

REPORT  
September 20, 2022

On August 1, 2022, Graham Arader asked me for my written opinion on the identity and authenticity of a Delaware Valley mahogany dressing table, furniture inventory number 331. This report summarizes my observations and opinions.

**Dressing table**

Delaware Valley, 1760-80

Mahogany; tulip poplar drawer sides, white cedar drawer bottoms and case back board.

28-3/4 x 34-3/4 x 19-5/8

This dressing table, popularly called a lowboy, mixes urban Philadelphia features with those more typical of surrounding areas. Among urban Philadelphia characteristics, the dense and figured mahogany used in the case piece is of high quality. The shape of the front skirt is unusual, but it resembles that of another, very ornate dressing table. That example, in the Colonial Williamsburg collection (acc. no. 1990-295), has foliage-carved quarter-columns, a shell drawer with tendrils, and richly carved leg knees and brackets, as well as a rare blind-fret band below the top. All of those exceptional features argue for an origin of that dressing table in Philadelphia.

Execution of the fluted quarter columns on this dressing table indicates an origin outside of the competitive urban marketplace of Philadelphia. In contrast to all known Philadelphia examples, they are made in one piece rather than three: namely, the central fluted segment with separate abutting pieces representing capitals and bases. The fluting on these columns starts and ends unevenly.

Geographical origins in Philadelphia or in the surrounding area are difficult to distinguish for the shell-carved cabriole legs and trifold feet. These simpler versions were made in earlier decades but continued to be made as cheaper alternatives to claw-and-ball feet having more ornately carved foliate knees and knee brackets. So many variations of trifold survive that recognizing a particular example as urban or not is simply not possible.

The pierced brasses are handsome but not original to the dressing table. They are at least the third set. Earlier post holes indicating former brasses have been carefully filled and colored on the insides of the drawer fronts to disguise their presence. The brasses themselves cover the

earlier holes that would otherwise be visible on the outsides. The table top, which appears to be original, has been attached from inside the frame with brass fittings; glue blocks, which appear to have been made from old wood, have been added. The right side molding strip below the top is a replacement, as is the side bracket of the left front leg. The drawer runners have been replaced.