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**"EVERY NECESSARY HOME COMFORT":
SOCIAL CLASS AND MATERIAL LIFE IN BRIDGETON, NEW JERSEY,
1865-1880**

by
MARY JANE TAYLOR

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 1997

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to define the class structure of the small New Jersey town of Bridgeton in the period 1865 to 1880 through an examination of typical houseplans, household furnishings, and practices of employing household servants. Through careful examination of twenty-six room-by-room probate inventories, a young woman's diary, census data from 1860 and 1870 and the expense records of a doctor and a grocer, this thesis will demonstrate that houseplans, domestic material culture and household composition can be used in combination to determine social class.

Further, this study will establish how members of the different social classes in Bridgeton furnished the public spaces of their homes. Only the elite of the small town, it will be shown, followed the furnishing patterns of the urban middle- and upper-middle classes.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

On February 9, 1875, a young woman named Martha Pierson Webster from Bridgeton, New Jersey recorded in her journal:

What a bitter day this has been, the coldest of the season. We could hardly keep warm with good wood and coal fires, what it must have been for those whose supply is so scanty. How much we have to be thankful for every necessary home comfort...¹

Martha's gratitude for her station in life and the detailed accounts contained in her voluminous diary help to define what it meant to be middle class in the small town in the years just after the Civil War. She reveals much about her life and her possessions. Using twenty-six room-by-room probate inventories and other records from Martha Webster's Bridgeton, New Jersey, this thesis will examine the typical houseplans, household furnishings, and practices of employing household servants in the small town in the 1865 to 1880 period. This thesis will argue that houseplans, domestic material culture and household composition can be used in combination to define the class structure of small towns. This study seeks to establish how the public spaces

demonstrate that the small town's middle-class furnishing patterns were distinct from those of the urban middle class in the Victorian period. Martha Webster's diary, census data from 1860 and 1870 and the expense accounts of a doctor and a grocer will be used to mitigate bias in the inventories as well as to provide a more personal perspective on wealth, status and home furnishings in the nineteenth century.

Social class in the United States is a subject that has rarely been seriously considered or widely discussed. In his 1980 book Inequality in an Age of Decline, Sociologist Paul Blumberg even called class "America's forbidden thought." Paul Fussell, who authored Class: A Guide through the American Status System, recounts that when he admitted at a cocktail party the topic of his latest book, the listeners shifted their weight uneasily, straightened their clothes and then excused themselves immediately.²

Despite deep discomfort with the topic of social class, and a lack of agreement about exactly what "class" is, twentieth-century Americans are generally very skilled at making assessments of another person's social level.³ John T. Molloy, in the research for his 1977 work The Woman's Dress for Success Book, discovered that when a photograph of a stranger was flashed before a series of test

subjects, the respondents could not describe the appearance of the stranger. After only this split-second look at the person, however, the subjects could accurately judge where the stranger fit into the American social scale.⁴

Victorian Americans, always concerned with "respectability," were also reluctant to discuss the subject of social class, and yet they were also skilled at making class judgements.⁵ As Kenneth Ames points out, trade catalogs of nineteenth-century factory-made furniture often provided in a single layout comparisons of size, materials, and quality of manufacture of similar goods. These advertisements, labeled with the prices, taught Victorian consumers to appraise the goods and thus the social and material well-being of others.⁶

The skill of the appraisers who took the inventories used in this study also points to an acute cultural awareness of household furnishings. Any disinterested freeholder could be chosen by the family of the deceased to take an accounting of the assets in the house, and these appraisers frequently drew fine distinctions between furnishings. They were able to evaluate a parlor carpet at \$.35 a yard, for instance, as compared to a dining-room carpet at \$.50 a yard. Often the fabrics and furnishings were scrutinized just as closely to determine fiber content

and wood type. In Dr. William S. Bowen's parlor, the appraisers carefully noted the presence of "1 Fey Brocalttle chair" and consequently valued it at \$5.00.⁷

Chapter II

DOCUMENT-BASED RESEARCH

For Victorian Americans, the material culture of the home played a crucial role in shaping their images of themselves. Christopher Clark-Hazlett emphasized the centrality of household goods in nineteenth-century America when he presented his exhibit research on the nineteenth-century American middle class for a session at a 1991 Strong Museum conference. Asked to consider "Who is Middle Class In America?" Clark-Hazlett entitled his presentation "You Are What You Own." He elaborated that with the onslaught of nineteenth-century factory-made consumer goods, there came to be subtle but very real attributions of personal, intellectual and even moral qualities to the mere ownership of particular goods.⁸

Newsweek columnist Robert Samuelson outlined three criteria for the twentieth-century American middle class which further this point. Arguing that class is as much a mindset as an income or an occupation, he outlined three

that creature comforts are expected, and such items as a home with basic appliances are taken for granted. The second was a desire and ability to "get ahead," and the last was a sense of security and orderliness to the world. The middle class, he argued, believed that they were largely free from crime and unemployment.⁹ These criteria remind us that class calculations are not made by income or financial position alone.

While in the nineteenth century it was accepted that the public spaces of one's home reflected one's wealth, class and social pretensions, twentieth-century material culture scholars have taken the link between Victorian social class and household furnishings very much for granted. Both Kenneth Ames and Harvey Green have ably elucidated the cultural meanings of specific nineteenth-century domestic objects. However, no published study to date has comprehensively examined which segments of Victorian American society actually owned the specific artifacts thought by modern scholars to convey status and privilege. In his ground-breaking work The Emergence of the Middle Class, Stuart Blumin opens the door for such work when he acknowledges that estate inventories provide telling evidence about antebellum living arrangements and advocates their continued investigation by fellow historians.¹⁰

In addition to the lack of studies about societal trends in furniture purchases, little consideration has been given to differences of place. At this point, most scholarship about nineteenth-century material culture is based entirely on urban households, with a very slight nod given to the far Western American frontier.¹¹ Small towns and settled rural areas have been entirely overlooked by material culture scholars. Even respected historian Katherine Grier has written that urban findings automatically hold true elsewhere.¹²

The small southern New Jersey town of Bridgeton, was selected for this study because of the unusual number of probate documents, municipal records, personal diaries and household accounts that survive. In the Surrogate's Office at the Cumberland County Court House, there are twenty-six volumes of probate inventories sitting dusty and forgotten on a shelf. The first records date from 1804 and the last records are from the 1970s. The inventories list the personal property held by county residents at their death, and sometimes divide the decedents' household furnishings on a room-by-room basis. These records form an almost unique source, because many historians have believed inventories non-existent for the Victorian period. And even when such inventories are located, they are compared with those taken

in the eighteenth century, and found wanting. In the nineteenth century, Stuart Blumin argues, inventories were not generally compiled for as high proportion of the population as in the eighteenth century. In his experience, Victorian inventories were also not very detailed.¹³ As the following methodological discussion will reveal, neither of these conditions were found to be true of the Bridgeton documents.

Apart from the availability of source materials, Bridgeton makes a good case study for studying small town decorating patterns in the mid-nineteenth century because of both its strong regional traditions of furniture making (the Ware family of southern New Jersey were renowned as chair makers for more than a century) and its close proximity to Philadelphia. Bisected by the Maurice and Cohansey Rivers and blessed by a border with the Delaware Bay, Bridgeton had been since the 1820s an important port for shipping such fresh produce as sweet potatoes, melons, strawberries and cranberries to the wider Philadelphia market.¹⁴ In the mid-nineteenth century, the transportation networks were further expanded to allow daily travel to Philadelphia via railway, stage and steamboat, making it increasingly convenient for town residents to enjoy the services, products and entertainments of the nearby city. Bridgeton

had a strong and diverse economy in the mid-nineteenth century: there were six produce canneries, three lumber yards and timber mills, a flourishing oyster trade; in addition, the Cumberland Nail factory was a large employer.¹⁵ That Bridgeton was a prosperous town for this period can be determined by the opening of the Bridgeton Gas Light Company works in 1858, and the celebration of the 1877 opening of the Bridgeton Waterworks with a grand parade on Christmas Eve.

The incredible wealth of surviving probate inventories listing the personal property held by Cumberland county residents at their death meant that any serious study of the documents' riches had to be limited in important ways. This analysis is confined to the city of Bridgeton, because of the very large area of Cumberland County. (The county was 30 miles east to west and 28 miles north to south).¹⁶ This study also only considers inventories taken between 1865 and 1880, because these years form a coherent period in the city's history: the Civil War had ended, the townships of Cohansey and Bridgetown had incorporated into the three-ward town of Bridgeton, and the glass industry of the 1880s and 90s had not yet come to dominate Bridgeton's economy.

One of the first difficulties confronted in this project was that the vast majority of Cumberland County inventories do not identify even the town or township of the decedent's residence, and none of the records indicate a street address. To narrow the study to just Bridgeton dwellers, a list was compiled of the adults who died in the county seat between the years 1865 and 1880. The names and ages were taken from a fragmentary volume of municipal death records, and the obituaries published in the local newspaper The West Jersey Pioneer. This list of 975 decedents was fleshed out with occupations and street addresses from city directories, and with family statistics, property ownership information and composition of household data from the 1860 and 1870 census. It was then determined from an index of New Jersey wills whether the decedent had left a will or an inventory. Decedents chosen for study are those who lived within the city limits of Bridgeton, whose estates had room-by-room inventories taken and those for whom full information on occupation and family composition could be located. The resulting list of twenty-six individuals formed the basis of this thesis.

Over the last twenty years, many social and economic historians and decorative arts scholars have used probate inventories in their work. Inventories are perfect for such

document-based material culture, since they are often the only documents that describe everyday domestic goods. One scholar wrote of the importance of knowledge gained from inventories, "[h]ousehold items reflect not only the standard of living of their owner but also the cultural assumptions that guided their purchase."¹⁷

Inventories, however, have inherent flaws as historical documents and must consequently be used with great care. These complications include the fact that they are somewhat unreliable indicators of a decedent's full financial position, since they frequently report neither debts nor total assets. Also difficult is that the age, wealth and gender distribution of probated decedents may not be representative of either the living population or the non-probated deceased. It was Gloria Main who first advocated that historians overcome these deficiencies by compiling and comparing the vital statistics of age and wealth for all decedents with those of probated decedents.¹⁸

The sampling method used in this thesis follows Main's prescription to eliminate the inherent biases of the probate records: the full list of all 975 Bridgeton decedents for the period 1865-1880 was compiled to determine whether there were obvious differences in the age, gender,

ethnicity, wealth or occupation of the individuals whose estates were inventoried and those whose estates were not subject to probate.¹⁹

When Harold Gill and George Curtis of Colonial Williamsburg examined the new historical studies undertaken by Main and her colleagues, they further warned that biases exist in the records because probate inventories were legal documents and "instruments of public policy."²⁰ Gill and Curtis urge that historians consult the statute books and case law that explains the role that public officials intended for household inventories in the administration of probate law.

New Jersey law in the period 1865-80 was fairly specific regarding the probate of estates and the taking of inventories. A decedent who left a will appointed in that document an executor who was responsible for settling the estate. For someone who died intestate, a close family member would assume the role of administrator to manage and distribute the property of the estate.

