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THE SELECTIVE CONSERVATIVE TASTE:
FURNITURE IN STRATFORD, CONNECTICUT, 1740-1800

BY
Edward Strong Cooke, Jr.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture.

June 1979

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FURNITURE IN STRATFORD, CONNECTICUT, 1740-1800

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Eighteenth-century Connecticut furniture demands closer attention from furniture and cultural historians. Although its craftsmen and manufactures have not received the scholarly attention paid to those from the neighboring colonies of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York, Connecticut possessed its own rich craft tradition that has not yet been fully defined or explored. Restricted by the lack of accessible information or perhaps influenced by the prejudice that furniture that is "odd and made from cherry" originated in Connecticut, decorative arts scholars have been content to attribute pieces of furniture simply to Connecticut without being able to identify their exact origin. At present the only satisfactory studies deal with the furniture of seventeenth-century Hartford and New Haven Counties, eighteenth-century New London County, and the turned chair traditions of western coastal Connecticut. What is lacking in the field of Connecticut furniture is the knowledge of regional stylistic and constructional characteristics that would enable a scholar to identify the locale in which a piece of furniture was produced. As John Kirk admonished in the introduction to his 1967 catalogue of Connecticut furniture, furniture historians should examine the objects of each community "in order to define more clearly the individual contributions
of the independent, but connected, network of areas we call Connecticut." This study is such a step in the identification of stylistic and structural characteristics in the furniture from one area in Connecticut.

This analysis focuses upon the specific town of Stratford for several reasons. Robert Trent, who first urged me to examine the case furniture traditions of western coastal Connecticut, provided me with invaluable notes and contacts that facilitated my preliminary research. The great amount of furniture with strong histories of ownership in old Stratford families, the survival of several pieces of furniture signed by a Stratford cabinetmaker, the large body of manuscript material from the eighteenth-century community, and the cooperation and support of a very active and enthusiastic local historical society all combined to make Stratford a community worthy of intensive study.

In more general terms this study responds to the need for additional studies of Connecticut society in the colonial period. As Bruce Steiner emphasized in his article on Anglican officeholding, social historians, much like the furniture historians, should focus their research upon the individual communities of Connecticut, since the towns were the loci of power. Although small in number compared to the studies of eastern Massachusetts, the existing corpus of works includes several good community studies of towns in eastern Connecticut, around Hartford, or on the western frontier in Litchfield County, and
several studies of colony-wide change during the Great Awakening. However, no study to date has concentrated upon the western coastal region. In addition, none has tapped the potentially valuable resources of material culture.

Following the advice of Kirk and Steiner, this study combines the study of furniture and furniture production with historical analysis at the community level in an attempt to gain a fuller understanding of one community in an area of Connecticut that has largely been neglected by historians.

The pioneering nature of this work has led to innumerable debts. First, I would like to thank all the people who welcomed me into their homes, talked about their furniture, and allowed me to photograph it. I would also like to express my gratitude to various members of the Stratford Historical Society, particularly Mr. and Mrs. Donald Fowler and Mr. and Mrs. Einar Larson, for their shared interest and their cheerful compliance to my requests for research and photographic time in the Judson house. Mrs. Dominick LaMacchia of the Huntington Historical Society and Mr. Edward Nichols Coffey of the Monroe Historical Society helped me locate Stratford furniture in the northern parishes of the town. Their hospitality also made fieldwork in the summer an enjoyable pursuit. I would also like to express my thanks to several other institutions: the Fairfield Historical Society and its staff who helped to preserve my sanity during a month and a half of probate research; the Fairfield Probate...
Court; the Bridgeport Probate Court; the Bridgeport Museum of Art, Science, and Industry; the Stratford Town Clerk's Office; the Historical and Genealogical Section of the Connecticut State Library; the Manuscripts and Archives Collection of the Yale University Library; the Connecticut Historical Society; and the Bridgeport Public Library, particularly David Palmquist.

Friends in the New Haven area made it a pleasure to research and write on a Connecticut topic. They were particularly appreciated during the month of January when I hacked out a rough draft. Friends and colleagues at Winterthur, through questions, suggestions, and good humor, also made significant contributions.

Several individuals should be singled out for their special role in this study. Robert Trent initiated my interest in the Stratford area and has constantly encouraged me either by sharing his knowledge or by exhorting me. To my official advisor, Benno Forman, and my unofficial advisor, Stephanie Wolf, I extend great appreciation for the many hours they took to discuss ideas with me, to point out problems, and to attempt to correct my writing style.

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I was also fortunate to have the help of Sandy Mitchell, who transformed my rough draft into its present neat form. My fingers and hands especially wish to thank her.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, I must thank the late Charles Montgomery for taking on an undirected student and introducing him to the exciting possibilities of the decorative arts. I shall never forget the example he set in regard to enthusiasm, energy, and scholarship.
INTRODUCTION

Within the past ten years, folklorists and decorative arts historians have paid increasing attention to the study of vernacular, or "folk" arts.¹ Henri Focillon, a leading art theorist of the early twentieth century, can rightfully be recognized as the founder of the folk art theory from which all present studies have evolved. In his introduction to *Art Populaire*, Focillon emphasized the need to legitimate the study of folk art as an independent field: "... it appears possible to consider folk art not as a series of secondary monuments or substitutes for sophisticated or high art, but rather as an order with its own laws, like a human language which is not a literary one and which finds its sources in other realms of experience."² The methodology for the study of a folk artifact proposed by Focillon was predicated upon an intense structural analysis of the individual object in terms of its form and material, and then a consideration of how aspects of that form might have changed over time.³ Focillon argued that such an analysis of folk forms allows one to recognize essential differences between the vernacular and elite
traditions. For while vernacular objects tend to be characterized by a stagnant temporal sense, an artificial perspective, and an over-riding concern for function, the more elite forms reflect change, a realistic perspective, and a propensity to sacrifice usefulness in favor of decoration.

Two contemporary scholars, in particular, have drawn upon Focillon's analytical model. In his study of a turned chair tradition, Hearts and Crowns, Robert Trent included a discussion of Focillon's theories and a translation of his introduction to Art Populaire. Applying the principles of Focillon's theoretical model, Trent arranged a group of coastal Connecticut chairs into a formal series and sought to demonstrate how the chairs' makers responded to the challenge of different elite styles. Henry Glassie, in Folk Housing in Middle Virginia, employed theories similar to those of Focillon in studying the lives of free Virginians who did not belong to the aristocracy. Glassie reiterated many of Focillon's major ideas, especially the object's primacy, its place within a series, and the definition of culture as a mental system. However, by extending his analysis to include a consideration of the maker-object relationship, Glassie moved beyond Focillon's major concern. Believing that the artifact is "an expression of the maker's mind," Glassie employed structural analysis in an effort to understand the artifact as the manifestation of the maker's cultural attitudes.
Although Glassie and Trent have made folk objects more accessible to scholars of various related fields, both have neglected to place the object and its maker within their larger context: one which would include the customer and the total operational culture. In the aptly titled chapter "A Little History," Glassie used letters and diaries to demonstrate the correlation between the evolution in housing style towards a more intensive one and the disintegration of the area's economic, political, and religious institutions. The inclusion of these subjective documents in his attempt to provide some cultural background for the change in the vernacular tradition is ironical since Glassie, earlier in the book, discussed the prejudicial evidence offered by the written word. The more objective written word, contained in town and church records, tax lists, and inventories, would have provided him with more accurate information and minimized the guesswork of his correlations. Trent, after devoting his study to the formal series of chairs from Stratford, Milford, and Guilford, and related chairs, also made a token attempt at placing the object within its cultural context by correlating the crown chair tradition to the religious climate of the coastal region. Although a step in the right direction, this undeveloped one-page speculation was seemingly tacked on as an afterthought.

Just as the work of Focillon, Trent, and Glassie indicate that scholars of material culture have become interested in analyzing art forms "from the bottom up," so historians have experienced a parallel interest in studying social structure rather than personalities or
institutions of power. Published studies of seventeenth- and
eighteenth-century American communities, though written with full
awareness of the larger historical patterns, have drawn upon
biographies, land deeds, probate records, town, church, and court
records, tax lists, and vital statistics in an effort to study such
subjects as the transference of Old World institutions and customs,
commercial development, political organization, and demographic
patterns, particularly as they relate to family structure. By
examining the community as a whole organism, these studies have
frequently challenged the time-honored general interpretations of
earlier historians.8

More recently, Richard Beeman has suggested that American
social historians employ the theories and methods of cultural anthropologists to help define "community" more accurately and understand
the bridge between "psychological and structural realities."9 He
noted that aspects of the theories of Clifford Geertz, Robert Red-
field, and Victor Turner should be utilized by community-oriented
historians, with special emphasis on the goal of Geertz, who strove to
achieve a "thick description" of a community's structure through the
semiotic study of its culture. Although any community study,
especially one which is anthropologically based, should include a
concern for material culture in its discussion, only one Colonial
American community study to date, John Demos's A Little Commonwealth,
has attempted to do this; and this pioneering work demonstrated the
awkwardness of the historian dealing with objects.10
The new social history methodology, which seeks to study the life patterns of the ordinary folk through the use of non-literary written sources, dovetails nicely with the artifactual paradigms proposed by Focillon and carried out by Glassie and Trent. The existing shortcomings of each mode of research would be eliminated by a synthesis that combines the knowledge of material culture of the folk art scholars with the contextual framework of the community study. Such an integration would result in an understanding of the object in a formal series, the object as an expression of ideas in the mind of its maker or user, and the object as a means of non-verbal communication among members of a community. Conversely such an approach would provide the historian with an added dimension in his effort to understand the social and cultural institutions and formations which include, make up, and are made from, the whole domain of lived experiences. This methodology implies that the dominant cultural mentalité, defined by a recent cultural historian as the "hegemonic," of a community can be extrapolated from that community's objects. 11

The following essay attempts to integrate the study of artifacts with historical study at the community level. It seeks to examine the dominant attitudes of the eighteenth-century community of Stratford, Connecticut, and the ways in which those attitudes, which can be best described as selectively conservative, found expression in furniture and furniture taste. In 1740 Stratford township was defined by the geopolitical unit which included the present towns of Stratford, Huntington, Monroe, Trumbull, Nichols, and Shelton, as well as
parts of Bridgeport and Easton. Each of these towns represents an area of Stratford farmland which had been given as home lots to third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation descendents. As each area became more populated, it was afforded separate parish status. The population and institutions of Stratfield Society, the most autonomous and westernmost parish which was established in 1694, were composed of a mixture of Stratford and Fairfield society, as its name implies. Since it can be considered as only half-Stratford, Stratfield Society was not considered as part of the Stratford community in this study. The other Stratford parishes, Ripton established in 1717, North Stratford in 1725, and New Stratford in 1762, all seemed to retain their communal identity with Stratford through the Revolutionary era, in spite of the establishment of their own religious institutions. Not until 1789 did Ripton and New Stratford parishes merge to form the new independent town of Huntington. The effect of this political redistribution upon the research for this study will be discussed below.

The essay's first section describes the economic, political, and religious processes that provided the social organization of the community and is intended only as a general survey to identify the existence of communal attitudes. Raymond Williams has provided a workable definition of hegemony as a dominant totality rather than a totality of dominance. This study has accepted Williams's formulation and has, therefore, sought to describe not only the dominant cultural expressions in Stratford, but also those that appear to be
in opposition or those that do not appear at all. For example, it is easier to understand the power of the town's dominant religious views through its response to such threats as a growing Anglican presence and New Lights during the 1740s. Although the sources for this section include such standard historical material as town and church records, account books, vital statistics, and secondary sources, much of the evidence about the economic lifestyles of Stratford was culled from inventories, a data base with certain inherent limitations. Inventories offer the historian rich material about types and values of personal possessions and patterns of material culture consumption for that particular segment of the population which left inventories. However, not everyone had his estate appraised and recorded in probate. Jackson Turner Main estimated that approximately 50-60% of the population of mid-eighteenth-century Connecticut left inventories. Most likely inventories survived for older members of the community, since estates were appraised after death, or for the wealthier ones, since large estates were more likely to have been recorded. In light of the findings of the inventory analysis of this study, the limitations of inventory analysis actually become evidence in support of the conservative economic and agricultural nature of the town. After all, if the better or the older sort, who were also likely to be better off, did not invest in mercantile activities, who could have?
After providing the communal context, the study examines the consumers' taste in furniture. This section draws exclusively upon inventories and is subject to the same limitations discussed above. The results of the inventory analysis reveal that conservative taste preferences pervaded all classes, in spite of the biases of the inventories in favor of the wealthy. If the better sort, who possessed the means to acquire the latest and most expensive styles, owned conservative forms, it was very likely that those who did not have inventories recorded, and who, in all likelihood, lacked such means, owned equally conservative forms. Although all Stratford inventories from 1740 until 1820 were read, a detailed study of four five-year periods, spaced twenty years apart, provided the data base for this section. For inventories up until 1789 this proved to be no problem, but with the split off of Huntington at that date, only inventories specified as being from Stratford were used since that was the definition of the community from that time forward.

The next section identifies the cabinetmakers who worked for those customers within the communal context. Biographical information is scarce, but what little there is allows for a basic understanding of the lives of certain Stratford cabinetmakers. This section naturally leads to the study of the makers' products. Surviving pieces of furniture, when used as resource material, are another example of selective evidence, much like inventories, since much of the original Stratford furniture has been lost or destroyed. Are the surviving objects used in this study an accurate representation
of the variety of forms and styles available to the people of eighteenth-century Stratford, or have they been preserved because they are the atypical monuments of the Stratford cabinetmaking tradition? Since the furniture that was used most frequently has probably worn out and since several generations of descendants have decided to preserve and hold on to the pieces of furniture considered, the furniture used in this study may represent some of the finer examples of the Stratford cabinetmaking tradition. That they are conservative in form and decoration further documents the strength of the dominant cultural attitude.

