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**TEXTILE STORAGE IN COLONIAL AMERICA, 1680-1750**

by

Susan Marie Kilpatrick

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

Spring 1998

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Trends in textile storage reveal a great deal about the importance and value of textiles in the home as well as the safe-keeping of these textiles in a piece of case furniture that made a visual statement to visitors and guests. The furniture used to protect and store textiles changed dramatically from 1680 to 1750, which affected methods of clothing storage and retrieval. In addition, the different cultural ideas brought to America by immigrants from various parts of Europe influenced the choices made regarding textile storage.

To determine methods of textile storage, an intensive survey of probate inventories took place, yielding information regarding the estate values, the appearance of textiles and storage furniture, and incidence and type of storage furniture. Other contemporary sources utilized include period domestic advice manuals, written accounts, and surviving case furniture and portraits. The four areas compared were: Suffolk County, Massachusetts; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; York County, Virginia; and New York City and its vicinity.

Throughout the period from 1680 to 1750, many changes occurred in the storage of textiles. Although people still tended to fold, rather than hang, their garments and linens, the objects in which they placed their textiles changed. While the chest remained a popular form for storage, changing little except stylistically during the time period studied, the popularity of the chest of drawers increased

dramatically. Additionally, the differences in the rate at which new forms assimilated into the homes of colonists from New England to the South is remarkable. Finally, throughout the time period studied in this thesis, 1680 to 1750, the colonists looked to their different cultural roots to determine what types of storage furniture filled their homes and how they stored the textiles themselves.

## Chapter 1

### TEXTILES AND STORAGE FURNITURE IN COLONIAL AMERICA

Throughout early American history, linens and clothing served as significant symbols of material wealth in an agrarian society. Displaying textiles in the home and on the person demonstrated wealth to friends and neighbors. In most households, however, not all textiles could be in use at one time. Therefore, it was imperative that the linens and clothing that were not in use be stored safely. One had to take into consideration creases, mold, water damage, rodents, insects, dust, dirt, discoloration, unpleasant odors, and theft, and try to prevent these problems from occurring during storage. Prevention was of critical importance as during the time period studied--1680 to 1750--as textiles were very expensive and laundry was a tedious and grueling task.<sup>1</sup> Under consideration in this thesis is one aspect of the care of textiles during this period: the storage of these items.

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<sup>1</sup> Laundry was an extremely exhausting task during this time period, requiring soap (alone difficult to manufacture), hot water, laborious scrubbing, and also arduous ironing. Although many publications describe the details of the laundry procedure, two good publications are Elizabeth Donaghy Garrett, *At Home: The American Family, 1750-1870* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1990), chapter seven; and Jane C. Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home, 1760-1860*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), pp. 130-142. While both of these publications deal with a later time period, the descriptions of laundering still apply to this thesis as the laundering process did not change substantially until the first hand-cranked washing machines became commonly utilized, well into the nineteenth century.

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, textiles were extremely expensive. When one considers all of the processes necessary to make a simple piece of cloth during that period, it is easy to understand why textiles are typically second in value only to land (and sometimes silver) in probate inventories. Cloth manufacture was a difficult process, requiring many different tools and a great deal of time. There were numerous steps one had to undertake before one could even spin thread or yarn, including procuring the fiber, then cleaning and combing it. After spinning the yarn, one had to dye the yarn to the desired color. The production of the actual cloth included preparing the loom for weaving, then the actual weaving of the cloth. After these many steps the final production of the finished goods could take place, such as cutting and sewing table and bed linens or garments.<sup>2</sup> The time and effort necessary in the productions of textiles yielded the high value placed on those textiles. Therefore, as these items were so valuable, it is important to scholars today to ponder the treatment of textiles during the period. The storage of these items, when not in use, went beyond the care of the textiles to the use of furniture within the home. The period of this thesis is an important period in the history of storage furniture as the common chest began to fall from favor and the chest of drawers became more prevalent. This is actually a drastic change in storage habits when one compares the motions of removing an object from a chest to those of removing an object from a chest of drawers. It is radically more difficult to clear off the top of a

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<sup>2</sup> For a good source of period illustrations and equipment that clearly demonstrate cloth production, see Merrimack Valley Textile Museum, *All Sorts of Good Sufficient Cloth: Linen-Making in New England, 1640-1860*, (North Andover, MA: Merrimack Valley Textile Museum, 1980), pp. 33-63.

chest, then remove several objects from the chest, and finally remove the selected object, than it is to simply pull out a drawer and remove the object. It also is indicative in American history of a colony maturing into a settled area. A chest is very easy to move from one location to another, while a chest of drawers is not.

This thesis will examine how Americans stored their linens and clothing within their homes, which rooms within the home housed textiles and storage furniture, and whether or not these storage units were on display in public areas of the house for visitors to see. As there is a great amount of change in the furniture used during the given period, it is clear that people began to require different options for storing clothing and linens. Additionally, methods of textile storage were different in the various areas of Colonial America. Influenced by people of different cultures emigrating to their areas, the South, mid-Atlantic, and New England regions of the American colonies demonstrated differing degrees of dependence on England, as well as differing financial positions. Textile storage was a dynamic, changing idea during the time period examined in this thesis, and financially important to the owner of the textiles and furniture.

### Researching Textile Storage

Researching this topic took imagination as most primary sources did not directly deal with the issue of textile storage. Instead, entry into early homes was gained “by the back door,” utilizing probate inventories from three different areas of Colonial America.

Probate inventories are amazing documents of early American homes. Simply put, an estate forced to go through probate court required a probate inventory of all of the deceased's possessions for tax or inheritance purposes and to estimate the wealth of the deceased. Neighbors or those of a similar profession of the deceased usually conducted the probate inventory. Some probate inventories are "room-by-room," listing objects by room. A small number of inventories list objects by type, such as clothing, silver, ceramics, or tools. Most are roughly room-by-room, but not clearly defined as such. When reading most of the inventories, however, one can imagine the inventory takers to be simply circling a room and listing objects as they came to them. These inventories allow the reader to glimpse the daily order of a home, and picture these interiors as they actually were.

As valuable as probate inventories are, they still have many limitations. The first limitation is perhaps the most important: not every estate went through probate. Other studies of probate inventories indicate that while incidence of probate varied widely from town to town, colony-wide approximately one-fourth to one-third of all estates did go through probate.<sup>3</sup> The wide variation of estate values in the probates surveyed indicate, however, that while not every estate went through probate, a wide economic cross-section of the estates did indeed go through the process.

Another problem is that the probate inventory of an estate only contains the property of the deceased rather than all of the property contained within the home.

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<sup>3</sup> The most complete collection on essays concerning probate inventories comes from the Dublin Seminar conference on the probate inventory. Please see Peter Benes, *Early American Probate Inventories* (Boston: Boston University Scholarly Publications, 1989).



Thus, the inventory not always lists all of the worldly goods of a family. For example, if the husband passed away, the belongings of his wife, such as clothing and perhaps some or all of her dowry, were not likely to appear in his probate inventory. Moreover, one way to lower probate taxes was to hide objects from those creating the inventories, thus affecting the inventory's list of items as well as the total value of the estate.

Finally, many different people conducted probate inventories, and thus the amount of detail varies from inventory to inventory. One inventory may simply list "trunks," while another may specify "three old trunks." Additionally, the inventories of the wealthy tend to be much more descriptive than those of the poor, probably to justify the values granted the particular items, but also because some of the items in the homes of the wealthy were new or unusual to those creating the inventory. Therefore, the numbers in this study are "at least" numbers. For example, a non-defined plural, such as "chests," was interpreted in this survey as two chests. With these limitations, therefore, a study of probate inventories can only yield broad generalizations that produce a general sketch of how people stored their valuable textiles.

For the probate inventory survey, analysis of three separate areas over time took place, yielding information regarding the appearance of storage furniture in the probate inventories. Those areas were Suffolk County, Massachusetts, which includes the city of Boston; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and York County, Virginia. The years surveyed were 1680, 1690, 1700, 1710, 1720, 1730, and 1740, or the closest approximation to these years available. Data recorded included total estate

values as well as the incidence of various types of storage furniture (see Figure A.1). A more detailed study occurred for every tenth probate, regardless of detail and/or wealth, or the lack thereof. This study included listing values for each piece of storage furniture, and listing all the linens and clothing in the inventories, with their values (see Figure A.2). Then data compiled for each year recorded the percentage of inventories that included storage furniture as well as the average number of boxes, chests, trunks, and chests of drawers per household. Unfortunately, efforts to compare the values of specific items over time only led to frustration. This was due to two reasons: the earliest price index located began in 1700, eliminating the opportunity to compare values from the seventeenth century,<sup>4</sup> and also because the inventories themselves are subjective documents. Each individual object varied in age, condition, and quality, but few inventory takers indicated such factors in the inventories. This was particularly troublesome when dealing with linens and clothing because the relatively large numbers yielded a wide variety of values and descriptions, making it difficult to determine if two items were truly comparable. The general comparison of storage furniture was a bit easier as there were fewer actual numbers in the four categories studied. But while the general values assigned to furniture appear to have held relatively steady, indicating an overall decrease in the

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<sup>4</sup> John J. McCusker wrote an article in 1991 that included useful price indices from 1700 to the present day. Although not used in this thesis, these indices allow the comparison of prices from different time periods. Please see McCusker, John J, "How Much is That in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, part 2, 1991.

value of these forms with the gradual inflation over time, direct comparison was again impossible.

Despite the limitations of probate inventories, the inventories did provide a great deal of information. By studying the inventories in the manner outlined above, perhaps we can attain a fair conception of how people stored their valuable textiles in the three regions surveyed in this thesis. Additionally, corresponding contemporary sources will reinforce the data the inventories provide.

This thesis will begin with brief remarks on the importance of textiles within the early American home, the storage options available to early Americans, and a brief look at English precedent for textile storage. Although estate inventories of the period comprise the major source of evidence for this thesis, other contemporary sources were used. These sources include period advice manuals, particularly manuals designed to advise housekeepers and servants in proper housekeeping skills, including textile related manners, and written accounts, such as diaries that describe textile consumption patterns. Other sources include surviving storage furniture, such as chests, chests of drawers, and clothespresses, and portraits that demonstrate clothing dimensions and fashions. In the chapters that follow, this thesis will examine textile storage patterns in four regions of colonial America: Boston, Philadelphia, York County, Virginia, and New York. The study of New York will not include a complete probate inventory survey as fire destroyed the probate records of the city early in this century. The final chapter of this thesis will include comparisons among the areas studied, and will present some broad conclusions.

### Textiles: Clothing, Linens, and their Care

When colonial Americans addressed the issue of textile storage, there were many physical aspects of the actual storage to consider. The ultimate goal, however, was always the same: textiles stored in a safe location and ready for use, whether immediately or at a later date. Dust was a major obstacle to this goal as it could soil and discolor textiles. Textiles stored in damp and/or unclean condition (or conditions) encouraged the problems of both mildew and insect damage. Starched garments were even more prone to insect damage since starch is a popular food for the moth grubs that cause moth damage. Additionally, textiles dyed a dark color needed to be stored away from white or lighter colored items as the dark dye could easily rub off onto a lighter colored textile. Clothing or linens stored while exposed to the light could easily fade, whites exposed to damp, stagnant air could turn yellow due to mildew and mold growth, fugitive dyes could disappear, and fabrics folded for extended periods of time could become permanently creased or even split.<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, help was not far away. The 1735 London publication of *The Gentleman's Companion: or, Tradesman's Delight*, offered advice to prevent textile damage during storage:

*Directions to keep Linen laid up without using  
from Damage for many Years*

Having washed, and well dried your Linen in the sun, fold it up, and scatter in the folding the Powder of Cedar wood or Cedar small ground,

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<sup>5</sup> Christina Walkley and Vanda Foster, *Crinolines and Crimping Irons: Victorian Clothes: How They Were Cleaned and Cared For* (London: Peter Owen, 1978), pp. 163-173. Although this book primarily deals with nineteenth-century problems, those listed above were equally prevalent in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

having first perfum'd your Chest with Storax;<sup>6</sup> by which Means, not only Dampness is prevented, but Worms or Moths, &c.

and,

*Further Directions to keep Woollen or Linen  
sweet and pleasant, as likewise from being  
damaged by Moths, Worms, &c.*

Take Orange Peels, dry them in an Oven, and beat them to a Powder, add to that Powder of Elicampane Roots, the Powder of Iris and that of Juniper, and air your Cloaths, when you lay them up, over a Fire wherein Bay-leaves are cast and burnt.<sup>7</sup>

Table linens, besides being of high monetary value, were also important as a tool for demonstrating that those within the home were well aware of the social niceties of the time. Covering the table with cloth and using napkins indicated refinement and wealth. Not using these items could reflect poorly on the individuals of the house, as indicated by Dr. Alexander Hamilton's opinion of a Susquehanna ferry operator in 1744:

whom I found att vittles with his wife and family upon a homely dish of fish . . . They desired me to eat, but I told them I had no stomach. They had no cloth upon the table, and their mess was in a dirty, deep, wooden, dish . . . They used neither knife, fork, spoon, plate, or napkin because, I suppose, they had none to use.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Storax is a type of resin used in perfumes.

<sup>7</sup> *The Gentleman's Companion: or Tradesman's Delight* (London: printed for J. Stone, 1735), pp. 30-31.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Alexander Hamilton, "The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton," in *Colonial American Travel Narratives*, ed. Wendy Martin (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 181.

It is easy for the twentieth-century reader to picture the linens of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and even easier for us to relate to folding the sheets, towels, napkins, and tablecloths as we do today. It is more difficult, however, to consider the clothing of that time period as fashions in clothing have changed dramatically.

Even though most people of the given period possessed less clothing than we do today, most did have more than one outfit and the outfits themselves could be quite complex. The portraits in Figures B.1 and B.2 demonstrate that fashionable dress could be quite bulky as well. During the time period of this thesis, the general style and silhouette of clothing changed slowly. Therefore, these portraits, both circa 1740, can serve as general models for the entire period.

The portrait of Edward Collins (see Figure B.1) clearly shows the fashionable dress for a gentleman of the time. Mr. Collins wears a shirt, ruffled shirt cuffs, a ruffled neckcloth, and a bulky coat that flares from the waist to approximately just above the knee. Although care of the shirt was likely to be relatively simple, the ruffled shirt cuffs and neckcloth would require much more attention. Whiteness was imperative in these items because this indicated the wearer was of the upper classes and not required to labor for a living. These ruffles then required very careful and difficult ironing. Storage was also a challenge because other garments or objects could crush the ruffles. The coat was even more difficult to deal with, though likely cleaned much less often as the shirt protected it from the skin, lowering the chances of

soiling. In an age before the clothes hanger,<sup>9</sup> however, storing this item without crumpling the dramatic flare must have been a challenge. Although they are not visible in this portrait, Mr. Collins undoubtedly also wears trousers, which, like the shirt, were relatively simple to store without harm as trousers easily folded without wrinkling.

The portrait of Magdalena Douw, (see Figure B.2) demonstrates the attire of women of the time period studied. Underneath her gown would be a chemise or shift, a thin, shirt-like garment worn against the skin, thus preventing her from soiling her gown. Over the chemise would be the gown, stomacher,<sup>10</sup> and in this case, what appears to be some sort of cape. The gown, much like Edward Collins' coat, is quite cumbersome and full, requiring careful storage to prevent creasing or crumpling of the wide skirt. Additionally, she is wearing shirt cuffs as well as numerous petticoats in order to give the skirt of her gown its fashionable volume. Folding most of these items required minimal effort, but folding the unwieldy petticoats and gown was a more difficult task. Additionally, the folded petticoats and gown required sufficient storage space due to their bulk and delicacy--objects placed on top of the gown in particular could easily crush it, adding to the gown's storage considerations.

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<sup>9</sup> Although invented in the early nineteenth century, the coat-hanger as we know it did not become common until the 1890s. Walkley and Foster, p. 169.

<sup>10</sup> A stomacher is: "A triangular garment reaching from neckline to waistline at centerfront, with the widest being at the top edge. It covered, or laid under the front lacing of the bodice of the gown, being pinned or attached by hoods and eyes to the front bodice." From Patricia Trautman, "Dress in Seventeenth-Century Cambridge, Massachusetts: An Inventory-Based Reconstruction," in Peter Benes, ed., *Early American Probate Inventories* (Boston: Boston University Scholarly Publications, 1989), p. 73.

Research for this thesis gave every indication that, as a rule, folding was the preferred method of storage. It is unclear whether many homes contained pegs or nails for hanging garments on the wall, though this is also a likely place for cloaks, coats, and other items in relatively constant use. Documentary and physical evidence, however, are not sufficient to suppose this to be true in the average early home. Additionally, early homes generally did not contain closets or case furniture that allowed for the hanging of clothes, as closets simply did not appear in these very early homes, and large case furniture was rather uncommon as it was expensive.

After a textile item or garment had been in storage for an extended period of time, it often became musty, stale smelling, and perhaps dirty enough to merit an additional cleaning. Hannah Glasse admonished English chamber-maids in her 1747 publication *The Servant's Directory, or House-Keeper's Companion*:

And be shure to have all her [the mistress] Linen well air'd, and every thing set very clean and nice; and when dress'd or undress'd, fold up every thing very neat, and keep all your things in their proper places, that whatever is called for, you may know where to find it in a Minute; and when she is undress'd, take a clean dry cloth and rub them very clean, then fold them smooth, and lay them in their Places, but if any spots appear on the Clothes, take them out immediately.<sup>11</sup>

*The Gentleman's Companion* included two receipts to keep clothing smelling fresh while in storage: "To Perfume Clothes" and "A pleasant Water to preserve Linnen, or any other Thing a long Time, giving it moreover a curious Scent." These receipts utilized cloves, wood of rhubarb, cedar, spike-flowers, penny royal, mace, iris

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<sup>11</sup> Hannah Glasse, *The Servant's Directory, or House-Keeper's Companion* (London: By the Author, 1760), p. 3.



powder, and white wine.<sup>12</sup> Another housekeeping advice manual was Eliza Smith's *The Compleat Housewife: or Accomplished Gentlewoman's Companion*, which included receipts to "take Mildew out of Linen," requiring the use of soap, chalk, and sunning the items on grass. Ms. Smith's volume was first published in London and reprinted in 1742 in Williamsburg, Virginia, clearly indicating the importance of English advice manuals in American homes.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the easiest and most common way to maintain sweet smelling textiles during the given period is also common today--the sachet or sweet bag. A 1615 housewifery book by Gervase Markham recommended orris [iris], rose leaves, marjoram, cloves, storax, and mace, among other things, as ingredients for a sweet bag, recommending also that the bag be made of taffeta.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps Charles II took Mr. Markham's advice as he possessed 20 sets of bags made of crimson taffeta and metal lace for his royal closets and presses.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *The Gentleman's Companion*, pp. 31, 36.

<sup>13</sup> Eliza Smith, *The Compleat Housewife: or Accomplished Gentlewoman's Companion*, 8th ed. (London: printed for J. and J. Pemberton, 1737), p. 346. The Williamsburg publication is as follows: Eliza Smith, *The Compleat Housewife: or Accomplished Gentlewoman's Companion*, collected from the fifth edition (Williamsburg, VA: William Parks, 1742), p. 228.

<sup>14</sup> Gervase Markham, *The English Housewife*, reprint edited by Michael R. Best (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986), pp. 134-135.

<sup>15</sup> Beryl Platts, "The Perfume and the Potters," *Country Life*, 2 June 1977, p. 1548.

### Storage Furniture: The English Roots to American Traditions

In England, the chest had been a standard feature in homes since medieval times, storing anything that was worth preserving, notably textile objects, money, and other valuables. The benefits of chests were many, including ease of construction, as uncomplicated as six boards nailed together (see Figure B.3 for an example of a simple chest), providing a safe place for storage, seating for the household, and ease of transport, particularly in wealthy households that moved frequently.

Similar to the chest was both the trunk and the box, two forms that appear often in the probate inventories of the period studied. The trunk, when used within the home, served essentially the same function as the chest, though probably not serving as seating for the household as many trunks had rounded lids. Outside the home, however, the trunk was also useful as a form of luggage. As the trunk was useful for travel purposes, it was usually smaller than chests and had handles on either end for carrying. The box also served as a general storage receptacle, but was significantly smaller than a chest, easily carried, and often stored on top of other storage furniture.

Although not as easily transportable, and more expensive to construct (requiring more wood, hardware, and labor), case furniture with drawers first appeared in the fifteenth century, likely in the area of Flanders or Burgundy. By the sixteenth century, the drawer was in high demand and added to all types of furniture.<sup>16</sup> The chest of drawers added a new component to storage furniture: surfaces for

---

<sup>16</sup> Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: a Contribution to anonymous history* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 274-276, 305.

display. Although the chest did permit items to reside on its top surface, to gain entry to the interior these items had to be moved. With access to the chest of drawers from the front instead of the top, items residing on the top could remain there when accessing items stored inside.

In terms of American case furniture, it has been a widely held belief that the chest of drawers evolved directly from the chest. Previously, scholars believed a chest *with* drawer (or drawers—see Figure B.4) evolved from the chest by the addition of a drawer to the bottom of the chest. The addition of another drawer, and then another, and so on, yielded the final result: a chest *of* drawers. More recently, Benno Forman determined that the chest *of* drawers actually predated the chest *with* drawers in seventeenth-century New England documents. Mr. Forman also called the chest of drawers a “mild revolution” in textile storage, from the use of boxes and chests to the more expensive case furniture with drawers. The items thus became more accessible and the option of storing out-of-season or seldom-used items in less accessible forms, such as the chest, became available. Additionally, the earliest, mid-seventeenth-century chests of drawers added a set of double doors in front of the drawers (see Figure B.5).<sup>17</sup> While documentation does not exist that states why the earliest chests of drawers had doors, it is my supposition that the purpose of the doors was two-fold: added protection from dust, insects, etc., and the need for only one lock instead of two or three (as hardware was imported and therefore expensive), in order to protect the items inside from theft. Theft was a significant concern for American colonists. In

particular, those with servants or slaves feared for the safety of their belongings as servants and slaves had easy access to the home and its contents. The high value of textiles made them a tempting target for those who needed funds or, as we will see later, absconded with them when running away from their masters. It is therefore unsurprising that newspaper advertisements specifically advertise “Newly imported . . . Chest Locks, Cupboard & Box Locks,” or “Imported from London & Bristol . . . Chest & desk locks.”<sup>18</sup>

One final form of furniture that merits discussion here is the clothespress, or press. During the period studied, the words “press” and “clothespress” were interchangeable but had two possible meanings: a large piece of storage furniture or a tool used to smooth or “press” linens and clothing (for an example of this tool, see Figure B.6). Therefore, it was impossible to consider inventory entries of the “press” or the “clothespress” as storage furniture, prohibiting compilations of probate data for this elusive piece of case furniture, though most of the objects described as presses in inventories were probably storage furniture. Fortunately for this study, inventory listings of a press or a clothespress were far less common than those of the other furniture forms recorded in this survey.

England has a long history of clothespress use, though there is evidence that Americans used the form as well. The earliest extant wardrobes in Europe date to the

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<sup>17</sup> Benno M. Forman, “The Chest of Drawers in America, 1635-1730: The Origins of the Joined Chest of Drawers,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, volume 20, number 1, Spring 1985, pp. 1, 3, 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 9 August 1739 and 13 May 1742.

beginning of the thirteenth century and were ecclesiastical in nature.<sup>19</sup> By 1625 these storage pieces were relatively common in wealthy homes in England, succeeding the chest as the main storage piece in those homes. It usually consisted of two doors behind which were pegs for the hanging of padded trunks and hose, doublets, and dresses. A drawer below stored hats and ruffs. By the late seventeenth century costume was lighter and thinner, and required folding and storage in drawers or shelves rather than pegs that could rip or puncture the lighter material. The press adapted by continuing to look as it had before on the outside, but instead of pegs inside there were drawers and shelves. The example in Figure B.7, an English clothespress dating from the early eighteenth century, is representative. Behind the doors is a removable shelf.<sup>20</sup> This type of clothespress appeared in Anglo-America as well, as the American clothespress, illustrated in Figure B.8, and dating to circa 1740-1750, indicates. We will see later that the Dutch and Germans utilized the clothespress form more so than the English, and that the Dutch and German colonists brought their own versions of the clothespress to their American settlements. These *kasten* (Dutch) and *schranken* (German) relied on sixteenth-century designs in their construction and form.<sup>21</sup>

Although presses may have been growing in importance in seventeenth-century England, estate inventories from the period reveal the continued use of the

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph T. Butler, "The Kast and the Schrank," *Art & Antiques*, January-February 1983, p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Edward T. Joy, *Getting Dressed* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1981), pp. 11-12.

chest, trunk, and even the chest of drawers. An inventory from Stondon House in 1623, for example, indicates the use of the chest and trunk for clothing storage. The “Brushinge Chamber” of Stondon House contained the following items of clothing and storage furniture:

fflower trunckes whereof two bound wth Iron, two plaine, one great fflate Chest covered wth leather . . . In one Truncke there a velvett jerkin,<sup>22</sup> a Tufftaffeta [taffeta] blacke gowne wthout ffaceinge, a velvet Cloake lyned wth tuftafeta wth two gould laces about, one other velvett Cloake lyned wth Silke Chequer worke, wth one silke and gould lace about: One other velvett Cloake lyned wth Tuff velvett wth two blacke silke laces about: one broad Cloth Cloake layd about, wth one Lace looped and buttond wth gold and Silke: a paire of hangers and girdell of goulde and Silver needell worke and a little hoode . . .<sup>23</sup>

When Sir Ralph Bankes made an inventory of the items missing from his home after the English Civil war, he included “Several Trunkes of linnen . . . Several trunkes with flaxen sheets and table linnen . . . A trunke with all sorts of fine child-bed linnen . . . Several trunkes of wearing clothes and wearing linnen,” and boxes of bed hangings and linnen in trunks and boxes “numbered and lettered from A to the letter O.”<sup>24</sup> Finally, the inventory of Ambrose Andrews of Whitechapel (England), taken on December 15, 1666, listed “one chest of drawers wth fifteen paire of shets and one

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<sup>21</sup> Butler, p. 65.

