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**The most opulent form: A structural analysis of New York
five-legged card tables**

Levy, Frank Millner, M.A.

University of Delaware, 1991

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THE MOST OPULENT FORM
A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF NEW YORK
FIVE-LEGGED CARD TABLES

by
Frank M. Levy

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

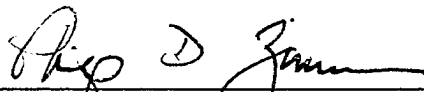
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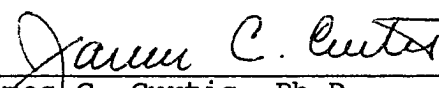
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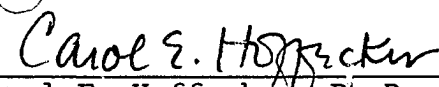
THE MOST OPULENT FORM
A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF NEW YORK FIVE-LEGGED CARD TABLES

by

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ABSTRACT

The structural examination of New York, five-legged, Chippendale era card tables presents new names, ideas and relationships, heretofore unknown regarding New York cabinetmaking. Through close structural analysis of over seventy examples, certain patterns of construction are apparent. These patterns appear to indicate specific shop traditions, and certain aspects about the marketplace for New York cabinetwork at this time. Moreover, the discovery of a signed example allows, for the first time, attributions of a group of card tables to a known New York firm, that of Marinus Willett and Jonathan Pearsee. Other groups of tables reveal identical tops appearing among many cabinetmaking shops, the work of craftsmen outside New York City's borders, and stamped metal hinges that support the previous dating of the form.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

New York pre-Revolutionary furniture has never received the careful scholarly attention that many other American colonial regions have enjoyed. This oversight may result from its reputation as uninspired, a lack of documentation, or even a refusal to recognize the economic and social importance of pre-Revolutionary New York. For whatever reason, while work on other cabinet-making centers has flourished, furniture from the Chippendale era's second largest city, and the English colonial trading capitol, has never been fully surveyed.

By 1771, New York had passed Boston to become the colonies' second largest city, behind Philadelphia. Nearly 200 ships a year came through New York trading for wood, skins, and agricultural products.¹ With all of the commercial wealth developing in New York, both city and state, the demand for high quality and stylish objects was strong. It is visible in surviving objects, including

¹ Jerry E. Patterson, The City of New York; A History Illustrated from the Collections of The Museum of the City of New York, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1978) 45.

silver, portraits, ceramics and furniture owned and used by New Yorkers. Such a proliferation of goods led John Adams to note the "opulence and splendor" visible in New York homes.

Since New York cabinetmakers seem to have developed certain innovative stylistic forms in the New World, further proof exists of their importance. Recent work on the carver Henry Hardcastle has identified his work on a four legged, serpentine front card table, owned by The Chipstone Foundation, and a serpentine front chest of drawers owned by Winterthur.² Since Hardcastle died in 1756, both objects must predate that year; these objects are, therefore, two of the earliest serpentine furniture forms known in the New World, and are contemporary with fashionable English designs.³

Perhaps the greatest obstacle for a thorough study of New York furniture concerns another aspect of the city's history, repeated destruction due to fire and mismanagement. The December, 1776, fire that destroyed

² The table is pictured on page 317 of Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque, American Furniture at Chipstone, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984.) The chest is pictured on page 27 of Charles F. Hummel, A Winterthur Guide to American Chippendale Furniture; Middle Atlantic and Southern Colonies, (New York; Rutledge Books, 1976).

³ I am indebted to Luke Beckerdite, Executive Director of the Chipstone Foundation, for this information.

one-quarter of New York City, including many of the enclaves of wealth, destroyed much of the finest furniture. Subsequent fires, including one in 1778 and others in the nineteenth century, further destroyed many examples of the city's decorative heritage.⁴ Moreover, the Revolution forced many loyalists to depart for England and they may have taken furniture with them. These destructive forces, as well as New York's notorious lack of preservation, destroyed most eighteenth century account books, diaries and documents related to cabinetmaking.

With very little documentary information available, the scholar of New York furniture must develop a methodology that is not dependent on written sources. Since objects themselves are the best, and in many cases, only evidence of certain eighteenth century cabinetwork, the study needs to focus on them.

Through a comparative analysis of New York card tables, this investigation identifies separate shop traditions, as well as certain aspects of the eighteenth century New York cabinetmaking marketplace. The examination is in three parts; gathering information on individual forms (over 70 tables were measured and

⁴ David M. Ellis, et al., A History of New York State, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967) 4.

documented), patterning this information through comparative analysis, and finally providing possible explanations for these patterns.

When projecting explanations for the patterns, a necessary weighting of information takes place. Structure, carving, decoration, proportion and materials all reveal certain patterns that, at times, conflict. Therefore, depending on what the examiner hopes to discover, some elements must be emphasized over others. Since this study attempts to discover cabinetmaking shop traditions for the tables, it will focus on their structural features and depend less heavily on decorative elements.

The reason for an emphasis on physical structure in this examination stems from an assumption held by many furniture and economic historians that the primary "concern of the shopowner [was] making money."⁵ Therefore, the unseen structural features of a product, those that would neither add nor subtract from the overall price, were kept to a minimum cost. To do this, cabinet-shop owners developed unwritten formulas for production. These methods maximized the structural integrity of each

⁵ Philip D. Zimmerman, "Workmanship as Evidence; A Model for Object Study", The Winterthur Portfolio, Vol. 16, no.4, (Winter, 1981), 289.

product while minimizing labor and material costs. Through a comparative analysis of the tables therefore, one should find patterns of construction wherein certain structural details, usually many, become the "signature" of a shop tradition.⁶

However, if one changes the assumptions, very different conclusions can be reached. For example, the identically sized and shaped tops that appear on most of the five-legged tables, might lead one to attribute all of these tables to one shop. Or a proportional examination might suggest that only two shops produced New York card tables. Careful consideration of the information as a whole, including documentary sources, decorative features and the entire structural makeup of the tables, provides evidence that neither of these statements is completely valid. However, they do reveal one of the implicit dangers in regard to the act of interpreting meaning from

⁶ This methodology is best described in Zimmerman, "Workmanship as Evidence." The article establishes some of the necessary assumptions for this kind of a study, as well as clearly delineating the differences between the work of one man, and one man's imprint on a shop tradition. Zimmerman also delineates, using David Pye and Benno Forman's work as models, between the "workmanship of certainty", the "workmanship of risk" and Forman's "workmanship of habit." Each of these concepts has an important impact on this methodology, as evidence of either physical or mental templates reveals degrees of each type of workmanship. It is this evidence that forms the basis for conclusions in these studies.

patterns. Such interpretation forces a decision among many possible explanations. Although the interpretation may be informed by many patterns and documents, we still must realize that some of the underlying assumptions of a study may not be correct, and a series of possible explanations exist. Therefore, the interpreter must, through a careful consideration of all information, attempt the most accurate recreation of past marketplace traditions.⁷

This paper is divided into six chapters and discusses eight possible shop traditions. Each chapter divides into three parts: a report on the structural patterns for the

⁷ Scholar E. D. Hirsch, although discussing literature, set forth a useful distinction between "meaning" and "significance" that explains the difficulty in interpretive exercises. "Meaning" to Hirsch is the original intention of the author. It is an unchanging entity, which, regarding the card tables, indicates that each structural feature reflects a purposeful decision by a cabinetmaker. However, the modern interpreter approaches the card tables with a distinct disadvantage, namely that we can never regain the entire context and purpose for each visible element. Therefore, the interpretation of these texts reveals what Hirsch calls "significance" or "the textual meaning as related to some context beyond itself.... that is to say a larger context, another mind, another era, a wider subject matter, an alien system of values, and so on." See E. D. Hirsch, The Aims of Interpretation, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pages 2-3. The interpreter must accept that the study takes place out of the original context, and therefore the patterned information allows for numerous interpretations. Throughout the significance sections of this paper, or those sections explaining the distinctive group characteristics, the reader should realize, and hopefully explore, other possible explanations.

group, a discussion of the decorative elements, and an examination of the possible significance of these patterns.⁸ In most cases the tables tell much about themselves, the relationships within the workshops, and the relationship between maker and consumer.

⁸ Significance was a conscious choice of wording and relates to Hirsch's definition of the term.

Chapter 2

THE WILLETT AND PEARSEE GROUP

The discovery of the Willett/Pearsee group represents the first time a known shop can be identified with a group of New York card tables. The group also provides an accurate date for the forms, and confirms the regional attribution of these tables to New York. The tables, in conjunction with extant advertisements, also reveal important information regarding the economic and commercial atmosphere that surrounded the supply of, and demand for, New York cabinetmaking.

Marinus Willett, an important military and political figure, first appears as a freeman in New York in 1767.⁹ Later advertisements indicate a partnership with his father-in-law Jonathan Pearsee.¹⁰ On the inner rear rail of a privately owned card table appears a chalk inscription "Willett". Since the mark is just below the top, any hand would be too constrained to print the name

⁹ For a biographical sketch of Marinus Willett see Appendix A.

¹⁰ Rita Susswein Gottesman, ed., The Arts and Crafts in New York; 1726-1776 (New York: New York Historical Society, 1938), 119-120.

after the table was assembled. Therefore, the inscription must have been written before the table was put together and cannot denote an owner which, given Willett's strong economic means, and the affinity of New York owners to brand and inscribe their furniture, one must consider.¹¹ Furthermore, the simple print suggests that the inscription is not a signature but appears on the table accidentally. For example, the board may have identified delivery to the Willett/Pearsee shop or may have been marked by the firm to discourage theft by an employee. However the inscription arrived on the table, it connects a cabinetmaker with his work.

Furniture historians generally accept that groups of furniture with identical construction techniques and revealing the same idiosyncratic methods of joinery and structure are the work of the same school of cabinetmaking.¹² Therefore, a close examination of the

¹¹ Roderic H. Blackburn, "Branded and Stamped New York Furniture," The Magazine Antiques, Vol. CXIX, no. 5, (May, 1981): 1130-1145.

¹² Some furniture studies that are based on this principle include Philip D. Zimmerman, "Workmanship as Evidence; A Model for Object Study," Winterthur Portfolio, Vol. 16, no. 4 (Winter, 1981): 283-307; Charles F. Montgomery, American Furniture: The Federal Period (New York: Viking Press, 1966), p. 14.; and, although not related to furniture but based on the same principle, Henry Glassie, Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975).

signed tables, and comparison to the structural makeup of other tables, allows a strong attribution to the Willett/Pearsee shop. The structural idiosyncracies observed on Willett/Pearsee tables include the shaping of the front skirt's interior to echo its exterior serpentine shape, the acute angular cut at the meeting of the front and side skirts on the leg, the undercutting of the rear joinery to an obtuse angle, the non-protruding hinge pin, and identically-sized knuckles on this hinge.

Of the nine tables from this group, three, including the signed table, are owned privately (see Catalog, TABLES 13, 21, 22) and others are in The Museum of the City of New York (TABLE 15), the Bayou Bend collection of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston (TABLE 16)¹³, the Pendleton Collection at the Rhode Island School of Design (TABLE 19), the Yale University Art Gallery (TABLE 14), the Nelson-Atkins Museum (TABLE 20)¹⁴, and two more in the collection of Bernard & S. Dean Levy, Inc. (TABLES 17, 18)¹⁵.

¹³ Not personally examined.

¹⁴ Examined by Scott Erbes.

¹⁵ It seems clear that the Willett/Pearsee shop produced more than the nine tables examined. Clearly the pool of tables has been biased by the many fires in New York including the great fire of 1776 where most of the wealthiest homes were destroyed, as well as other forms of destruction. It is therefore impossible to know exactly how many tables were produced, particularly since no

Structural Examination of the Tables

On all Willett/Pearsee tables, the front and side skirts and the inner rear rail are tenoned into the front and rear legs. Two pins secure these joints without any glue block support. At the front legs, behind the actual joint, the front and side skirts are sawn apart leaving a sharply angled opening (Fig. 1, A). Similarly, there is a wide and deep cut in the front skirt that echoes the serpentine front (Fig. 1, B). This cut appears on the solid skirt and the applied molding with most examples having congruent saw marks indicating simultaneous sawing. On tables where the saw marks of the skirt and molding do not match, other evidence demonstrates the reapplication of the front molding. Although other groups reveal cuts in the same areas as the Willett/Pearsee tables (Van Rensselaer Shop examples, for instance) the deepness and the angularity of these cuts, both center and side, are notable.

The Willett/Pearsee shop's joinery of the rear section is also unique among New York cabinet-makers. Typically the side rails fit into the rear legs with a mortise and tenon joint secured by pins. At the point of joinery between the side skirts and inner rear rail there is a half-inch cut in the side. This means that the

account book for the shop has surfaced at this point.

meeting of skirt with inner rear rail is not perpendicular like other tables but meets at an acute angle (Fig. 1, C)¹⁶ The inner rear rail is tenoned into the rear legs without any pin support.¹⁷

A thorough examination of pin size and separation reveals that placement of these elements was not determined by any gauging tool or template. The pins themselves are all the same diameter, implying some standardization. However, their distance from the top varies between one and one-and-three-quarters inches for the top pin, and two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half-inches for the bottom pin. The distance on the swing legs differs considerably as the bottom pin is usually between three and three-quarters and four-and-a-quarter inches from the top.