This study explores Stratford's "many-layered structure of routine," considering first the general nature of the community and then moving towards formal studies of the furniture itself. Thus, within a framework of concentric circles, furniture can be analyzed and explained in relation to its broader cultural context. The final series of concentric circles permits a fuller and easier understanding of the community, the furniture produced within it, and what one reveals about the other.
CHAPTER I

Economic, Political, Religious, and Cultural Climates in Stratford

Eighteenth-century Stratford, located upon the western bank of the mouth of the Housatonic River where it empties into Long Island Sound, lay between the town of Fairfield and the town of Milford and was, therefore, the easternmost town in what was Fairfield County. The town was settled as a part of the Connecticut Colony in 1639 by English people who had emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony and then proceeded to Connecticut. Most of the original inhabitants had gathered under the leadership of Reverend Adam Blakeman in Wethersfield, Connecticut, and had then proceeded south. Upon settlement, the town proprietors established an open field system whereby each settler was given a houseplot in the nucleated town center and a specified amount of farmland, meadow, and woodland in the common fields that lay to the south and north of the town proper. In order to preserve this open field system during subsequent expansion, the town leaders passed such acts as the one of 1661 that encouraged cultivation of the town's northerly land, but prevented people from living more than two miles from the center of town:
... all the inhabitants shall have liberty to take up a whole division of land in the woods for planting land anywhere within the bounds of Stratford where he can find fit land, provided it be not within two miles of the town, and also such who do take up land in this way are prohibited from making it their dwelling place... 2

By 1670 some people had begun to inhabit the hillier Stratford lands more than two miles to the north of the town center; but the size of the town absorbed this population growth and allowed for the continuation of the open field system until after 1800, though the divisions became smaller. 3

In 1740 Stratford was expanding since it no longer suffered from the threats posed by the Dutch and the Indians during the first fifty years. As the population increased from 423 in 1680 to 603 in 1708, and with this pattern continuing in the ensuing years, the outlying farms of the first- and second-generation settlers were distributed, as homesteads, to descendants. 4 The difficulty of traveling to the town center for the Sabbath necessitated the formation of new parishes within Stratford township: Stratfield Society was established in 1694, Ripton in 1717, and Unity, later called North Stratford, in 1725. During the eighteenth century such a dispersal of population and establishment of new parishes often led to the disintegration of the previously existing community and the creation of several new ones, as occurred in Dedham, Massachusetts. But Stratford, as was true of most old towns in Connecticut, did not split apart until after the Revolution. 5

By 1780 the town meeting
heard the first petitions suggesting the division of the town into two parts since the people in the northern section experienced difficulty in attending town meetings in the southern one. Even the formal division of Huntington in 1789 did little to upset the existing feeling of community, for Huntington maintained cultural and familial ties with the old town through the end of the century. Between 1740 and 1800 the people of the old town of Stratford did not move "toward a new social order, toward the republican pluralism of the nineteenth century" with speed or directness, but rather remained largely rooted in a "close-knit, tightly controlled community." An examination of how Stratford's economic, political, religious, and cultural structures changed over this period demonstrates that, in the years after 1740, the community of Stratford remained inward-looking and conservative.

As early as the end of the seventeenth century, such merchants as Daniel Shelton, Richard Blackleach, and Samuel Blague attempted to establish Stratford as a mercantile center; but evidence from the period after 1740 indicates that they did not completely succeed. Unfortunately no records for the port of Stratford survive; but the circumstantial evidence of probate records and account books, the best resources available, indicate that little full-scale mercantile activity ever existed in Stratford and that it remained largely an agricultural and fishing town throughout the eighteenth century. Of the 201 inventories studied in detail for Chapter II, only 3% contained any reference to a wharf, warehouse, or ownership...
of a sloop. Furthermore, the Trade and Maritime Records in the Connecticut Archives include only three cases involving Stratford ships or people, and all of these involve coastal trade with other colonial ports. Recently Jackson Turner Main presented a quantitative method to differentiate between agricultural and commercial towns in eighteenth-century Connecticut. He observed that, in a town dependent upon farming, most people owned personal estate whose value came close to the town's mean; while, in a town involved largely in trade, values of personal estate deviated further from the mean since there was a greater general prosperity in the town and since capital, merchandise, warehouses, and ships were included in personal estate. Such stratification meant that the median value of personal estates from that town would significantly exceed the mean value. Applied to Stratford, this comparison indicates that Stratford was a small-scale trading center in 1740, and that it became more rusticated as the century passed on, with only a slight increase in trade by the end of the time period with which this study is concerned (see Appendix A). Such an inference can also be drawn from Stratford's index of commercialization, a calculation of the town's colony tax divided by the total area of the town which indicates the marketing potential of the town. Stratford's rating of .703 ranks it sixth in a county of ten towns. In terms of the central place theory, it seems reason-
The population of Stratford seemed to consist mainly of farmers and craftsmen. The probate records point out that 85% of the people who left inventories included land and/or animals, the average total value being £465:19:9, or 69.1% of each person's total wealth. People in a mercantile-based town, on the other hand, would have most of their wealth tied up in personal estate. Though purchasing special goods such as furniture, brasses or a silver tankard from New York or Boston, or sugar products from the West Indies, the people of Stratford seemed to produce locally as many supplies as possible. Combined with a lack of specie, which was evident in the inventories and in the correspondence of Samuel Johnson, the result was a barter system of goods and services that is documented by the surviving account books. Such an economy formed a tight interdependent network among the farmers and craftsmen of Stratford. An English social scientist, William Williams, described the operation of much the same societal network in the nineteenth-century farming town of Ashworthy, where "kinship and neighborliness form complementary or overlapping networks which join together the individual conjugal families and which help materially to reduce their dependence on their own limited resources." In another book that focused on the country craftsman, Williams explained that the sense of kinship and proximity, the fundamental need for social and economic cooperation, and the exchange of goods and services rather than money resulted in a rural community that proved "highly resistant" to the change which characterized town
In light of the surviving evidence contained in probate records and account books, the economic life of Stratford possessed such resistance from 1740 until the end of the eighteenth century.

In order to understand the operation of the hegemonic in the political sphere, it is necessary to examine both the ruling structure at the local level for indications of the community's accommodative consensus and the influence of the town in colony-wide affairs for indications of outward looking interests. Such a two-pronged analysis can be carried out within the typological methodology presented by Edward M. Cook, Jr., in *The Fathers of the Towns*. In looking at the political lives of all New England towns through such indicators as length of service and prominence, Cook employed a political central place theory that relied not only upon town and colony government records, but also upon the general social, religious, and economic patterns of each town. This approach facilitates and encourages comparison among all towns of the four colonies, and an assignment of each community to one of the five types of towns: urban centers, major towns, secondary towns, small farming towns, and frontier towns.

In terms of local political activity, the substitution of Stratford data into Cook's typology shows that Stratford, like any town with more than a thousand inhabitants, had a developed social structure that resulted in a low percentage of leaders and a high average length of service. A more detailed examination of voting patterns reveals that the group of leaders who served five or more
terms, 33.7% of all the town leaders, served 67.7% of the total number of terms. Such concentration of local power among a few trusted leaders was not the result of an oligarchy, but probably the result of both competent performance by the leaders and the conditioned conservatism of the community that influenced voters to elect leaders whose primary concern was the community. The population and patterns of local office holding of Stratford paralleled those of such a major town as Braintree and such secondary towns as Andover, Duxbury, Middleboro, and Stonington.

In order to assign Stratford to either the major town or secondary town level, it is necessary to measure its position within the colony of Connecticut through its prominence and commercial indices, as defined by Cook. The former was calculated by adding together the number of Superior Court justices, justices of the peace and quorum, assistants, and college graduates who served in town office and dividing it by the population of the town in 1765. Although Cook classified a secondary town as one with a prominence index of less than ten, Stratford's high rating of 12.3 is as misleading as Newport's low index of 9.9. An examination of the makeup of this index reveals the cause of Stratford's inflated figure - seven of its nineteen positions of prominence were college graduates and another seven were in the County Court. The latter number is especially misleading since the Fairfield County Court consistently included justices from each of the four towns of Fairfield, Norwalk, Stamford, and Stratford. Significantly no one from Stratford ever

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served as the Chief Justice for this court. The few assistants and Superior Court Judges are more indicative of the town's limited political role within the colony. When Stratford did participate in the colonial government, bits of surviving evidence indicate that a distinctive conservatism flavored its actions. The nomination votes of 1745, which survive for several towns, Stratford among them, show that Stratford clearly favored the conservative Old Light, John Bulkley. During the political conflicts of the 1760s, William Samuel Johnson, Stratford's most influential political figure, got his initial entry into colony politics because he was a conservative Anglican, voted in as the result of an Anglican-New Light coalition in 1766.

The description of the town as a secondary town is given more credence by its relatively low commercial index that ranked it sixth in the county. Politically as well as economically, it was clear that Fairfield was the major town in Fairfield County, and that Stratford was overshadowed by Fairfield to the west and the urban center of New Haven to the east, both of which had high commercial and prominence indices. According to the economic and political central place theory, Stratford was caught between two politically prominent distribution centers and found itself limited to a secondary marketing role that gave it little prestige in colony politics and forced it to concentrate upon local affairs.
In the religious sphere, Stratford also displayed a certain inward-looking autonomy flavored with conservatism after 1740. Previously great animosity had existed between the established Congregational Church and the Anglican Church, which had established a parish in Stratford in 1707. The fear and suspicion brought about by the establishment of the Anglican faith initially caused the townspeople to glorify their local experience, to become Anglophobic, and to attempt to drive the unwanted Churchmen out of town. As Bruce Steiner pointed out, however, the patterns of Anglican officeholding demonstrate that this initial paranoid reaction was short lived and that the local communities reintegrated the Churchmen with a "revived sense of closeness and identity." Stressing that the Anglicans were first and foremost members of a kinship-oriented community, Steiner summed up the thrust of his argument by stating that "ties of kinship and neighborhood proved stronger than theological antagonisms and created a communalism that could span denominational differences." In Stratford such communalism manifested itself in the report of "peace and charity" between Christ Church and the First Society and in the attendance of Congregationalists at Anglican services in Ripton parish.

Related to this communal harmony, the conservative nature of the Anglican faith also helped the reassimilation of townspeople who converted to that faith, especially during the Congregational factionalism of the Great Awakening. The Reverend Hezekiah Gold, minister of the First Society in Stratford, openly favored the
New Light pietistic theology, and, as a result, alienated himself from a number of the more established members of his congregation. Some of these longstanding members, such as Edmund Lewis, James Lewis, and Theophilus Nichols, chose to convert to the Anglican faith, while others remained in the Society and eventually brought about Reverend Gold's dismissal in 1752. With the minister's departure, many of his sympathizers also left seeking the more tolerant religious environments of New Haven, Waterbury, Newtown, and New Milford. The fate of Reverend Gold serves to point out the power of the dominance of the Old Light, or conservative faction in Stratford, and the alliance, based on a shared socially conservative outlook, between the Old Lights and the Anglicans. This coalition also surfaced in the political arena as is demonstrated by the election of 1744, when two Anglicans, Theophilus Nichols and Edmund Lewis, were elected in preference to any New Lights, and by the continued return of Nichols to the assembly, sometimes with an Old Light from the First Society and sometimes with one from Ripton or another outlying parish. Thus the religious processes in Stratford parallel and intertwine among the economic and political processes; and, all together, they document the existence of a strong kinship-oriented communal network, woven from threads of conservatism, that was reluctant to change.

Stratford's agricultural economy, its limited colony-wide political influence and concentration on local affairs, and the dominance of family and propinquity parallel similar conditions in eighteenth-century Guilford, Connecticut. Further similarities
seem more than coincidental: both towns were founded in 1639, both were situated between New Haven and another leading mercantile town (in Guilford's case this was Saybrook and New London), both preserved their sense of community in spite of the theological division among five Congregational parishes and the Anglican Church, both chose Anglican deputies in proportion to their Anglican population, and both ranked in the top third of Connecticut towns in terms of taxes. 26 Although he used different sorts of data, many of Waters's observations are helpful in understanding Stratford's conservative communalism since the two towns are so alike. His main thesis, that Guilford's traditional social structure was based on patrilocal patterns of land inheritance and the dynamic use of land, may also shed some light upon the conservative strain found in the economic, political, and religious spheres of Stratford. Like Stratford's, Guilford's traditional stance appeared to have been, at least in part, self-imposed according to Waters, who wrote that "Guilford was not 'hermetically sealed off against the world' nor was it a stranger to the currents or thought of its time." 27

Waters briefly mentioned that Guilford's self-imposed traditional value system manifested itself in the architecture and silver produced by local craftsmen, but he did not explore this artifactual evidence in any depth. Guilford's turners and cabinetmakers were studied by Robert Trent, who identified the work of the Parmele family of turners and chairmakers who worked during the last half of the eighteenth century. 28 The conservative overall feeling,
the turned elements of the frame, and the heart-shaped cut-out on the crest rail of chairs attributed to this family of chairmakers resemble those elements of the crown chairs made in Stratford from 1725 until 1785. The similarities of these turned chair traditions link Guilford and Stratford further together and also imply that material culture provides an excellent means of identifying the existence of a dominant conservative point of view in these comparable towns.

An analysis of Stratford's taste in ceramics, pewter, and silver reveals that its inhabitants were also aware of stylistic variations and innovations in the rest of the colonies and in England, but chose to exercise their own preference. Many townspeople owned ceramics; but they were usually blue and white earthenware, or Delftware, which had been a popular ceramic in such urban and political centers as Boston, Providence, and Portsmouth earlier in the eighteenth century. In Stratford tin-glazed earthenware remained in use through the first decade of the nineteenth century; inventories as late as 1819 include mention of it. In comparison only 11% of the inventories studied in detail contained a reference to porcelain, and their average value was only 8/11, the approximate value of three cups and saucers, two bowls, and one teapot. Although porcelain was first mentioned in an inventory of 1742 and was, therefore, available early in the period covered by this study, relatively few people owned any porcelain in comparison to the mid-eighteenth-century inventories from such mercantile towns as Boston, New Haven, or even Fairfield. 29
The people of Stratford were aware of porcelain, but just did not seem to get caught up in the taste for Oriental porcelain.