<sup>22</sup> A jerkin is a “loose coat worn over the doublet; reached to the thighs and buttoned down the front; open or slit up halfway behind and had sleeves to the wrist, with cuff. After 1620 it had a small, flat, turned-down collar.” From Trautman, p. 72.

<sup>23</sup> “An Inventorie of all the beddinge and other furniture belonginge to the severall Chambers and Lodgings of Stondon House Taken the last Daie of August Anno Dni 1623,” quoted in Sir Ambrose Heal, “A Great Country House in 1623,” *Burlington Magazine*, volume LXXXII, May 1943, pp. 108-116.

odd shete, 8 pair of pillowbeers [pillowcases], 7 table clothes, 4 dosen of napkins, 12 towells, one long damaske napkin, 9 shirts, 12 bands.”<sup>25</sup>

In the four areas studied for this thesis—Suffolk County, Massachusetts, the New York area, the Philadelphia area, and York County, Virginia—it is easy to see how the English traditions transmitted themselves quite easily to the American colonies, particularly in the use of the chest, box, trunk, and chest of drawers. New York, of course, also received a liberal dose of Dutch influence, of which we will learn more in chapter five. In addition, the Germans also influenced various areas with their own traditions, most notably Pennsylvania, but also Virginia and other areas. The traditions of these three significant cultures all valued textiles in the home, and shaped how the colonists in the different areas studied stored those textiles.

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in: Elizabeth Godfrey, *Home Life Under the Stuarts, 1603-1649* (London: Stanley Paul & Co., Ltd., 1925), pp. 284-285.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Benno M. Forman, p. 1.

## Chapter 2

### **TEXTILE STORAGE IN SUFFOLK COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS**

By 1680 much of coastal New England had been settled by the English. Although immigrants from continental Europe were also settling in New England, the English continued to be the dominant cultural presence of the region. For the purposes of this study, Suffolk County, Massachusetts, which contains the town of Boston, serves as a case study for New England. The probate inventories for this county are remarkably complete, numerous, and often detailed. The inventories also represent a cross-section of the citizens of eastern Massachusetts, including both rural and urban areas in the county. What types and quantities of storage furniture appeared in the homes of Suffolk County? How were the people of Suffolk County storing their textiles? Supplementing the data on Suffolk County will be information from sites near the Boston area, such as Essex County, Massachusetts, which includes Salem.

#### Storage Furniture Forms Used in Suffolk County

Although probate research indicates that chests were the most common form of storage furniture in 1680, with nearly two chests per household (see Figure C.1), few examples of this type of furniture have survived to the present. Most of these chests were six board chests, consisting of simply six planks of wood. Although few



of these simple chests survive to the present, Figure B.3 illustrates one rather simple chest that does survive. This example consists of six boards, the two end boards extended downward to form legs, and a lock. In addition, there is some decoration on the front, as seen in the image. Most of these simple chests, however, probably lacked even that small amount of decoration. The practice of replacing these simple chests with finer examples or more expensive forms, once a family could afford to do so, eventually relegated many of these chests to the woodpile. As with many other domestic objects, the examples that remain today were the finest and most stylish when they were new. The same is probably true for two other types of storage furniture commonly used, the trunk and the box, as few examples of these forms survive today.

A few very early examples of chests of drawers do exist from the late seventeenth century. One example is the chest of drawers shown in Figure B.9, made by the Mason-Messinger shop in Boston circa 1650-1670. A high-style, expensive chest of drawers for the time, it features intricate and decorative turned elements and five drawers of varying depths. Only one drawer, the deepest one and immediately below the two shallow drawers at the very top, has a lock, indicating some concern for the security of the items, probably including textiles, inside that particular drawer.

As styles progressed and parts of the New England community became more settled and somewhat less mobile, larger examples of case furniture became more popular. One example is the chest on stand in Figure B.10, dating to the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The chest on stand usually consisted of four or five drawers on a stand of six legs. This object was very expensive when purchased new,

and the intricate veneering and turned legs and stretchers added considerably to the cost of the piece.

Another example of a large piece of case furniture is the chest-on-chest in Figure B.11, which was made circa 1715-1725. Consisting of no fewer than ten drawers and a linen slide—located between the upper and lower cases and intended to slide out and provide a surface for setting down objects, etc.—this object is large, providing many choices for sorting textiles and other paraphernalia, and one of the earliest American examples of the form. This example was expensive because of the cost associated with such a large case piece with many drawers, but also because of the fine applied veneer and the effort made to conceal the tenth drawer, located at the very top of the chest-on-chest, above the pair of two drawers, and behind the curved molding. That hidden drawer lacks hardware, as hardware would indicate its function. A similar drawer appears above the two drawers of the English wardrobe pictured in Figure B.7, but this example does contain a lock and hardware, indicating its presence and function, but more firmly securing the contents.

The chest-on-chest in Figure B.11 was likely among the first of many chest-on-chests that occupied Boston parlors and chambers. Likewise, the chest-on-stand evolved into the high chest of drawers and by the mid-eighteenth century both forms occupied many Boston homes. Unlike England, however, Boston never particularly utilized the wardrobe form.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the clothespress became popular among the wealthy in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. Although in modern

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<sup>1</sup> J. Michael Flanigan, *American Furniture in the Kaufman Collection* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1986), p. 64.

language the words “wardrobe” and “clothespress” may seem to be synonyms, they are somewhat different in meaning. While a wardrobe is currently defined as “a piece of furniture for holding clothes, now usually a tall, upright case fitted with hooks, shelves, etc.,”<sup>2</sup> the surviving mid-eighteenth-century Boston area clothespresses are chests-on-chests with doors over the top half of the drawers. These clothespress were also called linen presses, bureaus with doors, and chest-on-chests with doors by eighteenth-century Bostonians.<sup>3</sup> These clothespresses began to appear in Boston in the 1740s, around the time when Charles Apthorp imported an English linen press to Boston that had mirrored locking doors concealing twelve drawers.<sup>4</sup> Similar to the Apthorp linen press is perhaps the first Boston clothespress, the Deblois clothespress, dating from circa 1740-1750 (see Figure B.8). Behind the locking doors of this example are six drawers, the top one mirroring the outline of the top of the clothespress. At the very top, above the doors, lies one final drawer, a very narrow, non-locking drawer. All of the lower drawers lock.

Although the primary purpose of these assorted storage pieces was the storage of textiles, they often stored other things inside as well. The estate of William

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<sup>2</sup> C. L. Barnhart, ed., *The American College Dictionary*, (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 1373.

<sup>3</sup> Edward S. Cooke, Jr., “Boston Clothespresses of the Mid-Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, volume I, 1989, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76. The Apthorp clothespress is currently in the collection of the MFA, Boston, 1971.737.

Hathorne of Salem, Massachusetts listed a “chest with severall bookes.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the estate of Thaddeus Brand of Lynn included “In a chest there, 2 pewter platters, 2s., 2 porringers, 8d., 1 chamber pott, 3s. . . . the chest, 2s.,” along with clothing and linen in the chest.<sup>6</sup>

### Textiles and Their Storage in the Home

The textiles within the home varied in both quantity and origin. Although textile production occurred on a moderate scale in New England, the limited production resulted in a heavy reliance on imports from Europe, particularly England.<sup>7</sup> Surveyors of probate inventories carefully noted when a textile item was the product of domestic production, noting that the item was “homespun” or “homemade.” Used rarely, the appearance of this notation in the first place further indicates the heavy reliance on imported textiles. An example of the words “home spunn” occurs in the inventory of Ursula Cutt, describing woolen cloth, in the fourth drawer of her chest of drawers, described later in this chapter.<sup>8</sup> Some textile production within the home, however, did occur. A study of northern New England

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<sup>5</sup> Essex probate inventory of 10 June 1681, quoted in: *The Probate Records of Essex County Massachusetts*, volume 3: 1675-1681 (Salem, MA: The Essex Institute, 1920), p. 423.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 157-158.

<sup>7</sup> Linda R. Baumgarten, “The Textile Trade in Boston, 1650-1700,” in *Arts of the Anglo-American Community in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Ian M.G. Quimby (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1975), p. 200. See this article for more information on the importation of textiles through Boston in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Additionally, this article describes the types of textiles that appear in probate inventories in the latter half of the seventeenth century.

probate inventories, taken in the period 1670 to 1730, indicates that over 40% of inventories included spinning wheels, while seven percent listed looms.<sup>9</sup> If all of those spinning wheels and looms were in use, however, less than half of the inventoried households could produce thread or yarn, and only a very few could produce cloth, hardly enough to supply a large amount of domestic textiles.

The Suffolk County inventory of Moses Paine, taken 27 December 1690, is a representative example of the amount of textiles and storage furniture a person of rather small wealth possessed. At the time of his death in 1690, Moses Paine's estate was worth £113.03.02, only 42% of the average value of the probates of that year, which was £272.13.09 7/10. Of Mr. Paine's estate, £25.17.00 (22.8%) consisted of linens and clothing. Listed together and not itemized, Mr. Paine's clothing listing was typical of many inventories of the poor in its lack of detail. The itemized listing of his linens is therefore surprising. Valued at seven shillings (0.3% of his estate), the storage furniture consisted of two old chests and worth just 1.3% of the value of his stored textiles. The listed textiles are as follows:

	[£ s d]
in wearing Cloths	6.--.--
One linnen pair of sheets, one holland pair	1.18.--
one pair of cotton sheets, one pair of linnen	1.10.00
one pair of course linnen sheets, one pair of cotton & linnen	1.--.--
one pair of small linnen sheets, one odd course sheet	--.14.--

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Forman, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "A Friendly Neighbor": Social Dimensions of Daily Work in Northern Colonial New England," *Feminist Studies* 6 (Summer 1980): 395. For more information on the appearance of spinning wheels and loom in the eighteenth-century, please see: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Wheels, Looms, and the Gender Division of Labor in Eighteenth-Century New England," *William and Mary Quarterly* LV (January 1998): 1-38.

one pair of course linnen sheets	--. 6.--
one Diaper table cloth & 9 napkins	--. 6.--
one large table cloth & 1 small one of diaper	--. 8.--
nine old linnen napkins	--. 4. 6
one pair of holland pillow beers, one pair of cotton & linnen ditto wth seamings in y	--.12.--
one pair of plain ditto pr beers, 3 linnen tableclothes	--.16.--
one diaper cupboard cloth & 2 linnen towels	--. 5.--
one linnen case for a bolster & 7 old towels	--. 4.-- <sup>10</sup>

In contrast, we can examine the inventory of Charles Morris, taken 40 years later in 1730. At the time of his death in 1730, the value of Mr. Morris's estate was £2462.19.05, well over twice the average for 1730, £933.07.10 6/10. Of that amount, £79.12.06 (3.2%) consisted of linens and clothing, and £5.05.00 (0.2%) of storage furniture, which included a chest of drawers and table, as well as two old trunks, altogether valued at only 1/16 of the value of the textiles. The listed linens and clothing were as follows:

	[£ s d]
10 pr Coarse linnen Sheets	12.--.--
3 pr & 1 odd finer Sheets	6.--.--
6 pr & 1 od linnen Ditto [illegible], 19 pillow bears	10.19. 6
3 diaper table Cloths, 18 diaper Napkins	7. 7.--
12 D <sup>o</sup> [ditto] Napkins worn, 4 old Diaper Table Cloaths	3. 4.--
1 small Blankett	--.10.--
1 blew great Coat	3.10.--
1 Cloth Suit light Colour	7.10.--
1 Gray Suit much Worn	2.10.--
1 old Duroy Suit, 2 pr of Britches	2.10.--
1 Caliminco Jackett & Britches	2.10.--
3 Stript Cotton Jacketts	1.10.--
2 flannel Wastcoats	--.10.--
1 pr Silk Stockings, 1 pr Worsted	2.--.--

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<sup>10</sup> Suffolk County, Massachusetts, Probate Court, *Records*, microfilm M-111 through M-121, Winterthur Museum Libraries (hereafter SCPR): Moses Paine probate inventory, 27 December 1690.

1 pr Boots, 1 pr Shoes, 2 Wiggs	4.10.--
9 Shirts & other Linnen	12.-- <sup>11</sup>

Very few probate inventories list textiles as completely as those of Mr. Paine and Mr. Morris. Although one inventory obviously itemized linens, the other linens and clothing, it is also clear that in sheer number the amount of textiles within the homes inventoried were similar, despite the differences in time and wealth of the two gentlemen inventoried.

The most revealing inventory discovered during research is the inventory of Ursula Cutt, of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, taken on 7 August 1694. Included in this inventory is a drawer-by-drawer inventory of a chest of drawers, which follows:

	[£ s d]
In the upper drawer, 8 pair women's glasses and one pair of mens	--.12.--
Six pair rusty Suzsors [scissors]	--. 1. 8
One pin qushing [cushion] & a Smale drawer in it Cont:	
3 old Silver Thimbles, one English halfe Crowne	--. 8. 6
Twelve doz. of Silver & gold brest Buttons	--. 6.--
Three Smale Silver Botkings [bodkins], one silver Fagg [ <i>sic</i> ]	
& a silver Spoon	--.12.--
One pair of aggett pendants	--. 6.--
Tow remnants of Ribben, Stitching and Soweing Silk & pins &tc.	3. 5.--
<i>Second drawer</i>	
One Necklace of Smale Seed perle	1. 4.--
ffower [four] gold rings	2. 5.--
One Knitt wascot [waistcoat] motheaten	--.10.--
Nine Neck handkershfs. at 15d.	--.11. 3
One Smale Canvas Table Cloth	--. 2. 6
One ditto finer	--. 6.--
Two Cambrik Aprons & five pare of Sleevs, & old Caps	
& paer old gloves	1.--. 6
<i>Therd Drawer--</i>	
One peace kenting [type of linen]	--. 1.--

<sup>11</sup> SCPR, Charles Morris probate inventory, 10 March 1730/31.

To a pcell of old worne Linning two remnants of old Silk & tow Smale Remnants Silver lace	--. 1.--
<i>Fowerth Drawer</i>	
One pound & halfe whyted Browne thred	--. 5.--
Three peecis whyte Inch, one pc ½ whyte Tape	--. 4.--
To a smale pcell old Lying	--.12.--
One looking glass	--.12.--
ffower earthen dishes, & an old pewtr pott	--. 4.--
Three pces Course Kenting	2. 3.--
ffower yds & halfe of home Spunn woolling Cloth:	
2s.6d yd £2	3. 9.--
Six remnants of Course Lying Cont. 17.7lbs	1. 2. 8
Two pair Sheets	2.10.--
Two yds. broad Lying	--. 5. 6
ffwoer [?] yds red stuff. 1sp yd & 1 yd wosted Camb[lette]	--. 6.--
Six yds. portugal Lying	8.--.--
One old Lying petticoat, One Cubboard Cloth One smale Towell	--. 4.--
Two yds whyte flaning [flannel?]	--. 3.--
One Fussted [fustian?] holland Cloak wth silver Clasps	--. 8.--
One old red blanket for a child	--. 4.--
One broad Cloth petty Coat wth silver Lace	1.10.--
One child's old Cloak Lyped wth blew Silk	--. 4.--
One yd ¼ Course Lying	--. 1. 8
One hatt & a brush	--. 3.--
One old paer boddyus [bodice?]	--. 1.--
One old blankett	--. 4.-- <sup>12</sup>

Perhaps what is most interesting about this drawer by drawer inventory is the amount and variety of both the textiles themselves and the other objects being stored with them, such as the jewelry and eating utensils. Clearly inventoried first, the smallest drawer was likely the top drawer, and thus the most accessible drawer. Could this be Ms. Cutt's own junk drawer? The fourth drawer appears to be the largest, and contained by far the most items in the form of clothing, fabric, linens, and household goods.

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Forman, p. 16.



When considered together, the three inventories reveal that, as in the case of Mr. Paine, regardless of wealth people owned quantities of textiles, but also, as in the inventory of Ms. Cutt, textiles were not necessarily stored exclusively, but often with other, varied objects. Additionally, as seen in the inventories of both Mr. Paine and Mr. Morris, the textiles of the home could be of many times greater value than the storage furniture itself.

### The Suffolk County Probate Inventory Survey

The probate inventory search of Suffolk County surveyed 304 inventories for the dates 1680, 1690, 1700, 1710, 1720, 1730, and 1740, with only a bare minimum discarded due to illegibility. In these inventories the overall appearance of storage furniture was remarkable, with over 80% of households including storage furniture for every year surveyed except 1680, as seen in Figure C.2a. Overall, the appearance of storage furniture increased by nine percent, with most of this increase taking place between 1680 and 1690.

During the period 1680 to 1740 the methods of textile storage in Suffolk County changed, as the number of chests decreased markedly while the number of chests of drawers increased dramatically. Two other forms, the trunk and the box, also appeared in great numbers and their appearance was also recorded in the survey.

As Figure C.1 indicates, the number of chests per household dropped from 1.94 to 0.84, a decline of 57%, with the most significant decrease occurring in the decade between 1700-1710. Similarly, the number of boxes also dropped significantly, from 0.89 to 0.20 boxes per household, a decline of 78%. The number

of trunks also decreased, but not as significantly. The average household in 1680 possessed 0.56 trunks, while in 1740 the average household possessed 0.42 trunks, a decrease of 25%. The multi-purpose nature of trunks, useful for both storage and travel, likely supported the form's popularity and relative steadiness in number over time.

As expected, the appearance of the chest of drawers over time rose markedly. In 1680 the average household possessed 0.14 chests of drawers, while in 1740 that number had risen to 0.74 chests of drawers per household. This may at first appear insignificant, but this is an impressive rise of 528% (see Figure C.1). Clearly, the people of Suffolk County were replacing their chests and boxes with the new and fashionable chest of drawers.

#### Probate Inventories and Room Use

In 1964 historian Abbott Lowell Cummings compiled all of the Suffolk County room-by-room inventories, excluding Boston, for publication. These room-by-room inventories list specifically which rooms were storing textiles in rural Suffolk County. Although some room descriptions were vague, such as "Another Room," most inventories listed the rooms of the houses names such as parlor, chamber, kitchen, or hall. Over time few variations appeared in room usage and textile storage. In the 56 room-by-room inventories that dated to 1680 to 1750, the chamber was the most common room that stored textiles, appearing 37 times. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, however, the chamber was not a private space exclusively set aside for sleeping, as one might assume. It also served as a

place for entertaining, with the bed and its expensive hangings a focal point of the room and a way to demonstrate wealth to visitors. The parlor also served as a room for entertaining, and like the chamber, often housed a bed. Thus, it is not surprising that in 15 instances the parlor stored textiles. Spaces within the home that served more utilitarian purposes appeared less often than the more lavishly decorated chambers and parlors. The hall, a room used for cooking, eating, and other household chores, stored textiles in only five inventories, as did the garret, which was typically an unfinished attic space.<sup>13</sup>

The results of this survey indicate that textile storage occurred in rooms where these storage units were on display to visitors and guests. Not only did the storage furniture display wealth and a sense of fashion, particularly if in the latest form or style, but the objects placed on the furniture, such as silver and porcelain, and the amount of implied textiles stored inside the furniture, demonstrated to visitors that the owners had wealth and taste. The few room-by-room inventories that appear from other regions of the Atlantic seaboard generally adhere to the household distribution indicated in rural Suffolk County.

Over the period 1680 to 1750, Suffolk County witnessed dramatic changes in the way its citizens stored their textiles. Not only did the chest fall from favor as the chest of drawers became more fashionable, but the number of people owning chests of drawers increased. Additionally, as seen in the inventories excerpted in this

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<sup>13</sup> Abbott Lowell Cummings, *Rural Household Inventories: Establishing the Names, Uses and Furnishings of Rooms in the Colonial New England Home, 1675-1775*

chapter, there was a significant gap between the value of textiles and that of storage furniture: the items going into the furniture were worth many times the value of the furniture itself. Not only were textiles of great expense and value within Suffolk County homes, as seen in this chapter, but the methods of textile storage furniture construction also changed, becoming more elaborate and revealing the desire of their owners to express wealth and provide a more fitting container for the expensive textiles held inside.

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(Boston: The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1964).

## Chapter 3

### **TEXTILE STORAGE IN PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA**

The Philadelphia region was primarily under the cultural influence of England throughout much of its early history, but Germans moving into the area heavily influenced the region as well. Relatively large numbers of German immigrants made their way to the Pennsylvania area throughout the Colonial period (though primarily in the second half of the eighteenth century), and they had their own ideas about clothing and linen storage. The probate inventories for Philadelphia are not as numerous as those of Suffolk County, Massachusetts, but those that survive are complete and detailed. Additionally, the probates also represent an economic cross-section of the citizens of Philadelphia, representing both the rich and the poor. What types and quantities of storage furniture appeared in the homes of Philadelphia and how did the people of Philadelphia store their textiles?

#### Storage Furniture Forms Used In Philadelphia

Although most of the storage forms listed immediately below reflect the continental European influence on the Philadelphia area, the Philadelphia region was overwhelmingly of English character. The same options were available to the Philadelphia family as to the Suffolk County, Massachusetts, family in terms of storage furniture: the box, the chest, the trunk, and the chest of drawers. The

appearance of these forms within the home will be discussed later in this chapter. In the German homes of the Philadelphia area, however, continental forms, such as the chest and the *schränk*, appeared with regularity.

The Germans who immigrated to the Philadelphia area preferred large case pieces or chests in which to store textiles, rather than chests of drawers. The exterior of the traditional German case piece, the *schränk*, has two large doors, usually over two to three drawers, as seen in Figure B.12. Usually divided in the middle vertically, the *schränk* reserved one side for shelves on which to store folded garments and linens, and the other side for pegs on which to hang garments (see Figure B.13).<sup>1</sup> Many American *schränken* also had two or three drawers in the base, a result of English cultural influence.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that the example pictured in Figures B.12 and B.13 also has three rather large, secret compartments in the bottom of the *schränk*, below the doors, and beside the drawers. As the doors of this example lock, the items placed inside the main body of the *schränk*, as well as the items placed inside the secret compartments, were safe from theft. While this *schränk*, made in 1768, dates after the time period studied, it is nonetheless representative of the form.

Although none of the probate inventories examined used the word *schränk* to describe a piece of furniture, the phrase *clothes press* did appear and could well indicate the presence of a *schränk*. John Dickinson's probate inventory of 1722 listed

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<sup>1</sup> Roderic H. Blackburn and Ruth Piwonka, *Remembrance of Patria: Dutch Arts and Culture in Colonial America, 1609-1776* (Albany, NY: Albany Institute of History and Art, 1988), p. 260.

<sup>2</sup> Vernon S. Gunnion, "The Pennsylvania-German *Schränk*," in *The Magazine Antiques*, May 1983, pp. 1022-1024.

two mahogany clothes presses, one in the front parlor and the second on the stairhead, each valued at five pounds, a large sum,<sup>3</sup> and located in areas of the house visible to visitors and guests. When Abraham Shelley sold his household goods before departing to Europe, his sale included “a large clothes press,” which was to be “sold cheap.”<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, two Philadelphia inventories also included a form which will be discussed more fully in the chapter on New York, the clothes basket or hamper. The first, from the 1692-1694 period, listed “one hamper” valued at six shillings. The second dated from 1730 and listed a “clothes basket” valued at one shilling, six pence.<sup>5</sup> Although the hamper was a common textile storage receptacle in the Netherlands and in Dutch New York, the appearance of the form in Philadelphia indicates that either the Dutch also influenced the Philadelphia area or that the hamper or basket form for clothing storage was of Continental European origin and used by both Germans and Dutch. Either scenario is possible.

### Textiles and Their Storage in the Home

Like the English-influenced households of Suffolk County, the homes of the Philadelphia area considered textiles of great importance. The inventory of John White, taken 9 November 1693, was fairly representative of the earliest surviving

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<sup>3</sup> Cathryn J. McElroy, “Furniture in Philadelphia: The First Fifty Years,” in *Winterthur Portfolio*, 1979, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 30 July 1747.

