

The
Journal

of the
Lycoming County Historical Society

A Focus on Architecture & Furniture



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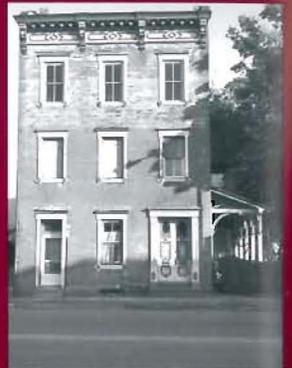
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On the Cover: A detail of the 'Rising Sun Chair' produced by Eugene Landon.

Architecture and Furniture



Treasure Comes in Many Forms

by Robert E. Kane, Jr.

All my life I have been intrigued by old houses. This seemed natural given parents and grandparents with a history of old houses in the Williamsport area. Growing up in a family of old house and antique furniture restoration seemed normal to me. History, especially Williamsport history, was a common topic of discussion. By middle age I

had many stories of my own related to old houses, antiques, and treasure hunting for all things old. Throughout the years, wherever we went, I always took note of interesting architecture. For example, we traveled down East Third Street in Williamsport hundreds of times to destinations on the eastern side of town from my home in the northcentral section of the city. Whenever I



Front of 162 East Third Street

was in this area, the house at 162 East Third Street always caught my attention. Something about the ancient, somewhat decayed look, of this house pulled me in. The double-front Victorian doors were extremely ornate and were in stark contrast to the severe, rectilinear elements of the pre-Civil War Federal brick facade. This house looked empty, forsaken, neglected, and mysterious.

As time marched on, my knowledge of architecture grew. My interest in local history and hunting for local treasures deepened. To tie this story together though, I have to back up and tell you about one of my hobbies. I collect antique bottles with “Williamsport Pa” embossed on them. There were sodas, medicines from local pharmacies, whiskey, bitters, and of course, Flock’s and Koch’s brewery bottles, to name a few. At one point I even found the local dump used by the original Williamsport Hospital. I remember when the land for the beltway was dug, local bottle collectors had a field day as earlier Williamsport dumps were uncovered in

the Old Williamsport canal area. After forty-some years of collecting, I was running out of sources to find old Williamsport bottles. One year I attended a national bottle show and ran into some young men from this region of Pennsylvania. They introduced me to the concept of “privy digging”. This is the hobby of locating where outhouses used to be at the rear of old houses. This form of treasure hunting actually started out West in the ghost towns. People started to realize we have much older houses here in the East equipped with outhouses. The outhouse holes were dug in the ground from 6 to 20 feet deep. They had retaining walls of stone, brick, or wood. When you locate where the outhouse holes are today, they can be full of old bottles, antique toys, marbles, dishes, guns, jewelry, etc.

What does this have to do with the house at 162 East Third Street? After numerous successful years of digging old Williamsport bottles from privy sites in the Williamsport area, our digging group focused on getting permission to dig in the original Millionaires’ Row area of Williamsport. That was, of course, East Third Street. If you know early Williamsport, the old bridge from Williamsport to South Williamsport crossed the river east of the current Market Street Bridge. Main Street in South Williamsport, which is east of Market Street, crossed over into the eastern section of Williamsport. East Third Street was an extension of the downtown and everyone from Michael Ross to James V. Brown built their houses in this area long before the post Civil War log boom that developed West Fourth Street.

After admiring 162 East Third Street for years, fate would bring me to this property. The owner, a preservationist and house restoration expert in his own right, had graciously given permission to our digging group to probe the backyard of this property to find the privy or succession of privy holes that would have existed. Just being in the backyard of this house stirred me with stories of Old Williamsport. The deep lot is shaded with old trees growing out of the uneven terrain typically found where years of changes have taken place. After hours of probing with steel rods we finally located a privy pit with stone retaining walls. The

ground was tough to dig as it was choked with tree roots. About two feet down we hit the top of a stone wall. Another two feet, ashes and glass shards appeared. Before you know it, we were digging clay marbles, clay smoking pipes, Williamsport medicine bottles, whiskey flasks, beer and soda bottles, etc. From the china shards we could tell the hole



Green pottery smoking pipe

contained 1880's trash. As we dug down in the hole, the trash turned older. China doll parts appeared along with every kind of cast-away you could imagine, including water pitchers, shoes, chamber pots, and spittoons. There were numerous glass feeders or baby bottles. One of our team was sifting the pile of dirt

we carefully laid out on tarps. He found a U.S. 'Large Cent' dated 1854. We started to realize that anything could come out of this hole. After 30 years of bottle collecting I dreamed of finding something rare from Williamsport and my hopes were building. This hole was about 9 feet deep when a beautiful green pottery smoking pipe appeared. This wasn't just any pipe! The pipe was molded in the shape of a Victorian lady's head with very distinct details. Again my mind wandered as I imagined the gentleman who lost such a distinctive item.

Many small treasures came out of this hole but one in particular brought me to my knees. After all of those years of searching I had never seen nor heard of a hand blown (pontiled) bottle embossed with "Williamsport Pa" on it. Wouldn't you know this gem of a house gave up a "once in a lifetime treasure" for a local bottle collector. At the depth of about 11 feet a small medicine bottle dropped out of the side wall. The bottle had been hand blown as a few other bottles at this time were. But the sight of lettering on this bottle that included "Williamsport Pa." was almost too good

to be true. Yes, we had found the only known hand blown bottle from the city, circa 1850! This was quite a milestone! The bottle said "Druggist" on one panel, "Williamsport Pa", on another panel and "J. Grier Hays" on yet another panel. Of course, the name of "Grier" and "Hays" are familiar in county history. This particular one was Doctor J. Grier Hays. Local records indicate he was born June 23, 1837, served in the Pennsylvania Militia



Druggist



J. Grier Hays



Williamsport

in 1862, and died November 13, 1883. He was buried in the Williamsport Cemetery. This entire treasure hunting experience lasted for two days. The privy hole bottomed out to a hard clay bed at approximately 12 feet. We carefully filled in the hole, replaced the topsoil and grass cap. Since all of our dirt and debris was kept on tarps you couldn't even tell we were there after the hole was filled. We pride ourselves in leaving yards in better condition than before we started. While this was great fun in its own right, the story of 162 East Third Street was far from over.

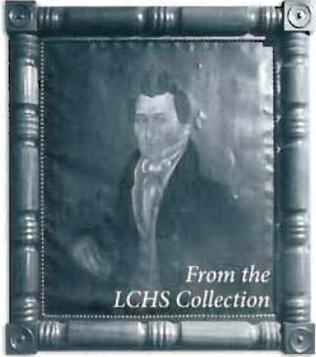
Two years after our outhouse pit expedition, I had the pleasure of running into the owner of 162 East Third Street again. His admiration for the property led me to examine this house more thoroughly. It is quite obvious when studying the exterior that this house started out as a Federal house and was Victorianized later on. The original Federal roof line is evident in the ghost marks on the brick wall especially on the west side. This house had a third floor addition and large attic added with Dutch-Flemish curves to the roof ends. The large attic gives the facade a 4 story appearance as it stands tall and proud. A top floor addition is rare. Ironically, the residence of John A. Otto built at West Fourth and Williams Streets had the same Federal facade with a Dutch-Flemish addition added on top of the second floor. No doubt the same architect builder developed this on both houses. The difference is that in later years, the third floor addition was removed from the John A. Otto house returning it to its original Federal roof line.

Scanning the surrounding area I was very much aware that the vacant parking lot on the west side of 162 East Third was the original location of the Tallman House. This grand Italianate Villa was spectacular. I distinctly remember going to the Tallman House before it was torn down in the late 1960's. My father took me there to salvage one of the most magnificent pairs of front doors in the city. Those doors with curved arched tops remain on my father's old house located at 823 Louisa Street.



Tallman House

What I didn't know yet until doing some research (in the basement of the courthouse) was that 162 East Third Street was owned by Charles Low, who purchased it from Jacob



Charles Low

Reighard in 1833. At that time the property also had a stonemith shop and a wagonmaker shop. The rear of the property has 40 feet of yard and another 40 feet of vacant lot where these buildings existed. The entire property was purchased for \$887.00. Third Street at that time was listed as Main Street, and Blackhorse Alley ran behind it. Upon checking further, at the Lycoming County Historical Society, there is a wonderful oil portrait of Charles Low hanging in the Greek Revival room. It turns out Charles Low's wife Ann was Michael Ross's youngest daughter. Of course Michael Ross's house was one block west at the northwest corner of East Third & Basin Streets. In later years James V. Brown lived in Michael Ross's Federal house until he tore the house down to build his famous mansion, which is well-documented in turn of the century insurance photos. Of additional interest is the location directly across the street from 162 East Third Street. Today the U-Haul truck business sits in this lot which once held one of the finest (in my opinion) early Victorian mansions in Williamsport. This was the Quinn-Coryell residence at



Quinn-Coryell House

165 East Third Street. More important to this story is the fact that prior to the Quinn-Coryell House, the lot at 165 East Third held Charles Low's mother's house which was built in 1802 and was the 14th house built in Williamsport. Charles Low served as Sheriff and Coroner and was appointed Major, 1st Batallion, 1st Brigade, 9th Division of the Pennsylvania Militia. He died August 26, 1876. His house was fitting for his stature within the City.

In the last half of the nineteenth century the house was owned by C.B. Bowman, Abraham Updegraff, and William Lawson among others. One of these people spent significant dollars to Victorianize the exterior and interior of the Federal house, as was so common.

