, and a third is Neoclassical.
35. The Goddard desk is illustrated in Moses 1984, fig. 4.2.
36. George Champlin will, Newport Probate Records, vol. 4, pp. 651–53.



## John Townsend: A Selective Catalogue

This catalogue brings together all the known documented examples of John Townsend's furniture. In addition, it includes pieces exhibiting his characteristic style that have a verifiable history of descent in the Townsend family. It also includes a number of pieces, such as an easy chair and serpentine-sided card and tea tables, which exhibit his distinctive handiwork and represent furniture forms for which no documented examples exist. No effort has been made to illustrate all the pieces that can be attributed to him. In individual entries condition is mentioned only when it affects a piece's appearance. Dimensions given are overall, height followed by width and depth.

In the matter of attribution, signed pieces (almost invariably bearing the phrase "made by") are deemed to be by John Townsend himself; unsigned pieces exhibiting many of his characteristic design and construction preferences are attributed to him, though they may include the work of other hands in his shop.

The catalogue is divided into four chronological sections, based upon style. Each is preceded by a brief overview of a particular style and of Townsend's work within it. Illustrations of documented pieces include one or more overall views, Townsend's signatures and labels, and, where appropriate, construction details and ornament. There is usually a single overall view of attributed pieces.

## Cabriole Furniture

Cabriole furniture stands on tall curved cabriole legs with knees, legs, ankles, and feet that mimic animal forms. In America between 1730 and 1790 the cabriole leg was the standard support for seating furniture and tables of all kinds and for high chests and dressing tables. Job and Christopher Townsend developed their own versions of the style in Newport in the 1740s, as illustrated by the documented 1746 dressing table and 1748 high chest (figs. 25, 38). Square and angular and ending in sharply pointed pad feet, this cabriole leg treatment is a distinctive Newport style. No doubt the young John Townsend first worked in this mode. By the mid-1750s, however, with a slab table for Captain Anthony Low (fig. 31), John Goddard had introduced an alternative cabriole, one that was big and round and bold. And in John Townsend's mature work these two different approaches are conjoined.

All the earliest documented furniture by John Townsend is in the cabriole style. There are three signed and dated pieces—a 1756 dining table, a 1759 high chest, and a 1762 card table—and together they offer a key to understanding Townsend's maturation as a craftsman. They show his emerging talent as a carver of the three principal decorative motifs of Newport furniture of the third quarter of the eighteenth century: the lobed shell, the claw-and-ball foot, and the leaf-carved knee.

All three carved elements are displayed on the 1759 high chest (cat. no. 8), which, with its high pediment and tall cabriole legs, appears delicate, even diffident. The shell centered in the skirt carries on a fashion introduced by Job Townsend in the mid-1740s; but what was then crudely cut out of the skirt board is now carved with professional assurance. The flowing lobes are neatly contained by an undulating incised border and by a crisply delineated central ornament. The high chest's claw feet are much like those of the 1756 dining table (cat. no. 1), the only earlier documented example of the claw foot in Newport, made by Townsend when he was but twenty-four years old. The table is an accomplished piece of work with legs of exceptional grace and elegance. The feet of both pieces are quite small, the balls flat, the talons softly modeled in a standard formula. They introduce the distinctive feature of the "open" talon (the wood beneath each talon is cut away), a refinement in American furniture unique to Newport.

The high chest's knee carving is the earliest documented instance of what was to become a signature motif in Newport furniture. The design is distinctive: lobelike renditions of leafage begin at the top of the knee and terminate in a broad flat palmette made up of stopped flutes. The cameo-like carving is in low relief and crisply executed. The origin of the design is probably the leaf carving found on the knees of some Boston furniture, with the elements converted into lobes and stop fluting, the distinctive syntax of Newport carving. The arrangement of motifs in the knee-carving rarely varies, regardless of maker. In the two known instances where the combination of motifs making up the knee-carving strays from the standard, we can identify high chests attributable to Townsend being made en suite with matching card tables (cat. nos. 6, 10). Since Townsend's carved knees appear most frequently on high chests and card tables, this was probably the Newport norm. (In Boston and Philadelphia, by contrast, the best high chests were routinely made en suite with dressing tables.)

Townsend's third signed piece, the 1762 card table (cat. no. 2), signals a dramatic change from his earlier cabriole work. The stance is more aggressive, the legs heavier and more angular, the carving more machinelike in its precision. The claw foot is bigger, the ball taller, the talons more sharply defined. There is a dramatic sense of musculature and an exaggerated angularity and sharpness. This is furniture with attitude, a claw foot with personality. Similar distinctive cabriole legs are found on a number of card tables and high chests that can be attributed to Townsend. Compared to those of the 1759 high chest, the legs of the later chests are lower, heavier, and bolder. On the basis of similarities in their claw-and-ball feet, several side chairs, an easy chair, and a bedstead (cat. nos. 11–15) can also be assigned to Townsend's mature work.

The dramatic maturation of John Townsend's cabriole style in the early 1760s coincides with the beginning of the longtime association of John Goddard, his cousin by marriage, with the Browns of Providence, specifically with his manufacture in 1760 of a scalloped tea table (fig. 36) with knee carving that is identical in design, though not in execution, to Townsend's of 1762 (cat. no. 3). One can hypothesize, but not prove, that Townsend's aggressively mannered cabriole style was an expression of his competitiveness with his older cousin. How long Townsend went on making furniture in this manner has yet to be determined.



## I. Dining Table, 1756

JOHN TOWNSEND

28¾ x 62¼ open (17½ closed) x 58¼ in. (73 x 158.1 open [44.5 closed] x 148 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: soft maple, red oak, and hickory

Labels and inscriptions: in graphite, on bottom of fixed top board, *John Townsend 1756 /B*; in graphite, on one fixed side rail, *John [Townsend]*; in graphite, on adjacent fly rail, *John.*; in graphite, on opposite fixed rail, *John's Table.*; glued wove-paper label, on first fixed rail, embossed *Dimanche* and inscribed in ink: *J B M[?] P f[?]*

Promised gift to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, of Philip Holzer, 2001, L.2001.53.1

PROVENANCE: (sale, Sotheby's, New York, November 17, 1980, lot 1357); Philip and Ann Holzer, New York, 1980

REFERENCES: Moses 1984, pp. 12, 66, 87, and pl. 9, figs. 3.1, 3.17, 3.17a, 3.34; Holzer 1990, pp. 40–47, no. 15, and pl. IV; Heckscher 2001, pp. 190–92, pl. 1

Made when Townsend was only twenty-four, this table is the earliest known signed and dated piece by him. The massive hinged leaves can be raised up to form an oval top. The system of cross-braces, which was to characterize his tables, is already well developed here. However, this was the only time he used red oak, rather than maple, to fabricate the inner rails and cross-braces. The hinged maple rails are worm-infested, a not-uncommon occurrence in Newport work, and one of the open talons is replaced. Otherwise the piece is wonderfully preserved.

The cabriole legs have not only great delicacy but also a muscular tension. The feet are

small and delicate, their fully articulated compressed balls grasped by elegant claws, the earliest documented instance of the open talon in Newport cabinetwork. The curve of the cabriole knees is continued in an applied molding across the bottom of the end skirts.

A number of other dining tables with similar cross-brace construction and skirt moldings look to be from Townsend's shop. Examples include a slightly smaller one at the Art Institute of Chicago (Moses 1982, p. 1134, figs. 11, 11a) and a slightly larger version (John S. Walton advertisement, *Antiques* 110 [September 1976], p. 380, and a table with a square top (Moses 1984, fig. 3.72).



1 (inscription)

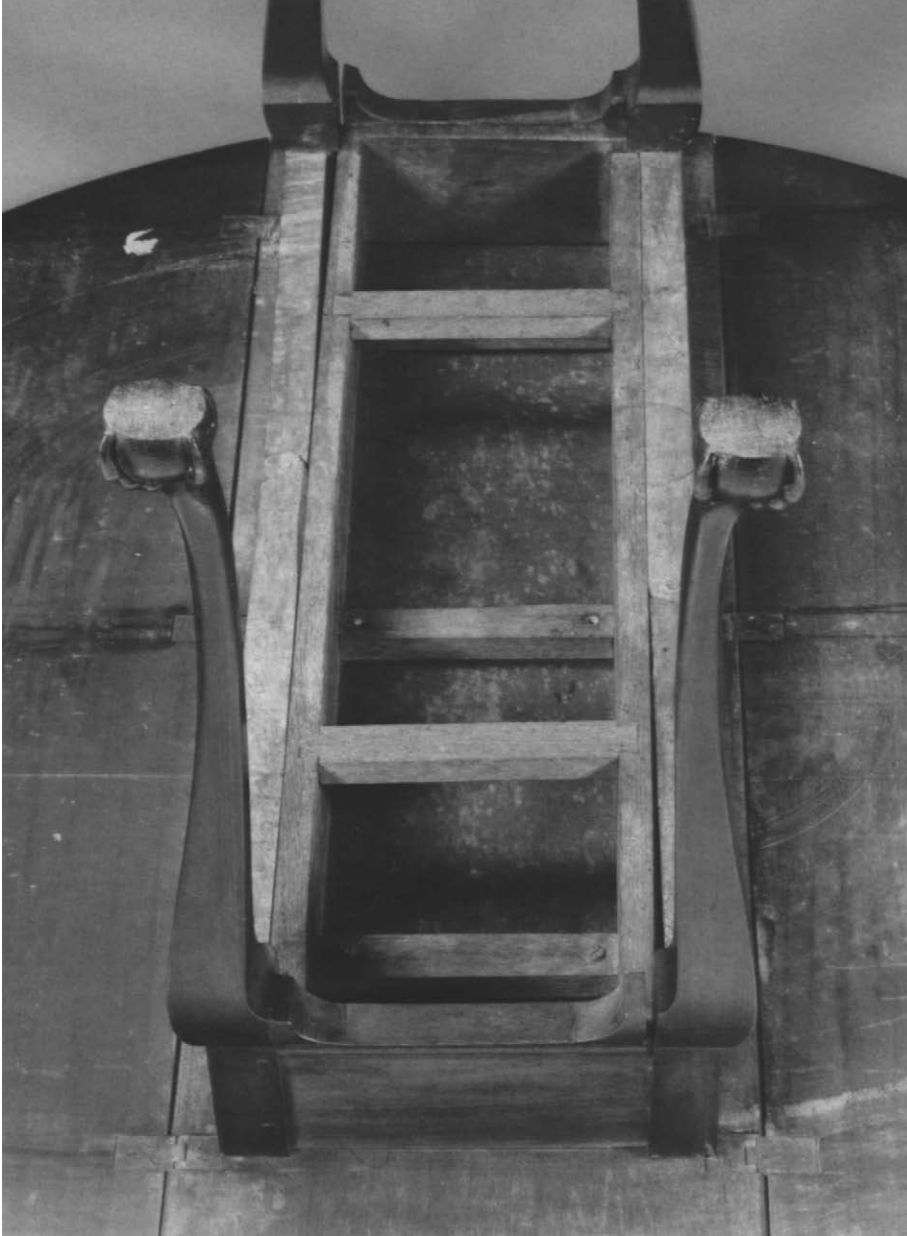


Table with cabriole legs and drop leaves, 17th century.

r



r (label)



1 (underside)



1 (foot)



1750-1760. Walnut, with a central compartment and four curved legs. The cabinet is shown from the underside.

## 2. Card Table, 1762

JOHN TOWNSEND

27¼ x 35 x 16½ in. (69.2 x 88.9 x 41.9 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: chestnut, maple, and white pine

Labels and inscriptions: in graphite, inscribed on back of outer back rail, centered between swing gates, *John Townsend/Newport/1762*; in graphite, inscribed on bottom of medial brace, *John Townsend/1762*; in graphite on inner back rail, beginning of inscription hidden behind fixed central back rail

Eric Noah, New York, New York

REFERENCES: Cooper 1980a, p. 27, fig. 24; Cooper 1980b, p. 14, fig. 3, p. 30, no. 30; Moses 1981, pp. 1161–62, figs. 15, 15a; Moses 1984, pp. 12, 89, 91, and pl. 8, figs. 3.21, 3.21a, 3.35

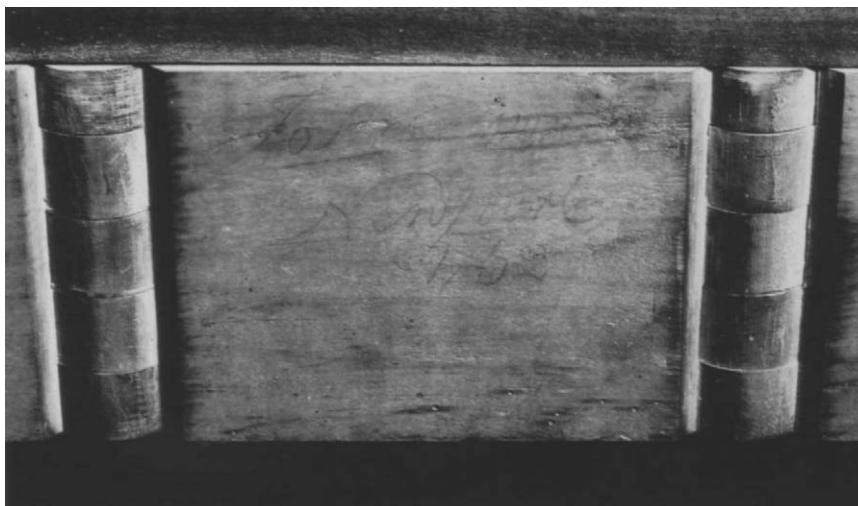
This table is one of but three pieces in the cabriole style that Townsend both signed and dated. It shows John, aged thirty, at the height of his powers. It documents his highly personal interpretation of the cabriole leg with carved knee and claw-and-ball foot. The intense angularity and the sharp planar quality, so often hallmarks of his work, are here in abundance.

The legs are of a dense, even-grained, purple mahogany. The front rail is of an equally heavy wood, but lighter in color and of an altogether different aspect. A pattern of scintillating flecks, in vertical strips like rainfall in a storm, drifts across the skirt front from the right side. All the grain is visible through the original thin oil finish.

The front and back rails are joined by two central medial braces, a narrow upper one and a wide lower one. The top is secured with three screws per side and by glue blocks.

The mortise-and-tenon joints securing the rear legs to their hinged rails are double-pinned in place. Those securing the front legs to the fixed rails are not pinned, and the legs have twisted.

An old photograph (Metropolitan Museum) of what appears to be the virtual mate to this table — even the wood seems to be from the same boards — suggests that the present table was originally one of a pair. The possible mate descended in the Slade family of Fall River, Massachusetts.



2 (inscription)



2 (inscription)



2



2 (leg and foot)



2 (knee)



2 (underside)



### 3. *Card Table, 1760–70*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

27½ x 34 x 16¾ in. (68.9 x 86.4 x 42.5 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: maple and poplar

Labels and inscriptions: in graphite, inscribed on outer back rail *John*; in graphite, inscribed on swing hinge rail, calligraphic *M*

Private collection

PROVENANCE: Said to have descended in the Brayton family, Somerset, Massachusetts; [Harry Arons, Ansonia, Connecticut]; the present owner

REFERENCES: Ott 1975b, p. 946, pl. III, pp. 949–50; Moses 1984, figs. 3.75, 3.75a

The partial signature is recognizably in John Townsend's hand. And despite the replacement of parts of the inner rails owing to worm infestation, it is evident that the table was originally constructed in Townsend's signature manner. This piece's dimensions are close to those of the signed and dated table (cat. no. 7). Its top is one inch narrower (there is less overhang at each end) and its skirt is half an inch deeper, however, and this makes for a significant difference in stance.



#### 4. *Card Table, 1760–70*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

26½ x 34½ x 16⅝ in. (67.3 x 86.7 x 42.2 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: white pine, maple, and chestnut

Labels and inscriptions: Until recent years, an engraved brass plaque was affixed to the projecting center of the front skirt. It read: *Townsend Table /Mrs. Redwood's Table /Miss Ellen Townsend*

Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, Rhode Island, Gift of Miss Ellen F. Townsend

PROVENANCE: William Redwood (1734–1794); Mrs. William (Sarah Pope) Redwood to Ellen F. Townsend (granddaughter of John Townsend); given by her in 1883 to the Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, Rhode Island

REFERENCES: Ott 1965, pp. 40–41, 164, no. 34; Moses 1982, p. 1135, fig. 13; Moses 1984, p. 142 and fig. 3.74

This table is a classic example of John Townsend's design and construction, but the proportions of its skirt blocking are dramatically different from those of cat. nos. 2 and 3. The center block has been reduced by about two inches in order to widen the flanking concave blockings by an equal amount. The center block still shows where Ellen Townsend's brass plaque used to be attached. That plaque firmly tied the table to William Redwood (1734–1794), son of Abraham (1709–1788), founder of the Redwood Library.



## 5. Card Table, 1760–70

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

27½ x 34½ x 17 in. (69.9 x 87.5 x 43.2 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany

Labels and inscriptions: none

Private collection

PROVENANCE: Descended in the Lyman family of Boston and Newport; [Israel Sack, Inc., New York, 1973]; the present owner

REFERENCES: Israel Sack, Inc., advertisement, *Antiques* 104 (October 1973), frontispiece; *Israel Sack Collection* 1969–92, vol. 4 (1981), pp. 864, 1026–27, no. P3855; Moses 1984, figs. 3.73–3.73b

One of the two furniture forms (the other was the bureau table) that John Townsend experimented with in the years before the Revolution was the blockfront card table, so called because the pair of concave sections in the front skirt rail are like the central recessed section of a block-and-shell chest. A number of examples of this model signed by or readily attributable to Townsend are known (see

cat. nos. 2, 3, 4), and with the exception of a possible mate to cat. no. 2, each is visually distinct and worth comparing. In his search for the ideal proportions, Townsend continued to modulate the width of the blocking in relation to the width of the central projection and the height of the skirt. This example most closely resembles the signed and dated example (cat. no. 2).



## 6. *Card Table, 1760–70*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

26 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 34 $\frac{1}{4}$  16 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (68.3 x 87 x 41.9 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods:  
maple and white pine

Labels and inscriptions: none

Collection of Mark and Ann Kington

PROVENANCE: (sale, Joseph Hessney [auctioneer], Geneva, New York, December 13, 2000); [G. K. S. Bush, Inc., New York, December 2000]; the present owner

REFERENCE: Kramer 2001, p. 10–A

The scallop-front card table is a variant upon the blockfront model (cat. nos. 2–5). Its shaped front skirt consists of a flat recessed central section flanked by serpentine-curved sections that terminate at their junctures with the legs. It is one of three of this design known with knee carving and claw feet in the manner of John Townsend. Neither of the other two, at Winterthur and at the U.S. Department of State (Richards and Evans 1997, pp. 269–70, no. 141; Conger and Itsell 1991, p. 156, no. 70), exhibits quite the delicacy and precision of execution found on pieces signed by Townsend and may accordingly be assigned to his workshop. On this

one, however, even though the table has suffered from structural and surface abuse over time, the quality seems worthy of the master. The typically abstract knee carving is distinguished by the inclusion, above the bottom anthemion, of a naturalistically rendered leaf, a motif precisely matching that on a high chest attributed to John Townsend (cat. no. 10), with which it may have been made en suite.

A number of tables of this type in the manner of John Goddard are known (see Moses 1982, pp. 1138–39). All have flat center sections wider than those made by John Townsend.



© 2001, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photographed by [unreadable]

## 7. Tea Table, 1760–70

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

27 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 34 x 21 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (70.2 x 86.4 x 53.7 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: tulip poplar and chestnut

Labels and inscriptions: none

Mrs. George M. Kaufman, Norfolk, Virginia, 84.4

PROVENANCE: Said to have been purchased at a Seattle, Washington, auction; Elizabeth Dille, Essex, Connecticut, about 1959; [Israel Sack, Inc., New York, 1984]; Mr. and Mrs. George M. Kaufman, 1984

REFERENCES: Moses 1984, p. xii, frontispiece; Israel Sack, Inc., advertisement, *Antiques* 127 (January 1985), inside front cover; Kaufman 1986, p. 752, pl. x; Flanigan 1986, pp. 40–41, no. 12; *Israel Sack Collection* 1969–92, vol. 8 (1986), pp. 2184–85, no. P5640; A. Sack 1987, p. 257, pl. v

This is the only known example of a fully developed Newport serpentine-sided or scalloped tea table made in John Townsend's manner. The attribution is based upon the knee carving and the claw feet, which closely duplicate those of the signed and dated card table (cat. no. 2). In addition, the table frame originally had three cross-braces (one remains), a favorite Townsend construction feature. The top was originally secured with screws, two on each side and one on each end.

In 1760 John Goddard billed John Brown of Providence £90 for a "Mahogany

Scalloped Tea Table" (fig. 35). Today at least eight such tables, with knees and feet carved in his manner, are known. The existence of but one by Townsend has yet to be explained. Could this have been a Goddard specialty that Townsend would only copy for his own use?

Gilbert Stuart's depiction (fig. 59) of Dr. William Hunter's two spaniels asleep under a serpentine-sided table, the sole known contemporaneous representation of a piece of Newport furniture, is witness to the high status of this distinctive Newport form.



Fig. 59. Gilbert Stuart, *Dr. William Hunter's Spaniels*, about 1769, oil on canvas. The Preservation Society of Newport County, Newport, Rhode Island. The Collection at Hunter House



Fig. 200. Mahogany, c. 1750

7

## 8. *High Chest of Drawers, 1759*

JOHN TOWNSEND

88¾ x 39¾ x 22½ in. (225.4 x 100 x 56.2 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: chestnut, eastern white pine, and cottonwood

Labels and inscriptions: in graphite, on inside of bottom of top wide drawer in upper case, *No. 28/Made By/John Townsend/Newport/1759*; in chalk, on outside of backs of drawers of upper section, beginning at upper left, *A, B, C, D, E*; on outside of back of wide drawer in lower case *A*

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, Bequest of Doris M. Brixey, 1984.32.26.

PROVENANCE: Richard DeWolfe Brixey (1880–1943); his daughter Doris M. Brixey; bequeathed by her in 1984 to the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

REFERENCES: American Art Galleries 1929, no. 659; Dyer 1931, p. 37; Moses 1984, p. 95 and figs. 3.99a–3.99c; Gustafson 1985, p. 133; Ward 1988, pp. 265–68, no. 140

This is the earliest version of the Newport bonnet-top high chest. Pairs of shaped panels fill the pediment, and a large shell is centered within the scalloped skirt. Here we see the earliest documented instances of John Townsend's signature carved cabriole knees—in full flower—on legs with dainty claw-and-ball feet much like those on his dining table of three years before (cat. no. 1). The only suggestions of the maker's relative youth are the almost promiscuous way in which he mixed different secondary woods in fashioning the drawers and the lack of precision in the fluted quarter-columns flanking the upper drawers. The shell in the front

skirt has a distinctive tripartite central motif, suggestive of a fleur-de-lis. A similar high chest (Hipkiss 1941, pp. 56–57, no. 32), at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, has a shell in its skirt with the same fleur-de-lis motif, and it can be safely regarded as a contemporaneous work by Townsend. The two pieces represent Townsend's first efforts with this ubiquitous American form.

The molding around the base of the plinth of the central finial is missing. The finials are modern replacements, as may be the veneer of the stiles above the front legs. The black paint on the backboards within the circular openings in the bonnet is apparently original.



8 (label)



Figure 1. Chest of drawers, 1750-1760.

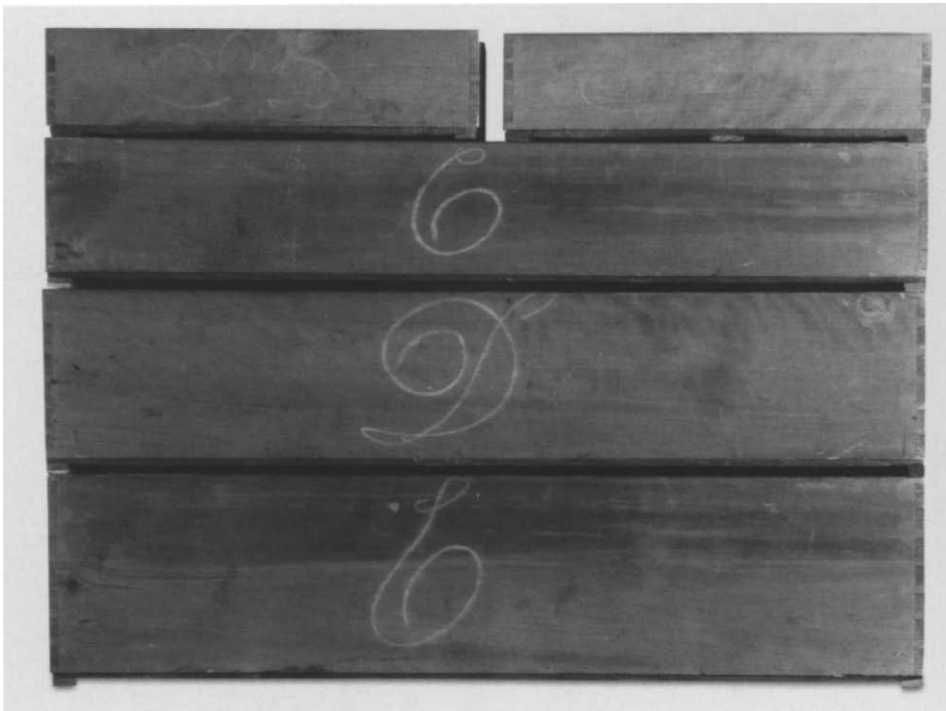




8 (shell)



8 (leg and foot)



8 (inscriptions)

## 9. High Chest of Drawers, about 1765

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

82½ (without finial) x 39¾ x 22¾ in. (209.6 x 101 x 57.8 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary wood: tulip poplar

Labels and inscriptions: in chalk, letters or cabinet-makers' marks on bottoms of two uppermost drawers and on underside of bottom board of upper section

Mrs. George M. Kaufman, Norfolk, Virginia 86.1

PROVENANCE: Said to have descended in the Annesley family of Newport, Rhode Island, and Albany, New York; Pierce Annesley Chamberlain Jr., New Jersey; (sale, Sotheby Parke Bernet, New York, November 18, 1978, lot 1073); [Bernard and S. Dean Levy, Inc., New York, 1978 until 1985]; Mr. and Mrs. George M. Kaufman

REFERENCES: Moses 1984, p. 9 and figs. 1.19, 1.19a; Bernard and S. Dean Levy, Inc., advertisement, *Antiques* 130 (September 1986), p. 327; Flanigan 1986, pp. 80–81, no. 27

A sense of the massive and the monumental pervades this powerfully architectural design. The scroll pediment is low and the round openings in the tympanum large; the cabriole legs heavyset and hard at work. Though the design is the same as that of the 1759 high chest (cat. no. 8), the execution by the mature craftsman could not be more different.