<sup>5</sup> Philadelphia Pennsylvania, Department of Records, *Wills and Inventories*, microfilm M-959 through M-1006, Winterthur Museum Libraries.

inventories of Philadelphia and reveals some of the trends evident in Philadelphia.

Mr. White was a man of very small wealth: his estate, valued at £188.19.07, was only 53.1% of the average probate inventory value of £356.03.11 7/10 for the period 1692-

1694. The inventory listed the following storage furniture and textiles:

	[£, s, d]
1 Chest of drawers of Oak	1.--.--
1 Sea Chest ye best	--.10.--
1 ditto & an Oak Box for Linnen	--. 6.--
His [illegible] & apparell	20.--.--
2 pare of flaxon sheets fine & an odd one	2.10.--
2 pare course ditto	1.10.--
1 pare Ozon brigh <sup>6</sup> Sheets worn	--.10.--
1 pare flannell ditto	--.18.--
1 doz Diaper Napkins at 2s ppr	1.04.--
1 Diaper Tablecloth	--.12.--
1 ditto torn & [illegible]	--. 6.--
an old Diaper tablecloth & 5 Napkins	--. 6.--
1 doz course flaxon Napkins	--. 6.--
8 cours Towells	--. 4.--
4 Pillow Case	--. 8.--
4 ditto Cotton & Linnon	--. 4.-- <sup>7</sup>

As a percentage of the total value of the inventory, the textiles account for 14.8% of the goods, whereas the storage furniture accounts for less than one percent (0.95%).

The cumulative value of the textiles is 15.5 times greater than that of the storage furniture, despite the appearance of an expensive chest of drawers, indicating further the importance of textiles in the home in terms of value and the importance of keeping those textiles safe.

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<sup>6</sup> Osnaburg is a type of coarse, unbleached linen first made in Osnabrück, Germany, and commonly used for trousers, sacking, and bagging. Despite the cultural influence of Germany in the region, Osnaburg appears throughout the colonies. Definition of Osnaburg from: Florence M. Montgomery, *Textiles in America, 1650-1870*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), pp. 312-313.



Even poorer was Thomas Graham, who was worth only £22.02.06 at the time of his death in 1710, only 10.4% of the average inventory of £212.05.06¾ for the year. Although he did possess enough linens and clothing (meager as the clothing was, see list below) to merit some type of storage, it is unclear from his inventory how he did store these items as his inventory lists no storage furniture. Perhaps there were pegs or nails in the wall for his clothing. Nevertheless, his textiles are as follows:

	[£, s, d]
1 Tick bolster Case	--. 3.--
2 D <sup>o</sup> [ditto] pillowcase	--. 2.--
2 Ditto Small Table Clothes	--. 8.--
3 ¾ Ell's holland at 6s. p Ell	1. 2. 6
1 old Cloath Coat very much worn	--. 6.--
1 old vest Turned D <sup>o</sup>	--. 4.--
1 pr old Leathr Briches Ript & holed	--. 5.--
3 old Ragged Shirts Torn [illegible]	--. 2.--
2 white handkerchers 2/6	--. 5.--
2 old Turne neckcloths	--. 1.--
1 pr old Shoes & Stockins near worn out	--. 3.--
1 old Hatt, 1 pr old ordinary Garters & an [illegible]	--. 3.--
1 pr old plush briches worn to pieces	--. 2.--
1 pr old Clock D <sup>o</sup> 4/ & 1 old Cloth wastcoat 6/	--.10.--
2 pr old Worsted Stockings	--. 6.--
1 holland Shirt	--. 6.--
2 old Linen Ditto much worne	--. 6.--
2 Ditto worn to pieces	--. 3.--
2 old Muslin neckcloths in Peices 1 old Linen Ditto	
2 White handkerchers 3 pr Short old holland	
Sleeves worn out 1 silk handkercher	--.10. 6 <sup>s</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> PPR, John White inventory, 9 November 1693.

<sup>8</sup> PPR, Thomas Graham inventory, 1710.

All told, his clothing and linens amounted to £5.14.00, 26% of his worldly goods. It is notable that even the very poor possessed enough linens and clothing to necessitate storage, even if the items were “much worn” or “ript & holed.”<sup>9</sup>

The inventory of Thomas Neville, a Philadelphia merchant who died in 1730, is interesting in its detail. Mr. Neville, like Mr. Graham and Mr. White, was of modest wealth: his inventory valued at £140.17.10 in a year in which the average inventory was worth £249.13.10, only 56.4% of the average. As with other households, his clothing was worth far more than his storage furniture. Mr. Neville owned more than 30 baskets, “trunks and chests,” a “Wooden Chest with men’s Clothes (vizt),” and a “Leather Trunk with Wom: Clothes.” Despite his large assortment of storage furniture, at £1.13.00, it comprised only 1.2% of the estate’s total value. In contrast, valued at £48.05.05, the textiles accounted for 34.3% of the entire probate inventory valuation.

Most of Mr. Neville’s textile items appear throughout his inventory, but at two points in the inventory they appear specifically with their storage furniture:

*Wooden Chest with men’s Clothes (vizt)*

7 pr thread & 3 pr worsted hose yellow Frock & Vest 4 Jacketts & 3 breeches 3 zeubr[?] 3 Coates 5 Vests Great Coate 6 pr Gloves mutt Large & Small bible 22 smallbooks 9 handkerchiefs 3 jacketts Cane 9 Shirts 6 Caps 5 neckcloths bagonett & Spatteredeskes £12.04.00

*Leather Trunk with Wom: Clothes*

hoop pettyCoate 2 Quilted ditto SearSucker Suit 2 Calico ditto 1 Calamancho ditto 1 yello Stuff ditto 10 Aprons 4 shifts Camblet Cloke 1 Course do. mothy old flannel Coate pinner 4 mobs 2 Suits pinner 2 pr ruffles mittens 2 pr old hose 3 Jacketts Chimney Cloth pockets bonnet Quill Calico Curtains Umbrella & 2 whips £10.10.09<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Interestingly, an additional item of storage furniture, a small leather trunk and its contents, appeared in the inventory. Like the wooden chest and leather trunk listed above, this trunk contained a variety of objects, including a silver spoon, six silver forks, tongs, a strainer, buttons, two pairs of buckles, one pair of garters, and two shirts, all valued together at £2.19.06,<sup>11</sup> and also illustrating that storage was multi-purpose, with clothing and linens stored alongside other items of value. The detail of Mr. Neville's inventory is unusual for a man of only modest wealth, but the storage furniture he possessed, and what belonged inside those objects, was in keeping with those of other men of his status. Mr. Neville possessed a variety of storage furniture and kept a variety of goods within those objects, and the objects placed inside the storage furniture were worth far more than the storage furniture itself.

As interesting as probate inventories, newspaper advertisements may also indicate methods of textile storage and the variety of items stored with the textiles. When an indentured servant “broke open his Master’s Chest, and took out four white Garlix [a type of linen] Shirts; Thirty two Shillings of Pennsylvania Money and Five Shillings in Copper; a Silver Clasp, and two Muslin Stocks [neckcloths],” the outraged master placed an advertisement in the 6 August 1741 edition of *The*

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<sup>10</sup> PPPR, Thomas Neville inventory, 20 October 1730. The most interesting entry in the inventory was a “Go-Cart” valued at three shillings, but unfortunately has nothing to do with textile storage.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

*Pennsylvania Gazette*. That the chest required force to break open indicates that the chest was locked to prevent such an occurrence.<sup>12</sup>

Timothy Scarth also placed an advertisement on 21 April 1747 that listed a variety of items stored in his desk and stolen by a thief. The thief

broke open his escrutore [desk], and stole the following goods, viz. A gold necklace and locket, and a gold locket, and a pair of gold buttons, six silver teaspoons, and two large silver spoons, a bed quilt, and some bed linnen, a set of fine hugabag [a type of linen] napkins, and sundry other Things, to the value of 40 Pounds, or upwards.<sup>13</sup>

This advertisement indicates that textiles were stored in all types of furniture, including desks, a form not generally associated with textile storage. Similar to the evidence of many probate inventories, Mr. Scarth stored different types of goods together, his stolen textiles stored with jewelry and silver.

#### The Philadelphia Probate Inventory Survey

For the probate inventory search for the Philadelphia area 135 probate inventories were surveyed. The dates of those surveyed were: 1692-94, 1700, 1710, 1720, 1730, and 1740. Examination only occurred for inventories that were at least fifty percent legible, thus eliminating a few in the 1692-1694 date range.

Overall, the results were remarkably like Suffolk County in that a high percentage of households possessed storage furniture, though not as many as in Suffolk County. Additionally, the appearance of storage furniture in probate inventories increased, from 67% of all probate inventories including storage furniture

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<sup>12</sup> *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 6 August 1741.

<sup>13</sup> *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 21 May 1747.

in 1692-94, to 73% in 1740, a rise of 8.2%. At its lowest point, only 50% of inventories recorded storage furniture, in 1700. The next decade, to 1710, however, showed the largest increase in storage furniture, with 1710 recording 83% of inventories with storage furniture (see Figure C.2b).

The four forms of storage furniture recorded in the survey were the box, the chest, the trunk, and the chest of drawers. As in the Massachusetts inventories, the box and the chest decreased in appearance, while the chest of drawers increased in appearance. The trunk, however, also increased in appearance.

The box peaked in the first sample of the survey, 1692-94, at 0.67 boxes per household, and then immediately bottomed out in the survey in 1700 at 0.20 boxes per household (see Figure C.3). It recovered enough to finish with an average 0.33 boxes per household in 1740, an overall drop of 51%.

The chest held relatively steady overall, dropping from 1.11 chests per household in 1692-1694, to 1.00 chest per household in 1740, a drop of only ten percent. Within the period, however, the appearance of the chest decreased to 0.60 chests per household in 1700, then climbed dramatically to 1.52 chests per household in 1710, and then decreased gradually to the 1740 numbers (see Figure C.3).

A surprise was the rise in popularity of the trunk, even as the popularity of the chest and box fell. The trunk was multi-purpose, useful for both storage and travel, which may account for its continued popularity. In 1692-94 there were 0.22 trunks per household, and none in 1700. By 1720 the number per household peaked at 0.63, then fell to 0.37 per household in 1740, an overall increase of 68% (see Figure C.3).

The appearance of the chest of drawers in Philadelphia was also slightly surprising as the increase in its appearance was more modest than in Suffolk County. Overall, the chest of drawers increased in appearance from 0.22 per household in 1692-1694 to 0.60 per household in 1740. This rise of 272%, however, is still a dramatic increase (see Figure C.3).

During the time period of this study, the German influence was still rather slim, though German forms, such as the schrank, were already in use. Changes from the large amounts of German immigration in the later eighteenth century, however, had yet to occur. English furniture forms, then, predominated in the homes of Philadelphia, at least through 1740. The appearance of storage furniture presented no real surprises, instead correlating with that of Suffolk County, Massachusetts. Like their counterparts in Suffolk County, Philadelphians were replacing their chests and boxes with the more elaborate and fashionable chest of drawers, though at a slower rate. These choices in textile storage further reinforce the English character of the Philadelphia region during the period studied.

## Chapter 4

### **TEXTILE STORAGE IN YORK COUNTY, VIRGINIA**

Unlike the previous regions discussed, the region of York County, Virginia, was a rural setting with no major urban population. Located between the York and James rivers, York County is just east and south of Williamsburg, and includes the city of Yorktown. The inclusion of York County in this survey, however, serves to broaden the geographical scope of this study to include the south, as well as to provide a valuable comparison with the northern surveys. Additionally, York County was near the major ports of Virginia of the time and the probate inventories of York County are in remarkably good condition, allowing a complete survey of the county and yielding important information about textile storage in the south.

The southern colonies were quite different from the northern colonies in several ways. Perhaps the largest difference was the rural nature of the southern colonies versus the relatively more urban nature of the northern colonies. Larger towns or cities, such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, simply did not exist in the south. Another critical difference was that the rural south also developed the plantation system with its slave culture, though that occurred towards the end of the time period studied in this thesis. In the later eighteenth century, as rice became a major agricultural product of South Carolina, Charleston would become a relatively large city, but the citizens of the south continued to live farther apart from one another

than those in New England. The lower population of Virginia also assisted in maintaining a primarily agrarian society. Therefore, the citizens of Virginia remained primarily agricultural, while the citizens of New England (and to a lesser extent the middle colonies) developed other professions more in keeping with an urban economy.<sup>1</sup>

Because Virginia remained agrarian, there were fewer tradesmen, merchants, and professionals than in the northern colonies. Thus, while the northern colonies, particularly New England, became increasingly self-sufficient and industrial, Virginia remained dependent on imports into the colony from other colonies and England. This was apparent by 1705, as Robert Beverley, a native Virginian, noted this dependence in his volume *The History and Present State of Virginia*:

They have their Cloathing of all sorts from England, as Linnen, Woollen, Silk, Hats, and Leather. Yet Flax, and Hemp grow nowhere in the World, better than there; their Sheep yield a mighty Increase, and bear good Fleeces, but they shear them only to cool them. . . . Nay, they are such abominable Ill-husbands, that tho' their country be over-run with Wood, yet they have all their Wooden Ware from *England*; their Cabinets, Chairs, Tables, Stools, Chests, Boxes, Cart-Wheels, and all other things, even so much as their Bowls, and Birchen Brooms, to the Eternal Reproach of their Laziness.<sup>2</sup>

Not only did Mr. Beverley lament the prevalence of English textiles in Virginia, he also worried about the apparent laziness of Virginians, extending the lack of local

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<sup>1</sup> Although there are many good publications concerning early Virginia's history, economy, and settlement patterns, two excellent examples are: Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company 1975); and Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Beverley, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, reprint edited by Louis B. Wright (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1947), p. 295.



textile production to the dearth of local production of wooden objects, such as utensils and furniture. Mr. Beverley was doubtless exaggerating things a bit, as Virginia-made furniture of the period still exists. Virginians of the time were not lazy, but rather focused on staple agricultural production rather than the manufacture of goods. His worries had merit, however. Because Virginians did not manufacture most of their household goods, they relied extensively on imports. This was still true seventy-six years later, in 1781, as Thomas Jefferson, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, was proud of the fact that Virginians made practically nothing for themselves, instead relying on imports in exchange for the raw products of their agricultural endeavors.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, Virginians imported more textiles and furniture than they manufactured.

While the southern colonies did produce some of their own goods, much of the household linens, clothing, and storage furniture were imports. These imports were arriving primarily from England and from New England. Imports from England likely included linens and cloth made in Europe and imported through England, as Robert Beverley and Thomas Jefferson both noted above. In contrast, furniture imports usually arrived from England and New England during this period. For example, John Bivens found that the vast majority of furniture being imported into North Carolina was arriving from Boston and Portsmouth, New Hampshire.<sup>4</sup> The importation of English furniture into the southern colonies also occurred, as in

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 216-217. In 1781 Thomas Jefferson wrote *Notes on the State of Virginia*, and his obvious pride in the agrarian structure of Virginia best manifests itself in his chapter titled "Manufactures."

Charleston in 1735/1736 when Richard Bacon advertised London furniture, including a “Variety of mahaganny tables, chests of drawers, burroes, desks, cloath chests, cupbards, back-gammon tables.”<sup>5</sup> English furniture was not the only import in the furniture genre: a small number of English-trained craftsmen also made the South a destination when immigrating, particularly Williamsburg, Virginia, and Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, during this period few cabinetmakers chose to immigrate to Boston from England.

### Storage Furniture Forms Used in York County

Although Virginia was quite similar to Suffolk County, Massachusetts, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in storage options, primarily using the chest, box, trunk, and chest of drawers, large case pieces of the clothespress genre also appeared in quantity in Virginia. Several examples of the form which date to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century survive to the present day. In the probate study of York County, Virginia, however, the same problem occurred as in Suffolk County and Philadelphia: changes in vocabulary. While probate inventories in York County did occasionally list a clothes press, and while most of these clothes presses were case pieces constructed for the purpose of textile storage, the same words could also describe a device for pressing linens or clothes, such as the example in Figure B.6,

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<sup>4</sup> John Bivens Jr., *The Furniture of Coastal North Carolina, 1700-1820* (Winston-Salem, NC: The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 1988), p.97. Mr. Bivens utilized shipping records to make this conclusion.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Bivens, p. 95.

<sup>6</sup> Cooke, p. 75.

obviously a very different apparatus. Therefore, the statistical survey of York County did not include clothespresses. Two extant examples of this form, however, illustrate both their presence in early Virginia and their European influence.

Clear evidence of at least two other cultures (besides the English) at work in the south is evident in a clothespress in the collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (see Figure B.14). A large piece of furniture, this clothespress, which dates from 1690-1710, is primarily walnut with yellow pine as the secondary wood, further indicating southern craftsmanship as yellow pine grows in great quantities in the southern states. Believed to be from Tidewater Virginia, it is more appropriate to call this clothespress a *schränk*. Although the exterior has the appearance of a continental case piece, the interior structure is similar to that of a German *schränk*, with shelves on one side and hanging space for garments on the other.

In contrast, a clothespress in the Garvan Collection at Yale University is more in the style of the Dutch *kast* (see Figure B.15), a form which will be discussed in the next chapter. A truly massive case piece, this clothespress clearly held shelves, parts of which still remain in the piece today (see Figure B.16), and are a typical feature of a *kast*. Interestingly, there are pegs at the very top of the back wall and sides of the clothespress. It is doubtful if these are original to the piece as the shelf supports seem older and more likely original to the clothespress. The shelf construction of the clothespress indicates a Dutch influence in Virginia, and indeed a 1671 inventory of

the estate of William Moseley of Norfolk County included a “greate Dutch Cash,” *cash* almost certainly being a corruption of the word *kast*.<sup>7</sup>

Another word used to describe a clothespress is *cupboard*, though in most cases the word cupboard described a smaller case piece for the display of luxury goods and perhaps for table linen storage, much like the court cupboard of New England. Because of the confusion in terminology and because of the uncertain amount of storage space in cupboards (some likely designed exclusively for display purposes), this survey does not include cupboards.<sup>8</sup>

By an extraordinary margin the predominant form of storage furniture in York County was the simple chest. Simple to construct, the most common chest in York County was probably the six board chest, much like the example in Figure B.17, dating to approximately 1690-1720, and likely made in Tidewater Virginia.<sup>9</sup> Although most of the six board chests were likely just that, six boards crudely nailed together, this one is obviously more complex, with a lock, decorative beading, and decorative detailing to the front and legs. As a rare survival of the time and region it is illustrative of the chests enumerated in the probate inventories.

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in the library folder 2024.1, clothespress, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.

<sup>8</sup> There are two extant early Southern cupboards in public collections: MESDA has one on permanent loan (2024.14); Colonial Williamsburg owns one as well (1966-461), published on p. 493 of Ronald L. Hurst and Jonathan Prown, *Southern Furniture 1680-1830* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1997). Both cupboards have a wide display surface, but also could hold a relatively large amount of linens.

<sup>9</sup> From library folder 4058, chest, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.

### Textiles and Their Storage in the Home

Most of the inventories of York County were quite vague in terms of textile and storage items, particularly if the estate was relatively meager. More complete listings usually appear for wealthier estates, as was typical of both Suffolk County and Philadelphia. The 15 August 1720 inventory of John Powers was one of the few poorer inventories that itemized textiles and storage furniture; his inventory was valued at only 67% of the average valuation of 1720-1721. It included:

	[£ s d]
1 deal box lock & key	--. 3.--
1 old Cloth Press	--. 5.--
2 chests & 1 leather trunk	--.17. 6
1 Chests, 1 pr. sheets	< 1. 5. 6
1 old Chest with Drawers	--.15.--
3 boxes, 1 Trunk, & a parcell of old books	--.15.--
a chest Drawers, 1 Table & Dressing box	4.--.--
1 Russia leather Trunk	1.10.--
19 Hucknback <sup>10</sup> Napkins	--.19.--
4 Tablecloths	--.16.--
2 Towells	--. 2.--
9 ells Garlix at 1/10	--.16. 6
3 ells Lockram <sup>11</sup> at 1/8	--. 5.--
3 yds Ticken [ticking]	--. 6.--
1½ yds Calimanco <sup>12</sup>	--. 3.-- <sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Huckaback is a type of linen, particularly for towels, with raised figures which give the cloth greater absorbency. Montgomery, p. 261.

<sup>11</sup> Lockram is a type of coarse linen first made in Locronan, Brittany. Montgomery, p. 279.

<sup>12</sup> Calimanco is a worsted [wool] fabric used primarily for clothing. Montgomery, p. 185.

<sup>13</sup> York County, Virginia, Probate Court, *Orders, Wills, Etc.*, microfilm reels 3-10, The Library of Virginia (hereafter YCPR), John Powers probate inventory, 15 August 1720.

Although Mr. Powers was relatively poor, he still possessed a wide variety of storage furniture and textiles, though it is interesting that his inventory contained no clothing. Of the total inventory value, 6.2% comprised the storage furniture, and 3.1% the textiles, indicating that Mr. Powers was one of the rare examples of someone who owned a higher value of storage furniture than textiles. Interestingly, when compared with the two inventories below of relatively wealthier people, Mr. Powers invested a much higher percentage of his assets in furniture and textiles. Mr. Powers also demonstrated a concern for theft, as at least one box had a lock. The storage furniture also stored a variety of objects, as one chest did store one pair of sheets, and a parcel of old books listed concurrently with a trunk and three boxes, indicating they were likely inside at least one of these receptacles.

Another interesting example is the 2 June 1711 probate inventory of Thomas Ballard. Mr. Ballard's inventory, when compared with the other inventories for 1710-1711, indicates that he was a wealthy man, as his estate valued at over seven times the average of that period. The inventory is also interesting for its wealth of storage furniture, though only valued at 1.1% of his inventory, and relatively small amount of linens, valued at 1.6% of his inventory. Although Mr. Ballard's linens were few, they were still of greater value than his storage furniture, following the general pattern of colonial inventories. Listed below are his storage furniture and textiles:

	[£ s d]
chest of drawers & small table with drawer	3.--.--
One Small chest	--. 7.--
1 large Chest with a lock & key	--.11.--
2 old Trunks	--. 6.--
1 small Gelded Trunk	--. 2. 6
1 small chest	--. 5.--

1 trunk with drawers	--. 7. 6
1 Seal Skin trunk	--. 6.--
1 old Chest Draws	--. 2. 6
1 large Chest	--. 8.--
1 old Seale Skin Trunk	--. 5.--
1 chest	--. 7. 6
3 old chests & a table	--. 8.--
1 diaper table Cloth & 1 doz Napkins	2. 5.--
2 pr Holed Sheets & 1 pr pillowbears	2. 5.--
1 large Hugaback table Cloth & a doz of Napkins	1.15.--
1 Corse Table Cloth & a doz Napkins	--.10.--
8 towells	--. 5.--
1 pr. old Muslin Curtains & Vallins	--.17. 6 <sup>14</sup>

With such a small mass of stored textiles, one has to wonder what Mr. Ballard was storing in the rest of his storage furniture. Unfortunately, it is unclear in this inventory what items stored textiles, and the inventory listed no clothing, though Mr. Ballard undoubtedly owned clothing. It is interesting that listed in the storage furniture is a trunk with drawers. Unless the interior of the trunk contained drawers, this object sounds more like a chest with drawers. Additionally, a large chest listed specifically with a lock and key indicates a higher value on locking storage furniture and a concern for theft.

Another example of a person of wealth is the 8 September 1691 inventory of M. Eliz. Deggt [sic]. Compared to the other inventories of 1690-1691, Ms. Deggt was a very wealthy woman, her belongings valued at over seven times the average of that period. The number and types of rooms listed in her inventory also further indicates her wealth: yellow room, hall parlor, large room against yellow room, garret, and low passage. Her storage furniture was varied and scattered throughout

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<sup>14</sup> YCPR, Thomas Ballard probate inventory, 2 June 1711.

these rooms, with the hall parlor containing two chests, the yellow room containing a chest of drawers and a box, and the large room against the yellow room containing her most expensive item of storage furniture, a chest of drawers valued fifty percent higher than any other item of storage furniture she possessed. The garret and the low passage also contained stored textiles:

In the Chest in the Low Passage	[£ s d]
36 Damask Napkins	1.10.--
9 ditto TableCloaths, & Cloth for twenty Napkins	8.--.--
5 Doz. of flaxin Napkins & four TableCloaths ditto	2.10.--
8 Diaper Towells & two Couse ditto	--. 2.--
3 pair holland sheets & [illegible] of pillowboard ditto	2.10.--
8 Ells of Holland & [illegible] ¼ at 3 li 6 s y Ell	1.10.--
8 yards & ¾ of Callico att	1.--.--
3 Ells of severall Remnants of lining	--.12.--
5 Ells & ¼ of lining att	--. 2.--
4 yards of bonting [?] att	--.15.--
In the garrett: In a chest 4 Cotton Curtains, 4 dimity [?]	
ditto, 1 old blankitt, 3 old pillows, and old napkin	
press & 3 Chests	2.--.-- <sup>15</sup>

The notation of the napkin press in the garret was likely indicating a device used for pressing napkins flat, as seen in Figure B.6. As mentioned above, this could be a large object, confused with a clothespress when interpreting inventories. Clearly the napkin press and three chests were not in the chest containing the textiles.