Many of the tables in this group came with drawers placed behind the swing leg. However, not all tables in this group have a drawer, suggesting that this element was an option. These drawers are often missing, and many are replacements, so great care must be taken in using them as proof of a shop tradition. In fact, only three tables,

¹⁶ Some of the tables retain the saw marks at this cut while on others the marks have been smoothed away. As well, tables made in the Apprentice group reveal similar cuts at this point.

¹⁷ Only on the repaired examples did pins enhance the inner rear rail's joinery.

(Yale, MCNY and the signed table) revealed the proper wear, oxidation and technique of construction to be original to the tables. Each drawer has one large dovetail, one-and-one-eighth of an inch in height, which is echoed at the drawer's rear. The bottom of the sides, back and front are rabbeted to house the bottom board, which nails secure into place. This drawer construction, among original drawers, does not vary.

Similarly, the drawer runner construction is identical throughout this group. Only two runners hung from the front skirt and the rear rail appear. The runners themselves vary slightly in thickness, although their lengths are identical. Nails from behind the inner rear rail secure the runners to the rear, while nails enter through the bottom of the runner into the front skirt at an angle. This security in the front rail does not pierce through to the outer surface.

The exterior rear rail construction of these tables differs considerably from that of other groups.¹⁸ As with all other five legged tables, the exterior rear rail consists of two boards connected by a wooden hinge that can have either round or flat knuckles. In the Willett/Pearsee group the five-knuckled hinge has round

¹⁸ The exterior rear rail includes both the swing rail and the stationary rail at the rear of the table.

knuckles that are smoothed to an even surface. The knuckles are of standard size throughout the group, with the top knuckle as the smallest, always one inch in height, and the remainder of the knuckles slightly larger, usually no more than one-and-one-eighth inches. These identically-sized knuckles appear to be the result of standardization within the shop, perhaps with some kind of template or marking device. Another hinge feature unique to this group is the blunt pointed central hinge pin which does not protrude beyond the bottom knuckle. Finally, the top, middle, and bottom knuckles swing while the second and fourth knuckles remain stationary.

The two boards of the exterior rear rail are a swing rail and a stationary one attached to the inner rear rail. On Willett/Pearsee tables, five nails secure the stationary board to the inner rear rail from the table's rear. A distinctive nailing pattern emerges as original nails appear in a box of four with a fifth nail placed in the center.¹⁹ Distinctive nailing patterns are also evident on the skirt moldings' application. On the front skirt, invariably, five nails secure the molding to the skirt with one nail directly in the center, two about five

¹⁹ On some examples additional nails or screws have been added later but this does not obliterate the original five screw pattern.

inches away on either side, and two more at the molding's corners. Three nails secure the side moldings into place.

Although the hinge, knuckles and joinery of this group are identical, the size of the swing leg portion can vary. All are about five-and-a-half inches in depth with a variation of one-eighth of an inch. Their lengths vary substantially as the ratio between swinging and stationary board lengths is not constant, although the overall rear widths of the table's bases are nearly identical. This is of particular interest since the Willett/Pearsee tables reveal a strict standardization in almost every other aspect.

Six screws secure the tops of these tables to their base from below, with two from the front rail, two from the inner rear rail, and one from each side rail (Fig. 1, D). Smoothed, semi-circular cuts in the rails house the screws, except where a cut out for the drawer exists and then the screw fits through the top of this opening on the inner rear rail. Gauge lines mark the depth of these immaculately smoothed cuts. The cuts are particularly uniform throughout the group revealing great concern with this process.

Another interesting aspect to tops of Willett/Pearsee tables is the tothing plane marks on their entire underside. Tothing wood was a common practice among

eighteenth century cabinet-makers to smooth rough surfaces for greater workability. Originally, they probably toothed both sides of the tops, although they planed the show surfaces to a smooth and even surface. Finally, gauge lines carefully mark the top's placement onto the base of each Willett/Pearsee table. Given all the care and neatness in the application of the top, it appears to have been of the utmost importance to the Willett/Pearsee shop.²⁰

Decorative Examination of the Tables

Having used the structural aspects of the tables to identify a group, a comparative examination of their decoration is useful. These elements include overall proportion and shape, knee and bracket carving, and skirt moldings.

All Willett/Pearsee tables display a particularly blocky claw-and-ball foot used on other New York furniture forms from other shops.²¹ Willett/Pearsee shop legs

²⁰ A comparative analysis of the primary and secondary woods for these groups revealed that they do not indicate a shop tradition. Therefore, they shall be discussed in the Catalog section with each individual piece, and not elaborated on within the text.

²¹ This type of foot is illustrated as number four in John Kirk, American Chairs: Queen Anne and Chippendale, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972) p. 45.

appear thicker than those on most other tables, giving the tables a sturdier image.

The knee carving has a basic design of a central C-scroll surrounded by a mantle decorated with a combination of ovals and pinwheels. A descending acanthus motif completes the design. The knee brackets have C-scrolls with foliate carving emanating from them, and terminate with a carved rosette. Within this basic design a variety of elaboration exists as mantle size, use of pinwheels and peanuts, and even the treatment of foliate design reveal differing degrees of attention within the group.

Although the carvings have similar designs, the execution among them differs as to the size and deepness of incisions and overall handling. For instance, on the signed table a slightly stiffer carving appears than the smooth and rounded carving of the MCNY, Yale or Bayou Bend examples. The designs also differ slightly as some have peanuts and pinwheels incised into the C-scroll's surrounding mantle, and others, RISD, Willett, and Levy, do not. The carved rosettes which appear on the corners of these tables also reveal a different design and further hint at different carvers. The different carving on tables from the Willett/Pearsee shop indicates that, as has been demonstrated in other style centers such as

Philadelphia, a multitude of carvers free-lanced their skills to area craftsmen.²²

The gadroon section of these tables also reveals the work of different hands. In general, the gadrooning contains twelve gadroons on either side of a larger central gadroon. Some tables, (Levy and Nelson-Atkins) have smaller and more plentiful gadroons and indicate the work of a different carver from the rest of the group. The final type of skirt molding on Willett/Pearsee tables is a floral and vine motif that appears on the inscribed table and one at RISD. These tables have plain knee carving without the incised peanuts and pinwheels on the C-scroll's mantle. This molding has a floral and vine motif adorned with bunches of grapes throughout. The carvings vary, however, as on the inscribed table bunches of seven grapes appear, while the Pendleton example has fourteen. Similarly, the leaves and flowers are proportioned differently.

Often the back legs of Willett/Pearsee tables reveal a simple foliate carving only if there is a molding along

²² For the variety of carvers available to different Philadelphia craftsmen see Luke Beckerdite, "Philadelphia Carving Shops, Part I: James Reynolds," The Magazine Antiques, (May, 1984): 1120-1133; "Philadelphia Carving Shops, Part II: Bernard and Jugiez," The Magazine Antiques, (September, 1985): 498-513; "Philadelphia Carving Shops, Part III: Hercules Courtenay," The Magazine Antiques, (May, 1987): 1044-1063.

the side skirts. However, one table from this group had a side gadroon and no back leg carving, while another had no side molding and carved rear legs.

The front corners on all Willett/Pearsee tables are rounded and the height for each example measures between twenty-seven-and-one-quarter and twenty-seven-and-three-quarter inches. The front and side skirts are three-and-a-half inches deep, excluding bottom moldings. Since the gadrooning among this group differs, the overall depth of the front skirt varies from four-and-five-sixteenths inches to three-and-seven-eighths inches. None of the examples are veneered and each has an identical sized and shaped top.²³

Each top has a half round molding on its edge and all examples reveal a cloth covering for the playing surface. Overall, only two known tables retain their original cloth playing surface, but all Willett/Pearsee tables had one. Similarly, each top is dished and cornered for chips and

²³ There are minor differences, less than 1/8 of an inch, in their frontal length. This is attributable to the molding of the top's edge and to possible miscalculation of sawing a marked board. The otherwise identical tops indicate standardization of this feature, while the extremely minor variations reveal that a degree of uncertainty exists even with templates. A full discussion of the identical tops appears in the significance section of this group.

candlesticks respectively.²⁴ Both tables with their original cloth, the inscribed table from this group and one owned by the MFA, Boston (TABLE 31), and discussed with the Apprentice group, have green baize with a gilt decorated leather surround.

On all five-legged card tables examined, visual analysis indicates mahogany as the sole primary wood. The secondary woods, however, vary among those commonly expected on New York furniture, including varieties of pine, oak, cherry, red gum, maple, tulip poplar and beech. However, there is no recognizable pattern to the use of these woods, and in no cases do they aid in the determination of this or other groups.

Significance of the Group

The structural pattern of these tables indicates that they are all the work of one shop, that of Marinus Willett and Jonathan Pearsee. We must then consider why these patterns exist, or what about the Willett/Pearsee shop would provide the structural and decorative traits previously noted. In some respects, the firm's advertisements offer a clue to these structural traits, as Willett and Pearsee often insist that their work

²⁴ Ruth B. Davidson, "American Gaming Tables," The Magazine Antiques,: (Sept, 1952) p.177.

represents "the greatest neatness and care."²⁵ These advertisements help explain the detailed marking and gauging on the tables. The carefully gauged and marked placement of the screws to the top, the well-marked rear wooden hinge, the gauging of the mortise-and-tenon joinery, and even the line indicating placement for the top onto the base demonstrate interest in the pre-designation of parts.

Not only are the markings clear, but the care and neatness revealed by these structural elements and the precise and finished quality of the secondary surfaces reveals a great interest in an organized and immaculate product. Compared to the work of other shops, these tables display the neatest interior surfaces.

Not only are Willett/Pearsee tables gauged more than any other group's, they also contain more chalk inscriptions as most have a series of "X"'s or numbers apparent on their underside. The signed Willett table has an "X" on the center of the front skirt as do other tables from the group which also have it on front, side and inner rear rails. Yale's table has a chalk mark "2" on

²⁵ This expression appears in an April 22, 1773 advertisement in Rivington's New York Gazetteer and in an advertisement of May 9, 1774 the firm insists that their work is "executed in the best manner." Both of these citations are found in Gottesman's, The Arts and Crafts in New York: 1726-1776 page 119 and 120.

its interior rear rail, possibly denoting it as the second table of a pair, although no Willett/Pearsee table with a chalk mark "1" is known.

The multitude of scribe lines and chalk inscriptions suggest a large Willett/Pearsee shop hiring many apprentices and journeymen to help in the manufacture of the tables. Evidence suggesting the large shop is in the tables themselves as the extensive markings appear to determine what parts went with certain tables. Under this probable scenario, the series of X markings indicate a reference for the craftsmen. Probably, the parts were made separately and then assembled together using the markings to determine the placement of each part.

This method of construction allowed the workers to specialize in their appointed tasks, as they would constantly produce a side skirt, a top, or the swing rail hinge. Such specialization may explain the standardization seen in the patterning of detailed construction elements. For example, the patterned nailing of moldings and the stationary section of the swing rail indicate the work of one familiar with this task. This degree of specialization allowed the worker to consistently produce the same nailing pattern. Similarly, the identical, non-protruding, blunt pointed pins for the wooden hinge, and the consistent measurement of the rear

hinges' knuckles reveal detailed specialization within the shop. This degree of specialization, where a division of labor for small structural elements appears, suggests a large shop, especially if they are to be "punctual in performing" the completion of their work.²⁶ Furthermore, a Willett/Pearsee advertisement calling for "two apprentices" intimates a large workshop.²⁷

The Willett/Pearsee card tables and supporting documents reveal a division of labor in decorative treatments as well. The design and execution of the carvings on tables from this shop varies and appears to be the work of different carvers. Possibly the changes indicate more than one carver employed within the shop, although the use of free-lance carvers is more likely. Advertisements suggest that free-lance carvers worked in New York, as they did in other regions. Carvers such as Nicholas Bernard, James Strachan, and Stephen Dwight, advertised for free-lance work during this period. Dwight's 1755 New York Mercury advertisement states that he does "all kinds of work for cabinet-makers."²⁸ Although this advertisement appears to pre-date the

²⁶ Gottesman, Arts and Crafts, 119.

²⁷ Gottesman, Arts and Crafts, 119.

²⁸ Gottesman, Arts and Crafts, 127.

Willetts/Pearsee shop, it is reasonable to assume that since Dwight's career extended into the 1770's, he continued in this kind of work. Although the identity of carvers for the Willett/Pearsee tables is unknown, the variety in carving execution indicates another separation of labor in these tables' production.

One of the most interesting aspects of these tables is the identically sized and shaped tops.²⁹ In the past, identical tops have led some furniture historians to conclude that the tables are a pair.³⁰ However, this examination reveals that all the tables from this shop have identically designed tops. In fact, many New York serpentine card tables not produced in this shop have this identical top so the tops neither indicate a pair, nor do they reveal the work of one shop.

Two possibilities for the cross-shop identical tops exist: one firm produced this particularly shaped top for many New York cabinet-makers, or more likely, the shops shared a template. Actually, the identical tops appear on tables associated with manufacture in the vicinity of New

²⁹ The only measurable variation of these tops is one-sixteenth of an inch at the front width. This difference may be the result of hand sawing a gauged out board and does not reflect on the shape or degree of serpentine to the top.

³⁰ See article by Harold Sack, "New York Tables: Washington's Choice," The Magazine Antiques, (February, 1952): 192-193.