I would describe 162 East Third Street as the classic

pre- Civil War townhouse set against the front walk and side walk. This 3 story red brick structure was 26 ft. wide and 25 ft. deep. The third story was added in the late 1870's. I know it was not added before 1865 as an 1865 flood picture of Market Square looking east, clearly shows the original



Side of 162 East Third Street



Front Doors of 162 East Third Street



Eaves of 162 East Third Street

2 story Federal roofline. More often than not these Federal houses had additions added to the rear of the property as this one did. The rear addition, also added in the late 1870's, extends south for 34 feet with 2 stories and a separate attic and pitched roof facing east-west. The west side of the addition includes an extension with a large gable pitched to the north and south. The extended area off the addition added significant space to the dining room and bedroom above. At the time of these additions, other modifications occurred including: the handsome and ornate Victorian front doors, the ornate Victorian fence and gate, the veranda on the west side (in the 'Stick-style' with square chamfered posts and brackets) and also on the west side, a 10 foot high entrance door with two glass panels over a larger glass panel. Of interest are the heavy granite lintels above the cellar windows on the east side, and stone lintels above the cellar windows on the front and west sides. Additionally, the veranda posts are supported with brown stone bases to deter rot or disintegration of the post bases. The other striking feature is the ornate Victorian corbels and brackets on the third story front and back eaves and decorative moldings on the cornice boards below the eaves.

Beyond discovering treasure in the backyard I was able to explore the interior of this historic mansion. After years of wondering what this looked like, I had the opportunity to see and touch the interior which is a treasure in its own



right. Coming through the large front doors I could see and smell history. Time had left distinctive clues. Inside the vestibule were large chestnut panel columns running floor to ceiling with a mottled glass transom above. This was a circa 1915 upgrade which was most likely added when the garden room was built on the rear of the property, as the design features are similar in age. This represented to me that the house was still greatly admired and improved upon when so many people added on to or built houses in the city (prior to the Great Depression). These columns also retained a portiere rod to hang heavy curtains to reduce drafts from the front doors. I found it ironic that old fashioned portiere rods from the Victorian era were added to 1915 posts that represented a more modern era.

Moving beyond the vestibule into the large 23-1/2 foot deep by 7 1/2 foot wide hall, one could see that the rest of the house was clearly still in the Victorian era of the late 1870's. The first thing I noticed and expected was very high (12 ft.) ceilings. High ceilings were common to this period but typically lowered to 9 or 10 foot by the 1890's. Whoever invested in this house in the 1870's didn't just spend money on the exterior. The front hall boasts a grand staircase that circles up to the third floor. This staircase has an ornate newel post topped with the original gas light. A classic large walnut hand rail curves up the staircase with countless ornate turned spindles. I noted, however, that while these spindles are usually made of solid walnut, these were actually made of softwood and grained walnut. (Softwood is easier to turn on a lathe and less expensive).

The front hall turns immediately left into the front parlor. Further down the hall is a left turn into the back parlor. Straight ahead is the dining room and to the right is the entrance door under the staircase that leads to the west side veranda. One notices ten foot high double arched swinging doors, grained in walnut, leading into the front parlor. The



Doorway with spandrel
mounting hardware. What a wonderful remnant of Victorian taste and decorative culture!

other very noticeable feature is the walnut spandrel in a stick and ball turned fretwork pattern above the doorway leading into the dining room. This door also holds an original portiere rod of wood with brass

Turning left into the front parlor, which is 15 1/2 ft. wide and 17 1/2 ft. deep, the large swinging doors that separate it give you a sense of formality and wonder. The multiple large windows shine through the dust hanging in the air. What was it like to have people walking on the sidewalk directly outside as you went about daily activities in the house? Interior privacy shutters hang in all the windows. (In contrast, I grew up in an era of city houses with front lawns and setbacks leading to front porches.) The medium width softwood plank floors reminded me that this house was built in the era of colorful wall to wall carpets sewn together in strips. Facing east there is a dark red slate fireplace that was marbled. This was in the popular mid Victorian fashion of curved arches with a central keystone. As you look south through the back parlor, a set of sliding pocket doors separates the rooms with the addition of an original portiere rod. One enters the back parlor and notes a matching dark red marbled fireplace on the east wall. The back parlor is 15 1/2 ft. wide and 12 ft. deep. The west wall contains the doorway to the hall. As you continue south through the back parlor you enter another room 15 1/2 ft. wide by 21 feet deep. This large room has built in corner cupboards on the north east and west walls. You realize this was either the original kitchen or dining room. At the end of the room there are backstairs to the second floor. When you face west you see into the dining room added in the Victorian period as part of the west side extension. The 15 ft. by 15 ft. dining room had a marbled slate fireplace centered in the south wall. The large fireplace was dismantled but all of the component pieces appear to be intact as they lean against the wall. The occupants of the house could dine while looking out large west side windows. Numerous pieces of furniture, telling stories of different eras within the house, are stacked in piles. While gazing at the array of household wares I was transformed back to memories of countless journeys through old houses. These structures never cease to amaze me. They speak to me. They tell me their stories through even the smallest detail. Only an old house lover would understand this feeling! I venture on back through the dining room into a 20th century kitchen (12 ft. deep by 10 ft. wide), on the west side, a 12 ft. wide by 13 ft. deep pantry to the east. Beyond this a garden room spans the width of the rear of the property. As you head up the front staircase you understand why the house is so tall. The second floor had two original bedrooms with almost 12 foot high ceilings, massive windows and walnut grained doors. The east side



Park Theatre Poster



Door Latch



Page House and Store



Tinsman House



Ryan House

wall in one bedroom shows where another fireplace stood. The second floor addition to the south of the house contains a long hallway and 4 more bedrooms. The west side extension above the dining room contains a nicely proportioned bedroom with a large Victorian bathroom. At the end of the long hallway, a second balcony was created. Half the balcony was open as a sleeping porch and the other half was enclosed for a second bathroom. Each room has remnants of the past such as a small gas cook stove, furniture, and even an old poster from the Park Theatre in Williamsport. I noticed the transition from dark walnut grained doors in the front of the second floor to light curly maple grained doors in the back bedrooms. These have unusual, early door latches. As you continue up the curved staircase to the third floor you encounter two more large bedrooms (11 ft.) with high ceilings. Once again you are struck by the large imposing windows flooding the space with light. You have a feeling of height as you look across East Third Street at the old Page house and furniture store to the east and the Garrett Tinsman and Ryan houses to the west. These two houses were connected on the second floor for the families to go back and forth. Most people don't notice how spectacular the early Victorian house of the Ryan family was.

After looking out these windows you realize the height doesn't stop here as the front bedroom includes a door leading to

another level, the 4th floor or attic, which still has relatively high and pitched ceilings. More clues to the past appear, such as a Victorian gent's chair that has survived the ravages



Gent's Chair

of intense attic heat, pigeons, squirrels, etc. Which owner did this belong to? Possibly Abraham Updegraff, as this chair would fit the time frame that he owned the house. Abraham Updegraff founded the First National Bank that was organized in 1863, not long after the passage of the National Currency Act. Mr. Updegraff was a prominent local merchant and financier who was the Bank's first

President. More notable to historians, he was a conductor on the "Underground Railroad". His neighbor up the street, James V. Brown, was a major stockholder in the First National Bank. Mr. Updegraff's time (1877) of ownership of 162 East Third Street fits perfectly with the most significant improvements or Victorian conversion.

As the adventure through this 178 year old house ended I was thankful to have this experience and to mentally take notes of what was and imagine what could have taken place there. It struck me that the real "treasure" for me is the experience along the way and the people who share my enthusiasm. This house deserves to be preserved and my congratulations go to the owner for his appreciation of this "treasure" in its rough but original condition.



Robert E. Kane, Jr. a noted collector and architectural aficionado, is a native of Williamsport. He has served as a consultant in many restorations throughout the city of Williamsport, including the Rowley House, for which he currently serves as Curator. He has previously served as President of the Board of Governors of the Lycoming County Historical Society and as chairman of the Society's collections and personnel committees.

Currently, Bob serves as a Board member of Preservation Williamsport and as Chairman of the Historic Architecture Review Board for the City of Williamsport. Bob is President of the Susquehanna Regional Emergency Medical Services Corporation and is Vice President of Operations at Susquehanna Health.

A Common Canvas

POSTMASTER

Pennsylvania Post Office Art of the New Deal

by David Lembeck

As part of the New Deal effort to stimulate the economy, the federal government embarked on a massive program of public works construction. Across the country thousands of post offices, courthouses, bridges, and dams were built. The most visible and widely distributed of these facilities were the post offices. The Treasury Department, which appro-