The same selectivity appeared in their taste for creamware. This ceramic type, which began to be manufactured by Josiah Wedgwood in 1763, first appeared in a Stratford inventory in 1778, but appeared very infrequently after that time. Green and blue edged creamware occurred more frequently in some of the later inventories, but still not nearly as frequently as the great quantities listed by the late eighteenth-century inhabitants of other large towns. The initial inventory references to these ceramic types are very close to that which Marley Brown found in the inventories of Plymouth, Massachusetts, whose population and geo-economic position within the sphere of influence of an urban center approximated that of Stratford. But after the first references, Plymouth demonstrated a greater inclination to accept the more recent styles - the inventories of that town reveal that Delftware appeared most frequently in the 1760s just as porcelain started to become very popular. Through the rest of the century porcelain and creamware were the most common ceramic varieties. In contrast the first references to the current ceramic types proved that Stratford was as aware of popular fashion as Plymouth, but the continued number of references to Delftware demonstrated Stratford's predilection for the traditional.
Even though ceramic references demonstrate the selectivity of
the people of Stratford, they were not the favorite tableware. This
distinction belonged to pewter, which was owned in great quantity by
people of all means. Even inventories from the early nineteenth
century listed old pewter and pewter whose higher value indicated
recent manufacture. These prices and the short life expectancy of
pewter objects suggest that this favoritism was not the result of
inheritance patterns. Rather the people of Stratford must have con-
tinued to purchase great quantities of pewter throughout the
eighteenth century. Seventy-nine per cent of those inventories
analyzed in detail listed pewter of an average value of £1:16:3, the
approximate value of twenty-five pounds of pewter, which can be
itemized as four basins, seven plates, three platters, seven spoons,
one tankard, and some old pewter. In more trade-oriented centers
pewter had been replaced by the cheaper alternative of creamware, but
in Stratford the former resisted the latter and attested to the con-
tinuation of traditional ways of living.

This general survey of the economic, political, religious, and
cultural spheres of life in mid-eighteenth-century Stratford proves
the existence of a conservative attitude that manifested itself
through all realms of life, but an in-depth analysis of one particular
medium of material culture, furniture, should reveal the workings of
this selective self-imposed mentalité. This study seeks to examine the
taste of the customers, the makers, and the furniture forms, and to
offer possible explanations for the pattern of preferences revealed.
CHAPTER II

The Taste of the Customer

The account book of at least one cabinetmaker who worked in Stratford in the middle of the eighteenth century would provide the fullest and most accurate information about the furniture traditions of the town at that time; but, unfortunately, none are presently known to have survived. Therefore, one must turn to the written evidence of the probate records, which, in spite of their inherent weaknesses, are of great value in the identification of furniture forms and particular patterns of consumption of those people who left inventories. Although it was necessary to read all the probates of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to achieve an understanding of the continuum of furniture styles in Stratford, a detailed analysis of all the inventories from four five-year time periods spaced twenty years apart (1740-1744, 1760-1764, 1780-1784, and 1800-1804) and the codification of this information establishes a typology of household furniture which allows a close look at stylistic change through time and class. In each five-year period the people for whom inventories survive were divided up into three groups according to the total value of their personal estate, exclusive of furniture: small estates (£0-99), moderate estates (£100-199), and large estates (£200 and up). These values were all based upon 1760 values, and
consequently the values of the three other periods were adjusted according to the relative prices of cows and oxen.\(^2\) Granted there is no such thing as an average household, but an understanding of the typical possessions in furniture is invaluable in recognizing the cultural conservatism of the eighteenth-century community of Stratford.

1740-1744

In the inventories from 1740-1744, the eighteen people who owned less than £100 in personal estate comprised 56% of the total number of people who had inventories recorded in those years; and, of these eighteen, all but one owned some furniture. Most of the households contained very similar furnishings that included corded bedsteads, chests, and unspecified chairs and tables. The few specific references do clarify what taste prevailed. In regard to seating furniture, some older forms, such as turkey-work chairs and joint stools, had probably been inherited from ancestors; but the most popular style for this segment of the population was the black chair. Plain chests, probably the six board, nailed variety, were the most common storage forms to be found in this group of inventories, although a few people did own the larger, more complicated, and, therefore, more expensive pieces of case furniture with drawers. The quantity of small, square tables paralleled the simplicity of the storage forms. Accordingly the theoretical number of pieces of furniture possessed by an average person of this wealth consisted of two bedsteads; five or six chairs, probably of the black variety; two storage forms, at least one of which would be a plain chest; and two tables, at least one of which
would be small. Of all the inventories from this period, that of Isaac Clark, who owned furniture with a total value slightly greater than the average of this group, demonstrates this distribution the best. His estate contained one bedstead, six black chairs and one great black chair, two chests, one chest with drawers, two tables, and one round table.  

The nine people of this period with moderate estates all owned slightly more furniture, especially seating forms, than their contemporaries with smaller estates and, consequently, had a greater average value of furniture holdings - £6.18.0. Nevertheless, the forms and styles remained the same and resulted in an average possession of two bedsteads, twelve side chairs and one great chair (probably black with four slats), one plain chest and one chest with a drawer or drawers, and one oval table and one other type of table. The estate of Joseph Nichols, which consisted of two bedsteads, fifteen side chairs, two great chairs, a chest, a chest and drawers, a plain table, an oval table, and a box, approximates the average quantity of furniture and the average value of furniture holdings possessed by this segment of society.

The four large estates of this period listed stylistically similar furniture, but in still greater quantity. The increased amount of furniture drove the average value up to £9.5.2, illustrated by the furniture owned by Elijah Nichols at his death: three bedsteads, eight chairs and seventeen black chairs, one chest, one chest
with drawers, one case of drawers, two plain tables, one table, and
two round tables. The inference is that this group of people chose
to buy locally made furniture that was available to everyone, but that
they were not as constrained by price. Therefore, they purchased more
chairs; more of them could afford the more intricate and expensive
storage pieces; and they seemed to own tables whose value indicated
larger size or better quality wood than those with less personal
property. Significantly, only two definite references indicated any-
thing other than local furniture: the japanned chests of drawers.
But both of these references described the same piece of furniture
since one of the chests was listed in the 1743 inventory of Joseph
Goreham and the other in the inventory of his son, Joseph Goreham, Jr.,
who died later in 1743. Since japanned chests were made in Boston
from 1710 until 1750, this chest seems to indicate that some people in
Stratford were aware of the current taste of the leading American city
and possessed the means to keep up with it if they chose. The
uniqueness of this reference, however, demonstrates that the people of
Stratford usually chose not to.

In general the references from this period point out the
conservative homogeneity of taste. Most chairs were the turned,
slat-backed variety that began to appear in inventories as early as
the first five years of the eighteenth century and which timelessly
remained popular through the close of the eighteenth century. "Black
chairs," a generic term which subsumed the more descriptive names of
different traditions such as "cross slat," "2, 3, or 4 back," "rail
"crown chair" and "straight back chair," continued to be made into the 1780s as shown by their relative prices. As late as the early nineteenth century, black chairs were still assigned the relatively high value of 3s apiece. However, the first appearance of "old black chairs" at this same time also signified the beginning of the decline of the black-chair tradition. While the people with large estates in the 1740s tended to own just black chairs, those with smaller estates owned old ancestral furniture and also "white chairs," whose minimal value indicated a very basic and very plain chair. The inventories of the 1740s also foreshadowed the beginning of the townspeople's preference for "cases of drawers" and "dressing tables." The former was owned by a member of each estate group, a significant statistic considering its high cost. A new case of drawers cost between £5 and £9, while those in the inventories had an appraised value that ranged from £1 to £5. The desk with drawers, as distinguished from the earlier writing desk which was only a box with a slanted lid, sometimes on a stand, also made its first appearance in this group of inventories.

1760-1764

Fifty-nine per cent of the people whose inventories were recorded from 1760 through 1764 had personal property valued at less than £100. Furniture was listed in twenty-five of these thirty-three inventories with an average value of £2:5:9, a slight increase from the average of the same category twenty years earlier. Similarities between the two time periods were also reflected in the average amount
of furniture owned by someone in the later period. The estate of James Leavenworth - typical in regard to quantity and value of furniture - could just as easily have been recorded twenty years before its actual date of 1763. Its contents included one bedstead, four chairs, one great chair, two chests, and two tables. Yet the few chairs that received specific descriptions in this group of inventories indicated that changes were occurring. Although black and slat-back chairs still constituted a majority of the identifiable chairs and although cheap white chairs and old leather-backed chairs continued to be owned by these less wealthy people, the presence of "york chairs" demonstrates the acceptance of elements of the Queen Anne style in Stratford. In the early 1750s the Stratford cabinetmakers must have begun to produce their own version of the turner's Queen Anne chair that originated in New York City, since york chairs were first mentioned in the inventory of Samuel Beard in 1754. A large number of cases of drawers and the references to two desks also demonstrate the growing propensity for such expensive storage pieces to supplement the ever-popular chest.

The group with moderate property also seemed affected very little by the passage of twenty years. The seventeen people whose average estate fell between £100 and £299 possessed furniture which had an average value of £7:8:10, a 10s increase over the average of their earlier economic peers that can be attributed to a few more chairs per person and to the increased number of plain chests. The furniture that belonged to Ebenezer Sherman, which would have been an
even more accurate reflection of the typical distribution of furniture had he owned six fewer chairs and one additional plain chest and table, nevertheless serves as a good indication of the average amount of furniture owned by someone with moderate property at this time. His inventory, recorded in 1764, listed three bedsteads, twenty-one chairs, one great chair, one chest, one case of drawers and dressing table, and two tables. Unfortunately for present-day furniture historians, the estate appraisers from this time period were unusually ambiguous in their listing of furniture - they hardly ever described it. One cane chair, a relict from earlier in the century, was the only specified chair that was not black or white. It is possible that some of the black chairs from these inventories referred to the "crown chair," a local version of the Boston leather chair that was made in Stratford from about 1725 until 1785 and which began to appear in inventories in the 1750s and continued to be mentioned through the first decade of the nineteenth century. The growing popularity of case furniture, especially cases of drawers, parallels the taste demonstrated by the people with less personal property.

Similar numerical and stylistic changes occurred among the people of this time period who owned personal estate valued in excess of £300. The greater average value of their household furniture can be attributed to an ever increasing number of chairs and tables. While many of the seating forms such as "black chairs," "slat-back chairs," and the inexpensive "white chairs" appeared in earlier inventories, other types of chairs were more fully described or were newly

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introduced. Some black chairs were described as "crown chairs," and some chairs with two, three, or four slats were stained red with Spanish brown and logically referred to as "red chairs." Just as the people with inventories of medium value demonstrated one adaptation of the Queen Anne style, those with larger estates revealed their stylistic awareness through the ownership of the "crooked-back" chair, a form derived from the crooked-back export chairs produced in Boston from 1724 onwards. First mentioned in the 1748 inventory of Joseph Prince and quite numerous in the inventories of the last four decades of the eighteenth century, these chairs were usually made from cherry and had seats woven of flag, although maple frames and cloth and leather seats were also used. The ownership of "6 Crook’d Back Chairs & 1 Round Backt Great Chair £2:5:0" by Joseph Tomlinson in 1777 suggests an additional period term for these Queen Anne chairs. This possibility is further heightened since round-top chairs had similar values to crooked-back chairs and were mentioned in inventories that did not use the term "crooked-back." The households of the large estates of this period averaged six tables each. Some of these were inexpensive stands or small tea tables, and slightly fewer were larger or made from more expensive woods such as cherry or black walnut. The inventory of James Dunlop typifies the quantity and growing diversity of styles that was characteristic of this segment of the population: one bedstead, two chairs, one great chair, twelve black chairs, twelve crooked-back chairs, six white chairs, four red chairs, one chest of drawers, two desks, two round tables, and one stand.
On the surface, the inventories of the 1760s seem to show the coexistence of tradition and change with the acceptance of the Queen Anne style. Yet, if the chairs found in old Stratford families are an accurate means of measurement, the residual style remained dominant in spite of the emergence of a new one. York chairs and crooked-back chairs, both strongly based upon traditional early eighteenth-century prototypes, demonstrate this dominance. The York chair was structurally a turned chair with a few of the latest motifs, specifically the arched crest rail and the vase splat, grafted onto it (Figure 2). The crooked-back chair employed the latest features on its rear legs and back posts, yet its front remained essentially an early eighteenth-century chair with turned front posts, turned front stretcher, and "Spanish" feet (Figures 7-10). The people of Stratford readily adopted certain features of the Queen Anne style, but rejected others such as cabriole chair legs or compass seats. This selectivity did not result from the limited buying power of a less wealthy clientele. The increasing popularity of cases of drawers and desks as storage forms, even among people with small estates, indicated that the people of Stratford were willing to purchase expensive furniture. When he died in 1761 at age sixty-eight, David Judson owned such recent and expensive pieces of furniture as "1 Time piece Clock £8, 1 black Walnut Desk £2" in addition to such traditional forms as "2 blk Chairs 5/, 2 blk Chairs 3/, 2 blk Chairs 2/," and such inherited furniture as "4 Leath? Chairs 12/ and Carved Cupboard £1." The potential purchasing power of such patrons
precludes the possibility that conservative taste for furniture in Stratford was a product of limited economic means.

1780-1784

The inhabitants of Stratford who had personal property valued at less than £100 in the early 1780s enjoyed greater amounts of furniture than their peers from twenty years earlier. Despite the increase in average value of total furniture possessions from £2:5:9 to £4:3:5, taste for furniture remained consistent. People still owned many black chairs (some of which may have been crown chairs), chairs specified as crown chairs, and also slat-back and york chairs which were colored red. Two new chair types can be noted. The first was the "kitchen chair" whose low price suggests either a new chair with simple construction and decoration or an old form with a new name. Probably named for their location in a back room into which visitors rarely ventured, kitchen chairs must have replaced the white chair as the most basic seating form, although both terms were used at this time. Another chair variety, the "fiddleback chair," appeared for the first time in 1777. This was apparently the New York term for what Stratford people called "york chairs," for an Albany chairmaker pictured such a chair and mentioned "Fiddle-Back" chairs in an advertisement in the April 10, 1797, Albany Chronicle. The term could have been brought across Long Island Sound by the refugees who fled from Long Island and New York during the Revolution, but Abner Curtiss's ownership of both "6 York Chairs £1:4:0" and "6 fiddle Backd Chairs £1:10:0" in 1780 raises doubts about such an explanation.
Most likely fiddleback and york chairs shared a similar overall structure, but differed in their crest rails, the former having more of a swept eared crest rail and the latter having more of a yoke crest rail (Figures 3-5). This seems the most credible explanation of a fiddleback chair since the term appeared in Long Island and Stratford inventories at about the same time, when the Chippendale style had gained some sort of a foothold in these areas. The great number of cases of drawers in this group of inventories reflects an increased preference for case furniture; and their high values, indicative of fairly recent manufacture, point out the inhabitants' ability to purchase expensive furniture. Representative of the furniture in low value inventories of the 1780s was that in the estate of Elizabeth Beers, who owned two bedsteads, two chairs, four black chairs, four white chairs, one great chair, one case of drawers, two chests, two small tables, and one large square one.

