

REPORT

January 5, 2022

On December 20, 2021, Graham Arader asked me for my written opinion on the identity and authenticity of a federal saddle-seat side chair, furniture inventory number 24.

Side chair

Philadelphia or New York, 1795-1810

Mahogany; ash seat rails and open corner braces

37 x 20-1/2 x 19-3/4

This modestly carved side chair has a rare saddle-shaped seat with bowed front. The tapered front legs have molded decoration on the front and outer side faces. The medial brace is tenoned rather than half-dovetailed into the side stretchers—a chair-making change that began at the end of the eighteenth century. The chair back, comprised of three vertical slats, displays neoclassical ornament in the carved bellflowers and gathers of stylized leaves serving as capitals at the tops of the columnar slats and at the base of the center slat. The popular motifs that create this chair back do not have a strong regional affiliation. Use of ash for the seat rails suggests an origin in Philadelphia or New York. The seat frame employs open corner braces, which are replacements in original mortises, a construction practice common to both places (although many New York chairs began to use front-to-back braces).

The crest rail has split and is reglued and is now stable. The tops of the rear stiles are split and reglued immediately below the crest rail. A plugged screw hole on the left side of the crest shows where it was reattached to the top of the rear stile.