York City as expressed in the provenance of extant examples. These groups are the Willett/Pearsee group, a group that appears to be made by former Willett/Pearsee apprentices, the Beekman type tables of Group 1 and Van Rensselaer group tables. On the tables where other characteristics hint to an origin outside New York City, the tops are not of this shape or size. This indicates that the shared template was available only within New York City and not to other cabinetmakers outside the urban area.³¹

We can also see the impact of the consumer or the influence of demand on these tables. Visible in the decoration of this group is not only the work of different carvers, but different degrees of decorative work. A side gadroon and back leg carving appears on some tables, and it is assumed that since such tables used the most material and labor their cost to the consumer was higher than other less decorated examples. Other tables reveal only a side gadroon and no back leg carving while some have neither side gadroon nor rear leg carving, each indicating a lessening degree of labor. Clearly the appearance of these elements affected the price.

³¹ Of course many other possibilities for these identical tops exist, including that the wood merchants sold them this way, craftsmen copied directly from tables of other shops, etc. At this point, without any further evidence, no definitive answer can be given.

Regardless of whether the table was custom made, the decoration appeared at the buyer's discretion, or if the table was purchased ready-made,³² the degree of ornament must have been reflected in the price. Since drawers do not appear in all Willett/Pearsee tables, it appears that the appearance of a drawer indicates an additional luxury that also increased the original price of a table.

The commercial atmosphere of New York cabinetmaking, its international nature, is also exemplified in the Willett/Pearsee tables. Obviously the tropical hardwoods had to be shipped to New York, and were a part of the large shipping industry between North America's Eastern ports, England and the West Indies. Less obvious though are the iron H-hinges that hold the two top boards in place. Many of the hinges on this particular group bear the stamp H:TIBATS.³³ Research through the Birmingham

³² In their advertisement, Willett and Pearsee claim to have a large assortment of their furniture for immediate sale. This means that the shop made products without having a particular order. Nevertheless, the purchaser of these ready-made products would pay in relation to the amount and degree of ornament, addition of a drawer, etc.

³³ The tables from the Willett/Pearsee shop with this hinge are at Yale, The Museum of the City of New York, Bayou Bend and at Bernard & S. Dean Levy, Inc. However, New York tables from other shops also have this hinge, including a four legged example in the Winterthur Museum, the Weir table at the Metropolitan, and one privately owned table. The hinge appears on all kinds of tables and indicates that a large shipping merchant would purchase and ship the hinges from England, then sell them

directories between the years 1767 and 1800 reveals a Wolfhampton hinge-maker named Hugh Tibbatts who first appears in 1770 and his last listing is in 1780. We can be certain that the tables examined were manufactured near these dates, and this strengthens the Willett/Pearsee attribution, because the known dates of the Willett/Pearsee firm correspond with Tibbatts' dates. Also, that another non-American material appears on the table indicates the degree of trade between New York and other areas.³⁴

The Willett/Pearsee shop produced forms other than gaming tables as reported in their advertisement of April 22, 1773.

WILLET & PEARSEE, Cabinet and Chair-makers, at the Sign of the Clothes-Press, nearly opposite the New Oswego market, at the Upper-End of Maiden-Lane. Continues to make in the very best manner Cabinet and Chair-Work of every kind. As they are determined by being punctual in performing, and in finishing their work with the greatest neatness and care, to aim at giving general satisfaction. They humbly embrace this way of offering their service, and will with gratitude acknowledge the kindness of all such as please to favor them with their commands. They have on hand at present made of the best Mahogany and in the neatest Manner, A

to large merchants in New York City. These merchants could then sell the hinges directly to cabinetmakers or to smaller merchants both in the New York City or to others who would ship them out to smaller towns. Therefore the range of forms on which the H:TIBATS stamped hinge appears, does not appear to be exceptional.

³⁴ I am indebted to Donald L. Fennimore for suggesting the Birmingham directories.

very handsome Desk and Book-case,/A chest upon
 Chest A lady's Dressing -Chest and Book-Case,/
 Three Desks, Three Sets of Chairs,/A Pair of Card
 Tables and several Tea-Tables, Stands,/ Breakfast
 and China Tables, Bureaus & c. &c. N. B. Two
 Apprentices are wanting at the above place.-- ³⁵

This advertisement sheds new light on the process of sales within the Willett/Pearsee shop and confirms a meaning on many of the table's idiosyncratic traits. The substantial work force used to produce the tables appears in the multiple markings on each example, and is now solidified both by the shop's call for two apprentices, and their large inventory of items. Moreover, two different kinds of transactions are implied here. First, Willett and Pearsee emphasize that their work can be done punctually, implying a market for custom made work. However, they also advertise having furniture on hand, implying the sale of ready-made items as a second possibility for the consumer.

A later advertisement by the firm offers even greater insight into their commercial processes. Willett and Pearsee advertise that they sell both newly made work, as well as selling items on commission. The firm provided a multiplicity of services, including producing and selling their own work, taking pieces on consignment from estates

³⁵ Rivington's New York Gazetteer, April 22, 1773, as quoted in Gottesman, Arts and Crafts, 119.

and citizens wishing to dispose of their property, and holding auctions of furniture. They were a total exchange operation where it seems almost any kind of transaction regarding furniture could, and did, take place. Their 1774 advertisement states:

[Willett and Pearsee] Has remov'd his Vendue Store to the house lately occupied by Waldron and Cornel...and purposes to do all in his power to give satisfaction to whoever may be kind enough to employ him in that way; which he hopes, with the excellency of the situation, will be a sufficient inducement to those who have goods to dispose of by public auction, or on commissions at private sale.

Every article in the Cabinet and Chair way, May be had on the shortest notice, and executed in the best manner by Willet and Pearsey, at the said vendue store, or at the sign of the clothes press near the Oswego-Market, at the upper end of Maiden Lane, who will take dry goods in pay.

N. B. There is on hand at either of the above places and assortment of choice Mahogany furniture.³⁶

It is important to note in the advertisement that where a commercial exchange between client and shop, the singular he, meaning Willett, appears. This may reveal that Willett was the commercial director of the shop while Pearsee's involvement centered more on the manufacture. However, without any other available accounts, it is impossible to definitely state this.

Nevertheless, the Willett/Pearsee shop was one of the most important cabinetmaking concerns in colonial New

³⁶ The New York Gazetteer and the Weekly Mercury, May 9, 1774. as quoted in Gottesman, Arts and Crafts, 120.

York. That so many of their tables survive relative to the work of other New York shops, attests to that fact, as do the advertisements revealing the diversity of their commercial interests. The substantial size of the shop clearly added to Willett's importance in New York and may have helped him to gain the prestigious and powerful positions he attained later in life.

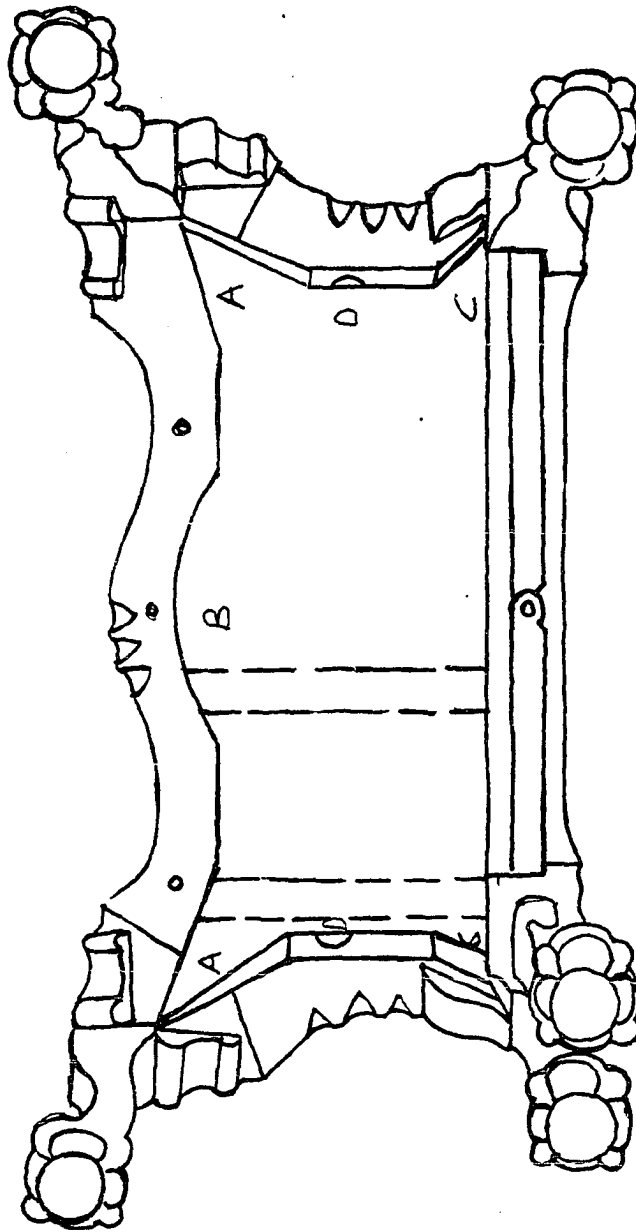


Figure 1. Construction of Willett/Pearsee Tables.
Drawing by Stefan Dedecek.

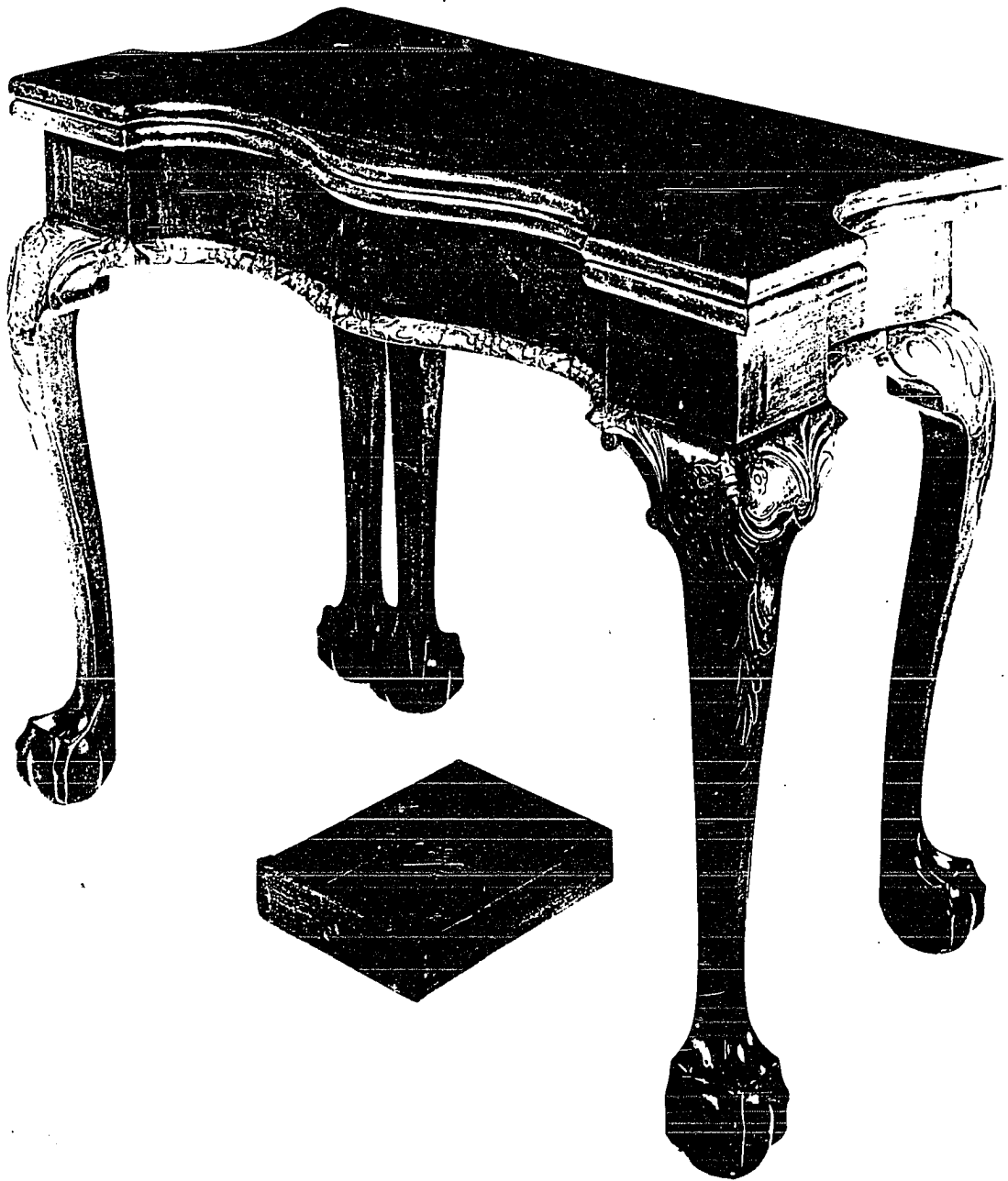


Figure 2. The Willett/Pearsee Table. Photograph courtesy of Bernard & S. Dean Levy, Inc.

Chapter 3

THE APPRENTICE GROUP

The two tables that form the Apprentice group are of the highest quality in their design, execution and decoration. Their carvings are as fine, mahogany as highly figured, and proportions as pleasing as the Willett/Pearsee tables. Actually, the resemblance between the groups suggest that they shared the same decorative design. Structural similarities also further a sense of interdependence between the groups. However, important structural characteristics, including interior neatness, marking, and hinge construction, separate this group from the Willett/Pearsee tables. The tables appear to be a product of a shop familiar with Willett/Pearsee techniques, but, one that, because of limited resources, could not continue all of the Willett/Pearsee shop practices. Possibly this shop was staffed by former Willett/Pearsee employees, either apprentices or journeyman, and thus it is designated as the Apprentice group. This group's tables are in the Museum of the City

of New York (see Catalog, TABLE 30), and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (TABLE 31).