As the previous time periods indicated, the greatest difference among estate categories in the same era was in the quantity of furniture. The total value of furniture owned by the fourteen people with moderate personal property averaged £11:12:1 and can be attributed to such a numerical increase. This group owned twice as many sitting, storage, and table forms as those with smaller estates. Many stylistically familiar forms, such as black chairs, crown chairs, slat chairs, white chairs, crooked-back chairs, and york chairs, were listed in these inventories, as were the newer kitchen and fiddleback chairs. One new type of chair, referred to as a "joiners chair,"
appeared in the inventory of Abijah Nichols. However, since its price of 7s was the equivalent of a crooked-back chair and since the rear posts, splat, shoe, and crest rail of a crooked-back chair were all joined, joiners' chairs were probably just another term for crooked-back chairs. Two other unusual references indicate some of the available forms that did not gain a great deal of popularity: the easy chair and the couch. Apparently most customers in Stratford did not wish to own either form, but rather consistently paid the highest price for a case of drawers or a desk. People of moderate estates who had inventories recorded in the 1780s also owned a large number of dressing tables and round tables. The furniture owned by Isaac Peet at his death reflects the taste of his time: six bedsteads, four old chairs, six fiddleback chairs, eight crooked-back chairs, one chest, one case of drawers, one dressing table, one desk, one square table, two round tables, and one stand.

The large estates of the 1780s listed similar furniture. The only unusual reference from these four inventories concerns the "upright back chairs." Straight-back chairs also appeared during the 1770s and 1780s; but indistinguishable prices, which ranged from 2s to 7s a chair, make it difficult to assign "upright chair" to a certain style. In all likelihood it probably described a crown chair or another variety of turned chair with straight rear stiles. This group of inventories also included the first reference to a "dining table" and a "kitchen table." The price of the former was equal to many of the earlier round and leafed tables and, therefore, must have only been
a terminological change that signified a specialization of function. The kitchen table, like the kitchen chair, was an inexpensive form that was relegated to the back of the house. The typical distribution of furniture forms for the four inventories of this group is best shown through the estate of James Lewis, who owned, at his death, two bedsteads, six black chairs, six slat-back chairs, two great chairs, six crooked-back chairs, three chests, one desk, one case of drawers, two round tables, one square table, and one stand.  

The inventories of the 1780s, in general, were closely parallel to those of the 1760s in terms of styles and numerical differentiation between estate groups. The same types of chairs were still in vogue, and the only distinctive new form, the fiddleback chair, was probably only a york chair with adjustments to its crest rail and its splat. Again, as in the 1760s, the selective taste of the people of Stratford was indicated by the infrequent mention of certain forms. Neither the easy chair nor the couch attained popularity at this time or later. All the Stratford inventories through 1820 revealed only six references to easy chairs and six to couches or sofas. Yet, it was not that the price was restrictive, for people of all levels owned cases of drawers with values that equaled or exceeded those of easy chairs or couches.

It might seem logical that both the advanced age of those who had estates appraised and the patterns of estate distribution may have had a major influence upon the conservative furniture taste of the
town. However, a correlation between forms of furniture and the ages of their owners minimizes the importance of these two factors. Although Stratford couples inherited and purchased much furniture at the time of their marriage, they continued to buy pieces of furniture during their lifetimes. Some of the older men did not continue to buy the same old forms with which they grew up, but often owned one of the first recorded examples of new furniture forms. However, all of this new furniture was heavily indebted to earlier traditional styles. When Joseph Prince died in 1748 at the age of fifty-three, he not only owned "13 Banester back Chairs £5;4:0," but also "6 crooked back Chairs £7:10:0," the earliest reference to that type of chair. The 1758 inventory of Joseph Blackleach, age sixty-two, listed "6 New Fashion york chairs 24/5." When he died in 1777 in his sixty-second year, John Brooks was having "Cringe Back Black Walnut Chairs" made. Younger men continued to buy traditional forms as proved by the ownership of "6 black chairs @4/6" by James Lewis, who died in 1780 at the age of thirty-nine. Although age and patterns of distribution probably contributed to the increased amounts of furniture in the inventories of the 1780s, these few examples of purchasing patterns indicate that the conservatism of the town was well ingrained in the minds of its inhabitants.

1800-1804

In the inventories from 1800-1804, the forty people with personal property valued less than £100 owned many familiar examples of seating furniture: black chairs, crooked- or round-top chairs,
crown chairs, fiddleback chairs, red chairs, white chairs, and kitchen chairs. In addition to this eclectic group, two new forms appeared by this time: the rocking chair and the Windsor. Rocking chairs were first mentioned in an inventory of 1803 and showed up sporadically in following inventories.\textsuperscript{32} The 1787 inventory of Isaac Hubbell lists the first Windsor chair in Stratford, but they began to appear very regularly after this date.\textsuperscript{33} Since Windsor chairs in Stratford were predominantly painted green, they were also referred to as "green chairs." The inventories also described Windsor chairs that were painted blue, black, yellow, or black with gilt, and others with arms or elbows.\textsuperscript{34} A look at the storage forms shows that cases of drawers were still the most popular, and their relatively high prices meant that they were still being made. The bureau first appeared in this era, but it was probably only a synonym for chest of drawers, not a new form. Although each form was not fully described, the furniture of John Selby demonstrates the ample amount of furniture owned by people with small estates: one bedstead, ten chairs, two great chairs, two old chests, one case of drawers, one cherry table, and one kitchen table.\textsuperscript{35}

People of this period with moderate estates owned a similar range of chairs; but also owned several expensive cherry and mahogany chairs whose relative value separates them from the normal crooked-back chair, yet was not high enough to suggest chairs in the most recent neoclassical style. Since the first reference to such highly valued chairs was the "6 Cringle Back Black Walnut Chairs" valued at £1 apiece
in John Brooks's inventory of 1777, it is very possible that the more expensive mahogany and cherry chairs in the inventories of the early nineteenth century were also of the pierced splat Chippendale style that "cringle back" connotes.  

Cases of drawers continued to dominate the taste for storage forms, but three examples of a new form, the bookcase and desk, also appeared. After its first mention in 1787, this form appeared only seven more times in all the inventories through 1820, and thus never seemed to gain the popularity of plain desks or cases of drawers. Several new forms of tables also appeared during this time period. The increasing use of the term "dining table" implies that this form served a specific function. More important were references to two other tables of specialized use: the breakfast and card tables. One person, James Hoyt, owned all four card tables and one of the two breakfast tables. He was the only person whose inventory survives that liked these forms, for the sixteen years of inventories after his death did not include any other examples. The quick acceptance of the Windsor chair - Boston inventories did not list them frequently until the mid-1770s - and the rejection of the card and breakfast table forms further prove that the people of Stratford were conscious of the current fashion, but did not accept all of it.

Although the average value of furniture owned by people with large estates was lower than that of people with moderate personal property, there were few differences between them in regard to forms. A comparison of the furniture owned by William Brooks with that of
Joseph Thompson reveals slight variations in quantity of objects, but few differences in forms. Each inventory had many bedsteads, a set of eight more recent chairs mixed in with much older chairs, two case pieces, one of which was a highly valued case of drawers, and tables of differing sizes and values. The main difference between the two inventories was that Brooks owned a couch.40

Several forms of furniture which one would expect to find in inventories from the early nineteenth century did not appear. A few of the mahogany chairs may have been in the classical style, but are not indicated as such. In fact, in all the inventories up through 1820, two references to "fancy chairs," a seating form one would expect to be popular in Stratford because of its simple form, were the only indications of a neoclassical style in chairs.41 The presence of a mere four sideboards demonstrates a similar distaste for the neoclassical style in storage forms.42 In other towns such as New Haven, Fairfield, and Litchfield the sideboard established itself as the most popular storage form for the parlors of early nineteenth-century houses.43 In Stratford this distinction belonged to the case of drawers which continued to be used in the parlor and the bed chamber. This form's dominance was so complete that there was only one reference to a chest-on-chest, a seemingly more practical piece of furniture, in all the Stratford inventories.44 The two references to breakfast tables and card tables further document the lack of success of the neoclassical style. Rather, the people seemed to prefer square, circular, or leafed tables which could serve a variety of functions.
In summary, the inventories point out the pervasiveness through time and class of the selective furniture taste of the townspeople of Stratford. The quantity of furniture may have drawn distinctions between people of different estate sizes, but the style of the pieces of furniture seemed to remain consistently homogeneous through classes of each time period. Even though they were aware of the latest fashion, as shown by the isolated references to such furniture as japanned chests, cringle-back chairs, card tables, and breakfast tables; and even though they possessed enough purchasing power to own cases of drawers, an expensive piece of furniture that an increasing number of people were able to afford, the people of Stratford chose not to use their wealth to keep up with current fashion. The few references to easy chairs, couches, and desks and bookcases, and the very few to chests-on-chests, sideboards, neoclassical chairs, card tables, and breakfast tables suggest that some sort of an aesthetic filter operated in Stratford. This screen allowed certain fashionable details like crest rails or splats, or even such simple forms of the latest fashion as Windsors to be incorporated into the Stratford style, a style which was classless and neither urban nor rural, but rather the style of one particular community of people.
CHAPTER III
The Makers and Their Furniture

Since the conservative furniture taste of eighteenth-century Stratford cannot be attributed to either limited wealth or a lack of stylistic awareness, the skill of the local cabinetmakers may be called into question. Was the local craftsman, who supposedly lacked the sophisticated training of his urban counterpart, able to produce only simple furniture or furniture that distorted the latest fashion? In order to explore this possibility one must first identify the craftsmen and then look at the furniture produced by them.

The examination of probate records for lists of woodworking tools, unfinished furniture, and shops, and the study of account books for references to furniture-making uncovered a number of important Stratford joiners, as the records of the time referred to these craftsmen. Although turners and joiners like John Gilbert and Joseph Trowbridge worked in Stratford at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries, the study of the eighteenth-century cabinetmaking tradition, especially the period after 1740 on which this paper focuses, must begin with the arrival of two English trained cabinetmakers: Thomas Salmon from Chippenham, Wiltshire, before 1719, and Samuel French from Bradford Abbas, Dorsetshire, in
1715. Unfortunately the dearth of studies dealing with English middle class and country furniture makes it impossible at this time to identify the styles they brought with them, but it seems inevitable that they greatly influenced later Stratford cabinetmakers.

Samuel French, called a joiner in the town records, was making furniture in Stratford as early as 1718, when he made "a chest of drawers" worth £3:14:0 and a table worth £1:7:0 for John Coe. How long French continued to make furniture is not known, but the few tools in his inventory indicate that French was not active in the trade at his death in 1763. More is known about Thomas Salmon, who was also referred to as a joiner in deeds and his will and whose shop was well-equipped with joiners' and turners' tools. He most likely introduced the crown chair tradition that remained popular in Stratford from 1725 until about 1785. Since Salmon died in 1749, the persistence of the identical turned vocabulary on the rear post of Stratford crown chairs, which can be described as baluster-ball-column, may seem puzzling; but the inventories of two of his sons, Richard and Ephraim, reveal that they were also woodworkers and suggest that they carried on the tradition. Richard, who died five years after his father, owned many files, a number of planes and chisels, but no turning tools. Thus it is hard to say whether he merely helped out in the family shop, or was primarily a carpenter. In any case Ephraim, who did not die until 1778, owned considerably more planes and other tools than his father and most likely took charge of the Salmon shop. His lathe, turning tools, and a "chair wimble" indicate that he was
capable of continuing the crown chair tradition. Coupled with the conservative taste of the Stratford people, this family tradition may explain the large number of surviving Stratford crown chairs which display only minor stylistic differences.

Josiah Hubbell, a joiner who helped build the flank galleries for the town meeting house in 1715, was the father of another family of woodworkers. Two of his sons, Ebenezer and Josiah, Jr., and one grandson, Silas, may have been the most skillful cabinetmakers in town according to the evidence in account books and inventories. Unfortunately no inventories were recorded for any of them, and no documentable furniture by them is presently known. The earliest reference to the Hubbells as cabinetmakers occurred in the account book of Henry Curtiss, a tailor, to whom Ebenezer sold "one drassing Tabell £2, one fall Tabell £1:10:0, a black wernot Tabell £2, and 6 Chares @6/ pies £1:16:0" in 1763. In spite of his advancing age Ebenezer must have remained involved in the family business in some way for in 1790, at age sixty-four, he bought "Cheritry timber for chairs" from John Ebenezer Coe; and in 1802, at age seventy-six, he sold Lewis Burritt "Six chairs @7/ £2:2:0, one great Chare 12/." Josiah Hubbell, Jr., probably worked with his brother. Prosper Wetmore bought one easy chair from Josiah in 1794, and Josiah, in turn, purchased escutcheons and screws from him.
 Ebenezer's son, Silas, must have apprenticed with his father and uncle. In 1775, at the age of twenty-three, Silas sold a desk to John Ebenezer Coe, who hauled "Cherry tree timber" to Silas in 1783. From this timber, Silas sawed up "Chear post, two set of Table Legs, one set of Draws Legs, Seaven plank for Chear backs, Stands feet" and a little wood for bowls and chairs, all for "his own use." In 1788 Silas also made a simple chest worth 10s for Thomas Burritt, a weaver. In spite of these individual references, at least two, if not all three of the Hubbells, may have been working in the same shop since the 1777 inventory of Ebenezer's brother-in-law, John Brooks, has a listing of "New furniture at Hubbells." The descriptions of this furniture indicate an active shop of skilled craftsmen: "1 Case Black Walnut Draws £8:10:0, 6 Cringle Back d° Chairs @20/ £6, 1 great Chair £1:5:0."  

Another cabinetmaker, Brewster Dayton, who came from Brookhaven, Long Island, in 1755, was making furniture in Stratford in 1762, when Henry Curtiss bought "one Case of Drawes £5:12:0, one Round Tabell £1:6:0, one ditto 8/, 6 Chares £3, 6 Ditto £1:16:0, 6 Ditto £1." Three cases of drawers with chalk signatures indicating that they were made by Dayton have survived (Figures 22-24). They show an affinity with cases of drawers from Boston and the North Shore region of Massachusetts in such details as the "corkscrew" finials, the flattened-arch skirt, the squareness of the legs, and the style of carving evident in the shell. Perhaps Dayton trained there or with someone who did. Dayton's inventory, dated 1797, described a well-equipped shop with
two benches, a lathe, and many planes. His numerous tools and the quality of his signed pieces indicate that he could probably have produced chairs with cabriole legs and joined construction throughout; but the inclusion of flags, chair rounds, chair slats, and red chairs suggest that his customers preferred him to produce turned chairs.

