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Limits of conservatism: Cabinetmaker Adam Kersh

Maurer, Nina Norem, M.A.

University of Delaware, 1992

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LIMITS OF CONSERVATISM:

CABINETMAKER ADAM KERSH

by

Nina Maurer

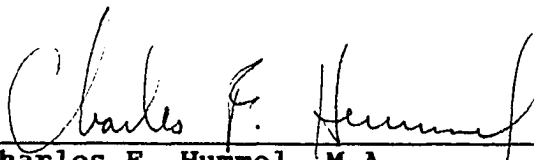
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University
of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture


Fall 1992

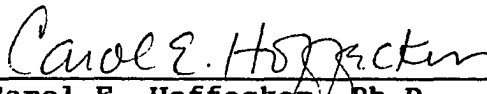
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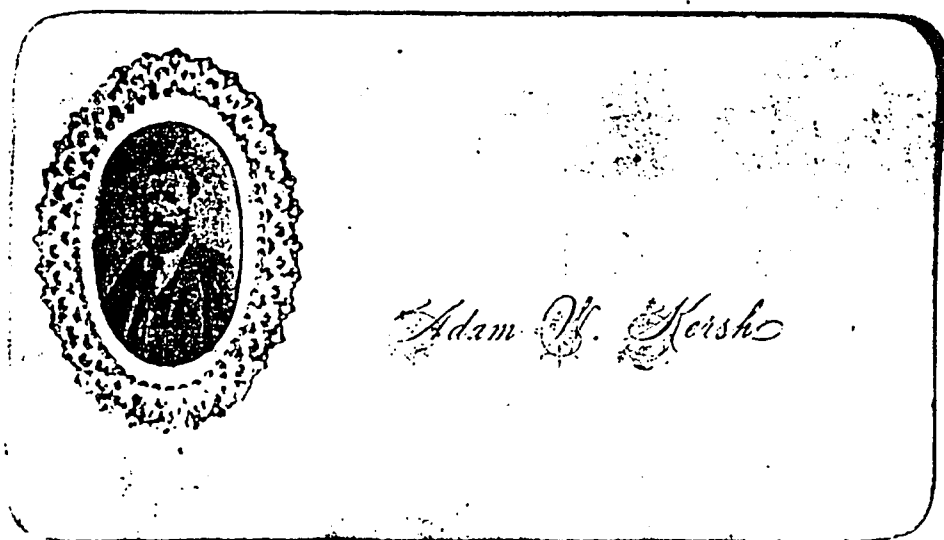
**LIMITS OF CONSERVATISM:
CABINETMAKER ADAM KERSH**

by
Nina Maurer

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Business card of Adam Kersh with inset photograph.
Courtesy, E. Ray Wine, Mt. Solon.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the sources of cultural continuity for a rural craftsman in an era of industrialization. Adam Wise Kersh (1828-1905) built furniture in a cabinet shop on his family's farm in Augusta County, Virginia, from before the Civil War until his death. Kersh operated in a conservative, rural, ethnic culture that was disrupted by the war and the speculation that followed. He was able to mitigate the effects of economic change by rejecting opportunities to enlarge his shop, hire out work, or invest in power machinery. Instead, Kersh and his customers chose to sustain familiar relationships by continuing direct transactions and patronizing traditional methods of construction. Two groups of artifacts provided the evidence base for this study. The contents of Kersh's workshop were acquired by the Museum of American Frontier Culture in Staunton, Virginia, when the shop was dismantled in 1985. His craft practice was further represented by 120 pieces of attributed furniture still owned in the vicinity of Augusta County.

INTRODUCTION

On a summer junket through Virginia in 1816, a youthful northerner named James Paulding recorded his impressions of Germans in the Shenandoah Valley in the vicinity of Augusta County:

Everything about him, animate and inanimate, partakes in this character of solidity. . . . It matters not to him, whether the form of sideboards or bureaus changes . . . his old oaken chest and clothes-press of curled maple, with the Anno Domini of their construction upon them . . . still stand their ground, while the baseless fabrics of fashion fade away, without leaving a wreck behind.¹

Though Paulding's prose is a little hackneyed, he was describing a conservative, rural, ethnic culture in a region whose economy was still dominated by the raising of wheat and livestock. Half a century later, in the wake of the Civil War, Augusta County's population had doubled. Paulding could have completed his trip down the Valley toward Maryland on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. Steam-powered sawmills cut tan bark and pine deal in the western foothills of the county. German congregations listened to sermons in English and chose their furniture with

deliberate care for the fashions then current in Cincinnati or St. Louis.

In this same Valley, a fourth-generation German, Adam Wise Kersh, made furniture from the 1860s until his death in 1905. His cabinet shop was located on the Kersh farm in Wise Hollow, a backwater neighborhood of Augusta County. The shop survived until the mid-1980s, when the building was razed and the homeplace sold out of the family. Cluttered with the accumulated debris of decades of farm life, the shop was hardly in working condition. Nevertheless, workbenches and a treadle lathe were in place. Patterns were still wedged in the rafters. Among the traditional tools of the cabinetmaking trade were industrial trappings as well--a patented treadle grinder made in upstate New York and paint supplies shipped from Baltimore. Preindustrial tools and patented goods were jumbled, cheek-by-jowl, prompting the question: In an era of industrialization, in what ways did Kersh continue to operate in a handcraft tradition?

The nature of preindustrial woodworking has been described by a number of historians and material culture scholars. A case study of a late eighteenth-century rural joiner was done by Barbara Ward.² Her profile of the Mill

Creek Hundred joiner is based on diary entries instead of objects, but her argument, rather than her document source, is the main point of divergence with this study. Ward defines traditional craft in terms of a maker's control over the pace of work and then provides a taxonomy of the joiner's preindustrial work habits. This study seeks to explain a maker's choices to perpetuate or reject his tradition, and focuses on continuity in the relations between members of a community rather than a maker's relation to his work.

Jan Seidler and Michael Ettema wrote on changes in the furniture industry in the nineteenth century, but their focus was the introduction of power tools.³ An article on the transition from hand to machine work by Polly Anne Earl is a corrective to their treatment of mechanization, in that she demonstrates the slow, uneven adoption of steam power and the persistence of treadle machinery throughout industrialization.⁴

The assumption of most of these essays has been that the shift from craft to industry was a technological evolution that was complete by the late-nineteenth century. But the mark of industrialization is a change in behavioral patterns, not equipment. This view is shared by Edward

Cooke, Jr., who has argued that craft and industrial methods of production have coexisted over three centuries and that each resurfaces based on local conditions.⁵ The task of this study is to evaluate the sources of continuity for an individual maker--his cultural background as well as his shop building, business practice, and products--and to explain the role of tradition in modifying the effects of economic change.

Introduction
ENDNOTES

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Chapter 1 CONSERVATISM

On the south wall of a one-room schoolhouse in Augusta County, Virginia, a bold hand printed the letters "AWK" in the year 1848. The initials were those of Adam Wise Kersh (fig. 1.1), who lived a mile below the school in a neighborhood known as Wise Hollow. The schoolroom served the congregations of nearby St. Michaels church, a union church for both Lutherans and German Reformed. In the decade after 1828 when Adam Kersh was born, the original original log meetinghouse on the site was overhauled.¹ The clapboard school building may have been added during that period. Kersh attended grammar school there, but his initials emblazoned on the schoolhouse wall were not a boyish prank. Written in the year of his confirmation at age twenty, the initials attest to Kersh's participation in a German community, in the Reformed church and in a family established in the Shenandoah Valley for three generations.²

The conservatism that characterized each of these groups--community, church, and family--shaped Kersh's life

as a rural cabinetmaker. Between a maker and his community there exists a web of relations that forms a context for his enterprise. Folklorist Henry Glassie has described context as controlling or prodding the principles by which a maker generates material things; hence, context can serve to explain a maker's choices.³ The causal link between context and a maker's decisions about his craft is not made explicit by Glassie, but his theory is useful to this study because it is an attempt to infer past patterns of thought from material remains. If we accept that in some degree context governs craft practice, then knowledge of Kersh's social relations is a basis for understanding his business choices.

German settlements in Virginia were established as insular communities from the time of their inception in the early eighteenth century. The first Germans to arrive as a colony were settled east of the Valley in the Piedmont in 1714 by Governor Spotswood with the proviso that they reside separately from English settlers and remain within the confines of a fort built for them, called Germanna.⁴ The site of the fort, near iron ore deposits in the foothills, was intentional. Just as German glass and soap makers were brought to Jamestown for their skilled trades, these forty-two colonists were imported as miners.

Justified as a buffer to the threat of Indian attack, the colonists were given the privilege to worship as a German Reformed congregation. As religious dissenters they were tolerated, but no encouragement was given them to appropriate the land as their new home.

A number of factors suggest why Germans in the Valley of Virginia remained apart late into the nineteenth century: the pattern of settlement, the size of the German population in certain counties, and the layout of villages. The tide of German immigrants arriving in Pennsylvania after 1700 and the increase in land prices that resulted drove settlers south and west toward the Shenandoah Valley. About 1727 the first settlement was made in the Valley.⁵ Adam Miller landed in Pennsylvania three years before his arrival in the Valley and came to the Massanutten land, in the lower Valley abutting the Blue Ridge Mountains, via Lancaster County. The way to the Massanutten tract was not unprepared, however; Northern land speculators were scouting the Valley and petitioning for large land grants of 5,000 to 100,000 acres. Miller bought his land from one of the speculators. Encouraged by the emigration schemes of the northern promoters, the number of German settlers increased until the 1740s, by which time three major settlements spanned the Valley from Winchester to

Rockingham County.

The consolidation of German settlements within a few decades enabled them to avoid assimilation. Moreover, in certain counties the concentration of Germans allowed them to maintain some cultural hegemony into the late nineteenth century. In Rockingham County, for example, descendants of Germans were calculated to be almost 70 percent of the population in 1885. The Scotch-Irish, who dominated in Rockingham before the influx of Germans, amounted to less than 14 percent of the population.⁶

The layout of German settlements tended to promote isolation as well. The abundance of land west of the Blue Ridge caused Germans to abandon the field-strip system of farming they were accustomed to in Europe, in which homes were clustered together in compact villages. Instead, they settled on isolated farms; the villages were developed later as commercial centers.

When Adam Kersh's ancestor Matthias arrived in Philadelphia from Heidelberg in 1752, he followed a pattern established by immigrants three decades earlier.⁷ Within a few years he and his wife Anna Margaret had settled in present-day Rockingham County and joined the Peaked

Mountain Church (also a union church). They first appear in the records of the church as sponsors for a baptism on October 1, 1756.⁸ It is worth noting that this was a period of profound anxiety for settlers in the Valley, as the English frontier had been pushed back to the Allegheny Mountains with the defeat of General Braddock in 1755. The threat of Indian attacks lasted into the next decade and must have contributed to the insularity of the German settlements.

Between 1762 and 1787 Matthias bought lands in both Rockingham and Augusta counties totaling 1165 acres.⁹ His son George was also a substantial landowner and a member of Peaked Mountain Church. Fifteen miles southwest in Augusta County a homestead was built by George's son Jacob on land he purchased from his father-in-law, Adam Wise.¹⁰ For three generations Jacob Kersh and his descendants farmed the land in Wise Hollow and attended St. Michaels Church.

Adam Kersh, Jacob's son, was a fourth-generation German American. The community in which he was raised was stable and supportive of an established order. But it is clear that in Kersh's lifetime the hegemony of German culture in the Valley was seriously eroded. Chief among the causes of this change was a shift in the language used

in local schools and churches from German to English. That shift can be traced in Kersh's family. Bibles kept by the first and second generations are in German, but the Bibles of Adam and his brother George are in English. All of Adam's correspondence is in English.

The only part of his record with particularly German associations is the musical scores in "shape-note" notation that he wrote on wood scraps in his shop. Although shape-note music was disseminated by a German publisher from Rockingham County, Joseph Funk, the notation was imported from northern states.¹¹ The hymns made popular by Funk in his Chorale-Music of 1816 were a combination of traditional seventeenth-century German chorales and American folk tunes borrowed from a Presbyterian hymn book. The tunes in his Harmonia Sacra of 1832 were English in origin. Thus Kersh's use of shape-note notation and his subscription to the magazine Musical Millions (successor to Funk's Southern Musical Advocate) are a mark of assimilation as well as persistence of tradition.

Most German schools in the Valley closed between 1825 and 1835, one hundred years after the first settlement.¹² The one at St. Michaels survived until 1870

as a parochial school, but classes were no longer taught in German. Resistance to dropping the German language was strongest in the churches. The record book of St. Michaels, begun in 1790, was kept in German until 1811 and mixed English until the early 1830s. Services were conducted in both languages until 1833, when the pastor John Brown recorded, "All services are delivered in English."¹³

The conservative disposition of Kersh's ethnic community was also evident in the religious heritage of the German Reformed denomination. Although the Reformed church was one of Continental Europe's dissenting sects, its doctrine rested on a fundamentally conservative belief--predestination. According to that doctrine, the omniscience of God implies that salvation is foreordained. Thus man can do nothing to effect his salvation; he must be elected by God. The essence of this doctrine is acceptance of an existing order, situation, or fact, and hence, deeply conservative. If predestination was a repressive doctrine, it was also reassuring, particularly in a frontier community. The meaning of individual lives is assured because they are part of God's design.

Historian Klaus Wust has indicated that churches

held a dominant place in the collective life of Virginia Germans in the eighteenth century--perhaps as much from social pressure as from piety.¹⁴ That powerful role continued into the nineteenth century, although on a more troubled footing. Close cooperation had existed between the Lutherans and the Reformed church, and union churches, such as St. Michaels, were common in rural areas. By the middle of the nineteenth century many of the union churches had formed separate congregations. At St. Michaels, the Lutherans deeded over their interest in the church in 1876.¹⁵ But the greater threat to the stability of the Reformed church was from Methodism. Methodists believed in full salvation for all, and through their practice of itinerant preaching, they introduced their doctrine into remote communities in the Valley. More unsettling still was the German counterpart to English Methodism, the church of the United Brethren, which rapidly gained popularity in the Valley after 1795.¹⁶

During Adam Kersh's early life the stability of his church was assured primarily by its pastor, John Brown, who served from 1798 to 1850.¹⁷ Although he had the care of seven union churches in Augusta and Rockingham, he was a permanent pastor, not an itinerant. Nevertheless, the continuity of his service may have been outweighed by the

upheaval he precipitated by his attachment to the German language. He was born in Germany, and believed that the preservation of the German language was vital in order to keep the Reformed church independent of the Presbyterians (the Reformed church was often called "Dutch Presbyterian").¹⁸ But his entrenchment on the language issue alienated third- and fourth-generation descendants, and he was forced to permit young preachers to use English. In 1841 the bilingual Reverend Daniel Feete was called to preach as an assistant pastor at St. Michaels.¹⁹

Other evidence supports the notion that the St. Michaels community was resistant to change. The original log meetinghouse was used for more than seven decades before 1876. Only once was it renovated, about 1830, when the choice was made to improve it with weatherboarding rather than to rebuild it. The brick church that replaced it in 1876 was commended as "plain yet neat" and "entirely free of debt."²⁰ The pastor of St. Michaels lauded the building committee for their "stern good taste" in rejecting the "meretricious ginger-bread style" and the decorative use of frescoes (suitable only for "opera house or theater") found in other churches in the Valley.

The involvement of the Kersh and Wise families in

the union churches of Rockingham County was regularly recorded in church documents. Matthias Kersh appears at Peaked Mountain Church first in 1756; he is among the elders listed in 1769, and his family continued to worship there until at least 1808. His son Jacob moved to Wise Hollow after 1819 and by 1829 was named as a trustee in the deed of St. Michaels Church. The acre of land donated to the church was owned by Adam Wise, Sr., Jacob's father-in-law. (Another of the trustees was Wise's nephew David, who became a deacon of the church in 1882.) Adam Wise was living in the county by 1784 and attended Friedens Church. In 1797 he bought land in Wise Hollow and must have helped to found St. Michaels, which was known locally as "Wises Meeting House" until the time it was renovated.

The commitment of Wise's grandson Adam Wise Kersh may have been considerably less than that of his predecessors. He was a member of St. Michaels and was confirmed there, but he is listed as a communicant only until age twenty-three. Although his brother's wife and his nieces attended, none of the men in the family were active in the church after the war.²¹ Perhaps Kersh's attitude toward religion was of the lukewarm sort described by G. Stanley Hall, writing of New England farmers in the late nineteenth century:

Most of them attended church more or less but few joined, or if they did they fell off later in life. In their maturer years my uncles almost never frequented public worship.²²

Hall designated his uncles as members of the "horse-shed class" who spent the interval between two services "in the horse-shed talking of secular matters instead of attending Sunday School." Two entries in the church records suggest Kersh's involvement with St. Michaels was similarly lackadaisical. When the church was rebuilt in 1876, Kersh contributed \$50 to the project, but he is absent from the list of builders and tradesmen who contributed to the new church.²³ Then in 1896 at age sixty-eight he had a "renewal" of membership, evidently under the influence of a new minister, Abraham Wolfinger, who arrived the year before.²⁴ Kersh's renewal demonstrates his continued association with the Reformed church, though at a lower pitch than his ancestors.

Descendants of Adam Wise occupied the farm in Wise Hollow from the time it was bought in 1797 until 1985. The longevity of that residence, together with a network of intermarriages between the Wise, Kersh, and Craun families who farmed the hollow, tended to produce narrowly adapted individuals. Jacob Kersh and both of his sons lived

throughout their lives in the house built by Jacob when he and his wife Susan first went to housekeeping about 1820. Jacob died early, when his son Adam was only eight and his eldest son George was fourteen. That circumstance caused George to take over the farm in his young married life; but it may also explain why Adam remained a farmer until age twenty-two and learned his trade as an adult.

When Adam was twenty years old, his brother married and bought a nearby farm.²⁵ Two years later, Adam was still living at home with his mother and older sister.²⁶ But in 1853 his mother, Susan, sold her household goods and farm equipment at auction. The largest single buyer of goods at the auction was, not surprisingly, George, who moved back to the Kersh farm with his wife and three young children that same year. By 1860 the household consisted of six children and six adults, including a domestic and a day laborer. The only unexpected turn was Adam's occupation; he was no longer a farmer, but a cabinetmaker.²⁷

At some point in his twenties, Adam had learned the skill of cabinetmaking. He bought a house and lot in Centerville in 1860.²⁸ About a month before Virginia seceded from the Union, he traded his property for a

smaller lot with a house, which he kept through the war years and after. But he was living on the farm when he enlisted and returned there at the war's end.

The farm was typical of those in the North River district for its size, 247 acres, and its value, \$7,410 in 1880.²⁹ The combination of livestock and grain crops--mostly wheat and corn--produced there was also unexceptional. The self-sufficiency of the farm is worth noting, not because it was unusual, but because it demonstrates the insular surroundings in which Adam Kersh worked. Butter and eggs were produced on the farm; sheep, cattle and hogs were raised there; it contained peach and apple orchards and a hundred-acre woodlot; and lime kilns and a loom house were on the site.

Adam may have done farm work during harvest. His nephew Stephen, recalling conditions on the farm after the war, noted:

It usually took at least one week to take off the wheat crop, and that meant from six to nine men and boys, including [my father] and regular hands. When it came to thrashing, it took as a rule twelve men and boys and about two days time.³⁰

In 1880, for example, several hands worked the farm;

according to the federal agricultural census for that year, George paid for more than one hundred weeks of farm labor. Adam contributed by making and repairing agricultural tools, including grain cradles and plows. But his cabinet business was full time, not seasonal. The shop (fig. 1.2), where he produced "chairs and other work," was operating twelve months of the year in 1870.³¹ When he returned from the Civil War Adam had the opportunity to live and work in the nearby crossroads of Centerville; his responsibilities to his mother had ended with her death during the first year of the war. His choice to remain on the homeplace demonstrates a preference for the familiar and the established. Like his initials on the schoolhouse wall, the location of his shop on the Kersh homeplace represents an attachment to tradition and a conservative frame of mind.

Kersh's limited business expectations are predictable in view of his conservative background. The evidence of traditional woodworking in his shop is not surprising either. He used a stone mortar and pestle for mixing paint when crank-driven paint grinders were available. His shop-made tools included a whittled chalk reel marked with his initials that was found beneath the shop stairs. These tools fit conventional notions of rural

craft practice. But the same shop contained a cast-metal, commercial chalk reel. Bags of dry pigment and kegs for white lead with Baltimore labels were in the shop, along with a packing crate from a supplier of scroll-saw goods in Chicago. On a shelf above one of the workbenches was an 1887 trade magazine from Cincinnati, The Lumber Worker.³² The magazine was a monthly that promoted lumbering industries in the South. Reports on new machinery and lumber markets in major cities of the South and East were interspersed with advertisements for planers, saws, and lumber kilns. Evidently Kersh never subscribed--only one issue remained in his shop, with the subscription form still in it. But the magazine, along with the patented tools and imports, represents the influence of industrial methods of production in a traditional shop. Why this infusion of industrial goods?

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, broad social disruptions brought changes to local patterns of exchange in backcountry Virginia. In Folk Housing in Middle Virginia, Henry Glassie outlined the process by which local cultural patterns change.³³ According to Glassie, large-scale disturbances in a society force accommodation in the set of rules that govern the making of material things. In Kersh's lifetime, three events were particularly

influential in exposing him to businesses outside the Shenandoah Valley and compromising his relation to his work and his customers: the Civil War, the expansion of railroads, and the proliferation of small industries in the Valley following the war.

Kersh was active in cabinetmaking before the Civil War, and he continued the trade after his parole, until his death in 1905. The social upheaval of the war years exposed him and his neighbors to foreigners from the north and east and to unfamiliar patterns of behavior. Kersh was a private in the Confederate Army for three years. He enlisted at Staunton in July 1861 in the first wave of volunteers to form Virginia regiments. Although he served with a company of local men, several of them Centerville "lads," he traveled farther from Augusta County in the infantry than he had prior to the war. His regiment marched west into the Allegheny Mountains, north to Maryland, and east to Bethesda Church near Richmond.³⁴ In letters written to his brother George during the war, Kersh expressed enthusiasm in the early months of the campaign. By October 1862 he noted the demoralizing conditions in camp:

We have no tents now. . . . Some of the boys are barefooted in our regiment now and their cloths

[sic] are very dirty and ragged Marching so much.
Which makes the confederates very bad.³⁵

Kersh pressed his brother to find a substitute for him. The urgency mounted until January, when his offer of \$2,000 failed to attract a suitable recruit. He was wounded in May 1864 at the battle of Bethesda Church, in which his regiment rushed a triple line of Union troops across an open field. Only twenty-one men from his regiment were unhurt; 116 were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner.³⁶ Kersh deserted the army by July and was presumably a fugitive until the close of the war ten months later. In a crawlspace under the parlor floor of the family farm (fig. 1.3), still visible at the time of this study, Kersh hid from the military, according to family members. His local loyalties were uprooted and his alienation from a patriotic cause complete.

The war's disruption of habits and values occurred on a regional as well as a personal level. Staunton, the county seat 10 miles south of the Kersh farm, became a main collecting point for Confederate Army supplies in northwestern Virginia. A diary kept by Joseph Waddell of Staunton chronicles the miseries inflicted by war.³⁷ Troops from Tennessee, Georgia, and the length of the

Valley were shunted through Staunton depot, and casualties transformed much of the town into a hospital site. In July 1861, just two months after the vote for succession was ratified, 300 wounded soldiers were removed to Staunton from battlegrounds 30 miles to the west. Local troops recently enlisted occupied the town in August 1861, swelling the population by about 1,200.

Dislocation caused by the press of troops was an early consequence of the war. Greater disruption followed in the form of inflation, exposure to foreigners, and destruction of property. The cost of basic staples such as flour and salt soared, and by February 1862 neither one could be bought. Waddell reflected on the hardship and tension created by the influx of soldiers: "We have more to fear from the scarcity of subsistence and clothing than from the Federal armies," he wrote. One year into the war Union troops occupied Harrisonburg and General Jackson's army of 10,000 was camped at Staunton. In May 1863 the road between Harrisonburg and Staunton was crowded with people fleeing the enemy. Federal prisoners were sent by railroad to Richmond, passing through Staunton at the rate of 4,000 in one week. A year later the Valley was overrun by the Federal army south to Lexington. Although Union forces were driven off, they retook Staunton in September

1864, determined to destroy the provisioning value of the territory and demoralize the residents. Burning crops, barns, and mills, taking livestock, and disabling the Virginia Central Railroad, Sheridan's army withdrew down the Valley. Kersh, absent from the army since August, was presumably in Wise Hollow at the time of the burning.

For Kersh the war brought personal alienation from a national cause. For his community the war eradicated seasonal work cycles and severed customary ways of doing business. Among its far-reaching effects were the breakdown of traditional lines of supply and patronage and the expansion of railroads. Railroad lines did not cross the Blue Ridge Mountains into the Valley until 1859, when the Manassas Gap Railroad from Alexandria was built west to Strasburg and up the Valley as far as Mt. Jackson, 25 miles north of Harrisonburg. Wagon service connected Harrisonburg to the railroad. By 1861 the Virginia Central Railroad ran trains between Staunton and Richmond, with connections on other rail lines north to Alexandria and south to Lynchburg in Virginia or southwest as far as New Orleans.³⁸

In rebuilding railroads after the war, train service up the Valley was extended to Harrisonburg, and when the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (B&O) leased the line

in 1873, Harrisonburg was connected to Baltimore and points north, including Philadelphia and New York City. By 1874 the Valley Railroad of Virginia linked Harrisonburg and Staunton. The travel time between Staunton and Baltimore on the B&O in 1887 was eight and a half hours.³⁹

In the early 1880s the Shenandoah Valley Railroad was completed from Waynesboro, in Augusta County, to Roanoke. The line ran as far north as Hagerstown, Maryland, and attracted northern tourists to the Valley's scenic caverns, natural bridge, and the springs resorts west of Staunton. The route to White Sulphur Springs from Staunton was on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, which ran from Norfolk to Cincinnati. Passengers could reach Staunton from Norfolk in eight hours.⁴⁰

Northern capital invested in the timber, coal, and iron resources of the Alleghenies fuelled attempts in the 1870s to build a railroad that would connect the mountain gaps of western Augusta and Rockingham counties with eastern ports. None was successful until 1896, when the Chesapeake and Western Railroad (C&W) was completed from Bridgewater through Harrisonburg to Elkton, on the South Fork of the Shenandoah River. By 1901 a new company, the Chesapeake Western Railway (affectionately known as the

"Crooked and Weedy"), had leased the C&W property, planning to extend the line from the coal fields of Elkins, West Virginia, to Fredericksburg in Tidewater Virginia. The western branch never advanced beyond North River Gap in Augusta County, where the lumbering boom town of Stokesville was built in 1901.⁴¹ The Chesapeake Western connected a string of villages to the county seat of Harrisonburg. The depot nearest to the Kersh farm was at Mossy Creek, 2 miles west of Centerville. Four passenger trains stopped daily, and the trip to Harrisonburg took about half an hour. Tourists also used the line to Mossy Creek, where in 1903 a pleasure resort with a small lake, pavilion, and dance hall was opened.

Reconstruction accelerated the level of business activity in the Valley. Small industries, particularly mills and tanneries, were established in the vicinity of the Kersh farm before the war. Mossy Creek had supplied power for the nearby Miller's Iron Works since before the Revolution. In 1850 at Mt. Solon, 3 miles west of Centerville, a paper mill, gristmill, and tanyard were operating, and to the north in Bridgewater two sawmills, three gristmills, and two cabinet shops were in business. At North River Gap in the Shenandoah Mountains, a New York iron and coal company bought 15,000 acres for mineral

rights in the early 1850s, inflating local land prices along a proposed rail route to Staunton.⁴²

But development of extractive industries did not take hold until after the war. In 1866 anthracite coal deposits were discovered at Briery Branch Gap in Rockingham County. The Shenandoah Lumber and Mining Company bought 13,000 acres of land at the gap to supply logs for a steam-powered mill producing shingles, flooring, sash, and door frames. Slate, iron and other minerals found near Bridgewater in the late 1880s spurred the organization of several local mining companies. Land speculation was fuelled by lumbering interests as well. The rail line to North River Gap served a three-story sawmill and lumber plant at Stokesville capable of producing 80,000 board feet of lumber a day.⁴³

In the 1890s, industrial development led to a surge in residential building. Ads in the Staunton paper for November 1890 announced the sale of building sites adjacent to the town limits by the Staunton Improvement Company. Public sales of lots at Buena Vista and Basic City were advertised in the same paper.⁴⁴ A planned community on the C&O line east of Staunton, Basic City was laid out by surveyors and sold in lots to newcomers. The population of

Augusta County had doubled in the half century from 1830 to 1880, despite the setbacks of the war.⁴⁵

Expansion of railroads, land speculation, and population growth were accompanied by a great increase in the number of small industries in Augusta and Rockingham counties. Between 1865 and 1880, thirteen small craft shops were established in Bridgewater, including a carriage shop, sash and blind factory, cigar factory, pottery, and woolen mill. A roller mill, stave mill, cannery, and steam-powered furniture and sash factories began operation in the last two decades of the century.⁴⁶ Consolidation of small industries was occurring in the same period. Writing in 1912, local historian John Wayland noted that "the last two or three decades have seen most of the small factories give up their business to a few large ones."⁴⁷ Economies of scale in the large factories caused small hand shops like Kersh's to expire.

From the vantage of a century later, the post-war period appears as an industrial watershed. But in the case of Adam Kersh, diversification of local businesses and the competition that it encouraged did not affect his cabinetmaking trade in predictable ways. The sharp business practice, weakening of local allegiances, and

social mobility that are thought to attend diversification did not characterize his business relations. His conservative heritage--the web of community, church, and family--anchored his choices to remain on the farm and continue in a small business.

Investigating the context in which Kersh worked, the sources of continuity in his work life are evident; clear also are the sources of abrupt change. When used as an explanatory as well as a descriptive device, context can show why choices were made. For Kersh, the routine of craft itself represented a buffer to the devastation he knew during the war. For his customers, upgrading their households in the expansive years of the 1880s and 1890s, dealings with Kersh reinforced their commitment to traditional patterns of exchange. In the contest between the tried and the untried, Kersh's shop and trade were a means to maintain the familiar.

Chapter 1

ENDNOTES

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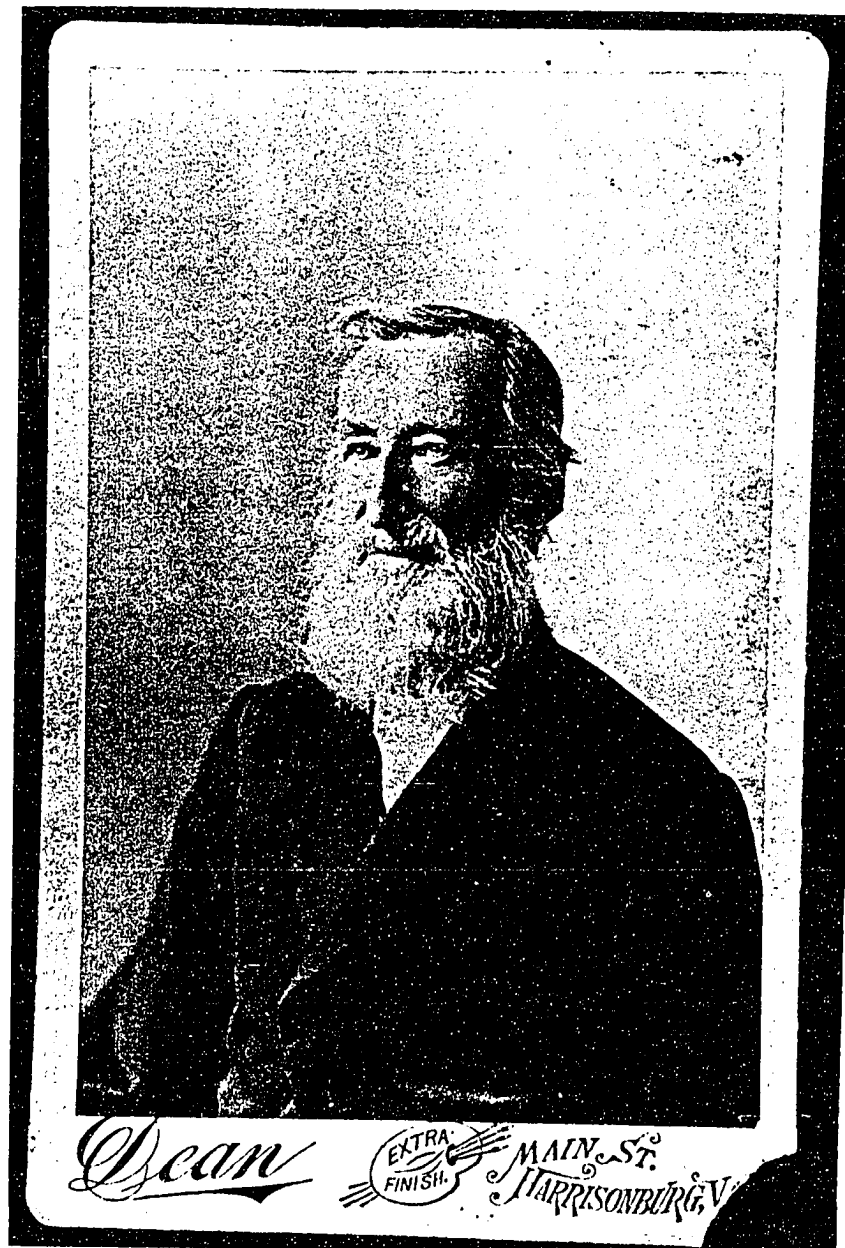


Figure 1.1 Adam Wise Kersh (1828-1905). Photo, Dean Studios, Harrisonburg. Courtesy E. Ray Wine, Mt. Solon.



Figure 1.2 Kersh cabinet shop, Augusta County, Virginia, in 1984. Kersh collection, Museum of American Frontier Culture (MAFC), Staunton.

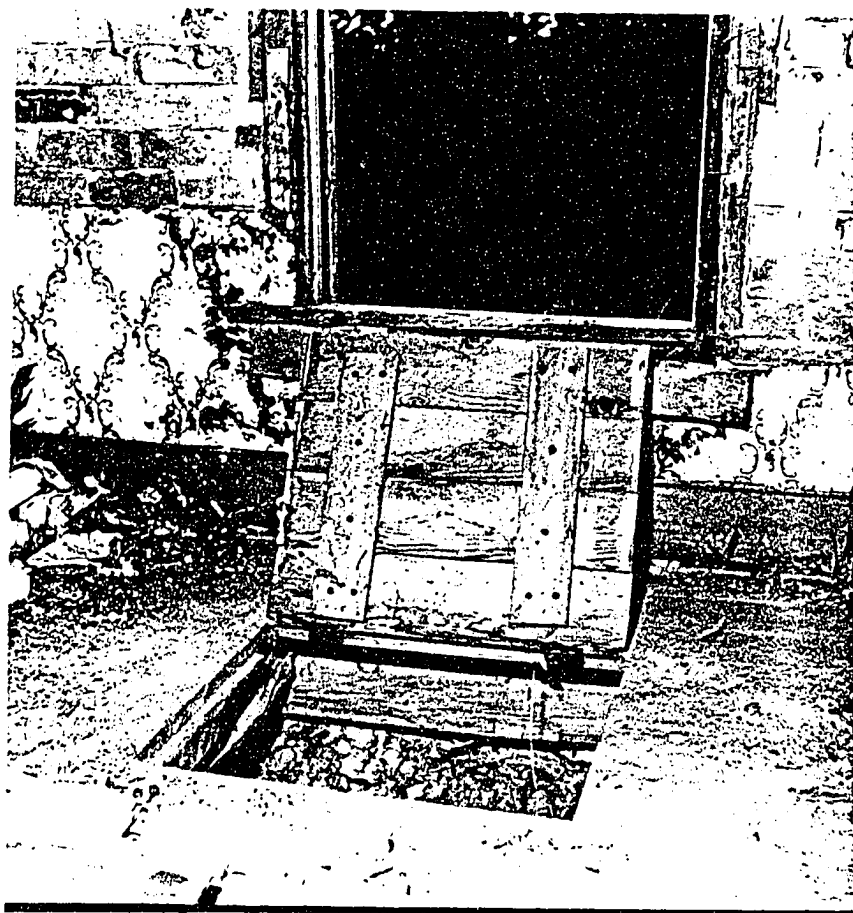


Figure 1.3 Trapdoor in parlor floor of Kersh farmhouse where Adam evaded military duty during the last ten months of the Civil War.

Chapter 2 THE SHOP

In the winter of 1862 Private Adam W. Kersh was camped with Confederate forces in the Allegheny Mountains, about 60 miles west of his home in Augusta County. His brother, George, wrote a letter to Adam with news of the family--whooping cough among George's six children, heavy snow the previous day, a young farm hand recently hired. A visit by two local men who were home on furlough prompted this mention of the shop where Adam had made furniture before he enlisted:

Bob [Robert Misner, later a blacksmith in the 10th Virginia Cavalry] staid allnight with us. today he is making a pair of wooden stirrups in your shop I have not worked in the shop three hours since the middle of July consequently I keep it locked after I came from the mountains I found it necessary to take that precaution your tools are all safe and in the order you left them except for a few not very valuable ones which were hooked whilst we were in service.¹

Replying to this letter four days later, Adam supplied the only other written reference to the shop when he asked George to hunt up a bottle of hair restorative "that I left on the shop loft in that old walnut chest."²

Though brief and commonplace, these comments refer to a shop on George Kersh's farm that stood until a winter 124 years later.

The Kersh farm is located in northwest Augusta County, 3 miles south of Bridgewater, Virginia. Off a gravel road that parallels a tributary of the North River, a mud lane rises past the barn and house. About 40 yards beyond the house, where the lane makes a sharp turn to the right, is the site of the cabinet shop (see plan, fig. 2.1). Before 1986 when the building was dismantled, it nudged up against the lane, a scrawny, two-story building with pine clapboards and tin roof (fig. 2.2). The long walls of the shop paralleled the road; the main door was in the east gable end, barely 5 feet from the roadway, through a picket gate and up two stone steps.

The shop was disused after Kersh's death in 1905. Over the next eighty years, layers of farm implements and junk were added--window sash, a cane wheelchair, cans of weed killer (fig. 2.3). In 1984 the contents of the shop were inventoried and packed by an archeological field team from James Madison University before their final removal to the Museum of American Frontier Culture in nearby Staunton. At that time, the workbenches were cluttered with ax

handles, hide stretchers, horseshoe nail boxes, flax hatchels, pipe cutters, and broken packing crates.³ Despite the fact that a blue wool vest identified as Kersh's still hung on the wall, the shop had been used as a storage shed and may have been used for occasional woodworking by a number of family members after Kersh died.⁴ The workshop was clearly not "undisturbed" from the time when Kersh was an active cabinetmaker.

The shop structure no longer exists, but a substantial record of the building was made as part of a site excavation done shortly before the shop was taken down.⁵ Photographs, inventories, plans, construction notes, and the excavation report provide extensive details about the building.⁶ Still, without the physical building, answers to a number of questions about Kersh's craft practice are ruled out. For example, the prosperity of a business can sometimes be inferred from additions to a building. In this instance, turns in the success of Kersh's business cannot be judged from a sequence of additions and changes to the shop. Work habits cannot be surmised from wear patterns on floors and sills. A beginning date for Kersh's career in the shop cannot be established with any precision.