Additionally, the “Barb Room” contained textiles. Valued at only 0.5% of the total estate, Ms. Deggt’s storage furniture was of significantly less value than her stored textiles, valued at 2.3% of the total estate, a ratio in keeping with most inventories of the time.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> YCPR, M. Eliz Deggt [sic] probate inventory, 8 September 1691.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



Of the inventories included in this survey, those that did list clothing tended to list them in one statement, such as the 1741 inventory of Edward Tabb in which “his wearing apparel Linnen &c” were valued at £5.14.00.<sup>17</sup> An example of an atypical York County inventory is the 1728 inventory of Richard King, in which his linens are rather vague but his clothing is clearly enumerated:

	[£ s d]
1 pair Womons thread Stockings 3/	--. 3.--
2 black Silk hoods 2 Muslin D° 10/6 1 Suit pinner 4/ white work D° 4/	--.18. 6
1 Suit plain D° 3/ a pleelt [parcel?] of old D° & night Caps 5/	--. 8.--
2 old Shifts & 1 old dimity Wastcoate 2/ 2 silk Apron 2/6 2 lin D° 2/	--. 6. 6
2 Muslin Aprons & 1 Short D° 7/ 1 large India Hankerchief 2/6	--. 9. 6
1 Muslin D° 2/6 5 pr plain & 1 [illegible] Ruffles 5/6 2 dimity quilted Coats 5/	--.10. 6
3 flarin Weastcoats & 2 petty Coats 2/ 1 old Camblet Cloak & hood 7/6	--. 9. 6
1 black gauze scarf & an old D° 15/ 1 India Morning Gown 15/	--.10.--
1 Searsuccor D° 7/6 1 Cultainse [?] gown & petty Coat a 1. 5. 0	1.12. 6
1 Old Callico petticoat & Calonas [?] Gown 5/ 1 old poplin gown & Sik pett. 1/6.0	--. 6. 6
1 green Burdet <sup>18</sup> gown & petticoat 2s 2 turnovers & a neck 2/	2. 2.--
pcel of old Linnin Caps 7/5 Shirts 12/6	--.13. 1
1 pr Worsted & 1 pr. [illegible] yarn hoes 2/6 2 pr holland D° 2/	--. 4. 6
2 Searsucker Weastcoates & Breeches 12/6 1 pr fine & 1 pr Course trousers 4/	--.16. 6

<sup>17</sup> YCPR, Edward Tabb probate inventory, 20 July 1741

<sup>18</sup> Birdet was an East Indian textile often reexported to the West Indies. The English tried to imitate this textile in silk and linen plain weave given a pressed or watered finish. Montgomery, pp. 168-169.

1 pr flower'd Silk briches 1/3 2 old Coats & 2 pr old breeches 2/6	--. 3. 9
1 Cloth coat old wastcoat & 2 pr old breeches	1.10.-- <sup>19</sup>

Mr. King's storage furniture was valued at less than a pound and included two chests, an unspecified number of old chests and boxes, and a small press.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, his clothing alone was valued at £12.04.04, many times the value of his storage furniture. Although Mr. King did own a varied assortment of garments, in material wealth he was only relatively modest, his inventory worth just over £206, approximately 1.6 times the average of just over £127. Because the listing of Mr. King's garments was so detailed, however, it may indicate that Mr. King's clothing collection was unusual in its depth and the norm for Virginia was a smaller assortment of clothing.

#### The York County Probate Inventory Survey

The probates of York County, Virginia, were of much fewer quantity than those of Suffolk County, Massachusetts, or Philadelphia. Thus, to increase numbers and to further substantiate any conclusions, an expansion of the survey by one year took place for each decade, thus, for example, studying 1680-1681 instead of simply 1680, and creating a survey of 115 inventories. Still, the low number of probate inventories in the York County survey does affect the conclusions made in this chapter. The reasoning behind the low numbers is simple: York County, Virginia was a rural county, therefore not as populous as the northern colonies. Additionally,

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<sup>19</sup> YCPR, Richard King probate inventory, 17 March 1728.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

the inventories of 1728-1729 are serving as a substitute for the missing inventories of 1730-1731.

The probate survey conducted of York County revealed two things: Virginians made do with far fewer objects in their homes, i.e., fewer linens, clothing, and furnishings, and Virginians made few objects for themselves. These findings are logical, given that imported items would be of higher cost than domestic items, thereby permitting the purchase of fewer items. Additionally, in terms of furniture and other decorative arts that survive into the present, there is a much larger quantity surviving from the northern colonies than the southern colonies dating from the period studied. And while some farmers in Virginia may have also been amateur craftsmen and produced some furnishings for their own homes, the quantities were not large and the finer furnishings were likely imported. Similarly, the appearance of other luxury goods, such as silver, prints, and paintings, was scarce.

The lack of domestic textile production in Virginia is clearly evident when looking at the probate inventories of the period. Unlike Suffolk County, Massachusetts, and to a lesser extent, Philadelphia, there were no references to “homespun” or “homemade” linens or clothing in this York County survey. In addition, spinning wheels, looms, or homemade linen simply did not appear in the York County probates surveyed. In fact, one survey of Virginia probate inventories from 1660 to 1676 revealed that only one percent of the inventories included a spinning wheel.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Carole Shammas, “How Self-Sufficient Was Early America?” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* xiii:2 (Autumn 1982): 255.

The appearance of storage furniture in York County probate inventories was surprising as the percentage of inventories with storage furniture was remarkably high. While only 44% of all inventories in 1680-1681 included storage furniture, from 1690-1691 until the end of the period studied the proportion increased tremendously, matching or exceeding both Philadelphia and Suffolk County (see Figure C.2c) and ranging from 86% in 1700-1701, to 100% in 1728-1729. From 1680-1681 until 1740-1741 overall, the appearance of storage furniture increased by 211 percent.

When compared to the numbers of boxes, trunks, and chests of drawers, the conclusion that the chest was consistently the chosen method of storage in York County is clear. This was true for the entire period studied (see Figure C.4). Additionally, as in Suffolk County and Philadelphia, during the eighteenth century the appearance of the chest generally decreases. York County, Virginians, however, did not abandon their chests in favor of other, more complex forms, such as the chest of drawers. While the chest of drawers increased in appearance significantly in Suffolk County and Philadelphia, it did not increase nearly as dramatically in York County.

Like Suffolk County and Philadelphia, York County homes also used boxes. Like the chest in Figure B.17, most of the boxes consisted of six boards nailed together, with or without a lock. In York County the use of boxes was sporadic (see Figure C.4), but unlike the other regions actually rose over time, ranging from no boxes appearing in 1680-1681 probate inventories, to a high of 0.77 boxes per household in 1720-1721, and ending with 0.48 boxes per household in 1740-1741.

The reason for the rise in the use of boxes is unclear but may stem from Virginia's continued reliance on older forms, as seen with the chest.

More baffling than the unexpected rise in boxes in the survey is the dramatic rise in the use of trunks. From 1680-1681 until the end of the survey, 1740-1741, the use of the trunk increased 373 percent, a significant amount, though never outnumbering the chest (see Figure C.4). The appearance of the trunk, after a low in 1690-1691 of only 0.10 trunks per household, peaked in 1728-1729 with 1.38 trunks per household. Again, the reason for the rise in the use of trunks is unclear but may be due to their multi-purpose nature: useful for both storage and travel.

The chest of drawers, though more expensive and luxurious than the simple chest or trunk, did not increase as dramatically in appearance in York County, rising a comparatively modest 72 percent. Unlike Philadelphia and Suffolk County, in York County the chest of drawers was the least favorite form of storage furniture in 1740-1741. The fewest chests of drawers per household unsurprisingly appear in 1680-1681, with 0.11 per household, and the number peaks in 1728-1729 with 0.38 per household.

In conclusion, York County, Virginia is in itself an interesting case study due to its agrarian nature and reliance on imports for the furnishing of homes. Virginians relied on traditional storage furniture that was also multi-purpose, such as the trunk, useful for storage and travel, and the chest, useful for storage and seating. Moreover, the residents of rural York County required fewer household goods than the residents of the northern colonies.

The plantation system would eventually create vast differences in furnishings between the wealthy plantation owners, subsistence white farmers, and African slaves in Virginia. These differences would broaden later in the eighteenth century. For the time period of this thesis, the plantation system was in place, but had yet to grow to the large proportions it would reach in the late eighteenth century. The final chapter will explore further the startling differences between York County and the surveys of the northern colonies.

## Chapter 5

### TEXTILE STORAGE IN NEW YORK AND VICINITY

New York is difficult to compare with the other three regions discussed in this thesis for two reasons. First, New York probates do not exist in large enough numbers to accommodate a probate inventory survey. Although a scattered few probates do exist, most burned in a fire at the beginning of this century. Thus, this examination of New York storage furniture is narrative in character. Second, the other three regions were much more heavily influenced by England. Unlike the other areas studied, New York was first settled by the Dutch, who continued to be a dominant cultural force throughout the period of this thesis, 1680 to 1750. Because of this influence of the Dutch in New York, it is appropriate to first consider textile storage and storage furniture in the Netherlands before considering the area of New York.

#### The Dutch in Europe

Unlike many households in other countries, the households in the Netherlands were notorious in the seventeenth century for being particularly clean. Visitors to the Netherlands thought the Dutch obsession with cleanliness quite bizarre. Within the Dutch household, the favored type of storage furniture was the *kast* (see Figure B.18). The *kast* was a large case piece similar to the German *schränk*, but with two doors

protecting horizontal shelves in the interior instead of shelves and pegs. The extravagant exterior proclaimed the wealth of the owners of the kast. The top was flat for the display of expensive decorative items, such as ceramics, glass, and silver. The interior was primarily functional and served as the prime storage space for linens within the Dutch household.<sup>1</sup>

Housekeeping guidebooks from the Netherlands contained numerous recommendations for the Dutch housewife in terms of linen care and storage. Recommendations included the daily washing and safe storage of linens. The items stored within the kast included pressed and folded table and bed linens, as well as lengths of linen cloth and clothing, rolled to prevent creases. Lining the shelves with linen kept the textiles stored inside the kast from touching the wooden shelving or sides,<sup>2</sup> probably to prevent soiling and snags. In addition to the linen used to line the shelves, lengths of linen also protected the linens and clothing from dust and kept the textiles in place. Placed perpendicularly on the shelf and folded over the clean contents, two wide strips of linen thus protected the shelf's contents. Labels, often embroidered and located on the edge of the shelf, identified the contents of these linen packets and could include quotations such as "If you wash your linens clean and fold them well, you are a good housewife."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This discussion of the kast is based on Peter M. Kenny, Frances Gruber Safford, and Gilbert T. Vincent, *American Kasten: The Dutch-Style Cupboards of New York and New Jersey, 1650-1800* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 6, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Blackburn and Piwonka, p. 260.



The kast was by far the most expensive type of storage furniture in the Netherlands, storing the linens, clothing, jewels, and family records, and on display to guests of the household. It was also the subject of seventeenth-century Dutch poetry, as seen in the following poem in which a Dutch maiden prepares her textile dowry and displays it in a kast for her wedding guests to admire:

Come along, Dutch maiden, make yourself at home  
Behold, linen neatly piled as high as mountains  
Expensive laces, all kinds of satins  
Which shine brighter than the stars  
Silks in copious variety  
Which would eclipse the wardrobe of a queen  
Come, lady, with many guests  
To this rich bride and groom  
All the precious beauty of the world  
Is gathered in this cupboard, this treasure to be admired!<sup>4</sup>

Not every household could afford a kast, however, and those with kasten also utilized other forms of storage furniture. Chests, simple six board examples as well as more complex forms, were available in nearly every household in the Netherlands. Like the kast, chests also stored linens, clothing, and blankets. In the middle of the eighteenth century two new forms began to infiltrate Dutch households, the wardrobe (*kleerkast*) and the chest of drawers (*latafel* or *commode*).<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the kast and the chest, the Dutch also used wicker hampers to store their textiles. These hampers were usually tall and included a lid to keep out

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in: Hester C. Dibbits, "Between Society and Family Values: The Linen Cupboard in Early-modern Households," in *Private Domain, Public Inquiry: Families and Life-styles in the Netherlands and Europe, 1550 to the Present*, ed. Anton Schuurman and Pieter Spierenburg (Verloren: Hilversum, 1996), pp. 126-127, 133.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 133, 138.

things that could soil textiles. The weaving of the hamper provided air circulation within, to prevent musty odors. In use, however, they were much like a chest in that many items required removal if the desired item was at the bottom of the hamper. Additionally, the relatively small diameter of the hamper, particularly when compared to a chest or a commodious kast, required tighter folding or rolling of textiles. Both a kast and a wicker hamper are clearly visible in the Dutch painting *The Linen Closet*, painted in 1663 by Pieter de Hooch (see Figure B.18). This painting also demonstrates the visual extravagance of the kast within the home, particularly when compared with the remaining objects in the room: the kast dwarfs the room and the women standing in front of it.

### The Dutch in America

The Dutch founded the colony of New Netherlands in 1624, but the colony became part of British North America in 1664. Although the colony welcomed emigrants of many cultures, the Dutch influence was dominant, particularly in rural areas. At the middle of the eighteenth century, the area of New York was still identifiably Dutch in character.<sup>6</sup> Like their counterparts in the Netherlands, Dutch-American women seem to have been as fanatical about keeping their homes as clean and tidy as possible.

The kast appeared frequently in wealthy Dutch-American homes, along with small chests and boxes used to store specialty costume accessories, such as headpieces, caps, and jewelry. Dutch Americans also used the wicker hamper, such

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<sup>6</sup> Kenny et.al, p. 3.

as the example in Figure B.19.<sup>7</sup> This hamper is American and the form is similar in both shape and size to the one pictured in *The Linen Closet*, clearly indicating the Dutch influence in this American example. The probate inventory of Cornelis van Dyck, written in Dutch on 22 December 1686 and translated into English in 1687, contained “2 sluytmands or hampers a great one & a little one” located “upon the chamber above the kitchen.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the inventory of Tobial Buel, dated 22 May 1728, contained “2 Large Hampers” valued at one pound for the pair.<sup>9</sup>

The kast appeared primarily in New York, northern New Jersey, and western Connecticut, the former Dutch colonies and settlements of America, from about 1650 to 1825. In terms of value, only the bed, with its expensive textiles, was of higher value than the kast in probate inventories.<sup>10</sup> The kast could appear in any room of the house, primarily in the chamber, often in the parlor, and rarely in the kitchen,<sup>11</sup> indicating that the Dutch in America placed an importance on displaying their wealth

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<sup>7</sup> Blackburn and Piwonka, pp. 199-200, 260.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in: Ruth Piwonka, “New York Colonial Inventories: Dutch Interiors as a Measure of Cultural Change,” in *New World Dutch Studies: Dutch Arts and Culture in Colonial America, 1609-1776*, ed. by Roderic H. Blackburn and Nancy A. Kelley (Albany, NY: Albany Institute of History and Art, 1987), pp. 69-70.

<sup>9</sup> New York City and Vicinity, *Inventories of Estates New York City and Vicinity 1717-1844*, filmed by the New-York Historical Society, microfilm reels M-1 through M-2, Winterthur Museum Libraries (hereafter N-YHS), microfilm reels M-1 through M-2, Tobial Buel probate inventory, 22 May 1728.

<sup>10</sup> Kenny et. al., pp. 1, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Patricia Chapin O'Donnell, “Grisaille decorated *kasten* of New York,” *The Magazine Antiques*, May 1980, pp. 1108-1111.

to visitors and guests in the form of this expensive piece of case furniture and the implied textiles it stored.

The earliest kasten made in America were relatively simple with no drawer(s) and with a plain or very understated cornice. The example in Figure B.20 illustrates this type, as the construction is quite simple and it is smaller than the more flamboyant kasten, such as the example in the Dutch painting in Figure B.18. Additionally, the drawer at the bottom of the kast in Figure B.20 is false, indicating the owner desired to demonstrate more wealth than he or she actually possessed. Later on, the styles of the Dutch Baroque heavily influenced the more extravagant kasten of the eighteenth century. These kasten boasted a massive cornice that could jut out at a 45° angle, paneled and molded doors, and one or two drawers in the bottom. The American version of the Baroque kast is similar to the Dutch example portrayed in Figure B.18, also had two doors, and generally contained two or three widely spaced shelves behind the doors, as seen in Figure B.21, which illustrates the interior shelving of the kast in Figure B.20.<sup>12</sup>

Like their Dutch counterparts, Dutch-American women also used cloth to cover the shelves of the kast to keep the textiles being stored from touching the wooden shelves and sides. An example of this practice is the home of Jacob De Lange, whose New York probate inventory listed “six cloths which they put upon the boards in the case.”<sup>13</sup> Dutch-American women also labeled their kasten shelves, as

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<sup>12</sup> Kenny et. al., p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Kenny et al., p. 9.

evidenced by an American kast that maintains its eighteenth-century labels, indicating “best sheets,” “old sheets,” and “guest napkins.”<sup>14</sup>

Although most people who possessed a kast only possessed one, François Rombouts of New York City owned five. Moreover, he used at least one of his kasten for display purposes as his 1691/92 probate inventory included one “holland Cubbert furnished with Earton ware and Parslin,” [earthenware and porcelain].<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Margareta Schuyler of Albany kept a kast in her *Groote kamer* [great chamber], and upon the kast was “1 great earthen pott & cup,” according to her 27 January 1711 inventory. Additionally, her kast contained a large amount of linens, clothing, caps, and headpieces.<sup>16</sup>

The wicker basket and the kast were not the only primarily Dutch storage pieces being used in the New World. When Robert Livingston translated Cornelis Van Dyck’s 1686 inventory into English in 1687, he could not find a single word to translate what he described as “1 chest of drawers of south walnut with a press for napkins on top of it.”<sup>17</sup> This was likely a form particularly associated with Holland and used to press linens (a device similar to that in Figure B.6), with storage space underneath the actual press.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the Dutch used what appear to be

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<sup>14</sup> Kenny et al., p. 9. This kast was sold at Cater’s Auction, West Berne, New York, in May of 1985.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Piwonka, pp. 73-74.

<sup>17</sup> Piwonka, p. 64, quoted on p. 69.

different forms for hanging clothes and cloaks. The following descriptions all vary slightly, but may describe similar objects: “a capstock of south walnut to hang cloaks upon,” in the great garret “1 small heungeltie [hanger],”<sup>19</sup> and “1 rod for hanging clothes.”<sup>20</sup>

In the early eighteenth century, the kast seems to have fallen out of favor in urban areas as the English chest of drawers became more fashionable and New York became more Anglicized. In more isolated areas, however, the kast remained a symbol of wealth further into the eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the probate inventories from the collections at the New-York Historical Society indicate that English forms became more common as the eighteenth century progressed.<sup>22</sup> An early example of the two cultures colliding is the 1686 inventory of Cornelis van Dyck, the owner of the linen press and capstock. In addition to these Dutch items, his inventory cites two examples of “a painted chest of drawers,”<sup>23</sup> an English form. In

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<sup>18</sup> Dean F. Failey, *Long Island is My Nation: The Decorative Arts & Craftsmen, 1640-1830* (Setauket, NY: Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities, 1976), p. 19. An example is published in this catalog, figure 12, page 19.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Piwonka, pp. 69-70. Both examples from the probate inventory of Cornelis van Dyck, Albany, 22 December 1686.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Piwonka, p. 73. From the probate inventory of Margareta Schuyler, Albany, 27 January 1711.

<sup>21</sup> Blackburn and Piwonka, p. 261.

<sup>22</sup> N-YHS, reels M-1 through M-2.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Piwonka, pp. 69-70.

contrast, the 1729 probate of John Ashby, a very English sounding name, contained linens listed together with a basket, a predominantly Dutch form.<sup>24</sup>

Although the New York area was under significant Dutch cultural influence, some English settlers always maintained very English interiors. James Lloyd of Lloyd's Neck owned no kasten, hampers, or capstocks, but instead owned a chest of drawers, two old chests, and six "sives" [safes?]. His clothing, listed separately from the rest of the room-by-room inventory, is second only to the bed in the hall chamber in terms of household value. With the bed in the hall chamber was the chest of drawers, the six "sives" and one of the two chests. Located in the upper chamber, the other chest held the linens of his home.<sup>25</sup>

The New York region was quite different in terms of clothing storage than the other regions discussed in this paper, primarily because of its Dutch influence. Although the chest of drawers, an English form, does appear in scattered probate records, chests and Dutch forms predominate. Additionally, the kast was more massive and difficult to move than the traditional English chest of drawers, but did allow sorting and ease of use, much like the English form. Eventually, by the end of the eighteenth century, English forms would predominate in the New York region.

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<sup>24</sup> N-YHS, John Ashby probate inventory, 6 August 1729.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in: The New-York Historical Society, *Papers of the Lloyd Family of the manor of Queens Village, Lloyd's Neck, Long Island, New York 1654-1826*, volume 1: 1654-1752 (New York: Printed for the Society, 1927), pp. 119-122.

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

Throughout the period from 1680 to 1750, many changes occurred in the storage of textiles. Although people still tended to fold rather than hang their garments and linens, the objects in which they placed their textiles changed. While the chest remained a popular form for storage, changing little except stylistically during the time period studied, the popularity of the chest of drawers increased dramatically. And although this transition occurred at different rates throughout the colonies, it also makes clear that the colonies were more alike in their textile storage than they were dissimilar, though cultural differences did create the appearance of differing storage furniture, such as the *schränk* and the *kast*. This chapter will compare the regions studied in this thesis, highlighting their differences and similarities.

The probate inventories of the three areas surveyed in this thesis are easily comparable despite the differences in actual numbers available. Although there were a greater number of inventories for Suffolk County, Massachusetts than for Philadelphia or York County, Virginia, the statistics gleaned from the respective surveys are comparable because roughly the same proportion and economic cross-section of their respective populations had estates that went through probate court and produced probate inventories, allowing for the comparisons generated here.



Another interesting aspect of the inventories is the contrast between the inventories of the wealthy and the inventories of the poor. As expected, there were fewer inventories for the wealthy than for the poor, as there were fewer wealthy people than poor people. The content of these inventories, however, are markedly different in both quantity and description of goods. The inventories of the wealthy tended to be quite descriptive, often room-by-room, with the majority of items listed specifically. The inventory of Ursula Cutt of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, excerpted in chapter two, is an excellent example of this type of inventory. The listed contents of a single chest of drawers in her possession is of great detail and the length of this part of her inventory is longer than most entire inventories. In contrast, the inventories of the poor tended to be quite brief, listing objects by category, without description. The inventory of Edward Tabb of York County, Virginia, is such an inventory. Valued at less than half of the average inventory value for 1740-1741, the listing of Mr. Tabb's textiles was generic: "his wearing apparel Linnen &c."<sup>1</sup> Probate inventories such as that of Thomas Graham of Philadelphia, excerpted in chapter three and of great detail despite his poverty, are rare.

All three regions surveyed showed an increase over time in the appearance of storage furniture in their probate inventories. This likely reflected the stability of the settlements by the middle of the eighteenth century and the increase of stability over time. The survey for the appearance of storage furniture for York County, Virginia, however, yielded a surprising result. Except for the years 1680-1681, York County

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<sup>1</sup> YCPR, Edward Tabb probate inventory, 20 July 1741.

consistently had a greater percentage of inventories recording storage furniture than Suffolk County, Massachusetts, or Philadelphia (see Figure C.2). The reason for the unusual results for York County, Virginia in the appearance of storage furniture is a result of the appearance of one type of furniture in these homes, the chest. Virginians utilized the chest in much higher numbers than those in the other regions surveyed (see Figure C.5<sup>2</sup>). Perhaps the reliance on the chest was due to its ease of construction as, unlike the northern colonies, Virginia did not begin to favor the chest of drawers to any great extent: few Virginians apparently replaced their chests with chests of drawers, probably because of the expense of the chest of drawers and the reliance in Virginia on imports. In Philadelphia and Suffolk County, however, the chest never appeared as frequently it did in York County, and the appearance of the chest declined over time, particularly in Suffolk County (see Figure C.5).

In contrast, for all three regions surveyed, the chest of drawers rose in appearance over time. Suffolk County reflected the greatest shift in favor of the chest of drawers, and Philadelphia revealed a smaller but still significant shift, while Virginia experienced a more modest rise in the occurrence of the chest of drawers (see Figure C.6). For all three surveys, however, the chest of drawers never appeared more often than the chest. The chest of drawers may have been the latest fashion, but the standard chest was still the most common form of storage furniture.