The three finials, the left rear leg, and the two bottom brasses are replacements.



## 10. *High Chest of Drawers, about 1765*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

81 ½ (without finial) x 41 ½ x 22 ¾ in. (207 x 105.4 x 57.8 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: chestnut and tulip poplar

Labels and inscriptions: markings where a paper label pasted on inside center of central bottom drawer was entirely scrubbed off; in graphite, upside down on inside of backboard of lower section, *thousand*; of indeterminate date, crudely incised, on outside of top backboard, 1759[?]

Private collection, a promised gift to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

PROVENANCE: According to her notes, Natalie Knowlton Blair acquired this piece from the New York dealer Charles R. Morson, who claimed that it came from the Willet-Seaman family; Natalie Knowlton Blair, New York, 1927; descended in the family, until 2004

REFERENCES: Lockwood 1926, vol. 1, p. 351, fig. XIX (before restoration); Downs 1947, p. 431, fig. 10; Moses 1984, p. 145

Four examples of Townsend's mature version of the Newport high chest — notable for their broad, squat stance and heavy Baroque feel — are known, three with bonnet tops (cat. nos. 9 and 10 and the Elisha Dyer family example [Moses 1984, fig. 3.100], and one with a flat top [John Walton advertisement, *Antiques* 68 (July 1955), p. 4]). All have low scroll pediments with large circular openings surrounded by raised moldings, fluted quarter-columns in the upper section, and boldly scalloped skirts with oversized central shells. Their legs duplicate those found on Townsend's card tables (cat. nos. 2, 3, 4). But there is considerable variation in the way

the pieces are made and in the secondary woods used. It would seem that Townsend may have given the men in his shop a certain freedom in doing the basic joinery. The present chest, which has the remnants of what may have been a John Townsend label, exudes an extraordinary sense of assurance and command.

The finial is old and in Townsend's distinctive style. It is one of three identical ornaments that were on the chest when it was acquired by Mrs. Blair. At that time the central finial had two fluted plinths, indicating that the set had come from another chest.



10 (finial)



## II. *Side Chair, about 1760*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

38¼ x 22 x 16 in. (97.2 x 55.9 x 40.6 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: maple, white pine, and chestnut

Labels and inscriptions: incised *V* on front rail rabbet and on slip seat frame on present chair; incised *II* on other chair

Newport Restoration Foundation, Newport, Rhode Island, 1999.537.1

PROVENANCE: Probably John Townsend; his daughter Mary Townsend Brinley, 1809; her nephew Christopher Townsend, 1856; his sister Ellen Townsend, 1881; her friend William P. Sheffield, 1886; William P. Sheffield Jr., 1919, until at least 1937; his daughter Elizabeth S. Renn, before 1965; acquired from her by the Newport Restoration Foundation, Newport, Rhode Island

REFERENCES: Keyes 1937, p. 308, fig. 3; Carpenter 1955, p. 44, fig. 1; Davidson 1965, pp. 392, 410; Ott 1965, pp. 14–15, no. 13; Moses 1984, pp. 66, 188, and figs. 2.3, 3.106, 3.106a

This is one of a pair of side chairs (from an original set of six) with a history of descent in John Townsend's family. Accordingly, ever since first being published in 1937, they have served as the touchstone of what chairs by John Townsend should look like. They appear solid and sturdy and firmly planted on the floor. The back legs are four square, with no attempt to reduce their bulk by chamfering the corners. The stiles are wide, perfectly flat in front, rounded in back. The broad, overlapping strapwork emerges, almost imperceptibly, from the serpentine crest rail, centered on which is a recessed field with an allover diaper pattern. The cabriole legs are heavy and rounded in front, straight sawn at the sides, and terminate in a sharp right angle in back.

The claw feet are solid and angular, and the rear talon extends downward in an unbroken line from the leg. They are a simplified version of those found on a signed card table dated 1762 (cat. no. 2). The two chairs, while certainly made en suite, differ in size; the one shown, number *V* in the set, is one half inch higher and one quarter inch wider than number *II*. Their upholstery is modern.

The splat design, inspired ultimately by English prototypes (see Kirk 1972, p. 145, fig. 192), was a popular one in Rhode Island and was adopted as the pattern of choice

by the Chapin family of cabinetmakers of East Norwich, Connecticut (Kirk 1972, pp. 146–47, figs. 193–96).

Two other chairs of identical design, and also certainly from the John Townsend shop, are known (Leigh Keno advertisement, *Antiques* 150 [September 1996], p. 230). One is of cherry wood and numbered *I*. The other is of mahogany and numbered *XXI* by a different hand. While the splats of both chairs are cut from the same template as that of cat. no. 11, they appear to be the work of different hands.



11 (splat)





## 12. *Side Chair, 1760–70*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

38 x 20½ x 16½ in. (96.5 x 52.1 x 41.9 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: maple, chestnut, and white pine

Labels and inscriptions: incised on rabbet of front rail and on slip seat *III*

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Anthony W. and Lulu C. Wang Fund Gift, 2004 (2004.97)

PROVENANCE: Purchased by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in 2004 from the dealer Peter Storey Pentz, Woodinville, Washington

This recently discovered chair, an apparently hitherto unrecorded Newport model, combines the strapwork splat of the Townsend family set (cat. no. 11) with the trapezoidal seat frame and pad feet of cat. no. 3.

The chair has fine color and an undisturbed old finish. All the elements appear to be original (X rays of the joints show nothing suspicious.) And yet there is a curious anomaly: the right side of the seat frame is higher, by one half inch, than the left, and the right side of the rear stretcher is lower, by one half inch, than the left. Something has certainly happened! It may be that, early in its history, the chair was damaged and returned to Townsend's shop, where it was fitted with ready-made components (a stile and a front leg) of slightly the wrong size.

## 13. *Side Chair, 1760–70*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

38⅞ x 24 x 17½ in. (96.8 x 61 x 44.5 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary wood: chestnut and white pine

Labels and inscriptions: incised on rabbet of front rail: *IIIIIV*; the matching chair is incised *VI*.

Mrs. Ralph E. Carpenter, Newport, Rhode Island

PROVENANCE: Acquired by the present owner's husband about 1955

REFERENCES: Carpenter 1955, p. 45, fig. 2; Biddle 1963, p. 8, nos. 12, 13

Compared to cat. no. 11, this chair has a more elaborate pierced splat, angular rather than rounded seat, and pad rather than claw feet. Yet in their execution the two chairs are virtually alike, the work of the same hand: the same solid, ground-hugging design; the same crisp and angular handling of densely textured mahogany; the same construction details including small round wood pins securing mortise-and-tenon joints and chestnut glue blocks with beveled edges; and the same ornamental diaper pattern in the crest rail. On this chair the heavy purplish mahogany, now turned a tawny brown, has its original surface.

The seat numbers on the chair indicate that it was originally one of a set of at least ten, of which one other, which has descended

with it, is now known. In a given set of chairs all elements are usually identical, but here the finish treatment on the splats differs. The chisel work on the chair illustrated is smaller in scale and more refined in detail than on the other; a different, smaller punch was used to create the decorative borders flanking the splat's two lower openings. This suggests that more than one person in the shop was at work on a large commission.

The strapwork pattern of the splat, a complex interweaving centered on paired double loops, has English prototypes (Kirk 1972, p. 84, fig. 77) and was also occasionally employed in New York (Kirk 1972, pp. 121–22, figs. 146–48) and in Philadelphia (Kirk 1972, p. 84, fig. 78). In 1767 the Providence merchant John Brown ordered a set of such chairs from Philadelphia (Cooper 1973, p. 328, fig. 2).

In Newport a few cabriole-leg examples like the present chair are known (*Antiques* 64 [July 1953], p. 38). The present splat pattern became widely popular in Newport only with the advent of straight-leg chairs with stop fluting, and none of the chairs of this type that I have seen (for example, Carpenter 1954, p. 30, no. 4, and Ott 1965, pp. 12–13, no. 12) exhibits the distinctive characteristics of John Townsend's shop.







13 (splat)

## 14. *Easy Chair, 1755–65*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

49 x 34¼ x 23½ in. (124.5 x 87 x 59.7 cm)

Primary woods: mahogany and walnut; secondary wood: not examined

Labels and inscriptions: none

The Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island, Bequest of Henry A. Hoffman, 1953.1.13.

PROVENANCE: Henry Hoffman; bequeathed by him to The Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island, 1953

REFERENCES: Carpenter 1954, p. 54, no. 28; Moses 1984, p. 147 and figs. 3.108–3.108b

In the 1809 inventory of John Townsend's estate "2 Easy Chair Frames" are valued at \$8. Yet no easy chair can be documented as Townsend's work, and only this one, on stylistic grounds, can be attributed to the master. Its claw-and-ball feet are similar to those on the card table signed and dated by Townsend in 1762 (cat. no. 2). In addition, its square unchamfered back legs and the crisply turned stretchers are in the manner of his side chairs (cat. nos. 11–13). The segmental arch crest rail and the square rear legs are features found on the famous easy chair with original needlework and bearing the inscription *Gardner, Junr/Newport May/1758/W*, but there the cabriole legs and turned stretchers look to be the work of a different hand.



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## 15. *Bedstead, 1760–70*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

85½ x 57¼ x 76½ in. (217.2 x 146.7 x 194.3 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany

Labels and inscriptions: Incised *II* and *III* on top of ends of left side rail; *VI* and *VII* on top of ends of right side rail

Newport Restoration Foundation, Newport, Rhode Island, 2001.5

PROVENANCE: Probably John Townsend; his daughter Mary Townsend Brinley, 1809; her nephew Christopher Townsend, 1856; his sister Ellen Townsend, 1881; her friend William P. Sheffield, 1886; William P. Sheffield Jr., 1919; Mrs. Clark Burdick, until 1937; Lilian S. Leonard; [Israel Sack, Inc., New York]; Cornelius Moore; (sale, Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, October 30, 1971, lot 148); Newport Restoration Foundation, Newport, Rhode Island, 1971

REFERENCES: Keyes 1937, pp. 308–9, fig. 1; Moses 1984, p. 147 and fig. 3.107

In his will John Townsend left his daughter Mary “One of my best Bedsteads with Claw feet, with the Bed thereon, usually kept in the great Chamber,” together with a second, plainer example. The present example has a history of descent in Townsend’s family and may be one of those bedsteads. Its claw-and-ball feet are of a distinctive design found on some of his documented work (such as the 1762 card table [cat. no. 2]). Together these facts support an attribution to his shop, if not his hand.

Above the rails the footposts are octagonal, with a single flute per facet. The outside upper edge of the foot and side rails is a molded quarter round. The tops of the



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footposts were at one time cut down and have since been extended. The headboard is a replacement.

A bedstead with virtually identical footposts is at Chipstone (Rodriguez Roque 1984, pp. 408–9, no. 192).

## Case Furniture: Block and Shell and Flat Front

More than any other single motif, the block and shell symbolizes the case furniture made in eighteenth-century Newport. And with half a dozen examples of the style bearing his signature, John Townsend's name is closely associated with it. Townsend was one of the earliest joiners — possibly the first — to introduce the tripartite block-and-shell case piece, and he continued making such objects for more than thirty years.

Case furniture is cabinetwork that stands on short, stubby bracket feet. These supports are made up of pairs of horizontal boards mitered together and reinforced with glue blocks. Case furniture was mostly intended for storage, and the forms in which it was fashioned included cupboards and clocks with doors, desks with drawers, desks and bookcases with drawers and doors, and chests of drawers of all sorts. We exclude here high chests of drawers and dressing tables, which are grouped with other furniture types supported on tall cabriole legs.

Newport case furniture was made either with shaped block-and-shell fronts or with flat fronts, depending upon the form. Almost all Newport chests of drawers and kneehole bureau tables are in the elaborate block-and-shell style, while most desks and chest-on-chests made there are flat-fronted. John Townsend worked in both styles, though he is best known, of course, for his blockfront pieces.

The blockfront originated in Boston, as did the carved shell, but the idea of putting the two motifs together was Newport's genius. The origins of this Newport vision must be sought in the work of Job and Christopher Townsend. The shell motif first appeared on the skirts of Newport high chests and dressing tables in the mid-1740s, as on a dressing table made by Job in 1746 (fig. 25). The earliest datable instance of the block and shell as a single decorative unit on the front of a piece of furniture is a group of clock cases made about 1750. On these clocks the shaft door is cut away in a concave blocking, the shell carved from the solid within an enframing arch. The doors of the great Christopher Townsend desk and bookcase (fig. 40) exhibit the early concave block-and-shell treatment at its most monumental. By the mid-1750s diminutive versions of the same motif routinely appear on the interiors of Newport desks.

The signed and dated pieces of John Townsend's block-and-shell oeuvre span the years between 1765 and 1792. But an earlier piece signed by him, a unique document cabinet (cat. no. 16) datable no earlier than 1760, illustrates his engagement in the creation of the archetypal Newport block-and-shell facade. In making the document cabinet, Townsend grappled with how to apply this single vertical motif across the horizontal fronts of chests and desks and other case furniture. He divided the facade into three equal parts. For the central part with the door he chose the existing formula: concave blocking and a shell within a relieving arch. For the outer parts with drawers he tried something new: convex blocking with tall and narrow applied shells. (There was no precedent, in Boston or Newport, for projecting shells.) From here it was but a couple of refinements — doing away with the recessed shell's relieving arch, making the applied shells lower and wider — to the classic Newport tripartite block-and-shell front. There remains an unanswered question. Was John Goddard, who is said to have made

a fully developed block-and-shell desk and bookcase as early as 1761, influenced by Townsend's design solution, or had he already figured it out on his own?

In addition to the document cabinet, five pieces of block-and-shell case furniture bearing John Townsend's signature or label are known: a 1765 desk, three four-drawer chests (1765, 1792, 1793[?]), and one tall clock (1789), among the most refined and accomplished of all pieces of Newport joinery. These case pieces demonstrate, over nearly thirty years, a remarkable consistency in design and execution. The convex shells have an even number of projecting lobes: ten on the clock, twelve on the chests, and fourteen on the desk; the concave shells have an odd number of lobes, one fewer than the flanking convex ones. On the convex shells the lobes project boldly and are separated by wide and deep valleys. Always there is an assurance, a sharpness and crispness in execution, that is rarely if ever equaled by Townsend's contemporaries. He was the supreme carver.

Over the years, Townsend refined his shell design. The earliest shells, about 1760 (cat. nos. 8, 16), have a fleur-de-lis-like tripartite center. Those from 1765 (cat. nos. 17, 18), have a central C-scroll (a refined version of the central motif found on Job and Christopher's shells of the 1740s and 1750s) filled with fluting or stop-fluting. And at this time the lobes of the concave shells are ribbed. In the final iteration, which is documented in the chests of the 1790s, the central C-scroll has a bed of cross-hatching with fluting above; and the concave shells have plain lobes and are framed by an incised border with scroll ends. Identical shells are found on a series of four-shell bureau tables (cat. nos. 23–28) — among Townsend's great masterpieces. But unlike the chests of the 1790s with their Neoclassical brasses, the latter pieces have Rococo hardware and may be of considerably earlier date. All that is certain is that Townsend had found his ideal shell and made no further changes.

John Townsend's flat-fronted case furniture consisted principally of desks, most doubtless made for export. With four graduated, thumbnail-molded drawers and ogee bracket feet, their outsides are indistinguishable from those of other Newport makers. The interiors follow the standard Newport design established in the desk and bookcases of Job and Christopher. The only visible clue to John's authorship is the prospect door shell, which sports his distinctive central C-scroll and surrounding incised border. On that basis about a dozen examples, together with one desk and bookcase, are known. One bears the chiseled initials *IT*.<sup>1</sup> Another, a recent discovery, sports a Townsend's label.<sup>2</sup> For family members Townsend sometimes made unusually large pieces. No signed chest-on-chests by John Townsend are known, but a few can be attributed to him on the basis of the similarity of their turned and fluted finials and quarter-columns to those of the labeled 1789 tall clock.

1. Harry Arons advertisement, *Antiques* 94 [July 1968], p. 37.

2. Sotheby's, New York, January 20–23, 2005, lot 1193.

## 16. *Document Chest, 1760–65*

JOHN TOWNSEND

27¾ x 25⅞ x 12⅞ in. (70.5 x 65.7 x 32.7 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: mahogany and white pine

Labels and inscriptions: in graphite, inscribed on right side of lowest left drawer: *John Town[se]nd/Newport*; in graphite, inscribed on outside of bottom board: *John T[ownsen]d/[Newp]ort*; in graphite, inscribed on backs of drawers, beginning at top left *A, B, C,* and *D* and at top right *E, F, G,* and *H*

The Chipstone Foundation, Fox Point, Wisconsin, 1964.4

PROVENANCE: Frederick Howard Reed, London; (sale, Christie's, London, November 16, 1955, lot 235); [John S. Walton, New York]; The Chipstone Foundation, 1964

REFERENCES: "International Saleroom" 1957, p. 110, fig. 15; Ott 1965, pp. 121, 169, no. 75; Stone 1967, p. 511. Stone 1973, p. 321, figs. 3, 4; Heckscher 1982, p. 1144; Rodriguez Roque 1984, pp. 74–77, no. 34

This diminutive chest, unique in the annals of Newport furniture, is Townsend's earliest known effort in the tripartite or three-part block-and-shell style of case furniture. (It was once thought that the inscription on the bottom board, now invisible to the naked eye, included the year 1756, an error corrected only in 1984.) The central shell, centered within an arch, carries on a style for concave shells used by Townsends of the prior generation, Job and Christopher. The outer shells show John experimenting with the new challenge of executing convex shells. The piece is exquisitely fashioned from carefully chosen mahogany (especially notable are the dovetails joining top to side boards and the carefully chosen figured piece for the central door). The thin, delicate drawer linings are of smoothly finished mahogany. In the cupboard both shelves and dividers have scalloped fronts, inspired by those within

fall-front desks. The rounded arch openings above the cubbyholes are like those on a desk signed by Job Townsend (Milwaukee Art Museum). The turned feet, though unique in Townsend's known oeuvre, appear to be original.



16 (inscription)



16



16 (shells)



## 17. Fall-Front Desk, 1765

JOHN TOWNSEND

42 x 45¼ x 24¾ in. (106.7 x 115 x 63.2 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: yellow poplar, eastern red cedar, white pine, and tulip poplar

Labels and inscriptions: in ink, on paper label centered on inside of bottom board of top drawer: *Made by/John Townsend/Rhode Island/1765*; in chalk, inscribed on bottom of each interior drawer, a capital letter, beginning with *A* in the upper left drawer and ending with *K* in the lower left drawer; on the bottom board, *bottom*

Bequest of Mr. Stanley Paul Sax, Diplomatic Reception Rooms, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D. C., L. 76.63

PROVENANCE: According to family tradition, Robert Y. Townsend (1827–1878) and his wife, Emily M. Cleland (1842–1875); [John S. Walton, New York, 1960]; [Israel Sack Inc., New York, 1972]; Stanley Paul Sax, Birmingham, Michigan, by 1975; bequeathed by him to the Diplomatic Reception Rooms, U.S. Department of State

REFERENCES: Israel Sack, Inc., advertisement, *Antiques* 101 (January 1972), frontispiece; *Israel Sack Collection* 1969–92, vol. 3 (1981), pp. 790–91, no. P3448; Moses 1984, pp. 88, 96, and pl. 10, figs. 3.2, 3.8, 3.57, 3.57a, 3.60, 3.60a; H. Sack 1987, p. 171; Conger and Itsell 1991, pp. 132–33, no. 51

This is a monumental piece of furniture: the case's forty-two inch width, which precisely matches the desk's overall height, is two inches greater than that of most other Newport fall-front desks but equal to that of Newport desk and bookcases. It bears one of John Townsend's first, elegantly scripted paper labels. It is reputed, albeit tenuously, to have a Townsend family connection, and—as with cat. no. 30—it may have been made for family use. The piece already exhibits Townsend's preference for the densest, finest mahogany and his extraordinarily refined execution. The bracket feet and the drawers, like those of a chest of the same date (cat. no. 18), are constructed in what was to become his signature method. The interior is standard Newport design. The desk, with its great fall-front shells, the largest and most

magnificent he ever made, is one of only four known Newport fall-front desks with block-and-shell exteriors. The other three (Moses 1984, figs. 7.5, 8.7; Christie's January 23, 1993, lot 568) are by different hands. Each of these desks has three deep drawers below the writing board, rather than the four shallow ones normally found on fall-front desks (cat. no. 29), which may make them appear awkward and out of scale. (For a fifth such desk, since altered, cat. no. 30.) The three-drawer format, however, was the design of choice for the lower halves of the nine six-shell desks and bookcases (fig. 8), which are Newport's most famous furniture form. That none of these desk and bookcases shows the hand of John Townsend may have something to do with the fact that the Brown brothers of Providence, who commissioned at least three of them, employed John Goddard almost exclusively.

The brasses are old but not original to the piece. The bottom two inches of the feet are replaced, and the corners of the bottom board shows marks of later corner blocks, now gone.



17 (label)





17 (underside)



17 (interior)



17 (shell fall front)

## 18. *Chest of Drawers, 1765*

JOHN TOWNSEND

34½ x 37½ x 20¾ in. (87.6 x 95.3 x 52.7 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: white pine, chestnut, tulip poplar

Labels and inscriptions: in ink, on paper label centered inside top-drawer bottom: *Made by/ John Townsend/Rhode Island/1765*; in chalk, on bottom board and on back boards, large joiner's marks: 05[?]

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1927 (27.57.1)

PROVENANCE: Probably originally purchased by George Champlin (died 1809), Newport, Rhode Island; his wife's niece Ruth Channing Tenney and her husband Caleb Jewett Tenney, Newport, Rhode Island, 1809; their daughter Elizabeth Tenney Allen, Northampton, Massachusetts, before 1865; her daughter Clara Channing Allen, Northampton, Massachusetts; purchased from her in 1927 by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. For a photograph of the chest in the Allen house, see fig. 3.

REFERENCES: Norton 1923, p. 63, fig. 1; Cornelius 1928, pp. 72–80, figs. 1, 4; Heckscher 1982, pp. 1145–49, figs. 3, 6, 7, 11, 14; Moses 1984, pp. 5, 8, 67, and pl. 3, figs. 2.5; fig. 3.3, 3.58–3.58b; Heckscher 1985, pp. 216–18; 365–66, no. 139

The chest exhibits a perfect sense of order and repose, and the shells perfectly terminate the blocking of the drawer fronts. Townsend has, at age thirty-three, achieved a mature design, elegantly executed.

The piece, whose label is identical in script and date to that on a block-and-shell fall-front desk (cat. no. 17), exhibits most of the distinctive features—in both visible design and invisible construction—that are characteristic of Townsend's later work. Like the desk, the chest gives the impression of being absolutely square (the overall height matches the case width.)

The chest closely resembles two chests Townsend made and labeled many years later, in the early 1790s (cat. nos. 19, 20). In a few features it shows John still

experimenting with solutions: stop flutes within the C-scrolls which form the centers of the shells but are later replaced with crosshatching; and screws, rather than double dovetail-shaped cleats, securing the top board to the subtop.

A small out-of-focus photograph of this chest was reproduced in *Antiques* in 1923, where it was described as bearing a John Townsend label inscribed *Made by John Townsend/Newport R.I./August 1783*. Its whereabouts remained a mystery until about 2000, when Michael Moses told me that his careful scrutiny of the photograph (Moses 1984, fig. 2.5) revealed a damaged keyhole escutcheon, which allowed the identification of the chest as the present piece, which has been at the Metropolitan since 1927.



18 (label)



18



18 (shell drawer)



18 (underside)

## 19. Chest of Drawers, 1792

JOHN TOWNSEND

34 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 37 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 20 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (87.9 x 95.9 x 52.4 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: mahogany, chestnut, maple, white pine, and poplar

Labels and inscriptions: in ink, printed on paper label centered on inside of bottom of uppermost drawer, *MADE BY/JOHN TOWNSEND/NEW-PORT*; and inscribed in ink *Sarah Slocum's* and *November 20th 1792*; in ink, inscribed on second paper label also on bottom of uppermost drawer,

[illegible] *give to Lydia T Conner* (ill. Christie's, New York, sale cat., June 18, 1998, p. 90); in graphite and chalk, inscribed variously on drawers and drawer slides, *A, B, C*; in chalk, inscribed (upside down) at the center of the back boards, *J<sup>x</sup> T*; in graphite, inscribed on a cross-brace, *J. C. S. Taber*

Private collection

PROVENANCE: Sarah Slocum (1771–1859), Newport, Rhode Island, and New Bedford,

Massachusetts, 1792; her cousin's son Joseph S. Tillinghast (1802–1876), Newport, Rhode Island, and New Bedford, Massachusetts; his daughter Lydia Tillinghast Conner (1827–1903), New Bedford and Springfield, Massachusetts; her son William Tillinghast Conner (1848–1914), New Bedford and Springfield, Massachusetts; Lydia Conner's first cousins James Curtis Swan Taber (born 1854), New Bedford and Boston, Massachusetts, and his sister Isabella C. Taber (born 1845); a member of the Taber family, possibly the







19 (shell drawer)



19 (label)

James Curtis Swan Taber mentioned above, or his daughter Caroline Louisa Taber (born 1902), Boston, 1929; [John S. Walton, New York, 1951]; Dr. William S. Serri, by 1953; (sale, Christie's, New York, June 18, 1998, lot 151); the present owners

REFERENCES: Ormsbee 1934, p. 71, ill. 25; John S. Walton advertisement, *Antiques* 59 (February 1951), p. 88; Carpenter 1954, pp. 65, 203, no. 39; Comstock 1957, p. 259, fig. 23; Moses 1984, figs. 2.6a–2.6c

This chest is almost identical to Townsend's first four-drawer chest of 1765, made twenty-seven years earlier (cat. no. 18). It is wonderfully intact and well preserved, including a lustrous old reddish brown patina. The name

of the original owner, Sarah Slocum (1771–1859), written directly on the cabinetmaker's label, provides a rare opportunity to trace the history of such an object, beginning with the occasion for which it was commissioned.

Sarah was the daughter of the prosperous Newport Quaker merchant John Slocum and of Martha Tillinghast. On September 24, 1792, the Second Congregational Church in Newport published the bans for Sarah's marriage to Thomas Hammond (1760–1803) of New Bedford. The chest's label bears the date November 20, 1792, just two months later, which would suggest that it was a marriage gift.

The chest demonstrates the conservatism of Townsend's Rhode Island clients, the longevity of his mature designs, and most importantly his continuing commitment to

the highest standards of cabinetmaking and craftsmanship. The only changes from the 1765 chest to the 1792 one are, in design, the insertion of cross-hatching beneath the flutes in the centers of the C-scrolls of the shells and the use of Neoclassical brasses; and, in construction, the use of bow-tie-like cleats to join the back of the top board to the subtop.