But inferences about working dates or business success are historically relevant only as a means of understanding the attitudes and assumptions of Kersh and his contemporaries. It is possible to reconstruct habits of mind through the study of a building that survives only in graphic form, even though conclusions are necessarily less reliable when the structure no longer exists.

Plans and photographs document, among other things, the form of Kersh's shop--its shape, internal divisions, and the voids created by doors and windows. The use of architectural form to study past lives has been prompted by historian Henry Glassie. Writing about the connection between form and habits of mind, Glassie argues that form is a "pattern of production" that exists at an unconscious level in the mind of the maker and is "drawn out" by some building problem.⁷ In the case of folk building, form is dictated not by function or utility but by psychological reassurance--certain forms are comfortable and familiar, and persist through time for that reason. Study of these persistent forms can uncover attitudes and expectations of the builder or user.

In the case of workshops, it seems that form is influenced by familiar examples and a deeply held

conception of how spaces should be arranged. Records for only a handful of American craft shops exist from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Measured drawings have been done of the Dominy shop (c. 1745) from East Hampton, Long Island, and of two shops from Frederick County, Maryland: the Christopher Laymon cabinet shop (before 1765), located in what is now Georgetown, D.C., and the Hall's Choice farm shop (early 1800s) near New Market. Plans for the Anthony Hay shop (c. 1756) at Colonial Williamsburg have been surmised from the evidence of a foundation and chimney excavated in the 1960s.⁹

All of these woodworking shops are rectangular in plan and range in size from 300 square feet (the Hall's Choice shop) to 540 square feet (the Laymon shop) on the first floor. The dimensions of the Kersh shop (see plan, fig. 2.4) are almost identical to those of the Laymon shop. Only the smallest shop had a partition dividing the first floor into two rooms. Perhaps this partition, removed in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, reflects the use of the space for repair or other occasional projects rather than cabinetmaking. The other shops, including Kersh's, have a single first-floor room. All of the shops have a ladder or stairs leading to a second floor or loft. The upper floor of the Hall's Choice shop was a living

space with separate entrance; other shops may have used the same space for lumber and tool storage, as in the Dominy shop. Only in the Kersh shop was the upper floor divided and partially finished (fig. 2.5).

Windows in these shops range in number from four to six. Two windows are inserted on south walls, except in the case of the Dominy shop where the south wall abuts a kitchen. The large number of windows suits the use of the shops for fabrication; windows are usually located directly above a workbench or lathe, or a bench projecting into the center of a room is oriented with its vise adjacent to a window or door. The same configuration is represented in paintings of early nineteenth-century English shops such as John Hill's "The Carpenter's Shop at Forty Hill, Enfield, 1813," and G. Forster's 1816 painting "The Cabinet Maker's Shop," which show large windows on the two or three walls that are depicted for each shop.⁹ In the Kersh shop, the first-floor room was lit from all sides by horizontal, sliding-sash windows (fig. 2.6) that were centered on the end walls and symmetrically spaced on the long walls of the north and south sides. Similar windows were paired on the long walls of the second floor and aligned directly over those on the first floor.

Doors were unexpectedly narrow in these shops. Most were 2 ft. to 3 ft. wide, except in the Hall's Choice shop, where the original door was 4 1/2 ft. wide. No shop had more than two doors on the first floor and none had an exterior door on the second floor except for the Kersh shop. The second story entrance on the south wall of Kersh's shop gave access to the finished room.

There are few consistencies among the five woodworking shops, and they may not be a representative sampling of the building type over a century. Two features of Kersh's shop are pronounced by the comparison, however. The large number of windows in his shop are commonplace enough; that convention seems to be part of the "plan for production" assumed by workshop builders. But the standard size of the windows and their symmetry is not found in the eighteenth-century shops or in the Hall's Choice shop until it was remodelled after 1850. Also, although most shops provided for a separate storage or work space upstairs, away from the dust and shavings of the first floor, Kersh was the only one to divide his second floor, apparently for two distinct functions, and add an exterior door. In these respects, the form of Kersh's shop was both more standardized and specialized than earlier shops.

No evidence suggests that Adam Kersh built his own shop, so a study of the construction features of the shop is likely to yield little information about him. The builder determines what materials and framing techniques are used. Also, there is no reason why the attitudes of a builder and user should be synchronized concerning matters of construction. Nevertheless, the tendency to standardize that is represented in the layout of the shop is repeated in its construction, which relies on standard-dimension lumber. The parallel is worth examining.

Traditional timber-frame techniques were still used in the Shenandoah Valley until the time of the Civil War; after 1865 they were rarely used except in mills or other large buildings.¹⁰ The builder of the Kersh shop followed traditional methods in a number of respects. The principal timbers--5 in. x 6 in. pine corner posts and center posts--were continuous from sill to top plate and mortised at both ends. Down braces on the corner posts at the first floor level were mortised to both post and sill. The sills were 7 in. x 7 in. oak timbers joined with mortise and tenon at the corners (rather than half-lapped, which became common in the first half of the nineteenth century). The studs were not continuous to the top plate as they are in modern framing, but broken at the level of the side and end girts.

Studs were also mortised into the sill, girts and top plate.

Heavy principal timbers and labor-intensive joinery are characteristic of traditional timber framing. In the Kersh shop materials and technology associated with industrialized production are represented as well: circular-sawn lumber, machine-made nails, and standard-dimension lumber. Framing, sheathing, flooring, lathing--all were cut with a circular saw. The presence of circular saw marks on timber used in Shenandoah Valley buildings suggests a construction date after the Civil War. In an essay on the history of timber framing, Dell Upton has commented that conversion to machine-made lumber was slower in rural areas where demand was insufficient to make the machined product cheaper than locally-milled lumber cut with a water-powered up-and-down saw. "In western Virginia," he notes, "the boom created by the increased exploitation of the uplands' timber and mineral resources in the 1880s and 1890s brought about the change"¹¹ The 1880 manufacturing census for the North River district of Augusta County, where Kersh operated his shop, lists two sawmills, both with circular saws.¹²

Consistent use of regular, standard-dimension

lumber is also associated with post-war building. In the Kersh shop, the studs were 2 in. x 5 in. and the joists were deep and narrow (2 in. x 7 in.) rather than the box shape used in earlier buildings. Both the sills and top plates on the long walls, which span 30 feet, were made of two timbers half-lapped and pegged beneath the center post. The side girts were interrupted half-way along the wall by the center post. This alignment of joints resulted in a "hinge" in the center of the building that became a serious structural flaw (fig. 2.7). Standard lengths were used for much of the interior sheathing. Planks on the long walls formed a seam where they met at the center post, with no attempt to stagger the joints. All of the floorboards were 14 ft. 7 in. long. and were seamed exactly in the center of the shop. But the decision to use shorter, same-length timbers seems to have been an economic choice and not the result of ignorance. Continuous sills and plates would have been more expensive.

Nails were used in the place of mortise-and-tenon joints on the second-floor down braces, which were simply mitred and butted against the posts--a cheap and perhaps redundant technique. The availability of inexpensive, machine-cut nails by the mid-nineteenth century promoted the balloon frame, a framing method that dispensed with the

mortise-and-tenon joint. But as Upton has noted, balloon framing was not an alien system that suddenly displaced folk carpentry. Particularly in the South, where rates of growth in rural areas were slow, aspects of balloon framing were integrated with traditional framing methods. Kersh's shop, with its thin studs on 2-ft. centers that were mortised into the rest of the frame, was just such an adaptation.

Little about the shop construction could be described as traditionally Germanic.¹³ Walls on the first level were insulated with chunks of brick, a technique known as nogging. German half-timber buildings in the East sometimes employed bricks for wall fill, but nogging is not restricted to German Fachwerk buildings. It was common to many homes in the Shenandoah Valley. The tapered battens used on the doors of the shop appear to be a cheaper nailed version of an earlier design in which the horizontal battens were slid into a straight-sided or dovetailed channel. This type of door joinery was not limited to Germany, however; it was also used by French descendants on the Mississippi and is Continental in origin. The feature of Kersh's shop most closely identified with a German-American tradition is the initials and date--"AWK 1887"--painted on the top batten of the shop's main door (fig.

2.8). Dates carved on doors or joists are a strong tradition among Germans in the Palatine region. Many German immigrants to southeastern Pennsylvania used stone plaques to mark ownership with initials, date and occasionally an epigram. The practice of inscribing buildings extended into German communities in Maryland and Virginia into the nineteenth century, although it, too, was not exclusively a German custom.

Despite the late date painted on the door, the shop may predate the Civil War. Mortise-and-tenon frames are unusual in buildings put up after the war, and standard-dimension lumber was not an anomaly before the war; it was simply more standard than lumber used in the 1780s, and less regular than lumber employed in the 1890s. The Kersh shop represents a point on that continuum of standardization often found in mid-century buildings. Moreover, dates and notations of all kinds are scrawled on the walls of workshops, including Kersh's. "Paid P August 1879" was written in pencil on the south wall of the shop, for example. Admittedly, Kersh's initials and the year were carefully painted in a prominent place, giving them an official quality the other inscriptions lack. But many dates on buildings were not put there to commemorate the date of construction. When Kersh asked his brother to

search "on the shop loft," he was likely referring to the shop that still stood in 1986.

Evidence about use of space in Kersh's shop is also documented in photographs and written records. The building was apparently erected at once full size, without later additions, and was originally designed as a shop. The limestone foundation was uniformly built to match the finished dimensions of the shop, and a single oak girder propped by five locust posts ran the length of the shop to support the first-floor joists. Evidence of another foundation was found next to the south wall, where a shed-roofed garage was added in the early twentieth century. The stone, brick and gravel foundation formed a corner about 5 feet beyond the shop wall in the area of the south-facing door. Excavation reports suggested that the foundation may have been intended for a porch or platform rather than an earlier building on the same site.

The placement of horizontal sliding-sash windows on all four sides of the building's main floor and both of the long walls upstairs strongly suggests that the building was designed as a work space. The tin-lined stovepipe hole in the center of the first-floor ceiling provided for the heat source necessary to glue up Kersh's tables, dressers and

other cabinet work.

Built into the shop were numerous fixtures common to many cabinet shops. Shelves nailed to the ceiling joists over windows in the north and south walls correspond to a shelf used to store molding planes in the Dominy shop. Bracket shelves were also mounted on the long walls of the Kersh shop. The same shelf design appears in the reconstructed Hay shop. Tool racks in the form of drilled or slotted strips were used in the Kersh shop just as they were in the Dominy shop or, for that matter, in the seventeenth-century joiner's shop depicted in the bas-relief carving called the Stent panel.¹⁴

The traditional character of the shop fixtures has to be qualified by the specialized way that space is allocated. The use of the shop's second floor remains unclear. Wood storage was a common use for shop lofts, but the upstairs exterior door (fig. 2.9) where wood presumably entered faced the short axis of the building and was blocked on one side by a partition. According to Glen Wise, who was born and resides on the farm next to the Kersh property, his father remembered Adam varnishing furniture upstairs in the shop. The paint colors on the interior door and partition of the second floor, which

appeared to be the result of brush cleaning or color testing, support the idea that the space was used for furniture finishing. Two irregular patches of red were also painted on the floor of the paneled room. Yet the paneling and chimney hole in one of the upstairs rooms strongly suggest that the finished room was used for living quarters. The exterior door would have given independent access to this room. (The addition of the shed roof could easily have effaced evidence of the few nails required to attach a stairway to the outside wall.) Locks on both doors to this room are on the inside, meaning that the room was closed off from the rest of the shop for privacy and not to control an employee's access to tools and equipment.

Whether the living space was used by Kersh or an employee is not known. The 1880 population census suggests that Kersh lived in his shop, since he is listed separately from the households of his brother and nephew, who each had a dwelling house on the farm.¹⁵ The second floor may have been converted to living quarters from an earlier use, as the paint on the floor implies. The segregation of space evident in the arrangement of the second-floor rooms is a form of specialization that is paralleled by the use of dimensional lumber in the shop's construction. Kersh's shop documents a decline in complexity of construction and

complexity of use.

If a building can indicate patterns of thought, the Kersh shop represents a divided mind. Some aspects of the shop were unchanged from eighteenth-century woodworking shops--the number of windows and the storage fixtures, for example. Other features, such as the thin, close-set studs and the division between public and private space, were a departure. In his study of rural housing in Middle Virginia, Henry Glassie drew attention to the dual tendencies of Virginia folk builders. "The old houses manifest a mind both conservative and practical," he claimed.¹⁶ The evidence of the Kersh shop suggests that there, too, tradition vied with pragmatism.

Chapter 2

ENDNOTES

1. Letter from George P. Kersh to Adam Kersh, January 25, 1862, Alexander Mack Library, Bridgewater College, Bridgewater, Va.
2. Letter from Adam Kersh to George P. Kersh, January 29, 1862, Alexander Mack Library.
3. Slides and negatives of the Kersh cabinet shop taken in 1984 and 1985 are on file at the Museum of American Frontier Culture (MAFC), Staunton. .
4. Dwight Shull, a great-grandson of George P. Kersh, stated that his father, Charles Eugene Shull, made stools and did caning in the Kersh shop when Adam was still working and perhaps after he died. Charles was born in 1888. Conversation with Dwight Shull, Bridgewater, Va., August 28, 1991.
5. The excavation was a project of the James Madison University Archeological Research Center in July 1985.
6. Records are on file at MAFC.
7. Henry Glassie, "Eighteenth-Century Cultural Process in Delaware Valley Folk Building," in Common Places, Readings in American Vernacular Architecture, ed. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 397.
8. Information about the Dominy and Laymon shops was gathered from Charles Hummel, With Hammer in Hand (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1968), 6-11, and Charles Hummel, "The Business of Woodworking: 1700 to 1840," in Tools and Technologies America's Wooden Age, ed. Paul B. Kebarian and William C. Lipke (Burlington: University of Vermont, 1979), 52-54. Plans for the Hall's Choice shop are on file at Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va. Information about the Hay shop is from Ivor Noel Hume, Williamsburg Cabinetmakers: The Archaeological Evidence (Williamsburg, Va.: The Colonial

Williamsburg Foundation, 1971).

9. The painting of the Hill shop (Tate Gallery, London) is reproduced in Scott Landis, The Workshop Book (Newtown, Conn.: Taunton Press, 1991), 4. The Forster painting (collection of Bernard H. Taff) is reproduced in Scott Landis, The Workbench Book (Newtown, Conn.: Taunton Press, 1987), 4.

10. The discussion of timber framing in this chapter owes much to the assistance of Edward Chappell, Director of the Architectural Research Department, Colonial Williamsburg.

11. Dell Upton, "Traditional Timber Framing," in Material Culture of the Wooden Age, ed. Brooke Hindle (Tarrytown, N.Y.: Sleepy Hollow Press, 1981), 90.

12. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Federal Manufacturing Census 1880, North River District, Augusta County, Virginia State Library and Archives (VSLA), Richmond, Va.

13. Information about the Germanic characteristics of the Kersh shop was also provided by Edward Chappell.

14. The Stent panel is reproduced in Benno M. Forman, American Seating Furniture 1630-1730 (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. for the Winterthur Museum, 1988), 45.

15. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Federal Population Census 1880, North River District, Augusta County, National Archives, Philadelphia, roll 1355: 2.

16. Henry Glassie, Folk Housing in Middle Virginia (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 178.

1

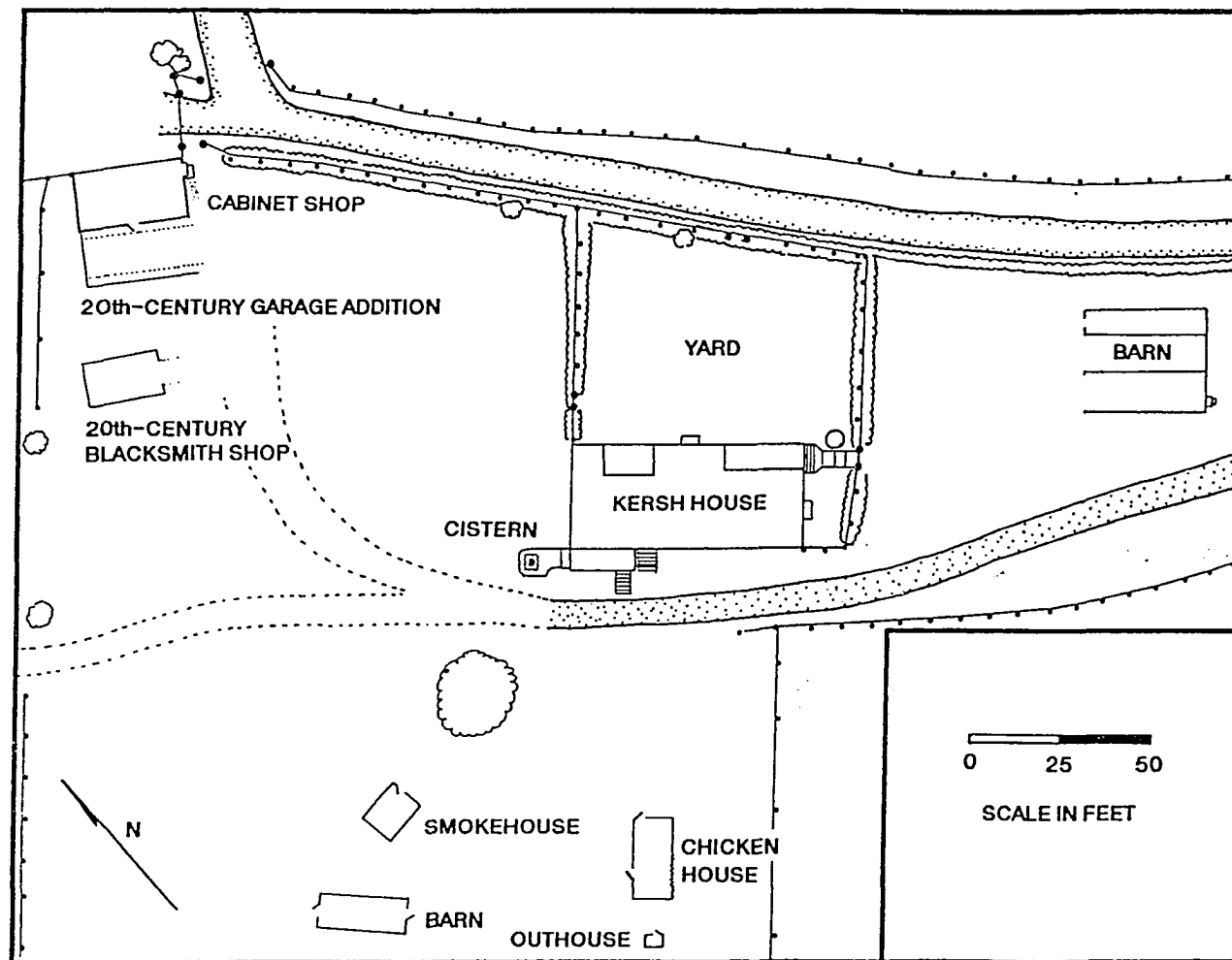


Figure 2.1 Plan of the Kersh farm. *Upper left*, cabinet shop at bend in road leading to St. Michaels Church. Drawing, James Madison University Archeological Research Center (JMUARC). Kersh collection, MAFC.



Figure 2.2 Kersh cabinet shop from the road showing main (northeast) door through gate. Kersh collection, MAFC.



Figure 2.3 Interior of Kersh shop first floor in 1984. View from northeast entrance showing clutter of farm storage. Kersh collection, MAFC.

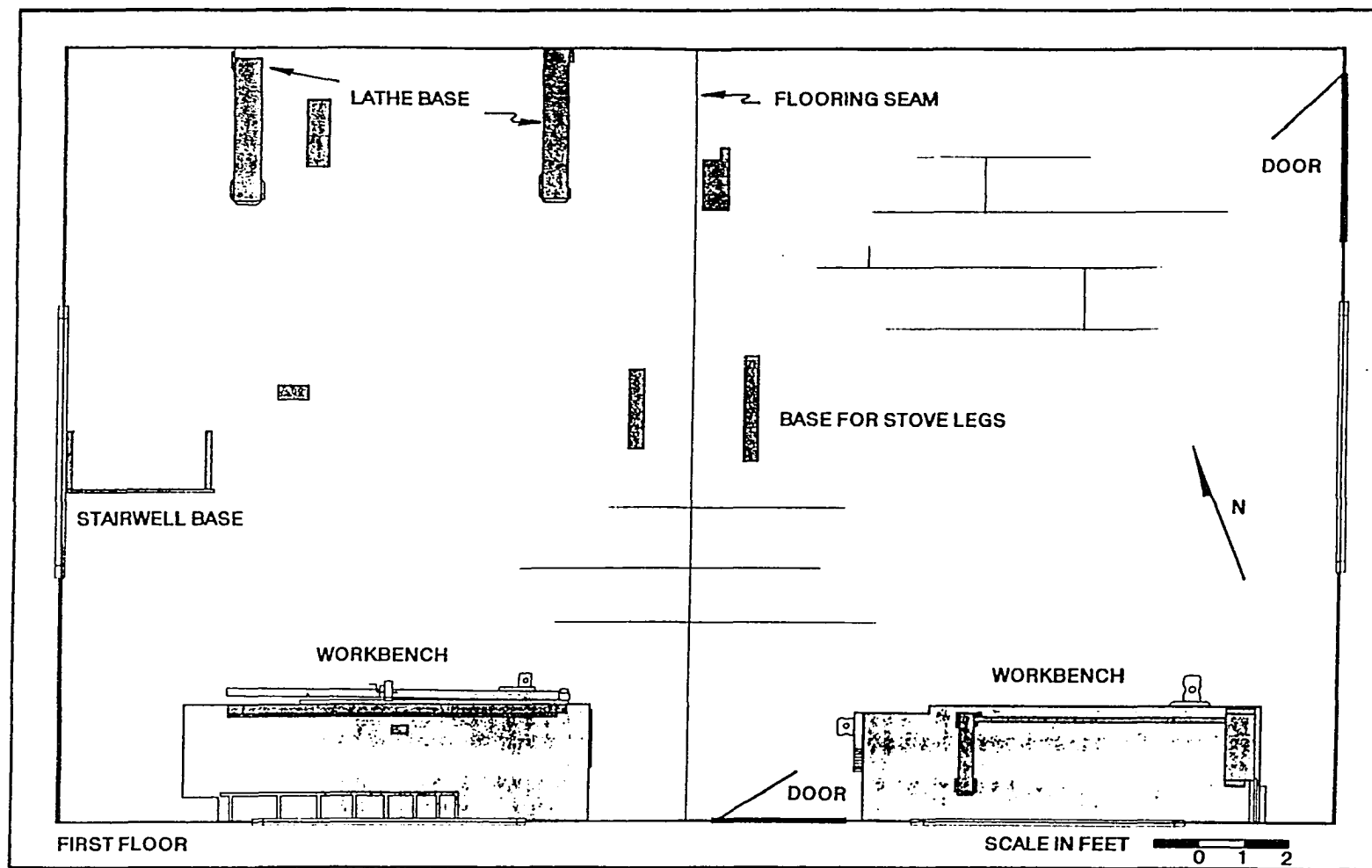


Figure 2.4 Plan of Kersh shop first floor. Drawing, JMUARC. Kersh collection, MAFC.

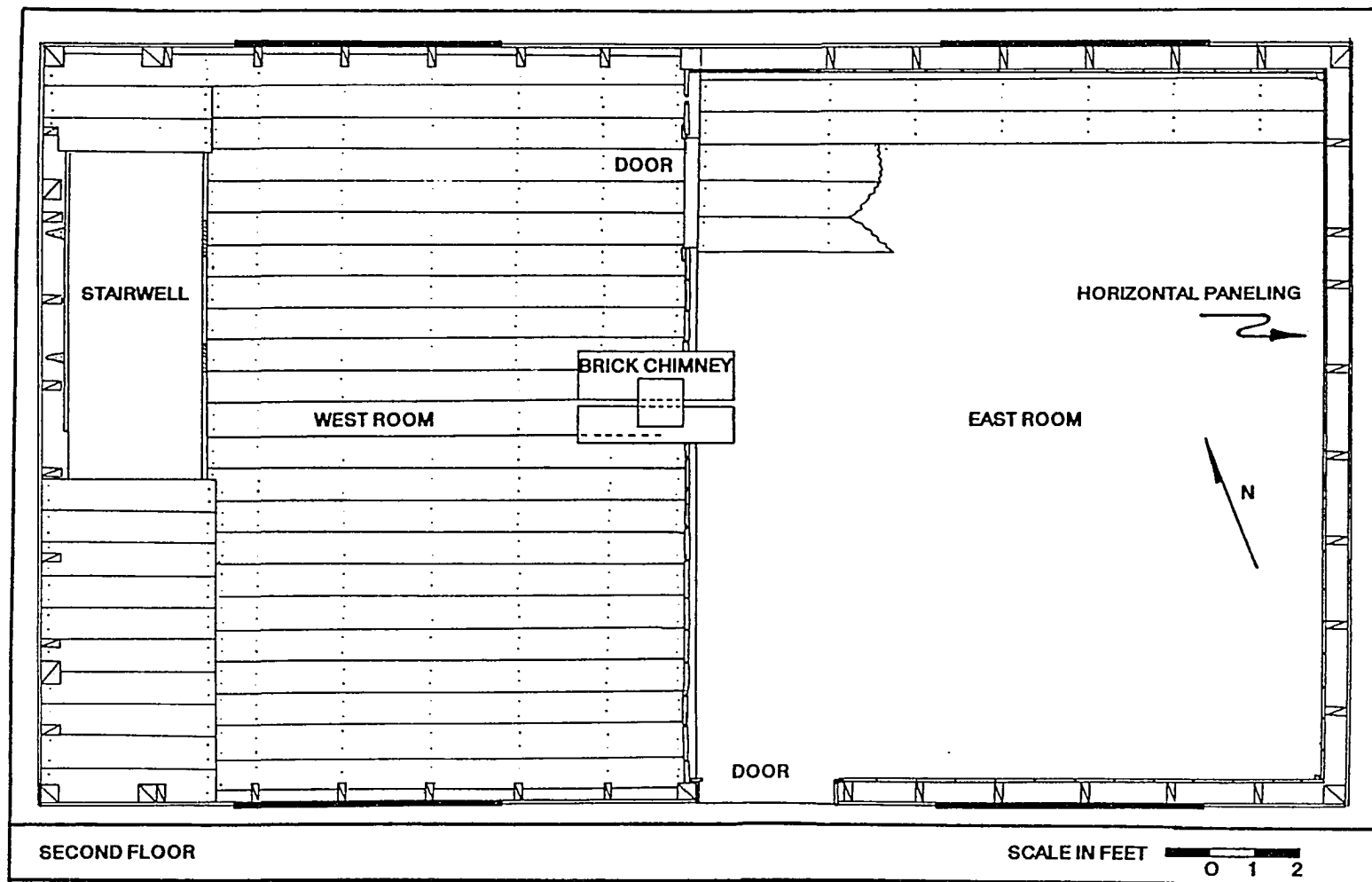


Figure 2.5 Plan of Kersh shop second floor. Drawing, JMUARC. Kersh collection, MAFC.

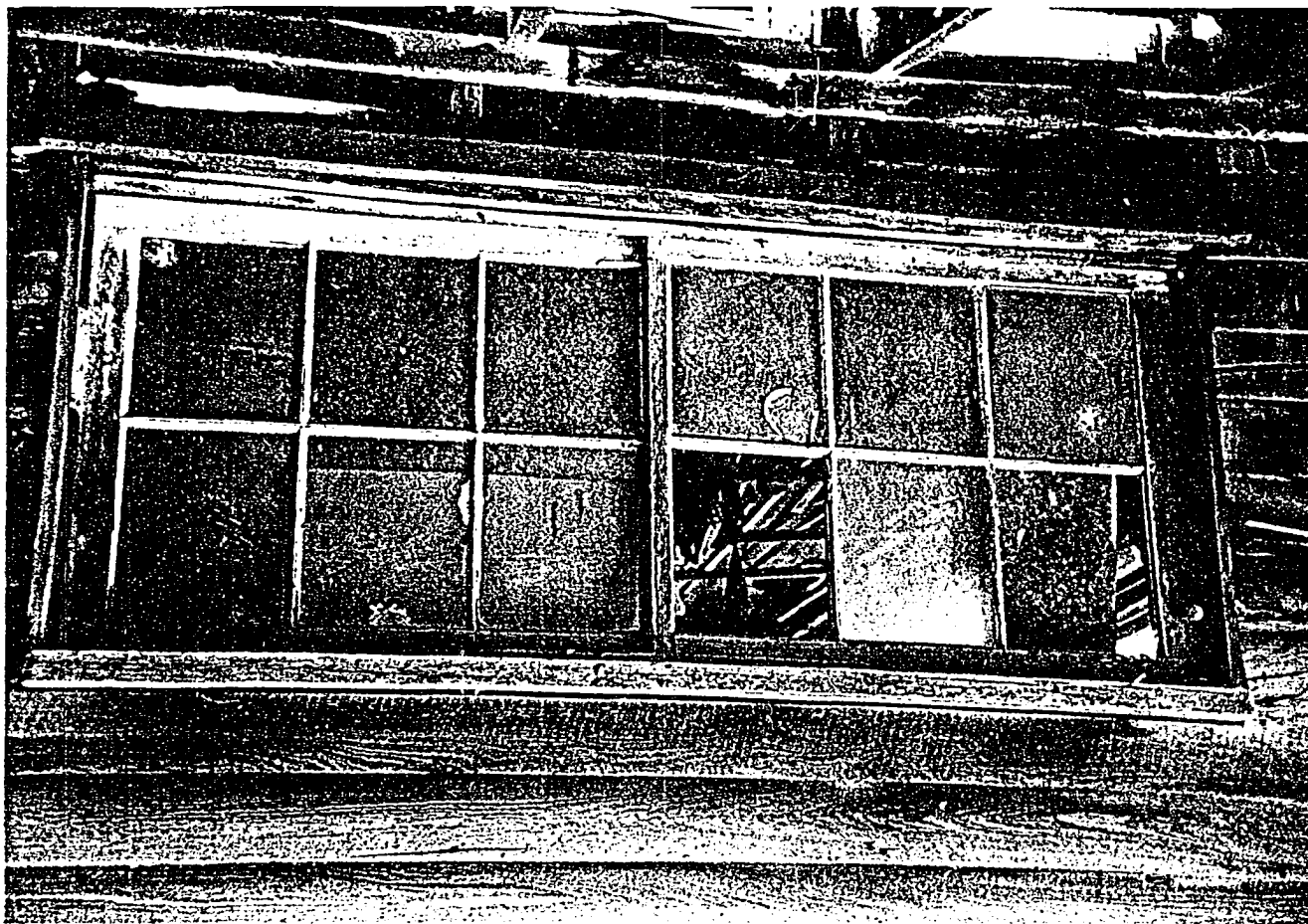


Figure 2.6 Horizontal sliding-sash windows in south wall of Kersh shop. Kersh collection, MAFC.



Figure 2.7 North wall of Kersh shop showing "hinged" effect of lapped construction. Kersh collection, MAFC.

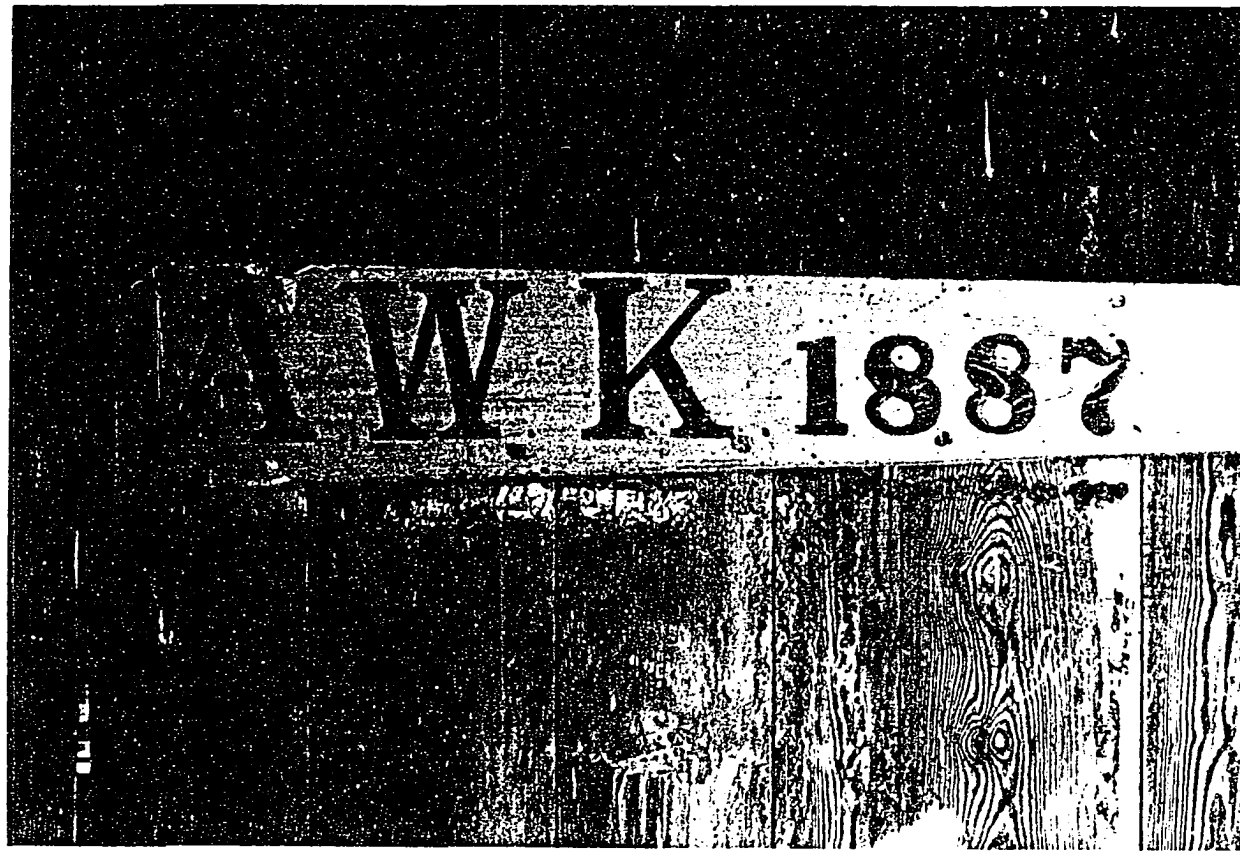


Figure 2.8 Batten on main door of shop painted with Kersh's initials and date "1887." Kersh collection, MAFC.

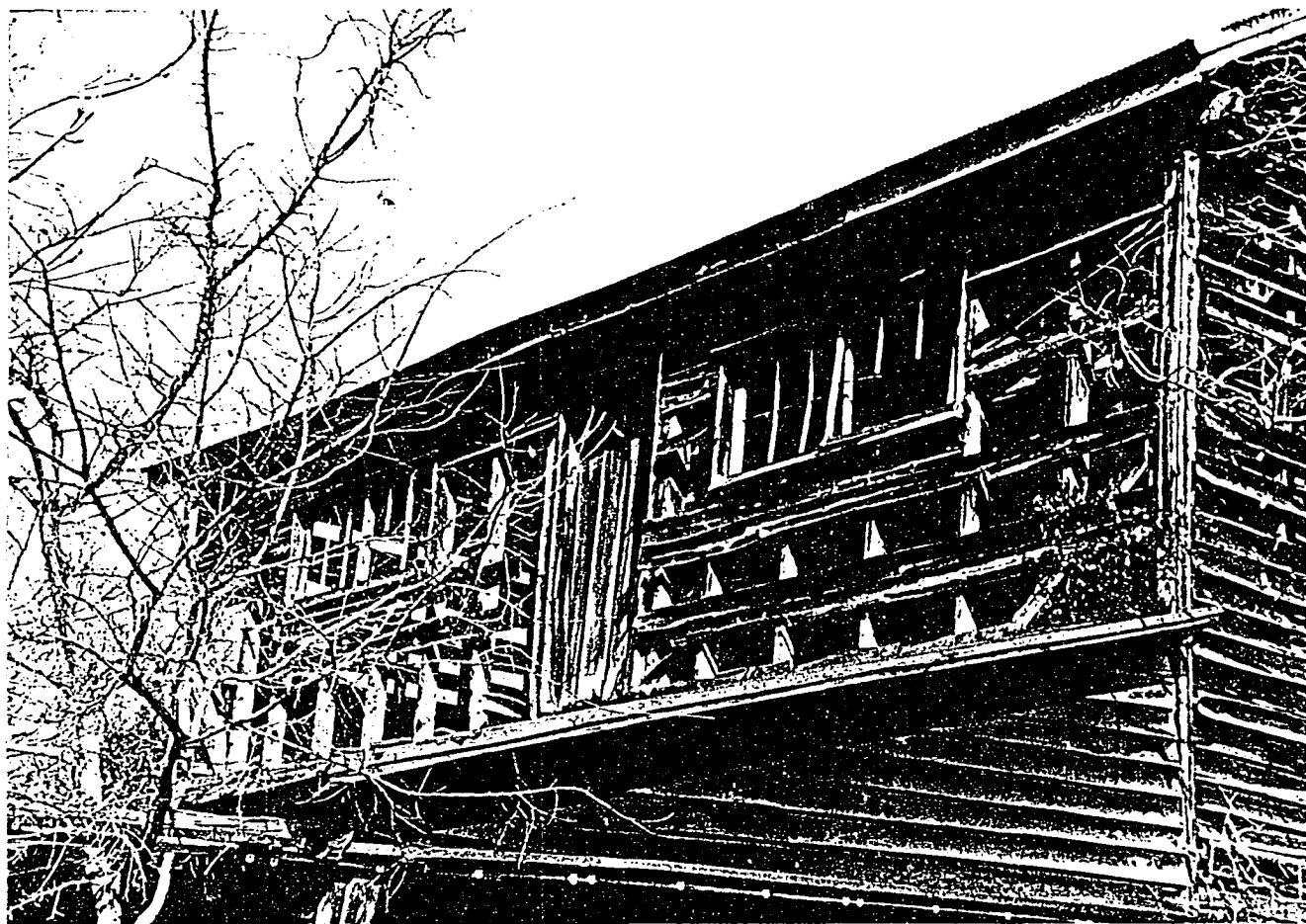


Figure 2.9 Second floor of Kersh shop on south side showing exterior door, possibly used as an entry to living quarters. Kersh collection, MAFC.

Chapter 3 TRADE PRACTICE

A board scored in pencil with music notation and clipped phrases (fig. 3.1) provides the only accounting of the productivity of Adam Kersh's shop. Between the lines of "My Little Sweetheart," Kersh jotted the number of common-bottom chairs produced during various months of 1874 and 1875. Ten months are represented. The legible figures, covering seven of those months, document an average production of fourteen chairs a month, including a few arm chairs and one baby chair. This literal scrap of evidence suggests pattern in the work life of a nineteenth-century craftsman, but offers no hard evidence about the total production of the shop, or whose work is represented, or a seasonal cycle of work habits.