State law decreed that every estate must file a detailed inventory of the personal property of a decedent. The only exemption to this requirement was that an executor who was named in a will as the sole legatee of an estate (after all debts and bequests were honored) did not have to

file an inventory in the county Surrogate's office. If any interested party raised questions about the management of the estate's assets, however, the executor could be compelled by the Surrogate or by a judge to file a detailed inventory.

The statutes decreed that inventories should be detailed and complete, listing every asset of the decedent except his or her wearing apparel. (Wearing apparel was exempt provided that the deceased left a family who resided in New Jersey.) Even items disposed of in a written will or verbally willed from the deathbed were to be appraised and listed in probate inventories.

New Jersey case law makes it clear that the inventory had to be specific. In Vanmeter v. Jones the court ruled that a document containing such listings as "household goods and kitchen furniture" did not in fact constitute an inventory.²¹ The law clearly specified that all assets were to be listed on the inventory, including land leases, items of trade, partnerships in businesses, stocks and bonds.

The administrator or executor of an estate could appoint the two appraisers who actually took the inventory, except in cases where the widow and children claimed a portion of the estate for their use. If a woman chose to

exercise this exemption, she was entitled to choose \$200 worth of goods for herself. The surrogate-appointed appraisers who handled these estates were instructed to list all the property of the decedent first, and then to file with the inventory the items that had been set off for family use.

In every estate, the values assigned to possessions by the appraisers were to represent the intrinsic worth of the items, not necessarily the amount of money they would command at auction.²²

In her studies of Virginia households, Anna Hawley discovered that inventories rarely reflected the total household contents. Many appraisers omitted goods that had no market value, for they were required only to inventory the assets of the estate. Consumable, perishable items such as food did not usually appear in the records for this reason. Objects were sometimes illegally concealed to lessen the dollar amount due to the decedent's creditors or to the tax authority.²³

Other goods were not in the household listings because they were not the property of the deceased. Some expected or necessary items could have belonged to other members of the household and consequently would not been subject to probate. In New Jersey, the Married Women's

Property Act of 1852 specified that the goods of a widow were not to be considered part of her husband's estate. This included items which belonged to the woman before marriage or that came to her as a bequest, a gift or an inheritance after July 4, 1852.²⁴

Inventories cannot tell historians everything about the appearance of interiors. As a study of the probate law reveals, they are especially likely to entirely overlook the possessions of female members of a household. This is essential for this study, since some of the items most revealing of social class (such as pianos) were more likely to be the sole property of a woman.

Census information was used in this study to give a fuller picture of household composition for all decedents, and helped to counterbalance the biases of the room-by-room inventories. The 1860 and 1870 U.S. census both provide the critical information of the ages of household members and descriptions of their occupation. This information, Lutz Berkner advises, allows the head of the household to be distinguished, and live-in servants to be enumerated.²⁵ As the ensuing discussion will demonstrate, the presence of household servants proved crucial in determining the social level of the Bridgeton deceased.

When using mid-nineteenth-century United States census records, it would be easy to assume that the documents are largely without bias, since federal census takers were provided with strict instructions about how to tabulate households. The complete name, age, occupation and place of birth were obtained for each person residing at a particular address. Not all of this information was obtained objectively, because the U.S. census bureau failed in 1860, 1870 and 1880 to provide a standard list of occupational categories for enumerators to consult. Many census-takers therefore recorded the job titles which subjects ascribed to themselves, and many of these descriptions are too vague to be of use to modern historians.²⁶

In Emergence of the Middle Class, Stuart Blumin discusses the valuation of individual real and personal property which was included in the 1870 census. This listing of the value of real estate, bonds, stocks, mortgages, notes, live stock, plate, jewels and furniture initially seems to allow the opportunity for a comparative analysis of households. But this data is also flawed, according to Blumin. Census takers were instructed not to record property worth less than \$100, but some enumerators did report these small amounts.²⁷ Also misleading is the unusually large percentage of people who are recorded as

possessing no property whatsoever. Blumin speculates that many individuals either refused to answer the census taker's query or denied that they owned any property.²⁸ With these limits in mind, the dollar values assigned to real and personal property in the 1860 and 1870 census have not been considered in this study. While recorded in the author's database, the numbers proved of little use in determining the financial well-being of Bridgeton residents. At the time of this writing, the 1870 census had not yet been fully indexed, and so comparative information on real and personal property holdings was non-existent.

This thesis, then, will use inventories to categorize Victorians based upon their home furnishings since the importance of home and hearth in the nineteenth century has been well documented.²⁹ This study will use census information to glean information about the number and type of servants in a decedent's household, since servants helped to provide the sense of domesticity and gentility demanded of "respectable" Victorian families.

Chapter III

CREATING A VICTORIAN HOME

Victorian Americans were ambivalent toward the changes that industrialization and urbanization had wrought, and increasingly came to view their homes as sanctuaries from the evil modern world. Contemporary observers believed that an ideal home was infused with the warm quality "home feeling."³⁰ Morality and Christianity were important components of this elusive but highly valued domestic atmosphere. The correct number and proper kind of objects and furnishings in the home were believed to mold an impure individual into an upstanding citizen.³¹ It was therefore possible in the nineteenth century to improve one's character (and thus one's social position) by procuring material possessions which were manufactured in the very factories from which one attempted to insulate oneself.

In furnishing a home, particular attention was paid to the parlor, the dining room and the front hall, for they were the spaces in which families presented their public selves. In these rooms families expressed the ideals of

their social relationships. Parlors were properly set apart simply for entertaining, and having a room for strictly formal purposes denoted that a family had at least aspirations toward middle-class status. In these "best" rooms, social calls and visits were paid, rites of passage observed, entertainments enjoyed, meetings of women's clubs held, and Christmas trees accorded special position. Due to the special significance attached to parlors, most families, period tastemakers reasoned, tried to follow the new fashions at least in parlor decorations.

Dining rooms were equally significant in broadcasting the fortunes of a family. Since the late eighteenth century, their mere presence in the home had signaled that one possessed the wealth and gentility needed to set aside a room simply for eating. One of the necessities of life could be elevated to a luxury by setting it apart from other daily activities. Victorian dining rooms were filled with highly carved sideboards, elaborate overmantel-mirrors and expensive silver and glasswares. Dining rooms were the stages where lengthy, multi-course dinners became rituals to be played out.

Front halls gave a nineteenth-century visitor a glimpse of what he or she would encounter in the parlor or dining room, which were frequently protected inner sanctums

of family life. One had to be invited inside the formal rooms of the house, but by simply knocking on the front door, one could view the more public space of the hall. Victorian halls, filled with coat and umbrella-laden hallstands and a variety of chairs, signified the household of a bourgeoisie family who were ready to welcome respectable callers. Stained-glass window panels surrounding the front door also equated the family home with a church.³²

Culture and education were key social and moral values to be imparted in the formal rooms of the house. The quality and subject matter of the pictures on the walls, the presence of an etagere (whatnot), and the ornaments and books on its shelves were indications of the inhabitant's societal standing and sensibilities. Images of such political and cultural heroes as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Shakespeare and Dante shared wall space with pastoral landscapes in the Victorian home. Displaying art on an etagere alongside such natural materials as plants and seashells was akin to having a museum in the home.³³

A piano or pump organ in the parlor was another indication of education: the instrument revealed that a woman in the family had been trained in music, and was free enough from mundane household duties to engage in the

regular work of practicing her talents.³⁴ Music had long held associations with morality and Christianity. Victorians wholeheartedly believed in the power of music to uplift the soul, and a pump organ in the parlor associated the room with the sanctuary of a church. Kenneth Ames further notes that the upper shelves of factory-produced organs were often decorated as altars.³⁵

Home furnishings could also send complex messages about societal roles and manners. Matched sets of sprung-seat parlor furniture, consisting of a sofa, a gentleman's chair, a lady's chair and four side chairs, carefully delineated gender roles. The gentlemen's chairs had high backs and arms, while the wider ladies' chairs allowed space for fashionable full skirts, but still required erect posture.³⁶ Well-lit (often marble-topped) center tables proudly displayed the family Bible, with its tooled leather decoration and brass clasps, and the family photograph album, showcasing religious persuasions and sentimentality. Victorians did not convey these lofty messages from their parlors at the expense of aesthetics. Beauty was highly valued, and a room and its furnishings had to be both instructive and attractive.³⁷

The seven key possessions which will be examined for this study are items found in these crucial public spaces in

Victorian homes. Sideboards in dining rooms, hall racks in front entryways, matched sets of sprung-upholstered parlor furniture, etageres (or whatnots), pianos or pump organs, center tables and valuable carpets in the parlor will be indexed as indicators of culture, gentility and social class.

The indexed items were recommended in the prescriptive literature of the nineteenth century, and are items consequently argued by twentieth-century scholars to have existed in great numbers in urban homes of a certain class or level.³⁸ This study will examine how frequently these symbols of Victoriana were actually found in a small town and what they said about a subject's social level. Only room-by-room inventories were selected for study so that the presence or absence of front halls, parlors and dining rooms could be assessed.

The first step in analyzing the twenty-six inventories was to chart the decedents under consideration and to notate the presence in their inventories of sideboards, hallstands, center tables, pianos, etageres, sets of upholstered furniture and valuable best carpets. Based upon this chart, the decedents were then divided into class categories. Those whose inventories listed none or one of the above items were set off as the lower class.

Ownership of two to four items was deemed middle class. To be considered upper class, a Bridgeton family had to possess five of the seven indexed items. This meant that the elite either had an exceptionally well-furnished parlor which included all five indexed parlor items or that they had a hallstand in the front entryway and/or a sideboard in the dining room. This inventory information was then linked to and compared against census documentation of household composition and the occupation of the head of the household.

The census records document the presence of servants in some Bridgeton households, and reveal the age and nationality of the women, and list the titles the families ascribed to the women. The inclusion of such specific titles as "chambermaid" and "cook" provides insight into the ways Bridgeton residents employed household servants.

In mid-nineteenth-century America, there were two distinct forms of household service. Although Harvey Green speculates that perhaps only one-quarter of all Americans employed household servants, having a household employee did not necessarily improve one's social standing.³⁹ It was imperative to have the right kind of servant.

In Bridgeton, most families who could afford a servant followed the tradition of hiring a young women from within their community to live in their homes. In return

for usually modest wages, these girls would assist with cleaning, cooking and care-giving. Employers called these girls their "help," and generally treated them as members of their families. The girls who hired on as "help" expected and received many privileges: they could return to their own homes for visits lasting a few days or a few weeks and they were permitted to receive their friends and family as callers in their employer's home. In both work and leisure, the help spent their days in close proximity with the family who employed them. Hired girls often performed housework right alongside their mistresses. While such small daily tasks as sweeping the front porch might be the responsibility of the help alone, arduous tasks like laundry or spring cleaning generally involved the lady of the house or one of her daughters. The girls always ate their meals with their employer, and were invited by their mistresses to participate in knitting circles, quilting bees and other local social gatherings. In Serving Women, Faye Dudden describes this traditional system of household service as "the exchange of daughters," and asserts that the system did nothing to elevate the employer's status.⁴⁰

By the late 1850s, the urban fashion of procuring "domestics" was replacing the tradition of benevolent, community-based employment. Instead of hiring a neighbor's

daughter, wealthy employers increasingly travelled to urban centers to recruit city-bred or foreign-born girls willing to work longer hours for relatively high wages. These live-in domestics were referred to by their employers strictly as "servants." Often uniformed, these staff ate their meals in the kitchen by themselves or with other servants, and thus came into very infrequent contact with their employers. Every morning, the mistress would assign her staff their tasks for the day, and then she would go about her personal affairs. These employers did not assist with housework, because they hired multiple staff to run the household.