The only other piece of documented Stratford furniture is the case of drawers made by Eli Lewis in 1784 for his niece, Helen Lewis, on the occasion of her marriage to Thaddeus Birdsey (Figure 25). Although Lewis did not sign the case of drawers himself, Helen Lewis Birdsey's great-granddaughter wrote the history of the piece of furniture on the side of a drawer. Since all the dates and names are historically correct and since Lewis's inventory included a lathe and cabinetmaking tools, it seems reasonable to attribute the piece of furniture to him. The similarities of its construction when compared with the three Brewster Dayton pieces of furniture imply that Lewis received his training from Dayton in Stratford. A cherry Windsor chair that has descended in the same family as the case of drawers may also have been made by Lewis since he owned a lathe, but the attribution is not nearly so strong (Figure 32).

What does the furniture made by these craftsmen look like? Other than the crown chair and a few related types, the furniture of eighteenth-century Stratford has received little scholarly attention. A comparison of the furniture still owned by old Stratford families with that in local historical societies and other cultural institutions

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has resulted in the discovery of much Stratford furniture and a
clearer picture of the several different cabinetmaking traditions that
prevailed there in the eighteenth century. These traditions include
crown chairs, york and fiddleback chairs, crooked-back chairs,
"Spanish" footed case furniture, and cases of drawers. The study of
the evolution, or lack of evolution, of these traditions during
periods of stylistic pressure makes it possible to view and understand
Stratford furniture on its own terms.

In his recent work, Robert Trent has identified Thomas Salmon
as the probable originator of the crown chair tradition and has
isolated the consistent rear post turned vocabulary of baluster-ball-
column of the Stratford style crown chair (Figure 1). By arranging
surviving chairs in a series, Trent showed how the style underwent
few changes from the progenitor of the tradition - probably made
between 1725 and 1735 - through later versions, which he thought dated
no later than 1785. These modifications consisted only of an extra
reel added to the front post under the hand grip, the use of several
different types of stretchers, and the use of several different crest
rails. The conspicuous absence of many alternative forms like the
Durands' yoke back red chairs, the large number of surviving crown
chairs, and the lack of significant stylistic drift or clubbing in the
turnings which one expects as forms pass through additional hands
attest to the strength of the tradition.¹⁸ The discovery that Salmon's
sons followed their father's calling and the conservative taste of the
town help to explain the long lasting consistency of the Stratford
style until 1780. The longevity of this tradition is also manifest in the appraised values of crown chairs in the later inventories of this study. Values of four or five shillings apiece in the 1780s and in 1800 imply chairs of fairly recent manufacture.19 With the death of Ephraim Salmon in 1778 and the growing popularity of crooked-back, York, and fiddleback chairs, the crown chairs finally bowed out.

A second turned chair tradition in eighteenth-century Stratford included York and fiddleback chairs. The first reference to York chairs in Stratford occurred in an inventory recorded in 1754. The listing of "6 New Fashion York chairs" in the inventory of Joseph Blackleach in 1758 provided additional proof that such chairs were being made by the 1750s.20 This chair (Figure 2), owned by the descendents of Ruth Judson Stiles, was probably made between 1750 and 1760 and shows how the local craftsmen interpreted the "Queen Anne" style on their own terms. They accepted the yoke crest rail and vase shaped banister of the New York prototype, but rejected the ball-urn-column-ball-stop vocabulary of the rear post, the spayed pseudo-cabriole legs, and the pad feet. Whereas the Durand family of turners in Milford derived their back post ornament from the New York chairs, the Stratford craftsmen who made York chairs developed their own vocabulary which consisted of a long attenuated baluster with a ring near the top surmounted by a stop.21 The gentle arch of the crest rail served to unite the framing curves of the slender balusters with the central curves of the broad banister and resulted in a composition displaying harmony and contrast.
Within fifteen years the basic York chair form underwent several alterations caused by the popularity of the Boston turners' answer to the "Queen Anne" style - the crooked-back chair. Some Stratford turners discarded the New York-inspired banister and crest rail and added a narrower banister and a saddled crest rail such as on this chair (Figure 3), whose pointed ears date it between 1765 and 1775. Whereas the front posts of the York chairs continued above the seat and were decorated with rings, the front posts of the newer chairs terminated at seat blocks which sat upon a baluster and conical stop element. Although the rear posts, lower front posts, and stretchers remained the same as in the earlier York chairs, these Boston-influenced turned chairs were probably referred to as "fiddleback chairs," a term which, like the chairs themselves, appears about twenty years after the first mention of York chairs. A second fiddleback (Figure 4), made perhaps ten years later, exhibits the same overall design, but the baluster on its rear posts has a more columnar profile.

The rear posts on fiddlebacks made after 1780 can be described more accurately as "columns." Other new details from this period include a three-bowed crest rail with rounded ears and tapered feet (Figure 5). The result was a highly eclectic chair: its tall, upright form reflects the early eighteenth-century popular taste; its banister, front posts, and front stretcher endured from the "Queen Anne" style turned chair; the crest rail was adapted from the "Chippendale style"; and the tapered feet and columnar rear post bespoke the current
neoclassical taste. One innovative turner even utilized Windsor spindles and a "Hepplewhite" crest rail in his design (Figures 6). Fiddleback chairs continued to be made many years after 1800 in Stratford and surrounding towns. Some turners used the yolk crest rail and other older features, but the abstraction of such elements as the rear posts and the elimination of the lower ring on the front post betray the later manufacture of these chairs.\textsuperscript{22}

Although first mentioned as early as 1747, crooked-back chairs, or "round-back chairs" as they were also called, probably began to be made in Stratford in the 1760s since they appeared in the inventories with growing frequency in the late 1760s. Their great number implies that several cabinetmakers' shops in Stratford must have produced them, an hypothesis born out by the variety of turnings on chairs still in local families. Most Stratford crooked-back chairs shared such common features as a front leg whose elements consisted of carved foot-block-baluster-block-baluster-stop; one low rectangular stretcher on each side; and a tripartite front stretcher. Within these parameters there was room for much variation, especially in the turned elements, as shown by a chair that descended in the Hawley family (Figure 7) and one that Henry Hammond Taylor bought in Trumbull, formerly Unity Parish, Stratford (Figure 8). A comparison of these two chairs reveals a similar overall design, but also glaring differences in the carved feet, the baluster turnings of the front posts, and the front stretcher.
Similarities among several other crooked-back chairs define the work of one particular shop and permit a study of the traditions within it. The distinguishing features of its chairs include a squarish carved foot whose two flutes, on each of the outside facets of the foot, are cut near the edge thereby producing a broad middle "toe"; one rectangular stretcher on each side and one in the rear; front posts whose elements consist of carved foot-block-compressed baluster-block-elongated baluster-conical stop; front stretchers which consist of a conical stop leading to a central design composed of an ovoid-reel-ring-reel-ovoid combination; a chamfer on the inside of the rear leg below the seat; an ogee molding run across the bottom of the banister shoe with a molding plane; and a back whose profile is more bowed than ogee.

The balanced proportions and delicate feeling of the baluster turnings of this chair identify it as among the first examples by this particular shop (Figure 9). Its crest rail, banister, and overall form may exhibit some similarities with the Boston type of crooked-back chair, but the Stratford cabinetmaker produced a quite different design. Instead of an ogee back, he preferred more of a bowed back. He simplified the front surface of the back by discarding the carved molding and plumage that characterized the back posts and crest rail of the Boston style. Instead he used flat-surfaced posts and a broad, shallow saddle on the crest rail in order to emphasize the lines of the chair, an emphasis made more effective by the chamfering on the backs of the posts. Whereas chairs of the Boston tradition show a
clearly defined ring below each baluster of their front legs, the Stratford cabinetmaker incorporated the ring into the block element. Further evidence of refinement is the use of one rectangular stretcher on each side rather than the Boston turned chair practice of two turned ones on each side. These adjustments resulted in a plain, but aesthetically pleasing chair whose stretchers give it more of the appearance of a joiner's chair.23

A second chair, probably made within five years of the first one, shares the same elements below the banister shoe, but differs above it (Figure 10). The splayed rear posts, rounded rather than chamfered on the back sides, show the influence of the "Chippendale" style; and the crest rail and banister, close in feeling to those of the york chairs, may be the result of experimentation on the part of the maker. He may have been dissatisfied with the visual effect of the Boston type crest rail on top of the splayed posts, and therefore used a york type crest.

The four side chairs and one armchair from the Captain John Brooks house demonstrate a third crest rail variety used by this shop (Figures 11-12). The "Chippendale" style of the three-bowed crest rail with rounded ears, also seen on local fiddleback chairs, and the slight clubbing of the vases and ovoids indicate that these chairs were probably made between 1770 and 1780. Although these crooked-back chairs, like the earlier ones, demonstrate a contrast between a
fashionable back and more traditional front elements, one is struck by the feeling that the maker of these chairs had a fine eye for refined designs and the skill to execute them well.

This intuition about the maker's skills in design and technique is proven true by a comparison of the Brooks chairs with three side chairs and one armchair that belonged to Nathan Birdsey McEwen (Figures 13-14). The almost identical crest rail, particularly the small projections on the inside of the ear which appear on no other Stratford chairs, suggest that all were made by the same maker. The only difference between the two crest rails are the two additional projections between the arches of the McEwen ones. These projections, intended to produce the same visual effect as the foliate volutes on Philadelphia examples of the same time period, the pierced Gothic splat, and even the rounded front corner blocks, consisting of two pieces of ash with a vertical grain, endow the chair with the pleasing appearance of an uncarved Philadelphia chair.\textsuperscript{24} The beautiful serpentine curve of the arm and the graceful sweep of its support also bespeak the fine eye and execution of the maker. When viewed with the crooked-back chairs from the same shop, the McEwen chairs serve to emphasize the skill and versatility that allowed the maker to produce successful pieces of furniture which combined traditional and fashionable elements in a plain, conservative, yet visually attractive manner.
Just as "Spanish" feet continued to be preferred on crooked-back chairs, they also enjoyed a parallel popular usage on case furniture, especially dressing tables. More accurately the period term for this favored foot was probably "carved foot," as suggested by the mention of "6 Chairs Carvd feet" in the 1790 inventory of Jonathan Edwards. Distinct from the more animalistic claw feet of some Boston case pieces made between 1730 and 1750 and from the "scroll" feet with a prominent collar above the ankle that appeared on some Philadelphia area case pieces also made in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the Stratford carved foot took on its own abstract character. It featured a square base, a broad middle toe between two thinner outer toes articulated by two flutes, and a long gentle slope to the toe that stopped, as did the flutes, where the thin ankle began. The analysis of several pieces of case furniture with these carved feet, specifically in regard to the handling of the foot and the construction of the case, implies that at least three makers produced case furniture with such feet.

The characteristics of work from the earliest shop are the broadening side toes on each foot, the wide unlapped thumbnail moldings on the edges of the drawer fronts, and the drawer construction in which drawer bottoms run through the side and are sandwiched in place by applied runners. Such features can be found on two related cases of drawers, one at the Wallingford Historical Society (Figure 15) and one privately owned (Figure 16). The Wallingford chest was originally even more similar to the privately owned one, but its skirt was cut
off sometime in the early twentieth century. The common proportions, carved feet, drawer construction, and other details strongly suggest that the two cases of drawers were made by the same craftsman, who only varied the woods he used. In the Wallingford chest he used yellow birch as a primary wood, oak for drawer dividers, and oak, tulip, and white pine for drawer construction. In the other one he used cherry for the exterior and tulip for the interior. The latter piece of furniture was given to Daniel Shelton and Mary French when they were married in 1758, according to family tradition. Assuming this history to be accurate, these two cases of drawers were probably made sometime before 1758. A dressing table which has some restoration to its feet is at the Henry Ford Museum and manifests a similar handling of the carving and the same drawer construction (Figure 17). However, it has several features that may signify a slightly later date of manufacture, perhaps between 1755 and 1765. The squareness of the feet is more clearly defined with the addition of a rib molding along the inner edges of the feet, the knees are more rounded, the legs possess more of a curve, and inlay, rather than paint or carving, has been employed to decorate the birch surface. That similar dressing tables with the same pleasing design and proportions have been attributed to Boston evidences the skill and success of its maker.²⁷

A second school also employed a rib molding along the inside of the base of the foot, but the uniform thinness of the side toes and the less rounded, spade-shaped middle toe distinguish this tradition. A dressing table owned by Jonathan Edwards, Jr. (Figure 18), valued at
24s in his 1790 inventory, was among the earlier examples with such a foot. The bead around the drawer fronts, the line inlay, and the use of few keepers in the dovetailing of the drawer sides place its date of manufacture somewhere between 1750 and 1765. Like the Ford dressing table of the same period, the proportions, the use of inlay to unify the whole piece, and the clear articulation of the feet signify another skilled cabinetmaker.

A dressing table made for the Coe family by another cabinetmaker perhaps twenty years later shows this second variety of carved foot in its mature phase (Figure 19). Like the Brooks chairs, this dressing table serves as an excellent example of a Stratford cabinetmaker's ability to synthesize traditional motifs and fashionable forms in order to produce a visually appealing, yet simple piece of furniture. In this example the maker has blended carved feet and a skirt design that had been fashionable earlier in the century with the mid-century form of a crooked-leg, scrolled-knee dressing table. Another dressing table (Figure 20), from the Ruth Judson Stiles family, has a similar overall design and shares the same drawer construction in which the bottom of the larger drawers consist of three glued pieces of wood with grain perpendicular to the front. The Stiles dressing table was probably made about ten years after the Coe example since its legs are slightly lighter. The carved foot was not restricted to chairs, cases of drawers, and dressing tables, as shown by a maple bedstead that was owned in the Blakeman family (Figure 21). From the frame up this is a standard example of a pencil post field bedstead.
made between 1780 and 1820, but the squared cabriole legs and the
carved feet demonstrate the continued popularity of these feet even
in the face of the neoclassical styles. 29

As the possible dates of the crooked-back chairs and dressing
tables indicate, the "Queen Anne" style in furniture forms prevailed
in Stratford during the entire second half of the eighteenth century.
The cabinetmakers used isolated motifs of past or current styles upon
these basic forms, but never in quantity or in such a way as to obscure
the visual impact of the sharp outline or flat facade of the object.
Nowhere is this preference made clearer than in the case of drawers,
whose prestige as the costliest piece of furniture that many people
owned would lead one to expect it to embody the latest styles and
ornament. In Stratford, however, this did not seem to be the case.
Luckily, of all the cases of drawers in private families and local
cultural institutions, the four that can be assigned specific dates
and attributed to certain cabinetmakers are, for the most part,
representative of the Stratford case furniture tradition.