Structural Examination of the Tables

Like Willett/Pearsee tables, small areas are gouged out of the front, side and inner rear rail, from which screws enter through the base and secure the top into place. These cuts in the rails are neither as deep nor as smooth as those of the Willett/Pearsee group, however. Also, layout markings appear on only two of these cuts while careful markings on this element characterize all Willett/Pearsee tables. The roughness, lack of depth, and rare marking of these cuts suggests less concern with overall neatness of workmanship. The neatness of these elements on Willett/Pearsee tables could be explained by a large work force that allowed a division of labor and specialization. Since such specialization may not be inferred from the Apprentice group tables, one assumes a smaller shop practice. At the very least, the differences indicate a different tradition from the Willett/Pearsee group.

Another similarity between the two groups is the joinery of the rails to the front and rear legs. Pins support mortise and tenon joints on the front legs and side of the rear legs. The back of the rear legs do not have pins. Where the front and side skirts join the front

leg, only the points of direct contact remain and all excess wood from behind the leg is sawn away leaving an acute angular void (Like Fig. 1, A). Similarly, where the back leg joins with the side rails, wood has been removed from the side skirt leaving an obtuse angle at that point of contact. The angular sawing of the front, and the angular cut on the back are traits of Willett/Pearsee workmanship. However, important differences exist. The cut-away section at the rear leg on Apprentice tables has a greater angle and begins deeper on the skirt than the corresponding Willett/Pearsee element. Similarly, the sawed out section behind the front legs of Apprentice tables appears rounder than the Willett/Pearsee tables' sharp, acute angle.³⁷ Although the practice of removing wood from these sections was transferred from one shop to another, the change in personnel carrying out these tasks created important alterations.

Thus far the discussion of these tables has concerned the subtle alterations of Willett/Pearsee structural practices. However, other major structural characteristics differentiate these tables from

³⁷ Though both are definitely rounded, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston's example is more rounded than the Museum of the City of New York's table.

Willett/Pearsee tables production; differences that appear to be the result of a smaller shop's economy of labor.

The most obvious structural difference is the lack of any cut on the interior section of the front skirt.

Willett/Pearsee tables all have a wide and curved cut in the back of the front skirt echoing the serpentine front, as do other similarly designed tables³⁸. For some reason these craftsmen did not remove the wood from the front skirt. Perhaps since the cut has no structural significance they might not wish to waste the manpower to remove excess wood.

The securing of the swing rail's stationary section also may indicate a smaller and less specialized shop. While a distinctive nailing pattern marks this section on all Willett/Pearsee tables, Apprentice group examples have screws, not nails, entering from the table's interior. No discernible pattern exists; as one table has three and the other table four screws securing this section. Certainly the patterned nailing of the Willett/Pearsee table reveals a standardization of that technique. This table's pattern-less screw placement may not outright prove a smaller Apprentice shop, but it does suggest less standardization within the shop.

³⁸ See the Van Rensselaer group's chapter.

The rear wooden hinge on these tables are also noticeably different from those of other groups. The deeper back skirt of these tables forces greater height in the knuckles of the rear wooden hinge. Moreover, the uniformity of the bottom four knuckles on Willett/Pearsee hinges does not appear on these tables.³⁹ Also, the tool marks for shaping this hinge are still evident on the Apprentice group while Willett/Pearsee hinges are completely smooth. On Apprentice group tables, the hinge's central pin sits flush with the bottom and is flat, not shaped like the other group. Again, these differences may result from an economy of labor as the unseen surfaces remain unfinished.⁴⁰

³⁹ The Willett/Pearsee tables had nearly identically designed rear hinges, with the top knuckle measuring between 7/8 and one inch and the additional four knuckles measuring 1 1/8 inches in height. These tables knuckle heights vary tremendously, although the top knuckle remains the smallest. Nevertheless, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston's table's hinge bottom four knuckles are closer to each other in height than on the Museum of the City of New York's table.

⁴⁰ There are other possibilities for these individual characteristics. However, taken as a whole they appear to reflect less concern with interior surfaces, less gauging and less finishing than the Willett/Pearsee group. These characteristics appear to imply that few people worked on the tables, as they probably would have been marked to reveal placement of separately made pieces. It is possible that a large shop could have communicated this information in another way, but that is unlikely. The scenerio that gains the most support from the evidence is the one put forth in this chapter.

The lack of chalk and gauge marks also suggests smaller shop production. Willett/Pearsee tables reveal chalk marks and other gauging marks, indicating a large division of labor as different people worked on particular sections of a table, marking each area for final assembly. Apprentice group tables have no delineation on the underside of the top to determine its placement onto the base, no gauge line for the screws to the top, and no chalk marks indicating an order of assembly. Also, toothing plane marks appear only around the area where the top and base meet. This lack of marking further separates these tables from the Willett/Pearsee group.⁴¹

Finally, the secret drawer construction differs on these tables. On the MFA, Boston example, which appears to retain its original drawer, two dovetails hold the front and back to the sides. On the Willett/Pearsee tables, only one large dovetail accomplishes this joinery. Given the danger in attributing tables by their secret

⁴¹ At the bottom of the Museum of Fine Art, Boston's table is a chalk inscription "C B." As of now the purpose or reference of that inscription is unknown although the sharp print appears later than the tables original manufacture. On the same table, and on the back of the frame is a pencil inscription reading Blair or Blain. This inscription is not by the same hand that wrote H F Seton on the interior of the swing leg on one of the Willett/Pearsee tables. Neither mark indicates that of a craftsman, or a mark delineating a structural method.

drawer dovetailing,⁴² this difference offers an additional argument against the possibility that these are Willett/Pearsee tables.

Decorative Examination of the Tables

Many decorative aspects of these tables are identical to the Willett/Pearsee group. The claw and ball feet have the same blocky shape, and the proportional relationship of the skirts, moldings, and overall form are similar. The design, shape and size of the serpentine tops of the Apprentice, and most New York tables are identical and suggest the use of the same template between the shops. The top therefore cannot indicate a shop tradition. Finally, the MFA, Boston's table retains its original surface covering of green baize surrounded by a band of gilt decorated leather. The leather band and vine and berry gilt motif are identical to the similarly treated Willett/Pearsee table.

Carved elements reflect decorative individuality for this group. The gadrooned moldings on Apprentice tables, with a more dramatic center section and deeper and more angular gadroons, reveal differences from the corresponding motif of other tables. In addition, significant differences in regard to design and execution

⁴² See Willett/Pearsee shop discussion.

of knee and bracket carvings occur. With their deep incisions, clear linearity and angular design, the Apprentice group carving relates more to the Van Rensselaer shop's carvings than Willett/Pearsee tables. These differences suggest the work of a non-Willett/Pearsee carver; possibly the Van Rensselaer table's carver.

The knee of the MFA, Boston's card table exhibits a series of rays emanate upwards and perpendicularly from a central C-scroll forming its mantle. Within the rays of the mantle are five circles or pinwheels. A foliate carving emanates downward from the C-scroll and terminates with a single curl. A C-scroll with parallel lines emanating from it make up the bracket carving with four pinwheels ornamenting these lines (Fig. 2 pictures the basic design of this carving, although without the peanuts in the mantle). The MCNY's table also has a C-scroll for the knee carving's central focus. However, parallel, not perpendicular, lines emanate from this central C-scroll and five peanuts ornament this motif. The foliate carving that continues down the leg from the C-scroll has a more curvilinear feel than the corresponding motif on the MFA, Boston's table. The knee brackets are completely different with their foliate sprays and carved rosette terminus developing from a central C-scroll.

The Significance of the Apprentice Group

These tables appear to indicate the transfer of ideas from one shop to another, with the differences possibly attributable to changes from large to small scale production. Therefore, most differences between the shops appear to be differences of size and potential, not training or ability. Apprentices moved on after completing their required service, taking that shop's tradition and approaches with them. Thus many traditional approaches, and even some idiosyncratic methods, were disseminated among different shops.

The tables also indicate how apprentices and journeymen retained certain commercial relationships formed during their service in other shops. Exposure to outside merchants and artisans had to occur during an apprenticeship or period of free-lance work. One expects these ties to remain and develop when the apprentice moved to another job. The similar iron hinges and the identical baize and leather surround on the MFA, Boston's table as on the Willett table indicate the work of the same specialist. Clearly, the apprentices or journeymen who founded the Apprentice shop retained certain mercantile ties they had formed during their time with the Willett/Pearsee shop. That is to say they retained the

same upholsterer, leather binder, and possibly metal merchant.⁴³

The importance and wealth of these table's original owners indicates how the Apprentice shop shared in the high-style New York market. The MCNY's table has a history with the Frost family. Although the table came out of Rochester, New York it appears that during the third-quarter of the eighteenth century, the approximate date of manufacture of the table, the Frost family resided throughout the New York City area and Southern Westchester County.⁴⁴ The MFA, Boston's table descended in the family of Jacobus van Natta of Morristown, New Jersey. That a New York card table appears in Northern New Jersey is no surprise. Many other pieces of New York furniture have New Jersey provenances, including the Boudinot chairs (Downs, 145) and the Schuyler family card table (TABLE 26), which enhances our understanding of New York as a commercial and stylistic center in the Eighteenth century. Given these provenances it appears that the Apprentice

⁴³ On neither table does the H:TIBATS hinge appear. The hinges are of the two screw, iron variety but there is no proof that they are a part of Hugh Tibats production. It is therefore impossible to say that this shop also used the same hardware merchant as the Willett/Pearsee shop. The hinges are, in this case, inconclusive.

⁴⁴ There was a Frost who served as a congressman from Westchester County in the first Congress as well as other Frosts listed throughout New York City.

shop was a competitor with other major cabinetmaking concerns.

Although this group does offer important insight into New York cabinetmaking, it also reveals a weakness to this method of gathering and interpreting information.

Although the structural elements of the tables have made clear a distinctly different approach to constructing card tables, exactly what causes this difference cannot be answered definitively. There is strong, in many ways compelling evidence suggesting work by one familiar with the Willett/Pearsee tradition but without the faculties to complete every idiosyncratic structural element. Just who these people were, and their definite relationship to the Willett/Pearsee shop remains a mystery that can only be solved with additional evidence.

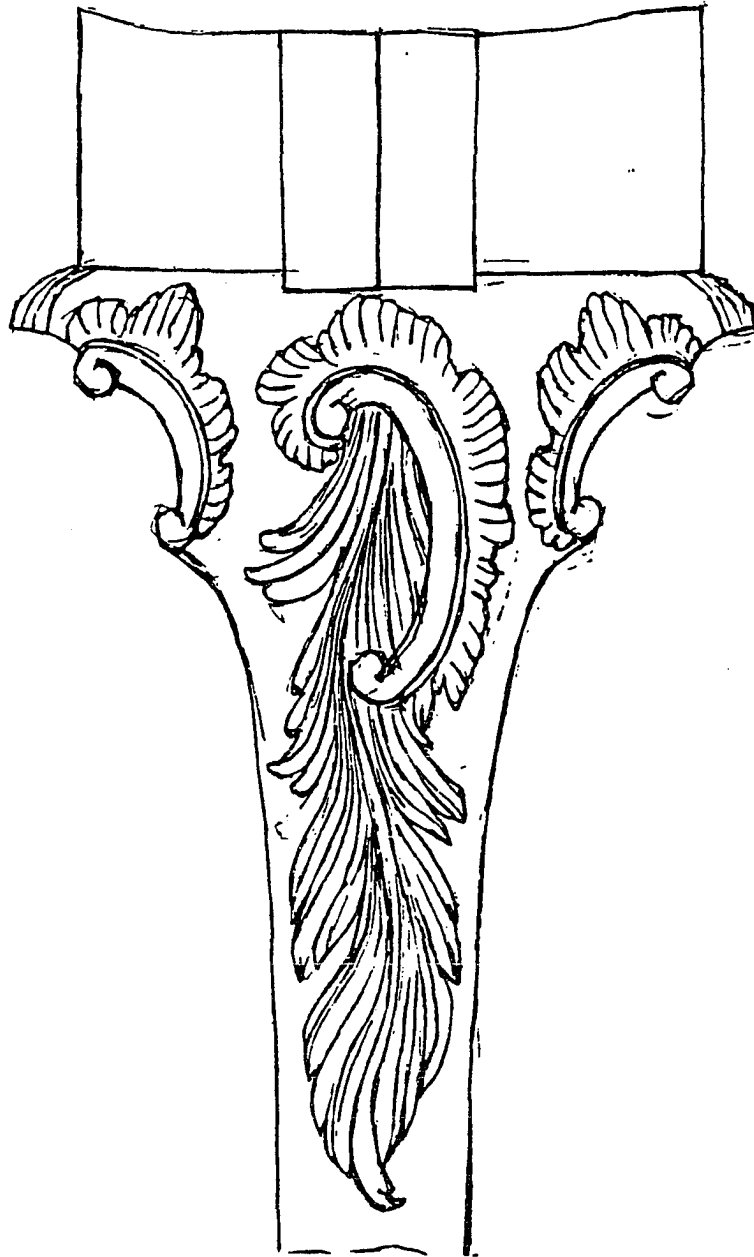


Figure 3. General Knee and Bracket Carving Motif.
Drawing by Stefan Dedeczek.