Other work patterns--less measurable but perhaps more rewarding as a line of inquiry--are suggested by the penciled remains. The combination of musical notes and furniture accounts suggests Kersh made no clear distinction between work and social life, a practice that has been described as preindustrial.¹ The irregular tallies of

monthly output on a piece of waste wood represent an outmoded method of shop accounting noted by Walter Rose in his description of his family's Buckinghamshire carpentry shop of the mid-1800s. "My father never aspired to printed time sheets, and the side-cuttings from tenons were used for that purpose," he recalled.² The habits of mind and behavior implied by the wood scrap are associated with traditional handcraft.

Kersh's enterprise can be called traditional in some respects. Custom work accounted for most of his production, which is the pattern for preindustrial craftsmen. But his shop also contained dedicated machinery, such as a mortiser, which is generally associated with factory methods of production. Decorative moldings and drawer pulls on his case furniture were mass-produced and available through mail-order companies.

The combination of craft and industrial practices represented by Kersh's shop is of interest because changes in the proportions of each altered the nature of work. That hand and factory methods coexisted is not surprising. In Walter Rose's youth, lumber was cut with a pit saw; by 1885, machine-planed boards were bought from a local timber merchant. But the harvest period still preempted carpentry

work, and it was not until 1893 that Rose felt the joiner's skills were discounted by the introduction of machine-made parts, such as doors, sash and moldings.³

In an essay on the craftsman's perspective in furniture making, Edward Cooke, Jr., has emphasized that there is no "inexorable evolution" from craft to industry. Aspects of shop practice associated with industry (labor indebtedness, subcontracting, and technological innovation) existed in the seventeenth century. And many small, otherwise traditional shops adopted special-purpose machinery.⁴ Kersh's shop is an example of this hybrid. In each generation, there are craftsmen who continue to do labor-intensive custom work or green-wood construction; handcraft methods are not abandoned.

The important issue is not which factors define traditional or industrial practice, but how each of these factors--the use of power tools, labor arrangements, the source of raw materials, the range of distribution--influences a craftsman's relation to his work. In Adam Kersh's case, a consideration of the work methods he chose and the alternatives available to him contributes to an understanding of the persistence of traditional craft in an industrial society.

Felloe patterns, gun cleaning rods, a harness maker's clamp, turning skew chisels and gouges, shoe lasts and pegs, blanks for hames and ax handles, paper stencils and bags of pigment, a violin mold--these remains of a working life once cluttered the Kersh cabinet shop. Occupations as diverse as leatherworking and musical instrument making were done in the shop, along with trades allied to cabinet work, such as wheelwrighting, gun stocking, furniture finishing, and the making of agricultural equipment. The used furniture parts and fragments that populated the shop indicate that Kersh did a considerable amount of repair, replacing rockers, chair arms, spindles, and drawer sides as well as scythe handles and grain cradle fingers.⁵

The federal census of manufactures taken in 1870 lists Kersh's production as "chairs and other work."⁶ Although the census taker was not overly scrupulous--the product of other cabinet shops in the district is "furniture" or "work of various kinds"--Kersh's entry suggests that he was primarily a chairmaker at that time. Counting his surviving furniture, two-thirds of his production is chairs, with half of that Windsors.

Sources of evidence converge to support the notion that Kersh plied a number of trades. His furniture finishing work, for example, is implied by an 1887 bill from Landes and Bell, local dry goods merchants, which lists four gallons of turpentine, six pounds of Spanish White, and other unspecified paint among his years' purchases.⁷ Turpentine cans, empty kegs of white lead and bags of powdered pigment were in the shop, along with paint stirrers, brushes, paper stencils, a stencil-cutting board, and a paint grinding table. Traces of paint on the walls and floor of the shop's second story suggest that Kersh finished furniture there, as neighbor Stephen Franklin Wise remembered.⁸ Orders jotted on scrap board in the shop specify "one set of split chairs [and] one arm chair green" and "one set of split chairs [and] one rocking chair painted green."⁹ Among the Kersh furniture are split-bottom chairs formerly painted green, grained and stenciled chairs, and rockers with pinstriping.

The range of skills represented in the Kersh shop is mirrored in the careers of other, earlier woodworkers. The Dominys of East Hampton, Long Island worked from the mid-eighteenth century until about 1840 at furniture making, carpentry, wheelwrighting, clock and watch making, gun repair, tool making, agricultural labor, and retailing.

Charles Hummel has described the rural, fairly isolated condition of the Dominy's community, and from their account books he has inferred the range of skills plied in a rural area.¹⁰

Similar conclusions were made by Barbara Ward in a study of the diary of an anonymous joiner from the Mill Creek Hundred district of Delaware. In the year covered by the diary (1785-1786), the joiner's primary trade of house and barn carpentry was supplemented by building gates, coffins, and furniture, gun stocking, tool making, and repair of spinning wheels and crocks. He also farmed and raised livestock. Ward tallies the range of his labors to demonstrate the preindustrial nature of his craft--that is, his control of his own work patterns, which he ordered by the task rather than by time or wage rate, and the lack of hierarchy among the tasks he chronicles.¹¹

In Ward's view, work organized by the task is contrasted with work ordered by time, a phenomenon she associates with the nineteenth century. But manipulation of work habits for reasons of productivity, as discussed below, is not an invention of the nineteenth century. And work measured by the task does not entail independence for the craftsman. Kersh made both china presses and

singletrees, and on a wheat and corn farm it is difficult to imagine that he avoided field work during the harvest season. Although no accounts exist to document patterns in his work life, an undated furniture order for Joseph Richie specifies "chairs to be done by 3 of June [and the] press after harvest."¹² The order suggests that Kersh, like the Mill Creek joiner, planned his work by the task, shifted occupational roles, and accommodated his trade to the demands of seasonal work.

If Kersh practiced his trade in a traditional, or preindustrial, manner, it was not because he was a generalist, but because he was involved in all stages of his work. Other nineteenth-century woodworkers who could aptly be described as generalists by the range of tasks recorded in their accounts were more managers than craftsmen. An example is William Alexander of Augusta County, whose business ledgers for the years 1850 to 1870 survive.¹³ Alexander sold bedsteads, safes, bureaus, washstands, chairs, and other furniture, along with coffins and a dasher for a washing machine. He repaired farm equipment but also metalware, such as a teapot and flute. He did finishing, cutting of glass, sharpening, turning, and agricultural work (fencing, spading, and hoeing). He rented his horse, buggy, and even a ten-plate stove; and he

retailed shoes and fabric, among other items. Scattered entries make it clear that Alexander was hiring others to do hauling and repair work. What is not clear is how much of the cabinet work was Alexander's, but his relation to the work was fragmented; he was both supplying turned parts for others and being paid in woodwork. Merchandising and other peripheral work dominate the pages of his ledgers, suggesting that he was as much a business manager as a cabinetmaker.

Expansion of markets caused specialization in the cabinet trade. In an essay on the business of cabinetmaking, Charles Montgomery noted that repair and finish work by furniture makers was common, especially in rural areas, before 1790.¹⁴ Toward the end of the century, large shops developed where the separate jobs of cabinet work, chairmaking, turning, and upholstery were combined. The incentive for a cabinetmaker to become a merchant was great, since the retailing end of the business was by far the most lucrative. Craftsmen like Alexander sought those opportunities; evidence suggests that Kersh did not. By 1820 the craft had become a business, according to Montgomery. But Kersh combined many of those functions in a one-man shop a hundred years after the trend to specialize was underway. What defined Kersh as a craftsman

was not the range of his tasks, but his proximity to the work--that for each task, he directly controlled the result.

The division of labor in a shop determines, in part, an individual maker's attitude toward his work. In Kersh's case, there is no clear indication of how many hands were employed in his shop. The 1870 census of manufactures lists only one person employed in the shop, which was small compared to the six other cabinet shops in that district of the county. Capital invested in Kersh's business was a little more than half of the average investment.¹⁵

The shop itself presents conflicting evidence. Two workbenches, plus a third work table built into an end wall, occupied the first floor--more than one would expect for a single cabinetmaker. But Kersh may have set up the benches for different kinds of work, as the handle-maker's vise clamped on one of the benches suggests (fig. 3.2). Shaving work was probably done at this bench. A drawknife hung over the bench; a scythe handle was on the bench and blanks for hames were beside it. Directions for making a hay fork were tucked into the wall box above the bench. The other bench may have been used chiefly for planing and

smoothing. The floor beneath the tail vise on this bench was packed with a dense layer of shavings and tobacco pouch tags about 5 inches deep. Six planes and plane irons were on the bench, and a small adze, suitable for shaping chair seats, was in the tool rack beside it. Thus Kersh may have operated the shop alone and left the benches set up for different tasks.

Whether Kersh ever kept an apprentice is unknown. An abbreviated form of the traditional seven-year cabinetmaking apprenticeship was still practiced in the late-nineteenth century, but the contract between master and apprentice was not normally part of the public record unless the apprentice was an orphan. Few of the private agreements survive and none for Kersh or a boy serving with him has surfaced.

The practice of "putting out," or subcontracting certain parts of fabrication work, was another means for expanding a business. Two tasks Kersh could have sent out were turning and finishing. A profusion of turned ware was sold from his shop, most commonly in the form of chair parts, but also as bed posts, table legs, towel-racks for washstands, and decorative half-spindles, finials, and roundels. The largest of these were bed posts with

integral finials, about 54 inches in length, which could readily fit on the large treadle lathe in Kersh's shop. A smaller combination lathe and scroll saw that sold in 1905 at the auction of his shop may have been used for lighter work.¹⁶ Kersh had the opportunity and incentive to hire out turning. In Burke's Mill district where he lived, a full-time turner was paid by Moses Strickler, a flour mill and foundry owner, to operate a four-horsepower, water-driven lathe in 1870.¹⁷ Despite the fact that local demand for furniture supported six other shops, Kersh chose not to accelerate production by contracting with a turner.

Among the contents of Kersh's shop sold at the 1905 auction were twelve lots of paint and "bronze" (referring to powdered pigment used in stenciling), along with varnish, oil, turpentine, pumice (an abrasive used between coats of varnish), and brushes. Specific paints listed are Spanish white, Venetian red, and red lead. Also mentioned is a paint mill (fig. 3.3) used for breaking up the clumps in dry pigment and mixing the pigment with oil.¹⁸ Cane for weaving the backs of rockers was sold as well. Kersh used these materials to finish chairs, which he variously painted, varnished, grained, striped, and stenciled. Finish work was subcontracted in some cabinet shops, at least by the mid-nineteenth century. A vivid record of

this and other shop practices is contained in the diary of apprentice cabinetmaker Edward Carpenter. In the shop where he trained in Greenfield, Massachusetts, a chair painter came periodically to finish furniture. This arrangement allowed Carpenter to concentrate on bureaus, secretaries, and tables, which he churned out regularly; the turning work was handled by another member of the shop.¹⁹

Little evidence from the shop suggests that Kersh mass produced furniture parts--another option for increasing the output of a shop that would have altered Kersh's relation to his work. Mass production was not an invention of the nineteenth century, despite its frequent association with the large, integrated furniture factories that developed after 1820. As early as the 1770s, stockpiling of chair parts was done in Philadelphia.²⁰ A century later, Kersh had not adopted the practice. A few blanks for ax handles and hames were left in his shop after his death, and a bundle of sized stock labeled "moulting" (molding) and "styles" (for chair stiles) was stored in the rafters. But no stacks of spindles or chair seats were sold with the contents of his shop. A single entry in the sale bill for "chair backs &c." (sold to a nephew, Claude Kersh) and another for five cents worth of bed posts are

the only indications of incomplete furniture. Few duplicates were among the furniture sold at the auction. Some items--a secretary, three chairs, a table--may have been work in progress; others, such as the desk (once used to store paint, now rehabilitated in the home of the buyer's grandson) were in service in the shop. Together, the auction list and the shop remains confirm the idea that Kersh worked not ahead, but from one order to the next.

In a study of the New England furniture industry in the nineteenth century, Jan Seidler has argued that when labor was divided, work routines became fragmented and creativity was redistributed to opposite ends of the manufacturing process.²¹ Inventive tasks were left to designers, who made patterns and molds, and finishers, who embellished. Kersh retained direct involvement in his cabinet work at all stages. He had the opportunity to speed production by reorganizing labor. His choice not to hire employees or stockpile parts may reflect, in part, his desire not to lose that control.

The rate at which Kersh produced furniture and the methods he used to speed production are other indicators of his relation to his craft. Efficient use of materials and tools is a goal of any cabinet shop. Regardless of the

period, the measure of economic success is profitability. This is true of the eighteenth century as well as the late nineteenth. In 1736, for example, Newport cabinetmaker Job Townsend was producing three or four major case pieces a month. As Margaretta Lovell has noted, "These [Newport] artisans were as attentive as any to the pressure to convert man-hours into money . . ."²² In contrast, the eighteenth-century craftsman has been described by Barbara Ward as perceiving "no urgency in work," having little sense of wasting time, and making little differentiation between work and socialization.²³ This kindly image of preindustrial craft is inconsistent with cabinetmaking as practiced in urban Newport in the 1780s, where rapid production and merchandizing of ready-mades were common, but also with cabinetmaking in rural Virginia in the 1880s, where Kersh took advantage of treadle machinery to speed cutting tasks in his shop.

Early in his career Kersh's capital investment in the shop was \$150, about half the average for cabinet shops in his area of the county; at \$625, the value of his annual production was almost average, suggesting that he conducted his business with some success.²⁴ No accounts exist to document changes in his production over time. But his attitude toward the pace of work is suggested in two ways:

the machinery in his shop and the workmanship of his furniture.

In his essay on New England's furniture industry, Seidler observed that woodworking machines used in the mid-1800s served two ends: they speeded up the process of roughing out wood to make multiple, uniform shapes, and they made clean, planed surfaces to emphasize the properties of the wood used in furniture.²⁵ Kersh had five treadle machines in his shop--a lathe, a lathe and scroll saw, a shaper and scroll saw (fig. 3.4), a circular rip saw, and a mortiser. These machines were of the roughing out and shaping type.

The lathes were used for making duplicate turned parts, primarily in chairs. To speed the layout of the turnings, Kersh employed lathe marking sticks (fig. 3.5), slim sticks pierced by nails at intervals to indicate the alignment of joints or the dimensions of decorative turnings. Some labeled and dated examples were among the dozen or so found in his shop. Scroll saws were used for curved cuts on lighter stock, such as the crest of a headboard, or for pierced fretwork on the top of a bed or dresser. A shaper cut molded edges into case furniture tops, doors, and decorative overlays. A circular saw would

have cut milled planks to dimension. The mortising machine replaced the brace and chisel in cutting mortices for joints in case pieces. Together the machines represent acceleration in the processes of repetitive cutting and shaping tasks.

Kersh speeded another task, that of layout, with a bewildering array of wooden patterns. Many of them were left in the shop rafters, including patterns that match extant furniture, such as rockers (fig. 3.6) and washstands, and some for furniture that no longer exists, such as a study table.

Furniture made by Kersh suggests that he continued to do some of the most labor-intensive work by hand. Planing and bevelling of back boards and drawer parts was clearly done by hand rather than by a machine joiner. The edges of rocker stiles were chamfered using a spokeshave rather than a shaper. The backs of bed posts were filed by hand. In case after case, Kersh chose laborious methods for smoothing surfaces and finishing; even hidden corner blocks designed to support bed slats were chamfered neatly.

There is slapdash work in Kersh's furniture--flaws in chair stretchers turned toward the floor, screw relieves

roughly gouged out, pinstriping on the front of posts only. But his construction shows consistently good workmanship. Dovetails are well cut (fig. 3.7) and woods are carefully chosen for door panels and overlays. Though it would have been faster to rout the edges of panels or drawer bottoms and slide them into a routed channel (a technique used on factory furniture), Kersh continued to hand plane bevels and grooves.

It appears that Kersh chose machines to speed repetitive tasks, not to eliminate the errors of hand work. The number of shaping machines he acquired--scroll saws, shaper, and lathes--suggests that he used machinery to alter the look of furniture readily, as suited the custom nature of his business.

Chapter 3

ENDNOTES

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2. Walter Rose, The Village Carpenter (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1937; reprint, New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1973), 36.
3. Rose, xviii.
4. Edward S. Cooke, Jr., "The Study of American Furniture from the Perspective of the Maker," in Perspectives on American Furniture, ed. Gerald W. Ward (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. for The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1988), 118.
5. Contents of the Kersh cabinet shop were inventoried, photographed, and packed and the shop site excavated in the summers of 1984 and 1985 during two field school projects conducted by the James Madison University Archeological Research Center under the direction of Dr. Clarence Geier. The shop contents are housed at the Museum of American Frontier Culture (MAFC), Staunton, Va.
6. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Federal Manufacturing Census 1870, 2nd District, Augusta County, Virginia State Library and Archives (VSLA), Richmond, Va..
7. Invoice to A. W. Kersh from Landes and Bell, Milnesville, Va., January 1, 1887, Lorraine Kersh Bosserman, Staunton, Va.
8. Information from Glen Wise, son of Stephen F. Wise, Centerville, Va., in conversation August 3, 1991.
9. Kersh collection, MAFC, box 22.
10. Charles Hummel, "The Dominys of East Hampton, Long

Island, and Their Furniture," in Country Cabinetwork and Simple City Furniture, ed. John D. Morse (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1970), 41.

11. Ward, "Joiner," 90.

12. Richie furniture order in the possession of Lorraine Kersh Bosserman, Staunton, Va.

13. William Alexander Ledgers (1850-1888), VSLA, Business Records #29658 a, b.

14. Charles Montgomery, American Furniture: The Federal Period (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 13.

15. The capital Kersh had invested in the shop in 1870 was \$150, or 58 percent of the average amount of \$260. The largest investment was \$500.

16. Sale bill of personal property belonging to the estate of Adam W. Kersh, sold May 10, 1905, Augusta County Courthouse, Staunton, Will Book 59: 542.

17. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Federal Manufacturing Census 1870, 2nd District, Augusta County, VSLA.

18. The mill, which was sold to Adam's nephew Claude Kersh, is almost certainly the paint grinding table found in the shop until 1985. The same item is described as a "paint table & fixtures" in the pre-sale inventory of the shop, and, along with the treadle lathe bought by Claude, may well have been left in the shop, which was located down the lane from Claude's house.

19. Christopher Clark, "The Diary of an Apprentice Cabinetmaker: Edward Jenner Carpenter's 'Journal' 1844-45," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 98,2:335, 353-54.

20. Charles Hummel, "The Business of Woodworking: 1700 to 1840," in Tools and Technologies, America's Wooden Age, ed. Paul B. Kebabian and William C. Lipke (Burlington: Robert Hull Fleming Museum, University of Vermont, 1979), 56.

21. Jan Seidler, "Transition in New England's Nineteenth-Century Furniture Industry: Technology and Style, 1820-1880," in Tools and Technologies, 75.

22. Margaretta M. Lovell, "'Such Furniture as Will Be Most

Profitable': The Business of Cabinetmaking in Eighteenth-Century Newport," Winterthur Portfolio 26,1 (Spring 1991): 52.

23. Ward, "Joiner," 89.

24. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Federal Manufacturing Census 1870, 2nd District, Augusta County, VSLA.

25. Seidler, "Transition," 73.

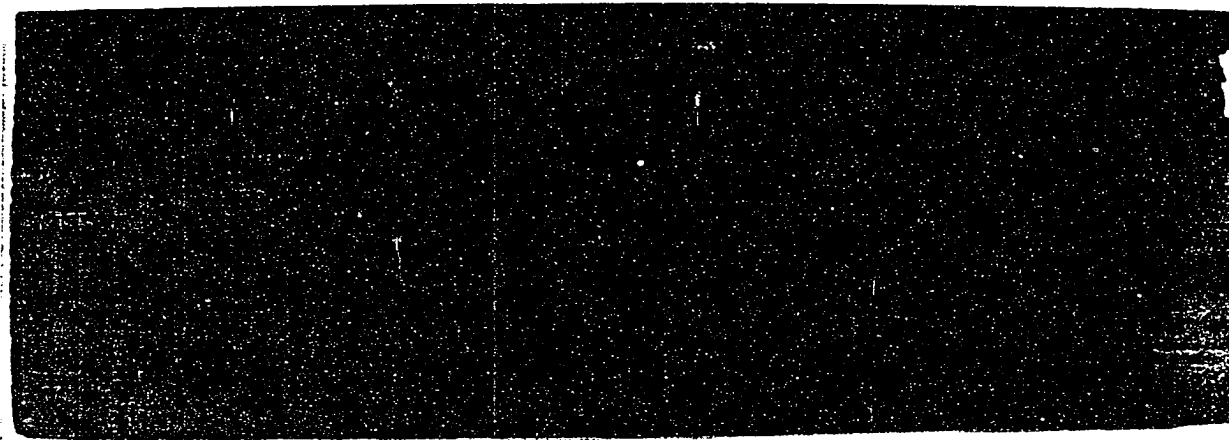


Figure 3.1 Board from Kersh shop with notes on chair production penciled between lines of shape-note music. Kersh collection, MAFC.

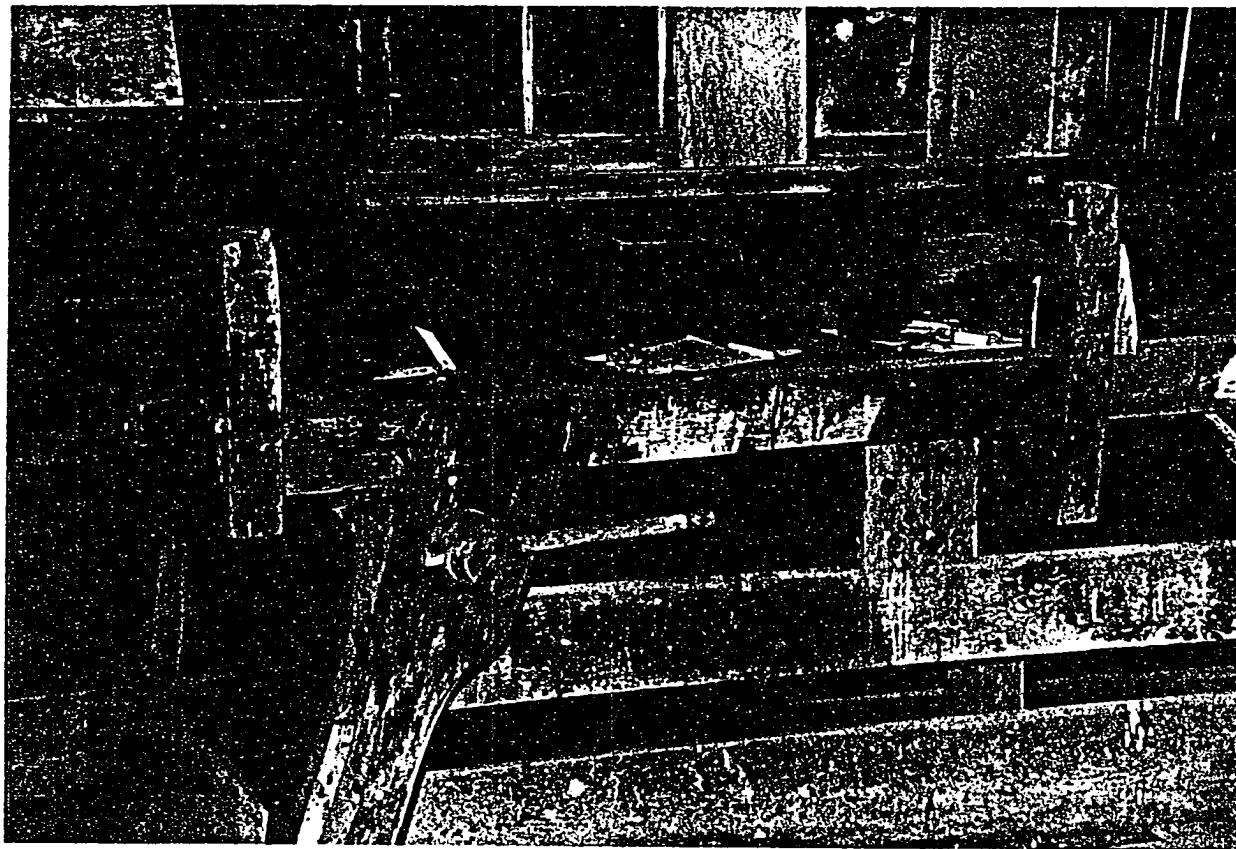


Figure 3.2 Workbench in southwest corner of Kersh shop, showing handle-maker's vise locked in leg vise of bench. Kersh collection, MAFC.

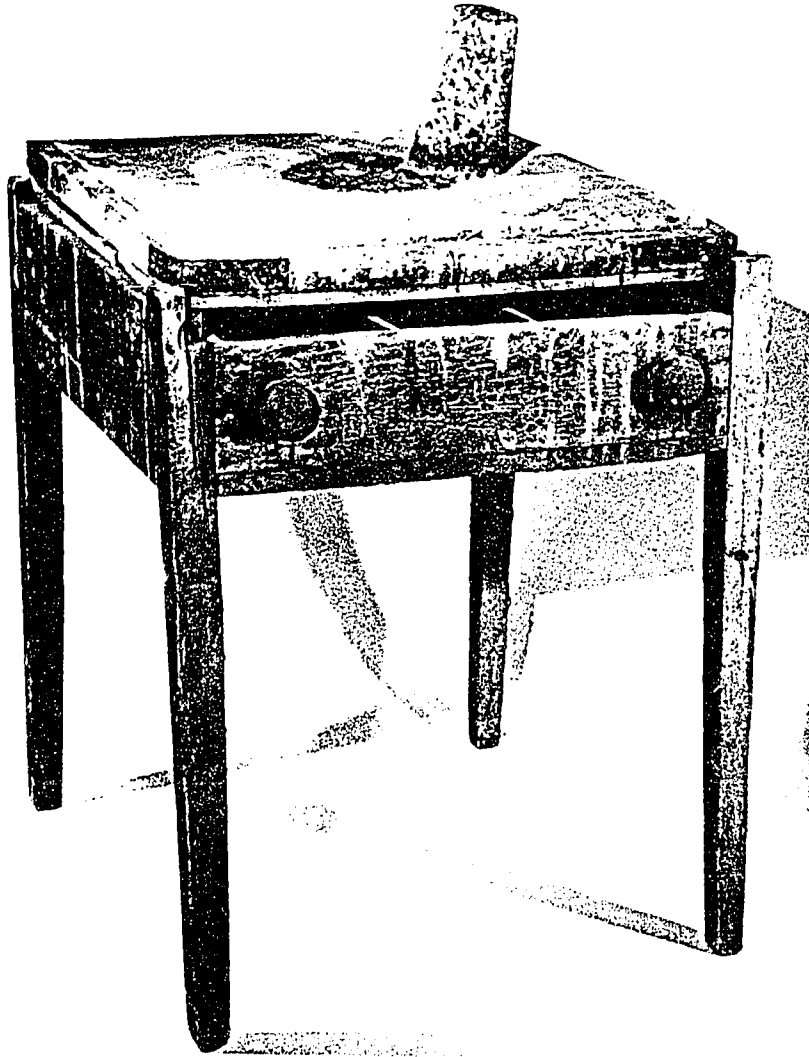


Figure 3.3 Paint-grinding table and pestle from Kersh shop. Kersh collection, MAFC.

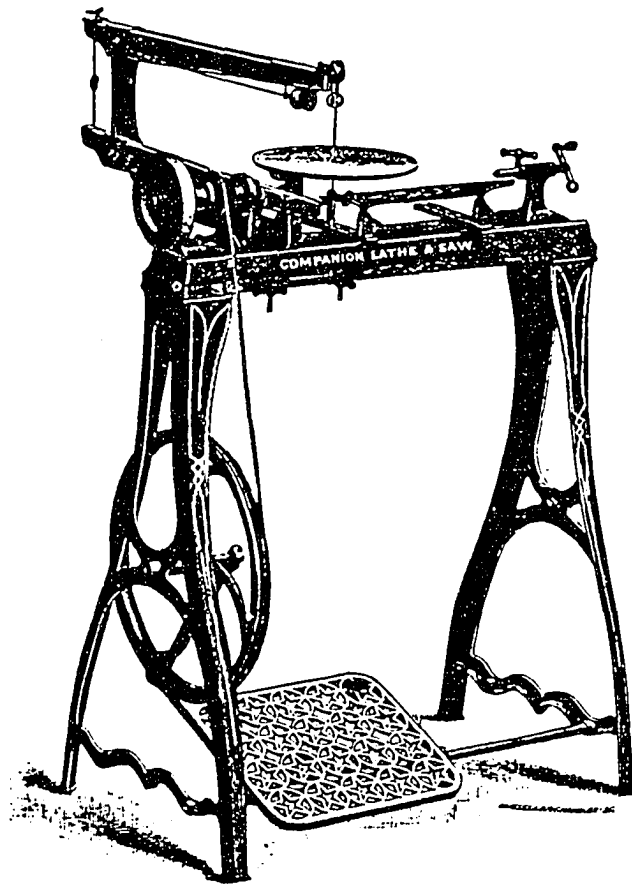


Figure 3.4 Combination lathe and scroll-saw treadle machine of the kind used by Kersh. From William P. Walter's Sons, Illustrated Catalogue of Wood Workers' Tools and Foot Power Machinery (Philadelphia, 1888), 184. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection.



Figure 3.5 Lathe marking sticks used to speed production of turned work. Kersh collection, MAFC.



Figure 3.6 Patterns for two rocking chair arms from the Kersh shop. Kersh collection, MAFC.



Figure 3.7 Detail of dovetail joint on washstand drawer. Owner Lorraine Dennison Diehl, Weyers Cave.

Chapter 4

THE FURNITURE

In October 1868, Adam Kersh wrote a letter to a customer in Port Republic (about 10 miles east of Kersh's shop) regarding the pick-up of some chairs. The customer's original order had expanded from two sets to five sets of chairs. Kersh confirmed that he would complete the balance of the chairs by the first of December, in five weeks' time. And he added, somewhat cannily, perhaps, "I wish to know if you want any rocking chairs with the last three sets you spoke for." In reply the customer, without further description, ordered two rockers.¹ No mention was made about what the other thirty chairs looked like.

Chairs were the most common furniture form produced by Kersh. Most were plank seated--what he called "common bottom chairs." Today they are known as Windsors. Among Kersh's surviving furniture are Windsors painted or grained, some with spindle backs and others with solid splats. The striking feature of these chairs is not their variety, however; it is the elements of design they share. Many of them represent designs current in Philadelphia and

Baltimore from 1800 to the 1830s, almost forty years before the date of the chair-order correspondence.

The simplest of Kersh's Windsors is a spindle-back chair with a shield-shaped seat and simulated bamboo turnings on the legs and back posts (fig. 5.32). Bamboo work was a feature introduced on Philadelphia chairs in the mid-1780s.² Another Kersh chair has half-length spindles with two cross slats and a shovel-shaped seat (fig. 5.33), a type popular in Philadelphia after 1820. A third type has a rectangular tablet mounted on top of the posts (fig. 5.35), a design that originated in Baltimore "fancy" chairs dating from before 1810 to the 1830s. Ring turnings on the posts and legs of this chair were used on Philadelphia and Baltimore seating from the 1820s. Several features of Kersh's fancy chairs represent later developments: the "cutout," or shouldered, tablet appeared about 1840 and the banister back, a spinoff from high-style furniture, was transferred to Windsors in the same decade. But Kersh never adopted the next major change in Windsor design, a balloon-shaped back introduced in the 1860s. Instead, his chairs imitate styles popular in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Chairs in the Renaissance revival style that were

fashionable after 1850 (fig. 4.1) and marketed widely by furniture factories in the Midwest were never made in Kersh's shop. He possessed the skills to produce a caned-seat version of the new style, with turned legs, scroll-work splats, and shallow carving. But he chose not to. Chief among the causes of his reluctance may have been the fundamentally different construction of the revival chairs. These chairs are the product of dry joinery, in which a seat frame made of several dry parts is joined and glued to a stile that is cut from a single length of wood. Windsors, such as those made by Kersh, have a solid-board seat with sockets for turned or shaved legs and posts. It is the drying of the sockets around the tenons of the upright members that keeps the chair tight. For a woodworker whose primary production was turnings, at least in the early years, Kersh may have rejected a chair design that required joined construction. The revival chairs are also much less durable than Windsors. A double course of stretchers is used to hold the uprights together in a chair with a multi-part seat, whereas the plank seat of the Windsor locks the legs in place. Because Kersh sold to a local market and likely repaired his own work (unlike midwestern factories), he may have avoided the inherently weaker design. Another consideration may have been the limited market for a caned version of the revival chair,

which was most frequently bought in an upholstered form as part of a parlor suite. He did not do upholstery and he did not collaborate; all aspects of finish work required for his chairs were done in his shop.

Seating furniture made by Kersh was thus traditional and outmoded in design. Although he shunned contemporary chair designs, nevertheless he dipped freely from a bottomless well of revival and reform designs when he built case furniture, beds, and tables. Kersh borrowed ornaments and proportions from the popular designs of the late-nineteenth century. His case pieces are derivative, as are his chairs, but with two notable differences. The design sources for his case furniture date primarily after the Civil War. Also, designs for his non-seating furniture are not derived from any region. Most of his chair designs originated in the mid-Atlantic region and south to the Shenandoah Valley. The larger furniture made by Kersh emulates the products of factories in Grand Rapids, Chicago, Cincinnati, and Boston.

Beds provide a useful foil to Kersh's unassuming chairs. The largest of the pieces made in his shop, his beds are showy and layered with novelty decoration. Six types survive, all characterized by large proportions and

flat surface decoration (fig. 5.5). Heavy pediments, turned posts with finials, figured overlays, and relief carving are found on about half the beds. These features are associated with the Renaissance revival style, popular in the period 1860 to 1875. Large manufacturers disseminated the style, and design elements from their furniture appear in Kersh's work. An 1890 catalog of The C. and A. Kreimer Company of Cincinnati advertised high-backed beds smothered in overlays, carved crests, roundels, and half-spindles.³ These decorative elements are recombined, to less flamboyant effect, in Kersh's revival-style beds. It is unlikely that the Kreimer furniture directly influenced Kersh. Both makers probably adopted motifs with vaguely historical allusions that appealed to their customers at the time.

The coincidence of design is far more direct between Kersh and another Cincinnati manufacturer. Mitchell and Rammelsberg Furniture Company was the largest furniture producer outside of the East by 1880.⁴ As early as 1849 the original firm of Mitchell and Rammelsberg operated a steam-powered factory employing 150 workers. The low prices of their goods attracted buyers in the South and Midwest, and the company's location gave access to broad markets via river and railroad transportation. For

example, in 1849 the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway connected Staunton with Cincinnati in thirty-eight hours (an hour less on the fast line).⁵ Certainly their furniture was marketed in the Shenandoah Valley. A dresser made by the company sometime after 1872 (fig. 4.2) was owned in the family of Kersh's niece Maude Reeves.⁶ It is modest compared to the extravagant chamber furniture the company was capable of producing, but its scaled-back design is similar to Kersh's work. Molded edges, pediments, and applied half-spindles appear on a number of his beds and case pieces. But the strongest resemblance between his furniture and that of the Cincinnati firm is the eclectic range of decorative elements that decorate the surfaces of the beds. One of Kersh's more elaborate bed designs has a sloping pediment with flaring "wings" and posts with rectangular overlays that occur on a bed (fig. 4.3) and matching dresser made by Mitchell and Rammelsberg Furniture Company about 1875. The most curious duplication is the carved leafy scrolls that adorn the head and foot boards on a walnut bed (fig. 4.4) made by the company about 1877 for a wealthy resident of Richmond, Indiana. Similar scrolls appear on Kersh beds clinging to the slopes of a pediment, like crockets on a Gothic spire, or incised on the outer corners of a headboard, where they resemble comets more than scrolls.

At the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, Mitchell and Rammelsberg Furniture Company contributed a sideboard and hall stand (fig. 4.5) said to be "the only example of furniture designed rigidly after the canons of Eastlake."⁷ The relentless patterning of these pieces is hardly in keeping with the tenets of Charles Eastlake's Hints on Household Taste, published in London in 1868. But certain features of these show-stoppers were transferred to some of Kersh's later beds. Eight of his beds show the influence of so-called Aesthetic furniture of the period 1865 to 1890. Four of them are dated by family tradition, one in 1896 and three in 1901. They have in common the planed surfaces, shallow incised carving, chamfered edges, scalloped borders, and, in one case, a sawtooth frieze that appear on the company's Centennial display furniture. Eastlake-inspired furniture was marketed in the 1880s by the Kent Furniture Company of Grand Rapids (fig. 4.6), by Keller, Sturm and Ehman of Chicago, and by the Boston firm of B. A. Atkinson and Company, among others.⁸ These mass-produced designs share a number of features with Kersh's chamber sets, including shallow carving of tendrils and scrolls, reeded edges, rectangular posts, flat crests, and fretwork.

Kersh saw Renaissance-revival and Eastlake designs in furniture sold in the Valley. Towns as close as Bridgewater, 3 miles to the north, had a furniture dealer; S. G. Driver sold chamber and parlor sets there as early as 1883. By 1904 Driver's successor, H. C. Hale, was stocking iron and wood beds, chairs, bureaus, pie safes, and china presses; the local hardware store, Sipe and Arey's, also carried furniture.⁹ Harrisonburg and Staunton, the nearest larger towns, both had furniture stores by 1861.¹⁰

Kersh may have consulted design books, since he was literate and owned about one hundred books at the time of his death. But the design elements he gathered from the work of Charles Eastlake seem to have come from popular versions of the style rather than Hints on Household Taste. Drawings by Eastlake for a sideboard (fig. 4.7) and a chest of drawers are reproduced in that volume.¹¹ They show recessed panels with chamfered edges, reeded bands, and ring pulls that Kersh incorporated into his case furniture. These are the sorts of devices frequently used by makers of mass-produced furniture.

Neoclassical designs from books such as George Smith's Cabinet Maker's and Upholsterer's Guide (London, 1826) broadly influenced the appearance of nineteenth-

century furniture. Devices such as palmettes, volutes, pediments, and scrolls, which were widely adopted in revival furniture, are illustrated in Smith's Guide. But the Empire designs promulgated by Smith occur in Kersh's work only in a generic form--a china press with a wide molded cornice, for example. A Baltimore architect, John Hall, published a book of neoclassical designs called The Cabinet Makers' Assistant in 1840. Design elements from Hall are indirectly incorporated in Kersh's furniture. For instance, the contour of a pier-table platform is duplicated in the back splash of a Kersh washstand (fig. 5.21).

The simplified Empire designs adopted by Kersh may be have been bred in the bone rather than lifted from picture books. Cabinetmaking was still learned by apprenticeship in the mid-nineteenth century when Kersh began making furniture. Census records suggest that Kersh acquired his trade sometime after the age of twenty-one. Not until the 1860 Federal census, when he is thirty-one, is he listed as a cabinetmaker.¹² The system of apprenticeship had weakened considerably in America since the mid-1700s, when apprentices were generally bound for a period of seven years. Kersh's training may have been four years or less. Particularly in rural areas, craftsmen

often trained with a father or near relation.¹³ None of Kersh's direct ancestors appears in the public record as a woodworker. But the conservative nature of the Centerville community suggests that he would have learned his craft locally.