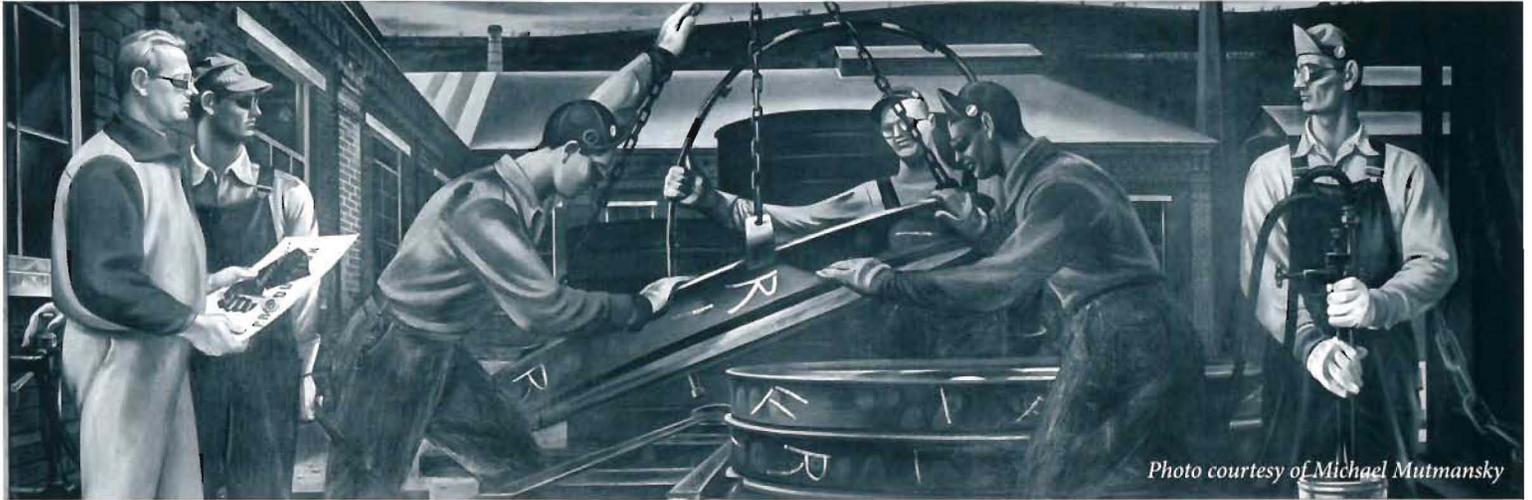
Pennsylvania received 94 commissions for murals and sculpture for federal buildings (88 post offices, five courthouses, one customs house). Nationwide, 80% of post office artworks are murals and 20% are sculpture. In Pennsylvania, almost half of our artworks are sculpture, giving Pennsylvania the most sculpture of any state, and the second larg-



Mural in the Muncy Post Office

riated the funds for all federal construction, also designed most of these projects through its Office of the Supervising Architect. At the beginning of the New Deal, the Treasury Department established a Section of Fine Arts (known simply as the Section), and one percent of appropriated funds were reserved for “embellishment” in the form of murals or sculpture. The Section invited artists to enter national competitions for large post offices around the country; runners-up were offered commissions for smaller post offices. The artworks were expected to reflect the town’s heritage in some way. Popular subjects included local industry, agriculture, and history. Artists were expected to travel to their assigned post offices, meet with the post master and other residents (often a local historian or librarian) and generate several ideas for subject matter. After a sketch was approved by the Section’s administrators, the artist could proceed to create his or her artwork.

est collection of both murals and sculpture in the country. The artworks were distributed across the state, both in urban and rural communities. Unlike the arts programs of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Section’s was not a relief program and its commissions were merit based. The Section administrators were enthusiastic supporters of American art and hoped to promote a uniquely American art via the mural program. Artists were requested to work in the “American Scene” style. The Section only vaguely defined this term, suggesting a straightforward realism portraying subjects easily recognizable by every American. Allegorical or symbolic paintings, abstraction and European-style modernism were forbidden. The Midwestern Regionalists like Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Steuart Curry were championed as exemplars of the American Scene and certainly many murals demonstrate an affinity with the Regionalists’ work.



Mural in the Renovo Post Office

The Susquehanna Valley region is home to an excellent collection of post office artwork. Pennsylvania's rich agricultural heritage is represented by artworks in Mifflinburg, Selinsgrove, and Bloomsburg. Two post offices highlight local industry. An aluminum panel in the Danville post office depicts the manufacture of the first iron railroad T-rails used in the country. A superb mural in Renovo features its local industry: the repair of railroad cars. Historical events and figures were also popular subjects in post office art. Theologian and amateur scientist Joseph Priestley is honored in a sculpture in the Northumberland post office. The mural in the Muncy Post Office tells the story of Rachel Silverthorne, a local figure revered for her bravery during the "Indian Wars" of the late 1700s. According to popular legend, on August 8, 1778, a band of Indians attacked a group of settlers and soldiers who were working at the mouth of the Loyalsock Creek. Captain Brady, mortally wounded in the attack, managed to ride to a nearby village. Brady asked settlers for a volunteer to take his white horse and ride up Muncy Creek to warn settlers who were next to be attacked. Silverthorne risked her life on a summer evening in 1778 to warn settlers of an impending Indian attack.

Artist John Beauchamp was encouraged to paint the scene after meeting with a local historian who believed Silverthorne "deserved to rank with the other heroic twenty-five women of the Revolution." Beauchamp shows Silverthorne riding a white horse, a detail that further enhanced her nearly mythical, Joan of Arc aura.

Of the 88 post office artwork commissions, 80 remain. Decades after their creation, these murals and sculptures continue to delight us with depictions of Pennsylvania's social, economic, and political history.



Mural in the Selinsgrove Post Office

David Lembeck has been studying Pennsylvania post office art and architecture for more than fifteen years. Following graduation from the Pennsylvania State University with majors in Graphic Design and Speech Communications he worked in publication design in Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and State College. Much of his work deals with architecture and historic preservation.

William Colt, Newberry Cabinetmaker

by Gary W. Parks

A leatherbound ledger in the collections of the Lycoming County Historical Society is a potential treasure trove for someone interested in the decorative arts. With over six hundred 'clients', one can only imagine that every household within Lycoming County had rooms filled with furniture built, repaired or painted by William Colt! Yet, William Colt was only one of many cabinetmakers quietly producing furniture within Pennsylvania. Even though William Colt was an established cabinetmaker in Newberry, I am unaware of a single piece of furniture attributed to Colt.

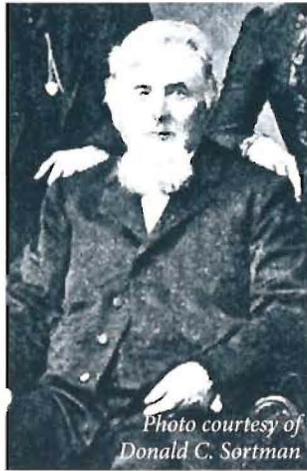


Photo courtesy of Donald C. Sortman

Most cabinetmakers never signed their furniture- why would they? Unless, perhaps, it was a presentation piece or a highly-complicated item. Through the publication of this article, I am hopeful that furniture produced by William Colt and lovingly cherished by the descendants of the individuals listed below, will become known to us. Eventually, I would like to see an exhibit of his furniture, drawn from private collections, mounted at the Lycoming County Historical Society.

William Colt was born 3 October 1824, the son of Thomas and Mary (Andy) Colt. According to John F. Meginness' *History of Lycoming County* (1892), William Colt was indentured in 1839 to learn the cabinetmaker's trade under the guidance of Godfrey Lenhart, the cabinetmaking grandson of the better known clockmaker Godfrey Lenhart of York, Pennsylvania. In the May Term 1840 sessions of the Orphan's Court, the Petition of William Colt was heard, requesting "that the Petitioner is a minor above the age of fourteen years and has no person to take charge of his person and prays the Court to appoint Samuel Pollock Guardian to take Charge of his person... May 12th A.D. 1840". By 1849, Colt had established his cabinetmaking shop in Newberry, continually working as a cabinetmaker for over forty years. Aligned to the cabinetmaking trade, Colt quickly became an undertaker. In addition, he was appointed as the Postmaster of Newberry by President Abraham Lincoln and was reappointed by President Ulysses S. Grant, serving for a total of eighteen years.

William Colt was a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, assisting in the establishment of the Ionian

Lodge, No. 729. He served as Past Grand Master of the Lodge. William Colt died 25 April, 1899 and is buried in the Wildwood Cemetery.

Colt's clientele apparently increased by word of mouth. To date, no advertisements have been found regarding his cabinetmaking business. Peter Betz, a cabinetmaker from Jersey Shore, advertised in the *Lycoming Gazette*, boasting, "PETER BETZ At his Cabinet Ware Rooms, Jersey Shore, Lycoming county, Pa., keeps on hand and is continually manufacturing to order, all kinds of CABINET WARE, beautifully and artistically made up and finished. Among the

articles which he makes and sells as cheaply as can be got elsewhere, he will enumerate: Bedsteads, Bureaus, Sideboards, Dress Bureaus, Center Tables, Dining Tables, Sofas, Settees, Enclosed and Common Wash Stands, &c., & c. He also manufactures and keeps continually for sale a large stock of CHAIRS: Common, Parlor, Rocking, & c., & c.

No man can be more accommodating to his patrons than the subscriber: He will furnish you with a Cradle in infancy; a Bedstead in which you can sleep, and a Table from which you can eat, in maturer years: an easy Rocking Chair to soothe declining age: and when you finally 'kick the bucket', he will encase your 'mortal remains' in the neatest kind of a Coffin, and if called upon, convey you to the place of your final rest in a stylish Hearse. Can an enlightened public refuse to reward such an obliging individual?" (*Lycoming Gazette*, March 17, 1852)

Certainly Colt sought apprentices to perform simple carpentry and to teach the trade. As yet, no advertisements have been found in the newspapers similar to one placed by Edward Calvert which reads, "Wanted, Two Apprentices to the Cabinet making Business, / Lads of about 16 or 17 years of age would be preferred, to whom liberal encouragement will be given, and great pains taken to learn them the various branches of the business. Edward Calvert, July 1, 1827."

William Colt married in 1845, Matilda Fessler, the daughter of Frederick and Elizabeth (Strayer) Fessler. Matilda was born 15 May 1824 and died 25 October 1891. Frederick Fessler, her father, was instrumental in establishing a tannery in Newberry. She too is buried in Wildwood Cemetery. Four children were born to this union, three of



whom survived to adulthood.

The Colts' son Almon(d) Davis Colt was born 18 August 1859. He took over his father's undertaking business. As well, he was extremely active within the community. He died 8 January, 1926 and is buried in Wildwood Cemetery. The Colts' other son Harry Eugene (b. 7 February 1866-d. 30 March 1926) was an original stockholder in the Bank of Newberry.

