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Litchfield Historical Society
7 South Street, On-the-Green Litchfield, CT 06759

To Please Any Taste:

Litchfield County Furniture & Furniture Makers, 1780-1830

SYMPOSIUM

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& Furniture Makers,
1780-1830

Friday, October 17, 2008
Litchfield Community Center
Litchfield Connecticut



Program

Rethinking New England Vernacular Furniture
Edward S. Cooke, Jr.: Charles F. Montgomery
Professor of Decorative Arts, Yale University,
New Haven, CT

Using "To Please Any Taste" as a departure point, this talk will sketch out ways in which we might probe the patterns and meanings of furniture production and consumption in New England during the colonial and early national periods. Extending beyond connoisseurly attributions or reliance on stable town and state lines, this talk will focus upon several principles to guide future work on the dynamic practice of vernacular furnituremaking.

The Dutch and Connecticut Furniture Before 1720: An On-going Research project

Robert Trent: Independent Furniture Scholar,
Former Curator at Winterthur and at the Connecticut
Historical Society, Wilmington, DE

Recent work in western and central portions of the state has found evidence of direct Dutch influence on early furniture. In some cases, the influence is quite apparent, while in others the influence is difficult to detect. Similar research on Dutch architectural influence conducted one hundred years ago suggests that Dutch influence may be more pervasive than previous art historians have thought.

Harbor and Home: Furniture of Southeastern Massachusetts, 1710-1850

Brock Jobe: Professor of American Decorative Arts,
Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, DE

This talk explores the furniture of a little-studied region stretching from south of Boston to Providence and east to the tip of Cape Cod and the islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. The many coastal communities throughout the area maintained commercial ties with the larger cities of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Newport, as well as distant ports in Europe. As a result, southeastern Massachusetts residents had access to both stylish imports and locally made wares. In addition, the region supported a sizable number of clockmakers during the early 19th century. Their products—today numbering nearly 400 tall and dwarf clocks—attest to the caliber of craftsmanship practiced in the area.

Beyond Goddard and Townsend: Furniture making in Eighteenth-Century Rhode Island

Patricia Kane Curator of
Decorative Arts, Yale University
Art Gallery, New Haven, CT

The Goddard-Townsend school is among the most illustrious in American furniture. The appellation so dominates the field that little furniture by other Rhode Island makers has been identified. This talk will present new discoveries made through research for the Yale University Rhode Island Furniture Archive.

Diversity Within: The Furniture & Furniture Makers of Litchfield County, Connecticut, 1780-1810

Derin Bray: Furniture Historian, Litchfield County Furniture Project, Portsmouth, NH

Litchfield County was home to four distinct social and economic sub-regions in the late colonial and early National periods. As a result, there was great diversity in furniture making practices from one town to the next. While the cosmopolitan shop of Silas Cheney employed Hartford-trained cabinetmakers to make sophisticated inlaid furniture, shops in the iron-mining towns of Sharon and Salisbury relied on native talent who were as apt at making chests of drawers as they were at crafting molds for large cannons and guns. This talk presents research gleaned from a one-year study to better understand these many furniture making traditions and their relationship to the rich and diverse economy of Litchfield County, Connecticut.



Schedule

The symposium will be held Friday October 17, 2008 at the Litchfield Community Center followed by a reception at the Litchfield History Museum.

- 9:00 *Coffee and Registration*
At the Litchfield Community Center
- 9:30 *Welcome and Introductions*
- 9:45 **Edward S. Cooke “Rethinking New England Vernacular Furniture”**
- 10:30 **Derin Bray “Diversity Within: The Furniture & Furniture Makers of Litchfield County, Connecticut, 1780-1810”**
- 11:15 *Break*
- 11:30 **Brock Jobe “Harbor and Home: Furniture of Southeastern Massachusetts, 1710-1850”**
- 12:15 *Lunch*
- 1:30 **Patricia Kane “Beyond Goddard and Townsend: Furniture making in Eighteenth-Century Rhode Island”**
- 2:15 *Break*
- 2:30 **Robert Trent The Dutch and Connecticut Furniture Before 1720: An On-going Research project**
- 3:15 *Reception at the Litchfield History Museum.*
Participants will have an opportunity to view the exhibition “To Please Any Taste: Litchfield County Furniture and Furniture Makers 1780-1830”