At least two other four-drawer chests, both at the Department of State, can be attributed to John Townsend. On one (Conger and Itsell 1991, pp. 125–26, no. 45), the shells relate to Townsend's earliest examples; on the other (Conger and Itsell 1991, pp. 123–24, no. 44), the shells are virtually identical to those of cat. no. 19, but the Rococo-style brasses and the lack of dovetail cleats to secure the top suggest a somewhat earlier date.



19 (underside)

## 20. *Chest of Drawers, 1793–95*

JOHN TOWNSEND

34¾ x 38 x 20 in. (88.3 x 96.5 x 50.8 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: maple, chestnut, and tulip poplar

Labels and inscriptions: in ink, printed on paper label centered inside top drawer bottom, *MADE BY JOHN TOWNSEND, NEWPORT*, followed by 179[?], handwritten in ink; in graphite, in center of bottom of bottom board, finishing mark in the form of a large calligraphic *A*

Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Warren Koontz, G1977–225

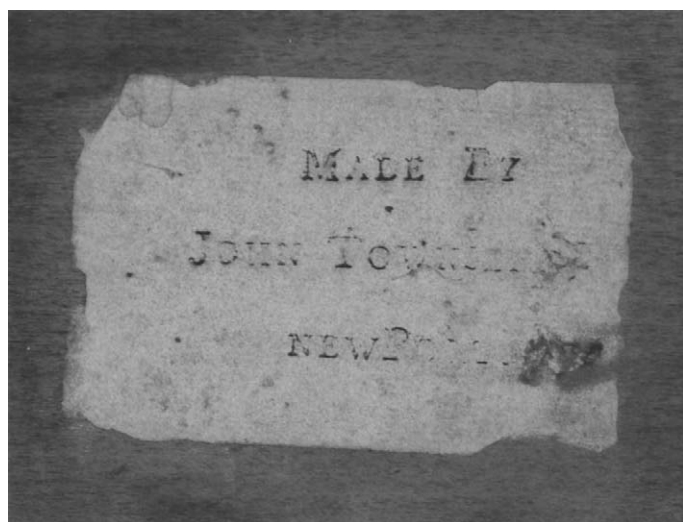
PROVENANCE: [John S. Walton, New York, 1958]; Dr. and Mrs. Warren W. Koontz; given by them in 1977 to the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia

REFERENCES: Moses 1984, pl. 13, figs. 3.61–3.61b, 3.9; Christie's, New York, sale cat., June 18, 1998, p. 91, under lot 151, figs. 10, 10a; Headley 1999, pp. 29–34

This is probably the latest of the three four-drawer block-and-shell chests labeled by John Townsend. One is dated 1765, another 1792. This one also bears a date, which has traditionally been read as 1790 (Moses 1984, pl. 13, and Christie's, New York, June 18, 1998, p. 91, under lot 151) but more recently as 1794 (Headley 1999, p. 30). While in fact the fourth digit appears to be illegible, a later date, in the mid-1790s, is more plausible. We know that Townsend used the first version of his printed label between 1786 and 1793 and the second version between 1793 and 1797. The label on this chest is the second version; accordingly the earliest that it would be logical to see it used is 1793. The chest is almost

identical to the 1792 chest (which has the earlier type of label), even including the same Neoclassical brasses. Both chests employ Townsend's signature bow-tie cleats at the back to secure the top board to the subtop. Their top halves are visible above the back-board which holds them in place.

At some time in the past the chest was reduced in width: at each side the molded edge of the top board and portions of the cornice and base moldings were sawed off. The width of each front foot was reduced about an inch by cutting a new miter. In 1958 the dealer John Walton expertly restored the missing elements, so that the chest now looks very much the way it would have originally.



20 (label)



20 (bow-tie cleat)



20



20 (shell drawer)

## 21. Tall Clock, 1789

JOHN TOWNSEND

MOVEMENT BY WILLIAM TOMLINSON, LONDON (ACTIVE 1733)

98 ¼ x 22 in. x 11 ¼ in. (249.6 x 55.9 x 28.3 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: chestnut, tulip poplar, and maple

Labels and inscriptions: in ink, printed on paper label in upper center of backboard, *MADE BY/JOHN TOWNSEND*, and below, inscribed in ink, *Newport Rhode Island 1789*; engraved on dial name boss, *William/Tomlinson/London*; in chalk, on backboard behind movement, a characteristic large Townsend finishing mark, *A* superimposed *M* (Moses 1984, fig. 3.10)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund, 1927 (27.57.2)

PROVENANCE: Probably purchased by George Champlin (died 1809), Newport, Rhode Island; his wife's niece Ruth Channing Tenney and her husband Caleb Jewett Tenney, Newport, Rhode Island, 1809; their daughter Elizabeth Tenney Allen, Northampton, Massachusetts, before 1865; her daughter Clara Channing Allen, Northampton, Massachusetts; purchased from her in 1927 by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. For a photograph of the clock in the Allen house, see fig. 4.

REFERENCES: Norton 1923, p. 63; Cornelius 1928, p. 75, fig. 2; Lee 1930, pp. 294, 295 (measured

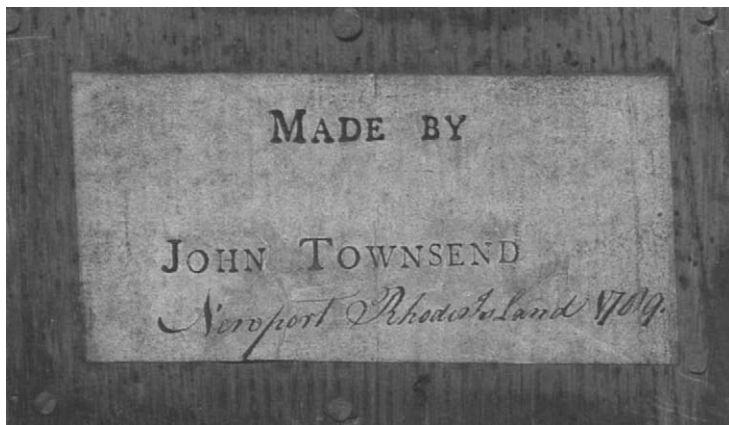
drawings); Heckscher 1982, pp. 1146, 1148, 1150, fig. 4; Moses 1984, pl. 12, figs. 3.10, 3.62–3.62b; Heckscher 1985, pp. 297–98, 362, 366, no. 192

This superb clock case is a fitting capstone to Townsend's achievement as a proponent of the block-and-shell style. The proportions are stately and thoroughly satisfying, and the execution, inside and out, is unsurpassed in its precision and refinement. The case, its bonnet capped by a segmental arch supported by fluted colonnettes, and its shaft door with a convex block and shell, is the classic Newport clock pattern. The cornice moldings match those on Townsend's chests of drawers, and the shell, with its even number of boldly articulated lobes and cross-hatched central C-scroll, is a reduced version of those on his later chests. The clock is the only signed Townsend piece with stop-fluted quarter-columns and with original reeded-urn finials. The wood has the old finish with a rich translucent brown patina. The feet are largely replaced, but the remains of the originals employ Townsend's standard arrangement of glue blocks. The twisted tops above the urns of the finials were at

one time replaced by Federal-period brass urn finials. Only recently has it been determined that the mention in a 1923 article of a tall clock labeled John Townsend Newport, 1783, in fact refers to this one.

With this clock case Townsend must have been consciously striving for a perfection of craftsmanship that transcended even his usual high level. This is particularly notable in the compulsive care with which he assembled the block- and-shell door and the pedestal panel below. On the door the projecting blocking and the carved shell are separate pieces fixed to a frame formed by the half-lapped and mitered mortise-and-tenon rails and stiles and reinforced by a dovetailed central horizontal brace. The top and bottom rails are tenoned through the stiles and pinned. The resulting interior panels are finished with an applied ogee molding, the whole neatly scraped and the wood still today with an unaltered purplish glow. On the pedestal, the rails and stiles framing the front panel are triple-tenoned at each corner (fig. 57).

William Claggett's death in 1749 left Newport without a master clockmaker, so it is not surprising that some of the finest Newport block-and-shell clock cases house movements by London makers such as William Creak (*Israel Sack Collection* 1969–93, vol. 3 [1981], p. 706), John Monkhouse (Sotheby's, New York, October 14, 1989, lot 261), and Marmaduke Storrs (Ott 1965, no. 79). Here John Townsend recycled a fine movement by William Tomlinson (active 1733), doubtless taken from an earlier case. In his will Townsend left his own clock "made by Storr in London" to his son John and a clock by Walter Cornell of Newport to his son Solomon.







21 (back of bonnet)



21 (finial)



21 (shell)



21 (fluting)



21 (interior)



21 (stop fluting)





## 22. Tall Clock, 1793

JOHN TOWNSEND

91½ x 21⅝ x 11¼ in. (232.4 x 54.9 x 28.6 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: chestnut and pine

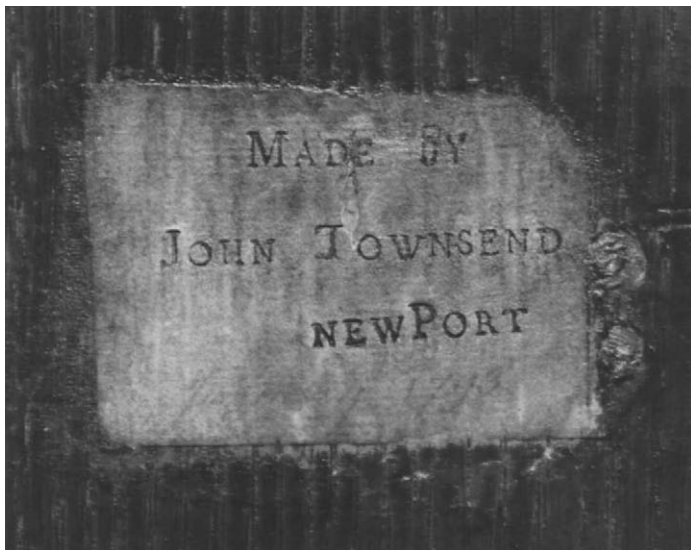
Labels and inscriptions: in ink, printed on label centered on backboard, *MADE BY JOHN TOWNSEND/NEWPORT* and inscribed in ink, *January 1793*

Marcy and Bruce Bowen Shilling, Woodland, Minnesota

PROVENANCE: Nathaniel Bowen, Fall River, Massachusetts; his son Paul Bowen; his son Frank Bowen; his son Nathen Bowen; his daughter Emma B. Purdy; her daughter Lena May Purdy Leidy; her son Percy M. Leidy; his daughter Percelle L. Paddock; [Estate Antiques, Charleston, South Carolina, 1993]; the present owner, 1993

REFERENCE: Estate Antiques advertisement, *Antiques* 143 (January 1993), p. 63

This clock had a long history of descent in the Bowen family, and it is only fitting that, after a brief hiatus, it has an owner who once again bears that name. It is a simpler version of the only other known labeled John Townsend clock (cat. no. 21), without quarter columns on the shaft or raised panel on the pedestal. Rather than a frame of mortise-and-tenoned parts, the doorframe is a single piece of wood. A photograph supplied in 1991 by the last family owner showed the clock with a flat inset door panel and no feet. According to the dealer who offered the clock in 1993, the present shell was modeled after the one on the David Williams clock at Winterthur and was carved by John Bivins (the late distinguished gunsmith and furniture historian). Both clocks have painted dials, as was the fashion for new clocks in the 1790s. The case of the Winterthur clock closely resembles that of cat. no. 21, Townsend's 1789 example, except that the figured veneers on the glazed doorframe and on the pedestal panel suggest a later date, perhaps about 1800.



22 (label)

## 23. Bureau Table, about 1765

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

34 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 36 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 20 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (87.3 x 92.7 x 52.1 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: chestnut, white pine, and tulip poplar

Labels and inscriptions: in pencil, on bottom of large drawer, *Bottom*; in chalk, on upper right drawer, *Made by/— [illegible?]/Mahogany*; in graphite, on rails below small drawers, beginning at upper left, *A, B, C, D, E*

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1909. (10.125.83)

PROVENANCE: Pascal Allen, Warren, Rhode Island; his grandson Pascal Allen Horton, Stratham, New Hampshire, until 1907; [F. C. Higgins, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1907]; H. Eugene Bolles, Boston, 1907–9; purchased from him by Mrs. Russell Sage in 1909 for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

REFERENCES: Lockwood 1926, vol. 1, p. 24, fig. 122; Miller 1937, vol. 1, pp. 494–95, no. 905; Margon 1965, pp. 194 (measured drawing), 195; Montgomery and Kane 1976, p. 150, fig. 99; Heckscher 1982, pp. 1150–51, fig. 19; Moses 1984, pl. II, figs. 3.83, 3.83a; Heckscher 1985, pp. 211–12, 365, no. 135

Nutting, looking at cat. no. 25, referred to the four-shell Newport kneehole dressing tables as “the supreme pieces of American cabinet work” (Nutting 1928–33, vol. 1, fig. 272), and few people would disagree. The design is small and compact, powerful and assertive. This example is the earliest of the eight four-shell bureau tables known in John Townsend’s distinctive manner. It shares a number of uncharacteristic features with the three-shell four-drawer chest Townsend signed and dated in 1765 (cat. no. 18): all the

shells have flutes within their central Cs; the middle shell of the upper drawer has ribbing in the lobes but no incised border; and the top board is screwed to the subtop. On this basis it can be accorded a similar date. In overall proportions the present piece is also slightly more vertical than Townsend’s other bureau tables. The side cornice moldings, the notched molding below the door, and the bottoms of the feet were restored under the direction of the prior owner, H. Eugene Bolles. The keyhole escutcheon, while old, is a replacement.



23 (center of shell drawer)



24. *Bureau Table,*  
*about 1770*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

34½ x 37½ x 21 in. (87.6 x 95.3 x 53.3 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: mahogany, chestnut, tulip poplar, white pine, hard and soft maple

Labels and inscriptions: in graphite, inscribed on rails between drawers, the cabinetmaker's partially legible letter markings

Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, Gift of Henry Francis du Pont, 1960 (59.2645)

PROVENANCE: Henry Francis du Pont; given by him in 1960 to the Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware

REFERENCES: American Art Galleries 1929, no. 629; Moses 1984, fig. 3.84; Richards and Evans 1997, pp. 387–88, no. 190

25. *Bureau Table,*  
*about 1770*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

34½ x 37½ x 20¾ in. (86.7 x 94.3 x 53 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: yellow poplar, chestnut, and eastern white pine

Labels and inscriptions: in graphite, inscribed on drawer dividers on left, from top to bottom, *A, B, C* and on the right, top to bottom, *D, E, F*; in black crayon, inscribed on top of dust board below wide drawer, *Upper* and other illegible or later writings

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, 1957.37

PROVENANCE: Francis P. Garvan, New York, by 1928; his wife, Mabel Brady Garvan, New York, 1937; given by her to the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

REFERENCES: Nutting 1928–33, vol. 1, fig. 272; Ormsbee 1934, p. 139, ill. 60; Rogers 1960, p. 57, fig. 7; Ward 1977, p. 14, no. 1; Mastelli 1980, pp. 33, 35, and front cover; Kirk 1982, pp. 148–49, fig. 381; Heckscher 1982, p. 1151, fig. 20; Moses 1984, fig. 3.87; Ward 1988, pp. 216–17, no. 109, and pl. 10

These four bureau tables represent the epitome of John Townsend's best work. Each is made of the finest figured mahogany to which time has imparted a rich, glowing color and patina. Each has its original Rococo brasses. Each is constructed in Townsend's refined and recognizable style. None is signed or documented, though two have provenances associating them with eighteenth-century Newport families. Cat. no. 27 is said to have descended from Samuel Fowler, whose Petty Ledger (NHS) records him selling John Townsend hardware in 1786–87. On this chest, the door shell and the top board are made like those on cat. no. 23, suggesting an earlier date. The three other chests (cat. nos. 24, 25, 26) are virtually identical, except for minor differences in size and proportion, and must have been made at nearly the same time. Their shells exhibit the cross-hatched centers, their top boards the bow-tie cleats, found on Townsend's 1792 four-drawer chest (cat. no. 19). Three more examples of this magnificent Townsend model are known (Wayne Pratt advertisement, *Antiques* 140 [September 1991], p. 268; Moses 1984, fig. 3.86; and fig. 2 in this publication). The last bears remnants of a label (Moses 1984, fig. 3.4) that has been interpreted as reading "John Townsend 1769" (Moses 1984, pl. 5).

26. *Bureau Table,*  
*about 1770*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

34½ x 38½ x 21¼ in. (87.6 x 96.8 x 54 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods:  
chestnut, maple, and yellow poplar

Labels and inscriptions: in ink, stamped on back  
and right sides of second small drawer from top  
right, *Eliza Wightman*; scored on bottom of right  
bottom drawer, *VII*

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The Bayou  
Bend Collection, Gift of Miss Ima Hogg, B.69.91

PROVENANCE: Probably made for Samuel  
Vernon (1711–1792), Newport, Rhode Island;  
his daughter Elizabeth Vernon (Mrs. Valentine  
Wightman, 1738–1812); her daughter Mary  
Wightman (1773–1840); her cousin William  
Vernon (1788–1867); his daughter Ann Vernon  
(Mrs. Robert M. Oliphant, born 1832); her daughter  
Grace Oliphant (Mrs. George Casper Kellogg,  
died 1950); [Israel Sack, Inc., New York, 1950]; Ima  
Hogg, Houston, Texas; given by her to the Bayou  
Bend Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

REFERENCES: Cooper 1980b, p. 177, pl. 34,  
p. 200; Moses 1984, p. 143, and figs. 3.82–3.82b;  
Warren et al. 1998, pp. 87–88, no. F140

27. *Bureau Table,*  
*about 1770*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

34½ x 36¾ x 20 in. (86.6 x 93.4 x 58 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods:  
chestnut, and tulip poplar

Labels and inscriptions: in chalk and graphite,  
inscribed on drawers and on drawer dividers, cabi-  
netmaker's lettering

The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Jamee J. and  
Marshall Field V, 1984.1387

PROVENANCE: Probably Samuel Fowler (1718–  
1794), Newport, Rhode Island, about 1786; his son  
Christopher Fowler, Newport, Rhode Island; heirs  
of the Fowler family; [John S. Walton Antiques,  
Inc., Old Lyme, Connecticut, 1976]; Mr. and Mrs.  
Marshall Field, 1976–84; given by them in 1984 to  
The Art Institute of Chicago

REFERENCES: John S. Walton Antiques, Inc.,  
advertisement, *Antiques* 110 (July 1976), p. 4;  
Moses 1984, figs. 3.88–3.88c; Barter, Rhodes, and  
Thayer 1998, pp. 80–82, no. 23



24



25



26



27



## 28. *Bureau Table, about 1790*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

33½ x 36¾ in. x 19 in. (85.1 x 93 x 48.3 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: tulip poplar, chestnut, white pine, and mahogany

Labels and inscriptions: inscribed in graphite, on undersides of two fixed shelves behind door, large *A* and *B*; other miscellaneous cabinetmaker's numbers and letters

Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, Gift of Henry Francis du Pont, 1958, 58.2139

PROVENANCE: Israel Sack, Boston; Henry Francis du Pont, 1928; given by him in 1958 to the Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware

REFERENCES: American Art Galleries 1929, no. 607; Downs 1952, fig. 176. Heckscher 1982, p. 1151, fig. 21; Moses 1984, fig. 3.85; Richards and Evans 1997, pp. 389–90, no. 191

With its flush central door, this chest is a dramatic variation on the block-and-shell bureau tables Townsend was making before 1790.

The design is a logical outcome of the knee-hole form, neatly integrating the door with the central shell above and providing a larger storage space. But the design did not catch on: the visual effect may have been jarring to clients used to the traditional knee-hole. Jonas Bergner carefully drew and measured the piece in 1927 (fig. 1), but

could not decide if it was by Townsend or Goddard. The applied shells are of an unusual figured mahogany. A second example of this model, said to have come down in the Townsend family, recently surfaced (Christie's, January 16, 2004, lot 546).

While the chests are at first glance identical, there are differences in overall size and in the proportional relationship of the drawer heights. On both pieces the workmanship is above reproach.



## 29. *Desk and Bookcase, 1760–70*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

98 x 40 x 22½ in. (248.9 x 101.6 x 57.2)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods:  
mahogany and tulip poplar

Labels and inscriptions: in chalk, on outside back  
boards of large drawers, beginning at the top:

*A, B, C, D*

Private collection

PROVENANCE: Jonathan Nichols (1700–1774);  
Walter Nichols (1748–1823); William Stoddard  
Nichols (1785–1871); Thomas Pitman Nichols  
(1816–1897); Othniel Foster Nichols (1845–1908);  
by descent to a seventh-generation descendant;  
[Israel Sack, Inc., New York, 1974]; present owner

REFERENCES: *Israel Sack Collection* 1969–92,  
vol. 4 (1974), pp. 915–17, no. P3555; Moses 1984,  
p. 144, and figs. 3.96–3.96b

Flat-front Newport desks and bookcases, unlike simple desks, are very rare — even more rare than those with costly block-and-shell fronts. Best known is one, now at the RISD Museum, bearing Job Townsend's label (fig. 23). While now missing its scroll pediment, the arched panels of the bookcase doors are characteristic of the genre. A unique variant is the present example, with rectangular fielded panels in rectangular doors; it is the only desk and bookcase that has been associated with Townsend or his workshop. The overall design has an elegant simplicity. The pediment has a low-slung scroll, like those on Townsend's high chests. The interior is virtually identical to that of the labeled 1765 block-and-shell desk (cat. no. 17). The reeded-urn finial (missing its turned support), the small interior shells, and the drawer and foot construction are all in



29

the John Townsend manner. The brasses are replacements. The interior is all tulip poplar, like cat. no. 9; the diminutive

thumbnail drawer moldings are like those on Townsend's high chest for Elisha Dyer (Moses 1984, fig. 3.100).



### 30. *Fall-Front Desk, 1760–90*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

41½ x 42⅞ x 23⅞ in. (105.4 x 107 x 58.7 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: mahogany, chestnut, tulip poplar, and white pine

Labels and inscriptions: in chalk, centered on backboards: *JT* [?]

Newport Restoration Foundation, Newport, Rhode Island, 2001.7

PROVENANCE: Probably John Townsend; his daughter Mary Townsend Brinley, 1809; her nephew Christopher Townsend, 1856; his sister Ellen Townsend, 1881; her friend William P. Sheffield, 1886; William P. Sheffield Jr., 1907; his son S. S. Sheffield, Cincinnati, Ohio, until 1937; Newport Restoration Foundation, Newport, Rhode Island, 1969

REFERENCES: Keyes 1937, p. 309, fig. 4; “Loan Exhibition of Furniture,” 1937, p. 11; Moses 1984, figs. 3.95, 3.95a

The desk is both wider (forty-two inches rather than forty or less) and constructed of denser and more richly figured mahogany than most Newport examples—exceptional features on an almost commonplace form. These distinctions, when added to an established history of descent in John Townsend’s family, lend credence to the surmise that the piece was made for a family member. In his will Townsend left to his son Charles “My Mahogany Desk which I have now in use” and to his son Solomon “A Mahogany Desk I had made for him.”

Drawer and foot construction are in the John Townsend manner. The Neoclassical style brasses suggest a date in the late 1780s or 1790s, but Townsend may have altered an already existing desk during these years. Patches on the inside front edges of the side boards show where the original drawer dividers were joined, indicating the presence of three deep drawers rather than the four shallow ones seen here. The earlier configuration would align the piece with the block-and-shell desk that Townsend labeled in 1765 (cat. no. 17).





### 31. *Chest-on-Chest, about 1790*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

86 x 45 x 24½ in. (218.4 x 114.3 x 62.2 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: chestnut, yellow poplar, and maple

Labels and inscriptions: in graphite, on backs of two small upper drawers: *A* and *B*; on backs of lower case drawers: fragments of the letters *A*, *B*, *C*, *D*

RISD Museum, Providence, Rhode Island, Bequest of Commander William Davis Miller, 59.251

PROVENANCE: Probably Elisha Reynolds Potter (1764–1835), Kingston, Rhode Island; his son Elisha Reynolds Potter Jr. (1811–1883); his brother William H. Potter (1816–1908); his niece Mary Lemoine Potter (1860–1938); her cousin Commander William Davis Miller, by 1936; bequeathed by him in 1959 to the RISD Museum, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island

REFERENCES: “Decorative Arts” 1980, p. 11; Monkhouse 1980, p. 126, pl. 1; Moses 1984, p. 144 and figs. 3.90–3.90b; Monkhouse and Michie 1986, pp. 86–87, no. 32

This chest-on-chest, with its wonderful tawny brown patina, can confidently be attributed to John Townsend. The drawer and foot construction and the calligraphic lettering in the upper drawers are without question characteristic of the work of his shop. But it is the delicate scale and precise articulation of the stop-fluted quarter columns and of the urn-shaped finials with reeded flared sides and bottoms—virtually matching those on the labeled clock case dated 1789 (cat. no. 21)—that are the compelling evidence that this is the work of John’s own hand. The Neoclassical-style brasses support a comparably late date, about 1790. His late case pieces are among his very best.

A closely related chest-on-chest at the Newport Historical Society (Moses 1984, fig. 3.92), can also be assigned to Townsend, though its bold Rococo brasses suggest an earlier date. Both pieces have the same low-slung pediment design, which is also found on Townsend’s fully developed high chests (cat. no. 10). On all of them, the height of the shaped panels within the pediment continues the graduated scale of the drawers below. Another related example (Moses 1984, p. 167, fig. 3.91), descended from Providence merchant Moses Brown, exhibits construction features characteristic of the Townsend shop, but has the high-arched pediment typical of Newport chest-on-chests by other makers, such as Thomas Townsend (fig. 29).



31 (finial)





## Stop-Fluted Furniture

Some years after the Revolution, in the mid-1780s, John Townsend experimented with what was in some ways, for him, a radically new style of furniture — furniture in which the cabriole leg was replaced by a straight leg, square in section and enriched on the outer sides with fluting, the lower few inches of which were filled in or “stopped.”<sup>1</sup> Four tables in this style — one card and three Pembrokes (cat. nos. 32–35) — bear his label and form the basis for attributing a number of other examples to him, including a china table and a basin stand. Each one of these tables exhibits the cross-braced structural system and refined joinery associated with Townsend’s documented oeuvre.

A census of Newport furniture in this stop-fluted style includes, in addition to the above-mentioned pieces, dining tables and serving tables, seating furniture (side chairs and armchairs, easy chairs, and sofas), and bedsteads. Virtually none of these other pieces, many known only from photographs, appears to have the weight and presence found, for example, in the cabriole-leg chairs attributed to John. Stop-fluted legs by themselves, be they by John Townsend or one of his contemporaries, all look very much alike. It is only in the other parts of a piece that his hand can be sought. The style is not suited to case furniture, and we have already seen that John carried on the block-and-shell style into the 1790s.