It was employing these domestics, families discovered, that enhanced one's social status. The mere appearance of multiple, uniformed staff called to mind the servants in a European country house. And the demeanor of uniformed servants, their American employers hoped, would also be impressive. By the 1870s, magazine writers urged their readers to employ only foreign-born servants, reasoning that Irish or Italian immigrants would be more restrained and submissive in their behavior. Local hired girls, Ladies Repository once advised, were just "too American to live with."⁴¹

Having a proper servant to answer the front door was especially important. In rural areas or lower-class

households, the mistress of the house or the hired girl answered the front door and welcomed every social caller into her parlor. If the lady of the house was not home, the hired girl might even visit with the guests herself. This practice was anathema to etiquette advisors, who urged by the 1870s that middle class women adopt the urban custom of calling with cards.

Under this refined system, the servant would screen the potential callers who arrived during the designated calling hours of early afternoon. Close friends would be ushered into the parlor where the lady of the house would be waiting. At the arrival of an unwanted or too frequent visitor, however, the servant would simply announce that the lady of the house was not "At Home." Before departing the front hall, the caller would leave behind two of her husband's cards and one of her own. Many calls were thus paid where the only contact was through the leaving of cards. Engaging in this elaborate ritual of calling presupposed that one had not only at least one well-trained domestic, but also a front entry hall equipped with a hall stand or small table and a decorative card receiver.

Likewise, a family's ability to host a fashionable dinner party depended on both the number and kind of servants employed and the presence of stylish furnishings in

their dining room. If a family wished to entertain in grand style, they needed a dining room dominated by an impressive table and a towering sideboard exhibiting a large collection of fine tablewares. At least two servants with somewhat specialized skills were also required. A proper Victorian dinner demanded that a trained cook devote her time to preparing the many courses of the meal while at least one other servant dashed between kitchen and dining room. One servant girl trying to do it all herself, many frustrated families discovered, was nearly certain to burn or spill something. And hosting a dinner where the hired girl joined the guests at the table would undoubtedly defeat a family's chances of climbing the social ladder.⁴²

Chapter IV
THE LOWER CLASS IN BRIDGETON

When the twenty-six Bridgeton probate inventories studied were categorized by class, nine decedents fell into the lowest category. These individuals who owned none or only one of the indexed furnishings constituted about a third of the sample. Five of the nine were farmers, two listed no occupation, and one was a lumber dealer and one a blacksmith. None of these individuals had servants living in their households, and many had dependents who were employed as seamstresses or domestics for other families.

Samuel Dubois was typical of this lower group. He was a farmer who died in 1873 at the age of seventy-nine. He did not leave a will, and he and his wife lived alone in a house on the corners of Lawrence and Irving Streets, away from the center of town. His total estate was valued at \$113.45, and his house contained a "front room downstairs," and a sitting room. Both spaces had very old-fashioned furnishings, including cane-seat chairs, windsor chairs, rush-bottom chairs and rag carpets. The furnishings of the

two rooms were nearly equal in value: the front room's contents totaled \$10.75 and the sitting room furnishings were assessed at \$11.00.⁴³

The most common "high status" possession of this group seemed to be the center table. This was also the indexed item most frequently found in middle-class parlors. However, only Henry Bowen of the lower-class group had a walnut table valued highly enough (\$3.00) to indicate that it might have had a costly and prestigious marble top. Three other members of this lower group had very inexpensive stands or tables (Ezekial Moore, Nicholas Bright, Josiah Woodruff) that might have functioned as center tables.

Overall, however, the evidence for this lower class group was inconclusive. While the sample size was adequate, there was limited detail provided in the inventory data.⁴⁴ Perhaps the appraisers were simply not concerned with providing detailed descriptions of very old, low-value furniture. It was thus difficult to discern how well these lower-class "front rooms" may have met middle-class parlor standards in the arrangement of furniture and the presence of small inexpensive accessories.

Chapter V

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN BRIDGETON

Sixteen of the inventories examined, almost sixty-two percent of the sample, were determined to be middle class. One difference between the middle and lower classes in Bridgeton was apparent from the census data. Two of the middle-class households had live-in servants in 1870, and none of the middling decedents had dependant daughters employed as domestics.

The middle class was remarkably cohesive in the furnishings present in their parlors. Center tables were the most commonly-owned item, with all of the sixteen households reporting one. It is intriguing that in fourteen cases, the tables were specified as having marble tops. The values of these marble-top tables ranged from a low of \$3.00 to a high of \$10.00. The other two decedents reported a "mahogany stand and cover" valued at \$1.00 and simply a "table with cover" worth \$4.00.⁴⁵

The second most common parlor item was a suite of sprung-seat, upholstered furniture. Eight decedents

possessed the furnishings variously listed by appraisers as "sofa chairs," "haircloth chairs" and "stuffed chairs." The values assigned to the chairs ranged from a low of \$.50 to a high of \$3.00 per chair, with five of the sets being valued at \$1.50 to \$2.00 per chair. Six decedents possessed a set of six matching sprung-seat chairs, while two middle-class families owned a set of four chairs.

Eight of the inventories included a best carpet valued at more than \$20.00. To evaluate these floorcoverings, one must depend heavily on the appraiser's judgement. A highly-valued carpet of unspecified construction could be an unusually large quantity of old machine-made carpet. However, expensive floorcoverings are usually specified somewhere in the inventory as being either stylish ingrain or Brussels carpets.⁴⁶

Etageres appeared in five of the middle-class Bridgeton households examined. These display stands were invariably described as "whatnots" or "watnots," and had values ranging from \$.25 to \$5.00. These assigned prices may, however, have included the value of the items displayed on the etageres.

Only two pianos (and no pump organs) were found in the middle-class Bridgeton households studied. One of the pianos belonged to Dr. John Morgridge, whose inventory

documents that the physician willed the instrument to his daughter Anne. The other instrument was in the home of diarist Martha Webster. The high cost of musical instruments was probably one reason that they were not more widely held in Bridgeton. In the 1870s, an upright piano cost at least \$350.00, while prices for stately square pianos started at \$500.00. Even the less-expensive (and less-prestigious) pump organ was priced at \$160.00.⁴⁷ Due to their high cost, it is possible that pianos were simply not carried by Bridgeton merchants. If pianos could only be obtained from nearby Philadelphia, their purchase would have involved the time and expense of traveling to the city to choose an instrument. And once a piano had been selected, one had to transport it to Bridgeton via steamboat. These transportation fees were not inconsiderable. From the accounts of Dr. William Elmer, it seems that freighting such a bulky item might have cost as much as \$2.00.⁴⁸

Despite the scarcity of pianos in middle-class parlors, it was encouraging that a substantial number of the households examined had four of the five indexed parlor furnishings: suites of furniture, center tables, etageres, and valuable carpets were found in most homes. From the inventory evidence it is possible to get a good sense of what middle-class Bridgeton parlors looked like.

William Pogue, a tin manufacturer who left an estate valued at \$18,395.37, had one of the most elaborate parlors of the middling group. The floor was covered with twenty-five yards of Brussels carpet (worth \$1.00 a yard), and the room was fitted with a half-dozen stuffed chairs worth \$18.00. Completing the furniture suite was a stuffed rocking chair worth \$12.00, and a sofa priced at \$32.50. The inevitable marble-topped stand was one of the most expensive seen in this study, assessed at \$10.00. Completing the parlor were a gilt-framed looking glass worth \$20.00, three candlesticks at \$1.00 apiece, three very fancy (probably painted or decorated) window blinds valued at \$15.00 and a set of china dishes and six pieces of Brittania ware lumped together at \$25.00. The sum of the room's contents came to an astonishing \$160.50. The only thing lacking in this stylish room was an etagere to display trinkets.⁴⁹

Daniel Clark, the owner of a flour mill who resided on Bank Street, left an estate worth just \$284.35 and a parlor that had most of the same items in it. The most costly parlor item Clark owned was a \$1.00 per yard carpet; the floorcovering may have been a Brussels carpet similar to Pogue's. A sofa and a marble-top table and window shades were other items present in the mill owner's home. Obviously Clark's furnishings were simpler and less

expensive: instead of Pogue's six stuffed chairs, the Clark parlor had a set of three cane-seat chairs worth just \$3.00 supplemented by a \$2.00 rocking chair. Both the Clark sofa (valued at \$10.00), and the marble-top table (valued at \$5.00) were assessed at a fraction of the worth of Pogue's. The two shades at the Clark's windows were worth the customary \$.50 apiece. A practical coal stove (\$5.00), a \$2.00 lamp, 2 pieces of oil cloth and a \$.20 spittoon rounded out Clark's room. Its total contents were worth \$45.70, about one-third the value of the Pogue parlor furnishings.⁵⁰

Clearly, the ownership of marble-top tables, fancy carpets, sets of upholstered chairs and etageres was equated with being middle class. The quality of a key item was secondary to its sheer presence in the family parlor. No inventory demonstrates this better than that of Wesley Barnes.

When the Bridgeton shoemaker died in 1879, his estate was worth \$2612.74. The Barnes house had three rooms on the first floor as well as a small entryway. The house which Barnes shared with his family had a parlor filled with every material symbol of the middle class. The haircloth chairs, the sofa and the upholstered rocking chair surrounded a marble-top table, a room-size carpet lay on the

floor, two looking glasses hung on the walls, and a whatnot was filled with books.⁵¹

Each of these items broadcast the family's up-to-date style and aspirations, even though the marble-top table, the etagere, the haircloth chairs and the carpet had the lowest values assigned to items of their type. Barnes' marble-top table was actually lower in cost than some tables found in lower-class front rooms. But placed in the context of a formal parlor with a suite of chairs, a whatnot and a room-size carpet, the inexpensive marble-top table was definitely a middle-class item.

If the appearance of parlors was fairly consistent among middle-class Bridgeton residents, and with the prescriptive literature, the other indexed items reveal that there were marked differences elsewhere in the house. The index of key furnishings turned up in middle-class inventories only one hall stand, a "hat rack" worth \$2.00.⁵² Just one sideboard was found as well, valued at \$6.00.⁵³

Why didn't Bridgeton residents consistently follow the fashions for creating prestigious front halls and dining rooms? The answer lies in the town's architecture, as evinced by the room-by-room inventories. A close examination of the probate documents (combined with a

familiarity of Bridgeton architecture) revealed that there were essentially three house plans represented among the middle-class residents of the town. Eight of the sixteen middle-class houses had just three first-floor rooms, with the front door entering directly into the front room of the house. Three more of the houses had three first-floor rooms accessed by a front entry hall. The final five of the houses had four downstairs rooms accessed by a front entry hall. Consequently, while all sixteen of the houses had parlors, only eight had front entry halls, and just five had the additional first-floor room needed to create a dining room.

One of those middle-class folk in Bridgeton who could afford a relatively large house with four first-floor rooms and a separate entry hall was Jacob Leeds. A liquor dealer, Leeds died at age 58 in 1875, leaving behind his wife Henrietta and three children. His two sons both had respectable jobs: Ellias was a clerk in a drug store, and George helped his father at the liquor store. A younger teenage daughter Jennie was still in school. His estate totaled \$4649.63.