Chapter 4

THE VAN RENSSELAER GROUP

Surviving examples suggest that within New York City's border at least two types of five-legged, serpentine card tables were available: the thin skirted "Beekman" type made only in Shop 1 (see chapter five), and the deeper skirted and more thickly proportioned product made in many shops. Structural examination of the latter group of tables indicates four different shop traditions. Two groups, the Willett/Pearsee and this one, appear to be the most important as indicated by volume of their surviving examples and the provenances of the tables. Seven tables make up this group, the third largest behind Willett/Pearsee and Group 1. This group consists of tables found at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (See Catalog TABLE 28), The Art Institute of Chicago (TABLE 27), The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum (TABLE 25), The New Jersey Historical Society (TABLE 26), Chipstone (TABLE 24), and in a private collection (TABLE 29). The table at the Metropolitan and the one owned

privately have histories in the Van Rensselaer family.⁴⁵ Although consistent structural patterns emerge from the tables, not all are identical in their construction. However, the minor differences may reflect some kind of change within the shop, as every other aspect of these tables indicates a Van Rensselaer grouping. For the purposes of this paper, this group shall be addressed as the Van Rensselaer group.⁴⁶

Structural Examination of the Group

As seen on Willett/Pearsee tables, this group reveals the removal of excess wood from behind the center of the serpentine front rail.⁴⁷ (Fig. 3, A) The gadrooned skirt

⁴⁵ The Metropolitan's table descended in the family of Stephen Van Rensselaer, and is thus known as the Van Rensselaer card table. The New Jersey Historical's table descended in the Schuyler family and is associated with the furnishings of Arent Schuyler. However, since this branch of the Schuyler family intermarried with the Van Rensselaer family, as well as other important New York and Northern New Jersey families, it is not certain that this table is of Schuyler descent. The privately owned table has a small card attached to its drawer that reads, "Mr. Van Rensselaer."

⁴⁶ This should not be confused with the Van Rensselaer group proposed by Morrison Heckscher in his 1973 Antiques article. That group consisted of all tables that were not like the Beekman type tables, including the work of Willett/Pearsee, the Apprentice Shop, Shop 1, the rural shops. This Van Rensselaer group is much more selective in its determining properties.

⁴⁷ The New Jersey Historical Society's table does not have its center cut although every other respect of its construction is identical to the other Van Rensselaer tables.

molding for this front skirt is also cut at its rear to echo the interior shaping of this section. Contrasting Willett/Pearsee shop practice, the molding and rail were not cut simultaneously.⁴⁸ At the joinery of the front and side rails to the front legs, the excess wood from behind the legs is cut away in a rounder fashion than the angular Willett/Pearsee cuts (Fig. 3, B). The central cut of the front skirt also differs from the corresponding cut on Willett/Pearsee tables as it is neither as deep nor as wide on the Van Rensselaer tables.

The inner rear rail is tenoned into the two stationary rear legs on each Van Rensselaer table. Side skirts meet at a right angle with the rear rail and are not cut out at this juncture, as the Willett/Pearsee tables. The ninety degree angle of this joinery allows for additional, rectangular glue blocks to support this joint, evidence of which is glue residue and oxidation shadows although a block does appear on the Metropolitan's table (Fig. 3, C).

All of the exterior rear rails from this group are between five-and-three-eighths and five-and-five-eighths of an inch in depth. They consist of two boards, the swing rail and a stationary board which are connected by a

⁴⁸ The molding is not shaped on the Winterthur card table and therefore overhangs the interior of the serpentine shaped rail.

round, five-knuckled hinge. Like the Apprentice group tables, either three or four screws secure the stationary board to the inner rear rail from the table's inside. Three of the tables have additional nails to help secure the stationary board, although these are probably later repairs.

The central hinge, around which the swing rail moves, is a five-part hinge arranged so that the first, middle and bottom knuckles swing while the second and fourth remain stationary. The top knuckle is slightly smaller in height than the identically sized bottom four. The purpose for this proportional arrangement is not clear. Although a similar proportional relationship on Willett/Pearsee tables appears, the actual measurements differ. The central pin is wide and flat and protrudes between one-eighth and one-sixteenth of an inch below the bottom knuckle.

All tables in this group have or had a drawer behind the swing leg, and therefore all of these tables contain drawer runners. The drawer runners of this group are inch thick boards cut to receive the drawer. Nails secure the runners in place through the inner rear rail and from above the runner into the front skirt. Two tables, one at Winterthur and one owned privately, have a block nailed into the inner rear rail and front skirt to support the

divider from below. Four tables have original drawers, and each exhibited identical construction.⁴⁹ On both the front and back of the drawer two small dovetails appear. Rabbets house the bottom board into the sides and between twelve and fourteen nails secure it into place.

Six round-headed screws secure the base to the top on all examples from this group (Fig. 3, D). As with the Willett/Pearsee group, these screws enter from the base into the top through a well gauged, rounded cut out in the side, front and rear skirt. However no gauge marks for the placement of the base onto the top appear on these tables. Most of the top's bottoms are completely tooth planed although some reveal planing only around the juncture of base to top.

A particular group distinction regarding the Van Rensselaer tops, especially since they are identical in size and shape to most other New York serpentine card table tops, is the rear tenon. This tenon, located at the back of the top board with a mortise on the back of the bottom board, appears on almost all the tables from this shop. Although it takes different forms, from the NJHS table's small half sphere to the more common three-quarter to seven-eighths-inch rectangular shape, it appears on all

⁴⁹ These tables are in The Art Institute of Chicago, Winterthur, the Stone collection and a private collection.

but one table.⁵⁰ This rectangle is often chamfered at the corners. Unstamped, iron hinges connect these tops to each other.

Decorative Aspects of These Tables

These tables have similar decoration to the Willett/Pearsee group. The tops are identical in proportion, size and shape, enhancing the likelihood of a shared template among New York cabinetmakers.⁵¹ All the tops are dished, presumably for chips, and although no table retains its original cloth covering, evidence suggests that each initially had one. Finally, these tops have the same half-round molded edge that appears on the other groups.

The blocky claw-and-ball feet resemble those of the Willett/Pearsee tables, although the two outer talons on Van Rensselaer tables are one-eighth of an inch thicker and slightly less angular. The height of their front skirts measure slightly smaller than other tables, averaging four-and-one-quarter inches rather than the more typical four-and-one-half inches. Gadrooned skirt moldings adorn the front and side skirts of each table in this group. The gadroons are thicker on Van Rensselaer

⁵⁰ The one table is the Metropolitan's Van Rensselaer table.

⁵¹ See Willett/Pearsee footnote on this phenomenon.

tables than other groups, having between nine and twelve evenly spaced gadroons on either side of a central element. Side molding gadroons match the front skirt molding in their shape and design. Unlike the Willett/Pearsee group, carving ornaments the back leg on every table. Finally, the front corners of the base meet at a relatively sharp angle in comparison to the Willett/Pearsee examples.

The main decorative difference between these groups appears on the knee and bracket carvings. As with the other groups, differences in execution exist among the knee and bracket carving suggesting that different carvers worked on tables from the same shop. The Willett/Pearsee tables raise the possibility of carvers free-lancing their work to the major shops in New York, and it appears that the same is true with the Van Rensselaer group. The designs fit into two general categories; a central C-scroll with concentric and variegated lines emanating upwards forming the mantle, (Similar to Fig. 2) and a group of wheat bunched at the center by a C-scroll (Fig. 4).

The first design appears on tables in the Metropolitan Museum and at the Art Institute of Chicago. A foliate motif continues down from the C-scroll and, except on the Metropolitan table, terminates with a curl.

Even with the same basic design, important differences occur in the overall "fanciness" of the carving. The Metropolitan table exhibits a series of peanut carvings within the perpendicular lines on both the leg and bracket as opposed to the plain sections on the Art Institute's example. Moreover, the bracket carving on these tables differs. The Metropolitan's brackets consist of a C-scroll with perpendicular incisions above it, like the central C-scroll. The Art Institute table's bracket carving consist of a C-scroll with an emanating foliate decoration and no perpendicular incisions.

An independent, central sheaf of wheat carved onto the knee with a C-scroll squeezing it together makes up the second carving design on these tables. Tables at Winterthur, the NJHS, Chipstone, and in a private collection have this design. All but the NJHS table, which ends with a curl, terminate this carved section with an acutely angled point. Very full, foliate and independent carving makes up the brackets on all of these tables except for the NJHS table where the bracket carving connects to the central wheat motif and has fewer foliate curls about it. Also, unlike all of the other similarly carved tables, the C-scroll termini have pinwheels carved into them on the NJHS example. Finally the brackets on

this table, in opposition to the others with the sheaf of wheat, end with a carved rosette.

Not only are the designs different on the Van Rensselaer group, but the execution also appears varied. On the first type of carving discussed, on tables at the Metropolitan and the Art Institute of Chicago, the same carver's work appears. The incisions are the same depth, the spacing of the perpendicular lines is nearly identically and there is an overall sense of similar tooling. Tables with the central sheaf of wheat motif reveal many important differences in the qualities of their carving suggesting the work of different carvers. The sharpness and straightness of line on the Chipstone knee carving contrasts with the looser quality seen on most other tables from this group. The privately owned table appears to be by the hand of the Chipstone carver. On the Winterthur example the carving, though of a similar motif, is less linear as the incisions for the separate strands of wheat are rounder and wider than on other examples. The roundness of the terminus for the base of the knee carving similarly contrasts with the work of other tables. Even at the point where the central C-scroll pulls the wheat motif together, there appears a greater curve than on the other tables. However, the curves and individual wheat sections are the least defined

in the NJHS example. Particularly thin lines seem far less controlled by the central C-scroll than on the other three tables, and the differences in design, as discussed above, further the contrast. The differences in execution suggest that more than one carver worked on the Van Rensselaer group of tables, possibly two or three.

Significance of the Van Rensselaer Group

The Van Rensselaer group's structural similarities indicate a shop tradition. This shop suggests certain features of the economic and mercantile structure of New York cabinetmaking. Tables with provenances suggest the shop's geographically diverse clientele. Work from this group originally spread hundreds of miles apart as tables' provenances include Northern New Jersey and near Albany.⁵² This places New York as a style center since the wares from its artisans appear many miles away, and may have influenced craftsmen in these more remote areas.⁵³ In places where shipping allowed for the transfer of tables made in the New York City vicinity such exchanges

⁵² The table at the New Jersey Historical Society has a history in the New Jersey branch of the Schuyler family. Similarly, Morrison Heckscher wrote that the Metropolitan's Van Rensselaer table was probably used at their upstate manor house and not New York City. Morrison Heckscher, "The New York Serpentine Card Table," The Magazine Antiques, (May, 1973), 974-983.

⁵³ This will be discussed in full in the chapter on tables made outside of New York City and its vicinity.

occurred. Of course the wealth of the client, especially the Van Rensselaers and Schuylers, to whom these tables traveled, allowed for these transfers. However, in the smaller, landlocked towns, where clients might not have had the wealth to make such shipments feasible, local craftsmen produced their own interpretation of the serpentine form.

Suggestions of the shop's size are the relatively large surviving output of seven examined examples, and the elaborate marking techniques visible on the tables. Clearly a great deal of care went into certain details, such as toothing top boards and smoothing cutouts for the screws, indicating a shop large enough to specialize and standardize these elements. Note that other shops of decidedly smaller outputs did not treat these details with such care, only the large shops like Willett/Pearsee and Shop 1 could do this kind of specialized work. Similarly, the chalk inscribed numbers that appear on two of the tables, one at the Metropolitan (a three on a side skirt and a drawer) and one in a private collection (an X on the interior rear rail and a side skirt) indicate that these parts were made separately and secured together at a different time. This division of labor appears to indicate a large shop practice. Given New York's population, it is not surprising that the tables suggest

at least three large cabinetmaking shops producing serpentine front, five-legged card tables.

Finally, within this group appears a multiplicity of carved decoration indicating a degree of customer choice as well as different carvers working for the same firm. Like Willet/Pearsee clients, Van Rensselaer shop patrons could choose among decorative possibilities. However, an interesting distinction in the customers' choice between these shops exists. Whereas with the Pearsee/Willett shop the customer could choose whether to have a drawer, a side molding, a gadrooned or carved molding, carved back legs or any combination of these, on the work from the Van Rensselaer shop the only choice indicated by the tables is the knee and bracket carving's motif. It appears that this shop did not offer the variety of the Willett/Pearsee group, a difference that may indicate a slightly smaller shop.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ As with any object based study a bias of survival exists. It is possible that more Van Rensselaer tables were destroyed during the fires and occupations of New York than any other groups thus slanting the study.