A case of drawers, made by Brewster Dayton in 1775, bespeaks
the emphasis upon outline and upon a rich, but flat surface (Figure 22).
The squarish cross section of the knees, the straightness of the legs,
and the flattened-arch skirt clearly and simply define the object's
space and give it a monumental look. This horizontality is balanced
by the vertical mass of the upper facade and the arrangement of the
brasses, and results in a solid, rather than ponderous piece of
furniture. With only the mid-molding, cornice molding, single fan, and shallow niche disrupting the front plane, the chest also adheres to the aesthetic of a relatively flat facade. The use of a single fan with convex, rather than concave, ribs emphasizes this point. A constructional feature, the applied strip over the front edge of the sides to conceal the groove into which the drawer dividers were slid, also serves to preserve the flatness and linearity by preventing any oddly angled seams or surface blemishes caused by exposed drawer divider dovetails.

Another case of drawers (Figure 23) made by Dayton nine years later has an identical lower case; but its upper case has a "crown head," as broken scroll pediments were referred to in eighteenth-century Stratford. In spite of the addition of this crown, Dayton's design preserved the balance of vertical and horizontal forces without sacrificing the flatness of the facade. To counteract the verticality of the crown, Dayton emphasized the plain expanse of the area immediately below it by placing the circular cut-outs high up, thereby increasing the surface area of the face of the pediment. He also used a three-drawer arrangement in the uppermost drawer row; but, unlike the typical Boston practice of repeating the lower central drawer motif in the upper central drawer, Dayton left the upper one plain. Nor did Dayton highlight the verticality of the crown with rosettes at the upper ends of the cornice, a practice that achieved great popularity in other parts of Connecticut. A third signed Dayton chest (Figure 24), also made in 1784, varies from its contemporary only by
the inclusion of scrolls behind the knees, in keeping with the predominant "Queen Anne" style since many chairs of that style have such scrolls. Similar treatment of the crown and upper case is also evident in the work of Dayton's probable apprentice, Eli Lewis, whose case of drawers of 1784 proves the strength of Dayton's total design (Figure 25). Lewis carved a shell that was slightly deeper than Dayton's fan, but he retained Dayton's proportions and used similar legs and skirt to give his chest the same flatness and harmony that Dayton's work demonstrates.

Although most Stratford case furniture has the Boston type of flattened-arch skirt seen in the preceding four examples, several have a double ogee skirt with a carved central shell, a variety of skirt seen on case pieces from the New York, New London, Rhode Island, and Salem areas. This dressing table (Figure 26), whose legs, knees, and drawer dovetails suggest the work of Brewster Dayton, has a tradition of being made as a wedding gift for Nathan McEwen and Abiah Wilcockson in 1769, a history confirmed by the eighteenth-century chalk inscription on the lower central drawer that reads "Maj. Nathan McEwen 1769." The same skirt, with a slightly larger shell, was used in this "married" piece of furniture that was created from parts of two different authentic cases of drawers: the upper section was probably made by Brewster Dayton because of the similarities in drawer construction to his signed furniture; and the lower section, whose knees, legs, and shell indicate a maker other than Dayton, has drawers that were made in the twentieth century, but is otherwise authentic (Figure 27). Such
a curvilinear skirt did not affect the facade or outline of the object. The carving of the shell on the skirt rather than on the central lower drawer only emphasized the flatness of its surface. The Stratford cabinetmakers also seemed to favor a small, semi-circular shell instead of the larger and deeper shells that dangled between the ogee elements of Rhode Island and New York skirts. The use of this smaller, more exactly defined shell allowed the Stratford cabinetmakers to use such a double ogee skirt while still producing solidly proportioned case furniture with very little ornament.

By looking at these examples of Stratford case furniture several conclusions can be reached. Most explicitly, the cabinet-makers possessed enough versatility to produce a variety of forms, all of which conformed to a certain aesthetic. Brewster Dayton's work shows similarities with the flattened-arch skirts and "corkscrew" finials of Boston furniture, the square knees of Salem cabriole legs, and the double ogee skirts of Rhode Island examples; yet he combined these motifs in a way which was neither slavish imitation nor misunderstood distortion. He seemed to incorporate these motifs within a simple style that was determined by his clientele. More implicitly the lack of rosettes, fielded panels in the pediment, ball-and-claw feet, or pilasters along the front edge of the upper case represent a conscious rejection of ostentatious decoration on the part of the consumer. Dayton's handling of the pad foot and ankle and his carving
suggest that he was capable of producing such ornament, but his use of a single fan or shell, a practice followed by all Stratford cabinet-makers, bespeaks the ultimate force of the selectively conservative taste.

Information from craftsmen's biographies and the evidence derived from pieces of furniture that can be attributed to the Stratford area illustrate the same dominance of the residual style implied by the inventories. And just as the inventories reveal that it was neither economics nor cultural lag that produced this conservative taste, the biographies and surviving furniture indicate that neither was it due to any lack of workmanship on the part of the cabinet-makers. Thomas Salmon and his sons must have continued making the same crown chair product because the public continued to demand it. If demand had slackened, the Salmons were competent to alter their design; and the surviving chairs would show more experimentation, like the Durand chairs. Even though the quality of Brewster Dayton's cases of drawers suggests that he could make a joined "Queen Anne" chair with finely shaped pad feet, he continued to produce rush-seated fiddleback and crooked-back chairs because that was what his patrons wanted. The furniture listed in John Brooks's inventory of 1777 revealed that the Hubbell family was also capable of making very fine and stylish furniture, yet the other account book references to the Hubbells record their making chairs whose prices suggest that they were flag-seated, crooked-back chairs. The crooked-back chair tradition, including the Brooks and McEwen chairs, demonstrated that
one shop could produce well-balanced, pleasing chairs in a variety of styles. Equally fine statements of the Stratford tradition include the Windsor fiddleback, the Coe dressing table, and the Brewster Dayton case of drawers with scrolled knees, to single out a few. The surviving Stratford furniture from the last half of the eighteenth century manifested a simplified and restrained decorative style that made eclectic use of past and present styles, a concern with sharply defined outlines that was typical of the "Queen Anne" aesthetic, and an eye towards harmonious proportions that balanced verticals and horizontal.

The well-executed consistency with which these design principles were followed characterizes the Stratford taste for furniture as selectively conservative and its cabinetmakers as skilled conservatives.
CONCLUSION

Since selective conservatism among Stratford consumers cannot be explained by a lack of cultural awareness, an inability or unwillingness to acquire expensive pieces of furniture, or a lack of skilled cabinetmakers, one must search elsewhere for possible explanations. Physical isolation, which seemed to play an important role in the conservative cabinetmaking traditions of the Dominy family in East Hampton, Long Island, does not apply to Stratford. Location on Long Island Sound, between Fairfield and New Haven, provided access to the New England-New York shipping lanes, while the Boston Post Road, the major overland route between New York and Boston, passed directly through town. However, some sort of a self-imposed mental isolation, of which furniture taste was a manifestation, operated in Stratford. The cause of this mentalité can be traced largely to the inter-relationship of two forces: the community ethos and the role of land.

As shown earlier, the bartering agricultural economy and the lack of specie combined with the ultimate strength of kinship and proximity to spin a communal web around the town of Stratford that forced the people of that community to look inward upon themselves and depend on each other for existence. Consequently, they devoted most of their attention to local affairs and relationships with their
relatives and neighbors and turned their backs on the outside world. Within this face-to-face agricultural community, land rather than material possessions denoted status and wealth. Land served as the basis of life for the present and as insurance in the future: it provided sustenance; enough of it would result in a surplus of animals or food supplies which in turn could be used to purchase other items by barter; it maintained the parents' authority within the family; and it eventually allowed a father to set up his sons with farms of their own and thereby guaranteed the continuance of the family name in the town.

The impersonality and capital-based economy of a mercantile urban environment where material possessions were used to express wealth or status contrasted with the communal sense and land-based economy in such a rural town as Stratford. In a mobile society where it is impossible to know everyone, furniture was an integral component of the physical setting which provided information about the owner "to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and they expect of him." Just as furniture was a prop in this social presentation, so was the cabinetmaker simply a service specialist who worked "in the construction, repair, and maintenance of the show their clients maintain before other people." In a face-to-face rural community, where a person's actions were seen and judged by family, kin, friends, and neighbors, there was little need for such a setting since everyone knew each other and since land, not personal possessions, denoted status. In Stratford this lack of
concern for personal presentation through furniture resulted in a passivity towards new furniture styles. The inhabitants seemed content to own old forms or furniture with the feeling of old forms. George Kubler pointed out the strength of such a preference in The Shape of Time: "When the industrial designer discovers a new shape to satisfy an old need, his difficulty is to find enough buyers for the new shape among people who already own satisfactory old forms."

Another difference between the urban environment and Stratford involved the cabinetmakers who produced these old forms. More than a member of the production crew in charge of props, the Stratford cabinetmaker, through kinship, propinquity, and the barter system, was an important member of the social and economic chains that defined the community, and, therefore, was subject to the same mentalité.

Other reasons undoubtedly contributed to the selective conservative taste in Stratford, but the importance of land and the sense of community seem to be the strongest. The force of these factors also suggests that the attitudes that produced Stratford's furniture taste were inextricably tied with the economic, political, and religious processes. In such a face-to-face community, William Williams noted that "physical proximity and the need for economic co-operation provide the broad positive conditions within which personal selection operates."

In Stratford communal introspection inseminated a conditioned conservatism that pervaded all life processes and especially exerted a visible influence upon the personal selection and rejection of furniture. Thus the selective conservatism
of taste for furniture was a manifestation of the cultural matrix that operated in Stratford and has permitted a fuller and deeper understanding of the extent and causes of the hegemonic in Stratford during the last sixty years of the eighteenth century.

To conclude and to suggest possible future directions, this study will enlarge its focus with the intention that such a broad perspective may permit an understanding of Stratford's role in western Connecticut. Although, as previously suggested, the town was overshadowed by Fairfield to the west and New Haven to the east, it may have had some importance and influence further upriver to the north, especially since the first settlers of Newtown in 1717 included many Stratford people, and since Woodbury, settled in 1673, was originally a Stratford plantation. By the time of the Revolution the towns of Newtown, Woodbury, and Southbury, an offshoot of Woodbury, were politically independent towns, yet the names of many of their inhabitants indicated that they were branches of Stratford families and their furniture showed some similarities with Stratford examples.

The presence of fiddleback chairs in western Connecticut and on Long Island has led to much confusion in the attribution of these chairs to certain areas. The cultural connections between Stratford and Woodbury have only increased this difficulty, as shown in the attribution of a chair owned by the New Haven Colony Historical Society that was recently published as a Stratford type (Figure 28).
The overall design and feeling of the elements are similar to the Stratford fiddlebacks; but the different turnings, splat design, rear posts, and crest rail indicate another tradition. A set of crooked-back chairs that descended in the Benjamin Stiles family of Southbury (Figure 29) share the exact same crest rail, splat, front posts, and front stretcher, and suggest that the New Haven Colony Historical Society's fiddleback was made in the Woodbury/Southbury area. The finials of the Eli Lewis case of drawers (Figure 25), urns with threaded flames, apparently influenced cabinetmakers to the north for similar finials appear on case pieces with Newtown and Woodbury histories. Most striking of all is a desk, once owned by Captain John Brooks, with a carved shell on the bottom drawer and a concave base molding to match (Figure 30). Its constructional similarities with other Stratford case furniture, especially a desk owned by his uncle Abijah (Figure 31), and the similarity between its shell and the one on the married case of drawers (Figure 27) document this desk as a piece of Stratford furniture. In the past, however, the use of such a deeply carved undulating shell in the bottom drawer of a desk, chest-on-chest, or secretary had always been considered a stylistic trait of the Booth family of cabinetmakers who worked in Newtown and Woodbury from 1764 until 1806. The supposed Booth furniture, like the other furniture of the area, has many similarities to Stratford furniture; but they do vary in their decorative finish.
with the use of ball-and-claw feet and the heavy use of such ornament as rosettes, pilasters, "snakeskin carving" on the knees, and multiple carved shells on one piece of furniture.

There are many possible interpretations for the appearance of these stylistic similarities: that bits of the Stratford style were transmitted northward by the kinship network; that some actual pieces of Stratford furniture were taken northward and inspired the local cabinetmakers to make similar furniture, but with their own touches on it; or that some Newtown or Woodbury cabinetmakers had been sent to train in Stratford, because of the reputation of that town's cabinetmakers, and then returned to their home towns to practice their trades. In any case the hegemonic at work in Stratford, at the mouth of the Housatonic River, also seemed to exert some cultural influence upon the rest of the Housatonic River valley. Just as goods could be shipped upriver, so could ideas, especially with the assistance of a kinship network. Perhaps the Housatonic River valley will join the Connecticut River valley and the Thames River valley as yet another river-oriented cultural region in eighteenth-century Connecticut.
FOOTNOTES

Introduction

1. Kenneth Ames explored the concept of folk art in Beyond Necessity: Art in the Folk Tradition (Winterthur, Delaware: The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1977). His essay "The Paradox of Folk Art" and the annotated bibliography point out the number of recent important studies of folk artifacts.


3. Methodologies similar to Focillon's paradigm have been adopted by recent folklorists and decorative arts historians, but these studies employ new terminology. In Folk Housing in Middle Virginia (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1975), Henry Glassie described his intense "synchronic" analysis of the individual houses, followed by a "diachronic" study of the housing styles in the part of Virginia that he studied. Because of Glassie's influence, the terms "synchronic" and "diachronic" have become key words in the jargon of material culture scholars. Synchronic and diachronic study of seventeenth-century joined furniture can be found in Robert B. St. George's "Style and Structure in the Joinery of Dedham and Medfield, Massachusetts, 1635-1685" in American Furniture and Its Makers: Winterthur Portfolio 13, edited by Ian M. G. Quimby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 1-46.


5. Glassie, Folk Housing in Middle Virginia, especially pp. 8-12.


7. Trent, pp. 92-93.

8. For a good summary of the American Colonial community studies and their value, see J. M. Bumsted and J. T. Lemon, "New Approaches in Early American Studies: The Local Community in New England," Histoire Sociale/Social History, 2 (November 1968): 98-112. This does not cover the most recent works such as Michael Zuckerman's Peaceable Kingdoms (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., Norton Library


10John Demos, A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Colonial Plymouth (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). Even in this study, material culture was used only as illustrative evidence. It received its own chapter, but the objects themselves did not provide any new ideas for the theories Demos had previously developed from the written documents. The use of objects as primary evidence and as a source of ideas in historical studies was urged by Cary Carson in "Doing History with Material Culture" in Material Culture and the Study of American Life, edited by Ian M. G. Quimby (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978), pp. 41-64.