The layout of Leeds' house is clear from the inventory. The appraisers start in the parlor, move on to the entry, then into the sitting room, the dining room, the

kitchen and the cellar. The entry of Leeds' house may have been slightly larger than most such spaces in Bridgeton middle-class houses, for this is the only inventory that lists a hall rack, and the only one to reveal multiple furnishings in the entryway. The "hat rack" is valued at \$2.00, and a camp chair is priced at just \$.50. The carpet on the floor is relatively valuable at \$2.00, and is covered by a \$.25 floor mat. A window in the entry is hung with a \$.25 curtain.⁵⁴

Alfred Hann was one of the middle-class residents to own a house with three first-floor living spaces accessed by a front entry way. The owner of a grocery store, Hann died at the age of 63 in 1874, leaving an estate totaling more than \$684.30. He may have served in the military during the Civil War, since he was referred to as "captain" in the 1870 census. Hann and his wife Ruth lived at 144 Vine Street, which was also the site of their business.

In the probate inventory taken after Hann's death, there is only a passing mention of the front entry hall. Having first valued the contents of the grocery store, the appraisers went through the items in the house's kitchen, sitting room and parlor, probably working their way from the back of the house to the front. Before heading upstairs, the inventory takers listed "Stair carpet and oil cloth in

entry, \$4.00," indicating that the entry was a small, unfurnished space. From the account records that survive of Hann's grocery store, however, a fuller picture of the entry hall emerges. A bill dated October of 1872 from Scull & Son, a Bridgeton paint and wallpaper firm, states that Alfred Hann purchased "2 pieces ceiling (paper) for Entry @ \$.15 for \$.30, 8 pieces Entry sides @ \$.15 for \$1.20, and 2 strips boarder (sic) @ \$.15 for \$.30." The bill does not reveal whether the Davis and Charles Scull were subsequently hired to hang the \$1.80 wallpaper. It does demonstrate, however, that although the Hann's entry hall may have lacked furniture, it did not lack decoration. Layers of colorful wallpaper hung on the ceiling and sides of the entry of the Hann house would have broadcast the family fortunes very clearly.⁵⁵

Davis Scull, the store owner from whom the Hanns bought their entry hall wallpaper, was one of Bridgeton's middle-class residents who lacked an entry hall altogether. In inventorying the house with three downstairs rooms that Scull shared with his wife Louisa and two daughters, the appraisers carefully noted the contents of the upstairs "front," "middle" and "east" chambers and the garret before descending the stairs to the first floor. There the contents of the stylish parlor (with its Brussels carpet,

sprung-seat chairs and two marble-top tables), the customary sitting room and the kitchen and cellar were listed. No mention is made of the stair carpet that would be expected on a visible stairway at the front of the house, and nothing about the front door or hall is detailed.⁵⁶ The probable explanation for this seeming discrepancy is that the house was accessed directly through the parlor, and the staircase was an enclosed winder located toward the rear of the house.

When the preceding three homes are compared, Jacob Leeds' house is notable for its comfortable appointments and its fully-furnished hall. But when the parlors of Leeds, Hann and Scull are compared, it can be seen that all three of these small businessmen lived in solidly middle-class dwellings. The same constellation of furnishings (a marble-top center table, a set of stuffed parlor chairs, a sofa, a rocking chair and a room-sized carpet) is present in all three homes. Indeed, a comparison of the three parlors reveals that while Jacob Leeds had the largest house, he had the least-expensive parlor furnishings.⁵⁷

None of these three men had live-in domestic employees during their later years. In such households without a servant who could serve as a buffer against unwanted visitors, differences in the appearance of the front hall probably did not reflect differences in the

manner that outsiders were welcomed into the home. Thus, the Leeds' hall stand probably did not display a calling-card receiver, because the Leeds family did not engage in formal calling.

While entry halls were found in eight of the sixteen Bridgeton middle-class houses studied, just five of the houses had the additional first-floor room needed to create a dining room. What is fascinating is that actually seven of the middle-class inventories reveal dining rooms. Five of these dining rooms occur in the five-room houses, where they were expected.

Joseph Ayars, a watchman, had one of these five dining rooms that occur in a five-room house. The space is noted on the inventory as "dining room," and is separate from the parlor and the sitting room. Ayars' dining room boasted 6 chairs worth \$2.40, a pine table with cover worth \$1.00, a \$1.00 rocking chair, a \$1.00 work stand and a \$3.00 clock. A looking glass worth just \$.50 hung on the wall. The floor was covered in an \$8.00 Brussels carpet, and the room was lit with three (probably gas) shades and fixtures worth \$1.50 and two \$.25 lamps, and heated with a \$10.00 stove. A \$1.00 brass kettle apparently sat on the stove. Dishes and glasswares in the built-in cupboard total \$10.00, but the Ayars family silver and cutlery were notated

separately. Six silver spoons were worth \$4.00, six plated spoons worth \$1.00, and a dozen knives and 10 forks were each worth \$2.00.⁵⁸ It was certainly a well-lit and well-heated space on the late March day the inventory was taken. This room, like the other four dining rooms that occur in the largest middle-class houses, was probably primarily for dining. However, the work stand and the rocking chair in this household, as well as the settees that appear in the other four inventories hint that the Bridgeton middle class may sometimes have used their dining rooms much as they would a sitting room.

Two of the middle-class Bridgeton dining rooms occur in the smaller houses with three first-floor rooms. These two case studies are interesting for what they reveal about their inhabitant's social aspirations, for they also comprise two of the three instances where middle-class households employed live-in domestic help.⁵⁹

By the time Robert Brewster died in 1871, he had become successful in the fertilizer business. His total estate was valued at an astounding \$43,479.57. Brewster had no immediate family living with him; a thirty-year old woman named Sally Parsons (probably an employee) kept house for him, and a twenty-year old drugstore clerk was a boarder.

Brewster had one of the houses with three first-floor rooms that lacked an entryway. It seems that instead of spending some of his considerable earnings on an addition to his house, Brewster chose to convert the first-floor room that most families used as an informal sitting room into an elegant dining room. This space when inventoried boasted a \$6.00 sideboard, (the only middle-class house in this study to have one) a \$5.00 large mahogany table, a \$5.00 small mahogany table with cover, and nine windsor chairs valued at \$3.33. It was finished off with thirty yards of carpet, worth \$6.00, a \$4.00 looking glass, two portraits (\$.50), three pictures (\$.25) and \$.50 worth of mantle ornaments and candlesticks. The four blinds at the window were worth \$1.00, and great quantities of silver and glassware were enumerated. The total value of the room's contents was \$60.43.⁶⁰ This room is notable for the absence of comfortable chairs; seemingly it was a formal room strictly for dining.

This is somewhat unexpected, given that the old-fashioned nature of Brewster's parlor. While he had a \$5.00 mahogany table with a cover, a secretary (\$5.00), an eight-day clock (\$5.00) and many books, he lacked a suite of sprung-seat furniture and an etagere. Six fancy rush chairs, worth just \$6.00, and two rocking chairs (\$3.00

total) provided the room's seating. Not even a lounge (a common "stand-in" for the costly complete set of upholstered furniture) was present in the Brewster home. Other furnishings in the space also hint at its out-of-date style: the parlor walls were hung with two portraits worth a meager \$.50, and the carpet on the floor, while valued at a respectable \$24.00, was described by the appraisers as "old."

The pattern of a stylish dining room and a less-fashionable parlor in the same dwelling also appears in the inventory of Eden Hood. A railroad agent responsible for transporting mail and newspapers, Hood died at a young forty-one, leaving behind his thirty-one year old wife and two young children. Although Hood's estate was valued at a meager \$258.74, the probate documents and census records reveal that he and his family lived very well.

Like Robert Brewster, Hood employed domestic help. The thirty-five year old employee must have assisted Cornelia Hood in caring for the couple's toddlers, and in the upkeep of their stylish house with three downstairs rooms. The centerpiece of the residence was the area termed by the inventory-takers the "dining room." While the space did not have the sideboard found in Robert Brewster's house, it was clearly a room specifically for dining, and not the

multi-function sitting room more common in small middle-class Bridgeton homes. Key furnishings inventoried in the dining room were a \$8.00 extension table and "6 cane seat dining chairs" valued at \$4.50. In no other middle-class inventory in this study were a set of chairs described as "dining chairs." Apparently Hood's chairs were readily identifiable as a set and as dining chairs, highlighting how frequently other Bridgeton middle-class dining rooms and sitting rooms had multi-purpose furnishings because they were multi-purpose spaces. Also present in the dining room were a round clock worth \$1.00, a \$.50 box of books, three window shades worth \$.75, and two maps, each worth \$.25. The twenty-three yards of ingrain carpet (valued at a mere \$5.75) most likely covered the floor.⁶¹

Hood seems to have assembled the specialized dining room in his house at the expense of the parlor. Just as in Robert Brewster's house, the Hood parlor lacked upholstered seating furniture and an etagere. Present in the Hood parlor were a relatively costly \$8.00 center table, 5 cane seat chairs, a \$5.00 lounge, a \$1.50 rocking chair and a \$20.00 ingrain carpet. Although the contents of the space were valued at about half the worth of Brewster's parlor furnishings (\$41.75 versus \$73.30), the Hood parlor may in fact have more closely followed the prevailing fashions.

With a lounge and an ingrain carpet, the Hood's best room gave a nod to the importance of plush upholstery and textiles.

Despite their stylish dining rooms and their employment of paid housekeepers, both Hood and Brewster were members of Bridgeton's middle class. The sole young woman that each household employed would hardly have been capable of single-handedly cooking and serving the elaborate dinners expected in an elite dining room. And both homes lacked the entry hall that served as an important buffer in upper-class homes. All guests to the Brewster and Hood residences would have walked directly into the parlor.

The relationship of houseplan, household employees, and household furnishings thus provided a basis for Bridgeton residents to assess social class in their small town. Class calculations were not made by income and financial wealth alone.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the pages of Martha Webster's diary. In her many journal entries the young woman detailed her middle-class beliefs and activities. While no probate inventory from the 1865 to 1880 period exists for Martha and her family, her diary reveals much about her possessions and her house.⁶² Her evocative writings provide a fuller picture of how families

like Jacob Leeds and Alfred Hann lived with their furnishings.

Martha Pierson's father George was a successful blacksmith who had his own shop in downtown Bridgeton. The nearby family home at 60 Bank Street, built in 1841, had elaborate iron railings on its front porch, and was surrounded by an ornate iron fence. Both elements were almost certainly made in or retailed through the Pierson shop. George and Susan Pierson raised their two daughters, Beulah and Martha, in this house.

Martha began keeping her journal in 1866, when she was twenty-four years old. She had been married for just over a year to Joseph P. Webster and was pregnant with her first child. Only eight months after the baby (a son named George) was born, Joseph became ill with tuberculosis and died. As a young widow and mother, Martha sold off most of her household goods and returned to live with her parents. It is the Pierson home to which Martha returned in 1868 which will be considered for this study. The first years after Martha returned home were relatively uneventful ones, as she hosted family gatherings to celebrate the sixtieth birthdays of both her parents. But in 1874, Martha's mother Susan died, and Martha's son Georgie became very ill. Household routines changed, and Martha became more dependent

on servants as she became the caretaker for both her young son and her aging, often abusive father. There are almost no entries in the journals after her son Georgie died in 1881. County records reveal that Martha's father lived on until 1887, and Martha remained at 60 Bank Street until her own death in 1921.