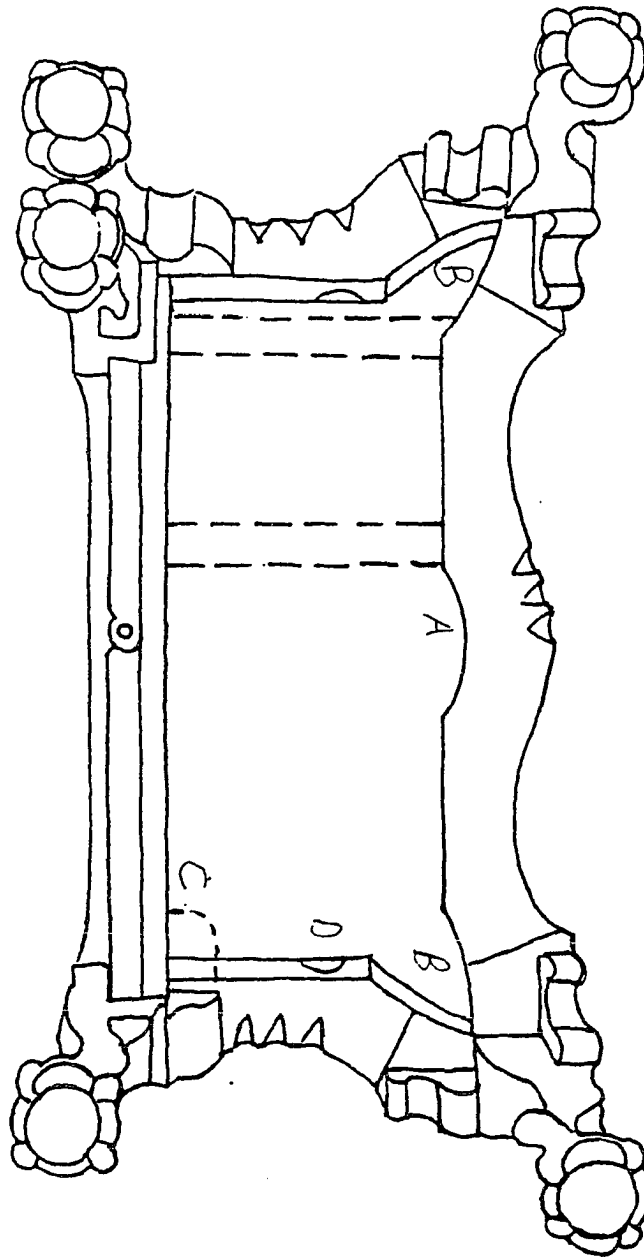


Figure 4. Construction of the Van Rensselaer Group.
Drawing by Stefan Dedecek.

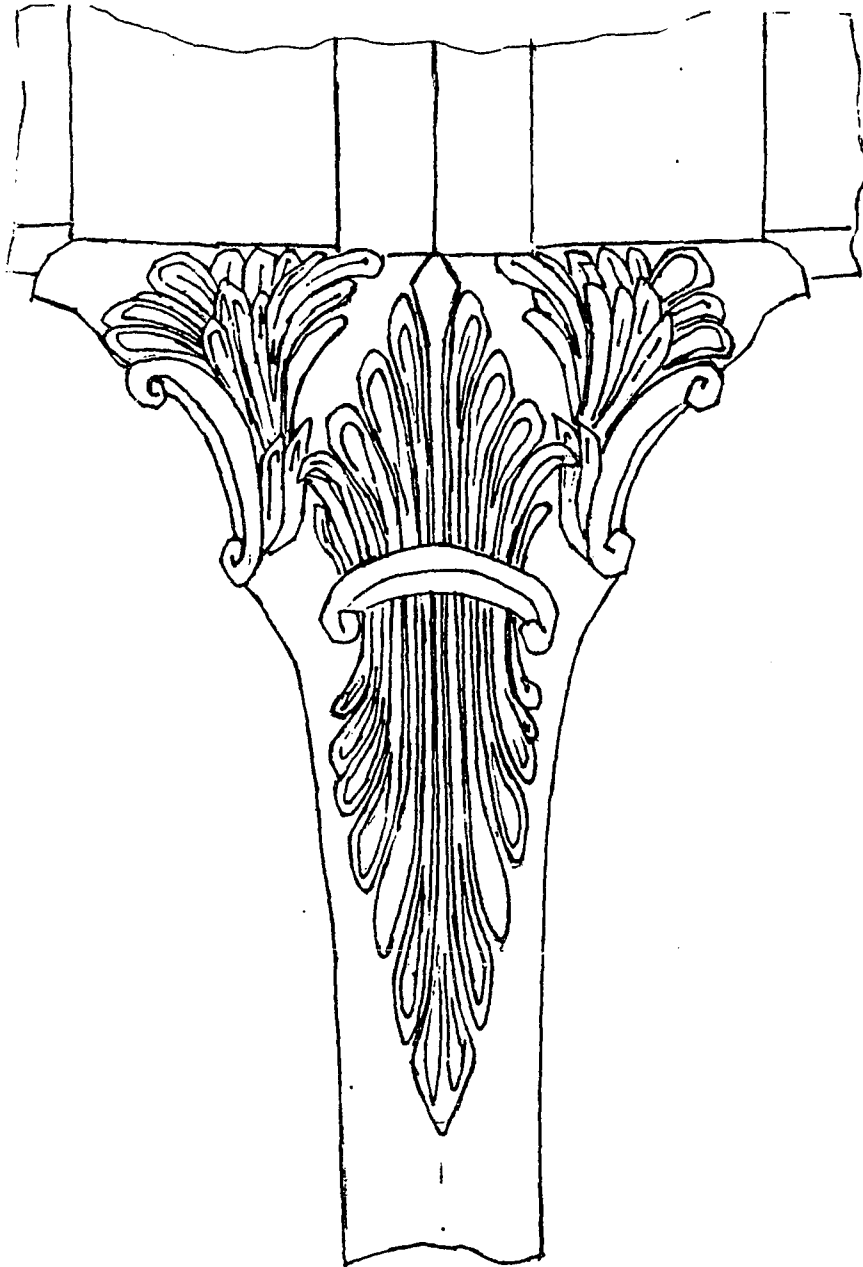


Figure 5. Wheat Carving from Van Rensselaer Tables.
Drawing by Stefan Dedeczek.

Chapter 5
SHOP 1
INCLUDING THE "BEEKMAN-TYPE" TABLES
AND THE "IMITATIVE-TYPE" TABLES

There appear to have been two types of serpentine frontcard tables made in New York: thick skirted and gadrooned tables made in many shops and thin proportioned examples of this group. The latter tables share certain decorative characteristics that do not appear in combination on other examples. Their front, side and rear skirts average one half inch shorter than other tables, and have a thinner molding with narrower gadroons. Moreover, the feet sit forward at the ankle from the rest of the leg with a taller ball and thinner talons than other New York feet.⁵⁵ Most of these tables have pine skirts with mahogany veneers although other secondary woods are possible, and two tables have solid mahogany skirts. Two of the best known tables having these decorative characteristics descended in the Beekman

⁵⁵ The feet are most like foot type 1a in John Kirk's, American Chairs: Queen Anne and Chippendale, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 44.

family, and thus this group has been previously named the "Beekman" group.⁵⁶

Although these decorative characteristics distinguish a group, structural idiosyncracies unique to these tables secure them as the work of a single shop. These features include the application of the tops, joinery of the sides and front to the legs, and a particular treatment of the swing leg hinge. However, these same idiosyncrasies appear on three tables which are based on the proportions of the Willett/Pearsee type tables. Therefore, a full evaluation of this group must include these decorative mavericks.

Unfortunately, none of the tables has a label or inscription indicating the cabinetmaker, and no documentary evidence offers further identification. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, the name Group 1 shall denote all twelve tables of this group. The subdivisions from this group shall be called the "Beekman-type" to indicate the seven tables most like the Beekman tables at the NYHS, and the "imitative-type" tables for the three examples from this group that look more like the Willett/Pearsee, Van Rensselaer and Imitative group tables.

⁵⁶ Morrison Heckscher, "The New York Serpentine Card Table," The Magazine Antiques, (May, 1973) 974-983.

There are, however, two unique examples that need their own identification. One is a table formerly owned by the Weir family, now at the Metropolitan, that has three tops with two different surfaces. One is an inlaid backgammon and chess board while the bottom surface has a baize covering and dished top for card playing. A second unique table, owned by the Henry Ford museum, shares proportional characteristics with the "imitative-type" tables, but overall appears more like the "Beekman-type" tables. The Ford table has a knee carving unlike any other seen on New York card tables.

The Henry Ford Museum (See Catalog TABLE 7), The Diplomatic Reception Rooms of the Department of State (TABLE 2), The Museum of the City of New York (TABLE 6), The New York Historical Society (TABLES 3,4), The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum (TABLE 1), Bernard & S. Dean Levy, Inc. (TABLE 12), Joe Kindig III (TABLE 8), and a private collector (TABLE 9) own tables from Group 1. A possible pair, also in a private collection, were unavailable for examination although a published study reveals "Group A" construction (TABLES 10,11).⁵⁷

⁵⁷ A 1962 Antiques article by Harold Sack provides a full description of the construction of the tables and also includes a series of revealing photographs. In addition, I have discussed the tables with David Stockwell who owned one of them, as well as with other dealers and curators who have had the opportunity to examine the "pair". Although this kind of reporting cannot fully

Structural Examination of Group 1

The examination and patterning of certain structural elements of these tables reveals that they all belong to one group regardless of their decorative differences. Nevertheless, structural variations within the group exist; some related to the different decorative forms, and other minor variations probably due to a small change within the shop.

On all Group 1 tables, screws enter through the top and into the base securing these elements into place. A baize covering hides the screw heads. Since this method of attachment appears only on tables from this group, it is a distinctive shop practice. None of the Group 1 tables retain their original cloth covering but as this structural practice reveals, each table must have had one.

Mortise-and-tenon joints join the legs to the front, side and rear skirts, while quarter-round glue blocks support the joint from behind (Figure 5, A). No wooden pins originally appeared. The excess wood of the side and front skirts, that which does not make the mortise and tenon joint with the leg, is cut to a miter. (Fig. 5, B) Although the miter has no structural task it differs from the other groups where the excess wood was either sawn

substitute a first hand examination, the information I have received from these sources offers adequate details.

away or butted together. On each table the inner rear rail is tenoned into the rear legs and additionally supported by quarter-round glue blocks (Fig. 5, C). The front and side skirts on all but two tables are secondary woods with a mahogany facing. As well, each table from this group has or had a drawer behind the fifth leg.⁵⁸

The exterior rear rail varies among Group 1 tables. All but the Weir table are made of two boards; a stationary section secured to the inner rear rail with nails from the front, and a swinging section. On some examples, the skirt of the rear section is serpentine shaped. The rear hinge, around which the swing rail swings, consists of five knuckles that surround a central wooden pin. On most tables the top, middle and bottom knuckles swing while the second and fourth knuckles are stationary. Some, particularly the shaped rear skirted tables, have the reverse arrangement with the second and fourth knuckles swinging and the others stationary. The height of these knuckles is uniform at one inch apiece although the minor variation among the heights appears to

⁵⁸ This is a significant observation as only the Van Rensselaer group had all of its tables containing a drawer. Often some tables had it while others did not promoting the sense that one paid extra for the drawer. Clearly drawers were standard equipment with this group.

result from imperfect workmanship.⁵⁹ On all Group 1 tables the relatively fat central wooden pin, averaging three-eighths of an inch in diameter, fits flush with the bottom knuckle.⁶⁰

Certain Group 1 tables do not share all of the same structural processes. For example, the Metropolitan's Weir table reveals certain structural differences that result from the necessary considerations of the triple top form. For instance, a tulip poplar board covers the base's entire bottom allowing the owner to use the base as a storage area. To secure this drawer, the maker constructed a lock system with a key hole at the center of the front skirt. This lock keeps the bottom board of the top in place regulating access to the storage section. Also, because of the different levels involved when opening the top, a special treatment of the rear swing rail is necessary. When the backgammon and chess top is in use, a small wooden stop within the swing rail rises to hold the first surface on a level. When the second top

⁵⁹ The standard deviation from one inch for this difference is less than 1/64 of an inch. A highly insignificant deviation when considering the enormous possibility for human or mechanical imperfection.

⁶⁰ The slight, 1/64 of an inch, protrudence seen on some tables appears to be the result of shrinkage on the swing rail.

opens, the wooden stop fits back into the swing leg as the second top sits level on top of the recessed first top.

There are other important differences to the rear swing rail of this table. The moveable section of the swing rail is half the height of the entire rear section and more than three-quarters the length.⁶¹ Therefore the hinge for this rail is smaller than typical tables with each knuckle measuring around three-quarters of an inch high. In addition, the leg swings on the second and fourth knuckles of the hinge, while the first, third and fifth knuckles remain stationary. However, like all other Group A tables, a round, flat-bottomed pin lies flush with the bottom of the hinge. Aside from the swing rail and triple top, the Weir table reveals the same methods of joinery and top security as the other tables from this group. Apparently the differences noted here are due to the form itself and not different shop traditions.⁶²

⁶¹ The exact measurements are 3 and 3/4 inches high and 19 and 1/4 inches long. Remember that most other tables have two boards that are each around one half the length of the rear and run the full height of the inner rear rail.

⁶² Other New York triple top tables reveal a similar treatment of the swing rail, particularly regarding the odd length and width of this segment. However, these tables reveal completely different characteristics regarding other joinery concerns and cannot be considered within the Shop A tradition.

The Ford table also reveals some structural differences from the rest of the group. The table has solid skirts while most "Beekman-type" examples and all "imitative" ones are veneered. Also, the second and fourth knuckles are on the swing rail, while the first, third and fifth remain stationary. Similarly, knuckle heights are nearly equal on the other tables while on the Ford table the middle three knuckles are noticeably larger than the outer two. These arrangements, oversized middle knuckles and second and fourth knuckles swinging, usually occur on tables with shaped rear skirts, unlike the Ford example's straight section. Nevertheless, screws secure the top onto the base from above, the front joinery is blocked and mitered, and the hinge pin is identical to the remainder of the group. Overall, the Ford table reveals characteristics of both the "Beekman-type" and "Imitative-type" tables from Group 1. This may explain the structural individuality of this table.