The straight leg was a common feature in English furniture of the midcentury — the first two editions of Chippendale’s *Director* (1754, 1755) were replete with massive, solid examples — but it was much less popular in America. In Philadelphia, where London fashion was followed closely, straight legs in the so-called Marlborough style, usually with cuffs or other carved ornament, were a viable, if not widely popular alternative to cabriole legs as early as 1772. The competing styles are described in detail in a book of cabinetmaker’s prices of that year.<sup>2</sup>

This straight-leg style could have been brought to Rhode Island by John Brown, Providence’s leading merchant, who had close commercial ties with Philadelphia and whose own furniture consisted, in considerable part, of Philadelphia pieces and of stop-fluted Newport pieces. None of the latter, including sofas and card tables and beds, is suggestive of John’s manufacture, nor is John known to have worked for Brown. John Goddard was Brown’s preferred joiner; Goddard also made pieces for another titan of commerce, Newporter Aaron Lopez, and records of their transactions contain the earliest references to fluted furniture: May 1769 — “To 2 Mahogany Square Tables 3 feet 9 . . . fluting legs . . . 1 Dollar”;<sup>3</sup> May 1773 — “To splicing & fluteing Sett Bed Posts [£] 1-4.”<sup>4</sup> What this furniture for Lopez looked like we do not know, but it is doubtful that it would have had the spare and elegant simplicity, the almost Neoclassical delicacy, of John Townsend’s stop fluting. There is not another reference to fluting in any of the surviving accounts of the Townsends and Goddards, not even in the Job Townsend accounts of 1750–78.

When, then, did John Townsend adopt a stop-fluted style? The only firm evidence is the furniture itself, bearing labels of a type that Townsend used between 1786 and 1793. Accordingly, stop fluting may be seen as a precursor of the Neoclassicism that

was about to sweep the new nation. The simple, crisp, and elegant style is particularly well suited to John's precise cabinetwork, and one would like to credit the introduction of stop fluting to him. But this cannot be proved. The scant documentary records suggest that other shops, as well as John's, worked in this style. In 1787 Townsend Goddard supplied Christopher Champlin with "a large maple Bedstead Fluted Posts & Bases . . . [£] 2-8-0."<sup>5</sup> Edmund Townsend's will (1811) lists "one Mahogany Breakfast Table with wings and fluted legs." And John himself spelled out in his will (1805) three such tables: "1 square mahogany 4ft. table with fluted legs," "all mahogany 3 ft. square table with fluted legs," and "one square pembroke table, with stretchers," compelling evidence of his affection for this short-lived style.

1. Stop fluting had its origins in classical architectural practice, where the filling up of the lower part of the fluting of a column was called "cabling."
2. Weil 1979, pp. 175-92.
3. Series 2, box 12, Aaron Lopez Papers, AJHS.
4. Box 13, folder 11, Aaron Lopez Papers, AJHS.
5. Swan 1950, p. 449.

## 32. Card Table, probably 1786

JOHN TOWNSEND

27¼ x 33¾ x 16⅞ closed in. (69.2 x 86 x 42.2 closed cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: maple, chestnut, and tulip poplar

Labels and inscriptions: in ink, printed on paper label pasted inside drawer bottom, *MADE BY/JOHN TOWNSEND/NEWPORT*; followed by, in ink and overwritten in ink, 1786.; in ink, parts of *N* and *P* of *NEWPORT* reinforced, and double-line border around the label; large painted letters (early nineteenth century), on bottom of fixed top board and on outside of drawer bottom, *CJT/No 31*

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Egleston Fund. 1927 (27.161)

PROVENANCE: Probably originally purchased by George Champlin (d. 1809), Newport, Rhode Island; his wife's niece Ruth Channing Tenney and her husband Caleb Jewett Tenney (whose initials are painted on the table's underside), Newport, Rhode Island, 1809; their daughter Elizabeth Tenney Allen, Northampton, Massachusetts, before 1865; her daughter Clara Channing Allen, Northampton, Massachusetts; purchased from her in 1927 by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

REFERENCES: Cornelius 1928, figs. 3, 6; Nutting 1928–33, vol. 1, no. 1024; Moses 1981, p. 1155, figs. 6–6b; Moses 1984, figs. 2.7–2.7b, 3.25–3.27; Heckscher 1985, pp. 167–68, 345, 366, no. 100

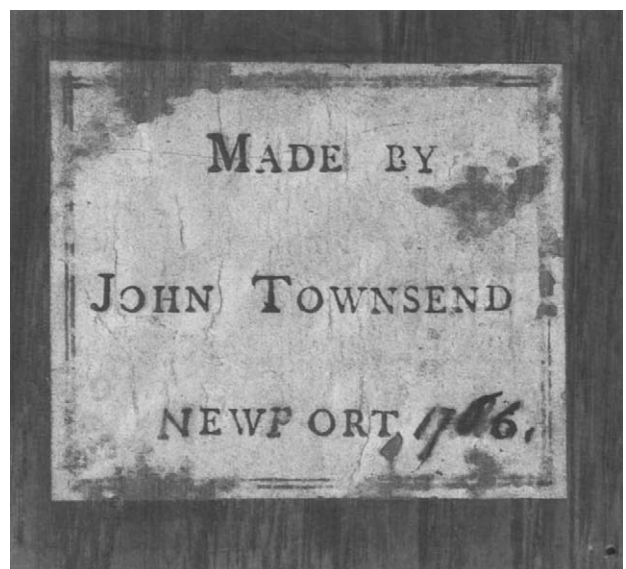
This deceptively simple table is one of the supreme examples of Townsend's late oeuvre. It is fashioned from the densest of Cuban or San Domingo mahoganies and retains its original oiled finish. The design is elegant in proportion and detail, and the construction has a machinelike precision.

The reading of the date on this table has always been questioned, because the faded brown ink of the original numbers has been strengthened and the third digit (a 6 or an 8?) possibly altered. Of the two possible readings, the 1766 date is stylistically implausible, but that of 1786 is perfectly appropriate. (For a similarly contested date, see cat. no. 21). The tall, attenuated legs of this table must have been a great novelty when it was first made. And it may have been a concern with this structural vulnerability that led John to use six cross-braces to reinforce the table frame (thereafter he usually made do with five) and to transform the traditionally ornamental pierced knee brackets into important structural members by mortise-and-tenoning them into leg and rail. At any rate, John was to employ this labor intensive structural refinement on all his stop-fluted tables. On this example the feature served its function well: some thirty years ago, one rear leg fractured and the single knee bracket held it firmly in place. In one respect this table is not characteristic of Newport work: it has a

fifth, swing, leg rather than two hinged rear legs; in another it is not characteristic of John's work: the drawer has thick, flat-topped sides into which the bottom board is rabbeted.

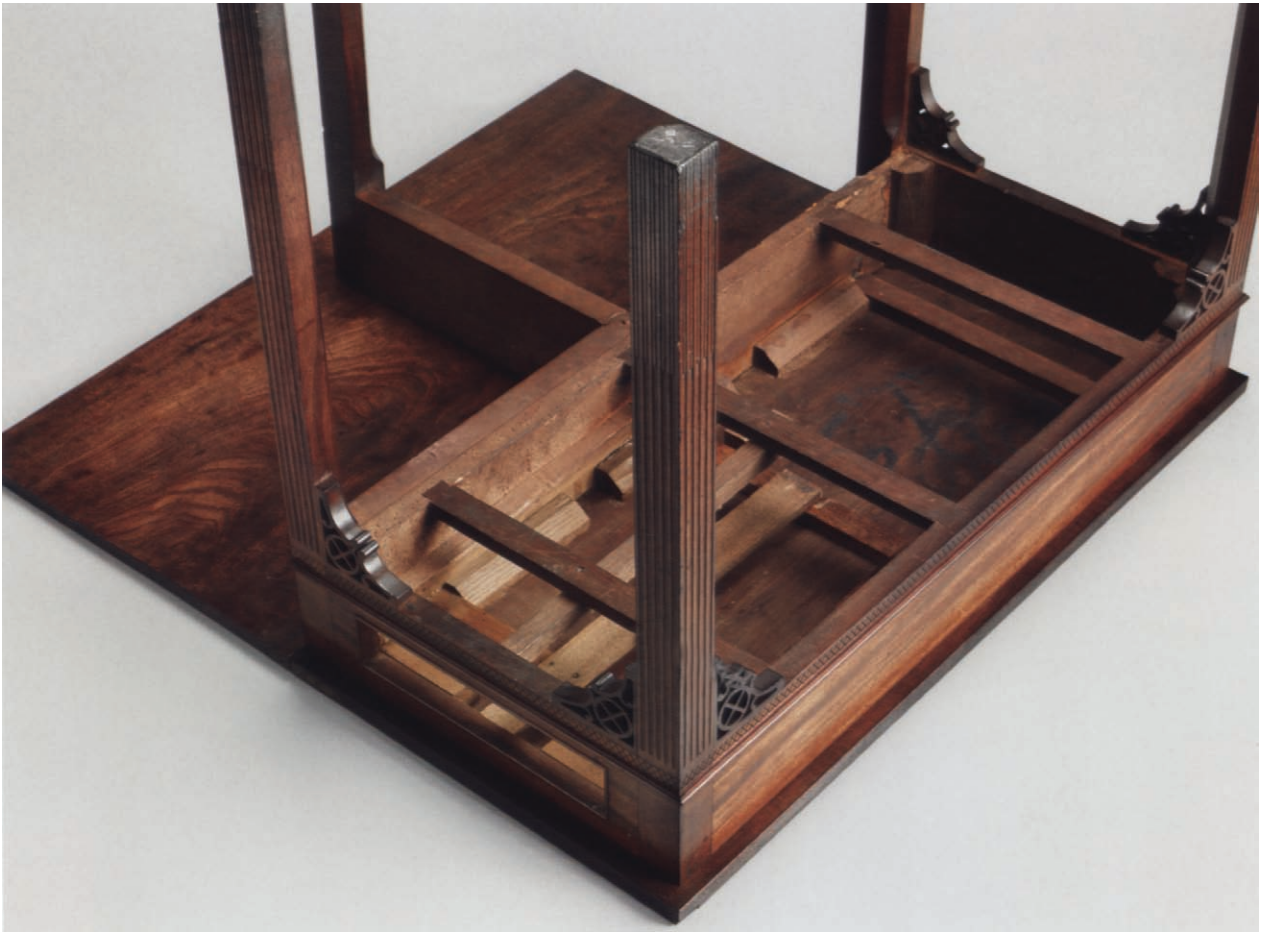
The only other such card table attributable to John is now at the Hunter House in Newport. The tables are virtually identical except for the design of the pierced knee brackets (those on the Metropolitan table are unique in having crossbars within the open circles) and the incised crosshatching on the skirts (that on the Metropolitan table is larger in scale).

This table is one of three labeled John Townsend pieces to descend together in the same family (cat. nos. 18, 21); in addition, a stop-fluted Pembroke table attributable to the John Townsend shop but not to the hand of the master, bears the same painted inscription (*CJT/no. 31*) and has the same provenance. (Ott 1965, pp. 62–63, no. 45). A set of stop-fluted chairs is visible in the background of a photograph of the family tall clock in situ (fig. 4).



32 (label)





32 (underside)



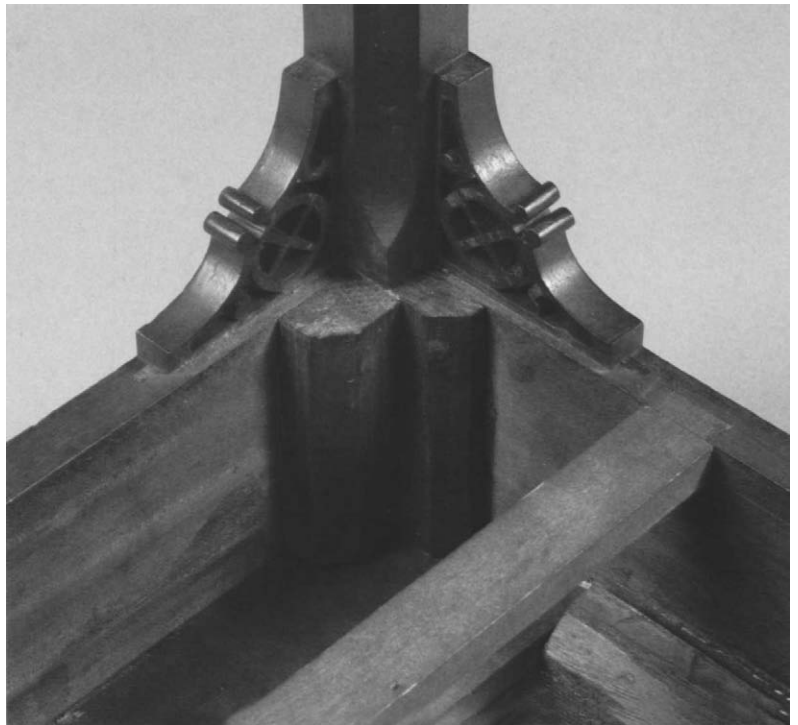
32 (underside)



32 (drawer end)



32 (bracket)



32 (brackets and glue blocks)

### 33. *Pembroke Table, 1785–90*

JOHN TOWNSEND

26¼ x 36½ open x 33½ in. (66.7 x 92.7 open x 85.1 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: maple, tulip poplar, and chestnut

Labels and inscriptions: in ink, printed on paper label pasted on inside bottom of drawer: *MADE BY/JOHN TOWNSEND/NEWPORT*; later inscribed in ink, upper left corner, 1743

Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware,  
Gift of Henry Francis du Pont (58.2147)

**PROVENANCE:** Owned originally by Colonel John Cooke, Middletown, Rhode Island; Philip Flayderman; (his sale, American Art Association, Anderson Galleries, New York, January 2–4, 1930, lot 472); in the sale catalogue the illustrations for this table's label and those of a pair of Federal card tables, lot 470, are transposed; Henry Francis du Pont; given by him to the Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware

**REFERENCES:** Downs 1952, figs. 311, 399; Moses 1981, p. 1152, figs. 1–1b; Moses 1984, p. 142 and figs. 3.7, 3.18, 3.18a, 3.23, 3.28; Richards and Evans 1997, pp. 264–65, no. 138

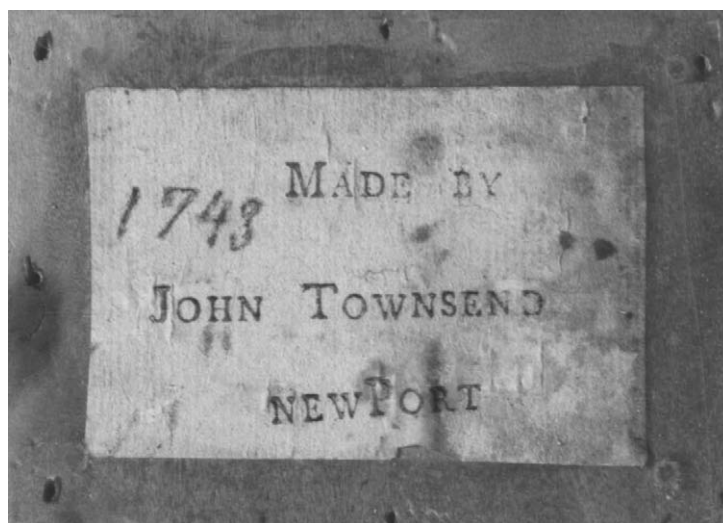
The Pembroke table was John Townsend's favorite form in the stop-fluted style. Three labeled examples (cat. nos. 33, 34, 35) have been identified, of which the present Winterthur table is the best known and best preserved (all three labels are of the first printed type used by John between 1786 and 1793). The incised crosshatching below the Winterthur drawer front matches that on the Metropolitan labeled and dated card table (cat. no. 32) and on one other Pembroke (cat. no. 34).

The sale of the Winterthur example to H. F. du Pont at the 1930 Flayderman sale brought the name of John Townsend to a wider public for the first time. The history of ownership by Colonel John Cooke is given in the 1930 auction catalogue, where four Federal-style card tables (cat. no. 40) from the same family, two of them bearing John's label, were also sold. Another Pembroke, of similar design but altogether different construction and not attributable to John's shop, is also said to have descended from Colonel Cooke (Rodriguez Roque 1984, pp. 294–95, no. 137).

The illustration in the auction catalogue of the table's label with its clearly apocryphal

1743 date encouraged the belief that the four-digit numbers on so many Townsend labels were not dates but some arcane accounting. A likely explanation for the number 1743 can be found twenty lots later in the same auction catalogue. Lot 492 is a set of Newport side chairs, said to have been made by Job Townsend in 1743 for the Eddy family. It is too much of a coincidence not to think that somebody, unaware that Job and John were of different generations, decided to embellish the table's history.

A number of other examples of the Winterthur model, virtually identical in design and construction, can be attributed to John's workshop with confidence, including one at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Hipkiss 1941, pp. 124–25, no. 66); one in a private collection (Carpenter 1954, p. 84, no. 56); one at the Hunter House, Newport (PSNC. 1720); and one at the U.S. Department of State (Conger and Itsell 1991, pp. 186–87, no. 97). Two unusual features of the last table—the shaped corners of the drop leaves and the uniquely patterned stretchers—appear to be later alterations, but since the piece has been entirely refinished, there is no way to prove this.



33 (label)



33





33



33 (underside)

### 34. *Pembroke Table, 1785–90*

JOHN TOWNSEND

26¾ x 36¾ open x 34½ in. (67.9 x 93.4 open x 87.6 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: maple, chestnut, and tulip poplar

Labels and inscriptions: in ink, printed on paper label, with several losses, pasted on inside bottom board of drawer, [MA] DE BY/JOH [N TOWNS] EN [D]

Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Ritter, Norfolk, Virginia

PROVENANCE: (sale, Christie's, New York, October 8, 1998, lot 54); the present owners

Not known until its auction in 1998, this table is the only addition in many years to the John Townsend canon of labeled stop-fluted pieces. The label is of the first printed type used by Townsend from 1786 until 1793. The table is virtually identical to the Winterthur example (cat. no. 33), except that its top is an inch longer and its drawer slides on a broad medial board rather than on side runners.

The scale of the crosshatching on the two Pembroke tables (cat. nos. 33, 34) is similar to that on the Metropolitan card table (cat. no. 32).

Except for the cross-stretchers, which were restored after the 1998 auction (following the model of Carpenter 1954, p. 84, no. 56), the piece is intact, including a thick buildup of old finishes on the legs and end rails.



34 (label)



### 35. *Pembroke Table, probably 1788*

JOHN TOWNSEND

26¾ x 33 open x 33½ in. (67.9 x 83.8 open x 85.1 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: maple, tulip poplar, and chestnut

Label and inscription: in ink, printed on label centered on inside of bottom board of drawer: *MADE BY JOHN TOWNSEND/NEWPORT*; in graphite, barely visible bottom left, 1788; in ink, remnants of double-line border around the label

The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Boston, Massachusetts

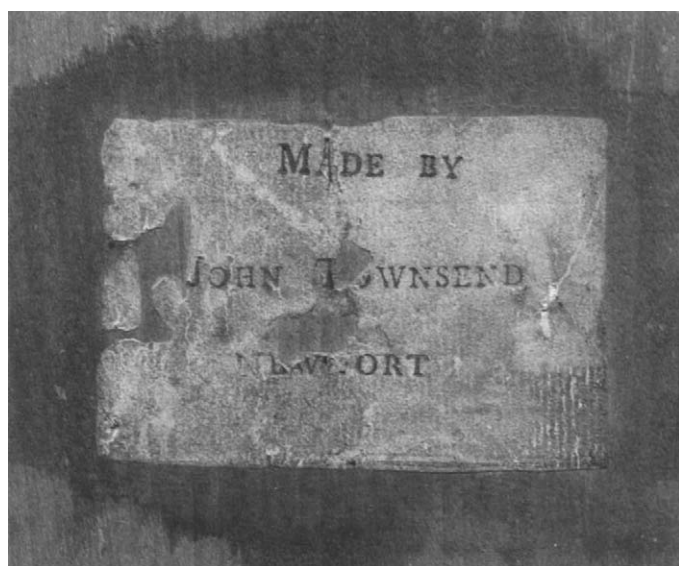
PROVENANCE: Presumably descended from William Ellery, Newport, Rhode Island; acquired by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Boston, as part of the William Ellery Channing Memorial

REFERENCES: Moses 1981, p. 1154, figs. 5, 5a; Moses 1984, p. 69 and figs. 2.8, 2.8a

This table differs from the two other labeled Pembroke tables and their related examples (see cat. nos. 33, 34) in the simpler treatment of the front and back rails. It is plain below the drawer opening, with neither inset bead molding nor band of incised cross-hatching. And the pierced corner brackets, though neatly mortise-and-tenoned to leg and rail in Townsend's signature manner, form a simple segmental arch with right-angle braces, rather than the more typical circle enclosed by paired double scrolls. Its label is identical to cat. no. 32, even to the use of a double-line border. However,

the 1788 date is not in Townsend's characteristic manner and, though stylistically plausible, may not be original. In matters of construction it is identical to cat. no. 33. The cross-stretchers, replaced in 2004, are modeled on those of Carpenter 1954, p. 84, no. 56.

This table is a rare instance of John Townsend's labeling a piece without all the costly extras. What gives it particular importance is that it remains together with its longtime "mate," a table identical in provenance and design but altogether different in construction (see Appendix 1).



35 (label)



35 (detail of bracket)



Fig. 1. A side table with a drop leaf and a drawer, made of dark wood with a fluted base and decorative cross-bracing.

35

## 36. *China Table, 1785–90*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

27¼ x 34½ x 20⅞ in. (69.2 x 87.6 x 52.4 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: maple and chestnut

Labels and inscriptions: in chalk (nineteenth century?), on underside of top, calligraphic *B*

Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, Museum Purchase, 58.37

PROVENANCE: Probably Jabez Bullock (1741–1808) and Mary (Richmond) Bullock (1740–1801), Rhode Island; descended in the Bullock family; [Nathan Liverant, Colchester, Connecticut]; [Israel Sack, Inc., New York, 1958]; Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware. According to Dorothy A. Harris, the last family owner of the table, “The Townsend silver table with the pierced gallery came to us through my husband’s family. It belonged to Rhoda Peckham Bullock, half sister of his Grandmother Sarah Pierce Bullock Harris. Rhoda P. Bullock was the daughter of Richmond Bullock and Rhoda Peckham Bullock, Granddaughter of Jabez Bullock (1741–1808) and Mary Richmond (Bullock) (1740–1801) and William

Peckham and Bethiah Peckham. Aunt Rhoda told me that the Townsend pieces were in the family and that Townsends were related to the family.” (Mrs. Thomas Harris, Saunderstown, Rhode Island, to Harold Sack, April 18, 1958, registrar files, Winterthur Museum).

REFERENCES: Israel Sack, Inc., advertisement, *Antiques* 73 (May 1958), inside front cover; Cooper 1980a, p. 142, fig. 160; Moses 1981, p. 1158, figs. 10, 10a; Moses 1984, figs. 3.79–3.79b; Richards and Evans 1997, pp. 244–45, no. 125

Rectangular tea tables with pierced galleries around their tops were dubbed “China Tables” in Chippendale’s *Director* (1754 and later). Examples of such tables from Newport are extremely rare, and this is the only one that can be authoritatively attributed to John Townsend. In construction and in ornamentation it conforms to the standard practice of his documented work: five cross-braces reinforce the table bed, the chestnut

glue blocks are neatly beveled, and the pierced brackets are mortise-and-tenoned to leg and rail. Every element is precisely executed and highly finished.

The incised crosshatching on the lower edge of the rails is much smaller in scale (allowing for another whole layer of diamonds) than that found on the three labeled tables sharing this motif (cat. nos. 32, 33, 34) but conforms to that found on two unlabeled Pembroke tables (Carpenter 1954, p. 84, no. 56, and Hunter House), which can safely be attributed to Townsend). A plausible hypothesis is that the latter tables were made at a different time than the labeled ones, either when labels were no longer available, or when Townsend was supervising but not actually finishing the pieces himself.

The pierced rim, neatly dovetailed at each corner, consists of a single motif repeated, at different scales, five times on each long side and three times on each short side. A similar rim is found on a basin stand (cat. no. 37) with the same provenance.



36

### 37. *Basin Stand, 1785–90*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods:  
chestnut, tulip poplar, and white pine

34 x 13 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 13 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (86.4 x 35.2 x 35.2 cm)

Labels and inscriptions: none

Private collection

PROVENANCE: [Nathan Liverant and Sons,  
Colchester, Connecticut, 1999]; [Israel Sack, Inc.,  
New York, 1999]; the present owners. The stand is  
said to have descended in the same family as the  
china table (cat. no. 36).

The attribution of this unique piece to John Townsend is based upon its design and execution and is buttressed by its provenance. The characteristic construction features include the following: small, perfectly round wooden pins securing all the mortise-and-tenon joints of the rails and stiles; mortised-and-tenoned pierced brackets; square legs with beveled inner edges; and neatly fashioned beveled chestnut glue blocks. The design of the pierced gallery consists of a single motif, a circle flanked by scrollwork beneath a ripple top edge repeated three times on each side. The pierced gallery matches that of the china

table (cat. no. 36) which shares the same history of ownership.

The present piece lacks a crosshatched band at the level below the drawer opening and the fluting or stop-fluting of the legs. Presumably John decided that the piece was too small and delicate to accommodate such ornament. The drawer pull may be a replacement.

A related stand, but with the drawer assembly at the top and stop-fluted legs, was advertised (Harry Arons advertisement, *Antiques* 87 [May 1965], p. 532). For another stop-fluted example, without drawer, see Carpenter 1954, p. 80, no. 52. Neither can be associated with John Townsend.