A variety of diary entries firmly place Martha in the ranks of Bridgeton's middle class. In 1875, she recounted having dentures made by Dr. Kirby. This attention to one's teeth was, in a small town, a luxury that only the prosperous could afford.⁶³ The same year Martha writes proudly that her eight year-old son Georgie has started attending a private school taught by Miss James & Miss Mary Applegit. She noted further: "I went downtown this evening and got him a reader and a speller...".⁶⁴ Education was obviously valued by the Pierson family, and they were willing to pay for it.

Despite the family's prosperity, Martha always displayed a middle-class concern with thrift. She recorded in her diary the price she paid for many of the items she purchased, and her family frequently bought only the raw materials needed for household repair or redecoration. Particularly in the early years of the diary, she and her mother routinely performed back-breaking jobs like white-

washing ceilings, wallpapering rooms and blacking the kitchen and parlor stoves.⁶⁵ Economy was evident in Martha's care during this period to recover furniture and make-over pillow ticks and feather beds. In January of 1869, for instance, she cut out a new lounge cover, edged it with binding bought in downtown Bridgeton and finished it just a few days later. By 1875, however, Martha's heavy nursing responsibilities for her father and her son compelled her to hire Mrs. Streaked to whitewash the sitting room, and to hire a handyman to black the stoves. Martha no longer had the time or the inclination for do-it-herself projects.

As the mother of a small child in the early years of the diary, Martha Pierson Webster had ample leisure time. She records pursuing such suitably "elevating" pastimes as reading aloud. In 1874 she wrote, "...Aunt Maria & Orrie were up all of the evening, I read aloud 'Janet's love & service.'"⁶⁶ Many of Martha's other activities were also communal, as evinced by the meeting of the Sewing Society on the afternoon of April 23, 1868 at the Pierson house.

Martha was an avid gardener, annually potting huge quantities of plants, and trading slips with many friends. Even during the time her father and son were ill she must have been well-known for her garden. She described a large party on August 21, 1876: "Our night-blooming cactus bloomed

this evening. Had two flowers on it-they were lovely, there were about 50 here to see it. Had music, singing, a good time generally." She may well have provided the music she mentions herself, since she took piano lessons for a short time beginning in 1869.

Such hobbies were possible for the young widow because the Piersons employed a series of young girls as household help from 1868 to 1879. Both Martha's diary and Bridgeton census records show that the girls's periods of employment ranged from more than three years to stays of just five or six months. It was twenty-one year old Elizabeth Lewell who lived with the Pierson family for three years and three months. It is from her long tenure that one can derive a sense of the responsibilities and roles that these hired girls had in the Pierson household. Routine cleaning (washing, ironing and scrubbing the porches) was assigned to the girls alone, while backbreaking seasonal tasks like the fall 1869 canning of 258 jars of fruit, and heavy spring cleaning were jobs shared by Martha, her mother and the employees. These hired girls also assisted with many pleasant routines. Lizzie Lewall accompanied Martha to downtown Bridgeton shops at Christmas 1871 to choose new tablewares for a Pierson family party. Gatherings for carpet-rag sewing and quilting brought the extended female

family together, and Lizzie always joined in these occasions. Other of Martha's "girls" attended church services and prayer meetings with Pierson family members; sometimes the employee returned to her own home for social visits and for family emergencies. All of the young women, in short, seem to have been treated like family. On March 10, 1875 Martha described a new servant this way: "Sallie Wick came to live with us, I do not feel that she is a stranger, having lived with Mrs. Ayars next door to us for over a year..."

Martha's diary entries perfectly correlate with the findings of Faye Dudden about "hired help." The Pierson women hired young women from their community or at least hired girls like Sallie Wick who were known in Bridgeton. Martha and her mother shared the labor of running the household with their employee, and they shared leisure activities with the young women as well. From the many journeys that Martha records her hired women taking, the Piersons seem to have been kindly, lenient employers.

Martha's reflection that she enjoyed "every necessary home comfort" seems very telling. Aside from being well-heated with coal and wood fires, there is ample evidence that the home Martha shared with her parents was indeed comfortable. There was mosquito netting at every

window, and maintenance was performed on the house every year. Martha recorded the gradual upgrade of the technologies which eased the burden of household labor. In 1867 "we washed and used our new washing machine for the first time. Like it very much;" in 1869 they invested in a Wilcox and Gibb sewing machine which cost \$59.00 including a tucker. The Piersons traded in their old sewing machine and received \$25.00 credit toward their purchase. In 1875 they purchased a new refrigerator (having sold their old one for \$18.00). The home had a bathroom, with water force-pumped from a cistern. The Piersons even had gas lighting installed in an outdoor shed so that garden work could continue after dark.

The house at 60 Bank Street still survives, and in 1992 was still inhabited by a lively 97 year old lady, Mrs. Helen Dare Sheppard Ross. Mrs. Ross and her husband, a Bridgeton lawyer, purchased the house and its furnishings in 1921 after Martha Webster's death. The Rosses made almost no changes to the house or garden, only opening up two small rooms to create a larger, modern kitchen. (The "modern" kitchen still boasted its 1922 stove and its refrigerator with the condenser on top.) A walk through the house revealed that the structure had five downstairs rooms with

a front entryway, making it slightly larger than most of the middle-class homes in the inventory study.

The Pierson entryway featured stained-glass windows around the front door. While Martha's diary does not reveal exactly how the space was furnished, her journal further documents the middle-class practice of wallpapering the vestibule. In 1868, Martha purchased wallpaper for the entry at a shop in downtown Bridgeton. She paid eighteen cents a sheet (only slightly more than Alfred Hann paid for the paper in his entry hall in 1872), and hung the paper herself. Carpet was added or updated on the front hall stairs in 1869. In 1874, George Pierson must have been prospering, for he totally renovated and redecorated the entryway. A new staircase was installed, and new locks and knobs were added to the sitting room and front doors. That spring, Martha herself cleaned the paint in the entry with concentrated lye to remove the varnish. She complained on May 25, "My hands are in a dreadful² condition. Fingers all eaten in holes." In June of 1874, sixteen pieces of much more expensive (forty-five cent) wallpaper were hung by a local firm and a local handyman completed the renovation project by applying a final coat of varnish.

Clearly the Pierson entry was elaborately decorated. It is less obvious how the family and their visitors

interacted in the space. With only one household employee, we would expect that Martha did not screen her visitors in any way; instead she would have welcomed everyone into her home. In much of her diary, Martha validates this view. In numerous entries she wrote of seemingly casual, spur-of-the-moment daytime and evening visits to extended family members, neighbors, and to the church parsonage. It was thus intriguing that on January 3, 1878 she characterized those visits in the unexpectedly formal terms of the urban elite: "Made my usual calls today."

In the parlor, it was accessory items that the diarist most frequently described. These articles seem to have helped the Pierson home meet the urban parlor standard of the day: tidies (small lacy doilies) were made for her "Mother's big chair," and her deceased sister Beulah's photograph was framed and arranged with other pictures on the parlor walls. The Webster family had purchased a stereoscope in August 1869 (in downtown Bridgeton) at the cost of \$1.75. Unlike all but one inventoried middle-class household, the Piersons owned a piano (which was quite a luxury) and had it regularly tuned.⁶⁷ Martha's younger sister Beulah had taken music lessons, and Martha herself began lessons in 1869.⁶⁸

Martha made a variety of items which she proudly displayed in her home, probably in her parlor. In March 1866, she wrote of making hair flowers, and arranging them with straw flowers and two small baskets of grass. Martha also began in 1866 to make wax flowers. She learned the craft from a Mrs. Thompson, and continued making the dome-covered arrangements for seven years. On February 12, 1873 Martha wrote: "I have been at work at wax flowers all the afternoon, got the shade for my vase this morning and got them fixed in it."⁶⁹ In November 1871, Martha added making straw frames to her list of accomplishments.

The care of the space Martha described as the front room or the sitting room reveals seasonal routines which are very telling of middle-class life. In 1871 the Piersons had a fruit cupboard built in the basement, which henceforth allowed the sitting-room cupboard to be filled with china dishes instead of one-hundred jars of homecanned peaches and pears. In late October of 1866, Martha's mother took up the sitting room carpet so that the winter one could be put down. Before the heating season began, oilcloth was placed on the floor beneath stoves and near hearths. A striped rag carpet made by Martha's mother was laid on the floor in 1872.

Martha's journal extensively documents the existence of homemade rag carpets in Bridgeton sitting rooms and the many winter days spent by middle-class women and their hired girls in cutting fabric strips, dyeing them shades of yellow, red, blue, brown, and green, and sewing them into large striped carpets destined for family spaces.

Although the Pierson home had ample space, the family seems not to have made one of their first-floor rooms into a formal dining room. Not once does Martha mention cleaning or redecorating such a space, and not once does she write of hosting elaborate dinners which would have made use of a formal area. It seems that all the family meals, including the large parties hosted in 1874 for her parents sixtieth birthdays, were held in the sitting room. A few diary entries indicate that the Pierson family used their additional first-floor rooms (beyond the kitchen, parlor and sitting room) as winter bedrooms. This seasonal change in sleeping quarters seems to be a continuation of early nineteenth-century rural traditions.⁷⁰

Martha confirmed throughout her diary that the Pierson family purchased their goods from local merchants whenever possible. On May 3, 1867, she writes: "went downtown in the afternoon. I bought a cottage marble-topped bureau at J.S. McGear's, gave \$19.00 for it." Only such

luxury items as books, picture frames, the refrigerator and possibly the piano were obtained in nearby Philadelphia.⁷¹

When Martha helped to decorate other people's houses, she procured furnishings locally and produced many items herself, just as she did for her own house. In October of 1875, Martha was asked to serve on a Ladies' Society committee to redecorate the parlor of her church's parsonage after the arrival of a new minister and his family. Martha diligently priced carpets and furnishings at local stores and produced a rag carpet for the parsonage sitting room.

In 1876 Martha traveled four times to visit the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, exploring the Main building, the women's pavilion, and the Art Gallery. She was apparently overwhelmed by what she saw. "It is certainly grand. I cannot attempt a description of it."⁷² Martha's multiple trips to the fair demonstrate that Bridgeton was not an isolated outpost, and that she and other residents were exposed to the new Japanese and Turkish styles of decoration promoted at the Exposition.

In her comfortable life, Martha Webster was definitively middle class. This can be more clearly seen when the sources for the upper class are examined.

Chapter VI

THE UPPER CLASS IN BRIDGETON

The sample of upper-class residents was very small, with just one inventory, that of Dr. William Bowen, falling conclusively into the top category. This probate evidence was supplemented by the household accounts of another Bridgeton doctor, William Elmer.

