

REPORT  
July 27, 2022

In June, 2022, Graham Arader asked me for my written opinion on the identity and authenticity of a walnut high chest of drawers, furniture inventory number 319. This report summarizes my observations and opinions.

**High chest of drawers**

Northern Delaware or southeastern Pennsylvania, 1760-90

Walnut; all tulip poplar secondary woods except white pine bottoms on both side-by-side drawers and the bottom drawer of the upper case and at least one drawer side of sweet gum (left side of the middle long drawer of the upper case).

77 x 43-3/4 x 25

This high chest of drawers, popularly called a highboy, has the drawer configuration of Philadelphia regional 18<sup>th</sup> century furniture. Specifically, the upper case has three side-by-side drawers over two over three full-width graduated drawers. All of the drawers have locks except the top three. Like other Philadelphia regional furniture, the cabriole legs have shells on the knees, flanked by ogee-shaped brackets with prominent spurs. The skirt of the lower case includes passages typical of the region, especially the flat section with a half-round hollow at each end.

Several features suggest that this high chest is not an urban product but was made in a contiguous area. It is of slightly heavier construction than most Philadelphia work. Secondary woods do not include white cedar drawer bottoms. Also, the backboard of the lower case is made of walnut—a premium wood typically not used where it is not readily visible. Of decorative features, the cornice and waist moldings are bolder than usual, and the lower case corners are chamfered and fluted, which is an easier decorative device than engaged quarter columns, as used in the upper case. Those quarter columns are also very telling: they are most unusual in being constructed in a single piece, rather than a columnar section with abutting capital and base made of separate pieces of wood, which allow for easier and more accurate fluting. The fluting in these quarter columns ends at uneven levels.

The argument for where on the urban periphery this high chest was likely made relies on a few other minor details. Evidence of provenance includes pencil inscriptions on the underside of the top middle drawer naming “Hazel C. Lickle / William C. Lickle Daniel C Lickle / Charles H Lickle / Wilmington / Delaware.” A brass plaque on the bottom drawer of the upper case reads,

“TO WILLIAM C. LICKLE FROM MOTHER AND DADDY.” William (1929-2021) and the three others were children of Charles Harold Lickle (1895-1969) and Hazel Elmedia Cauffiel (1897-1982), all of whom lived in the Wilmington, Delaware, area, although the parents were born elsewhere. A shipping label of the Adams Express Company, Atglen, PA, remains pasted to the top of the lower case. The high chest seems not to have descended to the Lickle owners, but inasmuch as ownership passed from the parents to William before 1969 and perhaps closer to 1950, when he married, the high chest was likely acquired locally. Further reinforcement of that regional origin comes from use of some sweet gum in drawer construction, in addition to tulip poplar.

The date range for the high chest begins at roughly mid-century when claw-and-ball feet began to appear on furniture. The brasses, which can be good indicators of furniture dates, have been replaced, so they cannot be used in this instance. The skirt outline derives from others of the Philadelphia area, but modest changes from the urban prototype can occur in furniture made farther away geographically or in time making use of this feature problematic. One aspect of the skirt that suggests a less-urban design is the exaggerated spurs that drop down below the vertical dividers separating the small drawers. Although the right spur is a replacement, that on the left side is original. The latest features on this high chest are the engaged quarter columns and chamfered corners, which suggest the date range.

Nearly full dustboards separate the drawers inside the case. The bottom backboard of the upper case has a small triangular section glued in place, apparently repairing woodworm damage that is now inactive. The left rear leg has a lamination on the knee that appears to be an original patch for a piece of walnut that was slightly too small for its intended purpose. Such original laminations occurred from time to time.