

REPORT
January 5, 2022

On December 20, 2021, Graham Arader asked me for my written opinion on the identity and authenticity of a Philadelphia racket-back side chair, furniture inventory number 23.

Side chair

Philadelphia
Mahogany, 1795-1810
36-1/2 x 20 x 18-1/2

This side chair, popularly called a “racket-back” for the dominant motif in the back, is a classic example of Philadelphia federal seating. The design of the back comes from plate 28, dated 1793, in Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing-Book* (London 1793). The bowed front seat rail tenons into undecorated square-tapered front legs. The square chair back has outline beading on the stiles, across the crest rail, and along the edges of the verticals and arched straps of the back. All of the carved details—stylized leaves in the top corners of the splat, suspended bellflowers in the center, stylized leaves at the base, and the carved molding across the raised top of the crest typify stylish Philadelphia chairs.

Although the seat frame was not examined underneath the present upholstery, the seat rails appear to be made of mahogany, except the front rail, which looks like maple. Use of mahogany rails suggests that this chair originally had a drop-in slip seat and was later upholstered over the rails. Incorporating the maple front rail into that scenario would argue that it was replaced at that time. Open front corner braces are now missing, and new corner blocks have been installed. All of the corner joints have iron braces screwed into the tops of the legs and the undersides of the rails: two braces in each front leg and one joining each rear leg to its side rail. Reinforcing screws covered by plugs have been inserted into the side rails from the backs of the rear stiles. The right rear stile needs to be reglued where it joins the crest rail.