Reading the ledger entries is a glimpse into the lives of our ancestors, as families increased by marriages and births and decreased by death. The cabinetmaker was there to accommodate the needs of his constituency. One of William Colt's repeat customers was Levi W. Blair. Blair purchased a total of three 'Bedstids,' a washstand, an extension table, a wood rocker, 1 arm chair, and a stand from December 1866 until May 1875. Likewise, H.H. Fessler, a physician in Newberry and a relative of Colt's wife Matilda, was a good customer. Between May 1866 and September 1870, the doctor purchased 1 'Beureau,' 4 bedsteads, 2 stands, 1 table, 1 'Din[ing] Table,' a bookcase, a towel rack, a crib, '1 bottle nitre,' and an extension table, as well as one coffin & case. His bill for the period was \$167.00. The doctor continued to purchase goods from Colt. During the period October 1871 until October 1883, Fessler purchased another stand, "1 Press Board", 4 arm chairs, 1 rocking chair, "1 Fish Rod...1

Snow Shovel... 1 Cham[ber] Set \$30.00 [and] 1 Spring Bed & Casters".

Bartering with grain products, fresh meat, and other products was often a part of the settlement of the debt. Tayler Daugherty paid his bill of \$45.00 for one coffin and case by paying \$5.00 in cash and "By 1 Sowing machine [\$]40.00," 23 August 1877. Colt refers to accounts being transferred to Ledger "B". I do hope someday it will appear and be preserved along with this ledger.

The written words that weave these entries into a wholeness are sometimes poignantly portrayed with the unspoken. H.S. Dory paid \$3.50 for "1 Cradle" 7 July, 1866. On 28 July, he once again appeared at the Cabinetmaker's shop to pay \$5.00 for "1 Coffin & Case." One can only surmise the loss of Mr. Dory's child.

I find the ledger a 'fascinating read,' like reading a good mystery. I can only imagine what the furniture looked like. When he painted chairs, was he painting plank bottom chairs- so typical of central Pennsylvania? What stencils did he use? What pattern books or inspiration for designs? Did his shop resemble the extraordinary workshop of Gene Landon? I am hoping that one of you has all the answers!

I am indebted to Donald C. Sortman for providing genealogical information and clues in the production of this article.

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|---|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Adams, Charles L. (p. 65) | Bennett, --- (Mrs.), Estate (p. 88) | Botts, John (p. 33) | Carothers, John (p. 112) |
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Gary W. Parks is the Executive Director of the Taber Museum. He has served in this position since January 2011, but was no stranger to the Museum when hired. From 1992 until 2005, Gary served in various capacities as the Museum's Archivist, Acting Collections Manager, and Guest Curator. Gary is a graduate of Towson University with B.S. degrees in Biology and English and a graduate of the University of North Carolina with a M.A. in History with a concentration in Public History. Gary's previous sites have included the Maryland Historical Society, the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in Winston-Salem, NC., the Monmouth County Historical Association, Freehold, NJ, and most recently as Director of the Slifer House Museum in Lewisburg, PA. Gary is the author of numerous articles regarding local history published in *Susquehanna Life*. Gary is the compiler of a number of genealogical indices published by Genealogical Publishing Company. He is a graduate of Leadership Susquehanna Valley and the recipient of the Union County Historical Society Preservation Award for his preservation efforts of the alleged oldest house in Winfield, PA., the site of the Lee Massacre.

Eugene Landon Master Craftsman

Insight into the Twenty-First Century

Interest in Antiques and Reproductions

Editor's Note: The following essay written by Kimberly Morris highlights the woodworking genius of Gene Landon. A Master Craftsman, Gene's meticulous reproductions of furniture from great collections of American furniture are currently found in museum collections as well as private homes throughout the country. His Rising Sun Chair and a life-sized eagle, carved from the last living Liberty Tree found on the campus of St. John's College in Annapolis, MD., now grace the Constitution Center in Philadelphia. A second Rising Sun Chair resides in the President's office at Lycoming College. Modest to

a fault and soft-spoken, Gene was always willing to share his expertise with the interested. I had the great pleasure of spending time with him in his workshop several years ago as he worked on the American eagle which now graces Constitution Center in Philadelphia. The nation lost this major talent when Gene, aged 76, passed away 1 June, 2011.

We are indebted to Gene's widow Jane Keyte Landon for the loan of Gene's portrait for inclusion in this article and to President James Douhat of Lycoming College for the photographic permission to reproduce the Rising Sun Chair in this article.

by Kimberly Morris

Millions of people today are collectors; some are attracted to small items like glass bottles or buttons, while others are drawn to larger pieces like tables and chairs. What is it about such items that attract so many people? Antiques can be found just about anywhere, from large auction houses like Sotheby's in New York, NY, to small town antique shops in rural Benton, PA. Why is it that many people are building brand new homes, only to fill them with old furniture or with reproductions of those styles? Is it because they want to capture a little piece of history in an effort to preserve not only the past, but also their heritage? Could it be that the items show the collector's appreciation for the skilled craftsmanship displayed by the furniture they produced? Or is it that the items are simply aesthetically pleasing and coincide with the collector's taste? Could it be the monetary potential for a great return from an investment in collectables? Perhaps more important, we might ask if it sheds light on the nature of our consumerist society.

In his book, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*, Daniel Boorstin addresses the last point by arguing that con-



Photo courtesy of Mrs. Jane Landon

sumerism, or a desire for non-essential goods, grew and blossomed, leading to the emergence of what he calls "consumption communities" in the late nineteenth century. These communities tied together people from different classes simply based on their collective use of similar objects.¹ These consumption communities became the central focus for advertising and marketing aimed at people who had money and a desire to spend, but who were unsure of what they "needed".² According to Boorstin, the emergence of modern advertising and a willingness to be led by advertisers to purchase various luxury goods began the path towards

consumerism, which has been popularly described as, "Buying things one does not need, with money one does not have, to impress people one does not know."

Another interesting point Boorstin makes is that marketers developed the ability to persuade people to buy things simply because of their products' low fixed price. In other words, he asserts that a product with proper advertising can "sell itself" if the price is low enough to grab the consumer's attention.³ He suggests that customers looking for particular goods will

¹ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Random House Inc., 1973), 89-90.

² Boorstin, *The Americans*, 113-118.

³ Boorstin, *The Americans*, 113.



enter stores, and, if the price is affordable, they will make the purchase. He explains that it is quite possible for customers to be tempted to buy certain products, based on impulse, simply because the product is priced so low.

Boorstin's findings about the nature of a consumerist society provide valuable insight into the emergence of consumerism, but he does not explain why people decide to purchase antiques or especially reproductions. Perhaps these customers buy on impulse when they stumble upon a reasonably priced piece of antique furniture. And maybe they would prefer a true antique, but since the originals are much more expensive, they settle for a reproduction. These reproductions may appeal to consumers because they are fixed price products and give people with diverse incomes access to a valued style of furniture, whether it is Queen Anne or Chippendale. Also reproductions are often very accurate depictions of the originals without the added cost. Perhaps people buy reproductions simply because they believe they can afford to do so. Or perhaps they like the style of furniture, but wish to use it in ways that may damage the original. Nonetheless, Boorstin's analysis does not explain the interest in antiques and reproductions because there are no producers hiring advertising agencies to market antiques, which are the basis for the interest in reproductions.

Ronald Bishop, an assistant professor of communication at Drexel University in Philadelphia, PA, spent a day in Baltimore, MD, at a taping of the television program *Antiques Roadshow* in an effort to determine what motivates people to flock to such events. He says people's interest in collecting antiques arises from nostalgia and media attention.⁴ He argues that baby boomers are the central focus of the antique and reproduction collecting community, explaining that their disposable income and a significant amount of spare time give them the necessary tools to make collecting a full-time hobby. However, they are driven by another essential factor: a powerful sense of nostalgia towards the objects in their collections.⁵ "We collect," he states, "in an attempt to reconnect with the past."⁶ This suggests that people are swept up in the collecting mania because they form attachments to the pieces and want to add them to their collections.

Bishop also suggests that media hype encourages the collection of antiques and reproductions and points out that

shows such as *Antiques Roadshow* actually increase the number of collectors. This is done by enticing the audience and exposing them to a variety of objects that may or may not be valuable. By examining the value of a stranger's piece, the audience member learns what is and isn't valuable and what to look for to distinguish an antique from a reproduction, which gives them the basic knowledge needed to begin collecting.⁷ This suggests that after watching an episode, audience members are motivated by a desire to be on the show themselves, so they search for valuable antiques, while others are introduced to styles of furniture that are very valuable, so they seek less expensive reproductions instead.

Bishop's analysis provides a new look at the growing interest in antiques and reproductions, by examining the media attention generated by venues such as *Antiques Roadshow*. This source is helpful in determining the current motives of people who begin their own collections, because he explains how the media hype and the associated excitement of being on television can drive people to look for valuable pieces with the hope of being on the show or enjoying the thrill of acquiring a valuable piece. However, there are still other driving forces that motivate people to collect.

According to Terrence H. Witkowski, many significant factors lead consumers to purchase antiques and reproductions. In his article, "The Early American Style: A History of Marketing and Consumer Values," Witkowski argues the interest in reproductions stems from the interest in antiques displayed in museums and historical sites, such as the Winterthur Museum and places like Colonial Williamsburg. Witkowski says reproduction programs have sparked visitors' interest in antiques and reproductions by giving them an appreciation for the techniques that were used to produce and authenticate the replicas.⁸ One exhibit called "American Rococo 1750-1775: Elegance in Ornament" appeared in various museums from the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The display in the Los Angeles Museum led to the creation of a mock exhibit in the museum's gift store nearby, creating a seamless transition between antiques and reproductions.⁹ This display attracted visitors who could then purchase reproductions of antiques they had seen in the exhibit.