Finally, among Group 1's "Imitative-type" certain structural peculiarities in relation to the other tables appear. All three "Imitative-type" tables have serpentine shaped back rails, and on each the knuckle arrangement has the second and fourth knuckles swinging and the first,

third and fifth stationary.⁶³ Similarly, the knuckles vary in height as the middle three knuckles are one-half-inch larger than the outer two.⁶⁴ These tables are veneered with mahogany onto an oak frame whereas the other tables, when veneered, have a pine or beech frame. Every other structural characteristic, however, places these tables firmly within the Shop 1 tradition.

One particular difference within Shop 1 tables is the shaping of the back rails. On two of the Beekman type tables, Winterthur's example and one of the actual Beekman tables⁶⁵, and all three of the Imitative-type tables, the usually flat swing rail is serpentine shaped. However, on the remaining tables from this group, including the Weir and Ford tables, the rear rail is flat.

Although certain structural differences exist among the tables from this group, they all share many important similarities that allow the group to be considered as such. Many of these structural differences appear to have

⁶³ On one of these imitative tables only the swing rail has the serpentine shape and the inner rear rail remains straight. The other two have the entire rear skirt shaped, as do the other Beekman type tables with shaped backs.

⁶⁴ Again this is not an exact measurement with two tables in a private collection but the photographs in Harold Sack's article appear to reveal identical proportions to the other table examined.

⁶⁵ New York Historical Society, 1962.61b

been caused by the variety of forms this shop produced, and they are probably not the result of major changes within the shop.

Decorative Examination of this Group

Group 1 is, excepting the Imitative tables, distinct in its proportional qualities. The tables incorporate a fairly thin skirt with a wider base than the others. The front and side skirt height (including gadrooned molding) measures three and three quarters inches, with the lone exception being the Henry Ford table that measures four-and-one-quarter inches. The shallow skirt contains an especially thin gadroon section, one-half inch, to remain proportionally correct with the piece. This gives an appearance of greater height than the 27 1/2 inch average and a sense of lightness to the tables. Furthermore, every Group 1 table base has sharp front corners, and three examples have a veneer covering the joinery seam between the legs and the front skirt.⁶⁶

The shape and size of the tops on all the tables from this group, again excepting the Imitative-type, are identical to the tops on tables from the Willett/Pearsee,

⁶⁶ These tables are the two Beekman examples, and the Winterthur table.

Apprentice and Van Rensselaer groups.⁶⁷ In addition, all Group 1 tables have a half round edge molding along their top boards, with only one Imitative table revealing a complex torus molding on this section.⁶⁸ The playing surface on each top, excepting the first surface of the Weir table, has a baize covering. This covering protects the top, offers a soft playing surface and hides the screws that secure the top to the base. The Weir table has three tops which offer two different playing surfaces, although these tops are also identical in size and shape to the others. On the first surface appears an inlaid chess and backgammon board while the second surface has a baize covering and wells for chips. The third top actually lifts up revealing a storage area within the base. This entire treatment appears to be unique in American furniture. Finally, within the group the placement and size of chip pockets and candlestick areas is identical.

The "Imitative-type's" tops are smaller than the Beekman type, although they do appear identical in shape and size to each other. Since two of the tables were

⁶⁷ For a full discussion of this phenomena see the Willett/Pearsee chapter.

⁶⁸ Although this table is the only five legged one examined having this torus molded edge, other four legged examples reveal the same treatment. Bernard & S. Dean Levy, Inc., own this table.

unavailable for study, a comparison of "Imitative-type" top shape and size is limited. However, those tables are said to have identical tops with a front width of thirty inches.⁶⁹ The third "Imitative-type" table has the same measurement at the front, and through photographic study appears to be identical to the other two. As stated above, the one observable difference between these tops is the half round molding on two tables and a torus molding on the other.

The ball-and-claw feet on all Shop 1 tables are less blocky than on the Willett/Pearsee or Van Rensselaer shop's tables. The front three talons consist of three knuckles, while the knuckle-less rear talon reveals a varying attention to form. The elaboration of the rear talon corresponds to the decorative elaboration of the entire table as the most highly ornamented examples tend to have better articulated rear talons. The feet are rounder and more delicate than on other tables, an impression furthered by the placement of the ankle slightly behind the foot. Rather than the leg coming straight down into the foot, it is set back slightly, creating an arch at the ankle. The balls on these feet are also higher than their counterparts from other shops

⁶⁹ Harold Sack, "New York Tables: Washington's Choice" The Magazine Antiques, (February, 1962) 192-193.

while their diameters, between one-and-seven-eighths and two-and-one-eighths inches, are slightly smaller.

The carving of most examples from Shop 1 is remarkably similar. The gadrooned molding nailed to the underside of the front and, occasionally, the side skirts is distinctly thinner and consists of narrower and more numerous gadroons than on tables from other New York shops. However, there is a variation in design among these gadrooned moldings. One design consists of uniformly sized and shaped gadroons that meet at a large central gadroon.⁷⁰ The other gadroon design reveals individual parts thickening toward the large central block and then descending in width as they move to the other side. These gadroons are also at more of an angle than the other type for this group.⁷¹

The moldings on all three Imitative tables have a carved floral and vine motif on them, ostensibly imitating the moldings seen on certain Willett/Pearsee examples. Careful examination of the three motifs reveals that, not

⁷⁰This group consists of the Weir table at the Metropolitan museum, one of the Beekman tables at the New York Historical Society, B, The Museum of the City of New York, 71.120.2, and the Diplomatic Reception Rooms, Department of State, 75.125.

⁷¹ These tables are at the Henry Ford Museum 29.873.20, Winterthur 58.1791, and the Beekman table A. The Imitative tables have a completely different Gadroon pattern which will be described later in the paper.

only do they differ from the Willett/Pearsee carvings, but they differ from each other. Even on the tables considered a pair, two different motifs, one busier than the other, appear.

The knee, knee bracket and rear leg carving is also very similar among Group 1 tables. Most tables have knee carvings with "an asymmetrical C-scroll and its surrounding mantle decorated with peanuts and pinwheels." (Similar to Fig. 3)⁷² Flowing below the C-scroll is a foliate carving that continues about one third of the way down the leg. It terminates with a slight curl to the proper right of the leg. All of the Beekman tables, the Weir table and the Imitative tables have this motif on their knees. The Ford table is the only one that does not. Its knee carving includes a three dimensional shell that rises above the leg to the front corner of the base. A floral motif sits below this segment with a foliate section leading down from it and terminating with three descending drops. This carved motif appears in full on the two front legs and only on the visible segments of the rear and swing legs.

In three cases, an "Imitative-type" table, the Ford table and the Winterthur table the rear legs are carved.

⁷² Morrison Heckscher, "The New York Serpentine Card Table", The Magazine Antiques, (May, 1973) 974-983.

On the Ford table the front motif is repeated on the outer side of the knee, and does not have a side gadroon. On the Winterthur example, the carving is primarily on the bracket and only a small portion on the rear leg. This table does have a side gadroon. Only one of the Imitative group tables has a carved rear leg and a side gadroon. This rear leg carving echoes the design on the front leg. The remaining Group A tables have neither carved rear legs nor gadroon molded side skirts.

Significance of Shop 1

The similar structural treatment of all tables in this group, including the application of the tops with screws from above, the mitering of excess wood behind the leg and the use of quarter-round glue blocks, indicate the work of one cabinetmaking shop. However, the enumerated decorative differences, and the occasional shaping of the rear skirt, need explanation.

Consider first the different decorative approaches to the tables. This shop offered two basic types of serpentine card tables, the "Beekman-type" and the "Imitative-type." However, they also supplied unique examples like the Weir and Ford tables. This variety alone reveals the diverse nature of the demand for New York card tables since each type found a purchaser. However, within the two types of tables decorative

variations exist. On the seven Beekman-type tables a variety of gadroon designs appear. Moreover, one Beekman-type table has a side molding and carved rear legs while three tables have swatches of veneer covering the seam of the front leg and skirt joinery. Studies into the available cabinetmakers price books reveals that most decorative elements had a particular price for the purchaser.⁷³ The decorative variation within this group therefore, may indicate the original price of the tables. The purchaser would pay extra for each additional decorative element since it was the result of added labor and material costs.

In addition, the Beekman-type tables have one structural element that varies within the group. The inner and exterior rear rail on two examples, at Winterthur and one of the Beekman tables, is shaped to a serpentine curve. Since, at this time, no other evidence indicates the reason for this variation, one might contend that this reveals an evolution of Shop 1 tradition. Possibly, as more apprentices and journeymen entered into the shop, their ideas and methods disseminated among other workmanship traditions. In effect, the shaped rear skirt

⁷³ Charles Montgomery, American Furniture: The Federal Period in the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, (New York: The Viking Press, 1966) 19-26.

may reveal earlier or later construction than those with a flat rear skirt.

Shop 1 also produced at least three tables whose overall formal approach appears to imitate the tables of other New York shops, like the Willet/Pearsee concern. Though the structural characteristics of these tables indicate they are Shop 1 products, their deep skirt, thick proportions and carved skirt moldings give the appearance of other five-legged New York card tables. Interestingly, these tables all have serpentine rear rails, and their rear hinge knuckle arrangement differs from the Beekman-type tables. Though current knowledge makes a definite answer impossible, it seems probable that these structural differences reflect a change within the shop, or are caused by the demands of proportionally different form.

The two decorative mavericks, the Weir and Ford tables, reveal the specific decorative features available from this shop. Considering the unique quality of these tables and the difficulty of producing such specialized items for general consumption, it appears that they were special orders.

The elaborate knee carving on the Ford table displays another interesting aspect of New York furniture. This carving appears on two chairs, one at the Henry Ford Museum and one in the Bayou Bend collection, indicating

the three objects to be part of a suite. Apparently New York cabinetmakers provided a number of suites for some of their wealthiest clients.⁷⁴ Whether the shop that produced the table also made the chairs has not been established, although the same carver appears to have worked on all three objects.⁷⁵

This group also contains two reputed pairs which close structural and decorative examination suggests otherwise. The pair at the New York Historical Society (TABLES 3 and 4), with a history in the Beekman family, consists of two tables with varied structures. For instance, one table has a serpentine shaped swing rail while the other is flat. The secret drawers also reveal the work of different craftsmen since their dovetail patterns and gauge marks differ. However, one must be

⁷⁴ Other New York card tables appear to have been made as part of a larger set. Perhaps the best known example is the four legged Verplanck family card table owned by the Metropolitan. They also own chairs and a settee from that suite of furniture. See Morrison Heckscher, American Furniture in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, II, Late Colonial Period: The Queen Anne and Chippendale Styles, (New York: Random House, 1985) See entries 24, 82, and 105)

⁷⁵ The amount of suites of Chippendale furniture in New York supports a view that the region was close to Philadelphia as a cultural and economic center in this period. That there was the kind of wealth to commission, and the ability to produce these ensembles provides insight into the New York social and economic elite in that they could afford such highly developed furnishings as a suite.

careful not to place too much emphasis on these drawers since they were often lost and replaced. A decorative difference appears on the skirt moldings as the gadroon motifs vary between the tables. One has identically sized and spaced gadroons while the other table has more angular, graduating gadroons. Finally, one table has fewer individual gadroons than the other.

Are these tables a pair? Their similar history hints at the tables spending most of their lives together⁷⁶, but the structural differences intimate that they were not made at the same time. The reasons for having a second table made are numerous and include the possibility that the Beekmans had a second table made, perhaps to match the first or to evenly distribute an estate among heirs. Nevertheless, the importance of the differences between the two tables cannot be overlooked, and they force one to question their designation as a pair.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ See Heckscher, The Magazine Antiques, (May, 1973), 981.

⁷⁷ I am defining a pair as two tables that were manufactured at the same time for the same owner. They should therefore share the same structural and decorative characteristics to be considered a pair. The question of what makes a pair has been recently discussed at Winterthur in regard to the Cadwalader furnishings and in particular the card tables from that group. The research revealed that in some cases a pair that is documented as such does not necessarily reveal the identical characteristics. Although the documentary evidence is clear in this case, one must consider the validity of such evidence. It is entirely possible for a shop to

A similar case exists with two "Imitative-type" tables (TABLES 10 and 11). Traditionally considered to be a gift from George Washington to Judge John Berrien, these tables reveal important decorative differences which undermine their designation as a pair. Most noticeable are the differences on the front skirt molding leaf and vine motif which is busier and more detailed on one. These differences in carving continue onto the knee brackets.

The designation of these tables as a pair finds its basis on the nearly identical structures and tops for the two tables. However, a third table exists that appears to have the identically shaped and sized top. Moreover, this table reveals the same structural features as the pair, indicating that the similarities among the tables indicate a shop tradition and not a pair.⁷⁸ Unlike the Beekman tables, the history of this pair remains uncertain. George Washington's gift of two tables to general John

misrepresent their work on a bill, claiming to have done the service themselves while actually sending the work to another shop. Certainly, the Affleck shop was busy enough with the remainder of the Cadwalader order that sending the table to be constructed elsewhere was a viable alternative.

⁷⁸ Given this third table, the "few subtle vagaries" of the possible pair's carving, become highly significant.

This quote comes from, Harold Sack, "New York Tables: Washington's Choice", The Magazine Antiques, (February, 1962), 193.

Berrien may be documented⁷⁹, but there is no documentation that these tables are the pair.

