

REPORT  
February 16, 2022

On December 20, 2021, Graham Arader asked me for my written opinion on the identity and authenticity of a New York Chippendale style chair with a diamond splat, furniture inventory number 10. This report summarizes my observations and opinions.

**Side chair**

New York, 1760-80

Mahogany; white cedar corner blocks

40-1/4 x 24 x 21-1/4

“II” is chiseled into the center of the front seat rail rabbet.

This side chair exhibits several features that identify it as of New York origin. The splat, composed of straps around a diamond, is a strong indicator (although central diamonds occasionally occur in chairs of other regions). The side seat rails have small brackets in the rear that visually echo the larger knee brackets of the front legs. These “bracket responds,” as termed by furniture historian John T. Kirk, are separate pieces of wood glued to the underside of the rail and inserted into the mortise cut into the rear stile. Another New York feature is the shape of the rear legs. They are a version of a “stump” rear leg that is essentially square in cross section with rounded corners. They contrast with Philadelphia stump rear legs that are round in cross-section, round with straight side faces, or octagonal. Moreover, these rear legs taper slightly from each end toward the middle of the leg. The chair has no through tenons.

A set of chairs inscribed with the name of Gilbert Ash (1717-1785), who worked on Wall Street in New York City are similar in several respects. They have a similar—but not identical splat—and similar front legs, although the knees are richly carved. Both this and the Ash chair have corner blocks within the seat frame oriented vertically, in the Philadelphia manner, in contrast to many other New York chair corner blocks that are laid horizontally. The Ash rear legs are indistinguishable from Philadelphia rounded stump legs, and they have through tenons. Several other New York sets with diamond splats and varying features are known. Although museums and the marketplace commonly associate Ash with their manufacture, the mere similarity of splat design is not a sufficient basis for that identification.

Although uncarved except for the claw-and-ball feet, this chair is well-made. Of note, none of the seat rail mortise-and-tenon joints has visible pins, which secure the joint but interrupt the smooth surfaces of the rails. Long after the chair was made, someone introduced custom-shaped iron straps that attach to adjoining rails and partially encase the corner blocks. No cracks, separations, or breaks suggest why the braces were installed, but they doubtless kept the chair in good condition. Additionally, there is little visible wear on the undersides of the front feet, although the finish on the feet is scuffed. The oak slip seat is a replacement.