Despite Kersh's ethnic background and the concentration of German families in his neighborhood, few joinery techniques associated with the Germans who emigrated from Pennsylvania are found in his work. The sides and doors of his case pieces are paneled and the door frames invariably have through tenons. But the lids on his small chests lack through tenons; the dovetails in his drawers are not wedged, and he used nails rather than wooden pegs to attach drawer bases and moldings. He used butt hinges instead of strap hinges, even where Eastlake advocated the use of such hardware. A single peg, versus the Germanic pattern of two diagonal pegs, secures the joints on his door frames.

Nevertheless, he may have learned from a German in his community. John Sheets, whose signed pie safe dated 1841 was in the Kersh farmhouse at the time the farm was sold in 1985, is one candidate. He was a member of St. Michaels Church, where Kersh attended, and his confirmation

date of 1831 suggests that he was about seventeen years older than Kersh.¹⁴ Sheets's furniture lacks most Germanic construction details, except that he wedges dovetails. A comparison of safes made by the two craftsmen shows similarities in their use of through tenons on doors and nails on drawer bottoms and in the configuration of dovetails front and back; however, discrepancies in their joinery methods come to light as well. The pattern of pegging on their cases and doors is different and the door seams are finished differently. Turnings on the feet and bevels on the side panels do not match. These observations cast doubt on a master/apprentice relation between the two. Moreover, Sheets's proximity is not a strong argument because other makers were nearby. In the 1860 population census, nine cabinet and chair makers are listed the North River district of Augusta County alone.

Regardless of whether Kersh learned from Sheets, both were using frame-and-panel construction, mortise-and-tenon joinery, and dovetails--that is, traditional construction that implies they were continuing old methods and learning by imitation.

In Augusta County, abundant springs and tributaries provided the motive power for the twenty sawmills listed in

the 1850 census of manufactures for the North River district. Kersh, and even his predecessor John Sheets working in the 1830s and 1840s, would have used lumber from these local mills. The difference between them is that Kersh's wood was sawn not with a traditional up-and-down sash saw, but with a much faster, continuous-cutting saw.

Torn-edged arcs are visible on the underside of drawers, backs of headboards, and inner walls of pie safes made by Kersh--in fact, on almost every piece of his paneled furniture. Saw marks on planks from his shop indicate that the saw blade was about 40 inches in diameter. A treadle rip saw of the kind owned by Kersh would have taken a 12-inch-diameter blade and was not used for processing logs.¹⁵ More likely, Kersh bought his wood from one of the portable steam-powered mills that were in use in Augusta County after the Civil War.

Milled wood was available from a number of sources in the vicinity of Kersh's shop. Twenty-six sawmills were in operation in his district of Augusta County in 1870. Most of them were powered by water and operated four to six months in the year. But four of the mills, including two with the highest production, were run with steam boilers. This development marked a distinct change from pre-war

conditions. In 1850, no steam-powered mills were in operation, and the average production of the water-powered mills was about 40 percent less than the average for local mills two decades later.¹⁶ Both circular and upright saws could be run at either type of mill, so the circular-sawn wood used by Kersh could have come from any of these mills. Not until the manufacturing census of 1880 was the type of saw in each mill identified. In that year, the three sawmills listed in Kersh's neighborhood of North River all had circular saws.

Another source of wood was the lumber dealers operating at major train junctions in the area. Advertisements for the Yangey and Kent lumber yard, opposite the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad depot in Harrisonburg, appeared in the local paper in 1887.¹⁷ Some of the wood may have been imported from the eastern terminus of Baltimore, but the great bulk of it must have come from nearby logging camps. Following the Civil War, lumber and tanbark mills burgeoned in the foothills of the Shenandoah Mountains. Portable steam-powered mills cut lumber on site. By 1902 a spur line run by the Chesapeake and Western Railroad connected Harrisonburg with Stokesville, the largest of the mill camps. Lumber was also advertised at the Staunton depot of the Chesapeake and

Ohio Railroad by Hendrys and Lushbaugh, who operated a door, sash, and blind factory as well as a lumber yard.¹⁸

Although Kersh could have made the 10-mile trip to buy wood at a depot lumber yard, portable mills closer to home were operating after the war. In Centerville, Kersh's neighbor E. M. Glick kept a portable steam-driven mill that he used for wood cutting in winter; in summer the same engine powered a threshing machine and clover huller.¹⁹ Kersh had access to planks from local mills and lumber yards, but wood was also harvested by his neighbors, which suggests that the material for his furniture may have come from no further than Wise Hollow.

Black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) is the primary wood on nearly all of Kersh's paneled furniture. Cherry (*Prunus serotina*) and oak (*Quercus* spp.) were used in his pie safes, rockers, and side chairs, but walnut predominates. In trade catalogs of the second half of the nineteenth century, mahogany (*Swietenia* spp.) was used in the most expensive and fashionable furniture, but walnut was the most popular native wood. The dark color of the wood suited the massive proportions of revival furniture.

During Kersh's lifetime, walnut was harvested

locally. The wooded end of the Kersh property, which extended up one flank of a knoll (called simply "Big Hill") may have been the source of his cabinet lumber. According to Glen Wise, who lives on the farm next to the Kersh property, about eight acres of the 127-acre strip that formed the Kersh farm were on the wooded slope of Big Hill. Glen's grandfather, George Newton Wise, operated a portable sawmill on a section of the hill adjoining the Kersh lot after 1875. Walnut grew there and still does; in the late 1980s, walnut trees from the Wise property were bought for veneer.²⁰ In any case, Kersh's use of walnut for secondary purposes, such as corner blocks for supporting bed slats, suggests that he had a cheap and ready supply of the wood.

Kersh used tulip (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) for secondary uses such as drawer bottoms and sides, backs of case pieces, chair seats, bed slats, shelves, and the like. Pine (*Pinus* spp.) was used in combination with tulip on his case pieces; sometimes the two woods were mixed in a single drawer. These softwoods were also available locally.

Writers on Southern furniture have commented on the common use of walnut and tulip in the region. Referring to coastal North Carolina, John Bivins has stated that 85 percent of furniture made in the period 1700-1820 used

black walnut as the primary wood; tulip was used in "great quantities," second only to yellow pine. In Tennessee, tulip was the most common secondary wood in furniture made before 1850, and walnut was the chief hardwood used next to cherry. What little has been written on Shenandoah Valley furniture mentions walnut as the most frequently used primary wood.²¹ Kersh followed native convention in this respect.

Other materials incorporated into Kersh's furniture suggest the same pattern of limited involvement with sources outside his community. The overlays that decorate his beds are thick slices of figured wood that appear to be custom made rather than bought. Among the remains from Kersh's shop are rough planks of crotch and burl wood and overlay blanks that bear the canted kerf marks of a frame saw, indicating their hand-cut origin. Turned components of his furniture appear to be universally his own work. Rosettes were commercially available, but Kersh produced them in his shop. Blanks roughed out in octagonal form and scored with a center were in the shop, along with partially completed domes of the type he used on bed posts (fig. 4.8). Finials, half-spindles, and scraps from circular shelf brackets were also found in the shop, corresponding to parts on his beds, china presses, and washstands.²²

The most telling examples of his about face on commercial alternatives are carved headboards and drawer pulls. Firms like A. Roda and Company of Rochester, New York, sold arched headboard crests very similar to one on a Kersh bed (fig. 4.9). But his patterns for scrolled crests and his use of an eight-pointed "flower" stamp on the crests as well as other furniture lead to the conclusion that Kersh did his own carving. The drawer pulls represent a still more significant choice because multiples were required for a single case piece and the cost of the commercial variety was so low--35 cents a dozen, or 6 cents for the couple needed on a pie safe that might have sold for \$8 (fig. 4.10). All of the pulls are hand carved, so it is difficult to assign them to a factory or to a small cabinet shop. Those decorated with a flower stamp (fig. 4.11) and others that are crudely consistent with Kersh's carving elsewhere--copies of mass-produced designs in which the original fruit and nut have become vague bulges--likely came from his shop.

Where Kersh could imitate mass-produced designs using hand processes he did so, although not exclusively. Some of the hardware he used was definitely purchased, including wooden keyhole escutcheons and half-round molding

strips for the fronts of drawers and cupboard doors. The rectangular shelf brackets on his dressers may be commercial as well. His decision to make or to buy was evidently not dictated by cost alone. He chose to carve and turn pieces that he could not have made faster than could factories in the North or Midwest. Perhaps local availability of these components changed over the course of his working life. The relevant point is that Kersh found it worthwhile to imitate factory designs in his small-scale production.

Kersh used only mass-produced metal hardware. The types he chose were closely adapted to fashion. On Renaissance revival dressers he used brass and ebonized-wood drop pulls (fig. 3.7) of the kind widely used on showier revival furniture made by large manufacturers. On bedroom suites with Eastlake-inspired design he used nickel-plated ring pulls (fig. 4.12) similar to those illustrated in Hints on Household Taste. The pulls, catches, and hinges applied to his furniture would have been available at the Bridgewater store of William J. Arey, who advertised hardware and painter's supplies in 1894. A crate from the Sipe and Arey store, which had taken over the hardware business of Miller and Wise by 1903, was among the contents of the Kersh shop.²³ Similarly, the paints,

oils, and solvents used by Kersh were probably ordered through local dealers. The general store of Landes and Bell in Centerville (then called Milnesville) billed Kersh in January of 1887 for his purchases in the previous year. These included turpentine, paint, nails, screws, glass, mirror plate, and hardware--the latter comprising nearly half of the total amount due.²⁴ A dealer in Harrisonburg sold Kersh kegs of lead white. On the bottom of one of the kegs a paper label identifies the local dealer and a Baltimore wholesaler, Hirshberg, Hollander and Company, suppliers of "glass, paint, oil, varnish, &c." Powdered iron pigments found in the Kersh shop also came from Baltimore, as indicated on the B&O Express shipment label on the bag.²⁵

Kersh was familiar with other sources of supply outside the Valley. A crate from John Wilkinson of Chicago, supplier of scroll saw goods, was in his shop; Wilkinson may have supplied the blades or parts for the scroll saw or the "turning lathe and scroll saw" (a combination machine) listed in the 1905 inventory of the shop.²⁶ But Kersh did not order from Chicago directly. The local addressee for the crate was Jonathan A. Wise at the Mount Crawford Depot, about 3 miles northeast of Centerville. That he continued to deal with local

suppliers and substitute his own hand work for mass-produced parts suggests that Kersh rejected commercial alternatives that would have changed his relation to others in his community.

Ready-made furniture was not Kersh's line of business; that much is evident from a comparison of the fifteen beds examined in this study. Only three of those beds, including one dated to about 1896, are identical in pattern and material. The other dozen vary widely, and through the use of overlays and profiles of head and foot boards, the beds seem purposely manipulated to be distinct. Even in the case of the most abundant and consistent type of Kersh furniture, adult rocking chairs, there are cane-back and slat-back varieties. Of the former, with arms, there are fourteen chairs in three variations, in both walnut and lighter hardwoods, some with pinstriping and some without. Orders for these chairs confirm the custom nature of his work. A scrap board from the shop shows a sketch for a desk for "Rev. Mr. Thompson," who was the minister at St. Michaels from 1887 to 1892. Below the sketch is an added notation: "Rocking chair/one inch higher in seat/arms 2 in higher."²⁷ Other customers specified variations of Kersh's work when making orders. An 1875 postcard from Isaac Myers of Green Mountain, Virginia,

requests: "I would like if you would make me a split Bottom Rocking Chair.. . . I don't want the seat too high from the floor but want the back and arms high as usual."²⁸

Kersh sold his furniture locally. The handful of surviving orders range only as far as Port Republic, a little more than 10 miles from the Kersh farm. The furniture included in this study was owned primarily by nine descendants of George Kersh, Adam's brother. The reasons for this imbalance are circumstantial; George's descendants were more easily traced through their continuing connection with the homeplace. Furniture owned by the fourteen children of Adam's sisters, Eliza and Margaret, is underrepresented, as are customers outside of the family. Nevertheless, all of the furniture attributed to Kersh whose original ownership can be traced was bought within the two-county area of Augusta and Rockingham. The majority was owned by residents of the Centerville area who were kin to the maker.

No advertisements for Kersh's furniture were found in the local paper, the Bridgewater Herald, or in the papers of the two nearby county seats, Harrisonburg and Staunton. The few documents connected with his sales that survive indicate that he marketed through kinship ties and

by word of mouth. Customers sent letters or postcards or came by the shop. An 1877 card (fig. 4.13) from Rebecca Houff in Staunton addressed to "Mr. Cash" (as his name was pronounced locally) gives a sense of the direct nature of his sales and the familiarity that customers had with his products. "Please make me a chair just like Mrs Hamrics and send it to Joseph Houffs if you get a chance and i will pay all expense," she wrote.²⁹

Whether her order, or any other, was paid in cash or by barter or labor exchange is not known. The prices noted on boards in the shop are figured in dollars and cents. Scattered references to the prices for individual pieces of furniture were made by Kersh on scraps of wood and paper. A table is listed at \$3.50, a pie safe at \$8, and a cottage bed at \$11. But no dates are connected with the prices. The only hint about relative value in these jottings is the mention of the cost of items in gold and "greenbacks," a slang term developed after the Civil War for U.S. government notes. Kersh charged \$15 in greenbacks or \$10 in gold for a china press; a set of chairs, two rockers, and a baby rocker cost \$10 in paper money or \$7.50 in gold.³⁰

Transactions between Kersh and his customers

represent choices to reject other furniture available locally. A consideration of the customers' alternatives sheds light on the meaning of Kersh's furniture for those who chose to buy from the Centerville cabinetmaker. Furniture factories and showrooms in nearby Bridgewater and in the county seats of Harrisonburg and Staunton were one source of competition. Before the Civil War, Harrisonburg had the cabinetmaking and bedstead factory of Miller and Clower, who were also upholsterers and dealers. The owners, G. B. Clower and B. F. Miller, continued after the war in separate shops, the former advertising as a cabinetmaker and undertaker and the latter as a maker of split-bottom chairs.³¹ Bridgewater, with a population of about 900 in 1883, had the Rockingham Furniture factory of Thuma, Dovel and Sellers in 1897.³² A description of Humphreys's factory written a few years after it was established made an important distinction about the type of work produced there. Humphreys's operation was a "home manufactory," meaning a native Virginia business. It was built in response to the brisk local furniture trade of the prosperous 1880s and, more notably, the increased "demand for Virginia furniture," as opposed to Northern goods, or "town" manufactures. The desirability of Virginia furniture is not explained, but the article does point out the local preference for native products.³³

In each of the three local towns, furniture dealers stocked imported goods in showrooms. John H. Long offered "by far the largest stock ever seen in Harrisonburg" at Long's Furniture Rooms. An advertisement in July 1861, three months into the war, announced that he had "Not Seceded Yet" and had "just received another lot of that splendid New Furniture."³⁴ Long covered the market for local goods through his cabinetmaking enterprise north of town, which had its own foreman and agent. In the early 1870s, S. M. Wilkes was selling "walnut marble top, cottage, and all kinds of parlor sets of furniture" at his warerooms on Main Street in Staunton.³⁵ Solomon G. Driver of Bridgewater bought the stock of Humphreys's original furniture store in 1878 and opened a "huge store" that sold primarily Northern work.³⁶ The implication is that local dealers carried fashionable revival furniture made in factories of the North and Midwest.

Makers outside the Valley promoted their goods directly in local papers. H. F. Zimmerman and Son of Washington, D.C., advertised upholstered parlor suites and chamber sets, as well as updated furniture forms such as invitation sets, etageres, and hatracks, in the Staunton Spectator in 1865.³⁷ A Richmond maker of furniture and

mattresses was advertising in the same period. By 1885 the large mail-order houses of Sears, Roebuck and Company and Montgomery Ward and Company offered another option to Valley customers. In its 1895 catalog, Montgomery Ward listed for sale fifteen styles of chamber suites, mostly oak, that could be shipped by rail from its warehouse in Chicago. That residents in the Centerville area patronized mail-order companies is evidenced by a Montgomery Ward bedroom suite (fig. 4.14) owned by Kersh's neighbor, Stephen F. Wise. Significantly, the suite was purchased two years after Kersh died; before his death, the Wise family had bought several suites from him.³⁸

Factory and mail-order furniture were not Kersh's most direct competition, however. His custom work made stylish goods available without eliminating direct exchange between the maker and customer. In the North River district of Augusta County, there were half a dozen cabinet shops other than Kersh's to choose from in 1870 (not including carpenters and shops that produced less than \$500 worth of goods annually).³⁹ Furniture similar in design to Kersh's work was made by J. E. James of Mossy Creek, 3 miles northwest of Centerville. A bed (fig. 4.15) labeled by James corresponds to the simple, arched-headboard beds made by Kersh, although James's turnings are less adept.

In nearby Mt. Sidney, Alexander Stuart (Sandy) Coffman made chairs and cabinet furniture. Coffman, who was fourteen years younger than Kersh and listed as a "cabinetmaker's apprentice" in the 1860 census, was in the same regiment as Kersh during the war. Although his occupation was later given as "carpenter," his ledgers of 1882-1905 indicate that he made furniture in a similar range to Kersh. Examples of Coffman's work still owned in the area show that his split-bottom chairs were nearly identical in design to Kersh's, although construction features differed. China presses and washstands made by Coffman lacked the overlays, moldings, and carving that made Kersh's furniture current in fashion.⁴⁰

Customers bought from Kersh, Coffman, and James in part because they were trusted and familiar. Evidently local pride influenced choices too, if the Rockingham Furniture factory's shift to "home" manufactures is any indicator. What distinguished Kersh's work from that of other local makers was that he supplied customary workmanship and the status of "town" manufactures in the same product. In this respect, Kersh provided a bridge to popular culture for a conservative, rural society.

Chapter 4

ENDNOTES

1. Letter from Adam Kersh to A. H. Pirkey, Port Republic, Va., October 24, 1868, Lorraine Kersh Bosserman, Staunton, Va.
2. Identification and dating of Windsor chair features for this study was done with the assistance of Nancy Goyne Evans, former Senior Research Associate, Winterthur Museum.
3. Eileen and Richard Dubrow, Furniture Made in America 1875-1905 (Exton, Pa.: Schiffer Publishing, 1982), 100-103.
4. Donald C. Peirce, "Mitchell and Rammelsberg, Cincinnati Furniture Manufacturers 1847-1881," Winterthur Portfolio 13 (1979): 209-11.
5. Bridgewater Herald, February 23, 1894, Alexander Mack Library, Bridgewater College, Bridgewater, Va.
6. Dresser owned by Janet Myerhoeffer, Dayton, Va. It is stenciled on the back of the case "From Mitchell & Rammelsberg Furniture Co. Cincinnati, O." The peg-and-scallop joints on the front and rear corners of the drawers were made by a Knapp dovetailing machine, which was acquired by the company sometime in 1873. See Patricia M. Tice, "The Knapp Dovetailing Machine," Antiques (May 1983): 1071.
7. George T. Ferris, Gems of the Centennial Exhibition (New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1877), 133. Quoted in Peirce, "Mitchell and Rammelsberg," 222.
8. Dubrow, Made in America, 92-94, 263, 266, 276.
9. Bridgewater Herald, November 30, 1883, and October 28, 1904.
10. Staunton Spectator, January 8, 1861, advertisement for the New Furniture Store, Staunton Public Library, Staunton, Va.; Rockingham Register, July 5, 1861, advertisement for John H. Long's Furniture Rooms, Carrier Library, James

Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va.

11. Charles L. Eastlake, Hints on Household Taste, 5th Am. ed. (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1877), 84, 219.

12. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Federal Population Census 1860, Burke's Mill District, Augusta County, National Archives, Philadelphia, microfilm, roll 1333: 923.

13. Charles Hummel, "The Dominys of East Hampton, Long Island, and Their Furniture," in Country Cabinetwork and Simple City Furniture, ed. John D. Morse, (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1970), 35.

14. St. Michaels Church Record Book, St. Michaels Church, Centerville, Va.

15. Appraisement bill of personal property belonging to Adam W. Kersh, May 9, 1905, Augusta County Courthouse, Staunton, Will Book 59: 488. Listing is for "1 Circular Rip Saw" for \$10.

16. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Federal Manufacturing Census 1850 and Federal Manufacturing Census 1870, 2nd District, Augusta County, Virginia State Library and Archives (VSLA), Richmond, Va. Average production of sawmills was \$873 in 1850 and \$1,206 in 1870, representing a 38 percent increase.

17. Rockingham Register, February 12, 1887.

18. Staunton Spectator, January 15, 1891.

19. Information from Hiram Arey, Centerville, Va., in conversation August 3, 1991.

20. Information from Glen Wise, Centerville, in conversation July 18, 1991 and August 3, 1991.

21. Woods used in Southern furniture are described in John Bivins, Jr., The Furniture of Coastal North Carolina 1700-1820 (Winston Salem, N.C.: Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 1988), 76-87; Derita Coleman Williams and Nathan Harsh, The Art and Mystery of Tennessee Furniture and Its Makers Through 1850 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society and Tennessee State Museum Foundation, 1988), 33-36; Louis G. Locke, "Antique Furniture of the Shenandoah Valley," Virginia Cavalcade (Winter 1975): 109-10.; and J. Roderick Moore, "Wythe County, Virginia,

Punched Tin: Its Influence and Imitators," Antiques (September 1984): 602.

22. Kersh collection, Museum of American Frontier Culture (MAFC), Staunton, Va.

23. Bridgewater Herald, February 23, 1894. An advertisement for furniture at Sipe and Arey appeared in the Herald, June 19, 1903. Wooden box from Sipe and Arey is in Kersh collection, MAFC, box 5.

24. Bill to A. W. Kersh from Landes and Bell, Milnesville, Va., January 1, 1887, Lorraine Kersh Bosserman.

25. Kersh collection, MAFC; kegs, boxes 13 and 23. Analysis of paint and pigments was done February 28, 1991 at the Analytical Lab, Winterthur Museum. One keg contained lead white and the other was encrusted with calcium carbonate (chalk) used in whitewash. The powdered pigments were umber (box FF) and yellow ochre (box 2). Pigments were used as colorants in a medium of oil, perhaps mixed with resin.

26. Kersh collection, MAFC; crate, box R. Lathe and scroll saw listed in Appraisement Bill, 488.

27. Kersh collection, MAFC, box O.

28. Postcard to Adam Kersh from Isaac Myers, June 18, 1875, Lorraine Kersh Bosserman.

29. Postcard to Adam Kersh from Rebecca Houff, April 3, 1877, Lorraine Kersh Bosserman.

30. Joseph Richie furniture order, n.d., Lorraine Kersh Bosserman.

31. Rockingham Register, March 29, 1861 and March 2, 1866.

32. C. E. May, Life Under Four Flags in the North River Basin of Virginia (Verona, Va.: McClure Press, 1976), 505.

33. Agricola, "Bridgewater, Its History, Present Enterprise and Industry and Future Prospects," Valley Virginian, Staunton, September 27, 1883, Alexander Mack Library.

34. Rockingham Register, July 5, 1861.

35. Staunton Spectator, September 5, 1871.

36. Agricola, "Bridgewater."

37. Staunton Spectator, October 24, 1865.
38. Information from Glen Wise, in conversation August 3, 1991.
39. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Federal Manufacturing Census 1870, 2nd District, Augusta County, VSLA.
40. Coffman furniture and ledgers owned by Ralph Coffman, Mt. Sidney, Va. George Lott of Chalfont, Pa., kindly shared his research on Sandy Coffman to aid this study.



Figure 4.1 Chair in the Renaissance revival style made by Mitchell and Rammelsberg Furniture Company about 1877. Gaar collection, Richmond, Indiana. Courtesy, Decorative Arts Photographic Collection, Winterthur Library (DAPC).

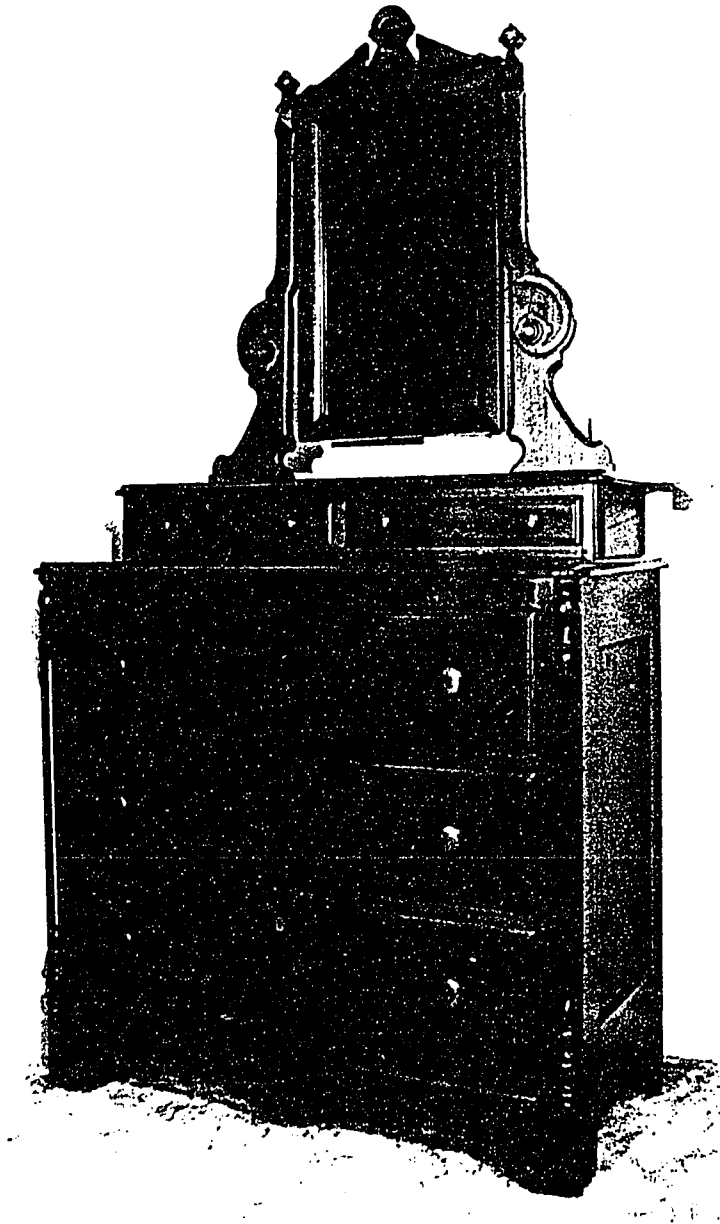


Figure 4.2 Dresser labeled by Mitchell and Rammelsberg Furniture Company made with a dovetailing machine. Owner Janet Myerhoeffer, Dayton.

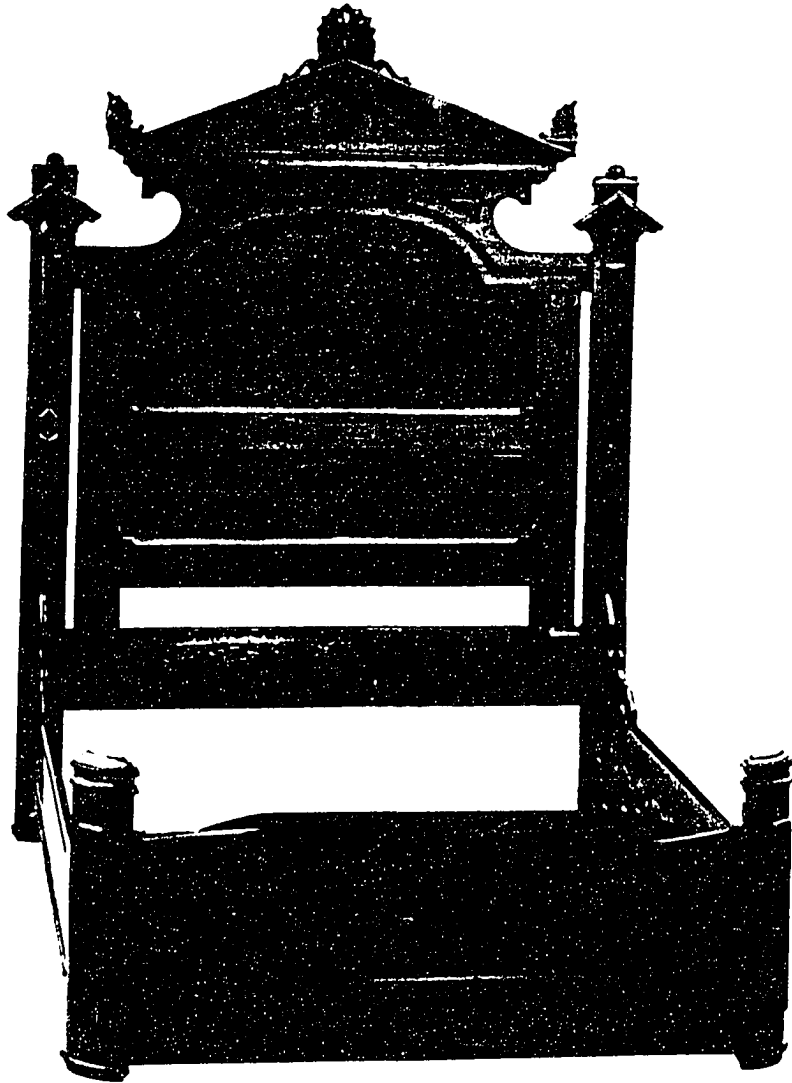


Figure 4.3 Mitchell and Rammelsberg bed (c. 1875) with sloped pediment and decorative flaring "wings" similar to those on Kersh beds. Collection of Indianapolis Museum of Art (#80.630). Courtesy, DAPC.



Figure 4.4 Mitchell and Rammelsberg bed (c. 1877) with figured overlays and volutes commonly found on Kersh beds. Gaar collection, Richmond, Indiana. Courtesy, DAPC.

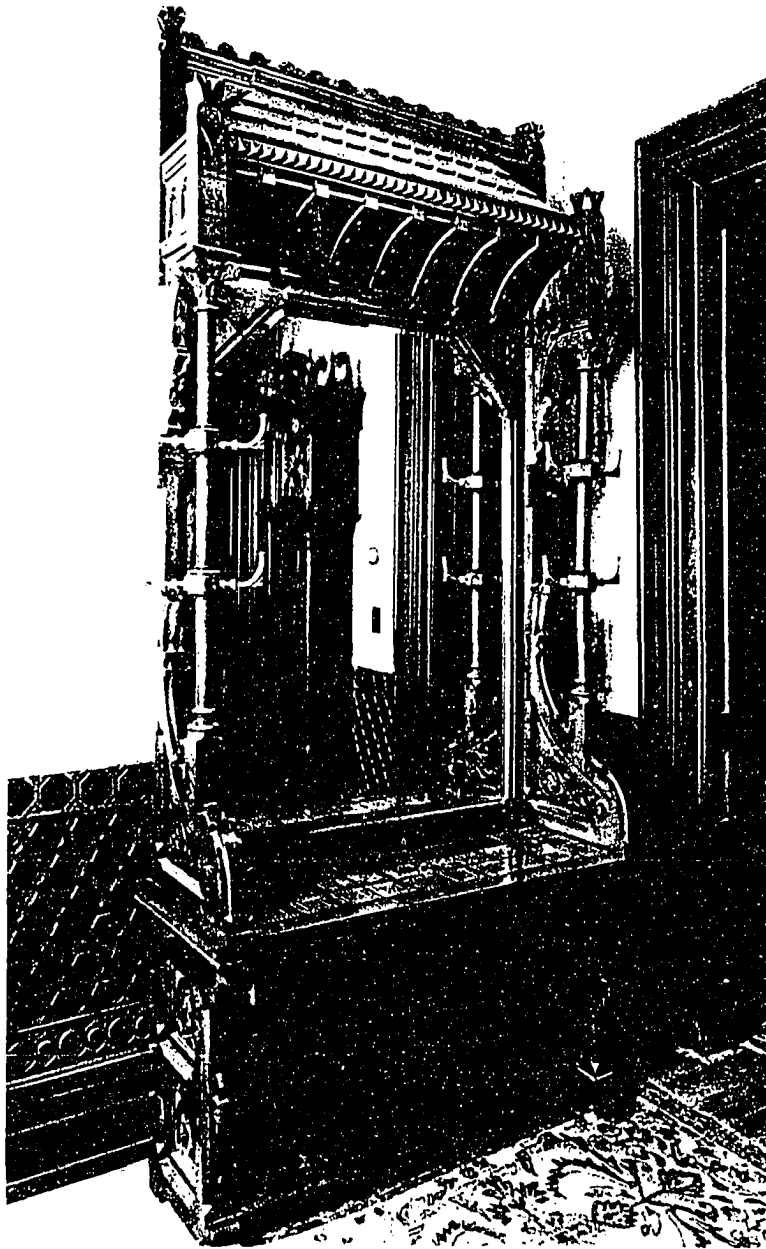


Figure 4.5 Hallstand (c. 1877) by Mitchell and Rammelsberg patterned on design reform principles of Charles Eastlake. Gaar collection, Richmond, Indiana. Courtesy, DAPC.

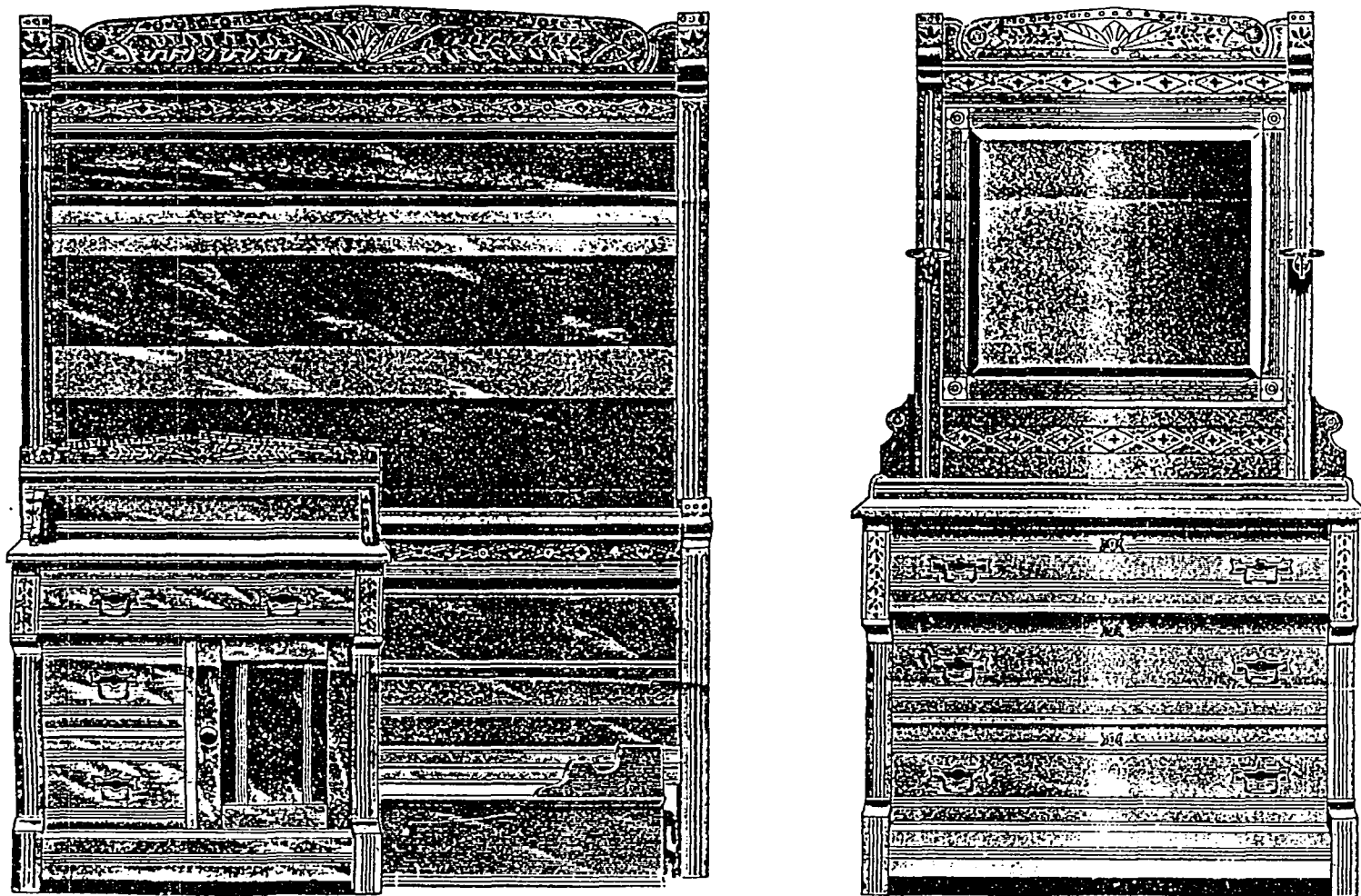


Figure 4.6 Bedroom suite with shallow carving, reeding, and straight contours borrowed from Eastlake designs. From Kent Manufacturing Company, Illustrated Catalogue (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1881), n.p. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library.

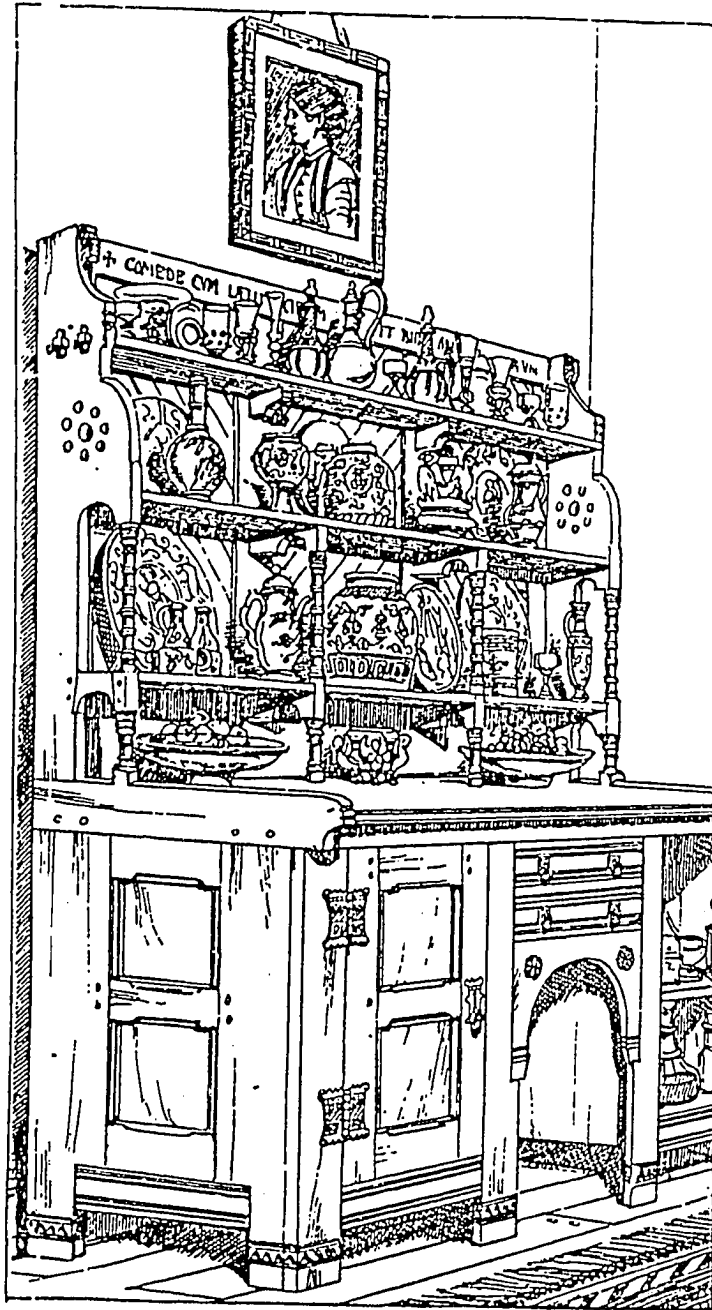


Figure 4.7 Drawing of a sideboard by Charles Eastlake. From Eastlake, Hints on Household Taste, 84.