It is not a coincidence that both of the elite households were those of physicians. Doctors enjoyed a special place in the class structure of small towns. According to Lewis Atherton, doctors were exempt from community service because of their odd hours, and the inherent virtue of their "healing profession."⁷³ The doctor's home was also frequently his office, and this was true for both Bowen and Elmer. This meant that the doctor's parlor was one that many town and country residents must surely have glimpsed. In cities people gleaned information about how to furnish their homes from the parlors of photography studios, hotels, voluntary association headquarters and steamboats and railroads. Since residents

of Bridgeton had access to only a few of these elegant public parlors, it seems likely that citizens of the small, close-knit towns also looked to their social betters for examples of correctly decorated parlors.⁷⁴

One member of the elite was Dr. William S. Bowen, who died at the age of 70 in 1872. He had shared a house with five downstairs rooms (parlor, sitting room, office, dining room, kitchen) and an entryway with his twenty-four year old son Charles who was "At Home." In 1870, Bowen had employed thirty-five year old Hannah Harker as his housekeeper, and nineteen year old Hetty Harker as a house servant. John Noleran, age twenty seven, was listed on the census as a farm hand.

The existence of a spacious entryway would have set Dr. Bowen's house apart from others in Bridgeton. The \$7.00 entry carpet (on both the first and second floors), a \$3.00 mahogany table, and a \$7.50 hat stand probably would have impressed many Bridgeton residents, who were accustomed to houses with either simply-furnished entryways or none at all.

Bowen's inventory also reveals some of the details expected of upper-class parlors: a \$25.00 carpet (possibly a Brussels) is on the floor, while a \$20.00 hair-seat sprung sofa, a \$4.00 mahogany card table, four haircloth chairs

(costing \$10.00), one \$5.00 "fey brocaletle" chair, and a \$10.00 "watnot" fill the center of the room. \$3.50 window blinds and a \$1.00 oil painting completed the room's trimmings.

Apart from a well-furnished parlor, the Bowen home boasted a dining room. A \$2.00 mahogany table was surrounded by seven windsor chairs valued at \$1.75, and accompanied by a \$3.00 sideboard. A \$1.50 looking glass and a \$.50 clock hint at elegance, but the presence of two small rocking chairs (worth just \$.75) and the very low value (\$8.00) assigned to the room's carpet indicate that this room was perhaps less prestigious than the home's parlor.

Interestingly, even Bowen's sitting room (usually a space reserved for informal family use) had more costly furniture and a pricier floor covering than the dining room. The most expensive item in the doctor's dining room was the Queensware stored in the room's north side closet and displayed on the side board. Altogether, these ceramics were valued at \$18.00, only twenty-five cents less than the combined total value of all the other furnishings in the space.

The meticulous household accounts kept by another Bridgeton doctor, William Elmer, help to provide a fuller picture of elite life in the small town. Remarkably, every

bill that the doctor received and paid for household purchases and repairs was carefully folded and filed away. Many of these account statements were notated on the front in Elmer's hand. Such scrawls as "Carpet for Henry's room, to be sent back if not smooth" provided some information about where furnishings (particularly floorcoverings) would be used in the house.⁷⁵ The accounts dovetail well with the inventory of William Bowen, because probate records necessarily reveal only the largest and most valuable furnishings in any home. By contrast, the Elmer purchase records for 1865-1880 recount primarily the acquisition of accessory items, and only hint at the household's existing major furnishings through repair and maintenance bills.

When the census taker visited in the summer of 1870, Dr. William Elmer's household consisted of himself, his wife Eliza, their three children Margaret, Macomb, and Henry, a twenty four year old boarder Julia Frame, and three servants. The fifty year old Irish cook Ann Gaines was assisted by twenty-five year old chambermaid Rosa Harrison, who was also Irish. Twelve year old Lizzie Mares was employed as a live-in house servant. Although an American citizen, young Lizzie's parents were both of foreign birth. It thus appears that Dr. Elmer was following the new fashion for having foreign-born (and first-generation) immigrant

servants with specialized duties. The presence of these three servants suggests the elite, urban lifestyle that the Elmer family led. Their purchase records largely confirm that the physician and his family led a social and material life far grander than most (if not all) of their Bridgeton neighbors.

The Elmer home had an entry hall hung with expensive wallpapers from Philadelphia. In 1865, the firm of Howell & Bourke billed Elmer \$12.75 for 15 pieces of "marble paper" at \$.75 each and for 3 pieces of border at \$.50 each. These were wallpapers that cost substantially more than the fifteen cent pieces of wallpaper bought by Alfred Hanin in 1872, and the forty-five cent wallcovering that Martha Pierson selected in 1874. Complementing the wallpaper in the entry was a gas powered "hall pendant" which was repaired and renewed by the Bridgeton firm of Warren Rook in 1870 at a cost of \$4.00. The most impressive item in the Elmer hallway, however, would have been the inlaid calling-card receiver bought in 1874 for \$5.00. This small receptacle would have been displayed on a hallstand or small table or pedestal in the entryway. Combined with the presence of the three uniformed servants who could screen the callers to the residence, the card receiver would have clearly broadcast the family's elite status.

There is somewhat less evidence about the Elmer parlor. While many pieces of fine furniture and works of art were purchased by the doctor in the 1860s and 1870s, he almost never notated on the bills for which room such items were destined. Generally only wallpapers and carpets were so documented. Thus the only items that can be definitively placed in the Elmer parlor are six walnut parlor chairs with green upholstery. The firm of Averill Barlow in Philadelphia sold Elmer the set in October 1872 for \$58.00.

Several other items appear in the accounts however, that were probably present in the Elmer parlor. A "full French lounge" costing \$40.00 in 1874 was supplied to the Elmer family by the same Philadelphia firm of Averill Barlow which sold the green parlor chairs just two years before. The lounge may have been intended for the family sitting room, but its high cost and its Philadelphia origin would support its use in the Elmer parlor. The same factors of cost and city origin indicate that a \$200.00 pier glass purchased in June 1872 was also destined for the best parlor. Another key furnishing in the space can be discerned in the 1872 bill of Applegate and Ogden. This marble yard charged Elmer \$6.54 for sending workmen to his home for a day and for polishing a table top. Seemingly, the Elmers opted for such expensive repairs only on

furnishings in the public rooms of the house. The newly polished table was thus most likely the center parlor table.

One would expect a large, handsome dining room in the Elmer home, since they employed a servant specifically as a cook, and both a chambermaid and a house servant who could have served an elegant meal for the family and their guests. The presence of a dining room in the Elmer home was, however, difficult to ascertain. Only one item, an oilcloth, was noted for use in the dining room. Beyond establishing the existence of the dining room, the 1877 purchase of the \$14.00 drugget from a Philadelphia supplier does not reveal much about the way the Elmer dining room was furnished. But other items do hint at the luxurious appointments of the space. In September 1869, Elmer paid Clark and Biddle of Philadelphia \$285.25 for "1 case silver set with 5 dozen pieces" and one fruit stand. This quantity of silver must have been a rarity in Bridgeton, and probably was proudly displayed on a sideboard or side table in the Elmer dining room. Other tablewares purchased in Philadelphia the same month included a dozen cut goblets (\$3.75) and a dozen tumblers (\$1.75). Four years before, Elmer had procured a dozen oyster plates (\$3.25) from a different Philadelphia establishment.

Interestingly, the chairs used in this dining space may not have been quite as elegant as the tablewares. A lengthy 1871 bill from Reuben Ware (a member of the Ware chair-making family who worked as a general handyman for the Elmers) contained a \$7.50 charge for caning "6 large chairs, extra dining size," and a \$1.50 fee for "varnishing same." Ware makes it clear that the chairs are recognizable as a set of dining chairs, differentiating them from numerous other caned chairs found in the Elmer household. The extensive repair of the set indicates that the chairs were not new; to be in need of re-caning and re-varnishing the chairs must have been at least ten or fifteen years old.

When taken together, the Elmer accounts and the Bowen inventory provide a fairly clear picture of the differences between elite homes and those of the middle class. One distinction of elite residences was that they always possessed both an entry hall and a dining room, since upper-class families could afford to hire multiple servants who could facilitate the formal calling and formal dining that the rooms were designed for. As noted above, only one-third of the middle-class homes had the five first-floor rooms necessary to create both an entry and a separate dining room, and none of those families had more than one local hired girl working for them.

Upper-class homes were also more completely furnished than middle-class residences. Entry halls, for instance, were decorated not only with the elaborate wallpapers favored by the middle-class, but also with an elaborate light fixture, a good quality floor carpet, and a table, as well as the expected hall rack. The Elmer's purchase of a \$5.00 card receiver confirms that formal calling was a ritual for the Bridgeton elite.

In the parlor, upper-crust Bridgetonians set themselves apart from their middle-class neighbors by furnishing their rooms with the complete constellation of indexed furniture minus the piano. Center tables, valuable carpets and etageres were all present in well-to-do homes. Elite parlors also contained a sofa along with a set of upholstered chairs, a pattern that occurred in only one-third of the middle-class houses. Most middle-class families probably had to choose between a sofa and a suite of furniture because they could not afford both.

The quality of their parlor furnishings also distinguished the upper class. Dr. Elmer, for instance, fitted one wall of his parlor with a very large \$200.00 pier glass⁷⁶. This was something quite different from the \$2.00 looking glasses inventoried in middle class parlors. The fabric on one of Dr. Elmer's parlor chairs must also have

been exceptional. The appraisers valued the "fey brocalltle" chair at \$5.00.⁷⁷

Both doctors had oil paintings hanging in their parlors, a luxury item found in only one middle-class inventory.⁷⁸ From Dr. Elmer's bills, we learn the subjects of some of those images. In 1866 the doctor purchased four chromolithographs framed in gilt for \$79.50. Their titles were: Bavarian Alps, By the Riverside, Autumn (after W. Hurt), and the Coast of England. Eleven years later, Elmer supplemented his parlor art with two oil paintings costing \$17.50. These works were also of the European countryside, entitled "views of Island of Scotland," and "view of Antwerp."

As Dr. Elmer's household accounts illustrate, elite public room furnishings were often distinguished by having been purchased in Philadelphia rather than in Bridgeton. Dr. Elmer and his wife traveled to the city to buy the vast majority of their furniture, and in 1874 they even ordered a carpet matting from Lord & Taylor in New York. Only such routine, consumable items as oilcloth druggets were purchased from Bridgeton establishments.

Chapter VII

CONCLUSIONS

The upper class of Bridgeton, then, with their elaborate houseplans, their multiple servants and their full complement of furnishings established a standard of living that the lower and middle classes could choose to mimic. How often the neighbors and patients of William Elmer and William Bowen actually attempted to make their houses look like those of the doctors is something that historians can never fully know. But through analyzing the rich sources of late-nineteenth-century probate inventories, census records, diaries and household accounts, material culture researchers can begin to uncover the realities of small-town American life, including the existence of distinct social classes and what the homes of people at different social levels really looked like.

The use of probate records for Victorian American history has to date been slight. The cache of documents in Bridgeton, however, hints at the rich possibilities that lie

undiscovered and therefore unutilized on dusty courthouse shelves across the United States. Arguments that nineteenth-century inventories are inferior to their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century counterparts were not corroborated by this study. On the contrary, the documents were remarkably representative of the entire deceased population of Bridgeton, and were incredibly detailed.

The wealth of specific census data available for the second half of the nineteenth century is yet another untapped resource. As indexes are published for the 1870, 1880 and 1890 federal census, historians should examine those records for important information about family and household composition, including the servants and "hired girls" whose presence provide such important clues to the past.