Witkowski also argues that affluent Americans have used

⁴ Ronald Bishop, "Dreams in the Line: A Day at the Antiques Roadshow." *Journal of Popular Culture* 35, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 195-209. *Academic Search Elite*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 16, 2009).

⁵ Bishop, "Dreams in the Line," 195.

⁶ Bishop, "Dreams in the Line," 196.

⁷ Bishop, "Dreams in the Line," 203.

⁸ Terrence H. Witkowski, "The Early American Style: A History of Marketing and Consumer Values." *Psychology & Marketing* 15, no. 2 (March 1998): 125-143. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 29, 2009).

⁹ Witkowski, "The Early American Style," 133.



reproductions as well as genuine antiques, to display and defend their social status. People with a piece of furniture that was made in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, can boast that they have a living piece of history right in their living rooms. This idea can be tied to Boorstin's conclusions about the nature of our consumerist society because both Boorstin and Witkowski assert that people buy antiques and reproductions because they want to impress others. These items are transformed into status symbols. There is an interesting irony to be noted here in that such people are purchasing antiques and reproductions styled from a period in history when republican frugality was valued, not consumerism.

Daniel Boorstin, Ronald Bishop, and Terrance Witkowski all shed light on why people are drawn to collecting antiques and reproductions. They indicate it could in part simply be the nature of our consumerist society. Perhaps it is due to the attention antiques and reproductions have been given on television venues like *Antiques Roadshow*. Some people are no doubt motivated to purchase valuable styles of antiques they have seen in museums to showcase their class or wealth. Unfortunately, few historians have explored the valuable insights provided by the people who restore antiques, are intimately involved in the process of making reproductions and those who purchase their work to answer this question. Perhaps this is a more effective way to understand the twenty-first century interest in antiques and reproductions.

To better understand what motivates people to collect antiques and reproductions and what those motives reveal about contemporary society, this paper will examine the work of Eugene E. Landon, a master craftsman who specializes in eighteenth century American furniture. Landon's work is especially valued by collectors because he uses authentic methods and eighteenth century tools to produce accurate reproductions of a variety of famous antiques. By evaluating the production and allure of the individual pieces that Landon has crafted, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the historical significance that people attach to the various pieces in their collections. Landon's experience with the restoration of antiques can also be used to better understand the motives that drive people to collect by identifying their interests in having those pieces preserved.

Other useful perspectives explored in this paper are those of Landon's students at the *Olde Mill Cabinet Shoppe* in York, Pennsylvania, as well as some of his clients, such as Dr. Russell Worobec and Dr. Christopher Tobiasz. Landon's students provide great insight into the twenty-first century interest in

antiques and reproductions by revealing their own motivation to learn how to produce accurate replicas of famous antiques. Also, Dr. Worobec and Dr. Tobiasz provide firsthand accounts of the collecting experience from a buyer's viewpoint and give valuable insight into the motivation to purchase antiques and reproductions.

While some observers may argue that economic interest is the most influential factor in determining the contemporary interest in antiques and reproductions, the true motivation goes far beyond a consumerist desire to display antiques and reproductions. After analyzing the various insights of Landon, his students, and his clients, it becomes clear that most people who collect antiques and reproductions share a common interest in the history surrounding the piece of furniture, the craftsmanship and talent displayed by the reproduction or restoration, or an attraction to the aesthetic design of the piece.

Landon and His Work

To better understand how a study of Landon and his work can provide valuable insight to explain what motivates people to collect antiques and reproductions, it is necessary to first look at his own motivation for restoring and producing those pieces. A brief biography of Landon reveals how he got started with the reproduction of famous pieces of eighteenth century American furniture, why he chose to use original methods and tools to produce his replicas, and how he selects which pieces he wants to reproduce. This last point is especially important in revealing Landon's personal motivation for producing and selling his reproductions, which can provide a unique insight into the collecting process. After studying Landon and his work, it becomes clear that he has a deep appreciation for eighteenth century American culture which far outweighs any implied economic motivation for producing his replicas.

Eugene Landon's interest in wood working began at a young age. One of his first pieces was a small eagle he carved as a boy scout. His grandfather was the head cabinet maker for L.L. Stearns and Sons Inc., a former department store in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and Landon recalls watching his grandfather work on various projects. "I was always interested in how things were put together, whether they were chemicals or pieces of furniture," Landon explained.¹⁰ Landon inherited his grandfather's tools when he was about eleven, helping to fuel his interest in wood working; however, he never received any traditional instruction on the techniques used in the eighteenth century.¹¹

¹⁰ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 7 October 2009, Montoursville, PA.

¹¹ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 21 October 2009, Montoursville, PA.



Landon is a 1957 graduate of Lycoming College, where he majored in chemistry and biology, and minored in history. While he was still in college, Landon was already producing reproductions of singular pieces from the eighteenth century, such as open arm chairs and side tables.¹² However, it wasn't until later that he decided to turn his hobby into a career. After graduating from college, Landon founded a chemical company that produced various industrial chemicals like lacquers and finishes. Every year he made trips to Philadelphia for a business meeting and visited an antique shop called Buchholtz Galleries. The owner, Theodore "Ted" Buchholtz, became good friends with Landon and sold him various pieces which he then restored and sold to clients.¹³ After Landon sold his chemical business he "retired" after a transition period during which he assisted the new owners. Retirement freed Landon and allowed him to continue working on restorations and reproductions and he was able to turn it into a second career.¹⁴ Buchholtz introduced Landon to a number of people who dealt antiques, including museum curators and other well known figures in the antique business, which gave him the opportunity to build his reputation.

Landon has been commissioned to build a number of noteworthy pieces. The Providence Forum, a non-profit organization that promotes the morals and values consistent with the founding of the United States,¹⁵ commissioned Landon to build two Bible Boxes which were presented to President George W. Bush in 2001 and President Jimmy Carter in 2002.¹⁶ He has also carved busts of President George Washington and President Lincoln, and a giant eagle with a six-foot wing span for Constitution Hall in Philadelphia.¹⁷ In addition to these pieces, Landon produces mostly Pennsylvania Queen Anne and Chippendale style furniture for a variety of private collectors. One of the most profound replicas Landon has built is the first authentic reproduction of the Rising Sun Chair, which is the chair George Washington sat in during the Constitutional Convention. The specific details involved in the production of this historic chair are discussed later in this paper.

One of Landon's most notable accomplishments occurred in 2003 when he received the Cartouche Award for lifetime achievement from the Society of American Period Furniture Makers (SAPFM), a group that he helped establish with its founder, Steve Lash, in 1999.¹⁸ One of the main goals of SAPFM is to develop and promote a set of standards for the reproduction and preservation of period furniture.¹⁹ Each year SAPFM selects an individual or organization whose achievements best represent this mission and who has demonstrated excellence in period furniture making. The name of the award comes from an accent placed at the top of certain pieces of furniture known as a cartouche which is used as a decorative trademark to distinguish one craftsman from another. The actual cartouche, from which the bronze award is cast, comes from a Philadelphia tall case clock that Landon built. Landon has been a long time contributor to SAPFM and is currently a member of the Advisory Board.

When asked how he acquired his skills, Landon simply replied, "Osmosis."²⁰ He went on to explain his gradual absorption of information and skill through his work with the restoration of various antiques that he purchased in Philadelphia or received from clients. Landon worked on some of the finest pieces of furniture in the country and restored them for his clients. "I played with this stuff my whole life, and it just so happened that I had two or three good clients that brought me great pieces."²¹ By receiving these antiques, he was able to carefully examine each piece and learn how it was put together and what materials were used in its production. One of the lessons he teaches his students is how to "read" a piece of furniture, much the same way he learned to read them to understand how they had been built in the eighteenth century. For example, he noted how there were standard practices used by the original craftsman to measure the wood needed to construct a particular piece. He learned this by taking apart antiques and looking at the markings the initial craftsman left behind to measure the thickness of the wood.

Landon is one of very few craftsmen who purposefully

¹² Eugene Landon, interview by author, 7 October 2009, Montoursville, PA.

¹³ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 7 October 2009, Montoursville, PA.

¹⁴ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 7 October 2009, Montoursville, PA.

¹⁵ The Providence Forum. "About Us." The Providence Forum. Available from <http://www.providenceforum.org/aboutus>. Internet; accessed 4 November 2009.

¹⁶ Society of American Period Furniture Makers. "SAPFM Advisory Board Member Biographies." Society of American Period Furniture Makers. Available from <http://www.sapfm.org/bios.php>. Internet; accessed 17 October 2009.

¹⁷ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 7 October 2009, Montoursville, PA.

¹⁸ Society of American Period Furniture Makers. "The Cartouche Award." Society of American Period Furniture Makers. Available from <http://www.sapfm.org/cartouche.php>. Internet; accessed 17 October 2009.

¹⁹ Society of American Period Furniture Makers. "Mission." Society of American Period Furniture Makers. Available from <http://www.sapfm.org/mission.php>. Internet; accessed 17 October 2009.

²⁰ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 11 November 2009, Montoursville, PA.

²¹ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 11 November 2009, Montoursville, PA.



chose not to use power tools to make his finished reproductions. After visiting Landon's workshop at his home in Montoursville, it becomes clear that his passion for history is the driving force behind his motivation to produce replicas of eighteenth century American furniture. It might be assumed that because Landon's reproductions are the main source for his income, that he has a powerful economic interest in producing them. However, Landon expresses a clear sense of nostalgia towards each individual piece he reproduces that far outweighs any monetary interest he may have in selling his reproductions.