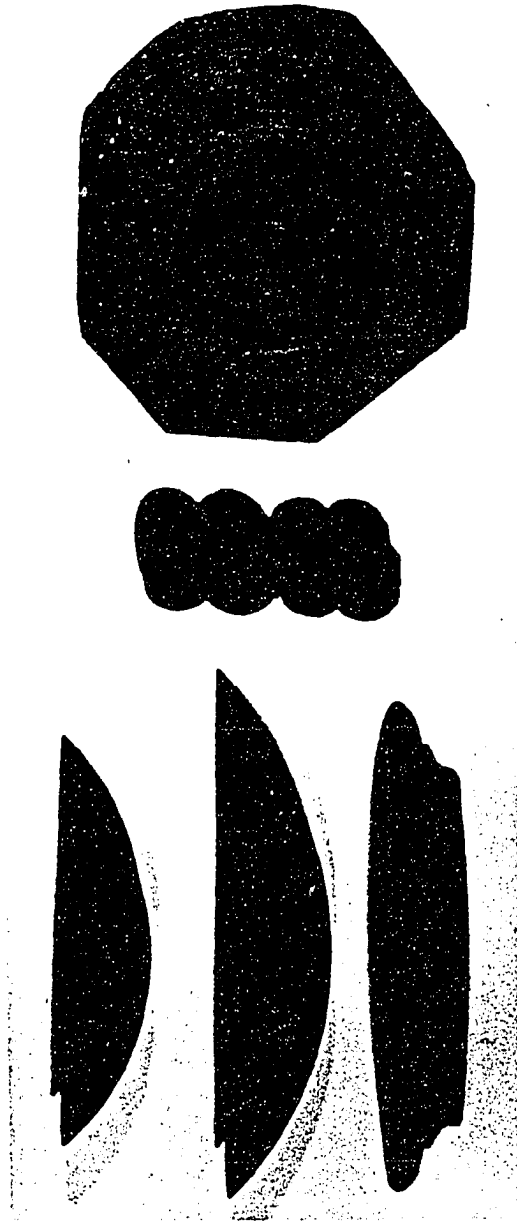


Figure 4.8 Turned elements from Kersh's shop. Kersh collection, MAFC.



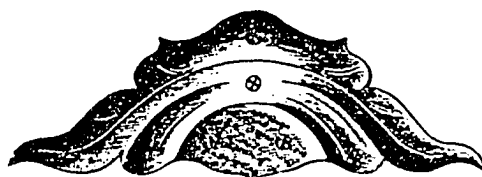
Figure 4.9 Carved headboard sold by A. Roda. From A. Roda, Illustrated Catalogue of Solid Wood Furniture Carvings (Rochester, N.Y., 1876), 14. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection.

Walnut & Chestnut Carved Drawer Handles

MADE OF

SOLID WOOD.

PRICES REDUCED.



No. 6. 1 Inch Thick. Three Sizes.

SIZES,
 $7 \times 2\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
 $5 \times 1\frac{7}{8}$ "
 $4\frac{1}{4} \times 1\frac{3}{8}$ "

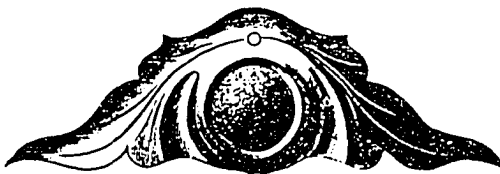
Price,
 Per Dozen,
 30 cts.



No. 7. 1 Inch Thick. Three Sizes.

SIZES,
 $7 \times 2\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
 $5 \times 1\frac{7}{8}$ "
 $4\frac{1}{4} \times 1\frac{3}{8}$ "

Price,
 Per Dozen,
 35 cts.



No. 8. 1 Inch Thick. Two Sizes.

SIZES,
 $7 \times 2\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
 $5 \times 1\frac{7}{8}$ "

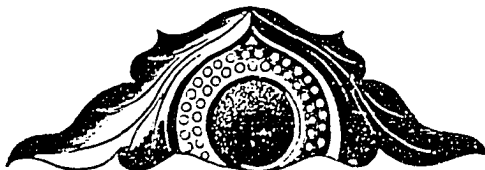
Price,
 Per Dozen,
 35 cts.



No. 9. 1 Inch Thick. Three Sizes.

SIZES,
 $7 \times 2\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
 $5 \times 1\frac{7}{8}$ "
 $4\frac{1}{4} \times 1\frac{3}{8}$ "

Price,
 Per Dozen,
 35 cts.



No. 9 1/2. 1 inch Thick. Two Sizes.

SIZES,
 $7 \times 2\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
 $5 \times 1\frac{7}{8}$ "

Price,
 Per Dozen,
 35 cts.

Figure 4.10 Carved drawer handles by A. Roda, of the type used by Kersh on case furniture. From A. Roda, *Illustrated Catalogue*, 2. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection.

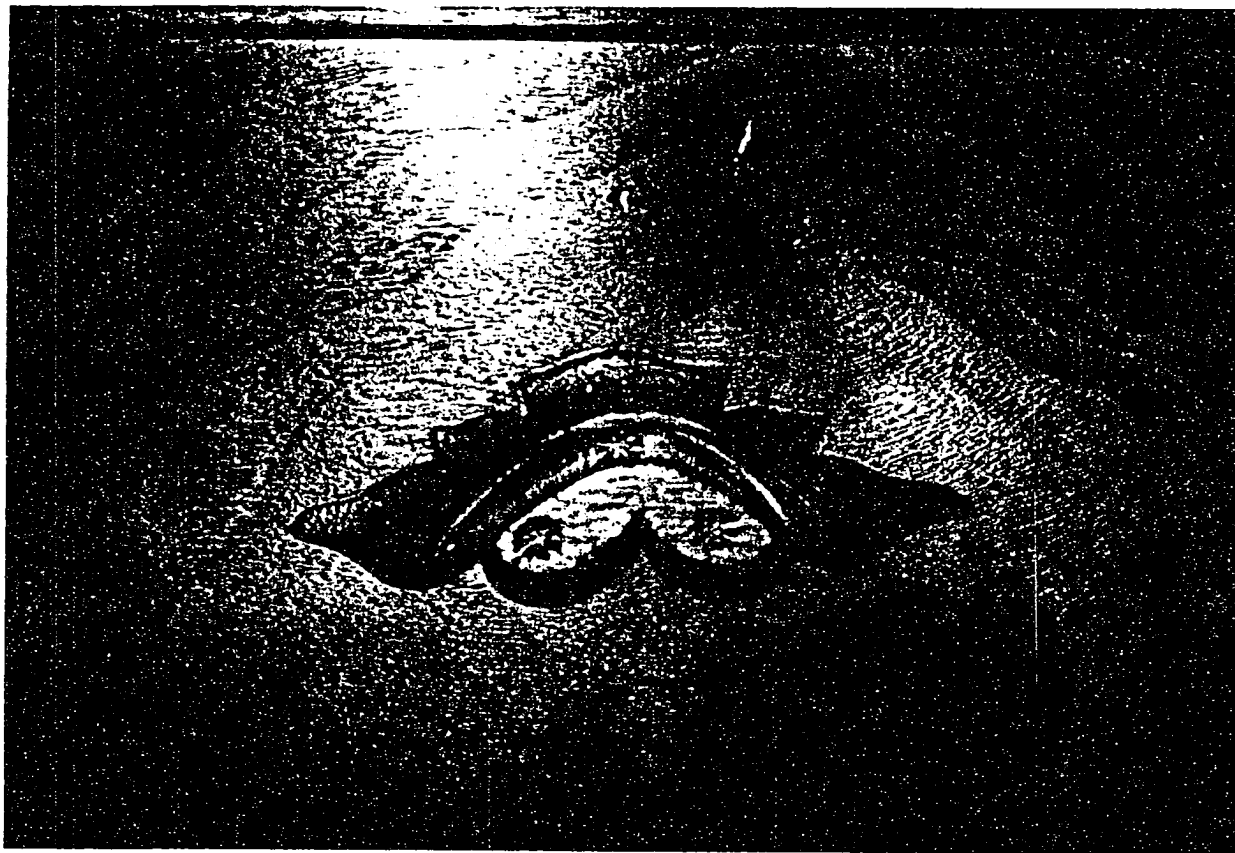


Figure 4.11 Drawer handle with floral stamp on a pie safe made by Kersh. Owner Martha Shull Peake, Wise.



Figure 4.12 Detail of Kersh end table drawer showing commercial stamped-metal pull. Owner Charles Lenford Kersh, Harrisonburg.

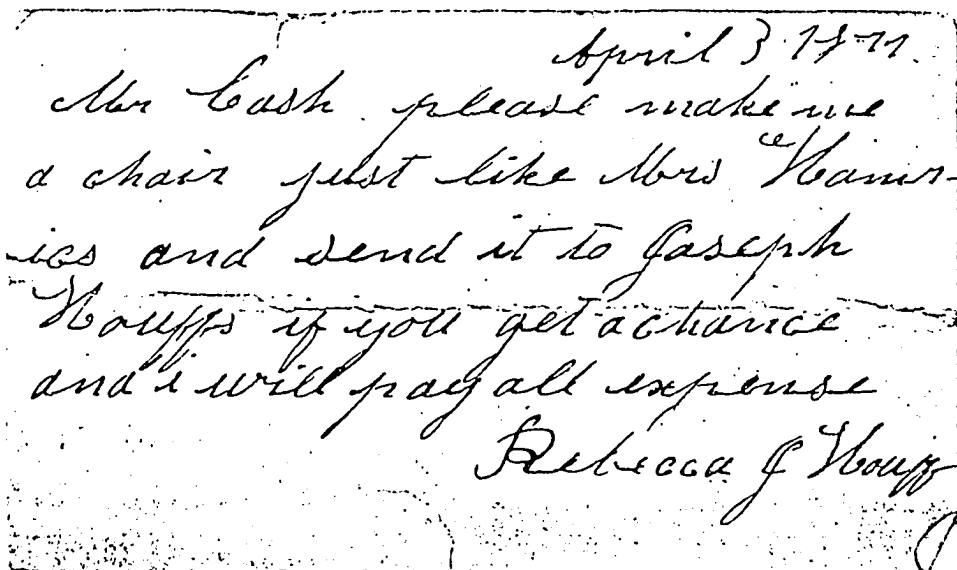
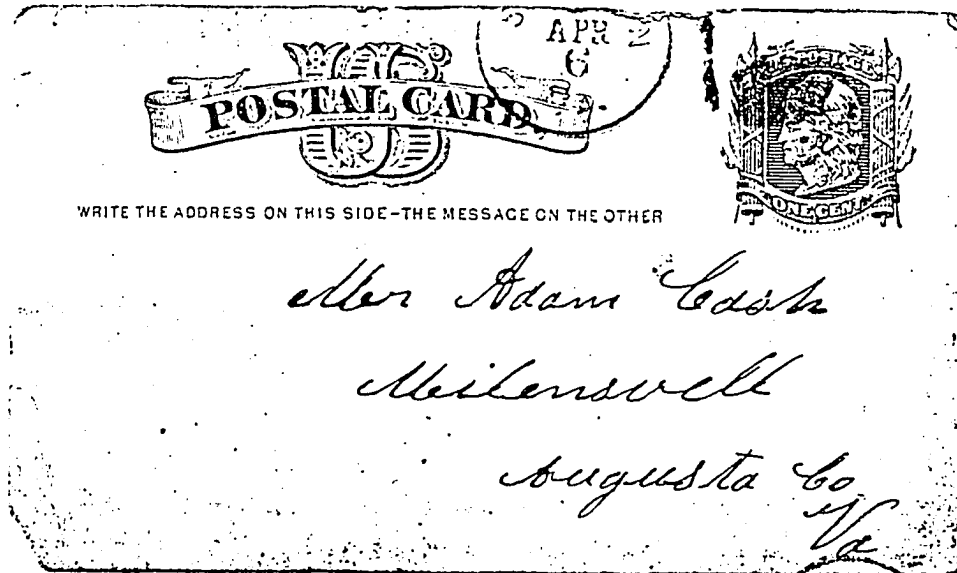


Figure 4.13 Postcard chair order from Rebecca J. Houff of Staunton to Kersh, April 3, 1877. Owner Lorraine Kersh Bosserman, Staunton.

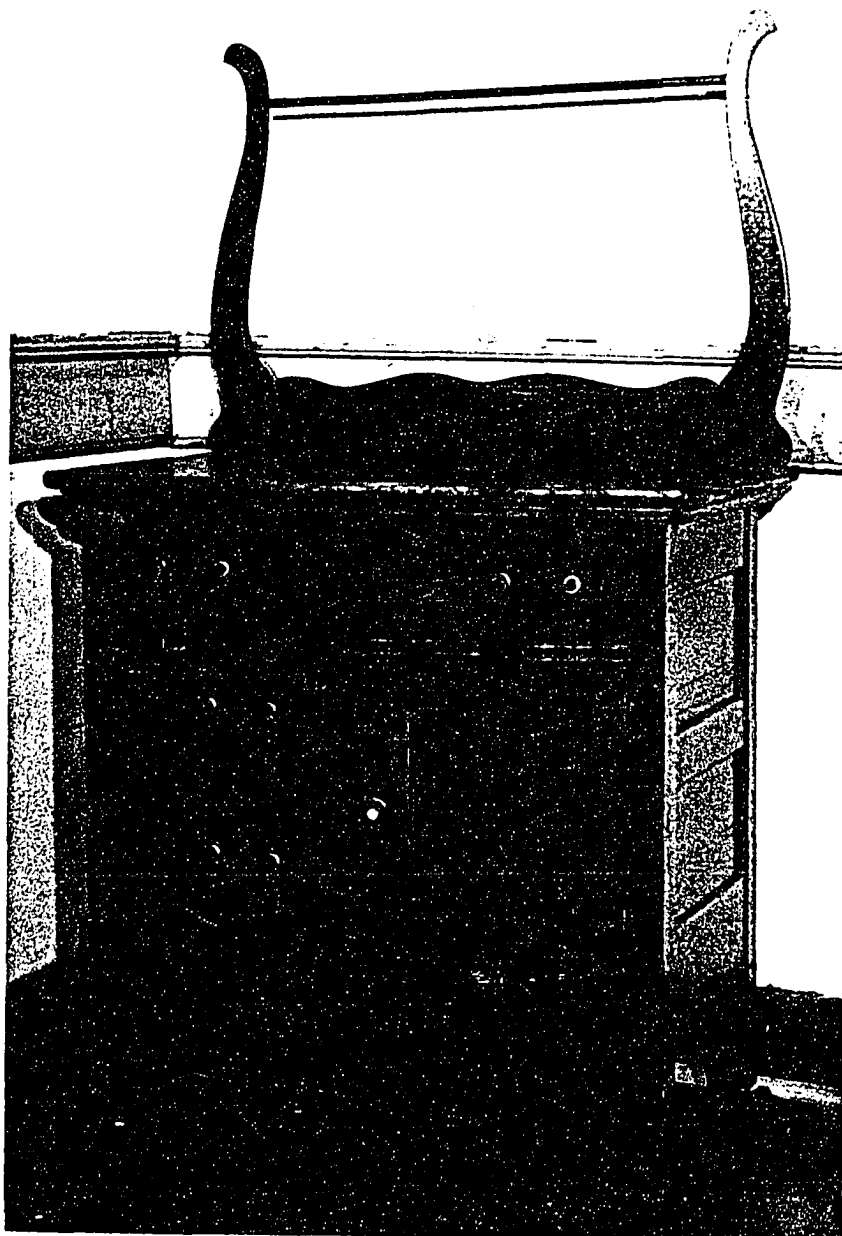


Figure 4.14 Washstand (1907) from Montgomery Ward, bought by Kersh's neighbor Stephen F. Wise. Owners Carlyn, Glen, and Stephen H. Wise, Centerville.

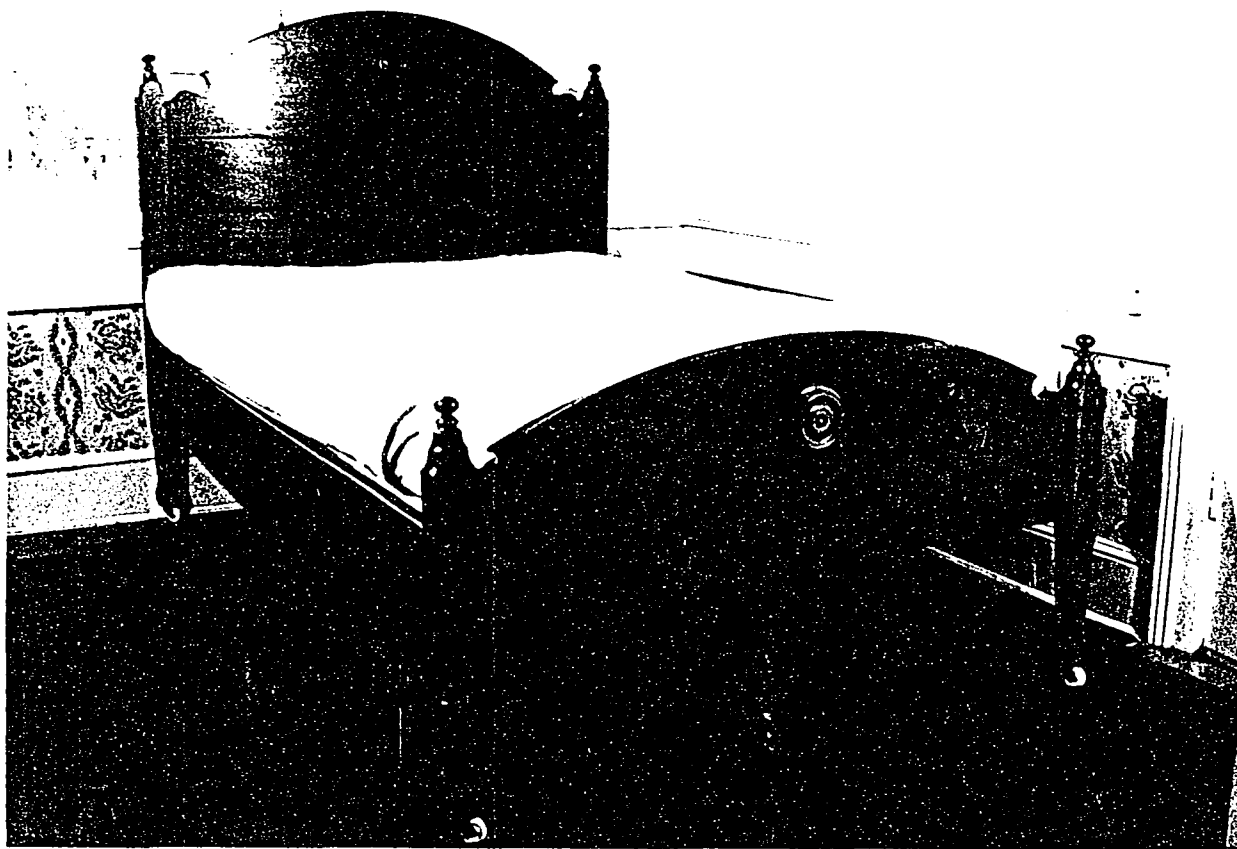


Figure 4.15 Bed made by a possible competitor, J. E. James of Mossy Creek, showing arched headboard and rosettes found on Kersh beds. Owner Lawrence Bowers, Mossy Creek.

Chapter 5 CATALOG

Furniture described in the text that follows is identified as the work of Adam Kersh. About 170 pieces of furniture attributed to Kersh were considered in the course of this study. Almost fifty case pieces, tables, and beds and more than seventy chairs--about 70 percent of the total--are recognized here as Kersh's work. Measurements are given in inches. Woods are identified visually. Communities in which furniture owners reside are in Virginia unless otherwise noted.

Beds

A. Simplest of the beds made by Kersh are those with a single arch crowning the headboard and posts left square. Embellishment is limited to single overlays of figured wood at head and foot and to finials, which are integral with the posts.

Despite its plainness, this bed (fig. 5.1) has

features commonly found on Kersh's work. Boards at the head and foot are constructed of frames and panels. The rails flare in width at both ends, where notched blocks (fig. 5.2) are screwed to the inside of the rails to hold slat supports. The slats, typically seven or eight, run head to foot--opposite the pattern on most beds. Walnut is used throughout the bed frame, except for the hidden head rail.

Four beds of this type were owned in Kersh's family; two were on the family farm until the mid-1980s. Beds of ornate design were used in the Kersh household along with modest beds, suggesting that the sparse designs were for children. Turnings in the shape of urns, beehives, trees, and spools enliven Kersh's beds. Discarded finials similar to those on his beds were found in the Kersh shop (fig. 5.3).

Construction and condition: Head and foot boards are frame-and-panel construction. Frames are mortised into posts and secured with large (5/16-inch) pegs. Rails are attached to posts with original cast-iron brackets. Corner blocks designed by Kersh to hold slat supports are still on the side rails, although rails were extended by 6 inches in 1986. Slat supports are refitted with angle irons screwed

directly to the rails. Casters (removed) are plated cast iron with wooden wheels.

Marks: Rails are numbered with gouge marks on bottom edge near each end, (, ((, (((, and blank.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; slats, slat supports, and head rail, softwood.

Dimensions: L. 81 3/4; W. 53 7/8; H. (head) 60 1/8, (foot) 32 1/4.

Ownership: Warren and Julian Shull, Centerville; Ellen Diehl Weaver, Weyer's Cave, 1985.

Related examples: Scott Burtner, Mt. Solon; Warren and Julian Shull, Centerville (sold 1985, location unknown); Lelia Huffman Skidmore, Dayton.

B. Four beds with identical carving were made by Kersh; all are dated by family tradition to the last decade of Kersh's career. The shallow carving of wheat sheaf, scrolls, volutes, vines, and oak leaf (fig. 5.4) are typical of Eastlake-inspired furniture of the late 1870s

and 1880s.

Kersh's neighbor Stephen Wise bought this bed (fig. 5.5) about 1896, when he was fifteen. According to family tradition, when Stephen's sister Emma was married in 1901, their father ordered a bedroom set for her and, thinking ahead, asked Kersh for two more sets for the younger sisters Ella and Lucretia. The dressers and washstands are the same for each set, but the beds are different, and none matches the dressers in its carving. The bed made for Ella is identical to her brother's made five years earlier, and the one made for Emma has the same carving. The youngest daughter's bed is a different type with a flat pediment on the headboard. Suites of bedroom and parlor furniture were first introduced in the 1850s, and their matching decoration encouraged customers to buy in multiples (see fig. 4.6). For Kersh's neighbors, the concept of a set had more to do with the material, or perhaps the maker, than decorative motifs.

Construction and condition: Crest is let into top of posts and held to each post by a dowel on the back side. Recessed panels at head and foot are framed on all sides and spandrels are nailed in each corner of the panels. A molding strip is pegged to the top of the footboard.

Corner blocks and slat supports are typical of Kersh's work.

Marks: Proper left rail has chisel mark "I" on bottom edge near footboard.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; slats and slat supports, softwood.

Dimensions: L. 76 3/4; W. 54 1/4; H. 70 1/8.

Ownership: Stephen Franklin Wise, Centerville; Carlyn, Glen, and Stephen H. Wise, Centerville.

Related examples: Etta Byerly Grimm, Linville; Lucille Huffman, Bridgewater; E. Ray Wine, Mt. Solon; Vesta Glick Zirkle, Broadway.

C. The contours of this bed (fig. 5.6) closely resemble Kersh's simplest bed designs, except that a scrolled crest crowns its headboard arch (fig. 5.7). Carved crests similar to this one were sold in the 1870s by A. Roda of Rochester, New York (fig. 4.9), but Kersh evidently made his own. Without exception, the carved headboards on his

beds are stamped with a small, decorative "flower" motif. The crest on this bed and a related example are dotted on the perimeter with the same floral stamp. Also, patterns for two scroll-edged crests were found in Kersh's shop (fig. 5.8). Patterns and blanks for arched molding strips were in the shop as well.

The slightness of variations between similar beds made by Kersh is striking. The dimensions and construction of this bed and a related example are nearly identical, but the sweep of the headboard arch is different and rosettes are substituted for circular overlays. Kersh catered to a custom furniture market, as demonstrated by his constant effort to create variations, however minor, in the decoration and contours of similar furniture forms. This bed was bought by a son of Kersh's niece Georgianna; another like it was owned in the family of Kersh's brother-in-law, Daniel M. Craun.

Construction and condition: Headboard is frame-and-panel construction; footboard is solid. A molding strip is nailed to bottom edge of footboard. Headboard arch is laminated to the top frame and extends behind the crest to support it. Crest is mounted on a thick molding, which is nailed to the front of the arch. Rails are replaced.

Original rails, which survive, have 2 1/2-inch extension on one end and no corner brackets; notched softwood supports are nailed to inside of rails.

Marks: Number "2" in pencil on inside of one original rail; other rail not examined.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; slats, slat supports, and head rail, softwood.

Dimensions: L. 79 1/4; W. 53 1/2; H. (head) 64 1/4, (foot) 32 1/2.

Ownership: Edward and Gertrude Allen; Ethel Allen Foley, Mt. Sidney.

Related example: Elanor and Edith Glick, Bridgewater.

D. Kersh made at least three beds with sloped pediments broken by a crest or shield. This bed (fig. 5.9) and one other are embellished with applied half-spindles, which also appear on a china press and washstand made by him. The broken-pediment beds are distinguished by a greater amount of decorative detail, which presumably made them

more expensive. The posts are adorned with rectangular figured overlays and plinths. Separate turned finials top the head posts and domes cap the foot posts. The crest is a curious combination of a carved "shuttlecock" shape flanked by flaring "wings" (fig. 5.10). Similar wing shapes protrude on the sloped pediment of a Mitchell and Rammelsberg bed made about 1875 (fig. 4.3).

This bed was owned by Kersh's niece, Maude Reeves, for whom he made his only signed piece of furniture, a small chest. The bed was in the house of Maude and William Reeves from the time it was made until 1989.

Construction and condition: Both head and foot are frame-and-panel construction; on a related example the footboard is solid. Plinths and overlays are nailed to posts. Lengthwise slats and corner blocks are Kersh's usual pattern. A third slat support is added widthwise at center.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; slats and slat supports, softwood.

Dimensions: L. $76 \frac{5}{8}$; W. $53 \frac{1}{2}$; H. (head) $61 \frac{1}{2}$, (foot) $35 \frac{7}{8}$.

Ownership: Maude Kersh Reeves; Ruth Reeves Wine Weaver, Mt. Solon; Lela Wine Southard, Massanetta Springs, 1989.

Related examples: Geneva Craun, Harrisonburg; Warren and Julian Shull, Centerville (two sold 1985, location unknown).

E. Pierced fretwork was a popular feature on so-called Eastlake furniture made from 1870 to 1890, despite Charles Eastlake's precept that ornament should reveal the character of materials. Kersh made both beds and dressers with pierced fretwork crests, although only one such bed (fig. 5.11) is known. In this design he clearly imitated the popular version, rather than the principles, of Eastlake. Kersh eliminated the scrolled crest that Eastlake abhorred as senseless and ugly and replaced it with a rectangular headboard and posts that reflect their tenoned construction. He used thick veneer overlays, sawtooth borders, and turnings for decoration (fig. 5.12). But he retained favorite appendages from revival designs--volute and odd flaring wings on the crest--and applied molding strips to the head and foot boards, a practice that Eastlake detested as flimsy and deceptive.

Construction and condition: Headboard is three horizontal panels reinforced with a batten at center back. Top panel is recessed. Footboard has a single panel and molding strips nailed to top and bottom edges. Eight slats run head to foot and are supported with corner blocks.

Fretwork crest is one piece, scroll sawn, attached to the top frame with two shaved pegs. Holes in fretwork are drilled from the front and sawn edges are bevelled and filed. Porcelain casters removed.

Marks: Rails are numbered with gouge marks on bottom edge near each end, (, ((, (((, and blank.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; slats, slat supports, and head rail, softwood.

Dimensions: L. 76 5/8; W. 53 1/2; H. (head) 80 3/4, (foot) 31 1/2.

Ownership: Sarah Evers Kersh Shull; Nellie Shull Dennison; Carroll Dennison, Weyers Cave, 1986; Lorraine Dennison Diehl, Weyers Cave, 1990; Ellen Diehl Weaver, Weyers Cave, 1990; Amber Weaver, Weyers Cave, 1990.

F. Competition in the market for bedroom suites was enormous in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In 1881 a manufacturer in Grand Rapids advertised three-piece suites consisting of a bed, dresser, and washstand in "imitation walnut" for \$18 to \$24. Kersh made a bedroom set in 1901 whose cost is unrecorded, but the labor required for its decoration was reduced to a minimum.

Two Kersh examples of this type of flat-crested bed (not illustrated) are known. Both have squared posts without chamfers, narrow panels in the headboard, and rectilinear overlays on the crest. Decoration on this bed is reduced to overlays without molded edges, incised scrolls on each corner of the crest, and a broad, scalloped valance below the crest. Kersh shaved away layers of embellishment until wood figure was the bed's dominant feature. Whether this tendency is a residue of design reform principles or Kersh's response to pressure from competition is not known.

Construction and condition: Head and foot boards are frame-and-panel construction. Crest is attached to a molding strip on top of the headboard frame by two dowels. Rails may be replaced; there are no chisel marks on rails

and no corner brackets. Slats are replaced.

Marks: Posts numbered with chisel marks, starting at foot, proper right (I); head, proper right (II); head, proper left (III).

Wood: Primary wood, walnut.

Dimensions: L. 80; W. 53 3/4; H. (head) 58 7/8, (foot) 31 1/2.

Ownership: Lucretia Wise Huff; Edith Huff Miller, Bridgewater.

Related examples: Catherine Hope Price, Petersburg.

Chests of Drawers

Of nine chests of drawers, or bureaus, considered for this study, none was definitely made by Kersh. No two have the same construction, markings, or style. Turnings do not correspond to those on other Kersh case pieces. Some have cock beading or veneer not found elsewhere in his work. Two of the chests share some characteristics; both

have overhanging top drawers, tapered rear feet, and matching dimensions except for height. But neither has the pencil or chisel marks Kersh commonly used to number drawers, and their neoclassical style is not distinctive. Two similar Empire chests thought to have been made by Kersh were signed and dated by other local makers--John Sheets, 1838, and Reuben Pence, 1856.

Dressers

A. This dresser (fig. 5.13) is one of four pieces of Kersh furniture dated in writing. On the underside of the bottom drawer the date "1884" is written in pencil over a large number "3," referring to the third drawer down (fig. 5.14). In the 1880s "dressing cases" such as this one, with two lidded drawers (sometimes called glove or handkerchief drawers) mounted on the case and an elaborate stand surrounding the mirror, were manufactured widely. The design of the pediment Kersh added over the mirror is more difficult to fathom, until the dresser is compared to furniture made by midwestern factories in the same period. A dressing case made by Mitchell and Rammelsberg Furniture Company about 1877 for a client in Richmond, Indiana, is crowned by a ball-edged palmette whose contour Kersh

imitated.

A blacksmith and neighbor to Kersh, Joseph M. Glick, bought this dresser. Another like it was owned by Kersh's niece Sarah, who married Glick's former apprentice, Daniel Preston Shull. The elaboration of these dressers and the fretted bed made by Kersh may reflect the prosperity of a local economy infused by timber and mining development after the Civil War.

Construction and condition: Case is frame-and-panel construction; joints are pegged at drawer divider and base on front and at top and bottom frames on sides. Foot brackets nailed to posts and base. Drawers dovetailed front and back. Small drawer cases screwed to dresser top and mirror stand. Stand is attached to base with two vertical battens. Gimbaled mirror is supported by threaded dowels. Fretted crest is a single, scroll-sawn board screwed to top of mirror stand. Carved pediment is screwed to fretwork. Molding strip is nailed below crest. Drawer handles replaced. Porcelain casters original.

Marks: Dated "1884" in pencil on underside of bottom drawer. Large drawers numbered in pencil "1," "2," "3" top to bottom on underside and on interior of rear wall.

Chisel marks on top edge of drawer fronts and sides at proper right corner, "I" (on top drawers), "II" (on middle drawer), "III" (on bottom drawer). (See fig. 5.15 for configuration of marks.)

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; case back, drawer sides and base, and mirror back, softwoods.

Dimensions: L. 40; W. 18 1/2; H. (overall) 86 1/8, (case) 36.

Ownership: Joseph M. Glick, Centerville; Edward Milton Glick, Centerville; Elanor and Edith Glick, Centerville.

Related examples: Amber Weaver, Weyers Cave.

B. Proponents of design reform such as Charles Eastlake believed that beauty resides in integrity; thus, furniture should reflect the linearity of wood grain and the angularity of a mortise-and-tenon joint. Eastlake also favored carving abstracted from nature over carving that mimicked natural forms. Both reform principles are applied in the design of this dresser (fig. 5.16) made by Kersh late in his career.

The shallow relief carving on the crest is found elsewhere on his headboards, a china press, and three dressers dated by family tradition to 1901. The crest's six-petaled flower was sketched on a scrap of paper in Kersh's shop (fig. 5.17).

The dresser was made for Sarah Huffman and David Craun Alexander on the occasion of their wedding in 1897. The bride had ties to Kersh's family--Sarah's brother married Kersh's great-niece Belle Craun--and the couple was married at St. Michaels, where Kersh was a member. They lived near Centerville, about 4 miles from the Kersh farm. The majority of surviving furniture made by Kersh was sold locally. Like the dresser, many pieces were made for relations or neighbors when they first went to housekeeping. The dressers made for the three Wise sisters on the farm next to Kersh's shop and a set of chairs made for Benjamin and Nettie Weaver (see Windsor "B" below) are other examples.

Construction and condition: Case and drawers have the same construction as dresser "A" discussed above, except that an apron is substituted for foot brackets at the base. Mirror stand is mortised and tenoned without pegs and is attached

to the case with two vertical battens. Crest is a single board with a molding strip nailed on top edge. Original porcelain casters. Keyhole escutcheons missing. Pyriform drop pulls replaced with domed wooden pulls.

Marks: Dated "1897" in pencil on underside of top drawer.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; drawer sides and bases, case back, softwood.

Dimensions: L. 39 1/2; W. 17 1/2; H. (overall) 70 1/2, (case) 32 3/4

Ownership: Sarah Huffman and David Craun Alexander; Rudolph B. Alexander, Weyers Cave, 1947.

Related examples: Edward Craun, West Palm Beach, Florida; Geneva Craun, Harrisonburg; Etta Byerly Grimm, Linville; Edith Huff Miller, Bridgewater; Vesta Glick Zirkle, Broadway.

China Press

China presses were not advertised by furniture

manufacturers in the Northeast and Midwest. Sideboards, often made with drawers and doors in a lower case and an upper shelf over a large mirror, served the same function of storing dishes and utensils. A "cupboard safe" illustrated in the 1891 catalog of Cron, Kills and Company of Ohio (fig. 5.18) shares several features of china presses made by Kersh: a flat, carved crest, cornice molding, double drawers and recessed-panel doors in the lower case, and scalloped-edge drawer pulls.

Neoclassical designs for bookcases and corner cupboards in English design books of the early nineteenth century show wide cornice moldings and arched door panels. They resurface in A. J. Downing's Architecture of Country Houses, published in New York in 1850, which illustrates a corner bookcase (fig. 5.19) that "would answer well, if necessary, as a china closet."

A china press (fig. 5.20) was probably the most expensive item of furniture Kersh made because of its size and joinery. A note in his shop gave the price of a press as \$15 compared to a price of \$10 for six chairs, two adult rockers, and one child's rocker. According to family tradition, this press was made for the 1891 wedding of Maude Kersh. A nearly identical press is dated 1896 on the

underside of one of the drawers.

Construction and condition: Lower case is frame-and-panel construction. Doors have pegged mortise-and-tenon frames with through tenons and recessed panels screwed to back of frame. Shelf in lower case notched around posts and supported by rails mortised into posts. Drawers are dovetailed front and back. Molding strip around base of upper case is nailed to top of lower case. Upper case has solid sides and six horizontal boards on back. Glazed doors are tenoned and pegged each corner. Each door has eight windows; only center horizontal muntins are pegged. Three shelves are dadoed into side walls. Cornice molding mitred at corners. Crest attached to cornice with two dowels. Casters and one pull missing.

Marks: Chisel marks "II" on proper left drawer, top edge of drawer front and side, in proper right corner. (Chisel mark "I" not visible on proper right drawer due to wear.) Pencil marks "1" and "2" on inside of drawer backs. "Maude Reeves/December/1927" in pencil on inside of proper right wall on proper right drawer.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; shelves, drawer sides and bases, and case back, softwood.

Dimensions: L. (lower case) 41 1/8; W. (lower case) 18; H. (overall) 89 7/8, (lower case) 35.

Ownership: Maude Kersh Reeves and William M. Reeves; Ruth Reeves Wine Weaver, Mt. Solon; Lela Wine Southard, Massanetta Springs, 1989.

Related examples: Wilma Craun Burtner, Mt. Solon; Mary and Alvin Landes, Bridgewater.

Washstands

A. Washstand and commode were interchangeable terms in the late-nineteenth century, when low chests with a "splasher back" and basin surface usually came equipped with a chamber pot cupboard as well. Marketed as the third component of a bedroom suite, washstands were often made to match a bed and dresser. Although this washstand (fig. 5.21) had no dresser counterpart in the bedroom of the Kersh farmhouse where it stood until 1985, it closely resembles one of the fretted dressers described above in its drop pulls, shelf brackets, overlay, and apron.

Kersh paid special attention to the figure of woods he used in overlays and panels. This trait is particularly evident in the book-matched panels of crotch walnut he chose for the doors of this washstand. Yet his adoption of factory methods is prominent in the same piece. The molded edges of the back splash (fig. 5.22), case top, and door recesses were cut with a treadle-operated router or "shaper," as listed in the 1905 inventory of his shop. The shelf brackets, which match exactly those on his dressers, may be commercially made.

Construction and condition: Case is frame-and-panel construction. Doors are through tenoned and pegged once on each corner. Panels are screwed to backs of door frames. A half-round strip is nailed to proper left door. Drawer is dovetailed front and back. Top screwed to case from underneath; screws are set into relieves in case sides. Shelves are screwed to back splash from rear. Rosette is glued.

Marks: Penciled "@" on underside and back of case and backs of door panels. Chisel marks "I" on top edge of drawer front and side, proper right corner.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; secondary woods, tulip and

pine.

