

REPORT
March 3, 2022

On December 20, 2021, Graham Arader asked me for my written opinion on the identity and authenticity of a walnut side chair with wavy crest shell, furniture inventory number 33. This report summarizes my observations and opinions

Side chair

Philadelphia, 1755-70

Walnut; white cedar corner blocks

41-1/2 x 22-3/4 x 21-1/4

“(((“ is stamped into inside of rear rail.

This side chair is an expressive example of a distinctive, small group of Philadelphia chairs and dressing tables and high chests of drawers that share features. The chairs in particular exhibit Continental European, rather than British, features, notably the tall, wavy-shell crest, deep center drop of the front seat rail, and heavier scaled carving and overall construction, such as 4-inch deep seat rails and thicker-than-usual splats and seat rails (see Winterthur, acc. no. 1961.1526, and Williamsburg, acc. no. 1959-267). In this and the Winterthur chair, the side rails do not tenon through the rear stiles, as is common in Philadelphia seating. The Williamsburg chair uses atypical double through tenons that express its heavier construction. (For another side chair from this group with a pierced splat, see Arader inventory number 11.)

The extra pair of carved volutes in the middle of the splat, in keeping with these general characterizations, recalls a group of Philadelphia Queen Anne chairs with four volutes in the splats, but those are conceptualized differently—the volutes on each side of the splat uncoil in opposite directions whereas these do so in the same direction and they are placed differently (see Morrison H. Heckscher, *American Furniture*, nos. 37-39).

Over the decades, furniture historians have followed William M. Hornor’s attribution to John Elliott of a mate to this chair (Blue Book, pl. 68). Hornor associated that chair and a “matching” set of stools (pl. 309, pp. 199, 213) with a 1756 bill of Elliott to Charles Norris of Philadelphia. Among evidence that undermines this attribution, the chairs and stools do not match—the stools do not have ruffled-mantle carving. Moreover, Elliott’s known work looks English, not Continental. A dressing table now at Colonial Williamsburg bearing Elliott’s label from before

his emigration from England to Philadelphia exhibits no relationship to the group of chairs or case pieces that form the group (acc. no. 1973-169).

The present shell on the front rail is an incorrect restoration, and the finish on the chair has become mottled. The slip seat is a replacement.