While it may be a truism that "richer people have nicer things," the complex relationships between social class and material culture in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America have not been adequately addressed. It is only since the 1980s that non-Marxist historians have even dared to seriously consider the existence of social class in the American past. This thesis is an attempt to contribute to an on-going scholarly discussion about the role of social class in American history.

This study also hopes to redress the lack of attention material culture researchers have given to small towns and rural areas. Too often, scholarly Victorian-American history has been written using the experience of the great urban centers of New York and Philadelphia to tell of the experience of all Americans. The United States never has had and hopefully never will have a completely monolithic culture. As citizens begin to appreciate the regional diversity of American culture in the late twentieth century, historians need to explore the true realities of what it meant to be lower class, middle class or upper class in every part of this nation. Many small, local studies like this one will be needed before we can truly understand what life was like for people such as Alfred Hann, Martha Pierson Webster and William Elmer across the United States in the years after the Civil War.

NOTES

¹Martha Pierson Webster, diary, 1875, Cumberland County Historical Society, Greenwich, New Jersey.

²Paul Fussell, Class: A Guide through the American Status System (New York: Touchstone Books, 1983), 15.

³For the purposes of this study, the definition crafted by Edward Pessen shall be used. He argues that the family is the core unit of class. In order to determine someone's class, the following factors about the family must be assessed: their total wealth and how it was accumulated, their household income, cost of their housing, the quality and style of their household furnishings, their social circle, and their status, length of residence and involvement in the community. Some characteristics of the individual also influence his or her social standing. These include his or her occupation and how it is perceived in the community, the quality, level and prestige of the person's education, his or her leisure activities, the number of marriages and children the person has had, his or her longevity and health, and "breeding" and manners. In Main Street on the Middle Border, Lewis Atherton writes of small town life after the Civil War using a very similar though less specific definition. Edward Pessen, "Illusion Versus Reality: Class in American Life and Thought," Lecture at the Symposium "Who is Middle Class in America?" 15 November 1991, The Strong Museum, Rochester, New York; Lewis E. Atherton, Main Street on the Middle Border, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1954).

⁴John T. Molloy, The Woman's Dress for Success Book (New York: Warner Books, 1977), 73.

⁵Lewis E. Atherton, Main Street on the Middle Border (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1954), 101.

⁶Kenneth L. Ames, Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 21.

⁷Probate Inventory of Dr. William Bowen, 1872, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Court House, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

⁸Christopher Clark-Hazlett, "You Are What You Own: Material Evidence and Middle-Class History" Paper presented at the Symposium "Who is Middle Class in America?" Strong Museum, Rochester, New York, 15 November 1991.

⁹Robert J. Samuelson, "Since World War II, or Why Middle America is Fat, Rich, and Disillusioned" Paper presented at Symposium "Who is Middle Class in America?" Strong Museum, Rochester, New York, 15 November 1991.

¹⁰Stuart M. Blumin, The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 158.

¹¹Sally Ann McMurray, "City Parlor, Country Sitting Room: Rural Vernacular Design and the American Parlor, 1840-1900," Winterthur Portfolio 20 (Winter 1985): 261-280. Angel Kwolek-Follard, "Domesticity and Moveable Culture in the United States, 1870-1900," American Studies 25 (Fall 1984) 21-37.

¹²Katherine C Grier, Culture and Comfort: People, Parlors and Upholstery 1850-1930 (Rochester, New York: The Strong Museum, 1988), 66. As one of the most respected writers on nineteenth century interiors, Grier echoes the work of many other scholars when she claims that "differences in the tastes of ordinary urban and rural parlor makers were not extreme by the second half of the nineteenth century, at least in areas no longer subject to the roughness of frontier living or to extraordinary geographical or social isolation." This study will show that Bridgeton was hardly an isolated locale in the 1870s, and yet many of its middle-class interiors of the antebellum period reflected an aesthetic at least twenty years old.

¹³Blumin, 158.

¹⁴The Business Review of Cumberland and Salem Counties, New Jersey. With Descriptive and Historical Sketches of the More Important Industrial Enterprises. (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania Publishing Company, 1891), 3.

¹⁵D.J. Stewart, New Historical Atlas of Cumberland County, New Jersey, Illustrated (Philadelphia, 1876), 32-33.

¹⁶Thomas Cushing and Charles E. Sheppard, A History of the counties of Gloucester, Salem and Cumberland, New Jersey (Philadelphia: Everts & Peck, 1983), 498.

¹⁷Gloria L. Main, "Probate Records as a Source for Early American History," William and Mary Quarterly 32 (January 1975): 92.

¹⁸ Ibid., 89-99.

¹⁹The twenty-six individuals whose inventories comprise this study are listed in the appendix. The full list of 975 decedents is available by request from the author.

²⁰Harold B. Gill, Jr. and George M. Curtis, III, "Virginia's colonial probate policies and the preconditions for economic history," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 87 (January 1979): 69.

²¹Vanmeter v. Jones 3 NJ Eq. 520 (1836) cited in S. Meredith Dickinson, The Practice of the Probate Courts of New Jersey. (Jersey City, NJ: F.D. Linn & Co., 1884), 82.

²²Dickinson, 65-101.

²³Anna L. Hawley, "The Meaning of Absence: Household Inventories in Surry County, Virginia, 1690-1715," in Early American Probate Inventories: Proceedings of the Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife in Dublin, New Hampshire, 1987, ed. Peter Benes (Boston: Boston University Press, 1988) 16-31.

²⁴Colegrove v. Dias, cited in Dickinson, 67.

²⁵Lutz K. Berkner, "The Use and Misuse of Census Data for the Historical Analysis of Family Structure," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 4 (Spring 1975): 724.

²⁶Richard Sennett, Families against the City: Middle Class Homes of Industrial Chicago 1872-1890 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

Robert Brewster, a decedent in this study, is an example of this phenomenon. He listed his occupation for the 1870 census as "fertilizer." This designation could mean that Mr. Brewster was the owner of a large fertilizer factory in the region, or it could mean that he was farmer successfully marketing fertilizer from his property, or it could indicate that he was a retailer or wholesaler of the product. Such vague occupation listings make even the categorization of someone as a manual or non-manual laborer difficult.

²⁷Blumin, 346 n36.

²⁸Ibid., 117.

²⁹See Harvey Green, Light of the Home; Kenneth Ames, Death in the Dining Room; Louise L. Stevenson, The Victorian Homefront: American Thought and Culture, 1860-1880 (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991); Colleen McDannell, The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986).

³⁰David P. Handlin, The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815-1915 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 15.

³¹Harvey Green, Light of the Home (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 94.

³²Ibid., 95.

³³Ibid., 96-7.

³⁴Craig H. Roell, The Piano in America, 1890 -1940 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), xii-xiv.

³⁵Ames, 157.

³⁶Green, 94.

³⁷Ibid., 96.

³⁸Godey's Lady's Book in 1850 declared that a stylish parlor should contain a set of rosewood-framed sofas and chairs upholstered in red or black satin damask or in velvet, plush or haircloth. Lounging chairs or armchairs were essential, as were a piano, an oval-shaped marble-topped sofa table, an etagere (a free-standing set of decorative shelves) and plenty of ornaments, especially vases and ceramic figures. Fancy window treatments and carpeting were to finish off the space. "New Furniture," Godey's Lady's Book, February 1850, 152-3.

³⁹See Green, 87; and Faye Dudden, Serving Women: Household Service in the Nineteenth Century America (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 114.

⁴⁰Dudden, 10.

⁴¹Ibid., 96.

⁴²Dudden, 97.

⁴³Probate inventory of Samuel Dubois, 1873, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Court House, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

⁴⁴Probate inventory of Samuel Reeves, 1879, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Court House, Bridgeton, New Jersey. The above inventory is unusually detailed for this group. The document is exceptional in its inclusion of such items as a framed \$.05 picture of President William Henry Harrison hung in the second story front bed chamber.

⁴⁵Probate inventory of Robert Brewster, 1871, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey; Probate inventory of Harmon Krouse, 1866, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

⁴⁶Gail Caskey Winkler and Roger W. Moss, Victorian Interior Decoration: American Interiors 1830-1900 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 88-89.

⁴⁷Ames, 256 n9.

⁴⁸Dr. William Elmer, household accounts, 1876, Special Collections and Archives, Rutgers University Libraries, New Brunswick, New Jersey. Dr. William Elmer recorded a payment of \$2.00 on September 1, 1876 to the steamer "City of Bridgeton" for the transport of "Furniture & c." A year later in 1877, having a wire mattress repaired cost the doctor an additional \$3.50 in transportation charges. One dollar of that fee was for the freighting of the piece, while \$2.50 was charged by the repair firm for the "portorage of goods from the boat to W. Philadelphia." Clearly, having goods sent to and from the city could be an expensive undertaking.

⁴⁹Probate inventory of William Pogue, 1865, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

⁵⁰Probate inventory of Daniel Clark, 1877, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

⁵¹Probate inventory of Wesley Barnes, 1879, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

⁵²Probate inventory of Jacob Leeds, 1875, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

⁵³Probate inventory of Robert Brewster, 1871, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

⁵⁴Probate inventory of Jacob Leeds, 1875, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

⁵⁵Probate inventory of Alfred Hann, 1874, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey. Alfred Hann, Account records of Hann's grocery store, 1872, Special Collections and Archives, Rutgers University Libraries, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

⁵⁶Probate inventory of Davis Scull, 1876, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

⁵⁷ Jacob Leeds' house had 5 downstairs rooms, and his parlor totaled \$40.50; Alfred Hann had 4 downstairs rooms, and his parlor totaled \$66.00; Davis Scull had just 3 downstairs rooms, and his parlor totaled \$59.10.

⁵⁸Probate inventory of Joseph Ayars, 1873, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

⁵⁹For a history of dining room furnishing practices in small, rural homes, see Beth Ann Twiss-Garrity, "Getting the comfortable fit: house forms and furnishings in rural Delaware, 1780-1820" (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1984).

⁶⁰Probate inventory of Robert Brewster, 1871, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

⁶¹Probate inventory of Eden Hood, 1875, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

The Hood inventory is somewhat problematical because a few furnishings seem to have been rearranged before the inventory was taken. Several items appear in the dining room that are clearly out of place: an additional stove, a straw bed tick, a down bed spread, a lot of tin ware, a clothes basket and clothes pins, and a lard can all seem to have been brought in from a shed or carried down from the garret. These items are listed at the very end of the dining room section, an indication that they may have been placed in one corner of the room. One validation of the confusing Hood inventory is the fact that one of the appraisers was Alphonso Woodruff, the recently retired surrogate. As an inventory-taker, Woodruff would have been very familiar with the state laws requiring a full and complete accounting of all possessions.

⁶² An 1888 inventory does exist for Martha's father, George Pierson. The document is problematical for many reasons, including the fact that it mentions George Pierson's hitherto unknown widow Mary, whose role in the Pierson household is unclear. It is also not a room-by-room inventory comparable to the other records used in this study. Because the inventory is outside the 1865-1880 time frame under consideration, it has not been utilized in this analysis.