Dimensions: L. 29 3/8; W. 15 3/8; H. (overall) 41 5/8,
(case) 30.

Ownership: Warren and Julian Shull, Centerville; Carroll
Dennison, Weyers Cave, 1985; Lorraine Dennison Diehl,
Weyers Cave, 1990.

B. That Kersh made this washstand (fig. 5.23) is certain. A pattern from his shop labeled "washstand" (fig. 5.24) matches exactly the pendant shape in the center of the apron. But the commercial character of its decoration is striking. The handles, half-round molding, split spindles (fig. 5.25), and brackets were all available from carved-wood dealers in the Northeast and elsewhere. It is possible that Kersh made the turned elements, but the applied half-round molding requires high-speed machinery for its manufacture. The trim suggests that Kersh incorporated mass-produced parts in furniture with traditional joinery.

One other extant piece, a china press, has the same combination of handles and applied decoration. The press

was owned by a daughter of Martha Kersh Craun, Adam's niece. Martha owned the washstand until she died in 1940.

Construction and condition: Case is frame-and-panel construction with exposed tenons on case back. Doors are through tenoned but not pegged. Handles screwed to doors and drawer from rear. Hand-carved swivel latch screwed to case from underneath. Drawers are dovetailed front and back.

Marks: Penciled "@" on lower frame of case back. "May 1940" in pencil on case back. "Miss Annie M. Glick Va" in pencil on interior of proper left drawer side; "Miss Lee Anna Alexander Va:" in pencil on interior of proper right drawer side. Anna Melistha Glick, born 1878, was the daughter of Diana Miller and Joseph M. Glick, who lived on the Ridge Road in Centerville and owned the fretted dresser discussed above. Lee Anna Alexander was the sister of David Craun Alexander, who lived about four miles west of Centerville and owned the flat-crested dresser discussed above.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; secondary woods, softwood.

Dimensions: L. 27 1/2; W. 15 1/2; H. (overall) 39 3/4,

(case) 28 1/2.

Ownership: Martha Kersh Craun; Lelia Huffman Skidmore, Dayton, 1940; Richard Skidmore, Keezletown, 1990.

C. This washstand (fig. 5.26) is one of three made in 1901 for bedroom sets given to the daughters of Kersh's neighbor, George Newton Wise. The labeling of various parts of the washstand with the number two suggests that Kersh made the three washstands together, as family tradition relates. The washstands are nearly identical, but small variations (in the size of the door-panel overlay or the addition of a drawer-front overlay) seem included to distinguish one from the next.

Comparison of this washstand with one from a Montgomery Ward oak bedroom set (fig. 4.14) bought by George Wise's son Stephen in 1907 show radical differences in joinery between a small hand shop and a steam-powered factory. The mail-order washstand has paneled sides, but the panels are slid into machine-routed channels cut between the mortises. The panel edges were routed, not bevelled with a plane. No pegs were used to lock the frames together; instead, the tenons were nailed in place

on the interior side of the case. The drawer has machine-cut dovetails on the front and channels routed for the rear wall, which is also nailed. In contrast, Kersh followed the traditional practice of hand sawing dovetails on all corners of a drawer. The factory product has a minimum of skilled joinery, and its price reflects the reduction in labor. In the Montgomery Ward catalog for 1895, the going price for a similar washstand with towel rack was \$2.70; a caned hardwood rocker in the same catalog sold for \$2.

Construction and condition: Frame-and-panel case is pegged. Doors are through tenoned and pegged. Half-round strip is nailed to edge of proper right door. Drawers dovetailed front and back. Arms of towel rack screwed to back splash from rear. Porcelain casters are original.

Marks: Chisel marks "II" on top edge of drawer front and side, proper right corner, and on inside of proper right door frame. Penciled "2" on interior of drawer back and on upper side of case bottom at front edge.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; secondary wood, softwood.

Dimensions: L. 28 $\frac{7}{8}$; W. 15 $\frac{3}{4}$; H. (overall) 53 $\frac{1}{2}$, (case) 29 $\frac{3}{8}$.

Ownership: Emma Wise Byerly; Etta Byerly Grimm, Linville.

Related examples: Edith Huff Miller, Bridgewater; Vesta Glick Zirkle, Broadway.

Pie Safe

A footed cupboard with pierced-tin panels in the doors or sides was commonly used in the nineteenth century to store perishable foods that required ventilation. Gnawed drawers and back panels of pie safes made by Kersh attest to the attraction this furniture form held for rodents. Pie safes were housed on porches or in a pantry or kitchen. This safe (fig. 5.27) stood next to the cookstove in the kitchen of the Kersh homeplace. Like the other Kersh safes, it was formerly painted.

Six pie safes were considered for this study, including one of tulip. Most have the form of this safe, with two drawers above, six tins on the front, wooden panels on the sides, and a low gallery. This configuration is common on safes made in the Shenandoah Valley but is quite distinct from those made further south, for example.

Near the border of Virginia and Tennessee, safes dating from the mid- to late-nineteenth century are typically shorter and about a foot wider than Valley-made safes, and their tin-paneled doors have either one or no dividers.

Related to the pie safe is a jelly cupboard, which has solid wood panels in the place of tins. A cupboard of this type made by Kersh bears a distinctive construction mark reproduced on three of his pie safes. On the top surface of the drawer divider, beneath the proper left drawer, "up" is written in pencil to remind the maker how to orient the board during assembly.

Construction and condition: (Not examined in person.)
Frame-and-panel case is pegged twice on top and bottom of side frames. Front cross members are mortised into posts and pegged. Doors are through tenoned and pegged once each corner and at each divider. Half-round strip nailed to proper left door. Tins are set into grooves in frames. Two shelves are notched around posts and nailed to rails, which are mortised into posts. Drawers are dovetailed front and back. Handles are screwed from inside drawers. Gallery is let into edges of overhanging top board and nailed from side. Single large dovetails join corners of gallery. Original paint removed.

Marks: Chisel marks "I" and "II" on top edges of drawer fronts and sides, proper right corner. Chisel mark "I" on proper right side of upright between drawers; "II" on opposite side. Penciled numbers "1" and "2" on inside of drawer rear walls.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; secondary woods, softwoods.

Dimensions: L. 40; W. 17 3/4; H. 57 1/2.

Ownership: Warren and Julian Shull, Centerville; Martha Shull Peake, Wise, 1985.

Related examples: Rudolph B. Alexander, Weyers Cave; Wilma Craun Burtner, Mt. Solon; Juanelle Mottern Crump, Wilmington, Delaware; Ethel Allen Foley, Mt. Sidney; Lucille Huffman, Bridgewater.

Chest

The only known piece of furniture signed by Adam Kersh is this chest (figs. 5.28, 5.29). It was made in 1889 for his niece Maude Kersh when she was nineteen years

old and still living on the farm where she grew up and where Kersh had his cabinet shop. This chest and another he made of pine are small; perhaps they were used for storage of clothes and linens. A locked drawer built into each chest was designed for valuables. Maude may have used her uncle's gift as a dower chest. Two years after it was made she married.

Construction and condition: Frame-and-panel front and sides are pegged at top and bottom of each post. Back is a single board. Lid is three boards butted and attached to case with two butt hinges on rear edge. Molding strip is nailed to front and side edges of lid. Hole is drilled on inside of lid to accommodate key in drawer. Drawer wall dadoed into top frame of chest front on the inside and nailed to back of chest from the outside. Base of drawer nailed to drawer wall along bottom edge. Drawer lid swivels on dowels cut into two corners of lid. Base of chest nailed to sides along bottom edge.

Marks: Inscribed in pencil on top edge of back, "Nov.--1889--Adam W. Kersh to Maude" and on inside of lid "Maude Kersh."

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; drawer, back, and base,

softwood.

Dimensions: L. 28; W. 15 3/4; H. 18 3/4.

Ownership: Maude Kersh Reeves; Ruth Reeves Wine Weaver,
Mt. Solon; Everett Wine, Montezuma.

Related examples: Ron Kersh, Williamsburg.

Desk

Desks with a table base and partitioned cabinet have been called "post office" desks in the Shenandoah Valley region because they were suited to the modest postal needs of a rural community. Such desks were not used exclusively for sorting mail, however. In the late 1860s and early 1870s manufacturers such as Kehr, Kellner and Company, owner of the American Desk Manufactory in New York, advertised small, partitioned table desks. A single-drawer, drop-front desk made by Kersh (not illustrated) resembles the factory designs. The drop front dates to the late-eighteenth century, when massive secretaries with hinged, vertical writing surfaces were introduced in France.

This writing desk is the only known example of a Kersh desk. A similar desk with double doors in place of the drop front is owned in Grottoes, Virginia, about 10 miles southeast of Centerville. Its table base nearly duplicates Kersh's design but lacks two distinguishing features: chisel marks on the top edge of the drawer and a combination of cupped and spool turnings on the legs. Both features appear on end tables made by Kersh as well as on this desk.

Construction and condition: (Not examined in person.)

Base is post-and-rail construction, pegged. Legs are turned and drawer is dovetailed front and back. Top is two boards butted and attached to base from underside. Molding strip nailed to top secures cabinet on front and sides. Drop front is two boards butted and hinged at base.

Overhanging gallery surrounds top of cabinet. Interior has dadoed partitions forming two large center compartments, with a drawer below three vertical slots on proper left side and a drawer below six cubbyholes on proper right side. Drawer pulls are replaced.

Marks: Chisel mark "I" on top edge of drawer front, proper right corner.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut.

Dimensions: L. 36; W. 20 1/4; H. (overall) 50 1/4, (base) 29 1/4.

Ownership: Marion Jefferson Craun; Everett Evers Craun, 1980; Everett Marion Craun, West Palm Beach, Florida.

End Table

The turnings on the slim legs of this table (fig. 5.30) are duplicated on other furniture considered in this study, making it possible to link a range of furniture types to Kersh's shop. Two end tables close in form and dimensions to this one survive. One has a thicker version of this table's ring-baluster-reel foot. The same turning, variously compressed and elongated, appears on three gateleg tables by Kersh and on two of his pie safes. The other end table has cupped turnings that match those on the upper legs of this table. On rockers for both adults and children, Kersh used the same cupped turnings.

Construction and condition: Table base is mortised and tenoned and pegged. Drawer is dovetailed front and back,

with base slid into rabbet and nailed along rear edge. Overlay is nailed. Top is screwed to base from underside; screw relieves are cut into sides with gouge. Top is two boards butted, with batten nailed to underside across width.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; secondary woods, tulip and pine.

Dimensions: L. 29 5/8; W. 18 1/2; H. 30.

Ownership: Edgar Adam Kersh; Charles Lenford (Lindy) Kersh, Harrisonburg.

Related examples: Lorraine Dennison Diehl, Weyers Cave; Edith Caricofe, Dayton.

Gateleg Table

Dropleaf tables with ring turnings were a product of early furniture factories in the Midwest. What identifies this table (fig. 5.31) as Kersh's work is the leg turnings and the pattern of the gateleg joint, which corresponds to an unfinished gateleg from his shop. Other,

less visible features distinguish his gateleg tables, or "harvest tables," as they are known in the region. Under the base of this table, alignment marks in the form of an "X" are penciled on one side and on the underside of the adjacent top board and leaf. Numbers from one to three also appear in the corners of the base on posts and sides.

Hidden under the leaf of a related table are pencil marks that suggest information about the maker beyond questions of attribution. The walnut leaf is covered with a child's drawings and scribbles. Apparently Kersh allowed children to draw on his stock and did not bother to plane down the marks. Among the remains of his shop was a board scrap with a child's drawing of a horse head. The drawings reinforce anecdotes about Kersh's fondness for children told by Nell Kersh Boitnott, a great-niece who played on the steps of his shop as a child.

Construction and condition: Base is mortised and tenoned; ends are pegged. Sides are two layers of softwood screwed and nailed together. Corners of base are reinforced with blocks nailed to sides. Gateleg has three tails and two pins held by a 1/4-inch dowel; post is joined to gate with mortise and tenon, pegged twice. Top is two boards butted and screwed to base from underneath. Screw relieves are

gouged. Leaves are two boards each and are attached to top board with three hinges each side.

Marks: Numbers "1," "2," "3" penciled on underside of base in three corners. "X" in pencil on underside of one leaf, rear of adjacent side, and underside of adjacent top board.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut; secondary wood, softwood.

Dimensions: L. 45 5/8; W. (open) 51, (closed) 18 1/2; H. 30.

Ownership: Sarah Evers Kersh Shull; Charles Eugene Shull, Bridgewater; Dwight Shull, Bridgewater.

Related examples: Lucille Huffman, Bridgewater; Ruby Sandy, Bridgewater.

Windsor Chairs

A. The plainest of Kersh's Windsors are also the earliest in design. Bamboo turnings on the legs, posts, and spindles of this spindle-back Windsor (fig. 5.32) date to the mid-1780s, but the shield-shaped seat and tablet set

between posts show the influence of Philadelphia after the War of 1812, when the export trade in Windsors accelerated rapidly. Great numbers of similar chairs were produced in this period; consequently, attribution is conjectural. All but one set of the Windsors considered for this study came from the Kersh farm, leaving no opportunity to match chairs from diverse sources.

Few quirks of the individual chairmaker are revealed by this chair. The posts are pegged in the seat mortises with square pegs. Stretchers are slightly shouldered at the tenons, and the tablet is stenciled with a cornucopia=and=scroll pattern. This chair and a related one bought at the 1985 auction of the Kersh farm are presumably from the same set. Both are painted brown over layers of green.

Construction and condition: Bamboo-turned legs, posts, and stretchers. Legs are socketed into seat; posts are through tenoned, wedged, and pegged. Shield-shaped seat is chamfered on all sides. Tablet is mortised into posts and pegged twice each end. Tablet is chamfered on top edge of back.

Wood: Not visible.

Dimensions: H. (overall) 32 1/2, (seat) 16 5/8; W. 16 1/2; D. 15 1/4.

Ownership: Warren and Julian Shull, Centerville; Dwight Shull, Bridgewater, 1985.

Related examples: Clarence Geier, Harrisonburg (match to Shull chair above); Museum of American Frontier Culture, Staunton (four); Dwight Shull, Bridgewater (one); William F. Wise, Weyers Cave (six).

B. Made for the wedding of Kersh's great-niece Nettie Craun and Benjamin E. Weaver in 1899, this slat-back chair (fig. 5.33) was used in the parlor of their home near Mt. Crawford, 3 1/2 miles from the Kersh farm. Infrequent use of the parlor chairs has preserved their finish, which is the best surviving example of Kersh's decorative work. Both slats have gold stencils in a scrolled pattern. Ring turnings are outlined in white; the front legs, seat, posts, and slats are pinstriped as well. The chairs are wiped with a brown stain over a layer of chalky red and covered with a clear finish.

Windsors with a scalloped "eagle" crest, flattened "mule ear" posts, and a single ring turned on the front stretcher were made in the Susquehanna Valley of Pennsylvania in the 1830s. The medial slat with half-spindles originated with Philadelphia painted fancy chairs of the same period. Both the half-spindle design and stenciled decoration persisted throughout the nineteenth century, as evidenced by an illustration from the Marietta Chair Company catalog of 1885 (fig. 5.34).

Construction and condition: Ring-turned legs, front stretcher, posts, and half-spindles. Legs are mortised into seat; posts are through tenoned and wedged. Shovel-shaped seat is chamfered on back and sides toward front. Spindles are whittled at joint with medial slat. Slats are mortised and pegged.

Marks: Six chairs in set are numbered "1" to "6" in pencil on underside of seat.

Wood: Seat, tulip; legs, stretchers, posts, and spindles, oak or hickory.

Dimensions: H. (overall) 30, (seat) 17 5/8; W. 14 1/8; D. 14.

Ownership: Nettie Craun and Benjamin E. Weaver, Mt. Crawford, 1899; Mary Katherine Weaver, Centerville, 1948.

Related examples: Linda Craun Brewer, Columbia, Maryland (one); Wilma Craun Burtner, Mt. Solon (one); Edward Craun, West Palm Beach, Florida (one to match Brewer chair).

C. Design elements of this banister-back chair (fig. 5.35) were integrated into the Windsor form from more stylish seating furniture. The tablet crest originated with Baltimore fancy chairs early in the century as a surface for painted decoration. The scroll that extends behind the crest and the stenciled cornucopia on the splat (fig. 5.36) are features that first appeared in the 1830s on fancy chairs made in Philadelphia, particularly by German craftsmen. Shouldered tablets and banister backs were adapted from high-end furniture in both of those urban centers by the mid-1840s. Among the contents of Kersh's shop were a tablet like the one on this chair (fig. 5.37) and a pattern for a larger banister-shaped splat.

Also in the shop were stencils with tulip, grape-leaf, and cornucopia patterns (fig. 5.17), although none

matched the stencils on his extant furniture. The decorative techniques used by Kersh were introduced on Windsors in the 1820s and 1830s, but the variations he employed date much later. The red-brown combed graining on this chair was popular after midcentury, and the use of intersecting arcs of pinstriping on chair legs dates to the Civil War period and later. Apparently the finish of Kersh's chairs postdates their form.

Sets of six chairs were his usual pattern. This chair and a companion are numbered "6" and "5" on the underside of the seat. Owners refer to them as parlor chairs; evidently their sharply raked backs are more suitable for socializing than for taking meals. Banister-back chairs from five sets are noted here, all of them originally owned in and around Wise Hollow. This chair came from the Kersh farm and belonged to Adam's niece Sarah Evers Kersh Shull, who married in 1885 and moved back to the farm with her family sometime after 1900. Another set (three of which survive) was owned by his nephew Stephen Kersh, who lived in a house built down the lane from the cabinet shop after he married in 1879. Three other sets were bought by neighbors--the Saufleys, living a mile south of the farm, the Areys, who rented a farm just over a mile north, and Stephen Wise next door. The actual distribution

of Kersh's chairs may have been broader, but the example of his banister chairs suggests that local patronage was a mainstay of his business.

Construction and condition: Turned legs are mortised into seat. Boxed stretchers are mortised into legs. Shovel-shaped seat is chamfered on rear and lower edge of sides. Posts are through tenoned and wedged into seat and mortised into tablet. Splat mortised into seat and tablet. Tablet chamfered on back. Original finish.

Marks: Numbered "6" in pencil on underside of seat.

Wood: Seat, tulip; legs, posts, and stretchers, oak or hickory.

Dimensions: H. (overall) 31 1/2, (seat) 17 3/8; W. 13 1/2; D. 14 3/4.

Ownership: Sarah Evers Kersh Shull; Warren and Julian Shull, Centerville; Maxine Shull, Bridgewater.

Related examples: Guinevere Davis, Centerville (one); Carlyn, Glen, and Stephen H. Wise, Centerville (six); William F. Wise, Weyers Cave (six); Lorraine Kersh

Bosserman, Staunton (one); June Thompson, Harrisonburg (one); Weldon Thompson, Bridgewater (one). The last three are from a single set.

Split-bottom Chair

Chairs with slats and seats of split wood were commonly made in the Appalachian region from Pennsylvania to North Carolina and are identified with rural makers. Factory slat-back chairs were usually made with caned seats or with woven seats of "reed," or rattan.

Kersh's split-bottom chairs (fig. 5.38) have narrow-necked stiles that are unusually slim and distinctive cupped turnings on the legs. These characteristics may be regional rather than individual, however. Another local maker, Alexander Stuart Coffman, produced chairs nearly identical to those by Kersh (although Coffman's chairs have an extra front stretcher and turned feet on both front and back). The dozen split-bottom chairs included in this study came from a set made for Adam's nephew, William Claude Kersh, and from the Kersh homeplace. Despite such limited ownership, Adam did not restrict the sale of his split-bottom chairs to family

members. A scrap board in his shop records an order for "one set of split chairs/ one arm chair green" and another for "one set of split chairs/ one rocking chair/ painted green." Evidence of original paint under the seat of this chair indicates that it was green. The seat is woven oak stuffed with corn husks. Other split-bottom chairs by Kersh are said to have had a stencil in gold on the top slat.

Low rocking chairs with split-wood seats (fig. 5.39) were also made by Kersh. Narrow stiles distinguish his low rocking chairs as well as his side chairs .

Construction and condition: Turned posts, stiles, and stretchers. Stretchers and rails are tenoned into stiles and posts. Split-wood seat is woven in basket weave. Stiles narrowed above seat and raked back; front of stiles shaved flat above neck. Slats mortised and tenoned into stiles. Refinished. Four of six chairs in set have seats replaced.

Wood: Primary wood, oak.

Dimensions: H. (overall) 34, (seat) 16 1/2; W. 17; D. 14.

Ownership: Warren and Julian Shull, Centerville; Charles Lenford (Lindy) Kersh, Harrisonburg, 1985.

Related examples: Nell Kersh Boitnott, Bridgewater (one from Crump set); Juanelle Mottern Crump, Wilmington, Delaware (four); Museum of American Frontier Culture, Staunton (one). Low rockers: Lorraine Kersh Bosserman, Staunton; Lelia Huffman Skidmore, Dayton; E. Ray Wine, Mt. Solon.

Rocking Chair

Rockers were enormously popular in the second half of the nineteenth century. The majority made by Kersh were caned-back, scroll-arm rockers with split-wood seats (fig. 5.40), although he also produced armless rockers and a slat-back version as well.

Three variations in the form of his caned-back rockers may indicate the sequence of their production. Differences occur in the turnings of the front posts and in the shape of the stiles, which vary from a pronounced double curve (fig. 5.41) to a slight bend. Patterns for both types of stiles (fig. 5.42) were found in his shop.

The straight pattern may be the later development. It matches a rocker said to have been bought by Daniel Chris Craun when he married in 1902. On that rocker the front legs have a single spool turning. In contrast, Kersh's rockers with a curvaceous stile and cupped turnings may be earlier; by family tradition, this rocker was made for the wedding of Kersh's niece Sarah in 1885. Kersh simplified rather than elaborated. In this respect, his rockers follow his designs for beds and case furniture.

In the mid-nineteenth century, rockers with caned backs and looping scroll arms were widely manufactured. The factory chairs usually had a caned or solid seat rather than a woven seat of split wood, which is associated with rural makers. A solid-seat design made by Kersh for which no example survives is the so-called Boston rocker (fig. 5.43), said to be the most popular chair ever made. A splat pattern labeled "Boston Fret 1898" and a lathe stick marked "Boston Rocker leg" were in Kersh's shop, suggesting that he made a banister-back version of this rocker.

Construction and condition: Front posts and front stretcher turned; rockers, stiles, and arms sawn; seat rails turned or shaved. Posts shaved flat on sides at base, through tenoned, and wedged into rockers and arms.

Stiles are rectangular at base, tenoned through rockers, and wedged. Stretchers are tenoned without pegs (although other Kersh rockers have pegs in irregular patterns). Arms are joined to stiles with dowels and possibly screws; dowels are exposed, three on arm front and one on stile back. Crest and back rail are mortised into stiles and pegged. Caning frame nailed to stiles. Caning replaced. Original pinstriping and stenciling visible.

Wood: Primary wood, walnut.

Dimensions: H. (overall) 41 5/8, (seat) 15 1/2; W. 20 3/4; D. 15.

Ownership: Sarah Evers Kersh Shull and Daniel Preston Shull; Charles Eugene Shull, Bridgewater, 1950; Dwight Shull, Bridgewater.

Related examples: Harry N. Arey, Bridgewater; Lorraine Kersh Bosserman, Staunton; Nelson Craun, Centerville; Paul Heatwole, Dayton; Violet Craun Lineweaver, Harrisonburg; Bob Monger, Mt. Crawford; Museum of American Frontier Culture, Staunton; Martha Shull Peake, Wise; Bob Reeves, Bridgewater; Carl Rhodes, Bridgewater; Virginia Craun Simmons, Harrisonburg; Lelia Huffman Skidmore, Dayton;

Larry Smallwood, Bridgewater; Carlyn, Glen, and Stephen H. Wise, Centerville; William F. Wise, Weyers Cave.

Child's Rocking Chair

Flat spots on the scroll arms of small rocking chairs made by Kersh attest to their use as plows in child's play, according to rocker owner Glen Wise. Kersh made half a dozen rockers for the sons of his nieces and nephews in a size suitable for two to four year olds. This rocker (fig. 5.44), made about 1890 for his niece Sarah's oldest son, Charles Eugene Shull, is a lilliputian version of Kersh's adult chairs in its turnings and "mule ear" stiles.

Birth dates for the original owners of five child's rockers are known, making it possible to date the rockers to a twelve-year period between 1888 and 1900. The most noticeable change over time is in the turnings on the front posts. Cupped turnings occur on the earlier rockers and are replaced by simpler spool turnings on the later rockers. The design sequence of the turnings reinforces an inference made about the adult rockers--that Kersh's earlier designs were more elaborate. An exception is the latest of his child's rockers (fig. 5.45), which has a

caned back and short columns of beading below the crest. This sophisticated chair shows the influence of factory-made rockers from the 1880s and 1890s, when beaded turnings in chair backs were fashionable.

Child's rockers were widely popular in the 1880s, and designs were adapted to current styles. The 1889 catalog of the Marietta Chair Company of Ohio, for example, shows half a dozen styles of child's rockers, including a fashionable caned-seat version with beading and incised carving.

Construction and condition: Turned stiles, posts, and stretchers. Stiles and posts tapered at base and through tenoned and wedged into rockers. Stretchers tenoned into posts and stiles. Seat woven in basket weave. Posts through tenoned and wedged in arms. Arms attached to stiles with screw and dowel. Slats mortised into stiles and pegged. Four layers of paint (green and black) visible.

Marks: "CES" written in ink four times on underside of seat.

Wood: Rockers, walnut; seat, possibly oak.

Dimensions: H. (overall) 20 3/4, (seat) 9 3/8; W. 14; D. 11.

Ownership: Charles Eugene Shull, Bridgewater; Dwight Shull, Bridgewater.

Related examples: John Boitnott, Baltimore, Maryland; Lorraine Kersh Bosserman, Staunton; Wilma Craun Burtner, Mt. Solon; Charles Lenford (Lindy) Kersh, Harrisonburg; Richard Reeves, Bridgewater.

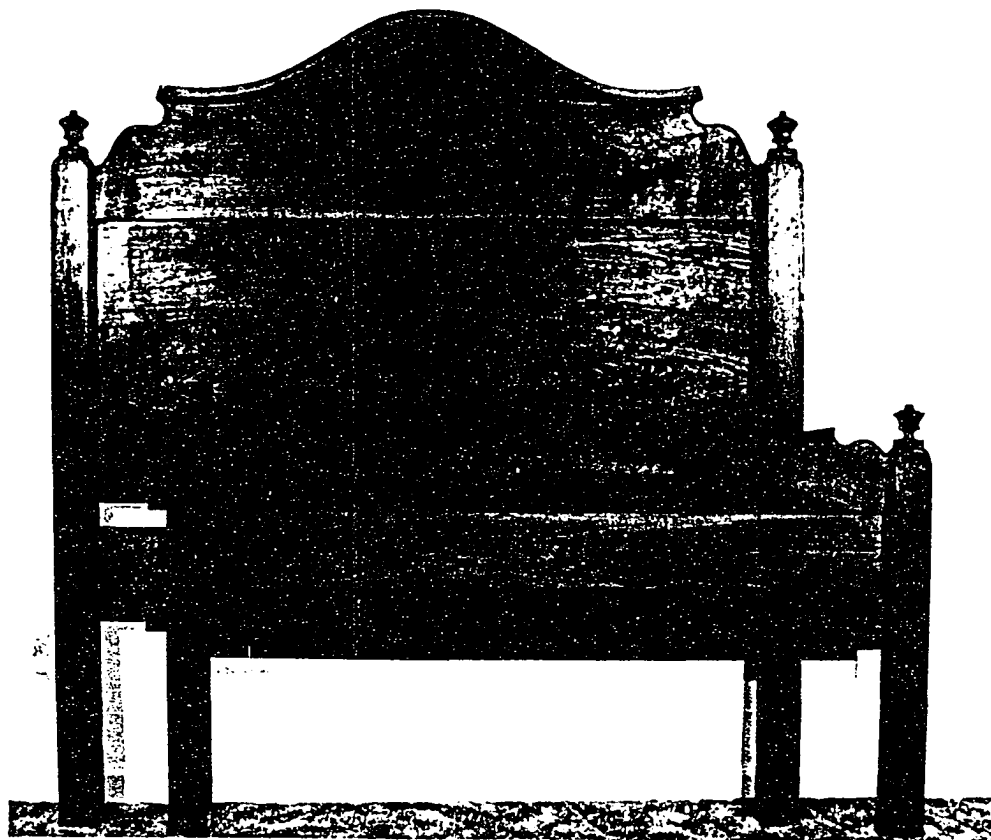


Figure 5.1 Bed with simple arched head and foot boards. Owner Ellen Diehl Weaver, Weyers Cave.

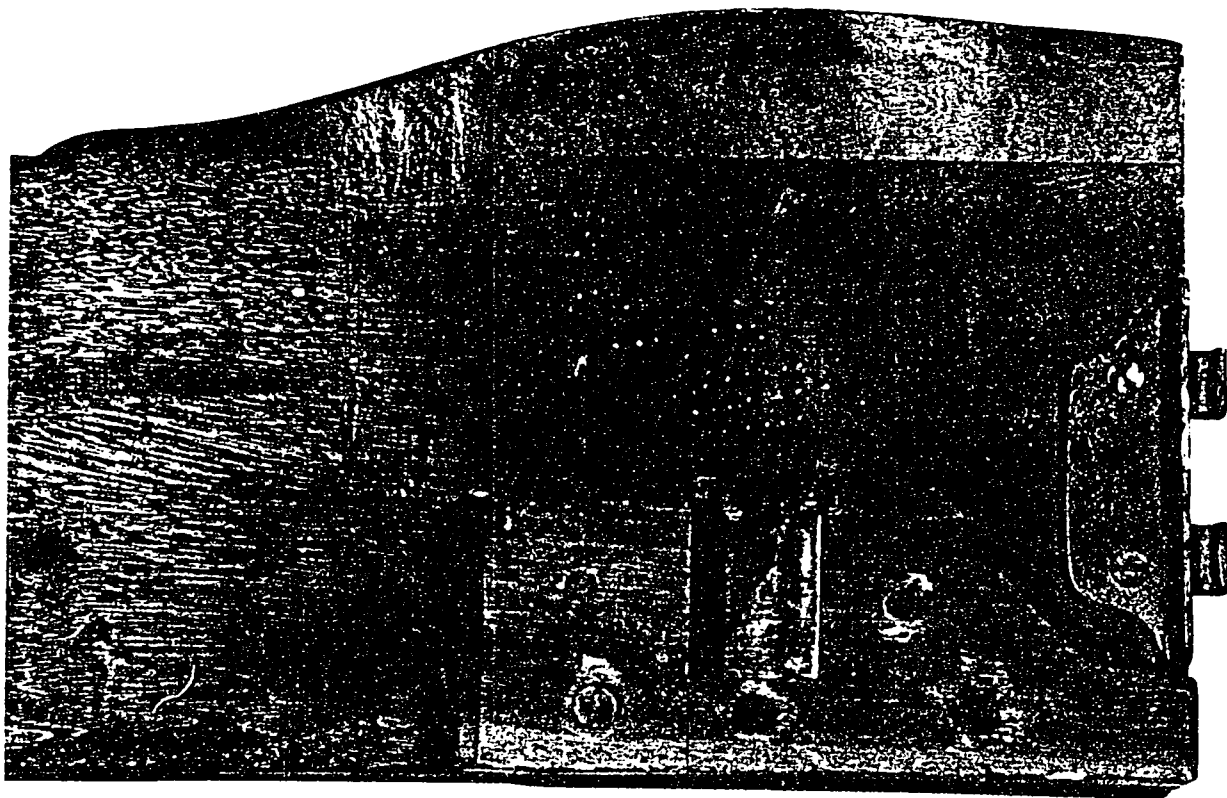


Figure 5.2 Detail of a bed rail showing shaped corner block designed by Kersh to hold slat supports. Owner E. Ray Wine, Mt. Solon.

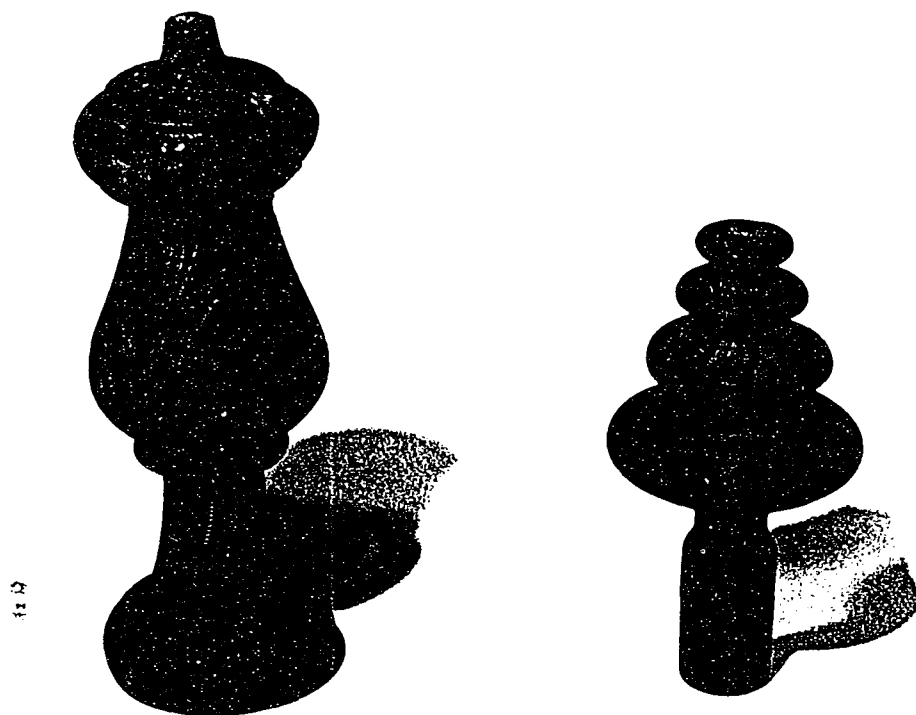


Figure 5.3 Two turned finials from the Kersh shop. *Left*, urn form; *right*, tree form. Kersh collection, MAFC.

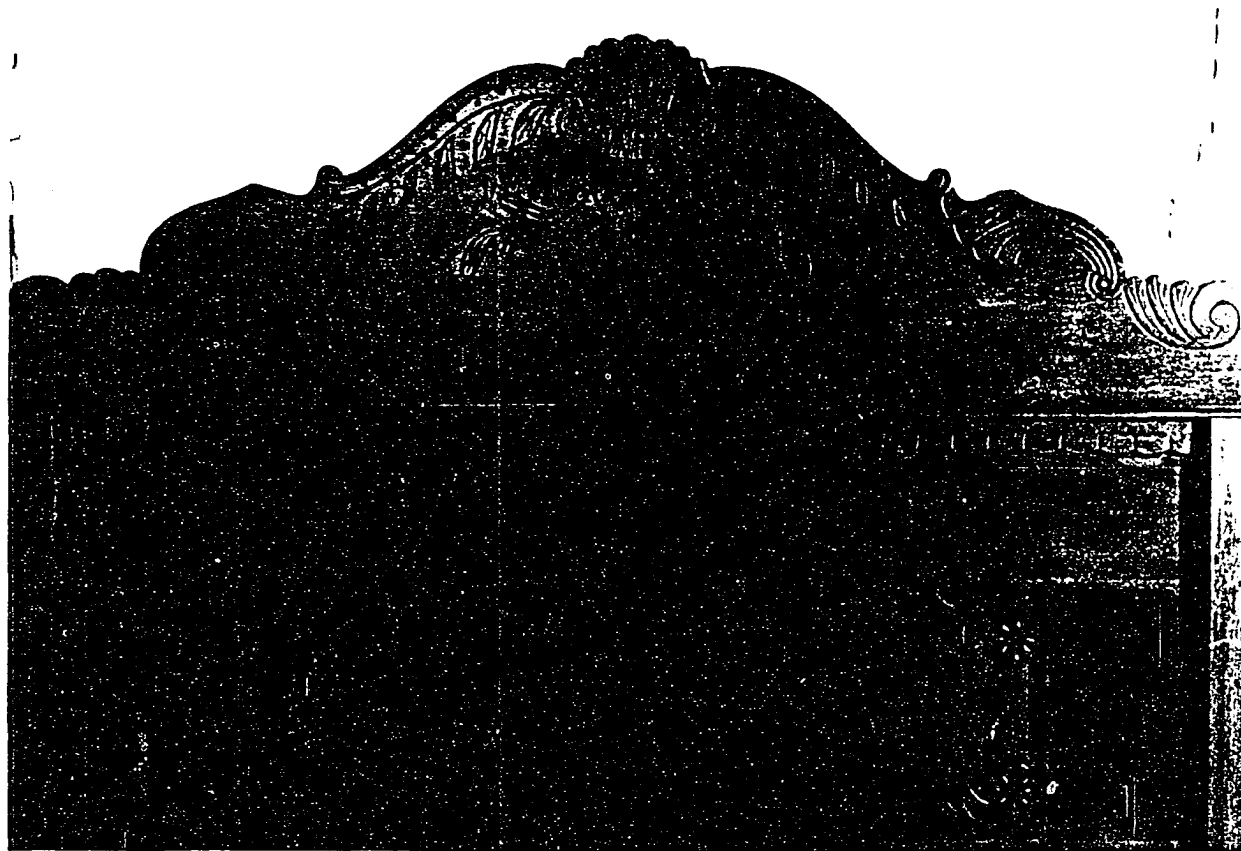


Figure 5.4 Headboard with shallow carving of S-scrolls, volutes, and leaves. Owners Carlyn, Glen, and Stephen H. Wise, Centerville.



Figure 5.5 Bed (c. 1896) with decorative carving reproduced on three other Kersh beds. Owners Carlyn, Glen, and Stephen H. Wise, Centerville.



Figure 5.6 Bed with scroll-edged headboard. Owner Ethel Allen Foley, Mt. Sidney.