## Federal Furniture

The Federal style, popular in America from the late 1780s, was an offshoot of Neoclassicism, an all-purpose international style that swept Europe after the rediscovery of Roman antiquity in the mid-eighteenth century. The Neoclassical manner was promoted among the English aristocracy by Robert and James Adam in the 1760s and 1770s in buildings and interiors recorded in their monumental *Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam* (London, 1773–78). Furniture in the style was popularized, for the gentry in England and America, by the illustrated pattern books of George Hepplewhite (*The Cabinet-Maker's and Upholsterer's Guide* [London, 1788]), Thomas Shearer (*The Cabinet-Makers' London Book of Prices, and Designs of Cabinet Work* [London, 1788]), and Thomas Sheraton (*The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing-Book* [London, 1793]). In both England and American furniture after these designs was ordered to furnish houses built or remodeled in the new mode. In 1787 Charles Bulfinch, just back from London and at the beginning of a brilliant architectural career, introduced the style to Boston. Great square three-story houses, their interiors decorated in the light and airy Adamesque style, sprang up throughout coastal New England, wherever commerce had been restored following the Revolution, even in war-ravaged Newport. Indeed in 1793 sixty-year-old John Townsend, Newport's preeminent cabinetmaker, purchased an unfinished example of just such a mansion on Washington Square, not far from the Colony House in what is today downtown Newport.<sup>1</sup>

Federal-style furniture made during the decades on either side of 1800 was characterized by straight lines and geometric shapes, lightness of design and attenuated proportions, and inlaid lightwood ornament. By the mid-1790s John Townsend had embraced the new fashion and was deeply engrossed in the manufacture of a limited number of types of tables: round, square, and serpentine-sided card tables, oval and square Pembroke tables, and multipart dining tables with rounded ends.<sup>2</sup> His tables, all with straight tapered legs, are distinguished by their abstract and angular design and their clean and elegant execution. Eleven different examples in the new style carry his printed labels, including several bearing dates between 1793 or 1794 and 1797. The documented pieces are all made with the same readily recognizable structural features found on his earlier cabriole-leg and stop-fluted tables: the same cross-braces and the same precision of execution are seen throughout. On the basis of these documented pieces, other similar examples can be attributed to John's shop.

The lightwood inlays which ornament all of John Townsend's labeled tables in the Federal style display a limited repertoire of similarly executed motifs: bookends on the stiles, pendant icicles or bellflowers on the legs, sunbursts centered in the skirts, and plain stringing outlining the legs and rails and drawer fronts. These inlays have all the earmarks of having been made in the Townsend shop rather than, as was often the case with expensive pieces, purchased ready-made. The designs are simply drawn and more abstract than pictorial, in keeping with Townsend's plain geometric forms; they are unlike those on pieces by any other makers; and there is a certain variation in the repeated execution of any single motif—for example, the number of

engraved flecks found on the bellflowers of the various dining and card tables of 1796 and 1797.<sup>3</sup>

Though Townsend's inlays are distinctly his own, the basic motifs he used are not. The contemporary terms for these inlays can be gleaned from the price books that were just then beginning to be published, especially in Philadelphia and New York, as the traditional small shop began to give way to a factory-like piecework system.<sup>4</sup> What we popularly call pendant bellflowers were "husk and drop" motifs, and our sunbursts were "patries," or paterae;<sup>5</sup> our bookends were "Inlaid Flutes in Friezes."<sup>6</sup>

There is a decided, if general, New York connection in the style of Townsend's Federal pieces. With that city he shared a preference for the round card table and the oval Pembroke and for book and icicle or bellflower inlays, although the handling of these inlays is very different and ineffably his. It is only with the latest of his documented pieces, a set of carved shield-back chairs of 1800 (cat. no. 48) that he faithfully copies a popular New York model (in fact, without the labels, these chairs would not be recognized as his).

Even during the short period during the 1790s when Townsend labeled and dated his tables, it is possible to discern a stylistic progression. He appears to have employed the icicle inlay pattern on the legs of his earliest Federal tables — square Pembrokes and serpentine-sided card tables — none of which is dated save a pair of card tables from 1794 (cat. no. 40). Also in 1794 he made another pair of card tables, identical in all particulars to the dated pair just mentioned, except for the bellflower pattern on the leg (cat. no. 41). These may be the earliest examples of his use of the motif: plain without any of the incised dark lines (engraving) that articulate all the later examples, including those on a dining table and card table of 1797 (cat. nos. 44, 45).

It is sometimes said that, with the Federal style, John Townsend's heart was no longer in his work, but the labeled pieces belie that simplistic conclusion. Most have the same high quality found in his earlier work: there are no neater pieces of joinery than the center sections of his three-part dining tables. He may have regretted no longer carving the block and shell or molding a stop flute, but he was constitutionally incapable of making a second-rate object.

1. In 1795 he sold the building, still unfinished, to his cousin Charles Feke, son of the painter Robert Feke. See Downing and Scully 1967, p. 110 and pls. 1 and 128.
2. Hewitt, Kane, and Ward 1982 illustrated twenty-six different Federal card table shapes, only the three simplest of which were made by John Townsend.
3. The alternative, purchasing ready-made inlay patterns from a supplier, is well illustrated by a Boston tall clock of about 1800 with an inlaid sunburst behind which is the original paper support bearing the name of Pengree & Co., the inlay supplier. The Pengree inlay is far more complex than Townsend's version of the same thing and agrees precisely with the description in the 1796 *New-York Book of Prices*. See Randall 1965, no. 205. The *New-York Book of Prices* (1796, p. 76) states: "For an oval patrie, two and a half inches long with twelve straight points, fill'd up at the ends with a different wood, and a single string round ditto. £0-1-3."
4. It was Charles F. Montgomery in his catalogue of the Federal furniture at Winterthur (1966) who first explored these price books as a detailed resource for the joiner's trade. See pp. 19-26, 488.
5. *New-York Book of Prices* 1796, p. 76.
6. *New-York Book of Prices* 1802, p. 60.

## 38. *Pembroke Table, about 1795*

JOHN TOWNSEND

26¾ x 36¾ (open) x 33 in. (67.9 x 93.8 [open] x 83.9 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany and lightwood inlays; secondary woods: maple, chestnut, and tulip poplar

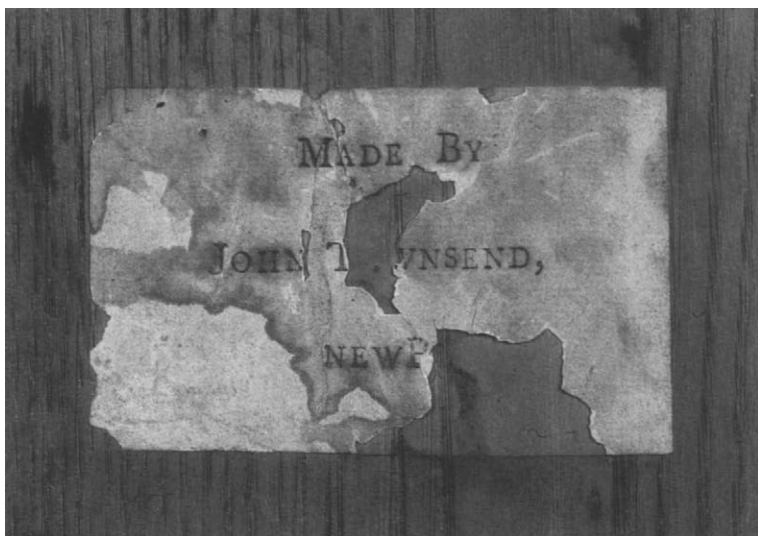
Labels and inscriptions: in ink, printed on a paper label on the inside of the drawer bottom: *MADE BY JOHN T[O]WNSEND, NEWP[ORT]*

Mrs. George M. Kaufman, Norfolk, Virginia, 74.1

PROVENANCE: (sale, Robert W. Skinner, Inc., Bolton, Massachusetts, January 19, 1974); [Israel Sack, Inc., New York, 1974]; Mr. and Mrs. George M. Kaufman

REFERENCES: Robert W. Skinner, Inc., advertisement, *Antiques* 105 [January 1974], p. 40; Moses 1981, p. 1154, figs. 4, 4a; Moses 1984, pp. 69, 89, 143, and figs. 2.12, 2.12a; Flanigan 1986, pp. 172–73, no. 67

The square table with icicle-like leg inlays was the earliest type of Federal Pembroke made by John Townsend. The frame, or bed, is rectangular, and when the leaves are up, the top is square. The leg inlay is a sharply pointed decorative pendant with incised cross-hatching. The drawer fronts, as with those of Townsend's stop-fluted tables, are sawed out of the end rails and neatly framed with beading. There are two examples of this type which bear the Townsend label (cat. nos. 38, 39), as well as an unlabeled example by him (Moses 1984, fig. 3.77). These pieces show a stylistic unity and elegance in their persistent formal angularity. A less expensive copy after his design (Moses 1984, fig. 3.48) is also known.



38 (label)



38 (leg inlay)



38

### 39. *Pembroke Table, about 1795*

JOHN TOWNSEND

27¼ x 36½ (open) x 33⅞ in. (69.2 x 92.7 [open] x 84.1 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany and lightwood inlays;  
secondary woods: maple and chestnut

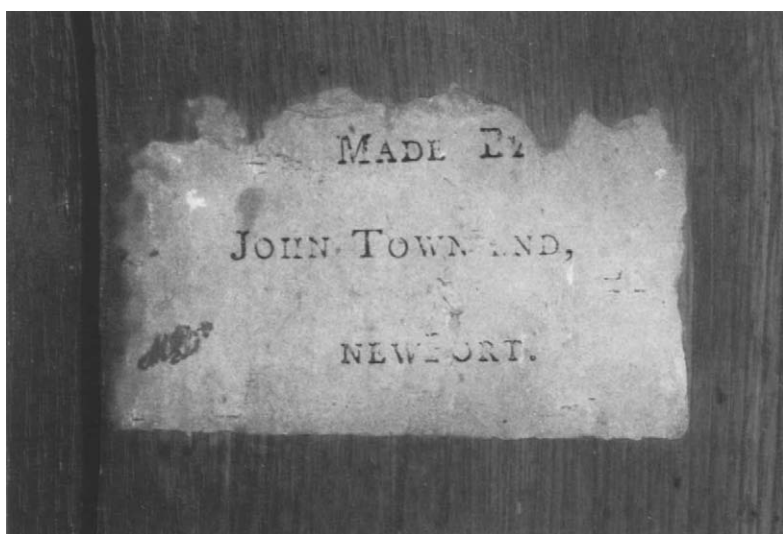
Labels and inscriptions: in ink, printed on a paper label on the inside of drawer bottom: *MADE BY JOHN TOWNSEND, NEWPORT.*; in gray ink, at lower left of label, *M[?]*

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. J. Carl De La Cour, Jr., 1980,  
1980.293

PROVENANCE: Laura Scull De La Cour (died 1960); her son J. Carl De La Cour Jr.; given by Mr. and Mrs. J. Carl De La Cour Jr. in 1980 to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

REFERENCE: Moses 1984, p. 69, and fig. 2.13

John Townsend's solution to the design of the square Federal Pembroke table, one of his most successful Neoclassical patterns, depended upon an absolute commitment to rectilinearity of form and ornament. The rounded corners of the leaves of this table are at odds with that design concept, and it must be that they were so shaped sometime after the table's manufacture. Originally it would have looked like cat. no. 38. The piece's undisturbed old finish is proof that any change must have happened long ago. The undersides have been oiled, apparently an early effort to inhibit worm infestation. One other such table with rounded corners, but of a different profile, and attributable to the John Townsend shop, is known (Christie's, New York, January 5, 2000, lot 132).



39 (label)



39 (leg inlay)



## 40. *Pair of Card Tables, 1794*

JOHN TOWNSEND

27¼ x 34 x 15½ in. (69.2 x 86.4 x 39.4 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany and lightwood inlays;  
secondary woods: mahogany, maple, chestnut, and  
tulip poplar

Labels and inscriptions: on each table, in ink,  
printed on a paper label on inside center of drawer  
bottom: *MADE BY/JOHN TOWNSEND,/NEWPORT;*  
in ink, inscribed lower right: *1794*

The Chipstone Foundation, Fox Point, Wisconsin,  
1948.II.1

Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City,  
Missouri, Purchase, Nelson Trust (33-524)

PROVENANCE: Colonel John Cooke, Newport,  
Rhode Island; Rhoda Cooke; William Cooke  
Gray; George Wanton Gray; Thomas T. Gray;  
Phoebe McCorrie Gray Durfee; Philip Flayderman.  
Chipstone Foundation table: (Flayderman sale,  
American Art Association, Anderson Galleries,  
New York, January 2-4, 1930, lot 470 or 471);  
Joseph H. Hirshhorn, New York; (sale, Parke-  
Bernet Galleries, New York, December 10, 1948,  
lot 215); Stanley Stone, Milwaukee, Wisconsin;

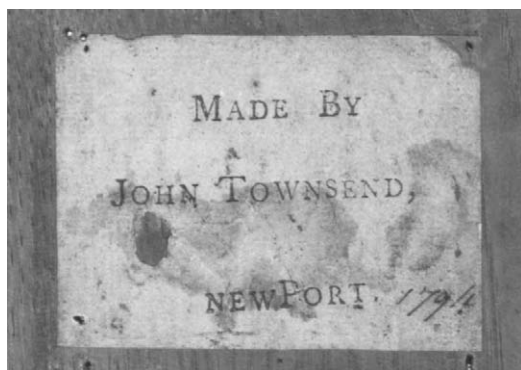
The Chipstone Foundation, Fox Point,  
Wisconsin, 1948. Nelson-Atkins table:  
(Flayderman sale, American Art Association,  
Anderson Galleries, New York, January 2-4,  
1930, lot 470 or 471); [Israel Sack, Boston and  
New York, 1931]; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art,  
Kansas City, Missouri, 1933

REFERENCES: Chipstone Foundation table:  
American Art Association January 2-4, 1930, lot  
470 or 471; Hewitt, Kane, and Ward 1982, p. 70,  
fig. 42; Rodriguez Roque 1984, pp. 328-29, no.  
154. Nelson-Atkins table: Israel Sack, Inc., adver-  
tisement, *Antiquarian* 17 (August 1931), p. 2;  
Carpenter 1954, p. 97, no. 69; Moses 1981, p. 1153,  
figs. 2, 2a, 3, 3a; Moses 1984, pp. 2, 69, 89, 92, and  
figs. 2.9, 2.9a, 3.19

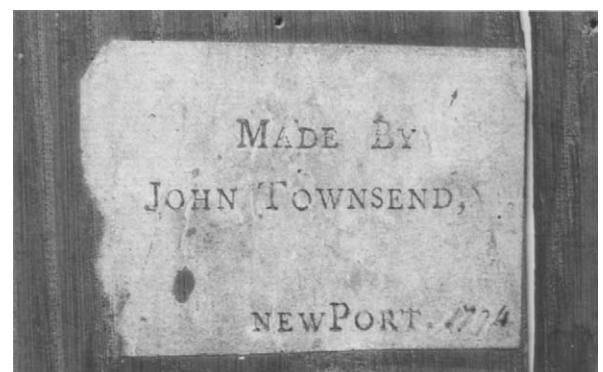
This labeled table and its mate, together with  
a stop-fluted Pembroke table also labeled by  
John Townsend (cat. no. 33), were sold at the  
auction of the celebrated Flayderman collec-  
tion at the Anderson Galleries in New York  
in 1930. The Flayderman collection sale  
included four virtually identical card tables,

two of which bore John Townsend's label  
and two of which did not. These were sold in  
two lots, each comprising a labeled table and  
an unlabeled table. Only fifty years later did  
Michael Moses note consistent differences in  
the construction of the labeled and unlabeled  
tables — most obviously, that on a labeled  
table the inside of the front skirt rail con-  
forms to the outside serpentine while on an  
unlabeled table it is flat (Moses 1981). All  
four were clearly from the John Townsend  
shop, and all exhibit what has been aptly  
described as “extraordinarily attentive crafts-  
manship” (Rodriguez Roque 1984, p. 328,  
under no. 154), but the labeled tables formed  
one pair, and the unlabeled ones another.

One of the unlabeled tables is in the  
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, and the other  
is now in the collection of Mrs. George M.  
Kaufman. A third table of this exact model,  
also labeled and dated 1794 (label opposite)  
recently came to light (Weschler's Auctions,  
Washington, D.C., October 23, 2004, lot 585).  
On this example, owned by Dr. Barrett  
Bready, Providence, Rhode Island, the inside  
of the front rail is flat.



40 (Chipstone label)



40 (Nelson-Atkins label)



40 (Bready label)

40



40 (Bready label)



## 41. *Pair of Card Tables, 1794*

JOHN TOWNSEND

27½ x 34½ x 16⅞ in. (69.9 x 87.6 x 42.9 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany and lightwood inlays;  
secondary woods: mahogany, chestnut, maple, and  
tulip poplar

Labels and inscriptions, on both tables: in ink,  
printed on a paper label pasted in the center of  
the bottom of the drawer: *MADE BY/JOHN  
TOWNSEND,/NEWPORT.*; in ink, inscribed  
lower right: *1794*; in ink, crudely inscribed on the  
label of the illustrated table the initials *C., S.,* and  
*R.* and *1794*; on the other table, clippings of press  
coverage about the Flayderman sale pasted on  
drawer bottom next to John Townsend's label.

Private collection

PROVENANCE: James DeWolf (1764–1837) and  
Nancy Bradford (1770–1838), Bristol, Rhode  
Island; their daughter Nancy Bradford De Wolf  
Homer (1808–1856); her daughter Isabel De Wolf  
Pegram (1843–1892); her daughter Nancy B. D.  
Pegram Clark (1872–ca. 1947); by descent in the

family (on loan to the RISD Museum, Providence,  
1972–99); (sale, Christie's, New York, June 16,  
1999, lot 228); the present owner, 1999

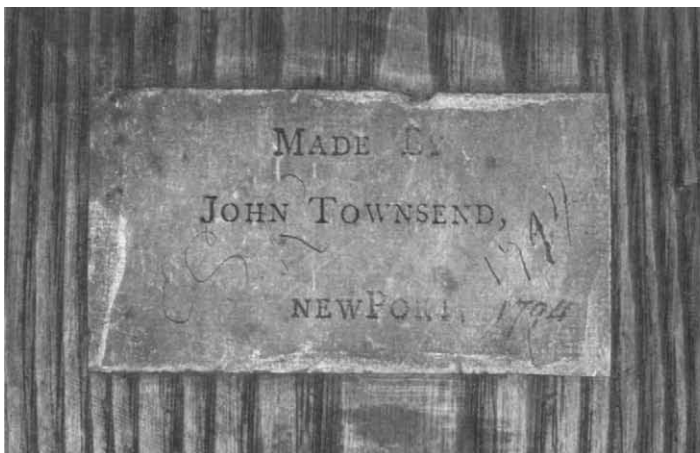
This pair of tables were presumably made for  
James DeWolf and Nancy Bradford, who were  
married in 1790, and to have been part of the  
furnishings of a handsome two-and-one-half  
story, Federal-style house in Bristol, Rhode  
Island, which James purchased from his brother  
in 1795. In 1808 he built a grander house, The  
Mount, whence the tables were removed.

These tables exhibit John Townsend's  
usual elegant refinement, inside and out, but  
with one curious lapse: the brass hinges sup-  
porting the folding top impinge on the light-  
wood stringing in the tabletop's edge: the  
available hinges must have been larger than  
those he had planned for.

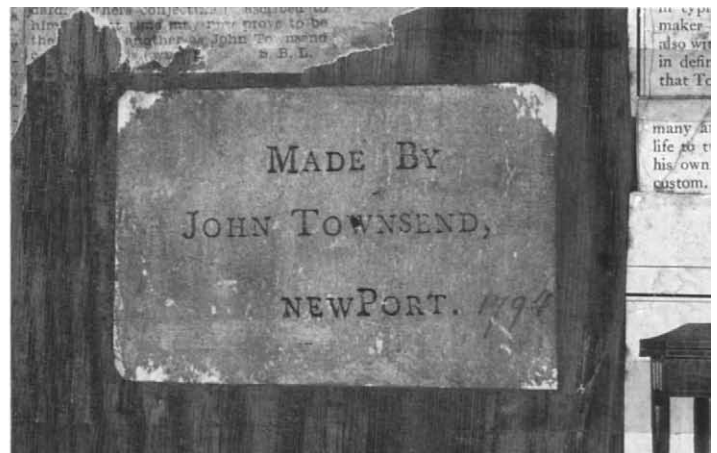
Both rear legs are hinged in the typical  
Newport manner. The lowest cross-braces

support the broad medial runner upon which  
the drawer slides.

The inlays on these tables include the ear-  
liest firmly datable examples of the bellflower  
motif that Townsend was to use almost  
exclusively hereafter. At this time Townsend  
has not yet turned to dark, incised ornament  
to give pictorial definition. The bellflowers  
are like blanks that have yet to receive their  
central vertical dividing line and hatchings  
in the flanking petals. On the rear legs the  
bottommost bellflower terminates in a small  
circle rather than a point as found on the  
front legs.



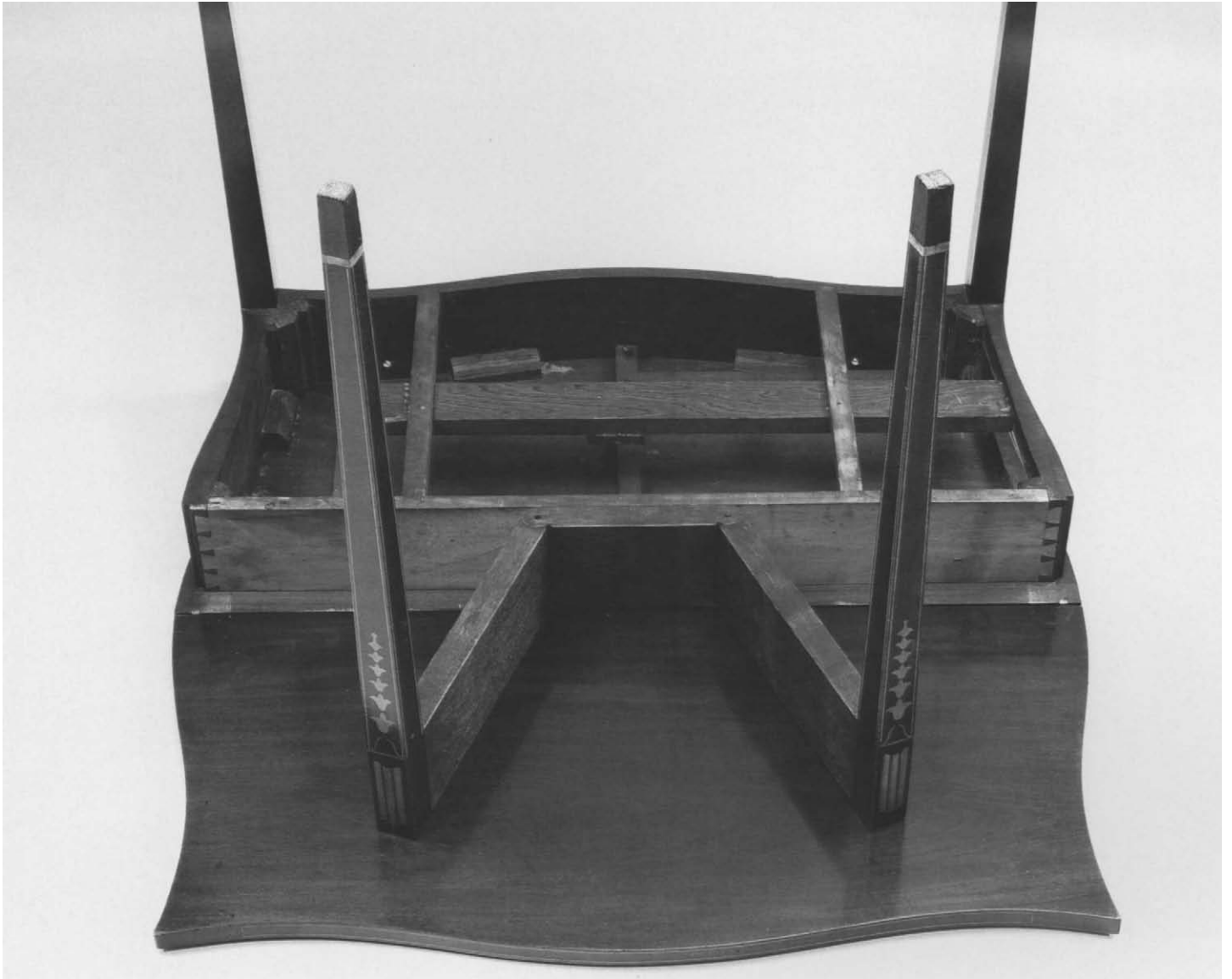
41 (label)



41 (label)



41



41 (underside)



41 (leg inlay)



41 (skirt inlay)

## 42. Pair of Card Tables, 1796

JOHN TOWNSEND

28 ½ x 35 ¾ x 17 ½ in. (72.4 x 90.5 x 44.5 cm)

Primary woods: mahogany, mahogany veneer, and lightwood inlays; secondary woods: maple and white pine

Labels and inscriptions on the Winterthur table: in ink, printed on label pasted on center of back side of back rail: *MADE BY/JO[HN] TOWNSEND,/NEWPORT*; in ink, inscribed on lower right of label, 1796; in graphite, inscribed on the inside center of back rail, a calligraphic *A*

Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware,  
Gift of Henry Francis du Pont, 58.135.3

Preservation Society of Newport County, Newport,  
Rhode Island, 6380

PROVENANCE: King family, Newport, Rhode Island. Winterthur Museum table: by descent to Dorothy Gordon King (Mrs. Alexander Nelidow), Newport, Rhode Island; [C. Wilyn Jr., New York]; Guy W. Walker Jr., about 1951; Henry Francis du Pont, about 1958; given by him to the Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware. Preservation Society of Newport County table: given to the Preservation Society in 1972 as part of the contents of Kingscote, the mid-nineteenth-century family house in Newport

REFERENCES: "Editors' Attic" 1951, p. 320; Carpenter 1954, p. 96, no. 68; Montgomery 1966, p. 34, fig. 95, pp. 324, 478, no. 288; Moses 1984, p. 89, figs. 3.22–3.22a, 3.26

Of the two tables only the one at Winterthur (illustrated) is labeled. The label's placement in the center of the back rail is usual in John's round tables. He was not able to employ his standard system of cross-braces on a round table like the present one. The four thick layers of pine laminate backing the veneered skirts was commonplace construction in New York and Philadelphia. The only distinctly Newport feature, aside from the inlay patterns, is that both rear legs are hinged. (Within the rabbet at the top of the right rear leg a patched mortise hole indicates a change of plan during construction.) One other card table of this precise model is known (Bernard and S. Dean Levy advertisement, *Antiques* 148 [September 1995], p. 209), but tiny differences in the bellflower inlays distinguish the two tables as separate commissions. On the other hand, the same features demonstrate the Winterthur table's association



42 (leg inlay)



42 (label)

with a labeled dining table made the same year (cat. no. 43).

Townsend's table conforms to the basic description of "A Circular Card Table" in *The Journeyman Cabinet and Chair Makers' New-York Book of Prices* (1796, p. 35): "A Circular Card Table, Three feet long, the rail veneer'd, one fly foot, a square edge to the top, four plain legs, £1-8-0." The second fly, or hinged rear leg and all the inlays were extras.



FIGURE 10-10. A semi-circular table with decorative inlay.