11For the purpose of this study mentalité is defined as the basic underlying cultural attitude of the community. Such an outlook was the product of mental, emotional, and ideological aspects of its society. This is a workable definition derived from James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalité in Pre-Industrial America," William and Mary Quarterly, Vol. XXXV, No. 1 (January 1978): 3-32. Raymond Williams, in Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 108-114, explained the far-reaching influence of the hegemonic within his discussion of the Marxian theory of culture. A slightly longer, and perhaps easier to follow, discussion appeared in his Culture and Society, 1780-1950 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 313-338.

12William H. Wilcoxson illustrated the parish boundaries and described their formation in his History of Stratford, Connecticut (Stratford: The Stratford Tercentenary Commission, 1939), pp. 264, 651-667.

13Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, pp. 121-127.


James Deetz discussed the biases of surviving artifactual evidence in *In Small Things Forgotten* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977), pp. 6-7, 93. Deetz was also of the opinion that surviving objects are often the richer or more unique examples of their culture.

Chapter I

1Samuel Orcutt, A History of the Old Town of Stratford and the City of Bridgeport (New Haven: Fairfield County Historical Society, 1886), pp. 89-90.


3Orcutt, pp. 168, 282; Edward M. Cook, Jr., The Fathers of the Towns (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 201, pointed out that Stratford's seventy-six square miles made it the largest town in Fairfield County.

4These population figures were computed by taking the number of taxables in Stratford, as published in Evarts B. Greene and Virginia Harrington, American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 53-58, and multiplying this figure by 4.5 as suggested by Cook, p. 193.


7Richard L. Bushman, in the preface to From Puritan to Yankee (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1970), explained that his study described the evolution of Connecticut society from a traditional one to one with a new social order.

8Orcutt, p. 293, wrote that these three built warehouses in the village.

9The difference between the mean and median values of personal estate as an index of commercialization was suggested in Main, "The Distribution of Property in Colonial Connecticut," p. 76. For the specific values, see Appendix A.

10Cook, p. 201.

11See the account books of Henry Curtiss (MSS in the Stratford Historical Society, Stratford, Connecticut), Vol. II (1749-1783), p. 57; of Joseph Shelton (MSS in the Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut), one volume (1728-1789), p. 30; and of an
anonymous shopkeeper in Ripton (MSS in the Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut), one volume (1772-1772). Other account books consulted are listed in the bibliography.

12 Johnson wrote about the shortage of money in Stratford in the 1760s, as mentioned in Oscar Zeichner, Connecticut's Years of Controversy (Williamsburg, Virginia: The Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1949), pp. 59, 81.


15 The figures presented here and in Appendix 3 were derived from the Stratford Town Records; J. Hammond Trumbull and Charles Hoadley, eds., The Public Records of Connecticut, Vols. 4-15 (Hartford, Connecticut: Case, Lockwood and Brainard, 1868-1890); Clifford Shipton, Sibley's Harvard Graduates, Vols. 4-17 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1933-1975); and Franklin B. Dexter, Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College with Annals of the College History, three volumes (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1885-1912). They were then substituted into Cook's methodology as presented in pp. 37-42, 53-62.

16 Charles Grant discussed the influence of ability and conditioned conservatism in the election of town leaders in Democracy in the Connecticut Frontier Town of Kent (New York: Columbia University Press, Norton Library Paperback, 1972), pp. 141-167. Michael Zucker-man dealt with the principles and practices of a communal consensus in eighteenth-century Massachusetts towns in Peaceable Kingdoms. He was of the opinion that "the quest for consensus found its ultimate locus in the town meetings" and that oligarchy did not exist in Massachusetts. See pp. 187-219.

17 Cook, pp. 159-163.


19 Bushman, p. 263.

20 Reports of persecution were reported by the members of the Church of England in Stratford in 1710. See Francis Hawks and William Stevens Perry, Documentary History of the Protestant Episcopal Church (New York: James Pott, 1863), Vol. I, p. 44. In School of the
Richard Warch stated that the threat of the Anglicans caused Connecticut to become even more of a closed society.


22 Ibid., pp. 395-397.

23 Orcutt, pp. 347-349.

24 Steiner, pp. 381, 385-386.


26 In addition to Waters's observations on Guilford, see Steiner, p. 372, for the patterns of Anglican officeholding in Guilford.

27 Waters, p. 133.

28 Ibid., p. 134; Trent, pp. 57-59, 60-61, 75-76.

29 The 1742 inventory of Daniel Holmes, Fairfield District Probate Court Records, Vol. 9, pp. 62-64, listed "Chene ware 6/.

30 The earliest specific reference to creamware was the "1 Dozen Cream Coloured plates 6/, 1/2 Doz Small d° 4/6, 1 Cream Coloured platter 2/" in the inventory of Dr. Agur Tomlinson, Fairfield District Probate Court Records, Vol. 20, pp. 83-95.

31 Marley Brown, "Ceramics from Plymouth, 1621-1800: The Documentary Record" in Ceramics in America, edited by Ian M. G. Quimby (Charlottesville, Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1973), pp. 41-74. Population data on Plymouth can be found in Greene and Harrington, p. 34.

32 Ledlie Laughlin hypothesized that the softness of pewter permitted an average life in usage of only five to ten years: Pewter in America (Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Publishers, 1966), p. 5.

33 The average weight and breakdown by form was obtained from the pewter holdings of Zacheriah Mead, Fairfield District Probate Court Records, Vol. 14, pp. 227-230, and Samuel Beach, Fairfield District Probate Court Records, Vol. 14, pp. 393-395.

The total values of personal estate do not include the values of furniture so that the reasoning about furniture ownership derived from the inventory analysis will not be circular. The terms "large estate," "moderate estate," and "small estate" were felt to be the most objective divisions. Although Jackson Turner Main suggested the use of the period terms "better sort," "middling sort," and "lower sort," these terms have value judgments attached to them. Main's terms were too full of status connotations for use in this study, which describes a common rejection of stylish furniture, irregardless of "class." For Main's analysis of colonial society, see The Social Structure of Revolutionary America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965) and Connecticut Society in the Era of the American Revolution (Hartford: The American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Connecticut, 1977).

For the purpose of accurate comparison, all prices were adjusted to the common value of 1760 prices. The adjustment figure of a 60% subtraction for the values of the 1740-1744 period is in Main, "The Distribution of Property in Colonial Connecticut," p. 101. The period 1760-1764 retained its values, while the later periods were calculated to be a 10% subtraction for 1780-1784 and a 25% subtraction for 1800-1804, a period which also necessitated the conversion of all dollar values to the English system. Once again this conversion (1 pence = 3/5 of 1 cent) was based upon the relative price of cows and oxen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Cows</th>
<th>Yoke of oxen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1740-1744</td>
<td>£10</td>
<td>£26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760-1764</td>
<td>£3'4'0</td>
<td>£11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1780-1784</td>
<td>£3'17'0</td>
<td>£13'15'0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800-1804</td>
<td>£4'8'0</td>
<td>£15'10'0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data of the inventory analysis can be found in Appendix C.

Fairfield District Probate Court Records, Vol. 9, pp. 265-266.

Ibid., pp. 157-159.

Ibid., pp. 138-140.

Ibid., pp. 119-122, 173-175. Joseph Goreham, Sr., originally of Barnstable, had arrived in Stratford by 1715 when he married Abigail Lockwood. It seems probable that he did not purchase the japanned chest of drawers until he was in Stratford. For genealogical information on the Goreham family, see Orcutt, pp. 1208, 1351.

The best articles on American japanned furniture are Dean A. Fales, Jr., "Boston Japanned Furniture," in Walter Muir Whitehill, Brock Jobe, and Jonathan Fairbanks, eds., Boston Furniture of the Eighteenth Century (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts,
In 1784 Justus Edwards had "6 Blk Chairs" appraised at 24s, and John Mallie owned "6 Blk Chairs 21/". The 1800 inventory of Benjamin Lewis included "3 Common black Chairs @3/ 9/" while Dorothy Wheeler owned "Three black Chairs 9/" in 1801: Stratford District Probate Court Records, Vol. 1, pp. 120-121, 115-115a; Docket No. 1200; and Vol. 4, p. 62.

These are period terms used in eighteenth-century Stratford inventories. "Cases of drawers" describe what are currently called highboys, and "dressing tables" refer to lowboys. Wherever possible in this study, period terminology has been used; and, in places where such language may be unfamiliar, footnotes explain the terms.


He owned "6 york chairs £9," the high price caused by the inflation of that time.


Trent, p. 44, maintained that black chairs could have included some crown chairs.


The estate of Joseph Prince listed "6 Crocked backt Chairs £7"10"0" in 1748; Fairfield District Probate Court Records, Vol. 9, pp. 508-511.

At his death Edward Burroughs owned "6 fiddle back Chairs 18/". Fairfield District Probate Court Records, Vol. 19, pp. 400-404.


Dean Failey stated that the term fiddleback was used on Long Island for the last two decades of the eighteenth century. See *Long Island is My Nation* (Setauket, New York: Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities, 1976), pp. 81-84.


Fairfield District Probate Court Records, Vol. 22, pp. 13-16.

Stratford District Probate Court Records, Vol. 1, pp. 116-117.

Fairfield District Probate Court Records, Vol. 20, pp. 218-225.


Olive Kirtland listed "1 rocking chair 2/" a price which suggests an old chair. Stratford District Probate Court Records, Docket No. 1156.


Isaac Hubbell also owned blue Windsors, Samuel Hubbell (Docket No. 2236) owned yellow and black Windsors, and Abijah Hawley (Docket No. 867) owned black gilt Windsors.


The first desk with bookcase was listed in the inventory of Isaac Hubbell. Stratford District Probate Court Records, Vol. 1, pp. 265-266.

Ibid., Docket No. 993. Hoyt's brother was a merchant in New York and probably provided James with his mahogany furniture.


Thompson's inventory can be found in Docket No. 1800 of the Stratford District Probate Court Records and William Brooks in Docket No. 369.

The inventories of Robert Walker (Ibid., Vol. 6, pp. 43-50) and Joseph Sterling Edwards (Ibid., Docket No. 708) listed fancy chairs.

According to the inventories, only Robert Walker (Ibid., Vol. 6, pp. 43-51), William S. Johnson (Docket No. 1101), Abijah Hawley (Docket No. 867), and Abijah McEwen (Docket No. 1258) owned sideboards.

Information on New Haven and Fairfield is based upon the author's reading of these towns' probate records of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Information on Litchfield was supplied by Cynthia Baldwin, who wrote on the Litchfield cabinet-maker, Silas Cheney: "The Emergence of Large Scale Production in the Furniture Making Shop of Silas E. Cheney of Litchfield, Connecticut, 1799-1821" (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1979).

The sole chest-on-chest belonged to Joel Curtiss (Stratford District Probate Court Records, Docket No. 594).
Chapter III

1John Gilbert, listed as a turner on page 397 of the second volume of Stratford land records, left considerable turning and woodworking tools when he died in 1709 (Fairfield District Probate Court Records, Vol. 5, p. 159). Joseph Trowbridge, who died in Stratford in 1715, owned a great number of planes and other joiners' tools (Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 313). Trent, on p. 39, pointed out that Salmon was in Stratford by 1719, when he married Sarah Jeans. Samuel French left England in 1714, arrived in Boston on June 4, 1715, was warned out within ten days, and ended up in Stratford: Mansfield Joseph French, Ancestors and Descendants of Samuel French, the Joiner (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1940), pp. 38-46; Ethel Stanwood Boston, Immigrants to New England, 1700-1775 (Salem, Massachusetts: The Essex Institute, 1931), p. 64.


3Fairfield District Probate Court Records, Docket No. 2277.

4Ibid., Vol. 10, pp. 34-36; Trent, pp. 39-49.

5Ibid., Vol. 11, pp. 133-136.


10Ledger of Prosper Wetmore (1794-1798), pp. 42, 55.


12Account book of Thomas Burritt (1778-1813), p. 27.


17 Trent, pp. 39-49, 73-75. Different crest rails can be seen in John Kirk, *Connecticut Furniture: Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hartford: The Wadsworth Atheneum, 1967), figures 211, 212. Since even a skilled turner cannot consistently reproduce the same exact turned element, decorative arts historians have recently become interested in stylistic drift, which can be described as the inevitable change of decorative forms as they pass through time or the hands of another maker. See Trent, p. 49.


21 For typical Durand york chairs, see Forman, figures 6 and 7; Trent, figures 38-42.

22 See Trent, pp. 85-88.

23 The initial crooked-back chairs, first made in 1724 according to Brock Jobe, were much like the leather upholstered examples he illustrated. This style set the trend for about the next fifty years in Massachusetts: Brock Jobe, "The Boston Furniture Industry 1720-1740," *Boston Furniture of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 40; later examples can be found in Dean A. Fales, Jr., *The Furniture of Historic Deerfield* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1976), figures 50, 52, 53; and Trent, figure 31.


Examples of the Boston type of foot can be seen on the John Pimm high chest at Winterthur and on a dressing table at Deerfield: Downs, figure 188, and Fales, figure 428. For Philadelphia carved feet, see Wallace Nutting, *Furniture Treasury* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1928), figures 358, 419, 421, 422.


A similar bedstead, but with tapered straight legs, can be seen in Barry Greenlaw, *New England Furniture at Williamsburg* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1974), figure 18.

The 1768 inventory of Ebenezer Hawley listed "1 Case draws Crown head £6:10:0." The listing of "A Case of Draws High Topt £5 A Case d° flat and Low Topt £2" in the 1777 inventory of Joseph Tomlinson indicates the coexistence of flat and crown top cases of drawers: Fairfield District Probate Court Records, Vol. 16, pp. 146-151; Vol. 19, p. 292.

Conclusion


6 Kubler, p. 116.


8 Wilcoxson, pp. 169-175, 269.


10 Trent, figure 72.
For Newtown and Woodbury case pieces with such finials, see *Litchfield County Furniture, 1730-1850* (Litchfield: Litchfield County Historical Society, 1969), figure 46; Kirk, *Connecticut Furniture: Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, figure 90; Downs, figure 231.