The Exhibition

To Please Any Taste: Litchfield County Furniture & Furniture Makers, 1780-1830

Between 1780 and 1830 Litchfield County experienced a surge in industry, agriculture, and international trade. Citizens of the region expected their homes, clothing and furnishings to reflect their status. Furniture makers responded to these needs, creating pieces that both reflected the desires of the client and the regional aesthetics of the craftsman. Towns in the county were settled at different time by people from different areas bringing regional variation to the area. In addition, developments within the towns led to variations in the forms and styles that were characteristic of a community. This exhibition includes over thirty examples of Litchfield County Furniture with pieces loaned by Connecticut Historical Society, Connecticut Landmarks, Harriett Beecher Stowe Center, Hartford Steam Boiler, Torrington Historical Society, Winterthur Museum, Yale University Art Museum, and private lenders.

Sponsoring Organizations

Litchfield Historical Society

The Litchfield Historical Society is a private nonprofit organization founded in 1856 to collect, preserve, and interpret the history of Litchfield, Connecticut. The Society operates the Litchfield History Museum, seven galleries of decorative and fine arts arranged to tell the community's history; the Tapping Reeve House and Law School, the site of America's first law school, 1784-1833; and the Ingraham Memorial Library, a research library for local history and genealogy. The Litchfield Historical Society is accredited by the American Association of Museums.

Connecticut Humanities Council

The Connecticut Humanities Council is an independent, publicly-supported foundation, established in 1973 as the state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Council's Professional Development grants support conferences, seminars, workshops, publications and other opportunities for museum professionals and Connecticut historians to engage in critical dialogue about issues of scholarship, museum practices, and the interpretation of Connecticut heritage.

Northeast Auctions

Northeast Auctions, begun in 1987 and specializing in the fine and decorative arts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is widely recognized as an important marketplace and resource for collectors, dealers and museums. With annual sales approaching \$25 million, it is ranked among the largest auction houses in the United States. Ronald Bourgeault, owner and auctioneer, has been actively involved in the antiques business for over 40 years and began Northeast Auctions after a long career as a dealer. Building on his wide network of contacts in the field, Ron prides himself on taking a personal interest in consignors and bidders alike- an old-fashioned notion that fits his “hands-on” style.

Directions

From New York City, Westchester County, Long Island: Take the Henry Hudson Parkway to the Saw Mill River Parkway to I-684 North.

From New Jersey: Cross the Tappan Zee Bridge to Rte. 287 South to I-684 North.

Follow I-684 North to I-84 East via Danbury to Rte. 8 North (Waterbury) to Exit 42 to Rte. 118 West to the center of Litchfield.

From Boston or Hartford: Take the Mass. Turnpike (I-90) West to the Sturbridge Exit to I-84 West.

Follow I-84 West via Hartford to Exit 39 (Farmington) to Rte. 4 West to Rte. 118 West to the Center of Litchfield.

Litchfield Community Center
421 Bantam Road (Route 202)

Take Route 202 West from the center of Litchfield. The Community Center is a modern building approximately xx miles on the left. Additional parking is available at the Litchfield Auction Gallery next door to the center.

Lodging is available from many area inns and hotels, including (area code 860):

- Abel Darling Bed & Breakfast 567-0384
- Days Inn 496-8808
- Lilac Hedges Bed & Breakfast 567-8839
- The Litchfield Inn 567-4503
- Quality Inn and Suites 496-8808
- Super 8 Motel 496-0811
- Toll Gate Hill Inn 567-1233
- Yankee Pedlar Inn 800-777-1891

The symposium is funded by a generous gift from Northeast Auctions by Ronald Bourgeault and a grant from the Connecticut Humanities Council.



Registration Form

Name _____

Organization _____

Mailing Address _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

The cost of admission includes morning coffee, a box lunch and a wine and cheese reception at the end of the day.

___ \$70 for members of the Litchfield Historical Society

___ \$85 for non-members

___ Please check here if you would like a vegetarian lunch

Payment Options

___ Check ___ Mastercard ___ Visa

Card # _____

Expiration date _____

Signature _____

Please return registration and payment to:

Litchfield Historical Society
P.O. Box 385
Litchfield, CT 06759

Telephone 860-567-4501
Fax 860-567-3565
www.litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org