42



42 (underside)



### 43. Dining Table, 1796

JOHN TOWNSEND

27½ x 97¾ open x 48¼ in. (69.9 x 248 x 60.3 cm)

Primary woods: mahogany, mahogany veneer, and lightwood inlays; secondary woods: maple, chestnut, and white pine

Labels and inscriptions: in ink, printed on paper label pasted to center back of back rail of one of the half-round ends: *MADE BY JOHN TOWNSEND, NEWPORT*. in ink, inscribed lower right: *1796*.; in white chalk, on center section, a large *A* on outside of one swing rail, a large *B* on outside of fixed rail on other side; in graphite, mostly illegible, on inside of one swing rail: *A McG*

Newport Restoration Foundation, Newport, Rhode Island, 1999.392

PROVENANCE: Purchased by the Newport Restoration Foundation, Newport, Rhode Island, in 1972 from Mrs. Benjamin Ladd Cook

REFERENCE: Moses 1984, figs. 2.10, 3.44, 3.44a

There is compelling circumstantial evidence that this table was originally made en suite with a circular card table (cat. no. 42). Both bear John Townsend's label and the date 1796, and both have bellflower inlays with double-incised hatching on each of the outer petals and a pair of inlaid dots below the bellflowers.

The center section of these three-part tables could serve independently as a drop-leaf dining table. This example shows John

43 (label)



Townsend late in his career at the top of his form. The boards forming the top are of the densest mahogany with the finest figure. The table frame, constructed in his usual manner except for the inclusion of a fourth upper crossbrace, is as impeccably crafted as anything he ever did.

There are mortise-and-tenon tabs in the edges of the tops wherever the three sections meet each other, such that the two ends can be fitted together to form a circular table or all three pieces can be fitted together as a banquet table.

*The Journeyman Cabinet and Chair Makers's New-York Book of Prices* (1796, pp. 40, 41) described "A Dining Table, Hung with rule or square joints, four plain legs, one fly on each side, the length and width added together, at per foot; £0-2-10" and "A half round Dining Table, Four feet long, veneer'd rail, three plain legs, £1-3-0."





43 (center section)



43 (leg inlay)



43 (skirt inlay)



43 (center section, underside)

Two of the latter half-round tables together with one dining table exactly describe Townsend's three-part dining table, except for the addition of the inlays.

In addition to this example, there is another labeled three-part ten-leg table at the Rhode Island Historical Society (cat. no. 44), identical except for arcane differences in the bellflower inlays.



43 (end sections together)

## 44. Dining Table, probably 1797

JOHN TOWNSEND

28¼ x 100½ open x 49 in. (71.8 x 254 x 24.5 cm)

Primary woods: mahogany, mahogany veneer, and lightwood inlays; secondary woods: chestnut, maple, and white pine

Labels and inscriptions: in ink printed on paper label pasted on outside center of back rail of one end, *MADE BY J[O]HN T[OW]NSEND, NEW-PORT.*; in ink inscribed lower right *179[?]*; in ink on square piece of paper nailed to rail at left of label, *Mrs Wood/corner of Court & Washington Streets/[?]*; in black paint inscribed on underside of top of same end section, *Rev H. Stanley/[?]*; *[?] AH Dodge/Georgetown/D. C.*

The Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island, 1967.24.1

PROVENANCE: Major John Wood and Rebecca Wickham, Newport, Rhode Island; by descent to Rev. H. Stanley, Washington, D.C.; [Israel Sack, Inc., New York, 1967]; The Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island, 1967

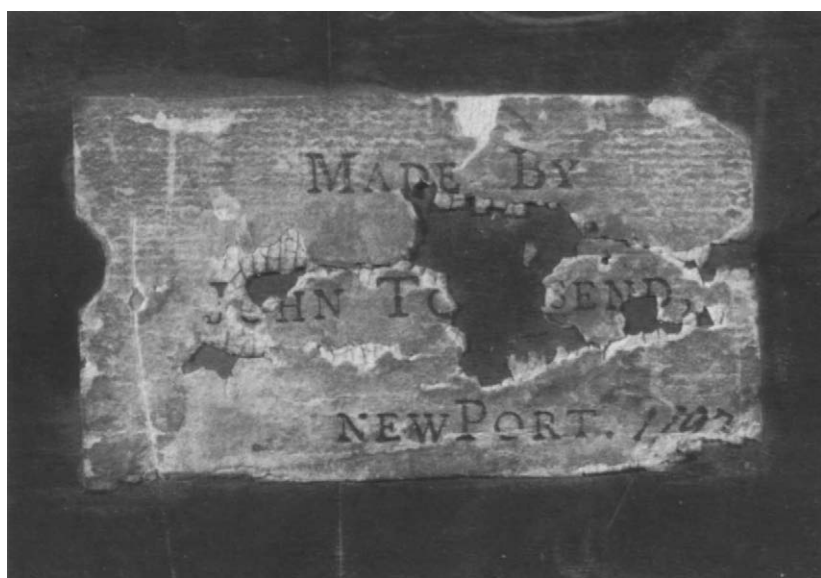
REFERENCES: Ott 1965, pp. 66–67, 166, no. 47; Moses 1984, pp. 69, 89, and figs. 3.20, 3.20a

Along with Neoclassicism came the fashion for having rooms exclusively devoted to dining and in them tables that could be extended to great lengths to accommodate large groups. Townsend moved aggressively in this new market, making tables that could be configured either as circles or as round-ended oblongs of virtually any size. Examples exhibiting his trademark construction and embellished with his early icicle pattern inlay include a four-part one with twenty legs (private collection, Norfolk, Virginia), and a three-part version with sixteen legs (American Art Association, Anderson Galleries, New York, May 2, 1932, lot 144, ill.). The center part of such a table, though with bellflowers, sold at Sotheby's, New York, January 20, 2001, lot 29.

The present table is one of two three-part ten leggers with bellflower inlays and bearing Townsend's label. It is said to have been made for Major John Wood of Newport. He married Rebecca Wickham in 1793, a date that coincides with the traditional reading of the partly missing last digit of the date on Townsend's label. However, that date would



44 (leg inlay)



44 (label)



44

make this table the earliest Townsend piece with bellflower inlay, even before the first experimental image (cat. no. 41). A more plausible reading is 1797, which would put it just a year after its virtual mate (cat. no. 43).



44 (center section)

## 45. *Pembroke Table, 1797*

JOHN TOWNSEND

26¾ x 37¼ open x 32¼ in. (67.9 x 94.6 x 81.9 cm)

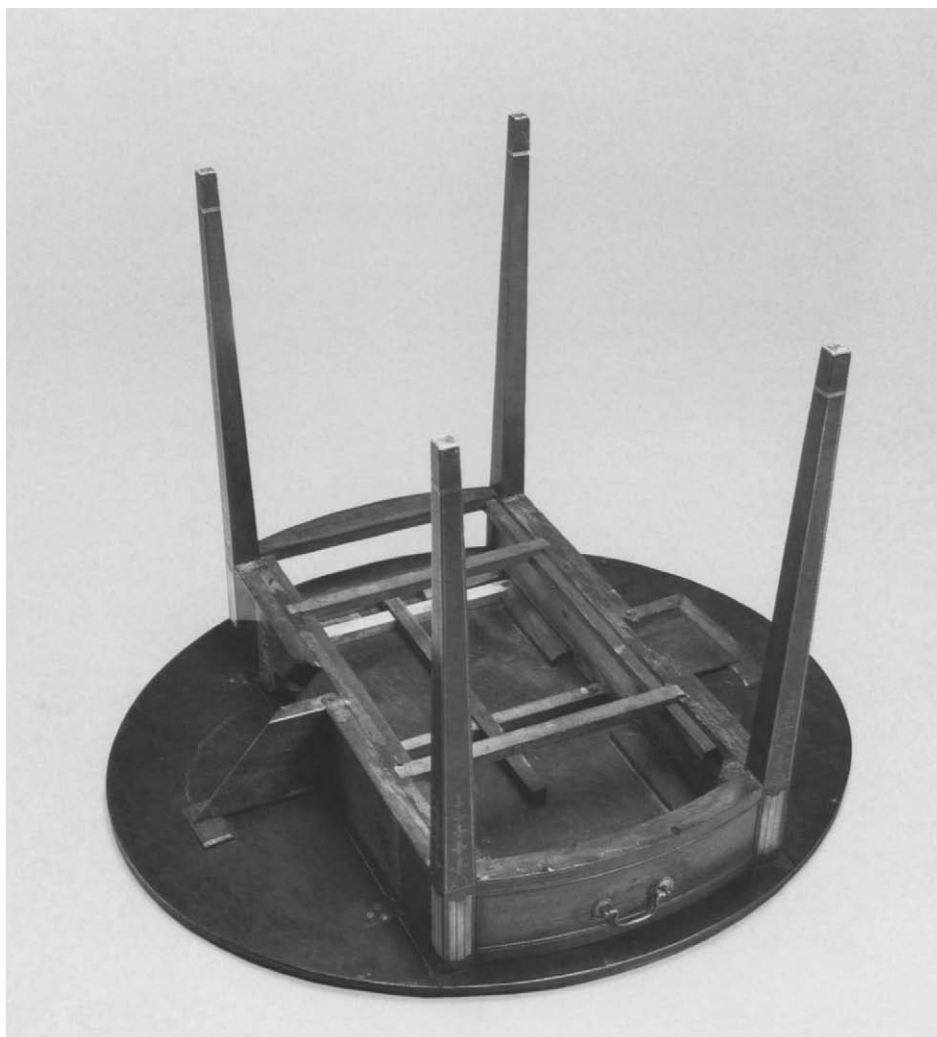
Primary woods: mahogany, mahogany veneer, and lightwood inlays; secondary woods: maple, chestnut, white pine

Labels and inscriptions: in ink, printed on label pasted on inside center of drawer bottom, *MADE BY/JOHN TOWNSEND,/NEWPORT.*; in ink, inscribed on bottom lower right of label, *1797*

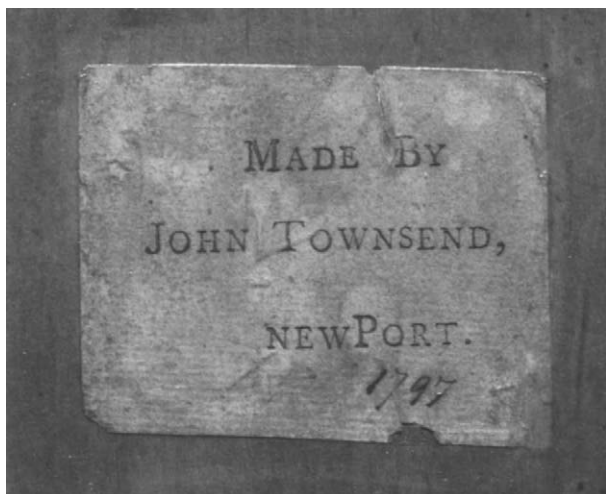
Eric Noah, New York, New York

PROVENANCE: [Charles Woolsey Lyon, Millbrook, New York, 1969]; [Israel Sack, Inc., New York, 1984, and 1992]; the present owner

REFERENCES: Charles Woolsey Lyon advertisement, *Antiques* 96 (August 1969), p. 165; Israel Sack, Inc., advertisement, *Antiques* 126 (July 1984), inside front cover; Moses 1984, p. 69 and fig. 2.11; *Israel Sack Collection 1969–92*, vol. 10 (1992), p. 2700, no. P-2165



45 (underside)



45 (label)



45

This table, dated 1797, is the latest of John Townsend's eleven signed examples in the Federal style. It is the perfect example of his final Pembroke design. Unlike the stop-fluted examples of the late 1780s and the square Federal ones up to 1794, it has an oval top with a crisply molded edge, elliptical end rails, and a drawer front that extends the full width

between the legs. The lightwood stringing that neatly enframed the smaller drawers of the earlier Pembrokes (cat. nos. 38, 39) has given way to strings above and below the drawer. These strings terminate abruptly in the stiles and are oddly unresolved; only the bottommost stringing ties neatly into that of the legs. The drawer pull is a replacement.

## 46. *Pembroke Table, 1795–1800*

JOHN TOWNSEND

27 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 39 x 33 in. (70.2 x 83.8 x 70.2 cm)

Primary woods: mahogany, mahogany veneer and lightwood inlays; secondary woods: maple, chestnut, white pine, and tulip poplar

Labels and inscriptions: incised on inside of laminated wood back rail, *IT 179[-]* and Townsend's large calligraphic *A*

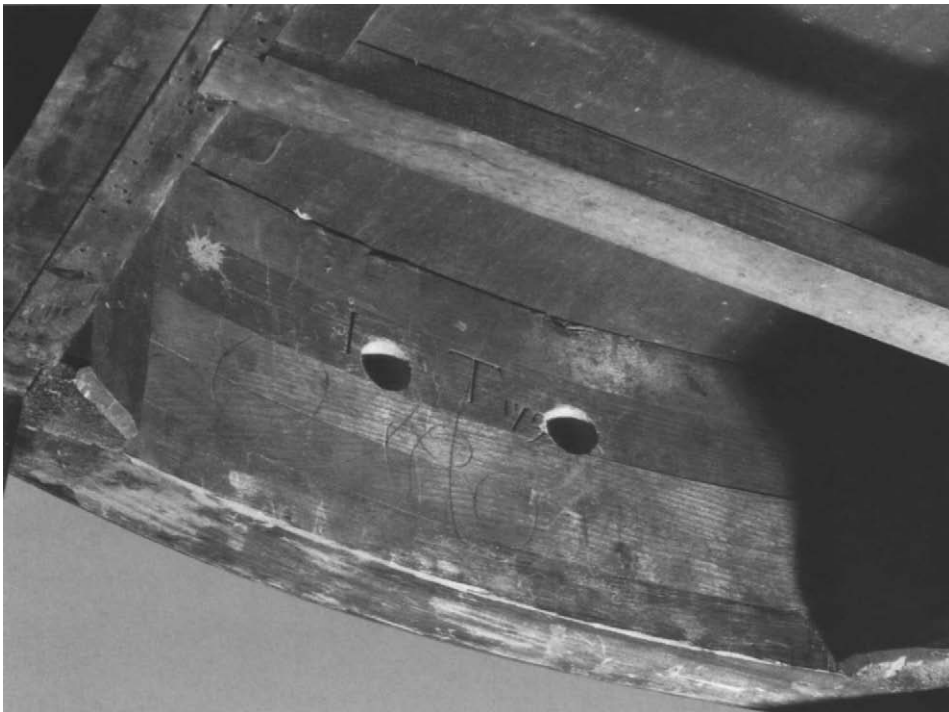
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of the Family in memory of Dorothy and Irvin Stein, 2000–136–1

PROVENANCE: [Israel Sack, Inc., New York, 1972]; Dr. Irvin Stein, Camden, New Jersey; (sale, Christie's, New York, October 5, 2000, lot 124); Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2000

REFERENCES: Moses 1981, p. 1159, fig. 11; Moses 1984, figs. 1.44, 1.44a

Townsend reverts to an unusual form of documentation with this table (the same chiselled initials appear on a fall-front desk (Harry Arons, advertisement, *Antiques* 94 [July 1968], p. 37), but the internal construction is so characteristic of his shop practices that the attribution cannot be doubted.

The table is somewhat larger than the preceding example of 1797 but otherwise very much the same. Here, however, the four-part bookend inlays relate to the dining table and card tables of 1796. The sham drawer on the back rail is neatly veneered to give the appearance of a single piece of figured mahogany from which the drawer front is cut. This is vintage John Townsend. Oddly, the same does not pertain for the functional drawer in front.







## 47. *Pembroke Table, about 1795*

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN TOWNSEND

27¾ x 39 x 31½ in. (70.5 x 99.1 x 79.1 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany and mahogany veneer;  
secondary woods: mahogany, maple, chestnut, and  
white pine

Labels and inscriptions: none

Newport Restoration Foundation, Newport,  
Rhode Island, 2001.3

PROVENANCE: Probably John Townsend; his  
daughter Mary Townsend Brinley, 1809; her  
nephew Christopher Townsend, 1856; his sister  
Ellen Townsend, 1881; her friend William P.  
Sheffield, 1886; William P. Sheffield Jr., 1907; his  
son S. S. Sheffield, Cincinnati, Ohio, until 1937;  
Newport Restoration Foundation, Newport,  
Rhode Island, 1969

REFERENCES: Keyes 1937, p. 309, fig. 5

This “plain Jane” Pembroke table has the distinction of being the only unornamented piece of furniture to be attributed to John Townsend. Nothing in the table’s exterior suggests a specific maker, except perhaps the top’s nicely molded edge. The interior, however, is textbook John Townsend, and the piece has a Townsend family provenance. One unusual, perhaps unique, refinement is the use of solid mahogany for the outer side rails (which include the partially visible swing flaps that support the leaves). The drawer hardware has been replaced.



## 48. Side Chair (set of four), 1800

JOHN TOWNSEND

38 ½ x 21 ¾ x 17 ½ in. (97.8-x 54.3 x 44.5 cm)

Primary wood: mahogany; secondary woods: birch, maple, white pine, tulip poplar[?], and chestnut

Labels and inscriptions: in ink, inscribed on paper label on inside of rear seat rail, on three of the chairs: *Made by John Townsend/Newport 1800*; on one of the chairs (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 66.11.1), *Newport, Made by John Townsend 1800*

Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, Museum Purchase 66.11.2; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, The Bayou Bend Collection, Gift of Miss Ima Hogg, B66.11.1-2; private collection

PROVENANCE: All four chairs: Admiral Stephen B. Luce (1827-1917), Newport, Rhode Island; descendants of Admiral Luce; [Hyman Grossman, Boston]; [John S. Walton, New York, 1966].

One chair: Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, 1966. Two chairs: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1966. One chair: private collection, 1966

REFERENCES: Ott 1968, p. 388, fig. 1, p. 389, fig. 1a; Bishop 1972, p. 262, fig. 398; Ott 1975b, p. 941, fig. 5; Warren 1975, p. 77, no. 141; Cooper 1980a, p. 22, pl. v; Moses 1984, pp. 13-14, 99-100, and figs. 1.45, 2.14, 2.14a; Warren 1998, pp. 94-95, no. F149

This set of chairs is the latest identifiable furniture known to have been made by John Townsend. Without their handwritten labels, however, there would be no way to identify their origin or authorship, much less that they were made in Newport. The design is entirely that of a New York chair, and John must have been commissioned to copy an

existing example from New York City, where this shield-back pattern was popular. The pattern for sawing out the chair backs matches that for New York armchairs (MMA 31.44.8 and 32.55.6; Winterthur 57.672.1,2).

What is notable about these chairs is their exceptional quality. The splat carving is crisper and more assured than that of their New York prototypes, and in one structural feature as well they are superior. When it came to copying the New York practice of inserting two front-back braces in the seat frame, he improved upon the original by inserting their dovetailed ends from above the seat rails, not from below, so that there was no chance that they would drop out. Both MFAH chairs have remnants of the original black horsehair upholstery fabric. The upper row of brass nails originally followed a swag pattern across the seat rail.



48 (Houston label, 66.11.1)



48 (Winterthur label)



48 (private collection label)



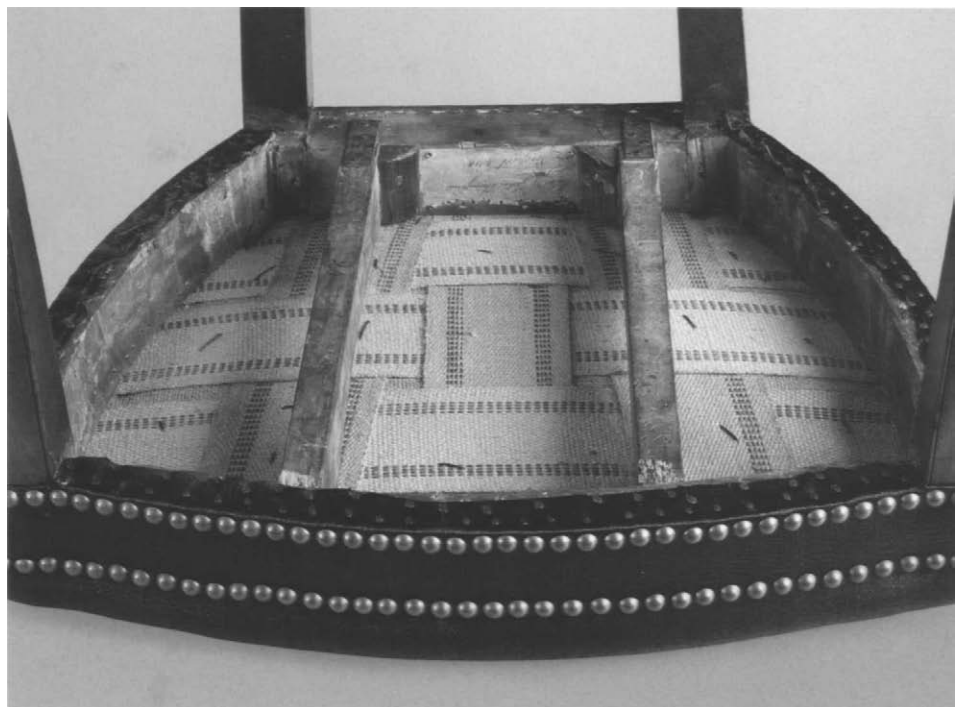
48 (Houston label, 66.11.2)





48 (Winterthur splat)

The chairs may have been part of a set that included two armchairs. Joseph K. Ott claimed to have seen a photograph of a room with these four chairs and two matching armchairs (memo dated November 20, 1976, in the files of the Bayou Bend Collection). A similar set of six chairs, with a history in the Wanton family of Newport, were offered for sale in 1951 (Charles Woolsey Lyon advertisement, *Antiques* 59 [March 1951], p. 165). Lyon attributed them to a New York maker, but with that family history they were probably made by John Townsend.



48 (Winterthur underside)



# Appendix I

## Pictorial Parallels: The Furniture of John Townsend and His Contemporaries

As eighteenth-century American joiners go, John Townsend was remarkable. More than any other he signed and often even dated his best pieces, evidence of a rare historical sense. These documented examples, forming the core of the catalogue in this publication, are proof of his exceptional abilities as a craftsman. They also provide a window on the evolution of his style. His working life spanned the second half of the eighteenth century: he came of age in 1754, his earliest signed piece is dated 1756, and he receipted a bill of sale for a desk and bookcase in 1802. During that time Townsend successfully adapted to tremendous changes in fashion: he made cabriole tables, chairs, and high chests in the late fifties and early sixties; block-and-shell case furniture from the sixties to the early nineties; stop-fluted tables in the late eighties; and inlaid Neoclassical tables in the nineties. But throughout these five decades Townsend retained a distinctive and remarkably consistent standard of workmanship. Whether in carved ornament or invisible interior construction, the products of his hand are notable for elegant simplicity and precision.

The extraordinary uniformity of design and technique found in John Townsend's documented pieces is evidence that he made them entirely himself or, at very the least, exercised complete control over their manufacture. These signed pieces exhibit none of the subtle variations that would reflect the turnover of journeymen and apprentices in the shop (the sort of variations found in some of the unsigned pieces). Just as certain painters can be identified by their handling of a brush, so John Townsend can be seen in the way a chisel is wielded. The analogy is not farfetched: as you compare the work of these Newport joiners, you will see that they were artists as well as artisans.

How does Townsend's work compare to that of his Newport contemporaries, his cousins and his competitors? Is it always the best? Is it really that distinctive? The only way to answer these questions is to look at the works side-by-side. In the following pages representative examples in each of the consecutive styles that John Townsend espoused are paired with similar pieces by other makers, some documented and some not. Whether his work is "better" than that of John Goddard, or Edmund Townsend, or Daniel Townsend, or Stephen and Thomas Goddard remains a matter of personal preference. What cannot be denied is how differently these various craftsmen treated the same forms.

## Cabriole Leg

The Townsend card table exhibits the firm, well-grounded stance of his mature cabriole pieces, while the Goddard table is graceful and light-footed. Precision versus poetry.



Fig. 60. John Townsend, card table, 1762 (cat. no. 2). Eric Noah, New York, New York



Fig. 61. Attributed to John Goddard, card table, 1760–85, mahogany, maple, chestnut, and white pine. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Friends of the American Wing Fund, 1967 (67.114.1)



60 (John Townsend leg)



61 (John Goddard leg)

On the Townsend table legs are thick and stocky, their edges sharp and angular; on the Goddard example they are thin and sleek.





60 (John Townsend knee)



61 (John Goddard knee)

These examples show the differences between the machinelike flatness and precision of Townsend's carving and the more modeled quality of Goddard's.



60 (John Townsend foot)



61 (John Goddard foot)

Goddard's claw feet show a fuller, more realistic rendering of the musculature of the foot, especially in the articulation above the rear talon.

## Case Furniture

Fig. 62. Attributed to John Townsend, bureau table, about 1765 (cat. no. 23). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1909 (10.12.83)

The John Townsend chest is distinguished by its more complex and precise cornice moldings, by a central shell that extends the full width of the kneehole opening, and by the molded brackets below the recessed door.



Fig. 63. Edmund Townsend, bureau table, 1765–85 (fig. 27). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, The M. and M. Karolik Collection of Eighteenth-Century American Arts no. 38 (41.579)



Fig. 64. Attributed to John Goddard, bureau table, 1765–90, mahogany. The Dietrich American Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

On the John Townsend shells (opposite) the lobes project boldly and are sharply rendered; the central C-scroll stands independent, superimposed above the lower lobes.





62 (John Townsend concave shell)



62 (John Townsend convex shell)



63 (Edmund Townsend concave shell)



63 (Edmund Townsend convex shell)



64 (John Goddard concave shell)



64 (John Goddard convex shell)

## Stop-Fluted Furniture

The exteriors of these two tables are virtually indistinguishable. Both belonged to the same first owner, who must have immediately commissioned an inexpensive copy of his costly labeled John Townsend original. The undersides of the tables (opposite) could not, however, be more different. The copyist used none of Townsend's signature construction features, such as cross-braces on the frame and pierced brackets tenoned into leg and rail.