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<sup>2</sup> The graphs in Figures C.5-C.8 are of two types. At the top of each Figure is the graph of the raw data. Below that graph is a second graph in which the data in the graph has been smoothed by the process of linear regression, in this case by taking the square roots of the raw data, in order to better see the general trends over the given period. For information on linear regression please see chapter three, "Two-Variable

The appearance of the trunk in probate inventories varied more widely by region than the other forms discussed. While the trunk declined in appearance in Suffolk County, in both Philadelphia and York County it increased in appearance, most significantly in York County (see Figure C.7). Because the trunk is accessed in the same manner as the chest, the residents of Suffolk County increasingly rejected the form. The trunk, however, is unlike the chest as it is multi-purpose and useful for travel, which may indicate why in Philadelphia and York County it increased in appearance.

The overall trend for the appearance of the box was also one of decline for all three surveys (see Figure C.8). Again, this is likely due to the awkward access to the storage compartment of the box, which functioned as a smaller form of a chest.

Although few of the inventories surveyed were of the room-by-room type, those that do appear indicate some interesting patterns in textile storage. The residents of the regions surveyed desired to display their wealth to the public, and utilized textiles and storage furniture to do so. Chests that primarily held textiles tended to appear in chambers and parlors while those that held other objects, such as tools or lumber (a word often used to describe wooden objects), appeared elsewhere. The chest of drawers, however, almost always appeared in the chamber or parlor. As both the chamber and the parlor were rooms used to greet guests and display wealth, this indicates that the storage furniture intended to hold textiles also indicated wealth to guests. In addition, not only did the chest of drawers indicate stored textiles, but

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Linear Regression," pp. 65-134, in Edward R. Tufte, *Data Analysis for Politics and Policy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974).

also indicated that the owner was aware of the latest interior fashions and had purchased this expensive new article, making the chest of drawers an item of display in itself. Increasingly relegated to service or storage areas, such as the garret, the discarded older furnishings went unseen by a visitor. Clearly the residents of all the regions studied desired to demonstrate fashionable interiors to their guests.

Despite the desire to display wealth to the public in terms of textiles and storage furniture, the four regions demonstrated that wealth in different degrees. Most importantly, the different cultural regions favored different storage furniture that in itself was impressive to the visitor, such as the Dutch *kast* and the German *schränk*. Perhaps the citizens of the former Dutch colonies in New York exhibited their wealth most blatantly, with their large, commodious kasten that also allowed display of porcelain and silver on top of the case piece. The large interior surely evoked ideas of large numbers of textiles inside to the visitor. Similarly, the people of New England and Suffolk County, Massachusetts, sought to demonstrate their wealth, but instead of the kast they utilized court cupboards for displaying porcelain and silver in the very earliest time of this thesis. The high chest of drawers with a flat top to display porcelain and silver and numerous drawers implying storage of a great number of textiles was in use by the early eighteenth century. Similarly, the low chest of drawers also displayed wealth in and of itself in the parlors and chambers of New England. In contrast, however, Virginians did not use these items in significant numbers. While the extremely wealthy did display their wealth by using the chest of drawers, usually located in public rooms of the house, the middling and poorer classes continued to favor the chest. Perhaps the greater disparity in the economic status of

the wealthy versus the poor in Virginia allowed for this discrepancy as the poor simply may not have had the money for display items or the expensive chest of drawers itself.

From 1680 until 1750, a great many changes took place in the storage of textiles. Although the task of caring for textiles changed little, and the storage methods for textiles (usually folding) also changed little, the cases holding the textiles changed a great deal. Slowly disappearing from public view were the simple chests, easy to construct but not easily accessible. Increasingly, furniture with differentiated spaces began to take its place. Chests of drawers, whose different drawers were useful for sorting and categorizing textiles, grew in appearance. With time, these chests of drawers would grow, sometimes containing twenty or more drawers, allowing a great deal of categorization. These high chests of drawers and their cousins, the wardrobes and clothespresses, became more common in the homes of the wealthy who could afford these complicated objects and the expensive textiles stored inside. Additionally, more storage furniture appears with time throughout the differing economic classes. Acquiring more objects of greater variety, these consumers demanded more storage pieces to accommodate and perhaps display these objects. Some regions were slower to assimilate these items into their homes, but by the middle of the eighteenth century all of the regions studied were increasingly becoming consumer societies.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This last statement based on Cary Carson, "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial America: Why Demand?" in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994).

The second half of the eighteenth century continued this trend of consumption and classification. As homes increasingly filled with objects, so too did they fill with furnishings to store these objects. To accommodate books, the desk and bookcase form became common among the wealthy. Growing numbers of high chests of drawers filled chambers with their accompanying dressing tables. Costume became more complicated and cumbersome to store until the last few years of the century, when the appearance of the Empire style, inspired by the lines of Classical antiquity, simplified the costumes of both men and women.

Similarly, the cultural influences in the colonies changed in the latter half of the eighteenth century, as did the methods of textile storage that reflected those changes. In New York, the Dutch waned as the leaders of government, fashion, and society, and the area became identifiably English in culture and textile storage. At the same time the *kasten* also waned in popularity, particularly in urban areas, and was replaced with the chest of drawers and the high chest of drawers. The Pennsylvania region, in contrast, welcomed increasing numbers of Germans into its colony, creating a clearly identifiable German culture in southeastern Pennsylvania that continues to exist in some areas today. The influence of Germans in Philadelphia was significantly less than in the southeastern Pennsylvania countryside, but still substantial, affecting the aesthetic of the interiors and the construction methods of both homes and furniture. This is indicated by the relatively widespread use of *schranks* and similar wardrobe forms in the Philadelphia and southeastern Pennsylvania area in the last half of the eighteenth century, but most easily illustrated in the Germanic through-tenons that appear in Philadelphia chairs.

The New England region, relatively well populated, became increasingly independent of England and her ideas and fashions throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century. As fewer English-trained cabinetmakers settled in New England, old ideas of furniture and thus textile storage remained in place for a longer period of time than in the other colonies. When newer forms, such as the wardrobe, which allowed for hanging clothing or placing clothing on sliding shelves, arrived in America in the 1790s, New England rejected the new form, despite the acceptance of the form by the other former colonies.

One of those former colonies that increasingly accepted new English forms was Virginia, which manufactured and imported a wealth of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century wardrobes. As the plantation system fully developed in the south, the wealthy plantation owners sought to gentrify their homes with English furnishings and styles, allowing new ideas of textile storage to easily take form in these areas.

Trends in textile storage reveal a great deal about the importance and value of textiles in the home as well as the safe-keeping of these textiles in a piece of case furniture that made a visual statement to visitors and guests. Additionally, the differences in the rate at which new forms assimilated into the homes of colonists from New England to the South is remarkable. Throughout the time period studied in this thesis, 1680 to 1750, the colonists looked to their different cultural roots to determine what types of storage furniture filled their homes and how they stored the textiles themselves.

Appendix A.

**WORKSHEETS**



	Boston	16	17
Clothing? yes no	Clothing? yes no	Clothing? yes no	Clothing? yes no
Linens? yes no	Linens? yes no	Linens? yes no	Linens? yes no
Storage Furniture? yes no	Storage Furniture? yes no	Storage Furniture? yes no	Storage Furniture? yes no
Box Lock	Box Lock	Box Lock	Box Lock
Chest Lock	Chest Lock	Chest Lock	Chest Lock
Trunk Lock	Trunk Lock	Trunk Lock	Trunk Lock
Chest of Drawers Lock	Chest of Drawers Lock	Chest of Drawers Lock	Chest of Drawers Lock
Wardrobe Lock	Wardrobe Lock	Wardrobe Lock	Wardrobe Lock
Hat & Box	Hat & Box	Hat & Box	Hat & Box
Old as Adj.	Old as Adj.	Old as Adj.	Old as Adj.
Total Value:	Total Value:	Total Value:	Total Value:
Other:	Other:	Other:	Other:

Clothing? yes no	Clothing? yes no	Clothing? yes no
Linens? yes no	Linens? yes no	Linens? yes no
Storage Furniture? yes no	Storage Furniture? yes no	Storage Furniture? yes no
Box Lock	Box Lock	Box Lock
Chest Lock	Chest Lock	Chest Lock
Trunk Lock	Trunk Lock	Trunk Lock
Chest of Drawers Lock	Chest of Drawers Lock	Chest of Drawers Lock
Wardrobe Lock	Wardrobe Lock	Wardrobe Lock
Hat & Box	Hat & Box	Hat & Box
Old as Adj.	Old as Adj.	Old as Adj.
Total Value:	Total Value:	Total Value:
Other:	Other:	Other:

Clothing? yes no	Clothing? yes no	Clothing? yes no
Linens? yes no	Linens? yes no	Linens? yes no
Storage Furniture? yes no	Storage Furniture? yes no	Storage Furniture? yes no
Box Lock	Box Lock	Box Lock
Chest Lock	Chest Lock	Chest Lock
Trunk Lock	Trunk Lock	Trunk Lock
Chest of Drawers Lock	Chest of Drawers Lock	Chest of Drawers Lock
Wardrobe Lock	Wardrobe Lock	Wardrobe Lock
Hat & Box	Hat & Box	Hat & Box
Old as Adj.	Old as Adj.	Old as Adj.
Total Value:	Total Value:	Total Value:
Other:	Other:	Other:

Figure A.1

Estate of \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Inventory \_\_\_\_\_

Storage Furniture?	yes	no		
Chest? _____	Locks?	yes	no	don't know
Trunk? _____	Locks?	yes	no	don't know
Box? _____	Locks?	yes	no	don't know
Hat? _____ & Box _____	Locks?	yes	no	don't know
Chest of Drawers? _____	Locks?	yes	no	don't know
Desk? _____	Locks?	yes	no	don't know
Wardrobe/Kast/Schrank? _____	Locks?	yes	no	don't know

What is the value for each piece of storage furniture?

total value of storage furniture \_\_\_\_\_

total value of clothing \_\_\_\_\_

total value of linens (not counting bed hangings and mattresses) \_\_\_\_\_

total value of estate \_\_\_\_\_

Is the clothing/linens listed separately or room-by-room?      separately      room-by-room

If the clothing/linens is listed room-by-room, what rooms have clothing/linens in them?

Does the clothing/linens seem to be matched with a piece of furniture?      yes      no

List value of all textiles below, with storage furniture, if possible:

Figure A.2

## Appendix B.

### FIGURES



Figure B.1  
Portrait of Edward Collins  
New York, ca. 1740, by John Watson  
Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, 80.25



Figure B.2  
Portrait of Mrs. Harne Gansevoort (Magdalena Douw)  
New York, ca. 1740, artist unknown  
Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, 63.852

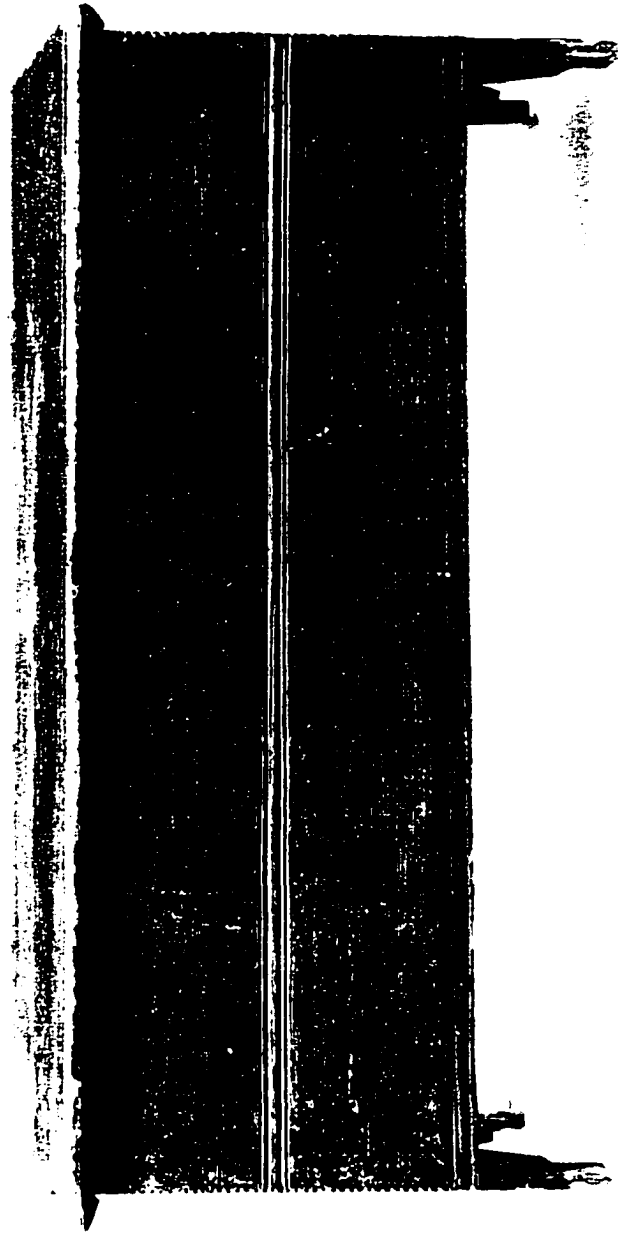


Figure B.3  
Chest, New England, ca. 1680-1700  
Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, 60.46

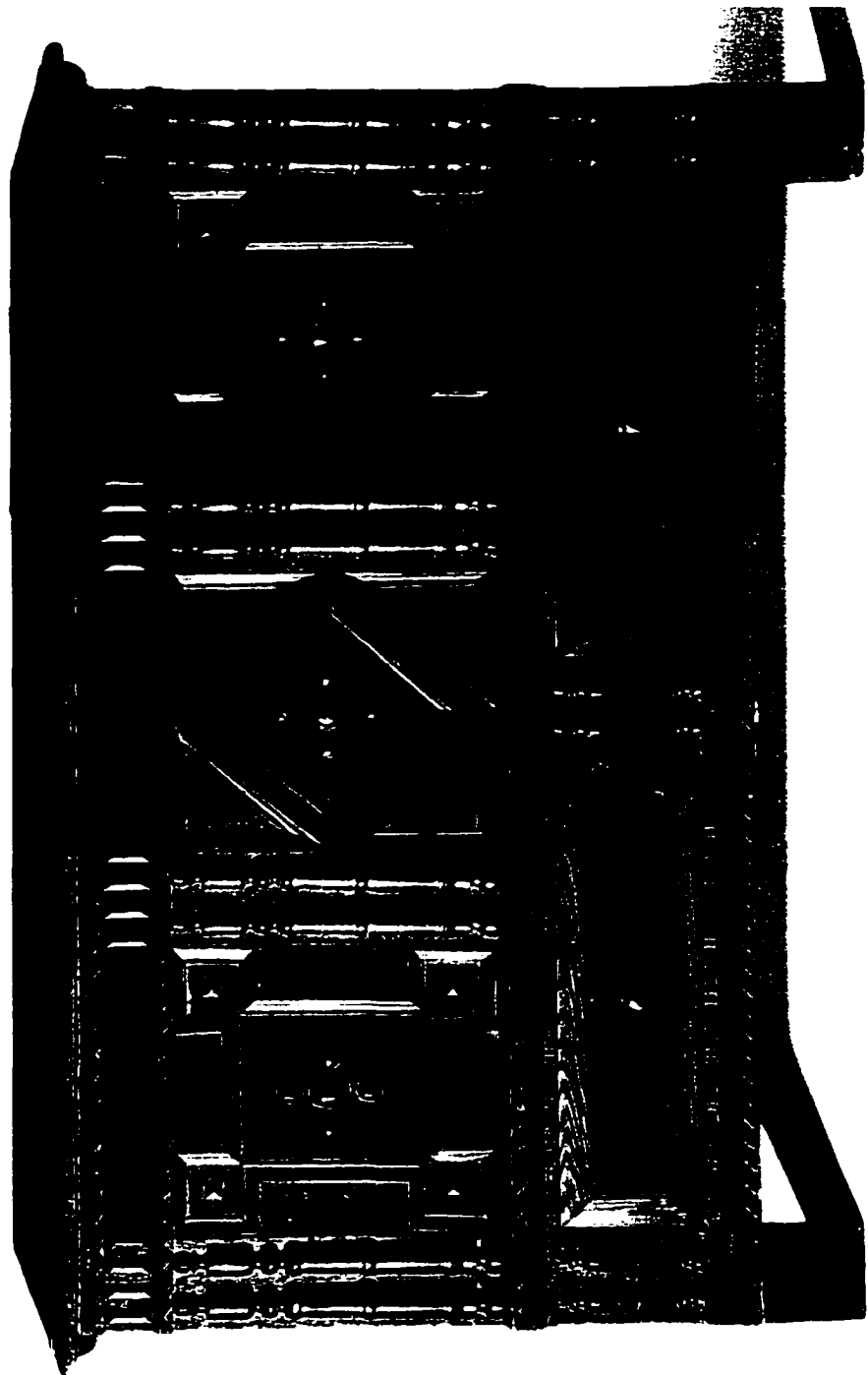


Figure B.4  
Chest with drawers, Plymouth, MA, ca. 1680-1700  
Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, 58.543



Figure B.5  
Chest of Drawers with doors, Boston, ca. 1650-1670  
Yale University Art Gallery, 1930.2109  
Photo taken by author



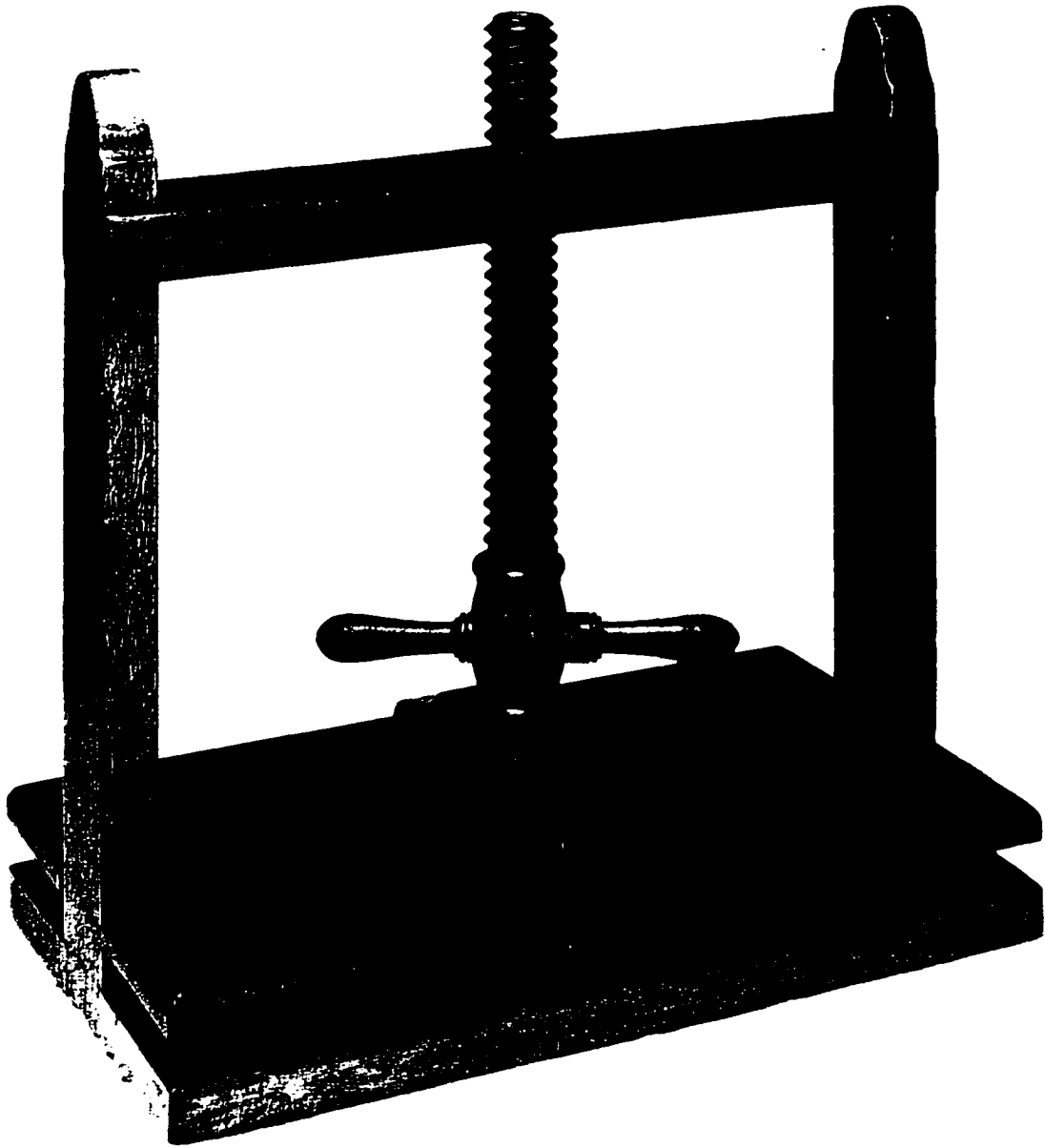


Figure B.6  
Linen Press, American, ca. 1750-1800  
Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, 66.0746

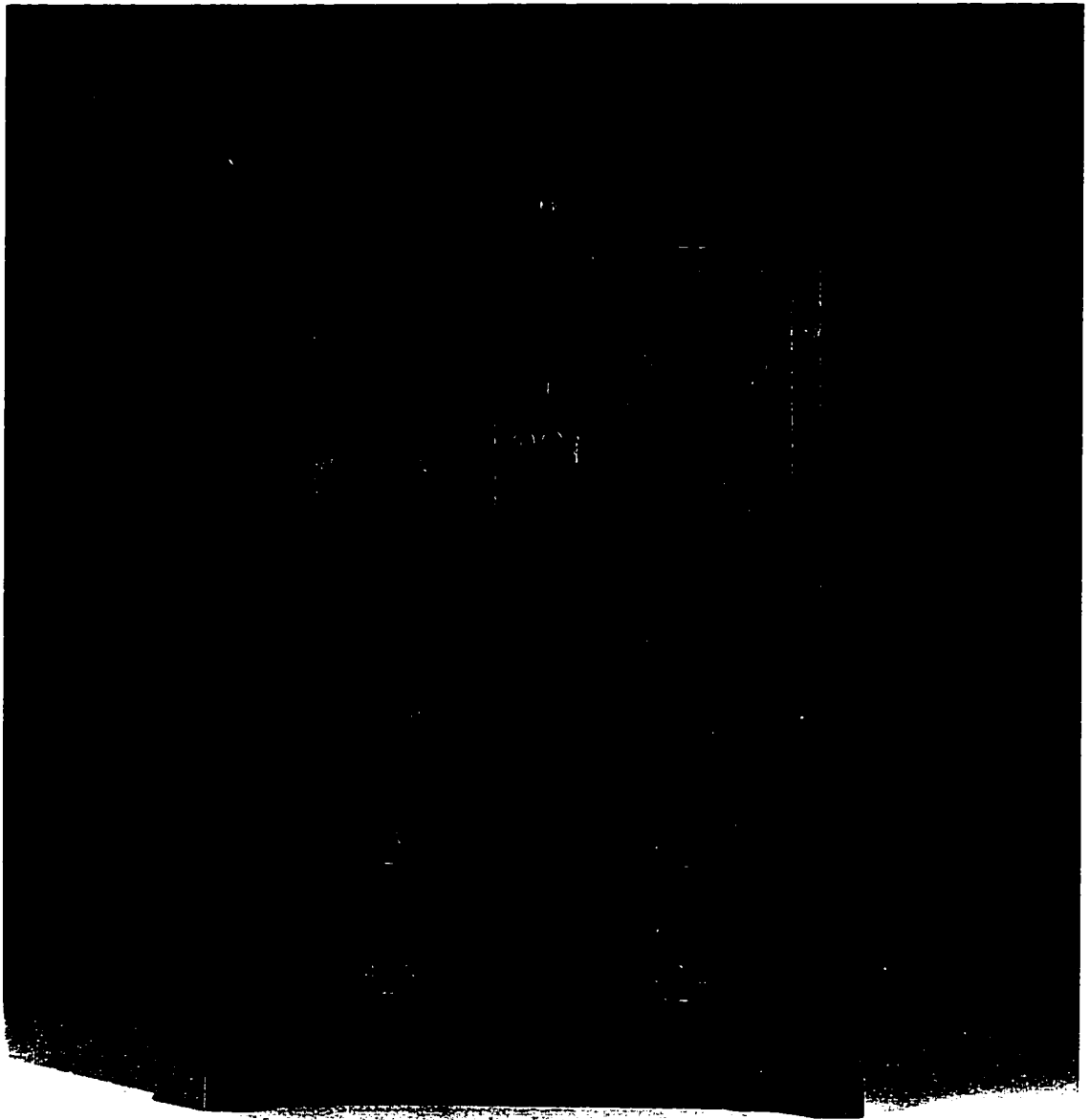


Figure B.7  
Clothespress, English, early 18th century  
Courtesy, Christie's, King Street, London