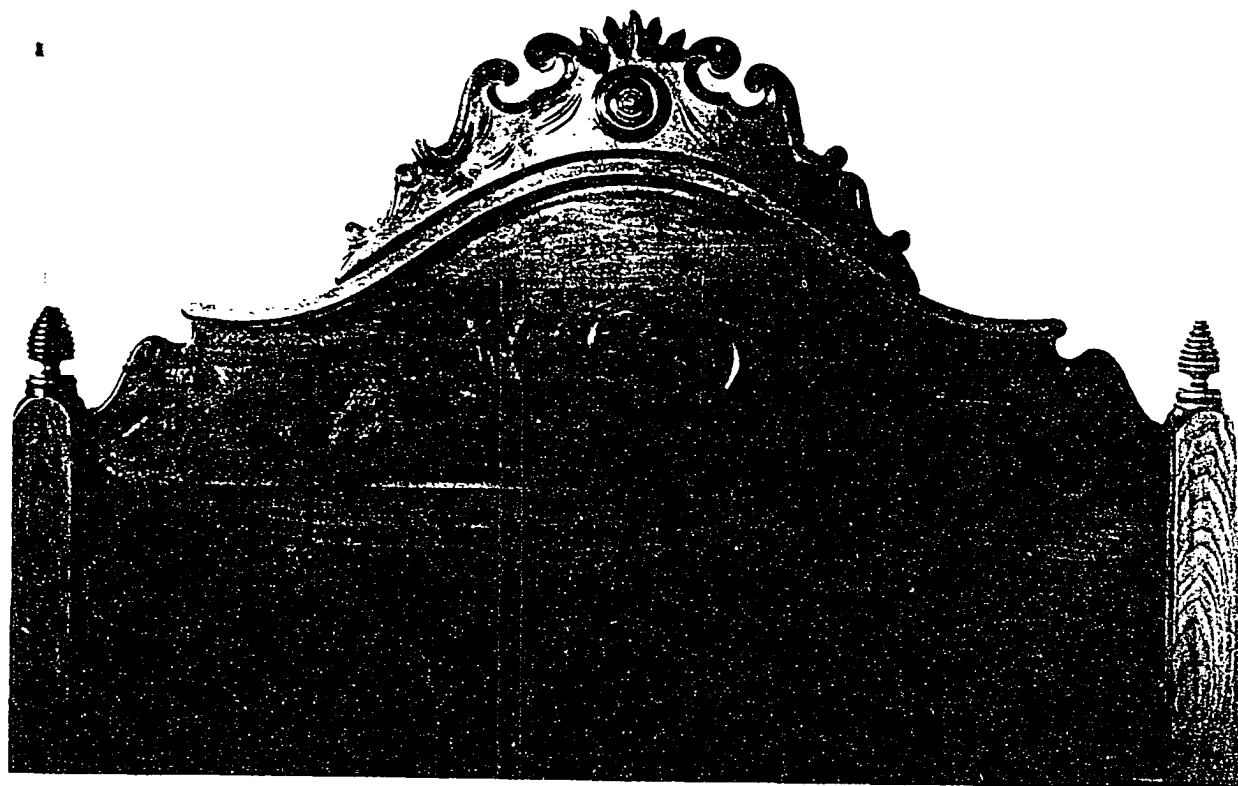


Figure 5.7 Carved headboard of Foley bed showing likeness to ones produced commercially in the 1870s.



Figure 5.8 Pattern for scroll-edged headboard found in the Kersh shop. Kersh collection, MAFC.



Figure 5.9 Bed with sloped pediment and split-spindle decoration typical of Renaissance revival furniture. Owner Lela Wine Southard, Massanetta Springs.

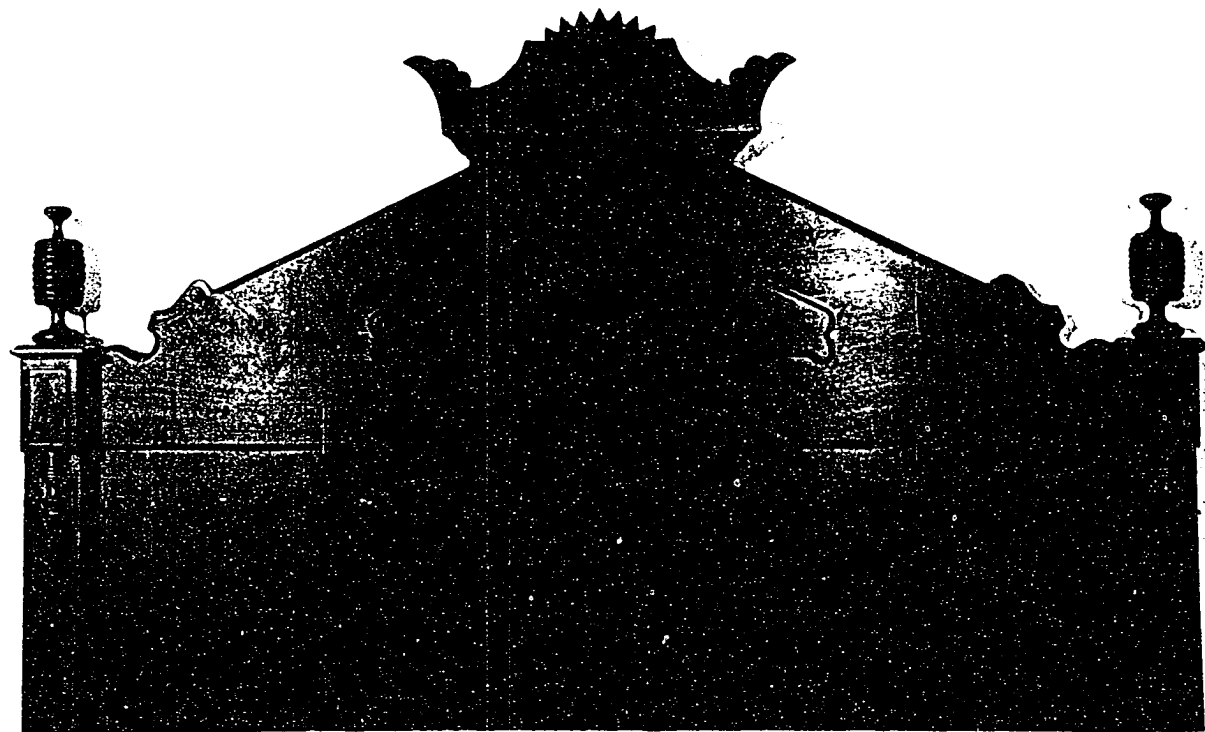


Figure 5.10 Headboard of Southard bed showing decorative devices found on factory-made furniture.

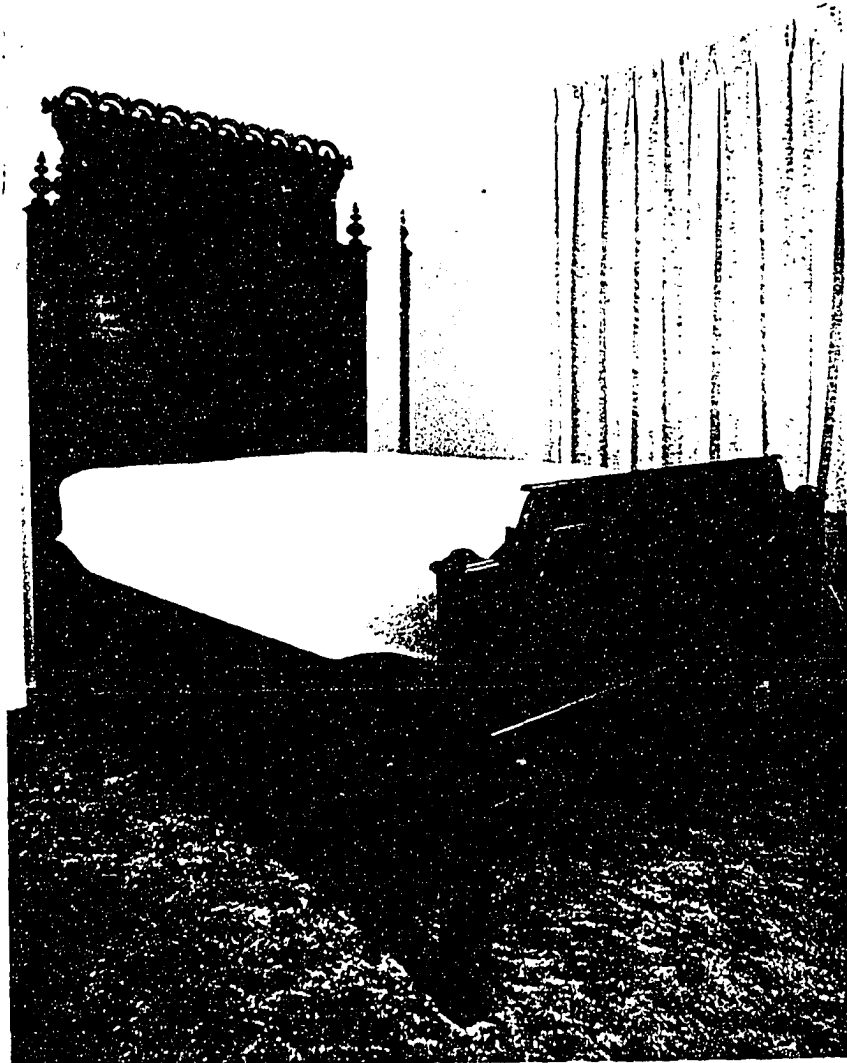


Figure 5.11 Bed with pierced fretwork crest associated with reform designs of Charles Eastlake. Owner Amber Weaver, Weyers Cave.

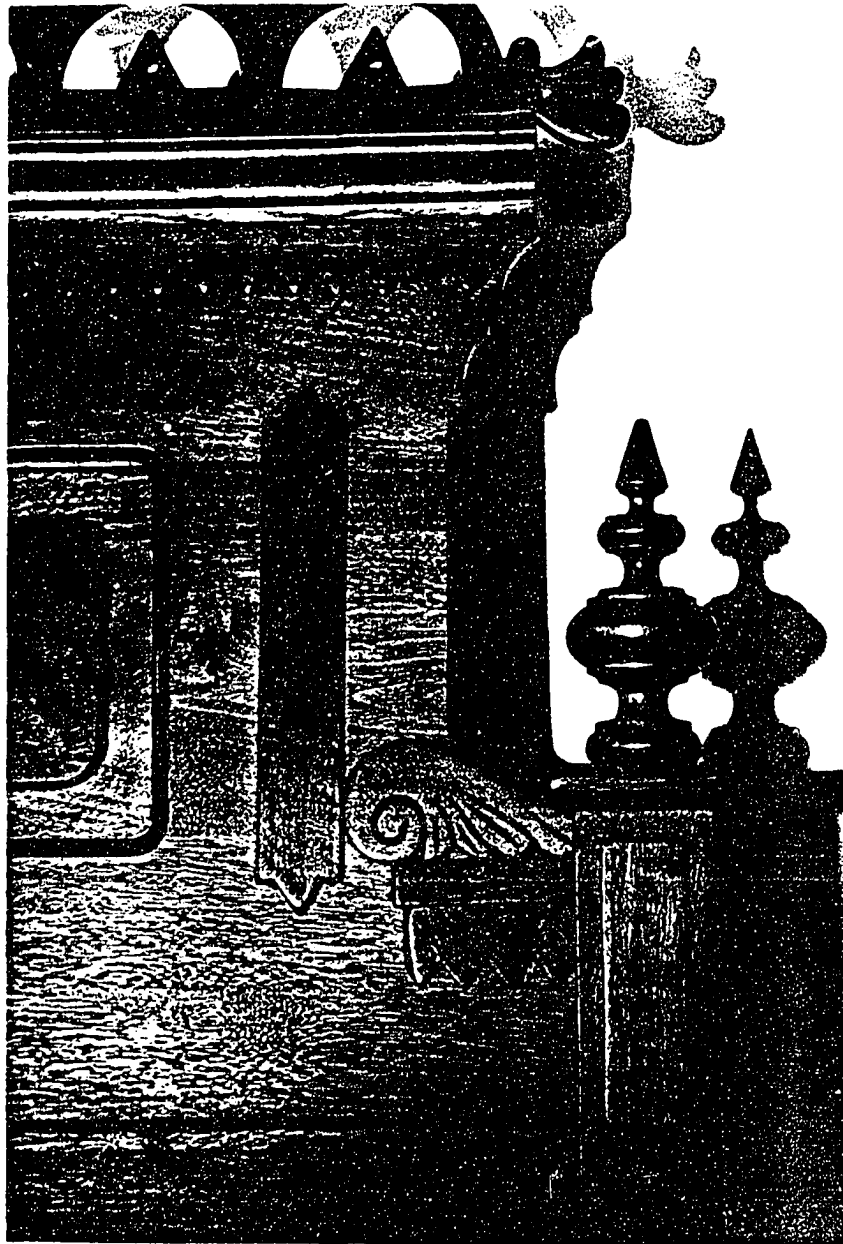


Figure 5.12 Detail of fretwork on Weaver bed showing revival-style appendages (volutes and flaring wings) on an Eastlake-inspired design.



Figure 5.13 Fretted dresser with elaborate mirror stand, dated 1884. Owners Elanor and Edith Glick, Centerville.

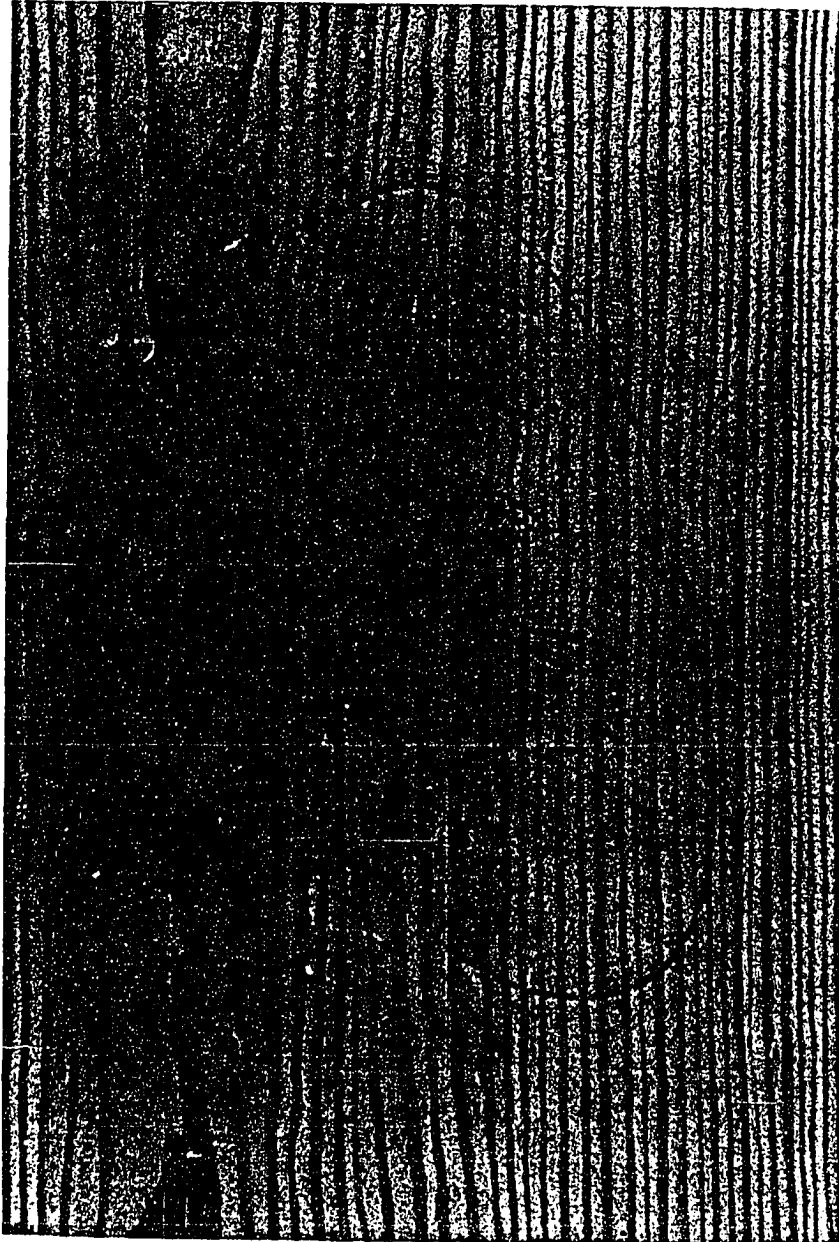


Figure 5.14 Date on underside of bottom drawer in Glick dresser.

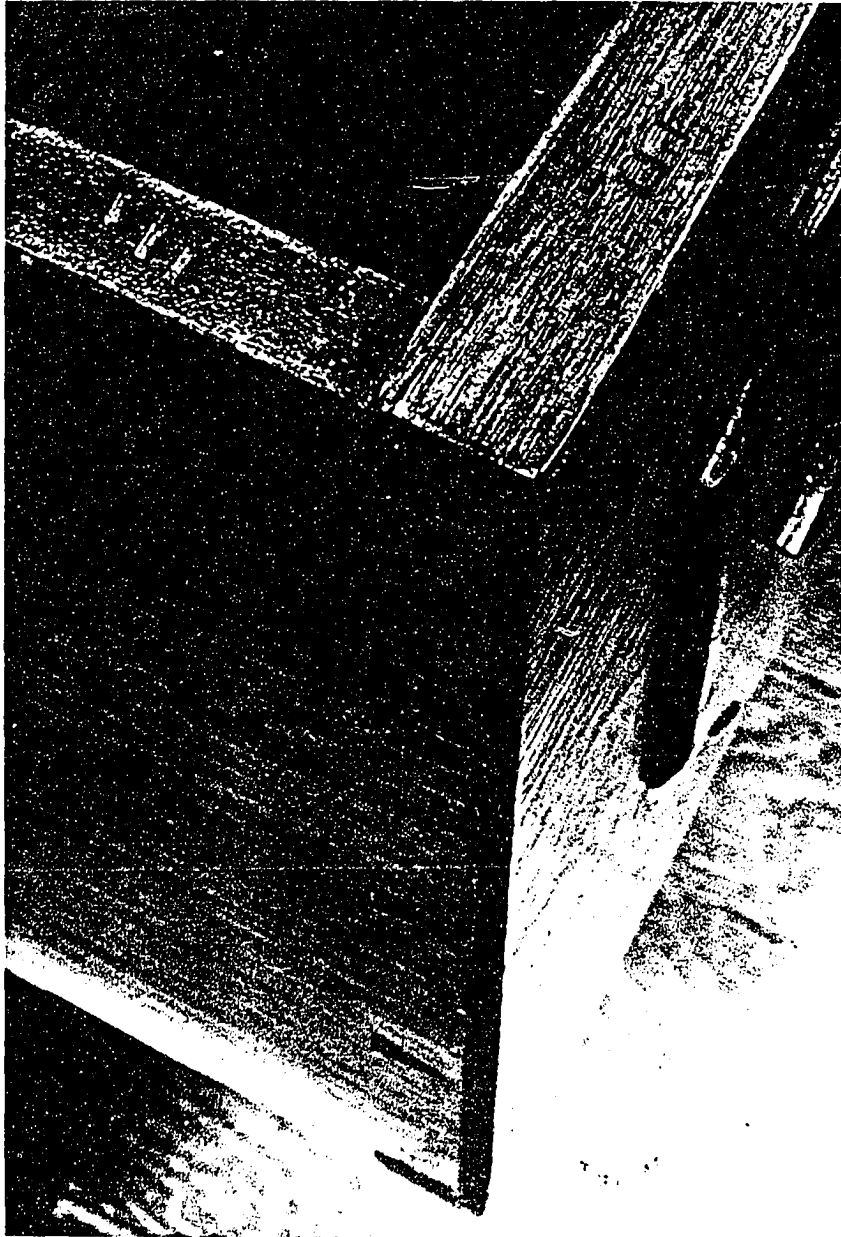


Figure 5.15 Chisel marks used by Kersh to align drawer parts during assembly. Glick dresser, bottom (third) drawer.

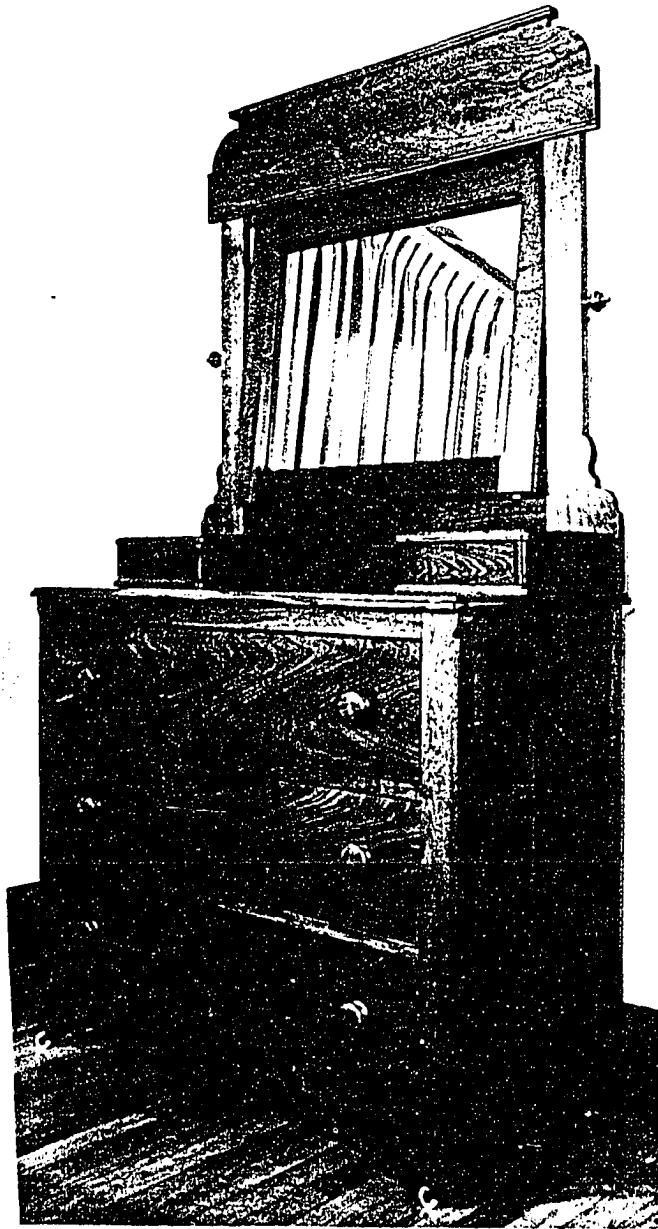


Figure 5.16 Dresser with linear design and sparse carving advocated by design reformers, dated 1897. Owner Rudolph B. Alexander, Weyers Cave.

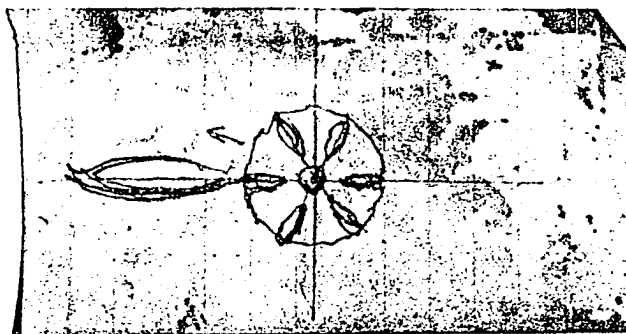
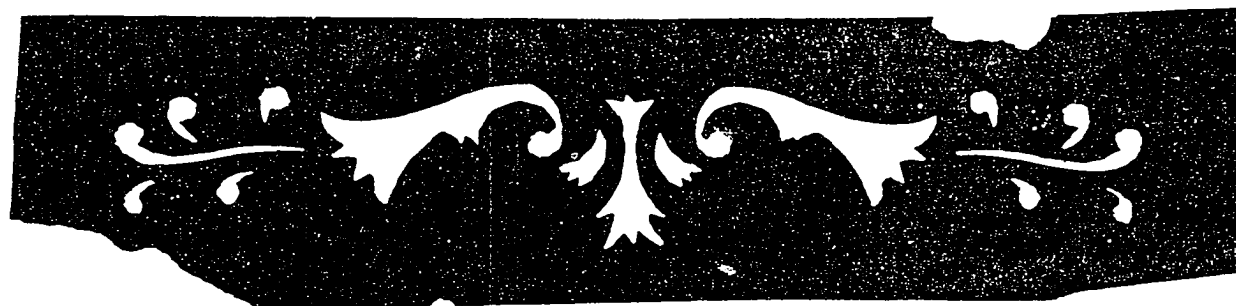


Figure 5.17 Sketch from Kersh shop of flower motif carved on Alexander dresser, and cornucopia stencil used by Kersh in finish work. Kersh collection, MAFC.

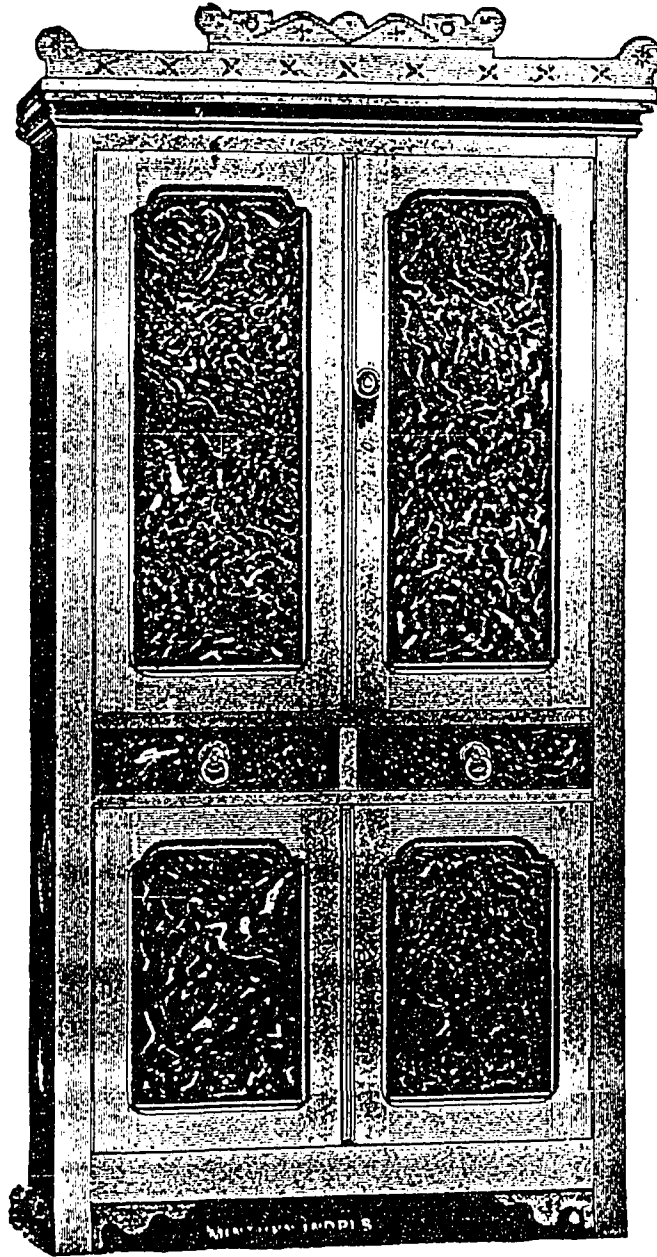


Figure 5.18 Cupboard safe with design features common to china presses made by Kersh. From Cron, Kills and Company, Illustrated Catalogue (Piqua, Ohio, 1891), 4. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection.

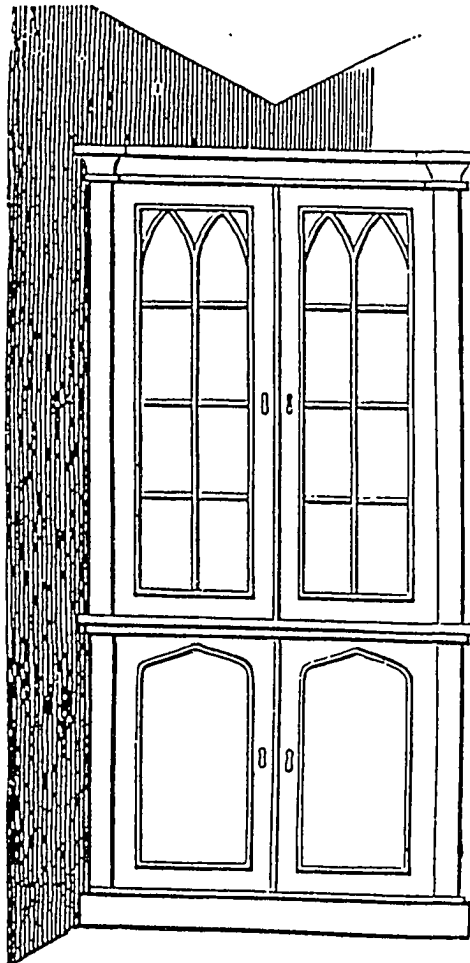


Figure 5.19 Design for a corner bookcase with cornice and proportions similar to Kersh china presses. From Andrew Jackson Downing, Architecture of Country Houses, (New York, 1850; reprint New York, 1969), 444.

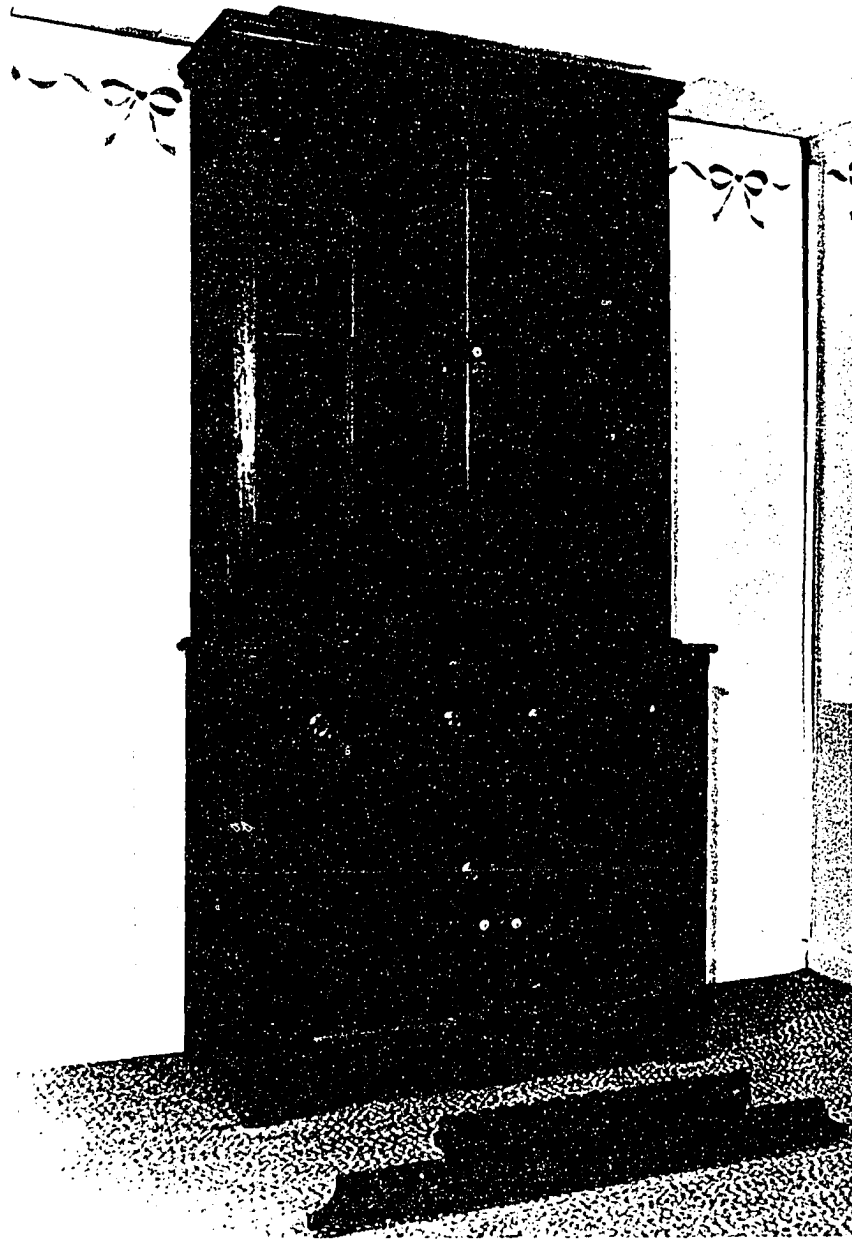


Figure 5.20 China press in a broadly neoclassical design. Owner Lela Southard, Massanetta Springs.

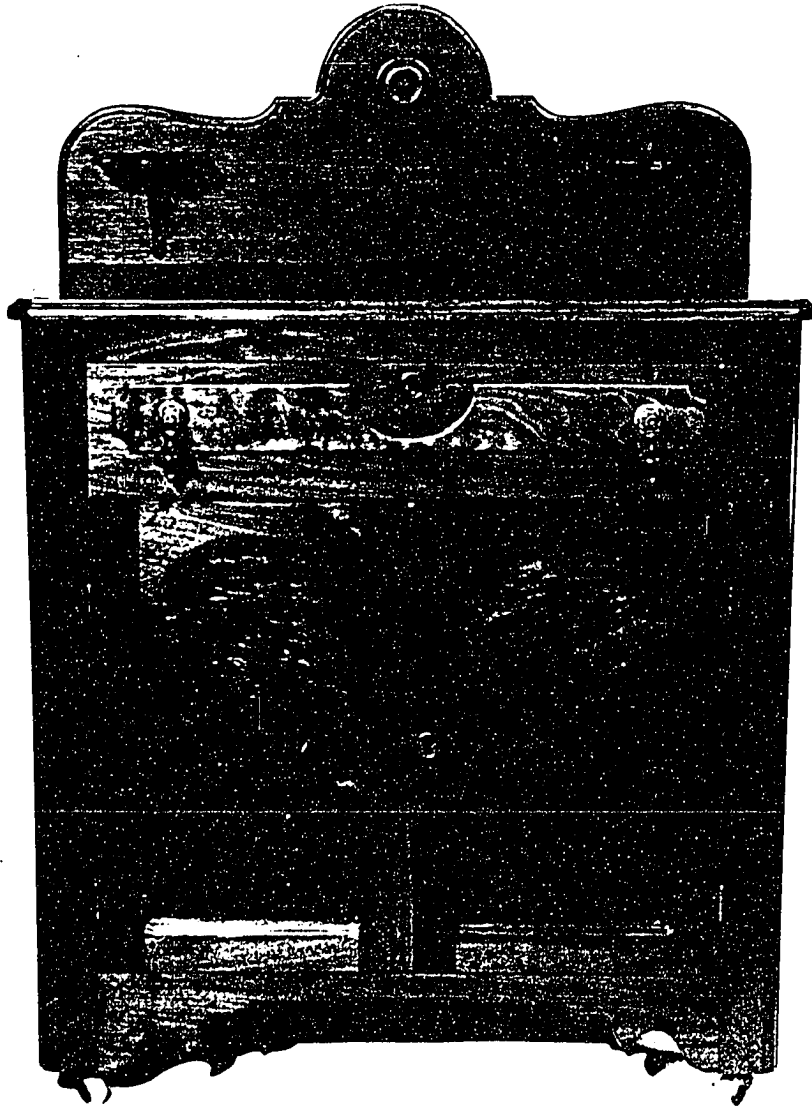


Figure 5.21 Washstand with book-matched recessed door panels and figured overlay. Owner Lorraine Dennison Diehl, Weyers Cave.

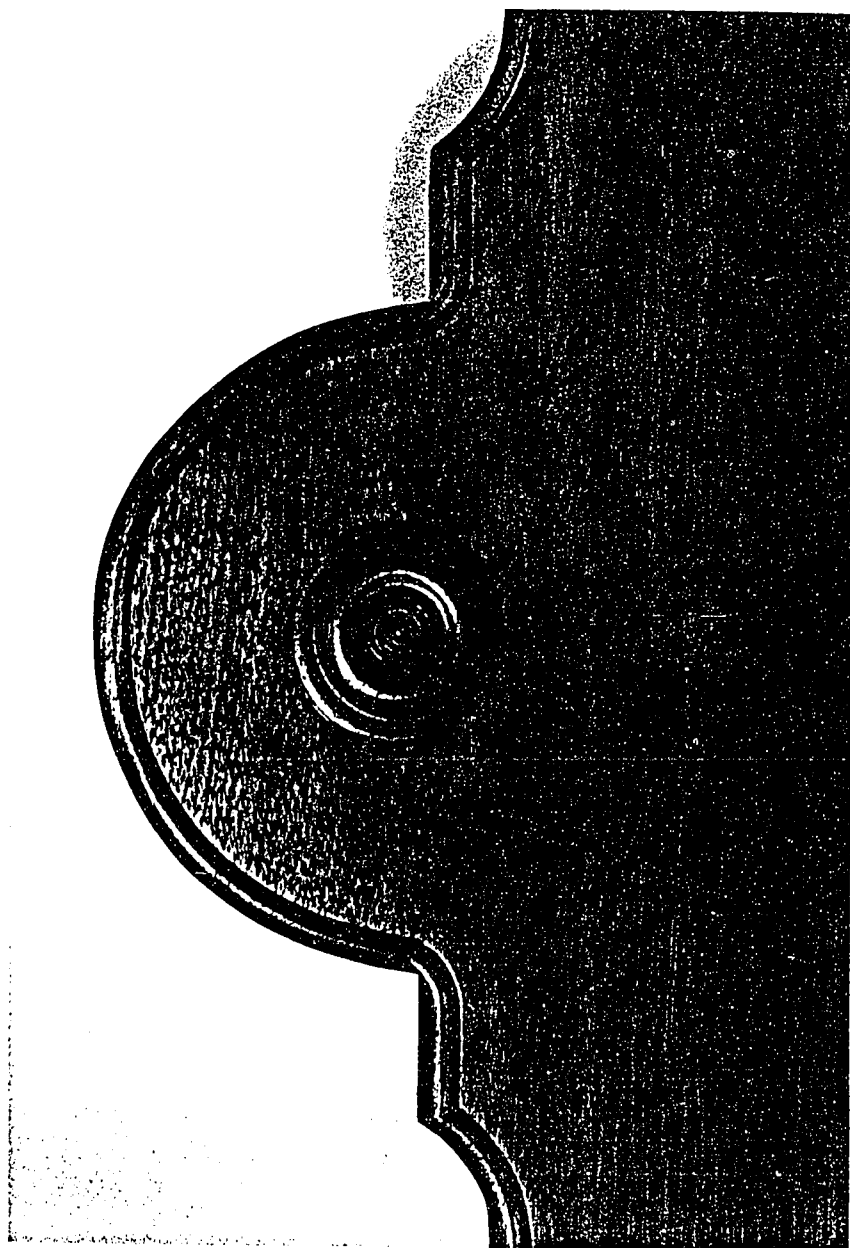


Figure 5.22 Detail of routed edge on Diehl washstand back splash.

