

REPORT  
December 20, 2022

On December 5, 2022, Graham Arader asked me for my written opinion on the identity and authenticity of a Philadelphia Chippendale mahogany side chair, furniture inventory number 357. This report summarizes my observations and opinions. It is not intended to be a thorough evaluation of condition.

**Side chair**

Philadelphia, 1765-80

Mahogany; white cedar corner blocks, hard pine slip seat

37 x 22-3/4 x 20-1/2

“T” is chiseled into the front seat rail rabbet and into the slip seat.

Rounded rear legs in combination with through-tenons (i.e., the side seat rail tenons passing through the rear stiles so that their ends are visible from the rear), undercutting of the seat rails, and vertically oriented corner blocks inside the seat frame indicate a Philadelphia origin for this chair. The particular splat design often raises the name of furniture-maker Benjamin Randolph, who labeled a pair of similar chairs now at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (acc. no. 41.602A, B). However, several small details indicate that this chair and the set of chairs from which it comes was made in another shop. (For a pair of chairs attributed to Randolph, see Arader inventory nos. 351 and 352.) Foremost among those details, the splat design incorporates a few minor, but significant, differences indicating it was made with a different splat template that incorporated conceptual changes. The lower of two balls separating straps in the center is slightly larger than that in the middle, and it separates the straps at the bottom creating a different design at the base than that on the Randolph chairs. The splat enters a shoe that lacks the pronounced bead found on several Randolph chairs. Other differences lie in the shape of the ends of the crest rail, which curve inward on this chair, rather than outward. Finally, the rear seat rail is decoratively undercut, a feature missing from Randolph seating.

The richly carved splat and crest rail exhibit similar motifs to those on the labeled Randolph chair but express them differently. The “ruffled oculus” in the center has a different pattern around the upper border. Details of the carving style are similar enough to suggest the carver might be the same as on the Randolph chair, but such a finding is not conclusive. The legs have stylized acanthus leaves flowing down the knees in a composition that is slightly simpler than the labeled chair but not plain (excepting carved flourishes on the knee brackets) as on the Arader

Randolph-attributed chairs. Of interest, the “relieving” of the splat by the carver resulted in strap loops at the base that flip in opposite directions—as in one, but not the other, of the Arader pair of Randolph chairs.

A member of the set from which the Arader chair comes is illustrated in Albert Sack, *Fine Points of Furniture: Early American* (1950), p. 36. That chair exhibits the same opposed loops as the Arader chair, but image details are not sufficiently clear to determine whether it is this same chair. Other examples from the set are at the St. Louis Art Museum (acc. no. 55.1932) and are owned privately. An armchair at Winterthur (1961.808) appears to be by the same maker as the Arader chair. It has the same crest rail, ruffled oculus carving, ogee-molded rear stiles, shoe, and distinctive knee brackets. At first glance, it seems to be from the same set, but none of the rails are undercut, and small details—notably cylindrical elements in place of the balls in the splat—demonstrate that the armchair is not ensuite with the side chairs. Because the armchair has no incised chair number, it may have been a single commission.

All of the undersides of the carved knee brackets of the Arader chair have had tinted pigments of red and dark colors added, probably to disguise some level of repair. The present carved brackets attach to the adjacent parts of the leg precisely, and grain and color matches exactly; they may be original, or if repaired, the repairs are not readily detected by eye. The left rear corner block inside the seat frame is a replacement, as is part of the left front corner block. The visible end of the left rear through-tenon appears to have been covered with a thin veneer of wood: no wedges inserted at the top and bottom to tighten the joint and no age splits in the tenon itself are visible. The chair has lost about one-half-inch from the bottoms of both rear legs so that the chair inclines slightly backward.