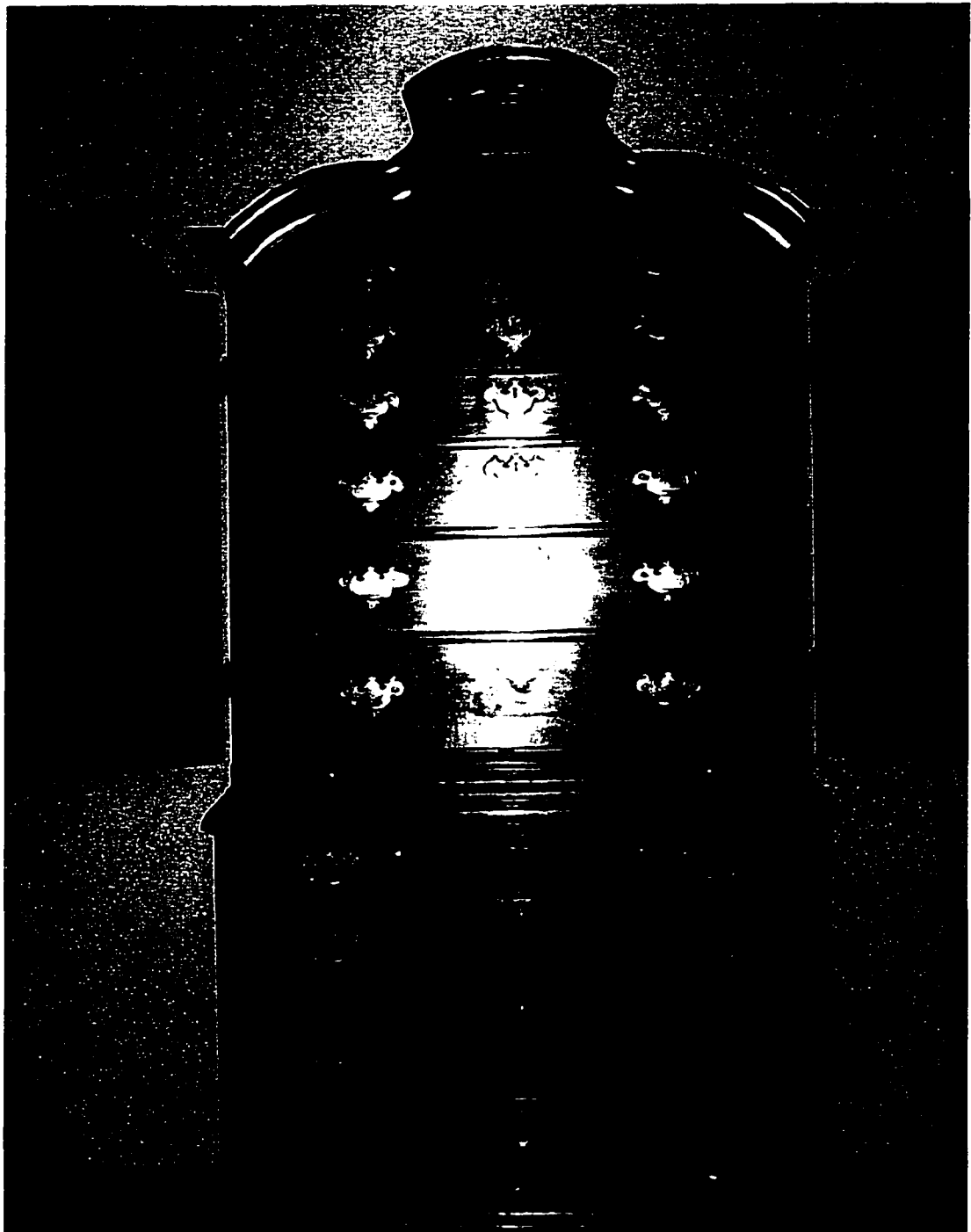


Figure B.8  
Clothespress, Boston, ca. 1740-1750  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1987.254  
Photo taken by author

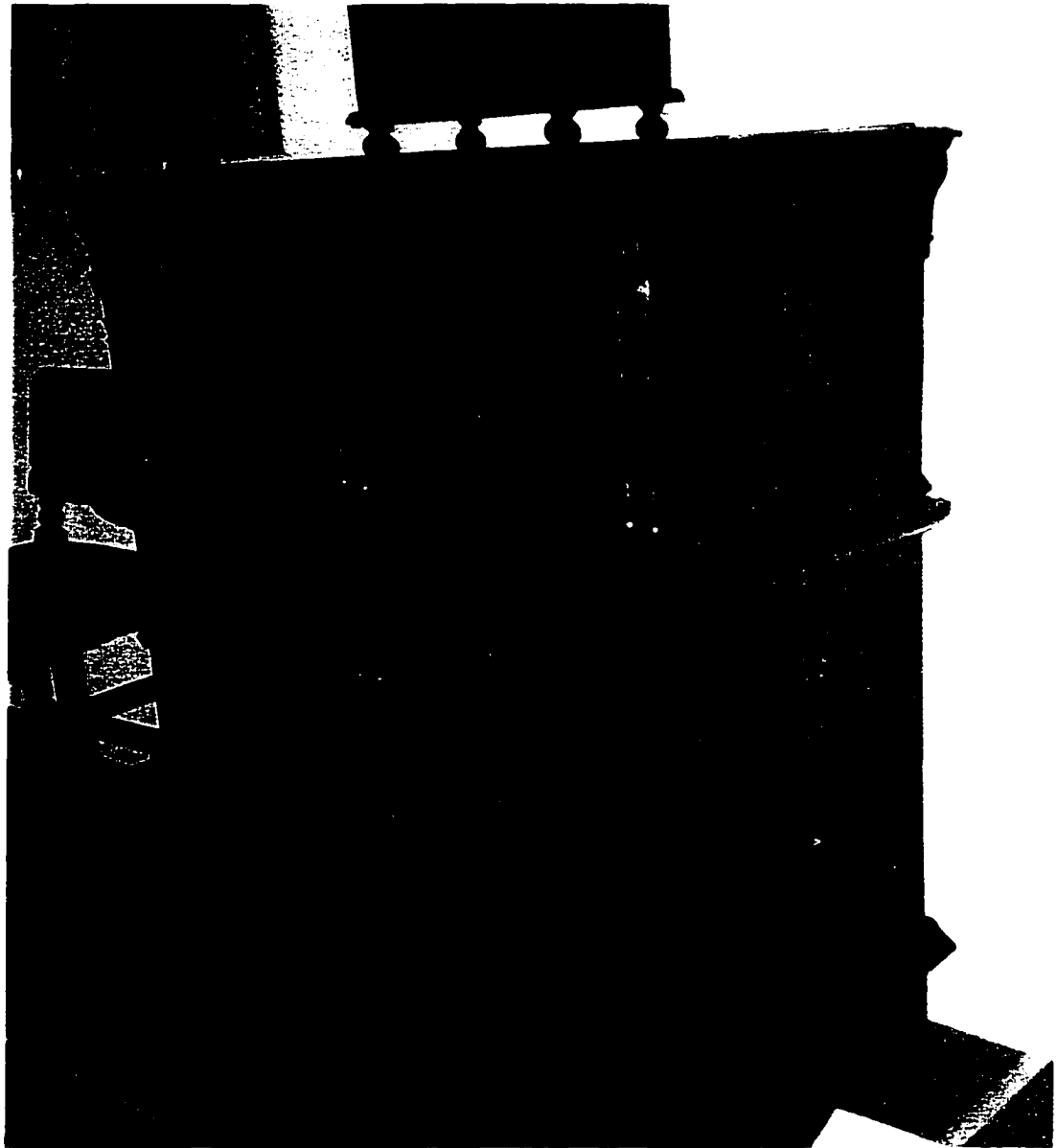


Figure B.9  
Chest of Drawers, Mason-Messinger, Boston, ca. 1650-1670  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 32.219  
Photo taken by author

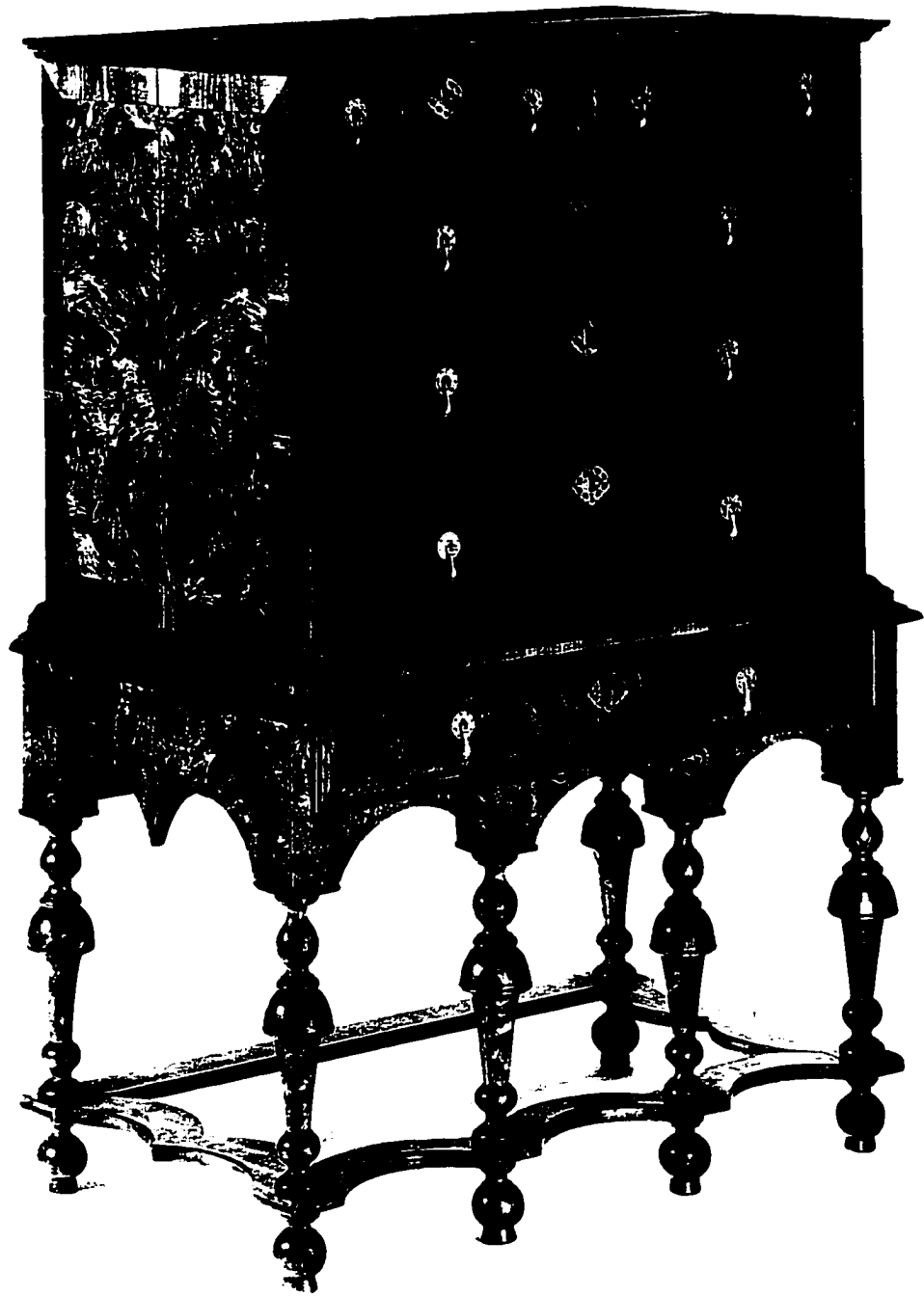


Figure B.10  
Chest on Stand, New England, 1700-1725  
Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, 58.579



Figure B.11  
Chest-on-Chest, Boston, ca. 1715-1725  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1986.240  
Photo taken by author



Figure B.12  
Schrack, Pennsylvania, 1768, 65.2262  
Courtesy, Winterthur Museum



Figure B.13  
Schrank, interior, Pennsylvania, 1768, 65.2262  
Courtesy, Winterthur Museum



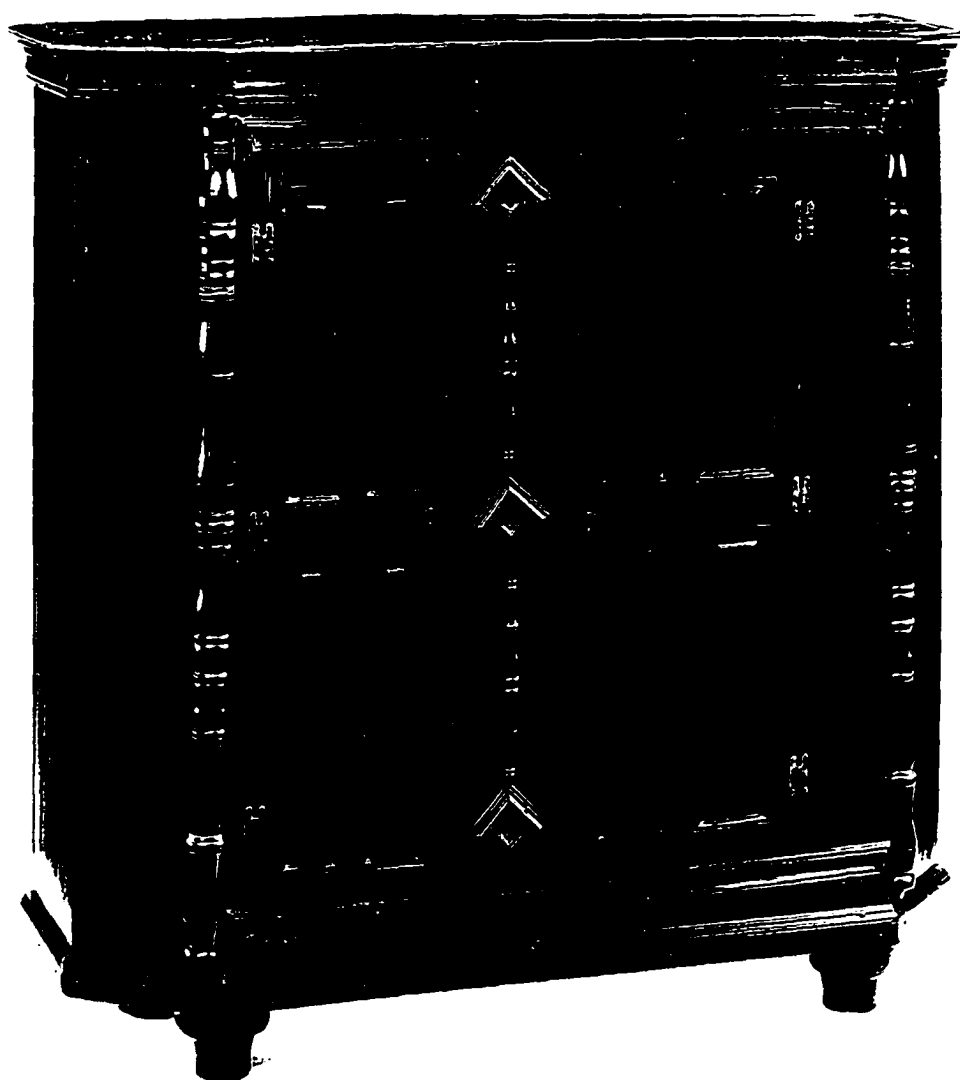


Figure B.14  
Clothespress, Tidewater Virginia, 1690-1710, 2024.1  
Courtesy, Collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts

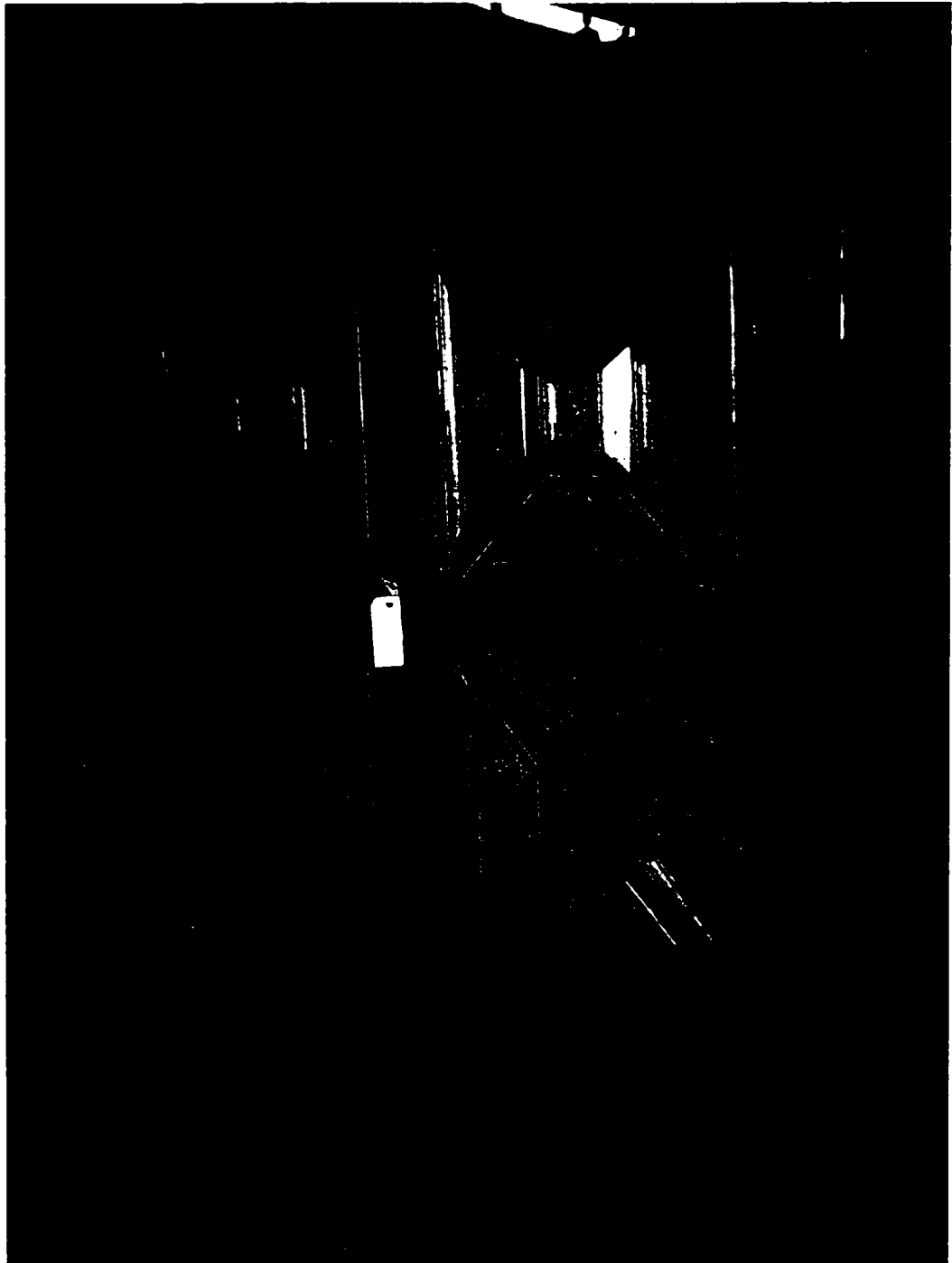


Figure B.15  
Clothespress, Virginia, 1680-1710  
Yale University Art Gallery, 1930.2660  
Photo taken by author

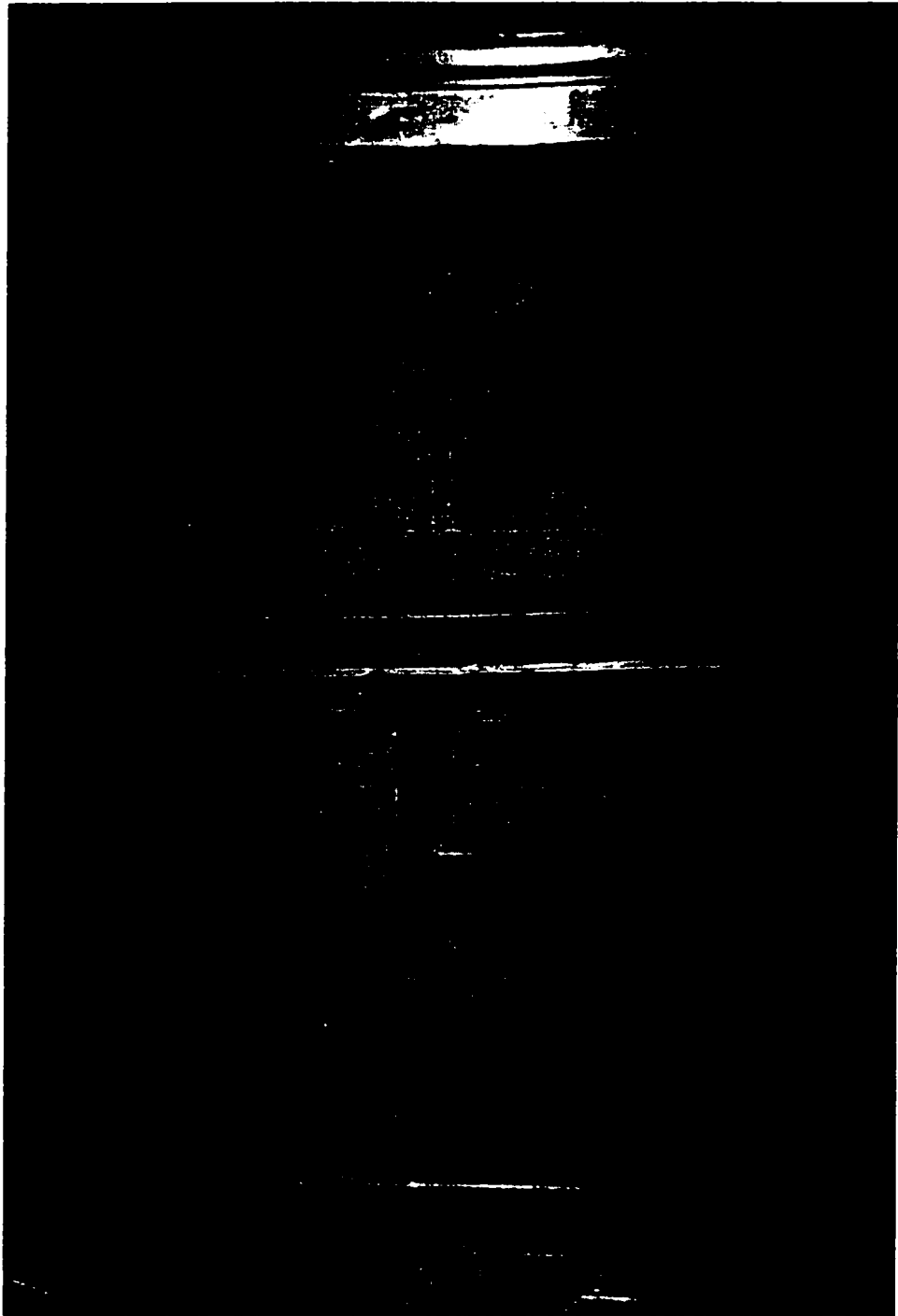


Figure B.16  
Clothespress, interior, Virginia, 1680-1710  
Yale University Art Gallery, 1930.2660  
Photo taken by author

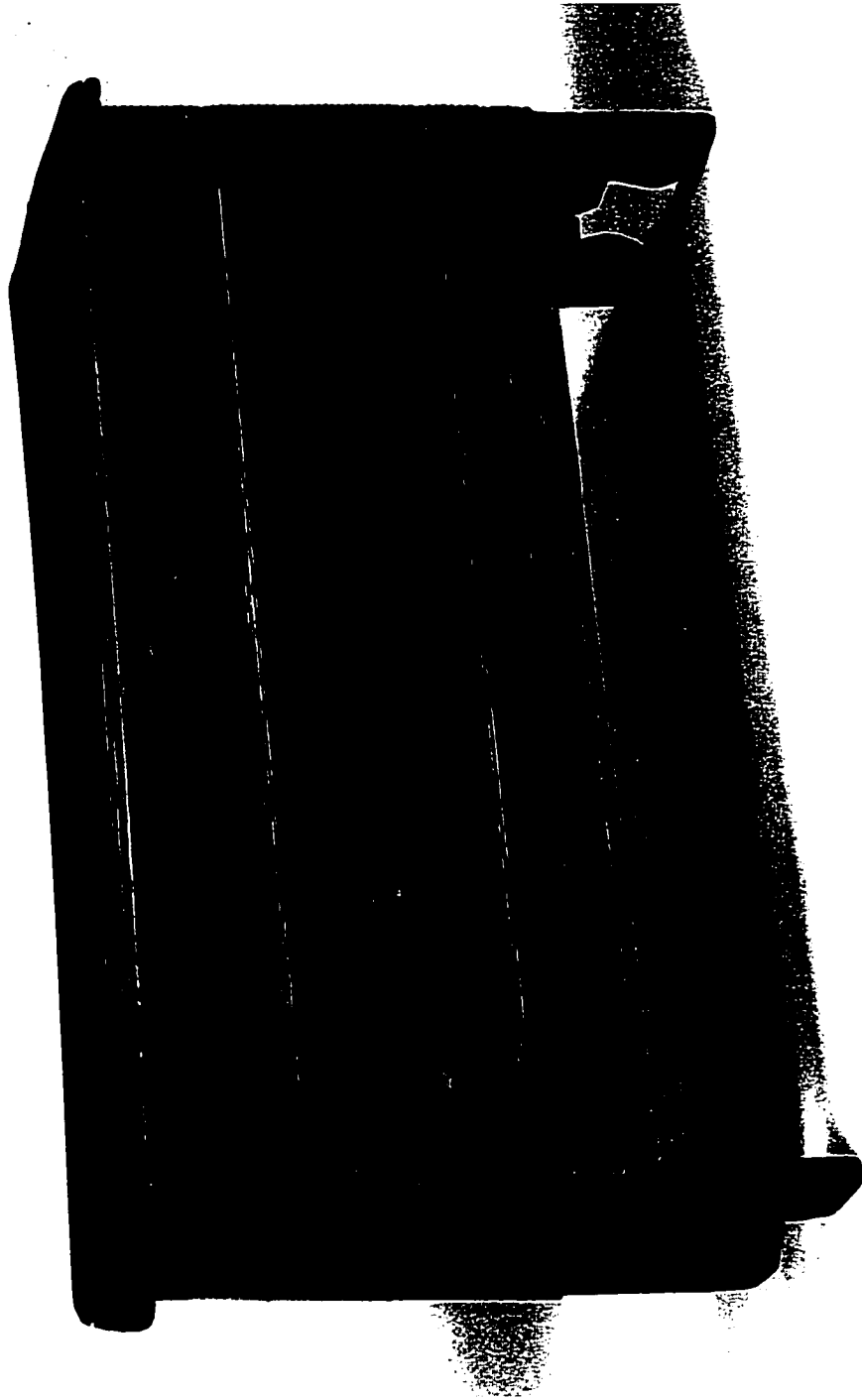


Figure B.17  
Chest, Tidewater Virginia, 1690-1720  
Courtesy, Collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 4058