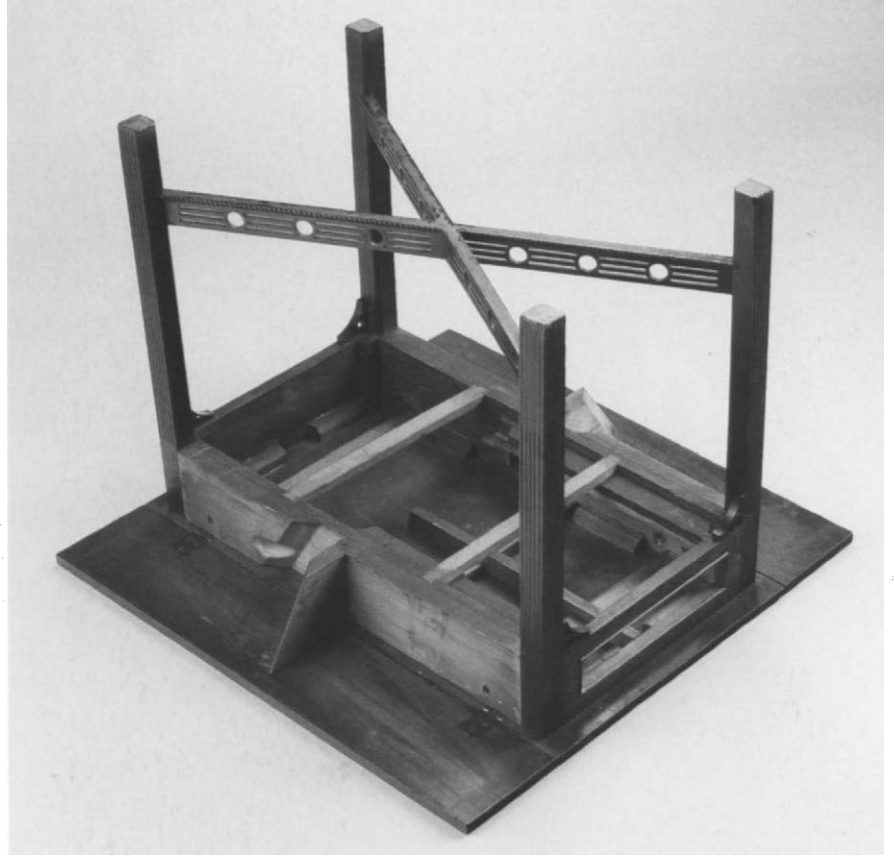
Fig. 65. John Townsend, Pembroke table, probably 1788 (cat. no. 35). The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Boston, Massachusetts



Fig. 66. Maker unknown, Pembroke table, 1785–90, mahogany. The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Boston, Massachusetts



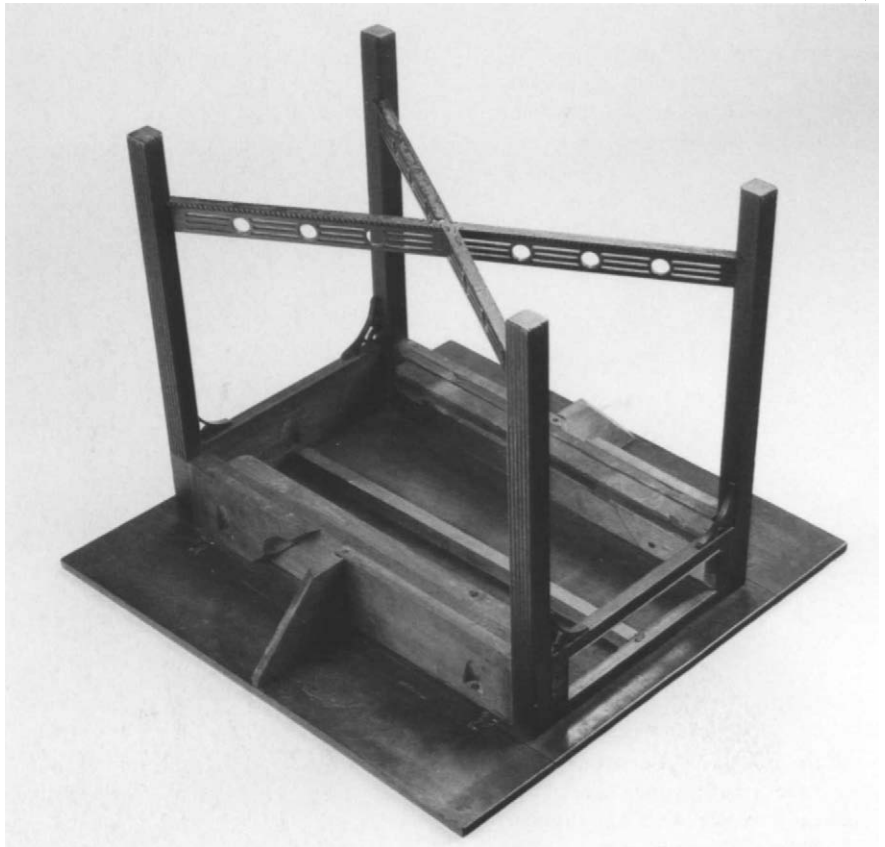
65 (John Townsend bracket)



65 (John Townsend underside)



66 (maker unknown, bracket)



66 (maker unknown, underside)

## Federal Furniture

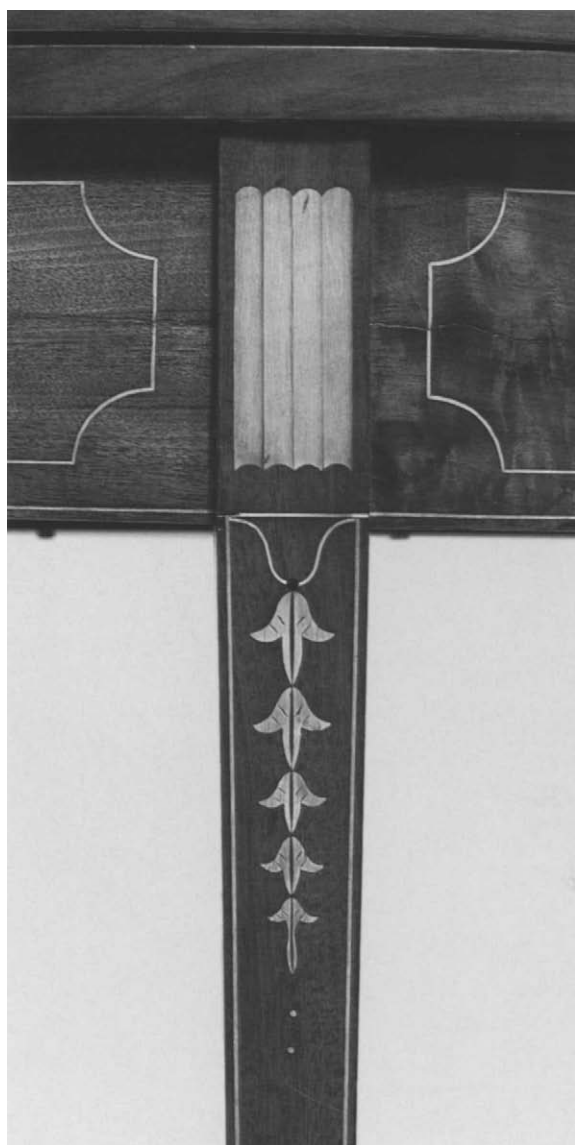
Fig. 67. John Townsend, card table (one of a pair), 1796 (cat. no. 42). Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, Gift of Henry Francis du Pont (58.135.3)



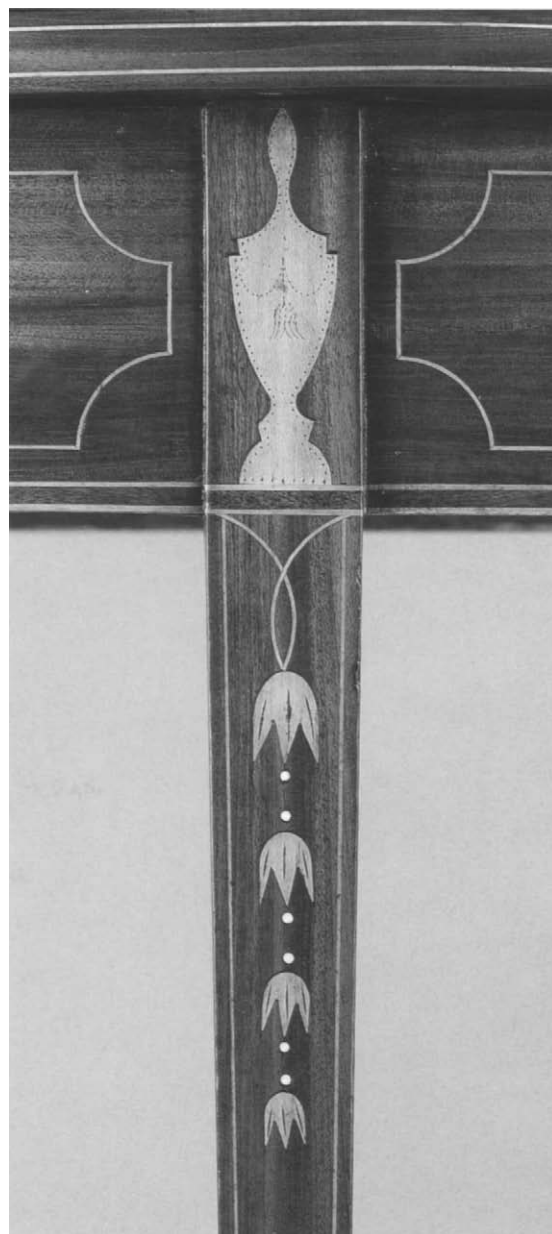
Fig. 68. Stephen and Thomas Goddard, card table, 1790–1804, mahogany, satinwood, ivory, tulip poplar, and chestnut. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1929 (29.75)



Both rear legs of the Townsend table swing out, in the Newport manner, to support the open top; on the Goddard table there are extra swing legs, suggestive of New York work.



67 (John Townsend leg inlay)



68 (Stephen and Thomas Goddard leg inlay)

Both these inlays were created in the cabinetmakers' shops and were not purchased as already assembled elements. Townsend's inlays—bookends over bellflowers—are simple abstract forms; the Goddard ones—classical urns, with pin-pricked outlines and swags, over bellflowers—are more pictorial.



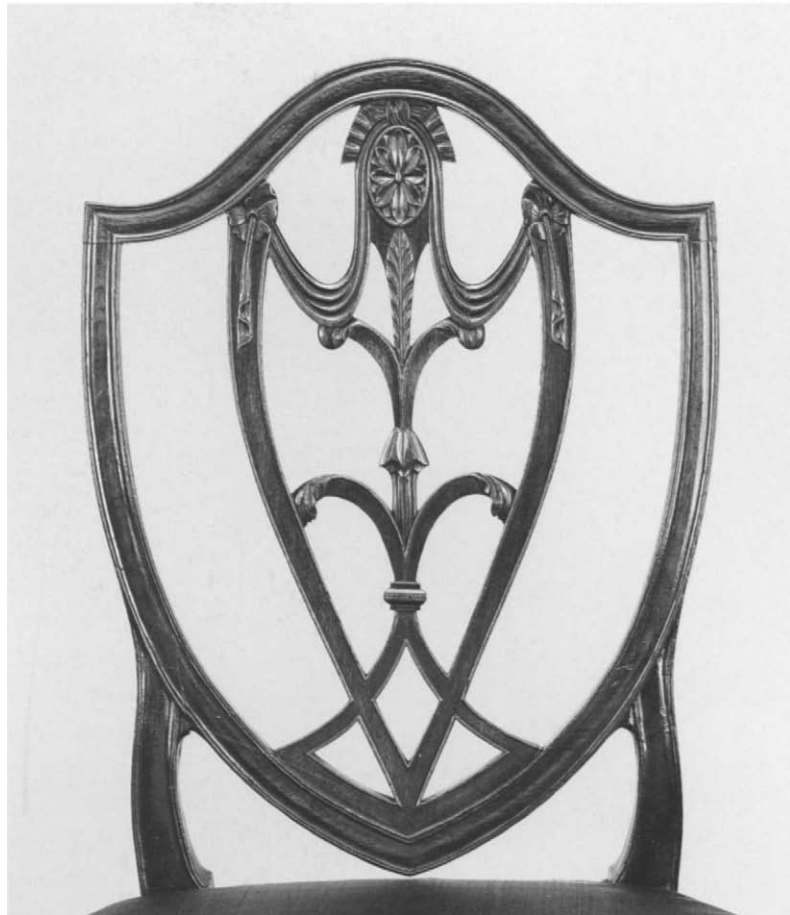
Fig. 69. John Townsend, side chair  
(one of four), 1800 (cat. no. 48).  
Winterthur Museum, Winterthur,  
Delaware, Museum Purchase (66.112)



Fig. 70. Maker unknown, armchair (one  
of a pair), 1795–1805, mahogany, satin-  
wood inlay, and ash. The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York, The Sylmaris  
Collection, Gift of George Coe Graves,  
1932 (32.55.6)



The labeled Townsend chair, a direct copy of a popular New York model, must have been a special order. Its splat was made from a template similar to that used for the armchair below. Except for the inlaid oval, Townsend's carving is identical to that of the New York chair but is more crisply rendered.



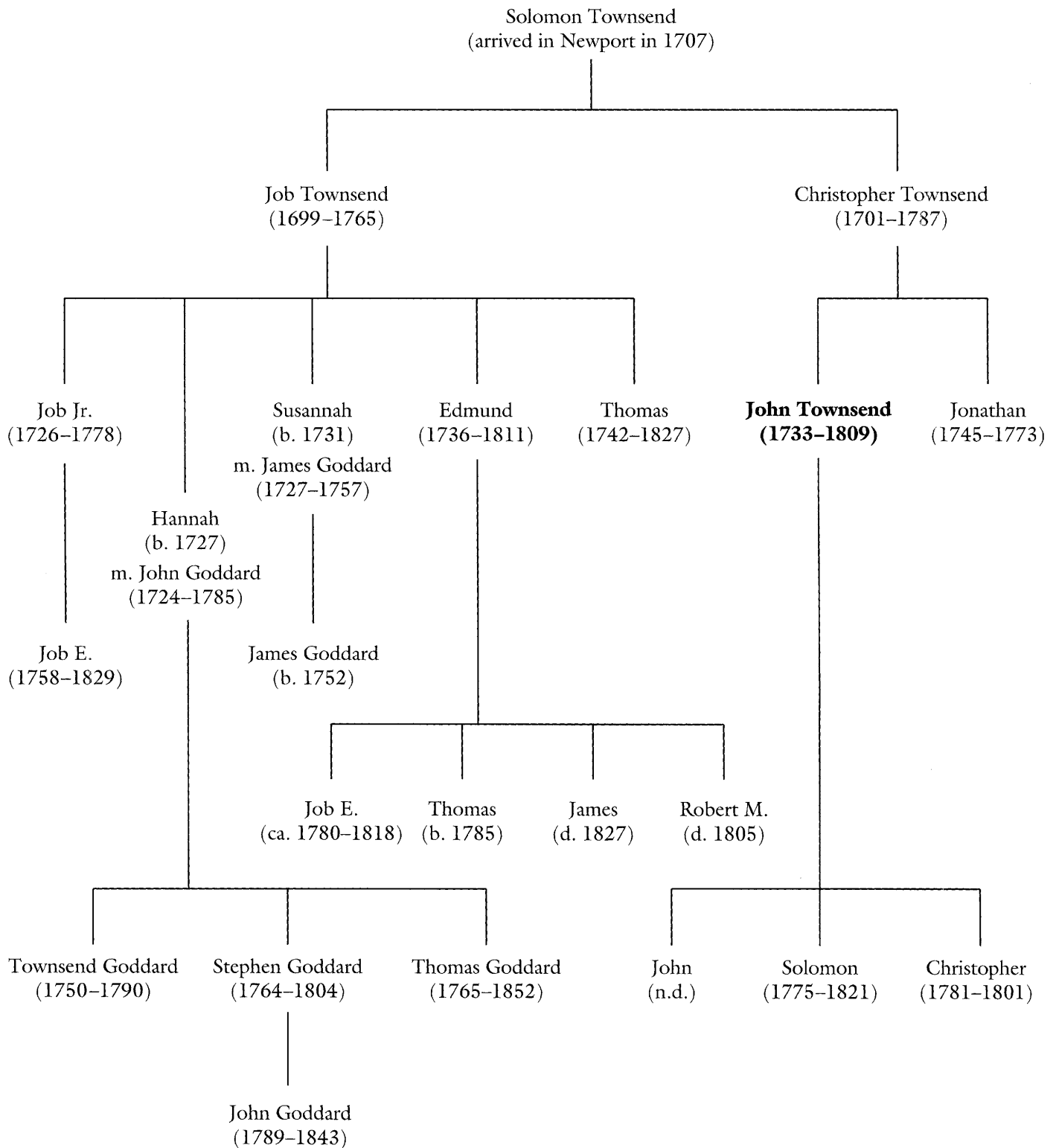
69 (John Townsend splat)



70 (maker unknown, splat)

# Appendix 2

## The Townsend Family Joiners



## Appendix 3

### Christopher Townsend's Will (1773), Codicil (1786), and Inventory (1792)

#### WILL (1773)

I Christopher Townsend of Newport, in the County of Newport, in the Colony of Rhode Island, and Providence Plantations, in New England in America, Shop-joiner, being of a sound and Well disposing mind & memory, blessed by God for the same and being Mindful of my Mortality, and the time thereof, being uncertain do make and Ordain this, my last Will and Testament, in manner following, and first of all, I commend my Soul to God, who gave it, and my Body to the Earth to be decently buried by my Executors hereinafter named, And as to such Worldly Goods and Estate as it hath pleased Almighty God to bless me with in this Life, I Give, devise, bequeath & dispose of the same in the Manner following that is to say. Imprimis, my Will is that all my Debts, and funeral Expenses be Paid in some convenient time after my decease.

Item, I Give and bequeath unto my well beloved wife Patience Townsend, the use and Improvement of all my Real Estate, for and during the time she shall be and remain my Widow, & Also the use and Improvement of all my, Household furniture (except what is herein after mentioned and bequeathed to my sons and Daughter). for and during the time she shall be & remain my Widow; And I further Give and bequeath unto my said Wife, my Cow, and One hundred Spanish silver milled Dollars, to be paid her out of my Estate by my Executors hereinafter Named, all which my Will is, shall be in Lieu of her Right of Dower, and thirds of and in my Estate.

Item. I give and Devise unto my Son John Townsend my House and Lot of Land belonging and adjoining thereto, being the Lot of Land Number Eighty One, in an Allotment of a Tract of Land called Easton's Point, situate, lying and being in Newport aforesaid, with the Appurtenances, To be held by him and his heirs forever, and to be Enjoyed by him after my said Wife, shall cease to be my Widow.

I also Give, and devise unto my said son John, the One Moiety, or half Part, of the Lot of Land Number Eighty two, in the Allotment of Land before mentioned, which I bought of Daniel Coggeshall, reference to be had to his Deed for the bounds thereof, with the Appurtenances. To hold to him and his heirs forever, and to be enjoyed by him and them after my said Wife Ceases to be my Widow, And I further Give and Bequeath, unto my said son John Townsend, two of my largest silver Porringers marked CLM, and Three hundred spanish silver Milled Dollars, and One feather bed and bedding now in my bedroom Chamber. Also, one third Part, of all my new desks, and other joiners ware that is for sale, except one large Mahogany Desk, which my son Jonathan Townsend made; And also all my Joiners Tools, and all my Mahogany and other Shop Joinery stock, and all my Desk furniture which shall remain after the said New desks which I have by me shall be finished.

Item, I Give and Devise, unto my son Christopher Townsend, my Dwelling House, in which I now live, and the Lot of Land whereon it stands, with Joiners Shop, and all the other Buildings thereon standing and being, said Lot of Land being the Fifty first lot, in Number of said Allotment of said Easton's Point, with the Appurtenances thereunto belonging. To hold to him & his heirs forever, to be enjoyed by him when my said Wife shall cease to be my Widow; I Also give and devise unto my said son Christopher Townsend, my store, or stable, with the Lot of Land, on which it stands, said Lot being the Forty ninth Lot in number of the above said Allotment in the first division of said Eastons Point. And is the same lot, which I bought of Matthew Borden with all the appurtenances thereunto belonging. To hold to him and his heirs forever to be enjoyed by him and them when my said Wife shall cease to be my

Widow. I further give and bequeath unto my said son Christopher Townsend, my Clock and Clock case, and Silver Watch, silver Tankard, Two silver Porringers Marked C.P., also Three hundred spanish silver Milled Dollars One large Mahogany Oval Table, one small Mahogany oval Table, One feather bed, bedding & furniture, and my Gun, or Fowling Piece. Also one large Mahogany desk, which his brother Jonathan made, the Mahogany Desk which stands in my Great Room, Also my large looking Glass in my great room, two round about or great Chairs, and six leather bottom'd Chairs, and the one third part of all my New Desks & other joiners ware which I have by me for sale, and five large Maps in Frames.

Item I give devise and bequeath unto my Daughter Mary Wanton, my House & Lot of Land which Sarah Cozzens now occupies, being part of, the Eighty fourth Lot, in number of said Allotment, on said Eastons Point, and which I purchased of John Hicks, with the Appurtenances thereof. To hold the said House and Land to her own use for and during the Term of her Natural Life and from and after her Death, I give and devise the same House and Land to her son Christopher Townsend Wanton, and his heirs of his Body, My Will is that my said Daughter Mary shall have and take the use and Improvement, of the above said House and Land, immediately After my said Wife shall cease to be my Widow, And in case my said Daughter, Mary Wanton, should die before the determination, of my said Wifes Estate, and Interest in said house and land, then Immediately After the Determination of her said Estate and Interest therein, my Will is that my said House and Land should be held by the said Christopher Townsend Wanton, in manner aforesaid – And if the said Christopher Townsend Wanton, should die without Heirs of the Body, lawfully begotten, then I devise the same, House and Lot of Land to his Brother Gideon Wanton and to the heirs of his Body lawfully begotten. Also I give unto my said Daughter Mary Wanton, the Feather Bed in my great Chamber, with all the bedding and furniture thereunto belonging, and the Looking Glass, and six Maple fram'd Chairs, all of them in said Chamber, and Also Two silver porringers, and One silver cream Pot to be enjoyed by her immediately upon my Wife's ceasing to be my Widow; My Will Also further is that my Executors hereinafter named, pay to my said Daughter Mary Wanton out of my Estate Two hundred spanish silver Mill'd Dollars, within three Years after my decease.

Item, My Will is that my Executors hereinafter named Pay to each of my said Grand Children, Chris[topher] Townsend Wanton, and Gideon Wanton, out of my Estate, One hundred Dollars when they shall respectively arrive to the Age of twenty one years, and in case either of them shall die before he shall have arrived to that Age, then his Part shall be paid to the survivor by my Executors, when he shall arrive to the Age Aforesaid.

Item. I do her[e]by release and discharge my son John Townsend from the Payment of the Ballance which may or shall be due from him to me at the time of my Death, on account or Otherwise, excepting the bond, which he gave to my son Jonathan deces'd, in his life time, and the Note of hand he gave to Me.

Item. I do hereby release and discharge my son Christopher Townsend from the Payment of the Ballance which may or shall be due from him to Me at the time of my Death, on account, or otherwise.

Item all the, Rest, Residue, and Remainder of my Estate, whatsoever, both Real and Personal, and whersoever situate, not before, in this my Will devised & bequeathed, I give devise and bequeath, unto my said sons John Townsend & Christopher Townsend and my said Daughter Mary Wanton to be equally divided amongst them, and to be held by them, and their heirs forever.

Lastly. I hereby Nominate, Constitute and Appoint, my said sons John Townsend and Christopher Townsend to be Executors of this my last Will and Testament, and I do hereby utterly disallow, Revoke and disannull all and every other Wills, Legacies, Bequests and Executors, by me at any time heretofore made, named, Willed or bequeathed, Ratifying allowing and confirming this & none Other to be my last Will and Testament, In Witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and Seal this Third day of the seventh Month called July, in the Year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and seventy three and thir[t]eenth year of the Reign of George the third King of Great Brittain &.

Christopher Townsend

Signed sealed Published Pronounced & Declared by the said Christopher Townsend to be his last Will & Testament in the Presence of.

Timothy Waterhouse  
William Ellery  
Jonathan Wallen

CODICIL (1786)

A Codicil to be added to and be Part of the last Will and Testament of Christopher Townsend of Newport, in the County of Newport, and State of Rhode Island &. Shop Joiner.

Whereas I have made and Published a Will in Writing, bearing date the third day of July, in the Year of our Lord, One thousand, seven hundred & seventy three; Now I do hereby, confirm and establish the same with the following Alterations, to wit, Whereas in and by my said Will and Testament, I gave and devised, unto my Daughter Mary Wanton my House and Lot of Land, which I purchased of John Hicks, and, she being Already deceas'd, I Give and devise the same to my son John Townsend, To hold to him, his heirs & Assigns forever, subject to this condition, that he my said son John Townsend, shall pay unto my Grandchildren Christopher Townsend Wanton, Gideon Wanton, and Edward Wanton, Children of my Daughter Mary Wanton Sixty Spanish silver Milled Dollars each, with the payment whereof I do hereby charge my said son John Townsend and the Premises Aforesaid, And it is further my Will that if either of my said Grand Children shall die before he or they shall arrive to the Age of twenty one Years, at which time they shall respectively be entitled to receive the same; that then the sum hereby bequeathed him or them so dying, shall be by my said son John Townsend paid to the Survivors or Survivor of them my said Grand Children that shall arrive to the full Age of Twenty One Years.

It is also my Will that my Well beloved Wife, Patience Townsend, shall have and enjoy the Rents and Profits of the same Premises, for and during her Natural life.

Also I give and bequeath unto my son Christopher Townsend Junr, the Bed, Glass and Chairs in and by my said last Will and Testament, bequeathed to my Daughter Mary Wanton, To hold to him and his Assigns forever.

Also I Give and bequeath unto my Grandson Christopher Townsend Wanton, the Silver Cream Pot, by me in and by my said last Will and Testament given and bequeathed unto his Mother, To hold to him and his Assigns forever.

Also it is my Will that all other bequests in my said Will contained to my said Daughter Mary Wanton, and to my Grand Children Christopher Townsend Wanton & Gideon Wanton, shall go to my said Executors, therein named, to be equally divided between them.

And I do hereby declare that my said Will and Testament, in Writing, & this Codicil which I Will shall be Added to and deemed a part thereof, do contain my Last Will and Testament, In Witness whereof, I have to this Codicil set my hand & Seal the eighteenth day of, March, in the Year of our Lord, One thousand seven hundred and Eighty six, and in the tenth Year of American Independency.

Christopher Townsend

Witnessed by:  
John Grelea [?]  
Edmund Townsend  
William Borden

[Newport Probate Book 2, pp. 239–42]

INVENTORY (1792)

“An Inventory of the Personal Estate of Christopher Townsend, late of Newport, Cabinet  
Maker, deceased, taken by us the Subscribers, November 30th, 1792.

