

REPORT  
April 25, 2022

In February 2022, Graham Arader asked me for my written opinion on the identity and authenticity of a Philadelphia walnut blanket chest, furniture inventory number 307. This report summarizes my observations and opinions.

**Blanket chest**

Philadelphia, 1740-1765

Walnut; tulip poplar back board drawer sides and large drawer bottoms, white cedar small drawer bottoms, maple small drawer fronts and lower rail inside the case, oak leg blocks, probably ash till.

30-3/4 x 50-1/4 x 22-1/2

This seemingly simple walnut blanket chest is a veritable sampler of fine 18<sup>th</sup>-century cabinetry. The utilitarian form is typically associated with non-urban furniture makers and with Pennsylvania German furniture. However, this example is clearly Anglican in its design, and inspection shows it to be urban in its construction, based on the assumption that the best craftsmanship was practiced in cities—in Philadelphia in this instance.

The chest case is dovetailed. The front dovetails are mitered, visible on the top edges of the case side boards. Those dovetails have wedges driven into the centers of the triangular pins, a technique that firmly secures the dovetail. The technique is widely associated with Germanic construction, but this chest otherwise exhibits no Germanic design or construction traits. The dovetails along the back corners of the case are blind-dovetailed on the sides, and the back dovetail pins have wedges inserted alongside the pins. Blind dovetails are more difficult to execute than normal dovetails, raising the unanswered question of why they occur in the back where they are not visible.

The large exterior and small interior drawers exhibit both kinds of dovetailing and wedging: the front dovetails are blind with wedges inserted alongside the pins; the rear dovetails have wedges splitting the pins. Wooden pegs hold the bottoms of the small drawers in place. The bracket foot facings are neatly mitered in the corners, which is a common practice. Less common, they are firmly pegged to the leg block inside, a large square block of wood that supports the weight of the chest. Least common, the leg blocks are round-tenoned into the underside of the chest. The round tops of the tenons are visible inside the drawer cavities. The leg blocks are also nailed to

the underside of the case. The center drop is tenoned into the underside of the case, and its tenon is firmly secured by a wood pin. The scalloped edges of the bracket feet are slightly chamfered, which produces a sharp visual line along the edge. This technique was commonly used with chair splats but not bracket feet. The bracket feet have scalloped sides composed of two levels of ogee lines, which represents greater design complexity than usual. The center drop is deeper than normal, which echoes the bracket foot outline in scale.

The interior till, located on the left side, has three tiers, a level of complexity otherwise unknown to the author. The top tier is a lidded box—representing the normal practice. Two side-by-side drawers slide into cavities below, creating a rare embellishment. The third level has a single wide drawer. The chest lid attaches with iron strap hinges. Chalk numbers, related to assembly, abound inside the case and drawer corners. The brasses appear to be original.