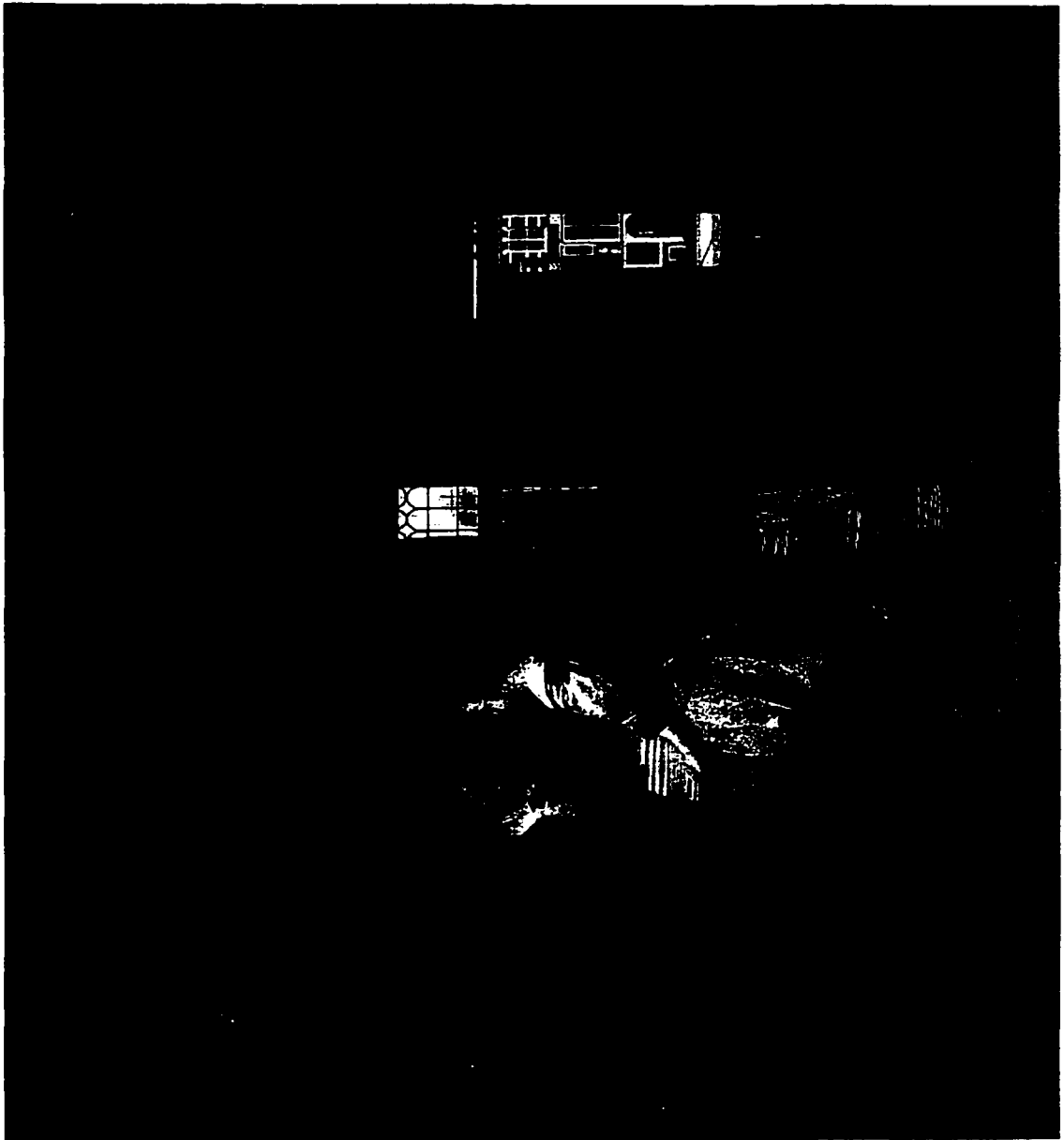


Figure B.18  
*The Linen Closet*, Pieter de Hooch, 1663  
Courtesy, Rijksmuseum, C1191

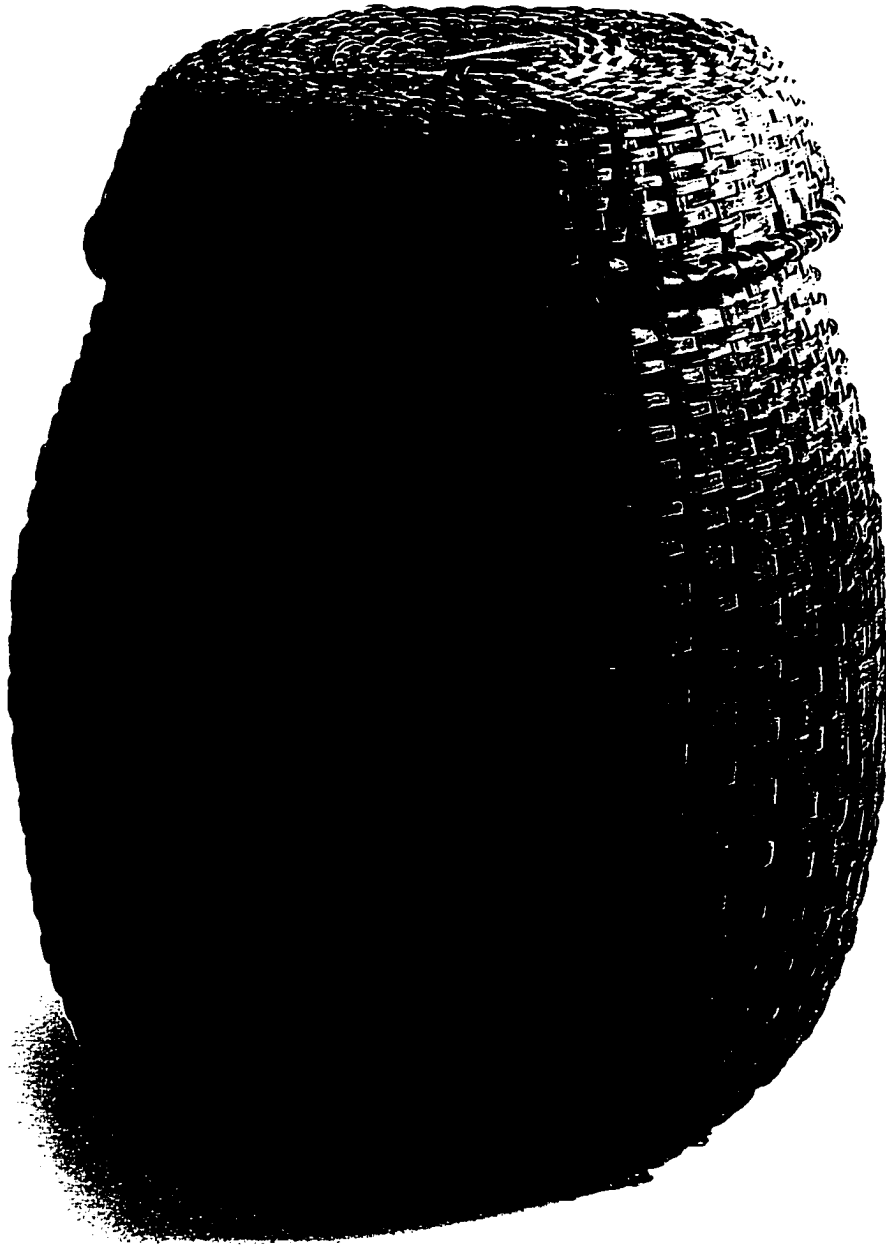


Figure B.19  
Hamper, America, probably New York area, 1650-1800  
Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, 60.994a,b

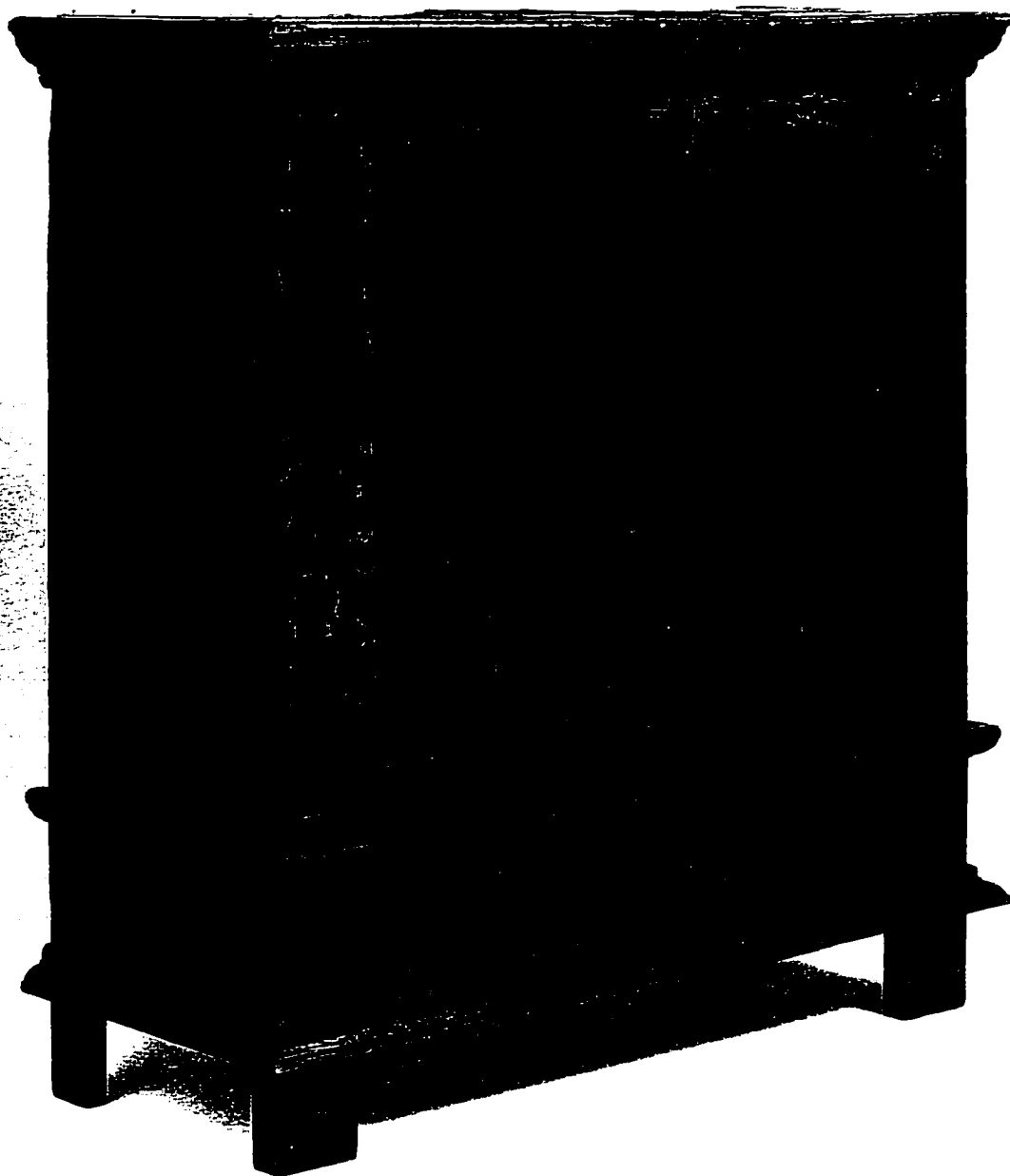


Figure B.20  
Kast, probably New York City, 1650-1700  
Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, 57.87.1

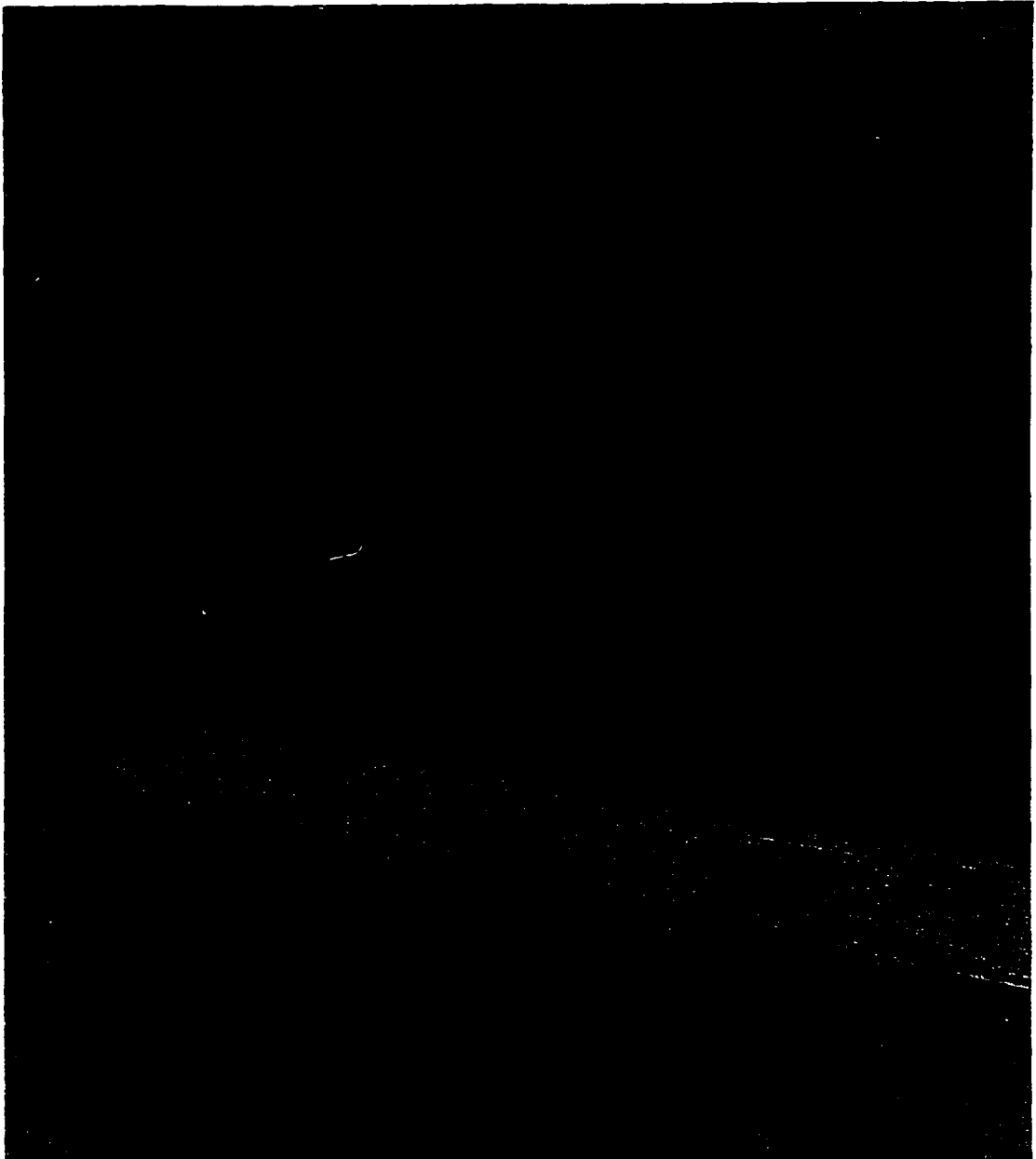


Figure B.21  
Kast, interior, probably New York City, 1650-1700  
Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, 57.87.1



## Appendix C.

### **GRAPHS**

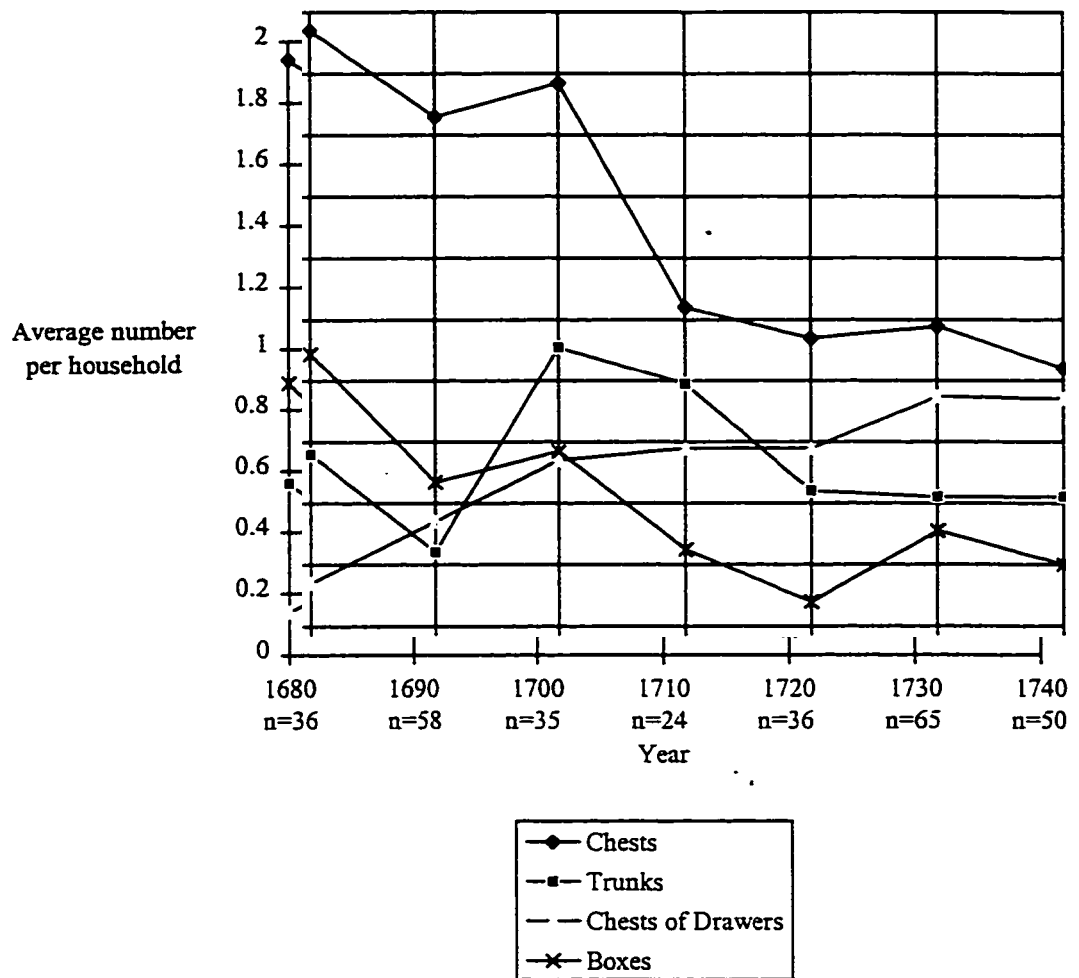


Figure C.1  
Suffolk County, Massachusetts: Appearance of Chests, Trunks,  
Chests of Drawers, and Boxes per Household

Figure C.2a  
Suffolk County,  
Massachusetts

Percent of  
Households with  
Storage Furniture

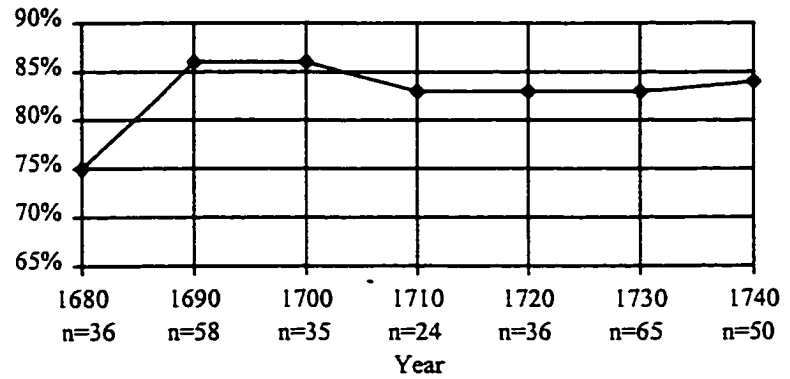


Figure C.2b  
Philadelphia,  
Pennsylvania

Percent of  
Households with  
Storage Furniture

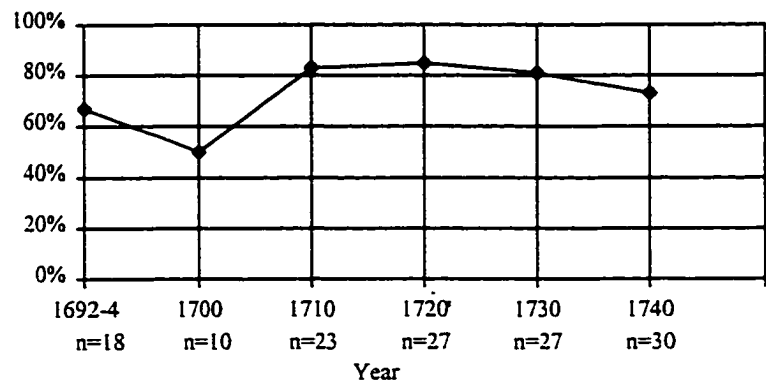


Figure C.2c  
York County,  
Virginia

Percent of  
Households with  
Storage Furniture

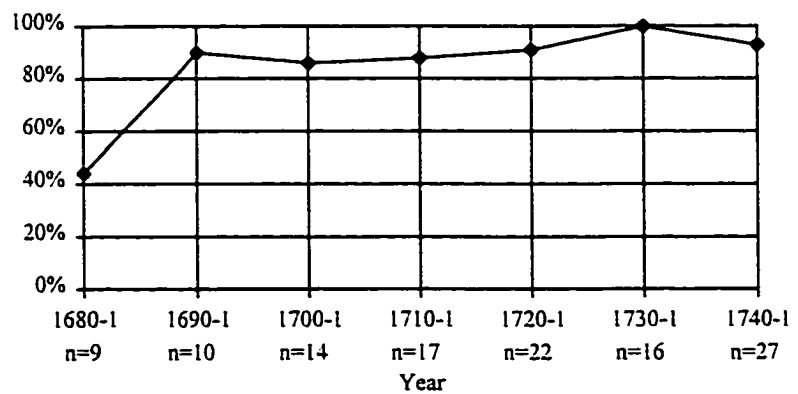


Figure C.2a-c  
Percent of Households with Storage Furniture in Suffolk County, Massachusetts;  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and York County, Virginia