⁶³In Main Street on the Middle Border, Atherton states that spending money on one's teeth was even thought vain, and that the condition of one's teeth was "proof of the economic and intellectual gradations in communities committed to a classless society." Atherton, 160.

⁶⁴Martha Pierson Webster, diaries, April 5, 1875, Cumberland County Historical Society, Greenwich, New Jersey.

⁶⁵Martha Pierson Webster, diaries, March 23, 1868, February 27, 1874, Cumberland County Historical Society, Greenwich, New Jersey.

⁶⁶On the importance of reading aloud to middle-class life, see Barbara Sicherman, "Sense and Sensibility: A Case Study of Women's Reading in Late-Victorian America," in Reading in America ed. Cathy N. Davidson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 200-225.

⁶⁷Probate inventory of John Morgridge, 1879, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey.

When Dr. John Morgridge died in 1879, his inventory listed a piano in the sitting room valued at \$150.00. This was the only such instrument found in a Bridgeton probate record. The appraisers of Dr. Morgridge's goods were careful to record that the piano had been willed to the deceased's daughter Anne. One wonders how many appraisers of other estates were so conscientious, and how often pianos were simply omitted from the inventories.

⁶⁸Sheet music marked with Beulah's name was found by this author stored in the attic of the Pierson home on Bank Street in 1992.

⁶⁹Mrs. Helen Dare Ross still possessed a dome-covered pair of the wax flower arrangements when this author visited her home in 1992. A kit of wax flower-making tools belonging to Martha Webster was donated by Mrs. Ross to Wheaton Village in Millville, New Jersey.

⁷⁰For more on sleeping quarters in "best rooms," see Elizabeth Donaghy Garrett, At Home (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1989), 52-54.

⁷¹Martha Pierson Webster, diaries, 1872, 1876, Cumberland County Historical Society, Greenwich, New Jersey. Martha records in her diary that her father brought home a book on flowers from Philadelphia in May 1872; he brought Webster's dictionary home in 1876.

⁷²Martha Pierson Webster, diaries, June 20, 1876, Cumberland County Historical Society, Greenwich, New Jersey.

⁷³Atherton, 153.

⁷⁴Grier, Culture and Comfort, 19-58.

⁷⁵Dr. William Elmer, household accounts, 1875, Special Collections and Archives, Rutgers University Libraries, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

⁷⁶Dr. William Elmer, household accounts, 1872, Special Collections and Archives, Rutgers University Libraries, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

The size of the pier glass is not stated, but the additional \$4.50 charge for freighting it to Bridgeton implies that the mirror was bulky. The usual charge for shipping a single piece of furniture via steamboat was about \$2.00.

⁷⁷ According to "A Glossary of Textile Terms," in Culture and Comfort, brocatel is a brocade or damask with a linen warp and wool weft. The twill surface was thought suitably silky for furniture coverings. Grier, 301.

⁷⁸Probate inventory of Rachel Butcher, 1874, Surrogate's Office, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey. Ms. Butcher's inventory lists a \$50.00 oil painting.

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APPENDIX

A database of the 975 decedents in Bridgeton, New Jersey in the years 1865 to 1880.

Name	Date_of_Death	Marital	Age	Sex	Occupation	Census_Real	Census_Pers.	Will	Inven	Birthplace	Notes
Ayars, Joseph S.	Mar 18, 1873	M	065	M	watchman	\$5,000.00	\$500.00		1873	New Jersey	house at Laurel above Washington Street; lives w wife Sarah, 62, who keeps house (1870)
Barnes, Wesley	Feb 8, 1879		061	M	shoemaker	\$5,000.00	\$500.00		1879		h Pearl ab Commerce; 1870 Hshld: Ann, 52, keeps house; Chs, 18, app tin smith; Bell, 15, AH; Wm, 25, clerk in store; Martha, 25, boarding.
Bowen, Henry S.	Apr 20, 1875	S	074	M	farmer	\$2,000.00	\$1,000.00		1875	Greenwich	h Academy nr Lawrence; lives w Lydia, 36, Keeps house.
Bowen, William S.	May 7, 1872	M	070	M	medical doctor	\$24,200.00	\$11,400.00	1872	1872	New Jersey	h Franklin, cnr Commerce St.; 1870 Hshold: Chs, 24, AH; Hannah Harker, 35, Kps House; Hetty V. Harker, 19, House servant; John Noleran, 27, farm hand.
Brewster, Robert G.	Mar 24, 1871	S	065	M	fertilize r, Laurel below Warren	\$12,000.00	\$30,000.00		1871	New Jersey	house on Laurel opposite Warren; lives with Sally B. Parsins, 30, House keeper; Richard Williams, 20, clerk in drugstore.

Name	Date_of_Death	Marital	Age	Sex	Occupation	Census_Real	Census_Pers.	Will	Inven	Birthplace	Notes
Bright, Nicholas	Jun 17, 1873	S	070	M	blacksmith	\$18,000.00	\$10,000.00	1873	1873	Salem	h Commerce St nr Church St. 1870 Hshld: lives w Ruth Mayhew, 61, who keeps house. She has rp=\$1600, pp=\$200.
Butcher, Rachel S.	Dec 1, 1874	S	065	F		\$5,000.00	\$200.00	1874	1874	Salem	1870: lives w Jonathan, 40, clothing store clerk, pp=\$500 & Ella, 36, keeps house. h Church cnr Cedar;
Clark, Daniel	Feb 7, 1877	M	076	M	flour mill	\$3,500.00	\$2,500.00	1877	1877	Fairfield	funeral at his residence, 111 Bank Street.; 1870 Hshld: Ellen, 35, kps hse.
Dubois, Samuel	Apr 27, 1873	M	079	M	farmer	\$4,000.00	\$1,000.00		1873	New Jersey	house on Irving at corner of Lawrence
Foster, Margaret Mrs.	Sep 7, 1878		063	F	keeps house	\$2,000.00	\$200.00	1878	1878	New Jersey	h Pearl ab Commerce; 1870 Hshld: Ella, 27, teacher; Margaret, 24, teacher, and Emma, 20, At Home.

Name	Date_of_Death	Marital	Age	Sex	Occupation	Census_Real	Census_Pers.	Will	Inven	Birthplace	Notes
Hann, Alfred Capt.	May 16, 1874	M	063	M		\$10,000.00	\$3,000.00	1874	1874	Bridgeton	lives Vine near Giles with Ruth, 55, Keeps House.
Harris, Alvah	May 28, 1878		083	M	Farmer	\$10,000.00	\$300.00	1878	1878	New Jersey	h Broad cnr Lawrence; lives with Sarah, 71, Keeps house; Harriet Renier, daughter, 33, pp=\$1200, and kids Jms, 5, at school, and Anthony, 3, Sarah, 2, Johnny, 1.
Hood, Eden M.	Mar 9, 1874	M	041	M	West Jersey RR route and mail agent	\$7,500.00	\$400.00	1874	1875	Bridgeton	h Washington nr Laurel; 1870 Hshld: Cornelia, 31, kps hse; Henry, 4, and Fannie, 3. Sarah Keen, 35, house servant.
Krouse, Harmon	Feb 7, 1866	M	051	M	ship carpenter	\$1,000.00	\$200.00	1866	1866	Bridgeton	wife Phebe; daughters: Hannah, 17; Ahena, 12, and Clara, 6 are at school; Mary, 4.
Lake, Abigail	Apr 1, 1872	M (wido w)	063	F	milliner, 28 Commerce Street	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00		1872	Atlantic County	house, 28 Commerce Street; 1870 lists occupation as keeping house.

Name	Date_of_Death	Marital	Age	Sex	Occupation	Census_Real	Census_Pers.	Will	Inven	Birthplace	Notes
Leeds, Jacob	Apr 14, 1875	M	058	M	liquor	\$7,000.00	\$7,000.00		1875	Burlington	business at 20 Commerce; h
					dealer					County	Bank ab Cedar; 1870 Hahld;
											Henrietta, 44, kps hse; Elias,
											23, drug store; George, 21,
											clerk liquor store; Jennie,
											14, at school.
Loder, Martin	Feb 5, 1866	S	038		farmer	\$5,000.00	\$500.00	(2)	1866	Bridgeton	wife Elizabeth, 30.
									1866		
Moore, Ezekiel	Jun 12, 1867	M	078	M	farmer	\$1,000.00	\$200.00		1867	Bridgeton,	wife Mary, 3 yrs younger.
										3rd ward	
Moore, John P.	Jun 30, 1865	M	055			\$7,800.00	\$1,000.00		1865	1866	wife Hannah; children:
											Abigail, 15, domestic; Anna
											F., 12, Aramenta C., 5, James
											F., 5, (these 3 in school);
											Joseph S., 2.
Morgridge, John	Aug 6, 1879		084	M	Doctor	\$15,000.00	\$3,000.00		1879	1879	Maine
											h & office, 154 E. Commerce
											St; lives with Mary, 69, Kps
											hse, and Mary, 37, AH.

Name	Date_of_Death	Marital	Age	Sex	Occupation	Census_Real	Census_Pers.	Will	Inven	Birthplace	Notes
Pogue, William Sr.	Sep 17, 1865	M	051	M	tin manufactur er	\$111,500.00	\$7,500.00		1865	Salem County	died suddenly; wife Martha; house at corner of Bank and Marion; 18 year old son in the business; 13 year old daughter in school. 12 year old daughter not in school.
Reeves, Samuel	Dec 4, 1879		078	M	farmer	\$40,000.00	\$10,000.00	1879	1880	New Jersey	h 67 S. Laurel Street; 1870 Hshld: Phebe, 67; Henry, 30, farm hand; Elizabeth Smith, 35, Seamstress; Sarah Poller, 22, kps house.
Riley, James M.	Mar 9, 1872	M	070	M	farmer	\$10,000.00	\$1,000.00	1872	1872	New Jersey	h Fayette cnr Vine; 1870 Hshold Ruth, 64, Kps Hse; Wm, 25, painter; Frank Riley, 27, bank clerk, rp=\$40 00, pp=\$500; Rebecca Riley, 25, boa rding; Alijah Gould, 23, (M) farm hand; Ester Gaskill, 30, hseserv.
Scull, Davis K.	Jul 24, 1876	M	070	M	house painter	\$4,000.00	\$2,000.00		1876	Bridgeton	h Laurel ab Washington; 1870 hshld: Louisa, 60, keeps house; Martha, 21, and Sophia, 19, both "AH"; Elsa Bowen, 30, (lives w father) and Byron, 11, at school.
Trenchard, James B.	Feb 27, 1877	M	066	M	Surveyor	\$6,000.00	\$2,000.00		1877	Fairfield	funeral at his home, 23 Pine Street. 1870 Hshold: Mary, 54, Kps hse; Ella, 22, AH; Jennett, 19, AH; Herbert, 1.

Name	Date_of_Death	Marital	Age	Sex	Occupation	Census_Real	Census_Pers.	Will	Inven	Birthplace	Notes
Woodruff, Joseph W.	Jun 19, 1875	M	073	M	lumber dealer	\$3,200.00	\$2,500.00		1874	Greenwich	h Orange nr Lemon; lives with Mary, 70, Kps house; Joseph Dilks, 34, waterman, pp=\$200; Adaline Dilks, 30, Kps hse; John, 10 and Lizzie, 7, students; Joseph, 5 and Clinton, 1.