*Litchfield County Furniture, 1730-1850*, figure 37; Downs, figure 231. For information on the Booths, Ethel Hall Bjerkoe, "The Booth Family of Newtown and Southbury, Connecticut" in Old-Time New England, Vol. XLVIII, No. 1 (Summer 1957): 8-11, remains the best source.


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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Secondary Sources - Historical


Secondary Sources - Cultural


Primary Sources


Account Books


Genealogical Sources


APPENDIX A

Wealth Distribution in Stratford Based Upon Inventory Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Total # of Inventories</th>
<th>Value of Personal Property</th>
<th>Farm Property as Function of Inventory Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740-44</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>£408:1:3</td>
<td>£229:12:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760-64</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>£127:18:3</td>
<td>£81:6:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1780-84</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>£119:6:2</td>
<td>£66:6:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800-04</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>£141:11:2</td>
<td>£70:3:6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Porcelain as Function of Inventory Value</th>
<th>Pewter</th>
<th>Silver and Plate as Function of Inventory Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Inventories Included</td>
<td>Mean Value</td>
<td>% of Inventories Included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740-44</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2/5</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760-64</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1780-84</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13/6</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800-04</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10/1</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a All average values have been adjusted to the prices of cows and oxen with the base year of 1760 (see supra, p. 75, fn. 2).

b Farm property includes animals and lands.
APPENDIX B
Stratford Substituted into Edward Cook's Indices of New England Town Types (1700-1774).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Town Founded</th>
<th>Pop. 1765-7</th>
<th>Leaders as % of Pop.</th>
<th>Terms per Leader</th>
<th>% of Terms by 5 year Men</th>
<th>% Taxes top 10%</th>
<th>Prominence Index</th>
<th>Commercial Index</th>
<th>Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stratford</td>
<td>1639</td>
<td>4606</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>7.8&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>67.7&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12.3&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Haven</td>
<td>1636</td>
<td>6690</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonington</td>
<td>1660</td>
<td>4465</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> This includes 4.3 terms per Selectman; 5.7 terms per Representative; 16.6 terms per Town Clerk; 4.5 terms per Moderator.

<sup>b</sup> Five year men comprised 33.7% of the leaders.

<sup>c</sup> This includes 7 members of the County Court; 1 member of the Supreme Court; 4 members of the Council; 7 town leaders who were college graduates.

### APPENDIX C

**Household Furniture Typology**

**1740-44**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Estates (£0-248)</th>
<th>Moderate Estates (£249-748)</th>
<th>Large Estates (£749-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total # of inventories</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% of the entire period's inventories</strong></td>
<td>56</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total # of inventories with furniture</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average value of furniture</strong></td>
<td>£5:6:9</td>
<td>£17:4:10</td>
<td>£23:2:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average value of furniture adjusted to 1760 prices</strong></td>
<td>£2:2:9</td>
<td>£6:18:0</td>
<td>£9:5:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typical household</strong></td>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Elijah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>Nichols</td>
<td>Nichols</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Bedsteads** | 26 | 19 | 16 |
| **Seating Forms** | | | |
| **Unspecified chairs** | 61 | 54 | 54 |
| **Great chairs** | 7 | 7 | 1 |
| **Turkey work chairs** | 5 | | |
| **Joint stools** | 2 | 1 | |
| **Black chairs** | 14 | 41 | 47 |
| **Slat-back black chairs** | | | 6 |
| **Black great chair** | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| **4-back black chairs** | | 16 | |
| **White chairs** | 5 | | 5 |

| **Storage Forms** | | |
| **Chests** | 24 | 12 | |
| **Wainscot chests** | 1 | | |
| **Sea chests** | 1 | | |
| **Chests with 1 drawer** | 4 | 1 | 2 |
| **Chests with 2 drawers** | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| **Chests with drawers** | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| **Chest of drawers** | 4 | | 1 |
| **Japanned chests of drawers** | | 1 | 1 |
| **Cases of drawers** | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| **Matching cases of drawers and dressing tables** | 1 | 1 | |
| **Desks** | 1 | 1 | |
| **Cupboards** | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| **Presses** | 2 | | 1 |
| **Boxes** | 8 | | |

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### Tables

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<td>Fall table</td>
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<td>Side table</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tea table</td>
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<tr>
<td> </td>
<td>Small Estates (£0-99)</td>
<td>Moderate Estates (£100-299)</td>
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<td>Total # of inventories</td>
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<td>£7:8:1</td>
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<td>Typical household</td>
<td>James Leavensworth</td>
<td>Ebenezer Sherman, Jr.</td>
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### Bedsteads

- Bedsteads: 30, 38, 19

### Seating Forms

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Type of Furniture</th>
<th>Small Estates (£0-99)</th>
<th>Moderate Estates (£100-299)</th>
<th>Large Estates (£300-)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>67</td>
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<td>Crown chairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leather-back chairs</td>
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<td>Caned chair</td>
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<td>York chairs</td>
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### Storage Forms

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<th>Large Estates (£300-)</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Dovetail chests</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chests with 1 drawer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chests with 2 drawers</td>
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<td>Chests of drawers</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Dressing tables</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matching cases of drawers &amp; dressing tables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Desks</td>
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<td>Cupboards</td>
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<td>presses</td>
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### Tables

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<td>Round tables</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oval tables</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stands</td>
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<td>Red tables</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tables with a drawer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tea table</td>
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### Clocks

| Clocks    | 1 |
1780-84

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Estates (£0-110)</th>
<th>Moderate Estates (£111-332)</th>
<th>Large Estates (£333-)</th>
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<td>£13:15:2</td>
<td>£19:18:0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average value of furniture adjusted to 1760 prices</td>
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<td>£12:7:8</td>
<td>£17:19:0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Typical household</td>
<td>Mrs. Elizabeth Beers</td>
<td>Isaac Peet</td>
<td>James Lewis</td>
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| Bedsteads                | 54                     | 36                          | 16                    |

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<td>Black great chairs</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slat-back chairs</td>
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<td>18</td>
</tr>
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<td>Crown chairs</td>
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<td>Crown great chairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kitchen chairs</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Easy chair</td>
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<td>Couch</td>
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<td>Sea chests</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dovetail chests</td>
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**Tables**

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<tr>
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<td>Dining tables</td>
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<td>Kitchen tables</td>
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**Clocks**

| Clocks | 1 |
### Total # of inventories

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Small Estates (£0-132)</th>
<th>Moderate Estates (£133-399)</th>
<th>Large Estates (£400-)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
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### % of the entire period's inventories

<table>
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<th>Large Estates (£400-)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
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### Total # of inventories with furniture

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Moderate Estates (£133-399)</th>
<th>Large Estates (£400-)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>16</td>
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### Average value of furniture

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£5:15:10</td>
<td>19:3:10</td>
<td>£13:18:8</td>
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### Average value of furniture adjusted to 1760 prices

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Moderate Estates (£133-399)</th>
<th>Large Estates (£400-)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>£4:6:11</td>
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### Typical household

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<th>William Brooks</th>
<th>Joseph Thompson</th>
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### Bedsteads

|        | 210 | 153 | 24 |

### Seating Forms

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<th>Large Estates (£400-)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Leather bottom chairs</td>
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<td>Close stools</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Easy chairs</td>
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### Storage Forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>38</th>
<th>24</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chests</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chests with 1 drawer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chests with 2 drawers</td>
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<td>Boxes</td>
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**Tables**

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<td>Leafed tables</td>
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<td>Dining tables</td>
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**Clocks**

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<td>Henry Beardsley (joiner)</td>
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<td>John Beardsley (joiner/turner)</td>
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<td>Elisha Booth (turner/carpenter)</td>
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<td>Samuel French (joiner)</td>
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<td>Daniel Turney (turner)</td>
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<table>
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<th>Years</th>
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<td>1776</td>
<td>Stratford Probate Records, Docket No. 151; Orcutt, pp. 1056, 1125, 1138; Hale Collection.</td>
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<td>1778</td>
<td>Stratford Probate Records, Docket No. 352; Orcutt, p. 517.</td>
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<td>Lewis Burritt Account Book; Orcutt, p. 1169; Hale Collection.</td>
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<td>1783</td>
<td>Stratford Probate Records, Docket No. 2777; Account Book of John Coe, p. 69; French, p. 28, 38-46; Bolton, p. 64.</td>
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<td>1785</td>
<td>Hubbell, pp. 244-249; Ledger of Prosper Wetmore, p. 42.</td>
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<td>1790</td>
<td>Fairfield Probate Records, Vol. 10, pp. 4-5; Orcutt, p. 1297; Forman, p. 1154.</td>
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APPENDIX E

Woodworkers Whose Specific Expertise Can Not Be Ascertained

Name (Dates) and References

Phineas Baldwin (1744/45-1813) - Stratford Probate Records, Docket No. 297; Orcutt, p. 1117.

Samuel Beers (1728-1799) - Stratford Probate Records, Volume 3, pp. 392-394; Hale Collection.

Edmond Booth (1705-1760) - Fairfield Probate Records, Volume 13, pp. 58-59; Orcutt, p. 1157.


Hezekiah Booth (1738/39-1764) - Fairfield Probate Records, Volume 13, p. 416; Orcutt, p. 1158.

Zachariah Booth (1721-1763) - Fairfield Probate Records, Volume 14, pp. 322-323; Orcutt, pp. 1158-1159.

Joseph Brooks (1748-1788) - Stratford Probate Records, Volume 1, pp. 325-326; Orcutt, pp. 1164-1165.

Eli Curtiss (1781-1819) - Stratford Probate Records, Docket No. 549; Hale Collection.

James Frost (1718/19-1756) - Fairfield Probate Records, Volume 11, pp. 376-379; Orcutt, p. 1205.

Stephen Frost (1747-1807) - Stratford Probate Records, Volume 5, p. 216; Hale Collection.


James Patterson (1724-1789) - Fairfield Probate Records, Volume 20, pp. 132-134; Orcutt, p. 1261.

Edmund Pendleton (?-1774) - Fairfield Probate Records, Volume 18, pp. 282-283.
Isaac Pendleton (1778-1824) -
Stratford Probate Records, Docket No. 1492; Hale Collection.

Bartholomew Sears (?-1773) -
Fairfield Probate Records, Volume 18, pp. 87-88; Orcutt, p. 1277.

James Sherman (1746-1815) -
Stratford Probate Records, Docket No. 1661; Orcutt, pp. 1288-1289.

Eli Smith (1761-1819) -
Stratford Probate Records, Docket No. 2325; Hale Collection.

Joseph Smith (?-1777) -
Fairfield Probate Records, Volume 19, pp. 379-381; Orcutt, p. 1294.

Nathan Terrill (?-1754) -
Fairfield Probate Records, Volume 11, pp. 91-93.

Jacob Wakeley (?-1760) -

Jonathan Wakeley (?-1743) -
Fairfield Probate Records, Volume 9, pp. 163-165.

Samuel Whitney (1687-1753) -
Fairfield Probate Records, Volume 10, pp. 559-560; Orcutt, p. 1345.
Figure 2: York Chair. Stratford, Connecticut, 1750-60. Maple, tulip, ash; OH: 39 3/4", SH: 17 1/4", SW: 19 1/2", SD: 14" (Privately Owned).
Figure 4: Fiddleback Chair. Stratford, Connecticut, 1770-80. Maple, tulip, ash; OH: 42 1/2", SH: 17", SW: 19 1/2", SD: 13 1/4" (Bridgeport Public Library).
Figure 5: Fiddleback Chair. Stratford, Connecticut, 1780-1800. Maple, tulip, ash; OH: 39 1/2", SH: 17", SW: 19", SD: 13 1/2" (Privately Owned).
Figure 7: Crooked-Back Chair. Stratford, Connecticut, 1760-80. Cherry, tulip, ash; OH: 45 1/2", SH: 16 1/2", SW: 18 3/4", SD: 14 1/4" (Privately Owned).
Figure 8: Crooked-Back Chair. Stratford, Connecticut, 1760-80. Cherry, tulip, ash; OH: 42", SH: 17", SM: 19 1/2", SD: 12 1/2" (Privately Owned).
Figure 9: Crooked-Back Chair. Stratford, Connecticut, 1755-65. Cherry, tulip, ash; OH: 39", SH: 16 1/2", SW: 19 1/8", SD: 14 1/2". Descended in the family of Reverend Nathan Birdsey (Stratford Historical Society).
Figure 11: Crooked-Back Chair. Stratford, Connecticut, 1765-75.
Figure 13: Cringle-Back Chair. Stratford, Connecticut, 1770-80.
Figure 16: Case of Drawers. Stratford, Connecticut, 1745-60. Cherry, tulip, yellow pine; H: 69 1/8", W: 38 1/2", D: 19 1/4" (Privately Owned).
Figure 19: Dressing Table. Stratford, Connecticut, 1770-80. Cherry, maple, tulip; H: 30 3/8", W: 30 1/8", D: 18 1/2".
Brasses are replacements (Bridgeport Museum of Art, Science, and Industry).
Figure 20: Dressing Table. Stratford, Connecticut, 1780-90. Cherry, white pine, tulip; H: 29 3/4", W: 30 1/4", D: 18 7/8". Rail over the upper drawer is missing (Privately Owned).
Figure 22: Case of Drawers, made by Brewster Dayton. Stratford, Connecticut, 1775. Cherry, tulip, yellow pine, white pine; H: 76 1/2", W: 39 1/2", D: 20 3/4". Backs of lower three drawers in the upper case are replacements (Privately Owned).
Figure 25: Case of Drawers, made by Eli Lewis. Stratford, Connecticut, 1784. Cherry, tulip, ash; H: 84 1/2", W: 40 1/2", D: 21 1/4" (Privately Owned).
Figure 26: Dressing Table, possibly by Brewster Dayton. Stratford, Connecticut, 1769. Cherry, tulip; H: 29 7/8", W: 29 7/8", D: 18 7/8" (Privately Owned).
Figure 28: Fiddleback Chair. Woodbury, Connecticut, 1770-90. Maple, ash; OH: 42 1/8", SH: 17", SW: 20 1/2", SD: 14"
(New Haven Colony Historical Society).
Figure 29: Crooked-Back Chair. Woodbury, Connecticut, 1770-90. Cherry, tulip, ash; OH: 40 1/4", SH: 17", SW: 20 1/4", SD: 13 1/2". Feet have been cut down (Privately Owned).
Figure 31: Desk, Stratford, Connecticut, 1770-90. Cherry, tulip, ash; H: 42", W: 39 7/8", D: 20" (Privately Owned).