Landon is very particular when creating his reproductions, which is why he chose to employ the original tools and methods used by the craftsmen of the eighteenth century. "As they would have done, I use handmade nails and old glues in the production of furniture," he explained.²² Landon even listens to Mozart because he feels that it adds to the eighteenth century atmosphere in his workshop and gets him in the right mindset to begin working on his various projects.²³ Although this may seem like a minor detail, it is further proof that Landon has a great appreciation for eighteenth century culture. His appreciation for that period in American history is brought to life through the pieces of furniture he produces.

One of the materials Landon uses for his reproductions is a special hide glue that can be heated up to release the joint between two pieces of wood. For example, if a craftsman made a mistake or didn't like how the wood lined up once the glue had dried, he could simply heat the glue, remove the joint, and try again.²⁴ Another important aspect of Landon's reproductions is the accuracy of the hardware he uses, such as locks, hinges, and nails. Many of these pieces are bought from blacksmiths in England who produce them with the same methods and tools used by the original blacksmiths. For example, Landon pointed out that the handmade rose-head nails used for the Logan Philadelphia secretary desk he is currently working on cost him \$1.00 each from a blacksmith using authentic production methods.²⁵ Landon also uses a walnut shell stain that he makes himself to get the right darkness for his pieces and always uses a basic shellac finish, a process that may look simple once finished, but one that takes a long time to complete. "It's a natural finish. A fin-

ish they would have used in the eighteenth century," Landon commented.²⁶ This careful attention to detail is a clear indication that Landon has a great appreciation for the methods used by the craftsmen in the eighteenth century and further supports the idea that he is motivated to produce his replicas because of a sense of nostalgia towards the pieces of furniture he builds and an appreciation for the skills of the original craftsmen who established these techniques.

Landon's love of history is also evident in his selection of reproductions. When asked why he chose eighteenth century American furniture, he replied that it was the most influential time in the history of the United States because the pieces represented the style of furniture used by our Founding Fathers.²⁷ Each piece of furniture that Landon chooses to reproduce has a certain historical value. Landon often goes to museums to look at the furniture in their collections and decide on a particular piece to recreate. For example, one of his projects at the Olde Mill Cabinet Shoppe was a Gratz Philadelphia Chippendale highboy that was selected from the Winterthur Museum in Delaware.²⁸ Landon also stated that he uses antique magazines and catalogues to select his projects. He tries to stay current with the antique business and has a large collection of catalogues in his office.²⁹ By staying up-to-date, Landon is able to understand what pieces are most important to his students and clients.

Another important factor that Landon relies on to choose his reproductions is their selling price at auctions such as Christie's or Sotheby's. Though this may appear to be evidence which suggests Landon has certain economic interests in producing his pieces, it is not. These prices are actually indications of the historical significance of the piece that are represented in numerical values. Landon told the story of one piece of furniture that he is currently working on which demonstrates this point.

An eighteenth century French Open Armchair that sits atop his workbench is a copy of a set of chairs that Benjamin Franklin once ordered. Landon explained that a similar set had been owned by John Penn, William Penn's son, and he pointed out that there were only about 13 of those chairs still available.³⁰ He said that one of the chairs was on display at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where he was given the rare

²² *America's Most Important Piece of Furniture: The Story of George Washington's Rising Sun Chair*. (Montoursville, PA: Vivid Publishing, Inc., 2009), 2.

²³ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 7 October 2009, Montoursville, PA.

²⁴ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 11 November 2009, Montoursville, PA.

²⁵ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 7 October 2009, Montoursville, PA.

²⁶ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 11 November 2009, Montoursville, PA.

²⁷ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 7 October 2009, Montoursville, PA.

²⁸ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 7 October 2009, Montoursville, PA.

²⁹ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 7 October 2009, Montoursville, PA.

³⁰ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 11 November 2009, Montoursville, PA.

opportunity to photograph and take measurements from the original, a privilege given to him because of the recognition he has acquired across the country. One of Governor John Penn's Chippendale Carved Mahogany Open Armchairs was estimated to bring \$400,000-\$600,000 at Christie's Auction; however the hammer price on the chair turned out to be \$1,049,000.³¹ One thing Landon often says is, "If you're going to waste your time--not waste--if you're going to use your time, you might as well use it on the best."³² This is an example of how Landon is able to choose the best pieces of eighteenth century furniture to reproduce.

The final auction price is a clear indication that this particular piece had such substantial historical significance that someone was willing to pay such a high price to add it to his or her collection. The historical ties that people attach to certain antiques increases their value at auction. Landon recognizes the same importance that others see in those antiques and selects the pieces that he feels best represents not only the style of that time period, but also his interest and the interest of his potential clients and students. This method of selection demonstrates Landon's true motivation for making his reproductions. It is because he wants to preserve the original techniques used in the eighteenth century and share his love of history and furniture by selecting the best pieces that would interest both his clients and his students. The following section will examine the most important piece Landon has produced to gain a better understanding of the importance people have associated with antiques and reproductions and how this explains their nostalgia towards those objects.

The Rising Sun Chair

Doctr. FRANKLIN looking towards the Presidents Chair, at the back of which a rising sun happened to be painted, observed to a few members near him, that Painters had found it difficult to distinguish in their art a rising from a setting sun. I have said he, often and often in the course of the Session, and the vicisitudes of my hopes and fears as to its issue, looked at that behind the President without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting; But now at length I have the happiness to know that it is a rising and not a setting Sun.³³

Benjamin Franklin made this observation at the Constitutional Convention in 1787, while examining the original Rising Sun Chair. This piece was made mostly of mahogany and was built by John Folwell in 1779.³⁴ The profound historical significance attached to the Rising Sun Chair makes it "America's most important piece of furniture". Because this piece of furniture has enormous symbolic meaning, being the chair the father of our country sat in while helping to write the Constitution, careful attention is needed in order to produce an accurate and authentic reproduction. Landon was commissioned to build the first reproduction of the Rising Sun Chair because of his incredible skills and his reputation in reproductions of eighteenth century American furniture.³⁵ He also made another replica, which was then donated to his alma mater, Lycoming College.



Photo courtesy of Lycoming College

Landon stands beside the finished product



Photo courtesy of Lycoming College

The Rising Sun Chair as seen in the President's office, Lycoming College

³¹ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 11 November 2009, Montoursville, PA.

³² Eugene Landon, interview by author, 11 November 2009, Montoursville, PA.

³³ James Madison. *Notes from the Constitutional Convention*, 17 September 1787. The Avalon Project http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_917.asp Internet: accessed 4 November 2009.

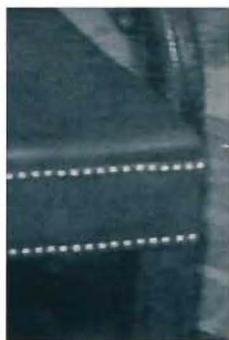
³⁴ *America's Most Important Piece of Furniture*, 2.

³⁵ *America's Most Important Piece of Furniture*, 1.

The reproduction of this historical chair is an incredible story that clearly demonstrates the interest in having such an important symbol of history preserved using the most accurate methods and materials available. Landon's astounding reputation with the accurate reproduction of eighteenth century furniture earned him the privilege of having access to the most important piece of furniture in our nation's history. Landon worked very carefully to insure that every measurement and carving matched the original. He went down to Independence Hall in Philadelphia and prepared to copy the original chair by taking hundreds of photographs and measurements and drawings. He referred to these photographs as "study pictures" and explained, "They don't mean anything to anybody but me."³⁶ This is because they were meant to provide him with the necessary patterns needed to accurately replicate the carvings on the original chair, but to anyone else they would appear to be candid snapshots of an old chair.

The materials that Landon incorporated into his reproduction of the Rising Sun Chair demonstrate not only his skill, but also his love of history. Both of his reproductions were made of mahogany, like the original, but the secondary wood for under the seat was white oak. Landon chose this wood because it was often used in colonial times for structural components to buildings and in the production of furniture since the trees grew tall and straight. The actual pieces of white oak that he used for the two replicas came from a very early Pennsylvania barn and the nails he used to fasten it to each chair came from a house built in 1769.³⁷

Another important material used for both reproductions of the Rising Sun Chair is the leather for the seats and the arms of the chairs. The leather that Landon chose was made from reindeer hides which were tanned by Russian artisans in 1785. The rolls of leather were cargo on a brigantine named *Die*



Frau Metta Catharina, which had set sail a year later from St. Petersburg, Russia, for Genoa, Italy.³⁸ While the ship was anchored in England's Plymouth Sound, a port on the south western tip

of the island, a large gale swept through and sunk the ship in about one hundred feet of water. The wreckage was later recovered in 1973 by a local diving club, who found that the lost cargo had been safely preserved by the thick mud that had covered it underwater.³⁹ This red Russian leather was a luxury item in the eighteenth century and it is still highly valued today, which is why Landon carefully selected it for the Rising Sun Chair. Landon's knowledge of history adds to the quality of his work and gives more meaning to an already meaningful chair, which symbolizes the birth of our nation.

The only difference between the reproduction made for the Constitution Center and the one donated to Lycoming College is the wood that was used for the face of the sun on the chair that was delivered to the



Constitution Center. Landon chose to use a piece of wood from the Last Living Liberty Tree to complete the most famous part of his reproduction. The tree was formerly located on the campus of St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, the alma mater of Francis Scott Key.⁴⁰ The tree bore witness to a number of historic events including a peace treaty signed in 1652 between Annapolis settlers and the Susquehannock Indians who inhabited the surrounding area. In 1781, the Annapolis Liberty tree became a resting place for French troops en route to help General George Washington at the famous Battle of Yorktown during the Revolutionary War.⁴¹ The historical significance of the tree, as well as the other materials that Landon incorporated into the chair, prove that there is more to collecting and preserving antiques and reproductions than basic economic interest.