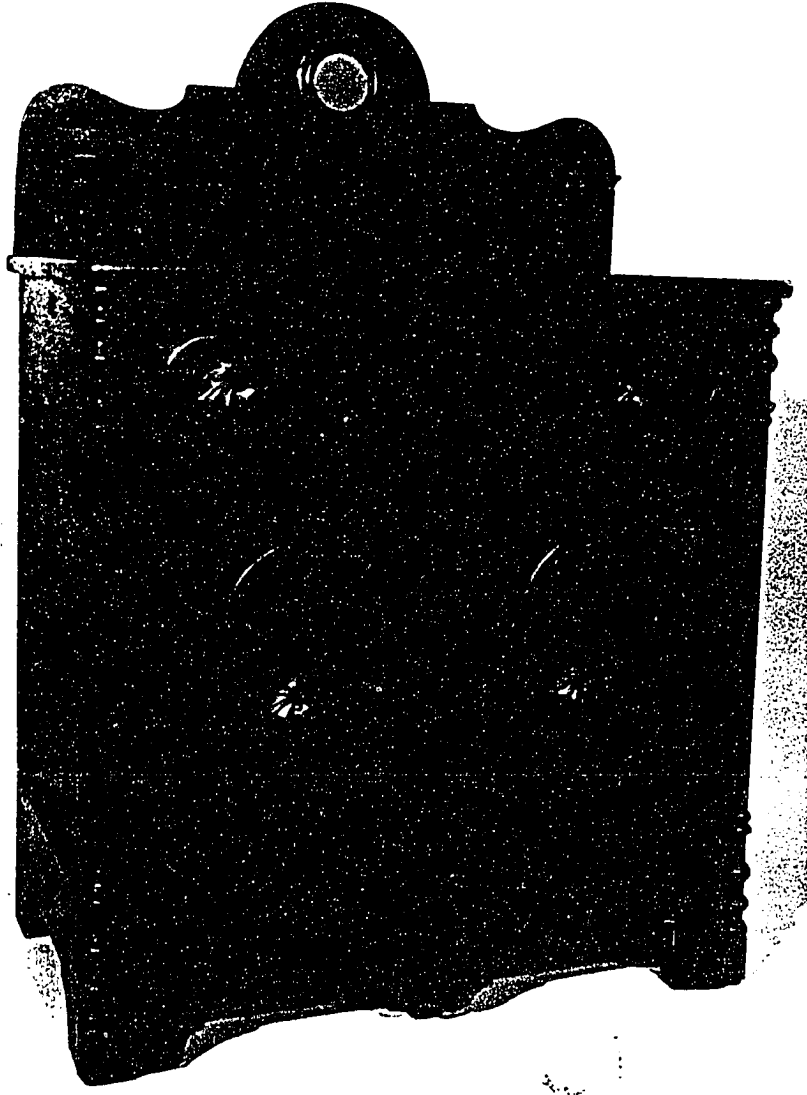


Figure 5.23 Washstand with possibly mass-produced ornaments. Owner Richard Skidmore, Keezletown.

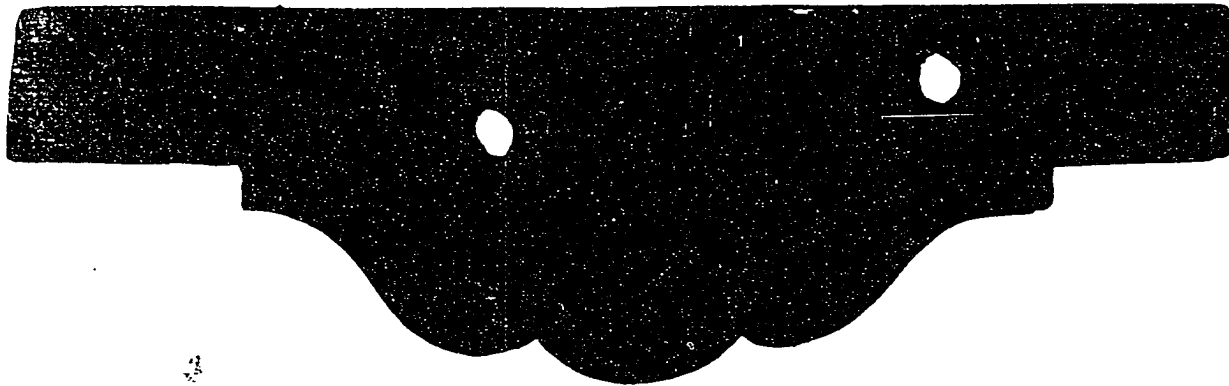


Figure 5.24 Pattern from Kersh shop that corresponds to apron on Skidmore washstand. Kersh collection, MAFC.



Figure 5.25 Detail of drawer handle and molding on Skidmore washstand.

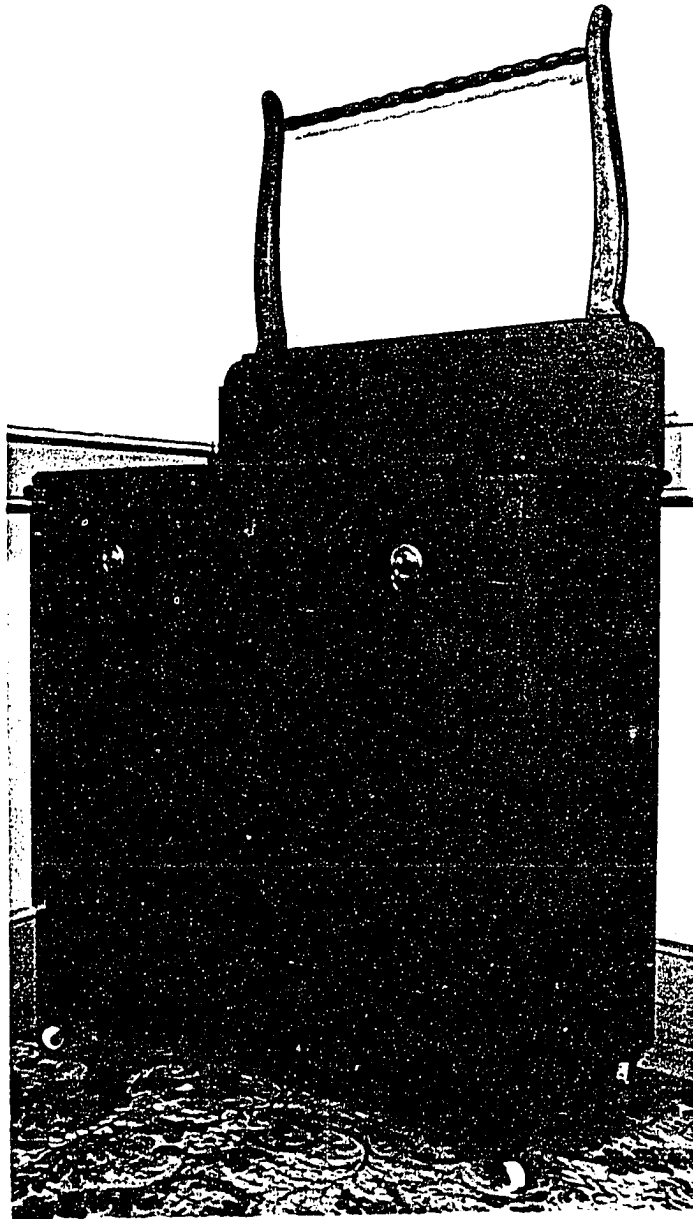


Figure 5.26 Washstand from bedroom set made in 1901 for Kersh's neighbor. Owners Carlyn, Glen, and Stephen H. Wise, Centerville.



Figure 5.27 Pie safe used on the Kersh farm, showing arrangement of drawers and doors commonly found on safes made in the lower Shenandoah Valley. Owner Martha Shull Peake, Wise.

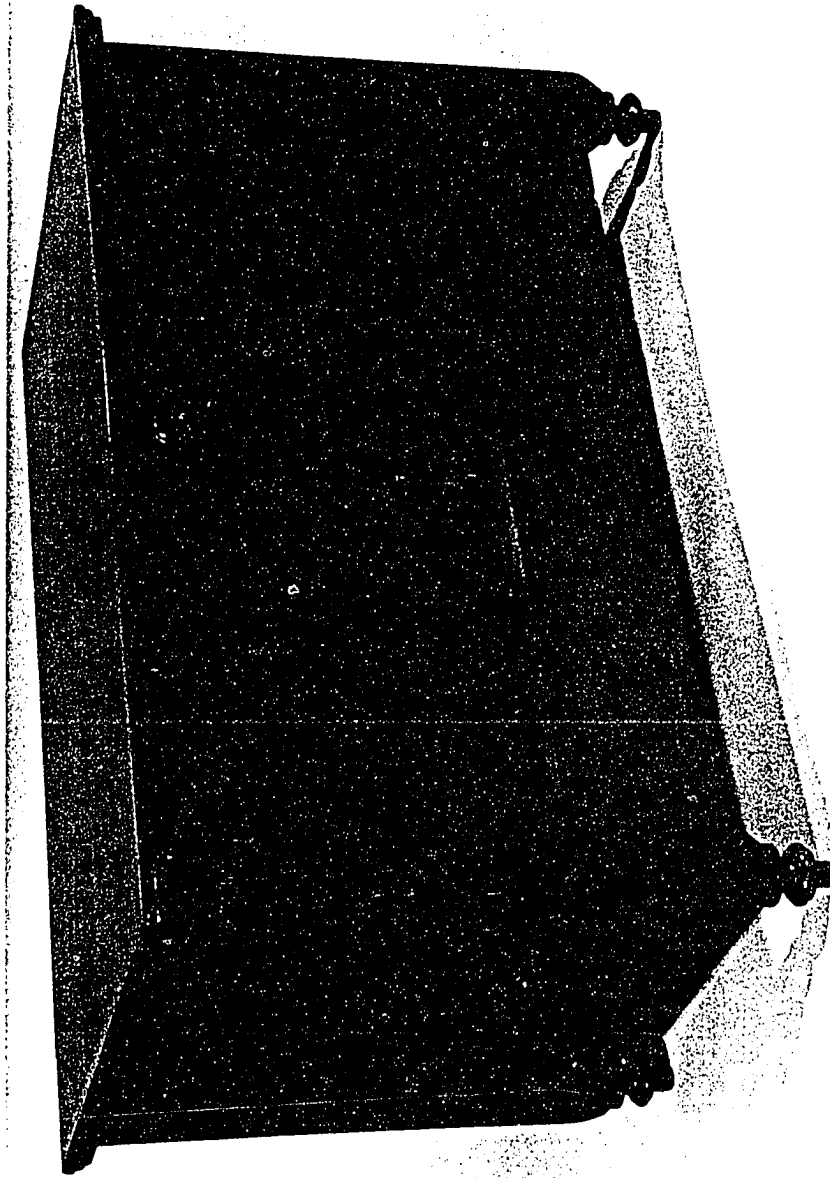


Figure 5.28 Chest, the only known furniture signed by Adam Kersh. Owner E. Ray Wine, Mt. Solon.



Figure 5.29 signature and date on chest: "Nov.--1889--Adam W. Kersh to Maude."



Figure 5.30 End table with cupped turnings and baluster feet found on other Kersh furniture. Owner Charles Lenford Kersh, Harrisonburg.

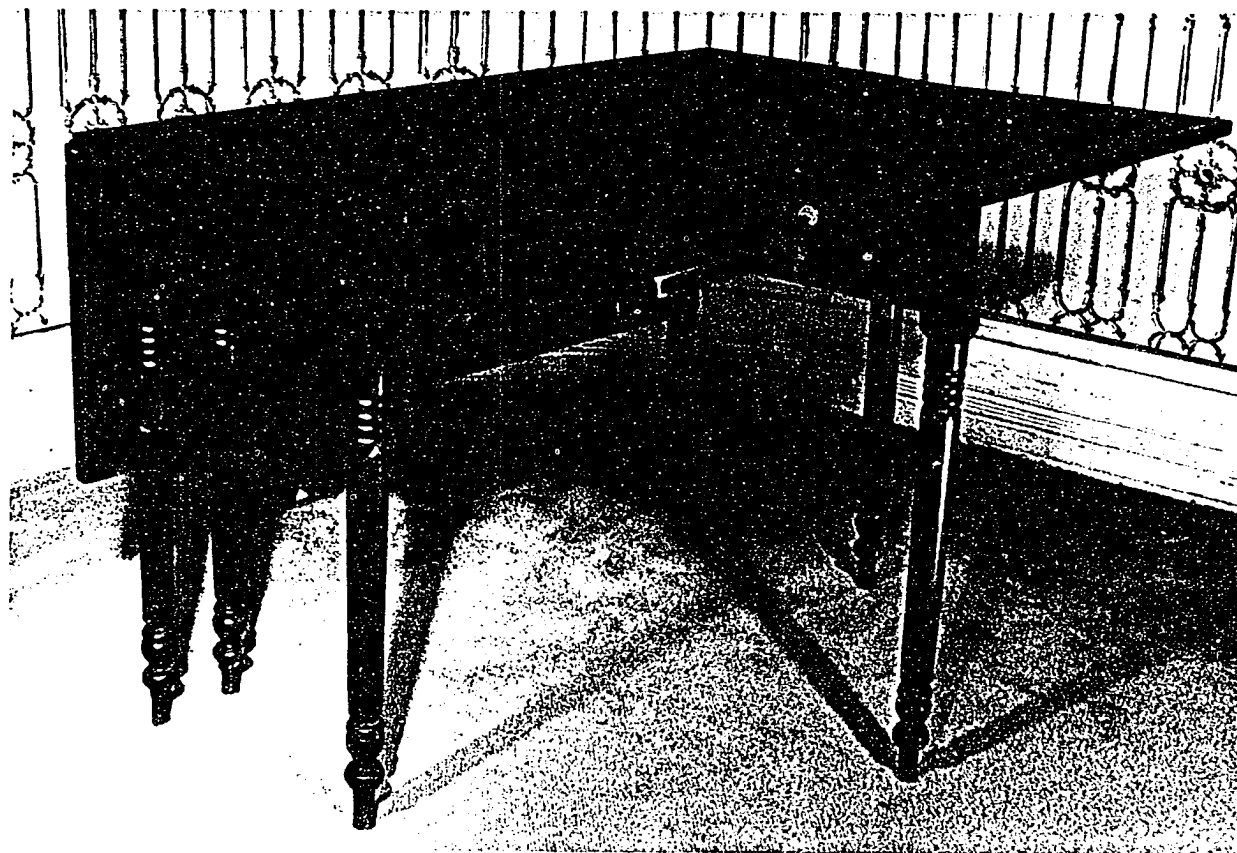


Figure 5.31 Gateleg table with ring turnings of a kind widely made by furniture factories. Owner Dwight Shull, Bridgewater.

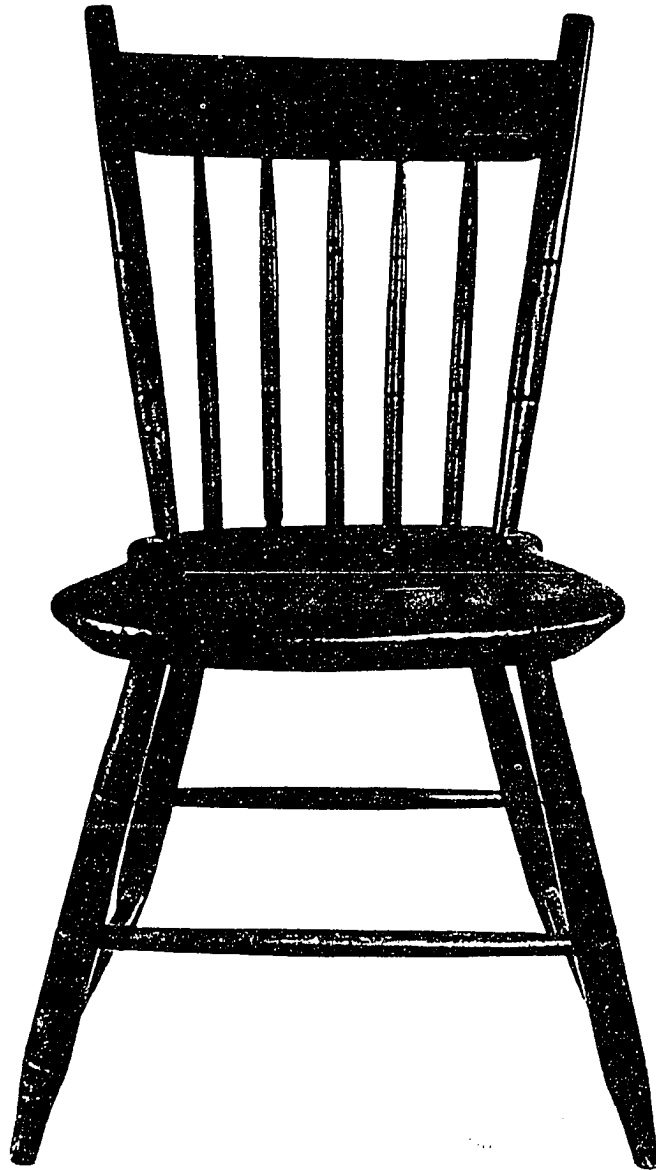


Figure 5.32 Spindle-back Windsor with bamboo turnings of an outmoded design. Owner Dwight Shull, Bridgewater.



Figure 5.33 Slat-back Windsor (1899) with pinstriping and stenciling. Owner Mary Katherine Weaver, Centerville.



Figure 5.34 Factory slat-back chair with half spindles that closely resembles Kersh's design. From Marietta Chair Company, Illustrated Catalogue (Marietta, Ohio, 1885-86), 48. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection.

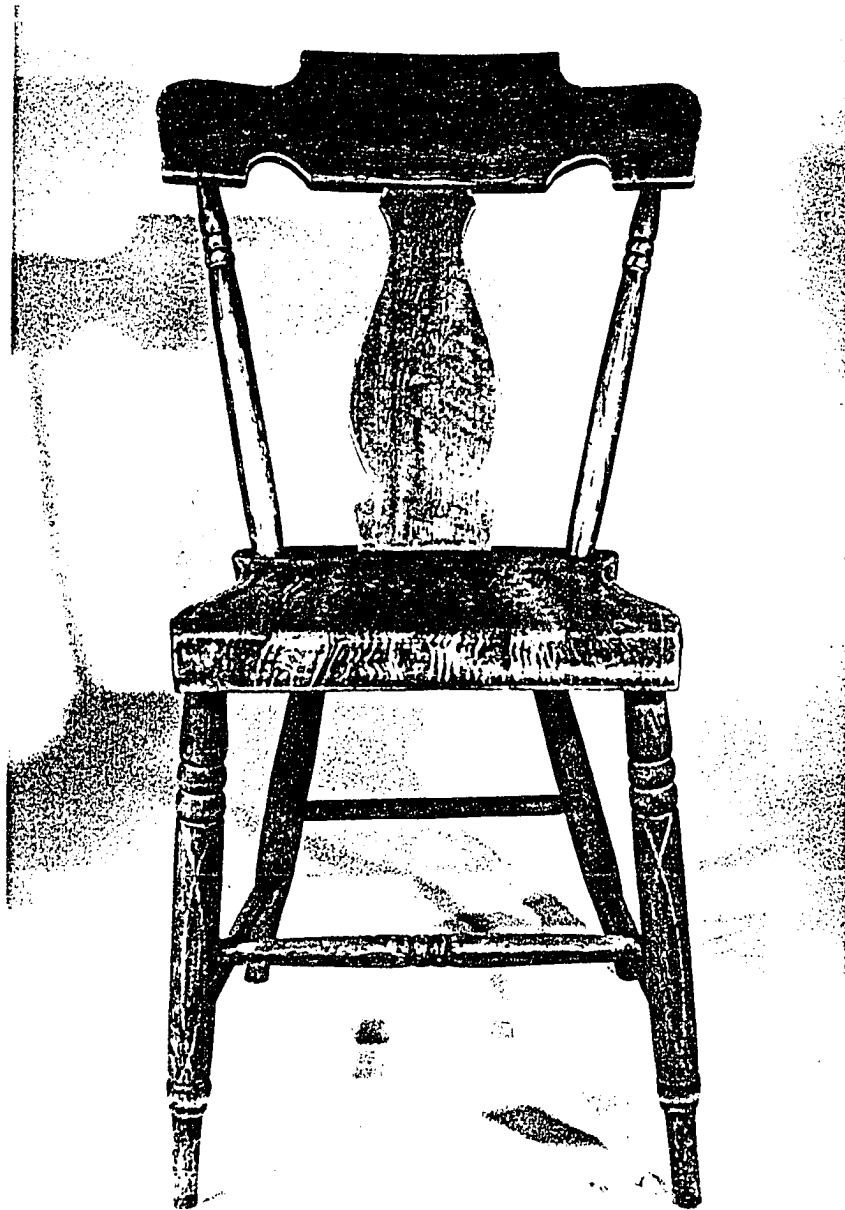


Figure 5.35 Banister-back Windsor with shouldered tablet adopted from painted "fancy" chairs. Owner Dwight Shull, Bridgewater.

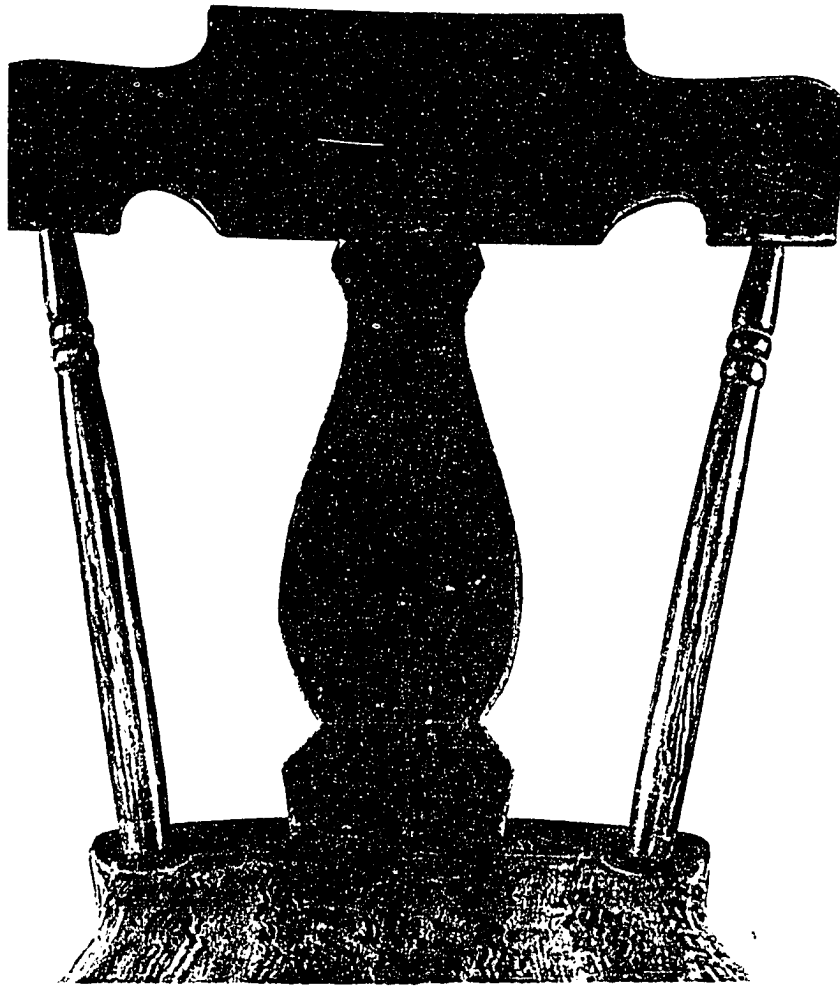


Figure 5.36 Detail of Shull banister-back chair showing combed graining and stenciling on tablet and splat.



Figure 5.37 Tablet with scrolled grip found in the Kersh shop. Kersh collection, MAFC.

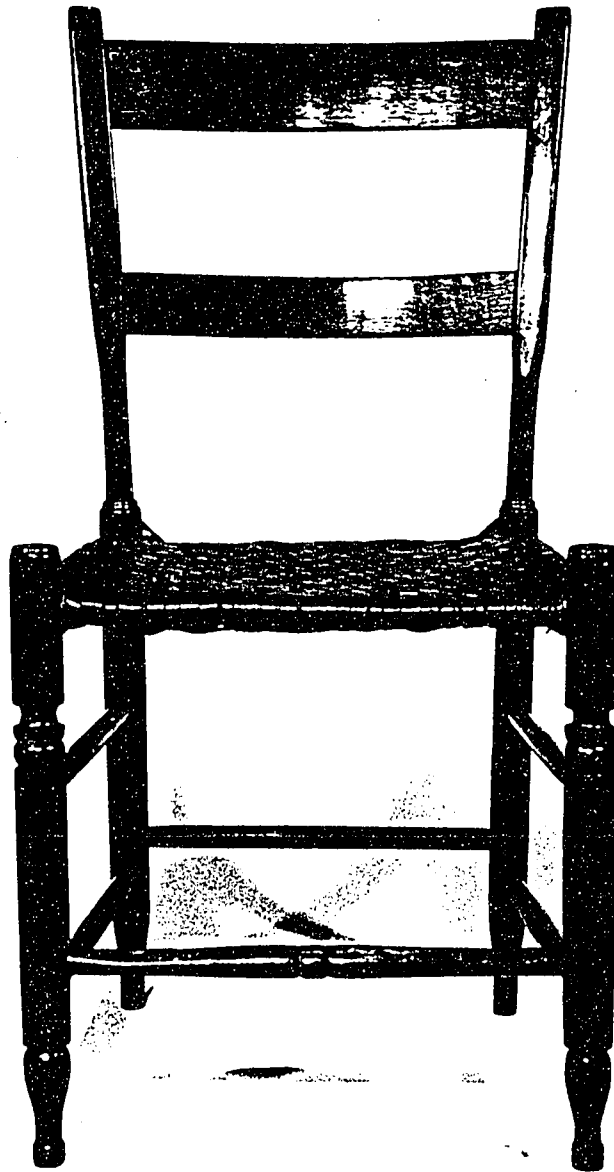


Figure 5.38 Split-bottom chair of a type commonly made in Appalachia and associated with rural makers. Owner Charles Lenford Kersh, Harrisonburg.

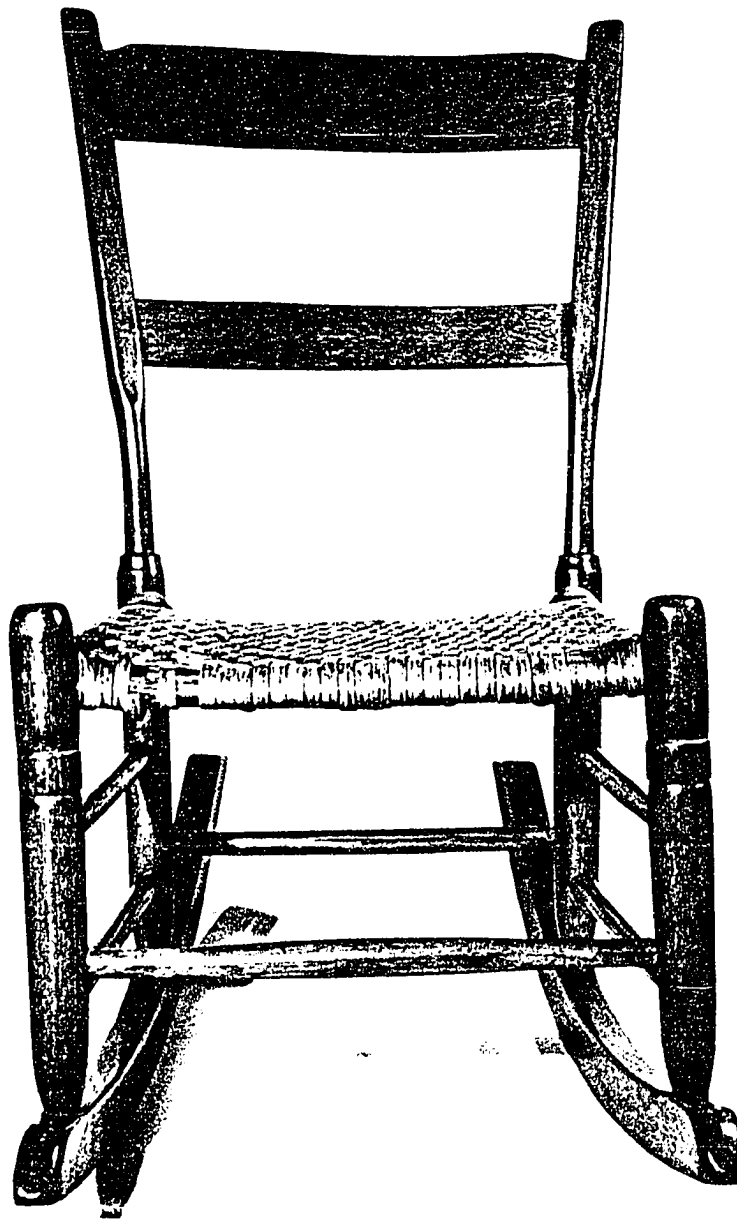


Figure 5.39 Low rocking chair similar to Kersh's split-bottom side chairs but framed to balance on rockers. Owner E. Ray Wine, Mt. Solon.

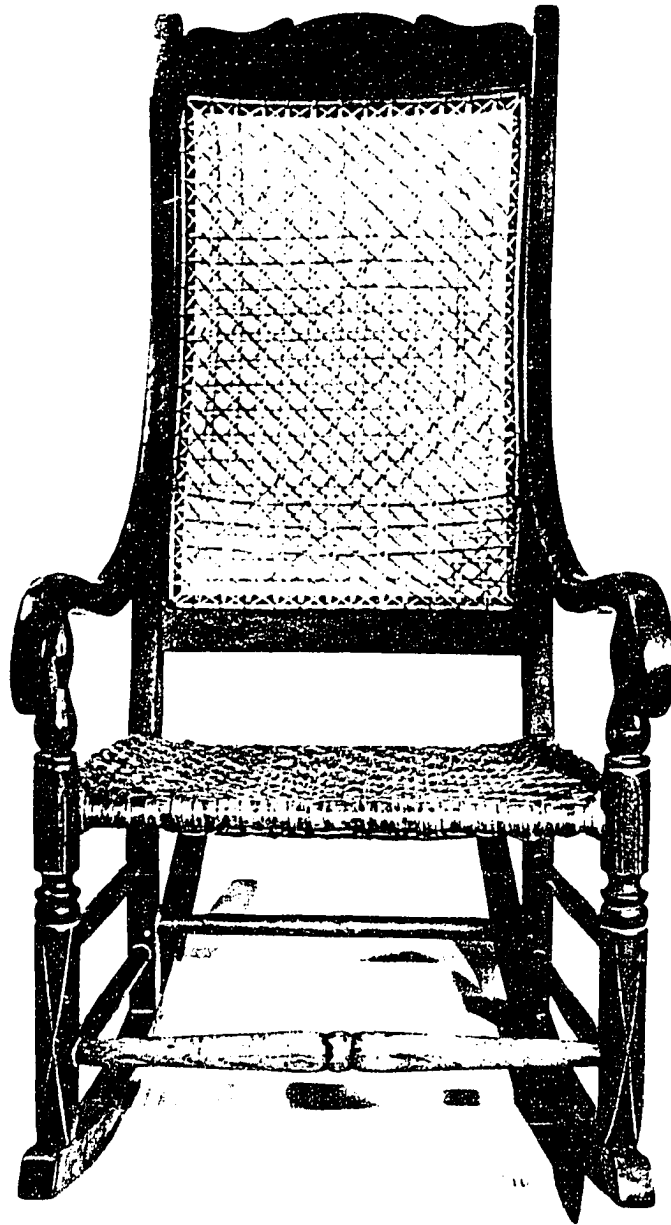


Figure 5.40 Caned-back adult rocking chair made by Kersh in large numbers. Owner Dwight Shull, Bridgewater.



Figure 5.41 Profile of Shull adult rocker showing curvature of stile.



Figure 5.42 Two patterns for rocker stiles from the Kersh shop showing difference in definition of curve. Kersh collection, MAFC.



Figure 5.43 The Boston rocker, a type defined by its S-curved board seat. From Marietta Chair Company, Illustrated Catalogue (Marietta, Ohio, 1889-90), 76. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection.

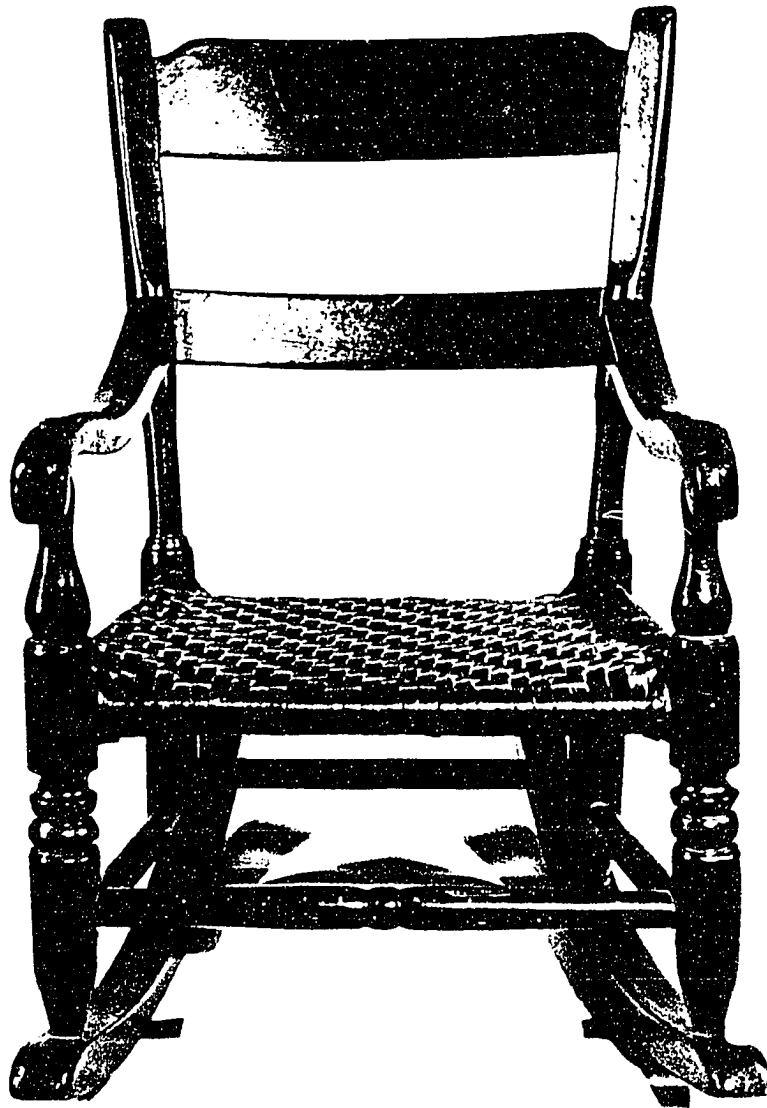


Figure 5.44 Child's slat-back rocking chair (c. 1890) with turnings and stiles modeled on Kersh's adult chairs. Owner Dwight Shull, Bridgewater.

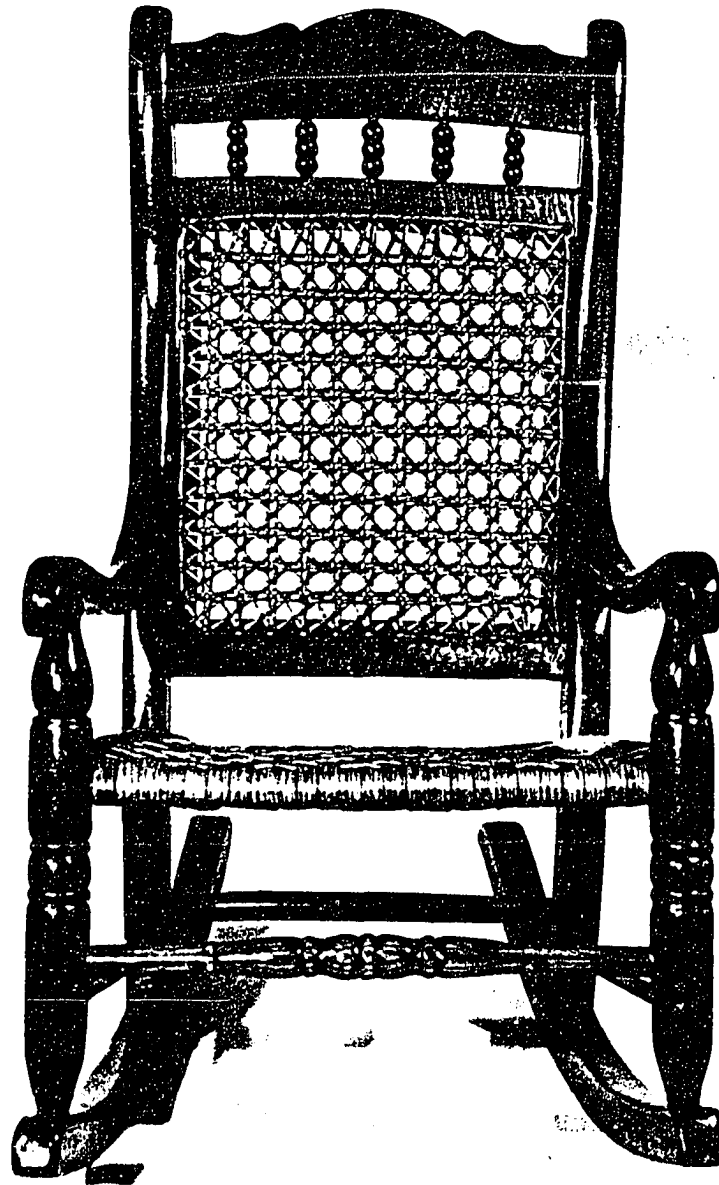


Figure 5.45 Child's caned-back rocker (c. 1900) with beaded turnings borrowed from factory designs of the late-nineteenth century. Owner Charles Lenford Kersh, Harrisonburg.

CONCLUSION

The study of Kersh's social background--his ethnic, religious, and family heritage--reveals much about this craftsman's predilections for conservatism. The insular character of his agrarian community and the strength of his local loyalties are manifest in the choices he made regarding his trade. Kersh remained on the family farm even after he turned to cabinetmaking and despite the fact that he owned property nearby. Although he traveled into the Allegheny Mountains and east to the Tidewater as a private in the Confederate Army, that exposure did little to widen the scope of his concerns. The social mobility, private ambition, and shift in allegiances away from local ties that are thought to attend diversification of local industries did not characterize Kersh's business practice. His self-interest remained limited. The savings he amassed reflected his success in the cabinetmaking trade, but his primary expenditures appear to have been loans to his brother and other community members. He was cautious in his business, never installing a steam or gas engine or taking on numerous employees. His sources of supply remained local (although some supplies were manufactured in

Chicago, Baltimore, and elsewhere). Finally, his social status never changed, despite his financial success. Kersh seems to have deliberately modified the effects of economic change by maintaining familiar relations with members of his family and community.

Kersh's craft practice suggests that many of the opportunities presented by industrialization were not adopted by him. In fact, he and his customers took refuge in the familiar by adopting the styles of fashionable furniture, but not their construction methods. Kersh's furniture designs are a compromise between traditional, outmoded styles and mail-order furniture of the sort made by factories in the Northeast and Midwest. But his joinery methods were the traditional dovetail and the frame and panel. Distribution of his furniture remained local, and his contact with customers was direct. Although he introduced machines into his work routines, the work they performed suggests that he chose them to speed repetitive tasks and to alter decoration quickly, not to eliminate the errors of hand work. Kersh broke with traditional craft primarily by imitating national trends in furniture design and finishing. But this practice enabled him to satisfy local customers while competing with factory furniture imported into the Valley.

Passing through Augusta County in 1816, James Paulding summed up the character of local Germans this way:

Ceaseless and unwearied industry is his delight, and enterprise and speculation his abhorrence. Riches do not corrupt, nor poverty depress him; for his mind is a sort of Pacific ocean, such as the first navigators described it--unmoved by tempests, and only intolerable from its dead and tedious calms.¹

The cocky Paulding was mistaken about the tedious calm of the Germans, just as early navigators were about the Pacific. Kersh did not distinguish himself by his habit to continue, but he successfully used craft tradition as a bulwark against the swell of economic change.

Conclusion
ENDNOTES

1. James Kirke Paulding, Letters From the South, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), Early American Imprints, 2d ser., no. 41738 (New York: Readex Microprint, 1979, microfiche), 2:110.

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