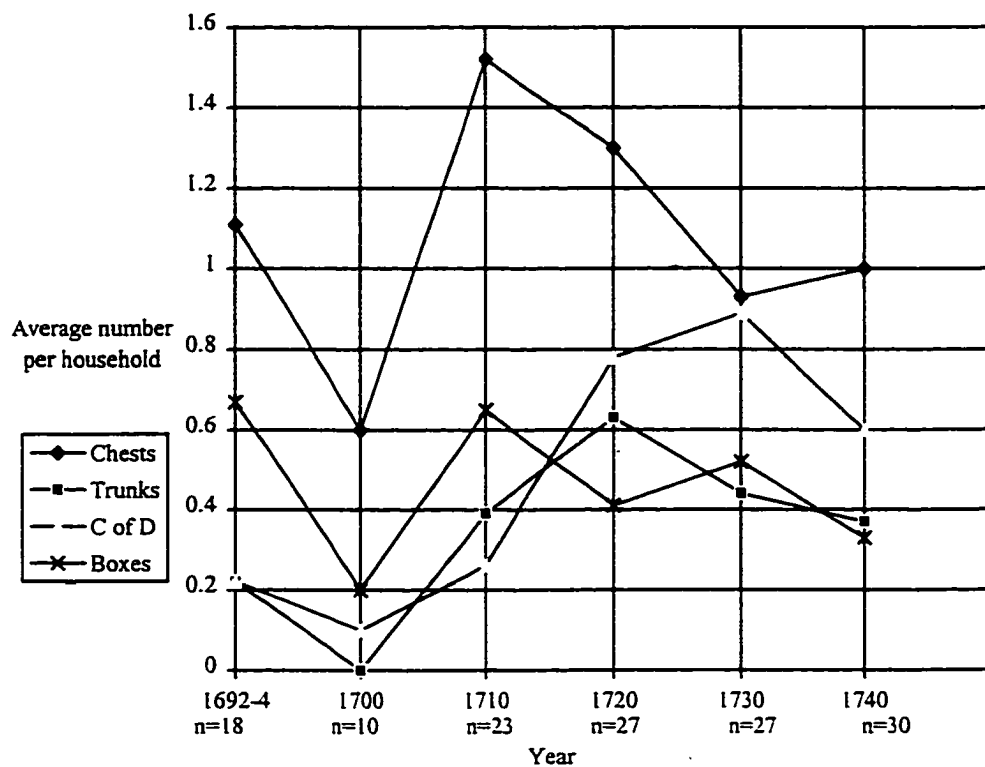


Figure C.3  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Appearance of Chests, Trunks, Chests  
of Drawers, and Boxes per Household

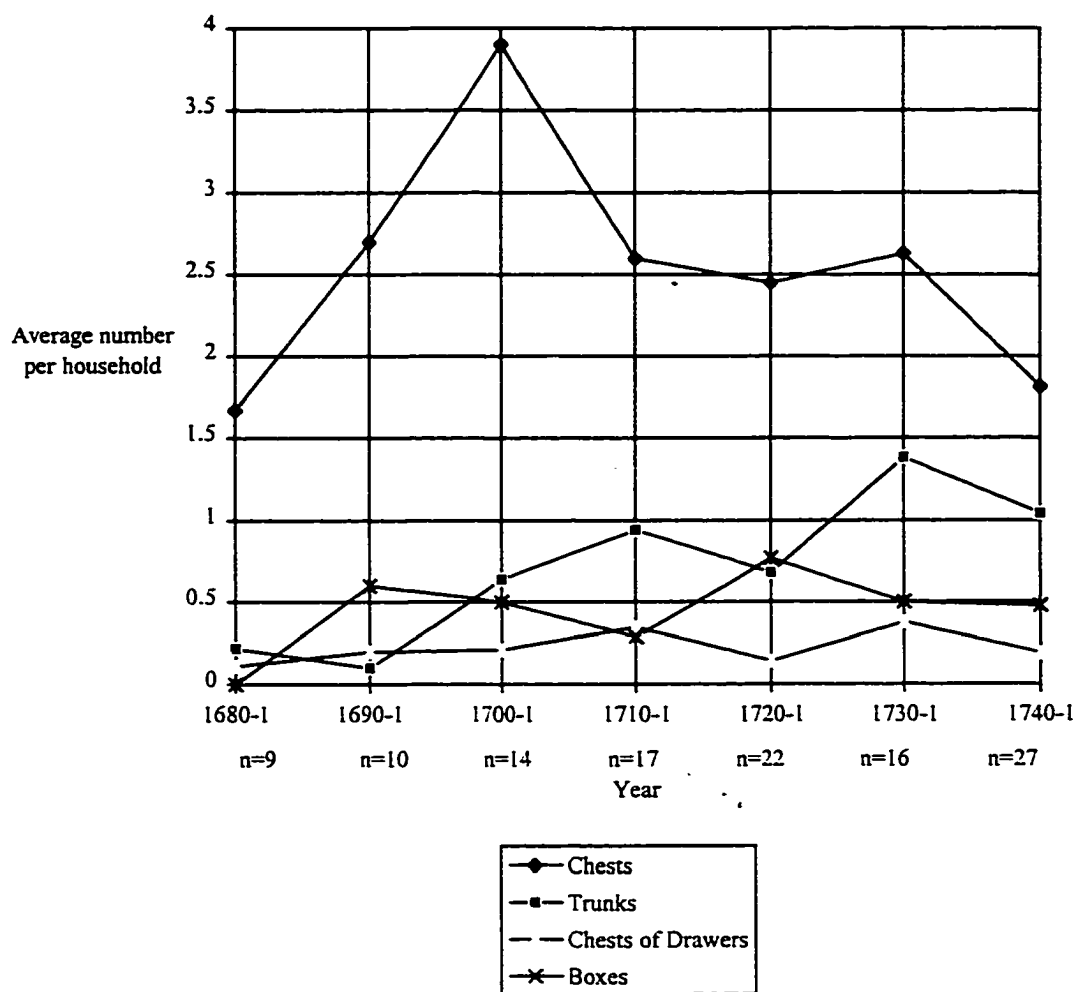


Figure C.4  
York County, Virginia: Appearance of Chests, Trunks, Chests of  
Drawers, and Boxes per Household

Figure C.5a  
Average Number of Chests  
per Household

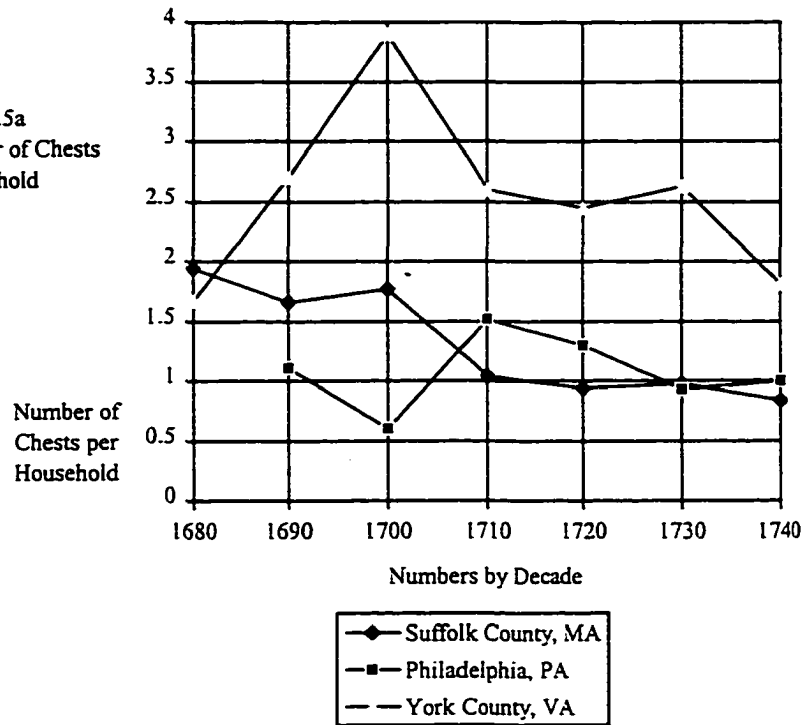


Figure C.5b  
Average Number of Chests  
per Household - Smoothed Data

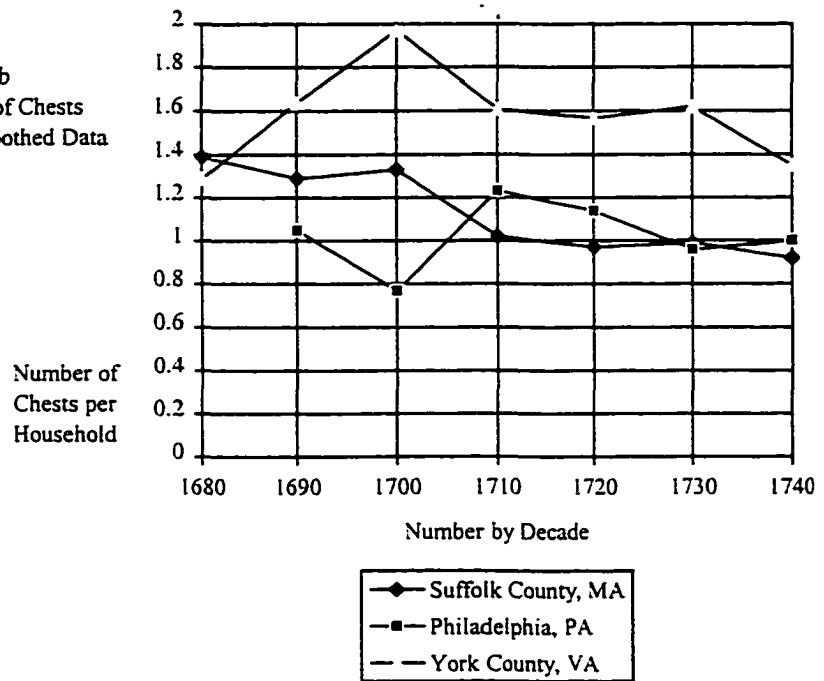


Figure C.5a-b  
Average Number of Chests per Household

Figure C.6a  
Average Number of  
Chests of Drawers  
per Household

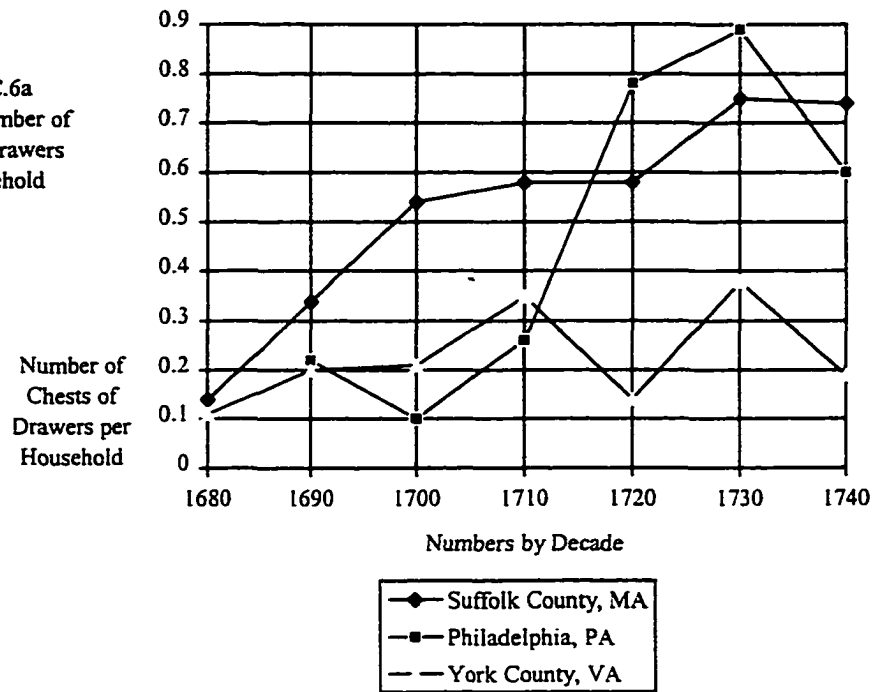


Figure C.6b  
Average Number of  
Chests of Drawers  
per Household - Smoothed Data

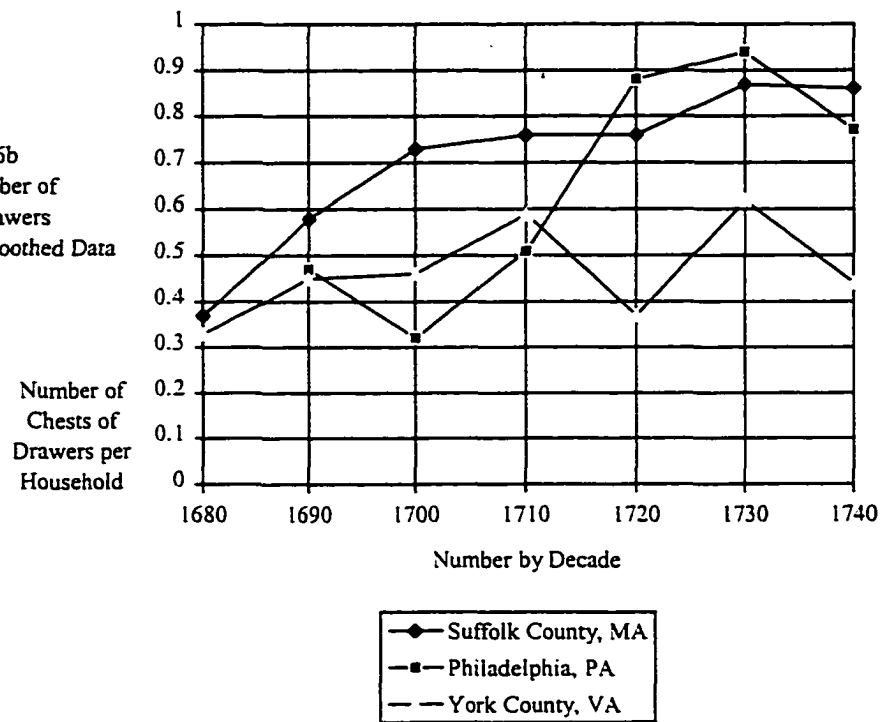


Figure C.6a-b  
Average Number of Chests of Drawers per Household

Figure C.7a  
Average Number of Trunks  
per Household

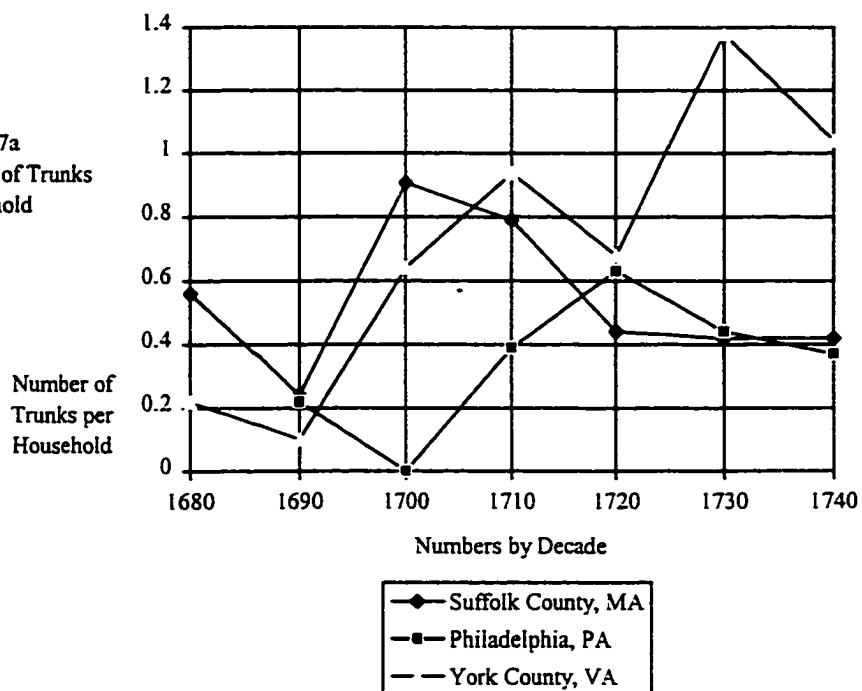


Figure C.7b  
Average Number of Trunks  
per Household - Smoothed Data

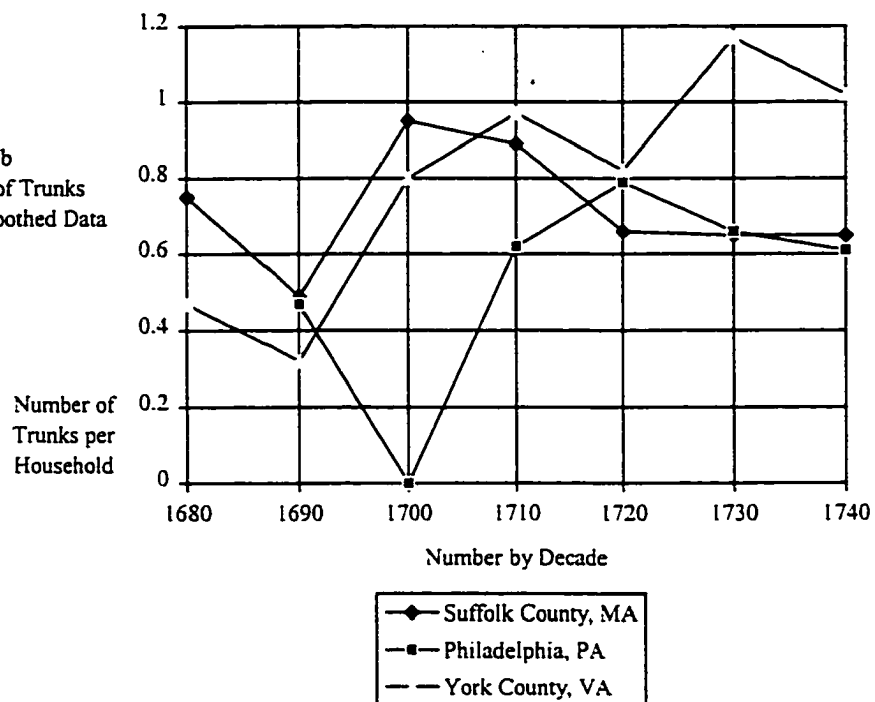


Figure C.7a-b  
Average Number of Trunks per Household



Figure C.8a  
Average Number of Boxes  
per Household

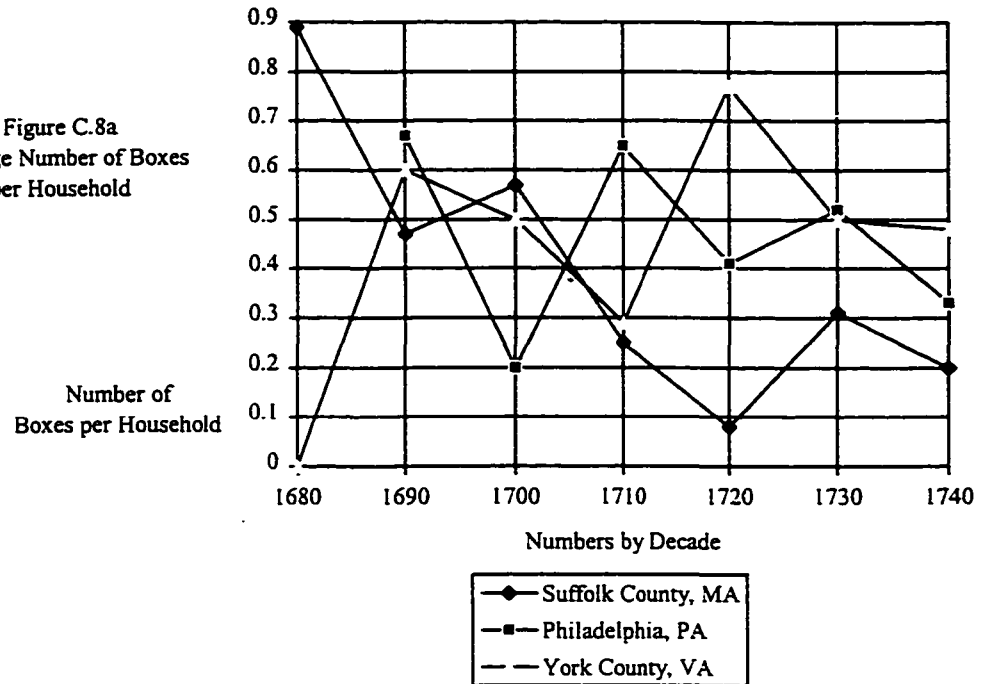


Figure C.8b  
Average Number of Boxes  
per Household - Smoothed Data

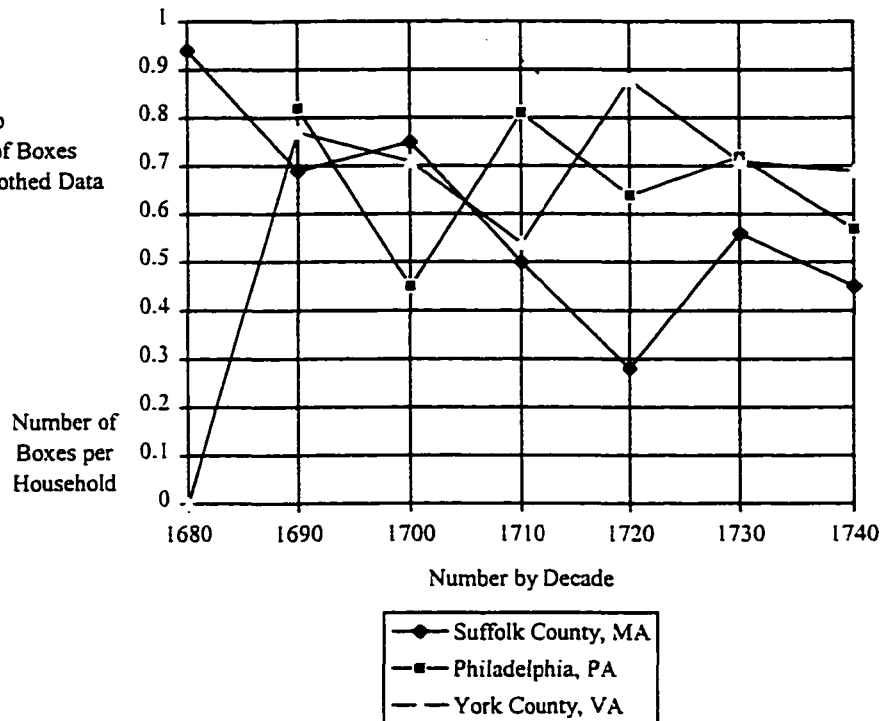


Figure C.8a-b  
Average Number of Boxes per Household

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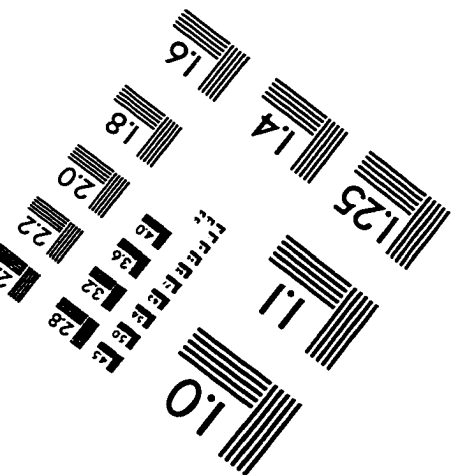
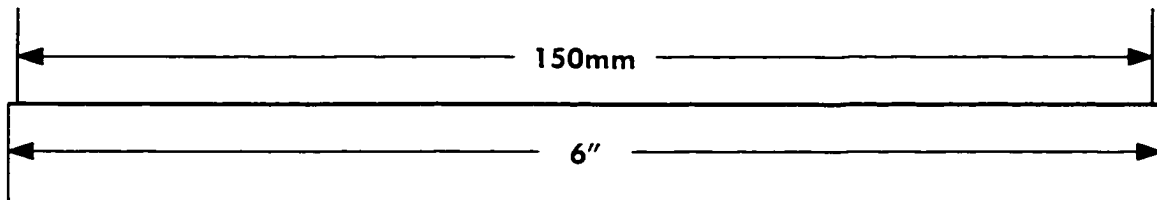
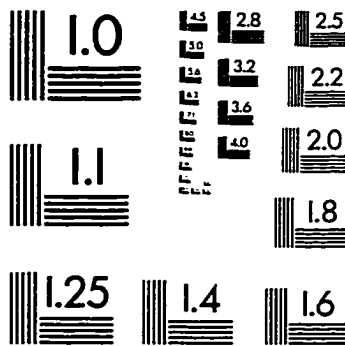
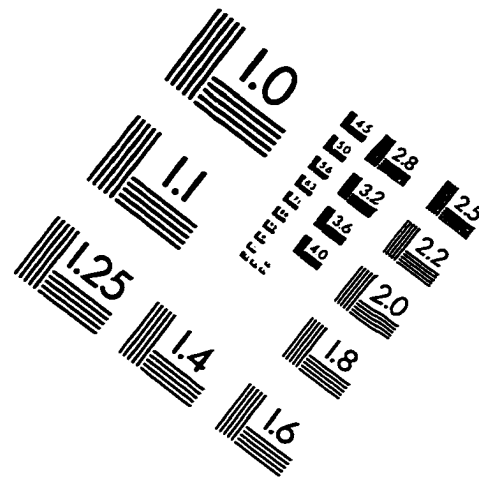
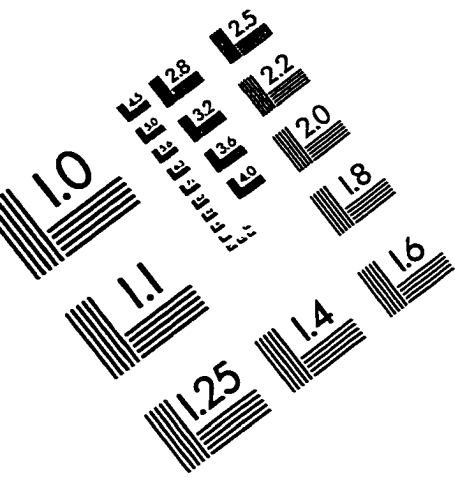
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