Landon's use of the wood from the Liberty Tree was highly symbolic and reveals his appreciation of America's past. Liberty trees were very popular during the Revolutionary War, when the Sons of Liberty, a group of patriots who opposed the taxes placed on the colonies by the British Parlia-

³⁶ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 7 October 2009, Montoursville, PA.

³⁷ *America's Most Important Piece of Furniture*, 15.

³⁸ R. W. Stevenson, "A 200-Year-Old Gift From Under the Sea," *New York Times*, April 28, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/28/nyregion/a-200-year-old-gift-from-under-the-sea.html> (accessed October 26, 2009).

³⁹ Stevenson, "A 200-Year-Old Gift."

⁴⁰ *America's Most Important Piece of Furniture*, 9.

⁴¹ David Thompson, "Rising Sun Redux: Area Craftsman Reproduces 'America's Most Important Piece of Furniture,'" *Williamsport Sun-Gazette*, May 3, 2009, <http://www.sungazette.com/page/content.detail/id/526248.html> (accessed October 26, 2009).

ment, met under the trees to conduct secret meetings.⁴² In 1775, Thomas Paine wrote a song titled “Liberty Tree,” which demonstrates the importance of the trees during the Revolution. The last stanza explains how the British were trying to locate and destroy the trees because they were powerful symbols of freedom and tells how the patriots united and fought to protect the trees,

But hear, O ye swains, (‘tis a tale most profane),
How all the tyrannical powers,
Kings, Commons and Lords, are uniting amain
To cut down this guardian of ours.
From the East to the West blow the trumpet to arms,
Thro’ the land let the sound of it flee:
Let the far and the near all unite with a cheer,
In defense of our Liberty Tree.⁴³

These Revolutionary War symbols were so important, that when the Last Living Liberty Tree, a tulip-poplar in Annapolis, Maryland, was felled by hurricane winds, Mark Mehnert, a local landscaper, made sure that the remnants of the historic tree were put to good use. Mehnert saw the tree being hauled to a nearby landfill and was able to recover most of the pieces.⁴⁴ He transported the wood to a warehouse where he curtained off a room with plastic and set up a moisture control system to keep the wood from drying out and cracking.⁴⁵ In 2001, Mehnert contacted Landon, after searching the country for a skilled craftsman who could use the symbolic wood for important projects.⁴⁶ Mehnert’s love of history and his knowledge of the significance of the tree, allowed him to save an important symbol of American freedom.

Landon has since used the wood, estimated to be between 400 and 600 years old, to produce a number of carvings⁴⁷; however, the most remarkable use of the Liberty tree wood is the face of the sun on his reproduction of the Rising Sun Chair. This small alteration to the famous chair George Washington sat in during the Constitutional Convention, adds even more historic symbolism to the chair. This symbolism drives many people to collect because of a sense of nostalgia for the past and a desire to preserve the pieces that define our nation’s history. People seek out and purchase both antiques and reproductions to have a piece of the past so they can iden-

tify with and form connections to the lifestyles represented by the pieces of furniture they collect. The incredible history surrounding the Rising Sun Chair is only one example of the stories that are preserved by the collection of antiques and reproductions. However, another important aspect to be studied is the motivation of the people who chose to reproduce these pieces of history.

The Students

Another interesting way to explain the twenty-first century interest in antiques and reproductions is by interviewing students who enroll in classes that teach eighteenth century methods of furniture production. The best candidates to provide insight about the contemporary interest in collecting antiques and reproductions are a few of Landon’s students at the Olde Mill Cabinet Shoppe in York, Pennsylvania. There, Landon teaches students from across the United States from a variety of professions including mechanical engineers, doctors, lawyers, dentists, pharmacists, computer software programmers, and aeronautical engineers. Interviews with Dr. Martha Bryden, Dave Tule, Frank McFee, and Rick Vannan reveal that students at the Olde Mill Cabinet Shoppe share a common appreciation for both the aesthetics and the craftsmanship represented by each piece of furniture.

Dr. Martha Bryden, a dentist from Muncy, PA, and her husband Dave Tule have been students of Landon’s since 2000. They explained that their interest in learning eighteenth century techniques of furniture production was driven by both an appreciation for the craft as well as the aesthetic appeal of the furniture. When asked what motivated her to begin taking Landon’s classes, Dr. Bryden responded that learning how to make the reproductions, using the techniques, and mastering the craft were her main interests. Dr. Bryden stated, “Once you know how to do it yourself, you have more knowledge when you look at the originals so you know what to look for because you’ve learned all the secrets from when they [the original craftsmen] built them.”⁴⁸ This knowledge of how the piece was assembled by the original craftsmen has given her the ability to tell an antique from a reproduction, and even an authentic reproduction from a poor reproduction.

Another aspect that helped fuel both her and her hus-

⁴² “Revolutionary War Symbol, The Liberty Tree, Is Cut Down,” *New York Times*, October 26, 1999, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/26/us/revolutionary-war-symbol-the-liberty-tree-is-cut-down.html> (accessed October 26, 2009).

⁴³ Thomas Paine, “Liberty Tree,” in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. 2, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: The Citadel Press, 1969), 1091-1092.

⁴⁴ Robbins, Michelle. “The Sweet Sound of Liberty.” *American Forests*. Available from http://www.americanforests.org/productsandpubs/magazine/archives/2002summer/feature1_1.php. Internet; accessed 27 October 2009.

⁴⁵ Eugene Landon, interview by author, 11 November 2009, Montoursville, PA.

⁴⁶ David Thompson, “Rising Sun Redux.”

⁴⁷ David Thompson, “Rising Sun Redux.”

⁴⁸ Dr. Martha Bryden, interview by author, 11 November 2009, Montoursville, PA.



band's interest in reproductions was the aesthetic appeal of the designs from the eighteenth century. Dr. Bryden explained the incredible appeal she found in the appearance of the eighteenth century furniture, "They're just so classic. The proportions, the design..."⁴⁹ Not only are the aesthetics important, but also the environment in which the original craftsmen had to work. For example, Dave Tule explained the setting common to most eighteenth century workshops, "They had limited space, small workshops and low light, either candle light or natural light. Sure we can still make them by hand, but it was so much harder back then to produce such masterpieces in that kind of a setting."⁵⁰ This appreciation for the environment in which the pieces were originally produced, shows that a desire to connect with the past is an important element in generating interest in reproductions. But Dave Tule and Dr. Martha Bryden also reveal that people are motivated to collect antiques and produce reproductions because they are drawn to the aesthetic appeal of the original furniture and the incredible craftsmanship it took to produce them.

Frank McFee of Richmond, Virginia, another student of Landon's and the person who nominated him for the Cartouche Award, provides further insight into the twenty-first century interest in antiques and reproductions. Like Dr. Bryden and her husband, McFee's interest in eighteenth century furniture began with aesthetics. However, it was his wife's interest in the cabriole leg, a style used on many pieces of Queen Anne and Chippendale furniture that sparked his interest in eighteenth century reproductions. Back in 1994, McFee did an online search for 'Queen Anne armchair' and one of the results was the Olde Mill Cabinet Shoppe and a class offered by Landon.⁵¹ Having no history with antique reproductions or basic carving, McFee enrolled in the class to learn how to make a Queen Anne armchair, which had the style of leg that his wife preferred.⁵² For awhile, McFee took every class with Landon that he could to learn the various techniques of the eighteenth century, but then he began to select the classes he wanted to take based on the aesthetic appeal that he had for that project. When asked about his personal interest in reproductions, McFee commented, "For me, it's the aesthetics. When I take a class, I chose my projects based on the aesthetics of the piece."⁵³ Frank McFee is another

example of how people are motivated to begin producing eighteenth century furniture for the visual appeal of the piece, rather than the economic benefits associated with the historic furniture.

Another student that benefited from Landon's classes is Rick Vannan. Vannan is also helping Landon put together a textbook of the eighteenth century techniques that Landon teaches to his students at the Olde Mill Cabinet Shoppe and has completed a preliminary introduction for the future textbook.⁵⁴ Vannan explained that he was always interested in woodworking and had constructed a few simple wall shelves before he attempted to build furniture. In 1996, he read an article about Landon in *Traditional Home Magazine* and was so impressed by the quality of work that Landon was producing, he decided to take a few of his classes.⁵⁵ Two weeks later, his first class after reading the article was about learning how to carve a ball and claw foot for a Philadelphia side chair. "I never thought that it was possible for an average woodworker [like myself] to make furniture of that type," Vannan explained.⁵⁶ However, once he arrived at the Olde Mill Cabinet Shoppe, he was very impressed by Landon's teaching style and soon found that he was able to make the same style furniture.

Vannan's interest in eighteenth century reproductions comes from a woodworker's perspective; however, it still sheds light on the contemporary interest in antiques and reproductions. Vannan's interest in reproductions stems from his interest in woodworking, which provided a link to the techniques used to produce the historic furniture of the eighteenth century. Vannan also pointed out that his love of Philadelphia style furniture was influenced by Landon and his classes at the Olde Mill Cabinet Shoppe, "I developed a love for the same style furniture that Gene has, which is Philadelphia style furniture."⁵⁷ If Landon's students didn't already have an appreciation for eighteenth century furniture reproductions, they developed one after taking a few of his classes. Dave Tule commented, "I learned more from Gene about the history surrounding the furniture, than what I ever learned sitting in a classroom."⁵⁸

Landon's students can provide insight into the contemporary interest in learning how to make eighteenth century reproductions, and they are excellent examples of why people

⁴⁹ Dr. Martha Bryden, interview by author, 11 November 2009, Montoursville, PA.