1 Mahogany Desk, 84/ . . . 1 Mahogany dining table, 40/ . . . . . 6..4..0  
 1 Clock & Case, 7..10..0 . . . One Small Oval table, 20/ . . . . . 8..10..0  
 1 Fly tea table, 20/ . . . 6 Black walnut Chairs, 72/ . . . . . 4..12..0  
 3 broken roundabout Chairs, 18/  
 ...  
 1 Bedstead, bed, bolster, & Pillows . . . . . 6..0..0  
 1 Old Blacknut, Oval Table, 6/  
 ...  
 1 Old Blacknut China Table, 1 Old Meal Chest . . . . . 0..3..0  
 6 Maple Straw bottom'd chairs, old . . . . . 0..15..0  
 2 Beds, 1 Bolster, 2 Pillows “old,” 1 pr. old sheets . . . . . 4..10..0  
 ...  
 1 Mahogany China table, 10/1 looking Glass, broke, 18/ . . . . . 1..8..0  
 1 Broken Stand  
 ...  
 1 Maple bedstead, 10/ . . . 1 Small black walnut desk, 30/ . . . . . 2..0..0  
 ...  
 1 Small Stool . . .  
 1 Old Chest drawers, 5/ . . .  
 2 Old trunks, 1 Old Chest, 4/ . . .  
 1 Oak bedstead, 3/ . . .  
 ...  
 2 Old bedsteads in the Garret, 4/ . . .

## Appendix 4

### John Townsend's Will (1805) and Inventory (1809)

#### WILL (1805)

In the Name of God Amen. I John Townsend of Newport in the State of Rhode Island &c: being of sound mind and memory and considering the frailty and uncertainty of this mortal state of existence do now make and Publish this my last Will and Testament in Manner following.

First, I Direct that my just Debts and funeral charges be paid in some reasonable time after my decease.

I Give and Bequeath unto my Daughter Mary Townsend, Twelve hundred Dollars to be paid her by my Executors herein after named, within one Year after my decease.

I Also, Give unto my said Daughter Mary the Rents and Profits of my House and Lot of Land in Newport, as now enclosed, fronting South on Bridge Street, and adjoining on the West to a Shop occupied by Peleg Cranston, and on the East upon an Alley which divides it from land of Gilbert Chase, to be enjoyed by her during her natural life, if she so long remain unmarried, otherwise until the time of her Marriage.

And further I Give unto her my said Daughter, the following Articles to Wit One of my best Bedsteads with Claw feet, with the Bed thereon, usually kept in the great Chamber, and the Bedstead and Bed in my Keeping room Chamber, which belonged to my Daughter Sarah, together with the Sheets, Blankets, Spreads, Bolsters, Pillows, Curtains & furniture belonging to said Beds. Also my best Mahogany Bureau, which I made for her Mother, and one plain Mahogany Bureau, eight Mahogany Chairs with Claw feet, six Black walnut Chairs with Hair bottoms, my Easy Chair, two Mahogany Oval Pembroke Tables. One Square Mahogany four feet Table with fluted legs, one Mahogany three feet square Table with fluted legs, one square Mahogany Pembroke Table with Stretchers, one Mahogany Tea Table with the set of China it Contains, three dozen China Plates and three large China Platters, one large Brass kettle, one pair brass Hand Irons, my best Shovel & Tongs, six large Silver Spoons, my silver Pepper Box & Cream Pot, one Silver Porringer marked P.C., my warming Pan, and one pair of my best Candlesticks.

Also I give and Devise unto my Sons Solomon Townsend and John F. Townsend their Heirs and Assigns forever, my House and Lot of Land lying on Thames Street in Newport being the Estate I purchased of John C. Scott, together with all the Rights and Privileges there to belonging, to be equally divided between them, share and share alike. Also I give and Devise unto my said Sons, Solomon & John, a four Acre Lot lying next Eastward of the Duck Manufactory, being the Lot I purchased of John Clarke to Hold to them their Heirs and Assigns forever share and share alike.

And it is my Will that my six Acre Lot which I purchased of Lemuel Wyatt and adjoins the last mentioned Lot, be divided lengthwise agreeably to a Plot drawn by John Gould surveyor, in two parts, one part to Contain three Acres and one third of an Acre, the other part to contain two Acres and two thirds of an Acre adjoining the said four Acre Lot on the North end thereof which said two Acres and two thirds, I devise unto my said Sons Solomon and John their Heirs and Assigns forever. share and share alike.

Also I Give and Bequeath unto my said Son Solomon a Mahogany Desk I had made for him and a Clock made by Walter Cornell with the Case &c.

Also, I give and Bequeath unto said Son John my Clock which now stands in my Keeping Room made by Storr in London.

And I do hereby release acquit & discharge my said Sons Solomon & John their Heirs



In the Name of God Amen. I John Townsend of

Newport in the State of Rhode Island &c. being of sound mind and memory and considering the frailty and uncertainty of this mortal state of existence. do now make and Publish this my last Will and Testament in Manner following -  
First Direct. that my just Debts and funeral charges be paid in some reasonable time after my decease -

Give and Bequeath unto my Daughter Mary Townsend Twelve hundred Dollars to be paid her by my Executors hereon after named, within one year after my decease -

Also Give unto my said Daughter Mary the Heirs and Profits of my House and Lot of Land in Newport, as now enclosed, fronting South on Bridge Street, and adjoining on the West to a Shop occupied by Peleg Canastota, and on the East upon an Alley which divides it from Land of Gilbert Chase, to be enjoyed by her during her natural life, if she so long remain unmarried, otherwise until the time of her Marriage -

And further I Give unto her my said Daughter, the following Articles to Wit -

One of my best Bedsteads with Claws feet, with the Bed thereon, usually kept in the great Chamber, and the Bedstead and Bed in my Keeping room Chamber, which belonged to my Daughter Sarah, together with the Sheets, Blankets, Spreads, Pillows, Sillars, Curtains & furniture belonging to said Beds. Also my best Mahogany Bureau, which I made for her Mother, and one plain Mahogany Bureau, eight Mahogany Chairs with Carved feet, six Black Walnut Chairs with Hair bottoms, my easy Chair, two Mahogany Oval Pembroke Tables, One Square Mahogany four feet Table with fluted legs, one Mahogany three feet square Table with fluted legs, one square Mahogany Table with stretchers, one Mahogany Tea Table with the set of Chairs & Curtains, three dozen China Plates and three large China Dishes, one large Brass Kettle, one pair of Hand saws, my best Shovel & Tongs, six large Silver Spoons, my silver Pepper Box & Cream Pot, one Silver Gearing marked P.C. my warming Pan, and one pair of my best Candelsticks -

Also I Give and Devise unto my Sons Solomon Townsend and John T. Townsend their Heirs and Assigns forever, my House and Lot of Land lying on Thames Street in Newport being the Estate purchased of John C. Scott, together with all the Rights and Privileges thereto belonging to be equally divided between them share and share alike. Also I Give and Devise unto my said Sons Solomon, John, a four Acre Lot lying next Eastward of the Duck Manufactory, being the Lot I purchased of John Clarke to hold to them their Heirs and Assigns forever share and share alike -

And it is my Will, that, my six Acre Lot which I purchased of Samuel Weyall and adjoins the last mentioned Lot, be divided lengthwise agreeably to a Plot drawn by John Gould Surveyor, in two parts, one part to contain three Acres and one third of an Acre, the other part to contain two Acres and two thirds of an Acre adjoining the said four Acre Lot on the North end thereof, which said two Acres and two thirds I will unto my said Sons Solomon and John their Heirs and Assigns forever share and share alike -

Also I Give and Bequeath unto my said Son Solomon a Mahogany Desk I had made for him and a Clock made by Walter Council with the Case &c. -

Also -

Fig. 71. John Townsend's will, dated June 1, 1805. Newport City Clerk's Office, Newport, Rhode Island

Also Give and Bequeath unto said Son John my Clock which now stands in my Keeping Room made by Storr in London.

And I do hereby release acquit & discharge my said Sons Solomon & John their Heirs Executors & Administrators of me from all bills, bonds, notes, balances & demands which I may have against them at the time of my decease.

Also Give and Devise unto my Son Charles I. I send his Heirs & Assigns forever, my Dwelling house where I now live, with the Sol adjoining when and it stands, which said Sol contains the Sol n<sup>o</sup> Eighty three, part of Sol n<sup>o</sup> Eighty two part of Sol n<sup>o</sup> Eighty one, as the same are laid out in an Oblatment of a Tract of Land called Eastons Point in Newport.

Also Devise unto my said Son Charles his Heirs & Assigns forever, my House & Lot, which is part of Sol n<sup>o</sup> Eighty four, and is here in before described, being the same House & Lot I have given to my Daughter Mary in her natural life or so long as she shall remain unmarried, after which period, I give said House & Lot with the Appurtenances to my said Son as aforesaid.

Also Devise unto my said Son Charles three Acres and one third of an Acre of the Sol Spurchard of Samuel Wynt as he prescribes, the remaining part of which Sol I have herein given to my Sons Solomon & John said three Acres & one third to be taken from the Northernly side of said Sol next to land of Oliver Perry Warner, and to be held by my said Son Charles his Heirs & Assigns forever. And it is my Will, that until my said Son Charles shall arrive at the age of Twenty one years, the Sols and House herein given him shall be under the care of my Executors and the profits thereof applied by them to his use.

Also Give and Bequeath unto my said Son Charles my Mahogany Desk which I have now in use and the Mahogany Bureau which was his Sesters Sarahs.

Also Direct, that my House & Shop, and the Sol on which they stand, which I purchased of the Executors of Kendall Nichols and likewise the fifth part of the House & Lot purchased of the Executors of Joseph G. Wharton as the same was laid out by a Committee shall be sold by my Executors and the proceeds thereof applied to the purposes of this my Will.

All the Rest and Remainder of my Estate both Real and Personal of every nature and wherever to be found and all Claims, Debts, Rights, Interests and Privileges which shall belong or accrue unto me, I give Assign and Devise unto my said three Sons Solomon John and Charles to be equally divided and enjoyed by them their Heirs and Assigns forever.

And hereby revoking all former Wills, I appoint Charles I. and my Sons Solomon I. and John I. I send to be Executors of this my last Will and Testament.

In Witness whereof I hereto set my Hand and Seal the first Day of June in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand eight hundred and five.

John Townsend

At a Court of Probate held at the Council Chamber in Newport Monday May 7<sup>th</sup> 1805  
William Eng's  
B. Howard  
In Open Court with Valentine Wightman and William Eng's two of the Witnesses to the foregoing Will in and their Solemn Oath declare and say that they were present at the time that John Townsend named in said Will executed the same to Wit, on the first day of June in the Year of Our Lord One thousand eight hundred and five, that he was then of a sound mind & memory, that they saw him sign & seal and heard him publish and declare the same as and for his last Will & Testament that they signed as Witnesses thereto at the same time in the presence of the Testator in the presence of each other and in the presence of Benjamin Howard the other Witness who is Absent. Wherefore said Will is Proved and Approved.

Jonathan Henry Probate Clerk

Newport 5<sup>th</sup> May 1805  
by Jonathan Henry Probate Clerk

Executors & Administrators, of and from all bills, bonds, notes balances & demands which I may have against them at the time of my decease.

Also I Give and Devise unto my Son Charles F. Townsend his Heirs & Assigns forever, my Dwelling house where I now live, with the Lot adjoining whereon it stands, which said Lot Contains the Lot No. Eighty three, part of Lot No. Eighty two & part of Lot No. Eighty one, as the same as laid out in an Allotment of a Tract of Land called Easton's Point in Newport.

Also, I Devise unto my said Son Charles his Heirs & Assigns forever, my House & Lot, which is part of Lot No. Eighty four, and is herein before described, being the same House & Lot I have given to my Daughter Mary for her natural life or so long as she shall remain unmarried, after which period I give said House & Lot with the Appurtenances to my said Son as aforesaid.

Also, I Devise unto my said Son Charles three Acres and one third of an Acre of the Lot I purchased of Lemuel Wyatt as before described, the remaining part of which Lot I have herein given to my Sons Solomon & John, said three Acres & one third to be taken from the Northerly side of said Lot next to land of Oliver Ring Warner, and to be held by my said Son Charles his Heirs & Assigns forever. And it is my Will, that until my said Son Charles shall arrive at the age of Twenty one Years, the Lots and Houses herein given him shall be under the care of my Executors and the profits thereof applied by them to his use.

Also I Give and Bequeath unto my said Son Charles my Mahogany Desk which I have now in use and the Mahogany Bureau which was his Sister Sarah's.

Also I Direct that my House & Shop, and the Lot on which they stand which I purchased of the Executors of Kindal Nichols and likewise the fifth part of the House & Lot I purchased of the Executrix of Joseph G. Wanton as the same was laid out by a Committee shall be sold by my Executors and the proceeds thereof applied to the purposes of this my Will.

All the Rest and Remainder of my Estate both Real and Personal of every nature and wherever to be found and all Claims, Debts, Rights, Interests and Privileges, which shall belong or accrue unto me, I Give Assign and Devise unto my said three Sons Solomon John and Charles to be equally divided and enjoyed by them their Heirs and Assigns forever.

And hereby revoking all former Wills, I appoint Charles Feke and my Sons Solomon Townsend and John F. Townsend to be Executors of this my last Will and Testament. In Witness whereof I hereto set my Hand and Seal the first Day of June in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand eight hundred and five

Signed Sealed Published and Declared by the said John Townsend to be his last Will and Testament in the presence of us who hereto subscribe our names as Witnesses thereto in presence of said Testator and of each other.

V. Wightman

Willm. Engs

B. Hazard

At a Court of Probate held at the Council Chamber in Newport Monday May 1st AD 1809 in Open Court cometh Valentine Wightman and William Engs two of the Witnesses to the aforegoing Will and on their Solemn Oaths declare and say that they were present at the time that John Townsend named in said Will executed the same to Wit, on the first day of June in the Year of Our Lord One thousand eight hundred and five, that he was then of a sound mind & memory that they saw him sign & seal and heard him Publish and declare the same as and for his last Will & Testament that they signed as Witnesses thereto at the same time in the presence of the Testator in the presence of each other and in the presence of Benjamin Hazard the other Witness who is Absent, Wherefore said will is Proved and Approved.

Jonathan Almy Probate Clerk

Newport 8 May 1809 Recorded

By Jonathan Almy Probate Clerk

INVENTORY (1809)

Inventory of the Personal Estate of John Townsend late of Newport Cabinet  
Maker deceased taken by us the Subscribers May 13th, 1809.

8 Black Walnut framed Chairs \$24.	
8 Mahogany Chairs not put together \$16 .....	\$40.00
4 Mahogany Bed Posts \$2.	
497 feet Mahogany \$78.72. 297 feet Walnut \$17.52 .....	98.24
4 Cherry Tree Bed Posts \$1. 50 feet Cherry Tree \$3.	
1 Grind Stone and frame \$4 .....	8.
Joiners Tools & 6 Benches \$59. 2 Easy Chair frames \$8.	
8 Blk Walnut frames Chairs \$24 .....	91.
1 Chaise \$25. 1 Frame Saw. Stove and Lathe \$4.50 .....	29.50
Samuel Vaughns Note \$64.77. John Marsh's Note \$27 .....	91.77
John Cooke & Sons Note \$160. George Brown's Note \$195.	
Samuel Vaughans Note \$177.77 .....	532.77
Thomas Warren's Note \$17. United States Certificate \$5.	
States Certificate \$16.23 .....	38.23
Wearing Apparell \$25. Cash on hand \$92. Wheel and Lathe \$8 .....	125.00
4 Mahogany Posts \$7. Nine feet Mahogany \$3.17 .....	10.17
	\$1064.68

Joseph Cozzens  
Job Townsend  
John Tillinghast

[Newport Probate Book 4, pp. 600-01, 635]



Fig. 72. Mary Buffum, *Ellen Townsend's Parlor*, about 1880, watercolor. Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island

## Appendix 5

# John Townsend Family Furniture

Most of the Townsend family furniture that can now be identified descended from John Townsend to his daughter Mary, to her nephew (and John's grandson) Christopher Townsend, to his sister (and John's granddaughter) Ellen. This Ellen Townsend came into additional inheritances, principally from her mother who was an Easton, and it was she, with a characteristic sense of family commitment to Newport, who made the initial distribution of these various family possessions to local cultural institutions: to the Redwood Library in 1883, the Newport Historical Society in 1884. At her death the remainder was sold to family friends, from whose descendants, in turn, the Newport Restoration Foundation purchased a number of important pieces of furniture in 1969. At one time Ellen owned six of the pieces of furniture in the catalogue of Townsend's work in this publication: cat. nos. 4, 11, 15, 30, 43, and 47.

A careful reading of the wills of Christopher and John Townsend (which are transcribed fully in Appendixes 3 and 4) suggests that, for both men, some of the furniture they made for their immediate families was viewed as an important legacy. Christopher's bequests to his son and namesake included "one large Mahogany desk, which his brother Jonathan made;" and among the things John left his daughter Mary was "my best Mahogany Bureau, which I made for her Mother." In 1937 Homer Eaton Keyes wrote about a group of pieces that had descended in the family, but an actual recapitulation of the peregrinations of the family possessions has not until now been attempted. (What follows is done with full awareness of the perils of family provenance when trying to trace individual objects.)

The descriptions of the individual pieces as given in the wills of the two cabinetmakers are excerpted below. For the succeeding generations, when objects were not individually singled out, only the relevant bequests are quoted. The descriptions of furniture given in the inventories that accompany these later wills are so generic as not to be worth transcribing.

### I. CHRISTOPHER TOWNSEND (1701-1787)

*Will dated 1773 (made at the time of son Jonathan's death)*

To wife Patience Easton Townsend (1703-1789): "The use and Improvement of all my, Household furniture (except what is herein after mentioned and bequeathed to my sons and Daughter). for and during the time she shall be & remain my Widow."

To son John Townsend (1733-1809): "Two of my largest silver Porringers marked C<sup>L</sup>M . . . and One feather bed and bedding now in my bedroom Chamber. Also, one third Part, of all my new desks, and other joiners ware that is for sale, except one large Mahogany Desk, which my son Jonathan Townsend made."

To son and namesake Christopher Townsend (1738-1809): "My Clock and Clock case, and Silver Watch, silver Tankard, Two silver Porringers Marked C<sup>T</sup>P, . . . One large Mahogany Oval Table, one small Mahogany oval Table, One feather bed, bedding & furniture . . . Also, one large Mahogany desk, which his brother Jonathan made, the Mahogany Desk which stands in my Great Room, Also my large looking Glass in my great room, two round about or great Chairs, and six leather bottom'd Chairs, and the one third part of all my New Desks & other joiners ware which I have by me for sale, and five large Maps in Frames."

To daughter Mary Wanton (died 1782): "The feather Bed in my great Chamber, with all the bedding and furniture thereunto belonging, and the Looking Glass, and Six Maple fram'd

Chairs, all of them in said Chamber, and Also Two silver porringers, and One silver cream Pot to be enjoyed by her immediately upon my Wife's ceasing to be my Widow."

*Codicil dated 1786 (made after daughter Mary Wanton's death)*

To son Christopher Townsend Jr.: "The Bed, Glass and Chairs in and by my said last Will and Testament, bequeathed to my Daughter Mary Wanton."

To grandson Christopher Townsend Wanton: "The Silver Cream Pot, by me in and by my Said last Will and Testament given and bequeathed unto his Mother."

## 2. JOHN TOWNSEND (1733–1809); (married Philadelphia Feke, died 1802)

*Will dated 1805*

[Newport Probate Book 4, pp. 600–601]

To daughter Mary Townsend (1769–1856): "One of my best Bedsteads with Claw feet, with the Bed thereon, usually kept in the great Chamber, and the Bedstead and Bed in my Keeping room Chamber, which belonged to my daughter Sarah, together with the Sheets, Blankets, Spreads, Bolsters, Pillows, Curtains & furniture belonging to said Beds. Also my best Mahogany Bureau, which I made for her Mother and one plain Mahogany Bureau, eight Mahogany Chairs with Claw feet, six Black walnut Chairs with Hair bottoms, my Easy Chair, two Mahogany Oval Pembroke Tables. One Square Mahogany four feet Table with fluted legs, one Mahogany three feet square Table with fluted legs, one square Mahogany Pembroke Table with Stretchers, one mahogany Tea Table with the set of China it Contains, three dozen China Plates and three large China Platters . . . six large Silver Spoons, my silver Pepper Box & Cream Pot, one Silver Porringer marked P.C.

To son Solomon Townsend (about 1775–1821): "A Mahogany Desk I had made for him and a Clock made by Walter Cornell with the Case &c."

To son John F. Townsend: "My Clock which now stands in my Keeping Room made by Storr in London."

To son Charles F. Townsend: "My Mahogany Desk which I have now in use and the Mahogany Bureau which was his Sister Sarah's [died 1803]."

## 3. MARY TOWNSEND (1769–1856), John's daughter (married Thomas Brinley, 1823)

*Will dated 1856*

[Newport Probate Book 18, p. 370]

To nephew Christopher Townsend: "All the household furniture, plate, and all other articles and things belonging to me, excepting only what is herein otherwise disposed of [a silver porringer to her nephew Christopher Townsend]"

## 4. CHRISTOPHER TOWNSEND (died 1881) (son of John F., grandson of John)

*Will dated 1877*

[Newport Probate Book 34, pp. 419]

To sister Ellen Townsend: "I give and devise to my said sister Ellen Townsend my interest in the house No. 31 Broadway, Newport R.I. . . together with all household furniture, articles useful and ornamental."

5. ELLEN TOWNSEND (1809–1887) (daughter of John F. Townsend; granddaughter of John)

In addition to all the household furniture of her brother Christopher, Ellen inherited things from her father John F. Townsend and her mother Ann Easton Townsend. Sometime between Christopher's death in 1881 and Ellen's gift of furniture to the Newport Historical Society in 1884, Mary Buffum (1855–1907) must have made the watercolor (fig. no. 72) of the family furniture as displayed in Ellen's parlor in the house on Broadway. It is the earliest surviving image of any of the family possessions. It shows a heterogeneous mix of mid- and late-eighteenth-century pieces. The oldest in style is the square tea table with pointed pad feet, doubtless identifiable with the one given by Ellen in 1884 to the Newport Historical Society. The side chair to the left may be one of the set by John Townsend of which two are now at the Newport Restoration Foundation (cat. no. 11). The camelback sofa, while possibly of Newport manufacture, copies a classic Philadelphia form. Flanking it are straight leg, presumably stop-fluted, pieces: at the left a Pembroke with crossed stretchers, at the right an upholstered back open armchair. Of the other furniture, all in the Federal style, the breakfront bookcase, a form associated with Salem, Massachusetts, may be identifiable with one from the Easton family that Ellen Townsend gave the Redwood Library in 1884. The armchair with the urn centered in the pierced splat is similar to a chair design in a 1788 newspaper advertisement of Thomas Timpson of New York, indicative of the strong influence New York had on Newport furniture in the Federal style.

*Ellen Townsend's gift to the Redwood Library, 1883*

The gift consisted of some four-dozen pieces of ceramics, some Chinese, some English; half a dozen pieces of Newport silver; and a few pieces of furniture. The smaller pieces were all exhibited together at the Redwood Library in the "Easton Cabinet" until 1910, at which time they were put on loan at the Newport Historical Society until 1991. The gift included objects from the Townsend as well as the Easton families.

The most important piece of furniture was the Redwood family mahogany card table, attributed to John Townsend (cat. no. 4), which once bore a brass label inscribed "Townsend table / Mrs. Redwood's Table / Miss Ellen Townsend." It was probably made for William Redwood (1734–1794) shortly after his marriage in 1757 to Sarah Pope (1742–1819). Sarah was the granddaughter of Captain Nicholas Easton, a founder of Newport. The other furniture included the Easton family Salem breakfront and two round mahogany tea trays.

Chief among the ceramics is a selection of fine mid-eighteenth century Chinese porcelains: three platters, three bowls, and sixteen plates, all with identifying labels pasted on their bottoms. That on the largest platter claims that in 1814 Sarah Redwood presented it to her cousin Ann Easton (Ellen Townsend's mother). The labels on some other pieces claim their ownership by John and Phila Townsend. The silver is equally divided among the Eastons and the Townsends. A silver teapot by Samuel Casey bears the initials SP, for Sarah Pope; a silver porringer, also by Casey, bears the initials CTP, identifiable with one of two that Christopher Townsend bequeathed his son Christopher. The "three dozen China Plates and three large China Platters" that John Townsend left his daughter Mary is tantalizingly similar to the three platters, three bowls, and sixteen plates of Chinese export porcelain in Ellen's gift.

*Ellen Townsend's gift to the Newport Historical Society, 1884*

The gift consisted of three pieces of furniture: a classic Newport Queen Anne tea table with pointed pad feet (1884.3.2) (ill. Moses 1984, p. 73, fig.2.2), assumed to be from the Townsend family; a high chest (1884.3.3) (ill. *Antiques* 1946, p. 229); and a dining table (1884.3.1) Both high chest, attributed to Job Townsend, and dining table, attributed to John Goddard, bear brass labels reading: *PRESENTED BY / MISS ELLEN TOWNSEND / 4TH IN DESCENT FROM / CAPT. NICHOLAS EASTON.*



*Will dated 1885*

[Newport Probate Book 39, p. 44–46]

“To my Executor the said John S. Coggeshall [cashier at the Union Bank] I give and bequeath the sum of two thousand dollars together with my household furniture and personal effects but upon trust in especial confidence that he will have regard to my wishes in the disposition of the same, the said money furniture and effects and that he will dispose of them the same as he may believe that I would have them disposed of if I were alive and acting herein.”

*Codicil dated 1885*

“Furniture, ornaments, articles of virtu which may remain in my house at the time of my decease which may not otherwise be disposed of under my original will or by directions by me given in writing to my Executor I give devise and bequeath to the City of Newport forever.”

#### 6. SALE, about 1887

John S. Coggeshall apparently sold much of the Townsend furniture to William Paine Sheffield (1819–1907), of Newport, a close friend, in whose family much of it remained until 1969 when some of it was purchased by the Newport Restoration Foundation. (cat. nos. 11, 30, 47) A family clawfoot bedstead (cat. no. 15) was purchased the next year. Other simpler pieces, including a maple high chest, a maple drop-leaf table with pad feet, a desk on frame, and a one-drawer blanket chest were offered but not acquired.

In addition to the furniture with Townsend family histories at the Newport Restoration Foundation, there are individual pieces with reputed, but unproven, Townsend provenances: the 1765 block and shell desk at the State Department (cat. no. 18), the china table at Winterthur (cat. no. 36), and the recently discovered flush-door chest (see ref. cat. no. 28). Another Townsend connection is the fact that not many months after Job Coit Jr. — one of the makers of the 1738 desk and bookcase — died, in 1745, his widow married one Jeremiah Townsend. It is not known if he was related to the Newport Townsends.

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## Abbreviations Used in This Publication

- AJHS American Jewish Historical Society, Newton Centre, Massachusetts, and New York, New York
- NHS Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island
- NRF Newport Restoration Foundation, Newport, Rhode Island
- RIHS Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island

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