⁵⁰ Dave Tule, interview by author, 11 November 2009, Montoursville, PA.

⁵¹ Frank McFee, interview by author, 15 November 2009, Millville, PA (via telephone).

⁵² Frank McFee, interview by author, 15 November 2009, Millville, PA (via telephone).

⁵³ Frank McFee, interview by author, 15 November 2009, Millville, PA (via telephone).

⁵⁴ Rick Vannan, interview by author, 13 November 2009, Williamsport, PA (via telephone).

⁵⁵ Rick Vannan, interview by author, 13 November 2009, Williamsport, PA (via telephone).

⁵⁶ Rick Vannan, interview by author, 13 November 2009, Williamsport, PA (via telephone).

⁵⁷ Rick Vannan, interview by author, 13 November 2009, Williamsport, PA (via telephone).

⁵⁸ Dave Tule, interview by author, 11 November 2009, Montoursville, PA.



want to learn the traditional techniques; however, another important perspective to include is from the clients who purchase Landon's reproductions. Though many of Landon's clients are wealthy, either independently such as manufacturers and investors, or by career choice such as doctors and lawyers, they demonstrate either a love of history or a love of the aesthetics and craftsmanship displayed by each piece. The next section will examine the interests of two of Landon's clients, both of whom are doctors in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

The Clients

An effective approach to understanding the twenty-first century interest in antiques and reproductions is to examine the interests of the clients who have purchased various pieces from Landon. For example, both Dr. Russell Worobec and Dr. Christopher Tobiasz have acquired reproductions from Landon and both provide valuable insight into the contemporary interest in collecting.⁵⁹ Dr. Worobec and Dr. Tobiasz express two specific interests in collecting that shed light on what may motivate other clients to purchase reproductions. Both clients demonstrate either an interest in the history surrounding the original pieces of furniture or a love of their aesthetic design.

Dr. Worobec is a retired orthopedic surgeon who does consulting from his office at Divine Providence Hospital. Dr. Worobec is a Korean War veteran and has spent many years adding various antiques and reproductions from around the world to his collection. He met Landon through his son, who has an interest in wood working, and was persuaded to visit Landon at his house to see some of his reproductions and was impressed with the quality of the work he was producing.⁶⁰ Dr. Worobec has a broad interest in history which is the primary motivating factor behind his collection.

Dr. Worobec has a wide range of furniture in his collection including oriental pieces and French furniture; however, he chose to focus on eighteenth century American furniture. When asked why he decided on this style, he explained that it was his interest in America that led him to collect pieces of Queen Anne and Chippendale furniture. He briefly mentioned that both of his parents were immigrants and further explained that his foreign background and his interest in

American history gave him a greater appreciation for American culture.⁶¹ He agreed with Landon that the eighteenth century was the most influential period in American history because it represented the birth of a new nation.

Dr. Worobec has purchased many pieces from Landon including a set of dining room chairs, a highboy, also known as a high chest of drawers, and a lowboy, which is similar to a small side table with drawers. Dr. Worobec explained that he purchased the reproductions for his dining room set from Landon because of the high cost of originals and because it is extremely hard to find an original matching set.⁶² Dr. Worobec's interest in eighteenth century American culture also led him to purchase Queen Anne and Chippendale style furniture from Landon. It was this primary interest in colonial American history that fueled his interest in furniture from that period. Without his interest in the period and its furniture, there would be less reason to purchase the reproductions. Although Dr. Tobiasz has different interests in antiques and reproductions, his motivation to purchase eighteenth century American furniture draws a similar conclusion.

Dr. Tobiasz is a cardiologist at Divine Providence Hospital and has purchased many reproductions from Landon. Unlike Dr. Worobec, Dr. Tobiasz did not share the same passion for history; however, he had purchased a colonial style home and felt it was appropriate to fill it with the same style furniture.⁶³ He heard about Landon from his niece and contacted him to see what pieces he could produce that would maintain the eighteenth century style of the house.

Both Dr. Tobiasz and his wife, Dr. Joanne Lalli, a specialist in internal medicine at Divine Providence Hospital, demonstrated an interest in the aesthetic appeal of Queen Anne and Chippendale style furniture. Dr. Lalli explained, "The designs in the furniture are very intricate. They just have a way of catching your eye."⁶⁴ When asked why they decided to purchase reproductions instead of the originals, they explained that not only were the reproductions less expensive, but they did not have to be as careful using them as they would with an original.⁶⁵ Because of the caution needed to have antiques for everyday use, many people choose to purchase reproductions instead. This demonstrates the appeal of the aesthetic design of the pieces.

⁵⁹ Although perspectives from more of Landon's clients would provide a better examination of what motivates people to collect, the nature of their professions limits their availability for interviews.

⁶⁰ Dr. Russell Worobec, interview by author, 4 November 2009, Williamsport, PA.

⁶¹ Dr. Russell Worobec, interview by author, 4 November 2009, Williamsport, PA.

⁶² Dr. Russell Worobec, interview by author, 4 November 2009, Williamsport, PA.

⁶³ Dr. Christopher Tobiasz, interview by author, 5 November 2009, Williamsport, PA.

⁶⁴ Dr. Joanne Lalli, interview by author, 5 November 2009, Williamsport, PA.

⁶⁵ Dr. Christopher Tobiasz, interview by author, 5 November 2009, Williamsport, PA.



Dr. Tobiasz also has a few original antiques, the most valuable being a Queen Anne side chair. Dr. Tobiasz and Dr. Lalli explained that they were able to afford originals of smaller antiques because they were less expensive; however, like Dr. Worobec, they had Landon build a dining room set because a complete, matching original set is very rare, and much more expensive.⁶⁶ Combined, these factors render the acquisition of such pieces nearly impossible. The price of the original antiques does not determine their true motivation for purchasing the reproductions, because it is their attraction to the aesthetics of eighteenth century furniture that led them to begin their collection.

Both Dr. Worobec and Dr. Tobiasz demonstrate that there is more to collecting antiques and reproductions than economic interest. Dr. Worobec's appreciation of eighteenth century American culture is the main motivating factor behind his collection. His interest in history fueled his desire to collect pieces of furniture that represented one of the most important periods in American history. Dr. Tobiasz is drawn to the aesthetics of the same style furniture, and although he does not share Dr. Worobec's historical interest, he does share his appreciation for eighteenth century American furniture.

Conclusion

It has been said that we often make connections with the past in order to better understand ourselves. This paper is an examination of those connections to the past and the people who have made them. Some people who recognize the historical importance behind a piece of furniture cannot afford the original. So they turn to reproductions of the originals to satisfy their sense of nostalgia and their need to connect with the past. While some might argue that this reveals an economic motive for purchasing reproductions, since they are less expensive than the originals, the true motivation behind the contemporary interest in collecting antiques and reproductions is more profound. Most people who collect antiques and reproductions share a common interest in the history surrounding the piece of furniture, the craftsmanship and talent displayed in the reproduction, or an attraction to the aesthetic design of the piece.

An effective method which can provide insight into the contemporary interest in collecting antiques and reproductions is to examine an individual who is intimately involved in the reproduction of antique furniture. Landon is a master craftsman who is nationally recognized as one of the most talented builders of authentic reproduction furniture. His

knowledge, skill, and reputation make him a valuable source to provide insight into the twenty-first century interest in antiques and reproductions. His desire to share his knowledge and skill with his students at the Olde Mill Cabinet Shoppe in York, Pennsylvania, and with his numerous clients, is a clear indication that his motivation to produce replicas of eighteenth century furniture is driven by the historical connections he draws with each piece of furniture he builds. An excellent example of this is the Rising Sun Chair and the careful attention to detail Landon used to add even more historical significance to an already highly valued piece of furniture.

Landon's students and clients also provide valuable insight into the contemporary interest in collecting antiques and reproductions. By enrolling in Landon's classes at the Olde Mill Cabinet Shoppe, his students are able to gain an understanding of how the original craftsmen constructed the same pieces two-hundred years ago. This gives them a greater appreciation for the craftsmanship needed to produce authentic reproductions and fueled their interest in building and collecting pieces of eighteenth century furniture. Landon's clients demonstrated both an interest in the history of the furniture and an attraction to the aesthetic designs. After interviewing Landon, his students, and his clients, it becomes clear that there is more to collecting than economic interest.

What does the contemporary interest in antiques and reproductions reveal about American culture? By understanding what motivates people to collect, we gain better insight into our heritage. The desire for people to connect with the past through the purchase of antiques and reproductions reveals the symbolic meanings attached to furniture. Both antiques and reproductions act as gateways to the past that brings history to life. By understanding the historical importance behind each piece of the furniture, people gain insight into the lives of the original owners and are driven by a desire to connect with the values of the eighteenth century.

⁶⁶ Dr. Christopher Tobiasz, interview by author, 5 November 2009, Williamsport, PA.



Kimberly Morris is a recent Magna Cum Laude graduate of Lycoming College. She received her Bachelor of Arts in History and minored in French with secondary social studies certification. Morris currently resides in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania and will begin her new position as an appeals coordinator for Geisinger Health Plan early next month. She completed this paper her junior year as a capstone requirement for her major; however, the subject of the paper, Master Craftsman Eugene Landon, was a suggestion made by Arthur Haberberger, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Lycoming College. Upon successful completion of the paper, Morris became the first recipient of Mr. Haberberger's newest endowed scholarship for exceptional research. She considers the experience of working with Landon an honor and a privilege which allowed her a rare opportunity to get to know a humble man with extraordinary talents.

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