⁷⁹ In his article, "New York tables: Washington's Choice," Harold Sack reveals that in a genealogical book there is a "confirmation of the tradition of Washington's gift of the pair of card tables." The gift of a pair given to Judge Berrien seems well documented, although I have not seen the genealogical book. That both of these tables are a part of this gift is unclear since there does not appear to be any documentation of both tables coming from either Washington or Berrien.

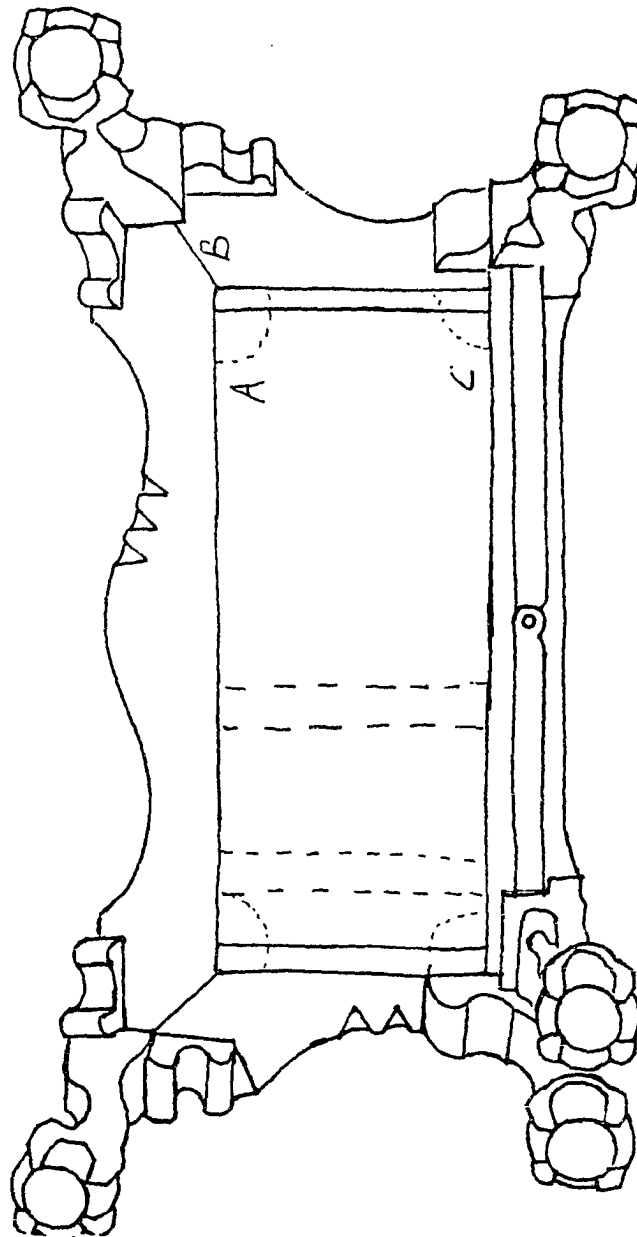


Figure 6. Construction of Shop 1 Tables. Drawing by Stefan Dedecek.

Chapter 6

THE VAN CORTLANDT AND RURAL TABLES

The popularity of five-legged, serpentine-shaped card tables spread beyond the borders of New York City as tables owned by families like the Van Nattas, Van Rensselaers and Schuylers suggest. Their tables were made by New York City cabinetshops and either shipped to upstate New York and Northern New Jersey or, less likely, used in their New York City townhouses. However, for wealthy families outside of the city, in such towns as Haverstraw, Kingston, Albany, or on any of the large manor houses along the Hudson River, local craftsmen may have supplied stylish furniture forms. Although they copied the urban form and decoration, these tables display structural techniques that belie a New York City place of origin. These structural techniques, along with provenance and a series of other important differences, suggest that two groups of serpentine shaped card tables are not the products of New York City shops, but of craftsmen trained outside of that urban venue.

Many aspects of these tables, their provenance, decoration and structural techniques, point to an origin outside of New York City. Structurally, these tables resemble New England craftsmanship more than New York work, particularly their flat knuckled rear hinge. The flat knuckle hinge appears on many New England pieces, but is rare on furniture from New York, Philadelphia and the South.⁸⁰ In fact, of all the five legged, serpentine front tables, only the two groups discussed in this section have a flat rear hinge.⁸¹ Also, the butting of the side and front skirt behind the leg represents a departure from New York City practices. Once again, this construction method appears more often on rural New England cabinetwork than on Middle Atlantic and Southern work.⁸² Given the similar economic and military concerns for northern New Yorkers and Western New Englanders, one

⁸⁰ Morrison Heckscher, "The New York Serpentine Card Table", The Magazine Antiques, (May, 1973), 978. Also, an extended search through Winterthur and other collections supported this statement as seventeenth out of twenty rear hinges on New England pieces were flat.

⁸¹ The one exception is the straight front, five legged table owned by Winterthur. A full discussion of that table can be found in the Winterthur group section. Also, certain four legged tables have a flat rear hinge, but again these seem to be an exception.

⁸² This trait has not been seen as often on New England furniture as the flat hinge, however.

can assume that the transfer of ideas, methods, and even craftsmen occurred.

Finally, the execution of carved decorations on the tables doES not relate to any known New York City carvings.⁸³ Since major New York City shops appear to have hired many of the same freelance carvers, some degree of overlap in execution should occur. There is little probability that these shops chose carvers from that urban locale. Indeed, the simplicity and lack of variety in design, and the difference in character of carved elements from this group, further suggest rural craftsmanship.

Because of their probable locale, these shops may not have produced as many card tables as their New York City counterparts. The volume of demand for card tables, a luxury form, was probably smaller in the rural areas than in the urban centers. Moreover, the availability of apprentices and journeymen needed to operate a large shop, as displayed by the Willett/Pearsee firm, further prohibited such a practice in these fairly remote locales. Examined tables indicate two non-urban groups, one

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has no known provenance (TABLE 34). The proximity of the two original owners suggests that the shop was nearby.

Structural Examination of the Van Cortlandt Group

Joinery of the skirts and legs in this group differ from those of most other New York serpentine front tables. As in all other card tables, the front and side skirts are tenoned into the front legs. However, the excess wood from the skirts is neither removed nor mitered. Instead, these sections butt against each other with the excess wood from the front skirt fitting squarely into a cut out of the side (Fig. 6, A). A vertical, rectangular glue block provides the only additional security to the joint.⁸⁶ This butting of excess wood at the front appears on other tables, but the vertical, rectangular glue blocks are peculiar to the Van Cortlandt group.⁸⁷ These tables have straight interiors to their front skirts unlike the shaped examples of the Willett/Pearsee or Van Rensselaer examples (Fig. 6, B). Their inner rear rails and side

⁸⁶ The blocks were missing on most tables but oxidation shadows and glue residue intimate their previous existence.

⁸⁷ Of the tables examined, this butting at the front occurred only on ones with a flat rear hinge. In fact, the second group of tables discussed in this section also have this butting although the deepness of the cut and the lack of vertical glue blocks indicate the work of a different shop. Nevertheless, the butting appears only on tables suggesting an origin outside of New York City.

skirts are tenoned into the rear legs, both at a ninety degree angle, with vertically oriented, rectangular glue blocks adding security (Fig. 6, C).

The rear hinge reveals another departure from observed New York City practice. Unlike the rounded hinges associated with all of the New York City groups, these hinges have flat knuckles. The relative ease in producing such a hinge may account for its appearance. However, flat wooden hinges appear on many New England examples and seem to indicate a regional characteristic. If flat hinges demonstrate regional methods, then their appearance on these tables suggest a transferral of structural practice from New England to upstate New York. In addition, the Van Cortlandt group displays a unique knuckle arrangement having nine half-inch knuckles where the first, third, fifth, seventh, and ninth knuckles swing while the second, fourth, sixth and eighth remain stationary. The original pin on two tables is round and protrudes slightly beyond the bottom knuckle. The State Department's table did not appear to retain its original

pin.⁸⁸ Four screws secure the stationary part of the swing rail, entering from each tables' interior.

On the Van Cortlandt and Van Rysma tables four screws, one on each skirt, secure the top to the base (Fig. 6, D) The State Department's table has a six-screw arrangement with two entering from the front skirt and inner rear rail, and one screw on the sides. Few gauge marks appear on these tables, and the gouged sections for the screws to the top are uneven, unmarked and unfinished. Only three mortise-and-tenon joints reveal gauge marks, and none of the tops displays evidence of tothing or marking for placement onto the base. Unmarked iron hinges attach the two part top.

Decorative Examination of the Van Cortlandt Group

Decoration on the tables is identical. Each has the same carved motifs, proportions, and top. However, the group's three tops, though identical to each other, differ from others in their depth and rear width. Because of the

⁸⁸ The entire rear skirt, not including the interior rear rail, may be a replacement, although the repairer took special care to recreate the same swing mechanism. It is identical to the other two tables except it is of southern pine instead of maple, and there are evidences of repair along the bottom of the table's top that do not appear on either table. There is evidence of the table having been apart, including numbers scratched into certain surfaces, all new screws, and the reapplication of gadrooned sections.

larger depth and rear width of the top, the serpentine shape differs in severity from the other tables. In this instance, the identical tops suggest the work of one shop. Apparently, since a rural location did not allow them to share the New York City template, they made their own.⁸⁹ Also, the half-round molded edge to the tops has a less severe profile than the New York City examples.

In addition to sharing a uniquely shaped top, these tables have identical height, width, depth, and depth of skirt measurements. The tables are not veneered, and have sharp front corners at the base.

The knee, knee bracket, and rear leg carvings reveal the same design and execution throughout the group. The bracket carvings are foliate motifs that curl onto the knee, down the leg and terminate at a rounded point. A thin, triangular void appears at the top of the leg between the curling foliate carving from the bracket (Fig. 7). Only on a brief passage of the State Department's table does the carving overlap; otherwise it is identical throughout the group. The identical motif appears on the visible section of the rear legs. Moreover, each skirt molding has the identically sized and designed floral and foliate motif that appears to imitate a wrapped wreath.

⁸⁹ The Rural group tops differ from both New York City tops and Van Cortlandt tops.

The legs are thicker and less shapely with a smaller degree of cabriole than on New York City tables, and the feet are squatter and rounder.

Significance of the Van Cortlandt Shop⁹⁰

The fact that all the provenances for tables of this type revolve around northern Westchester and Rockland Counties indicates a probable shop location. The limited accessibility of this area to New York City during the period suggests its need for qualified craftsmen of high style objects. The Van Cortlandt shop appears to have fulfilled part of that market driven need.

Another trait of this shop is the identical decoration that appears on all of its tables. Not only are carved elements identical, but overall proportions are also the same. Customers likely had little choice in the decoration of their tables, choosing only what local craftsmen could provide. However, there also must have been limits on the local craftsmen's production abilities. The tables suggest that this shop had only one carver, and surviving examples suggest he carved one motif. Perhaps this was because no other carvers were available in this

⁹⁰ A full discussion of this entire groups significance, that is the non New York City group, will come at the conclusion of all its subsidiary group's discussions.

non-urban locale although there is a possibility that the market fully supported this decorative motif.

The Rural Shop

Another group of tables, having similar decorative and structural elements as the Van Cortlandt tables, also appears to be the work of non-New York City craftsmen. The group consists of three five-legged tables and one four-legged example. Although the four-legged table's construction necessarily differs from that of the five-legged examples, the joinery of the front, the hinge arrangement and identical tops suggest the work of the same shop.⁹¹ The Museum of the City of New York owns one of the tables (TABLE 36), while the other three are in private hands, (TABLES 35 and 37 have five legs, TABLE 38 has four).

Unfortunately none of the original owners are known for this group. However, the structural and decorative aspects of the group that indicate non-New York City craftsmen are the flat rear hinge, butting of the skirts'

⁹¹ The examination of over thirty, four legged tables provided only one addition to the five legged groups. Perhaps because of other structural concerns the four legged tables do not have the same construction details as their five legged counterparts. In some cases the carved decoration appears nearly identical, or at least by the same hand on some four and five legged examples, but as has been discussed above, identical carving does not indicate work of the same shop.

excess wood behind the legs, and unique design to the knee and bracket carving.

Structural Examination of the Rural Shop

Structurally the group is identical (excepting the obvious differences of the four legged table.) On each table, the side and front skirts are tenoned into the legs with no other support for the joint.⁹² The excess wood from the front skirt fits securely into a one-inch deep cut of the side skirt, and thus forms the butting behind the leg (Like Fig 6, B). This is deeper than the corresponding cut on the Van Cortlandt tables. The serpentine front skirts are left straight in the rear.

On each example, the side skirts join at a ninety degree angle with the rear rail (Like Fig 6, C, although no blocks). However, on the four-legged table, dovetails secure one side of the inner rear rail directly to one side rail and not to both rear legs. The other side of the inner rear rail is tenoned into the stationary rear leg. This construction facilitates the use of a rear leg, attached to the exterior rear rail, as a swing leg. Because of the dovetailing, the rear and swing rails are equal in height to the side skirts, whereas usually the

⁹² Remember, the Van Cortlandt group had vertical rectangular glue blocks behind these joints. Fig 6, A

back rails on five-legged tables are deeper than the show skirts.

On the MCNY's five legged table, two inner rear rails appear; a smaller rail dovetailed into the side skirts and an inner rear rail tenoned to the rear legs. Beyond the second inner rear rail is the swinging rail. The smaller, dovetailed inner rear rail may be the vestige of four legged table construction, although its true purpose is not known. The third and fourth privately owned tables' rear joinery is standard five legged joinery with an inner rear rail tenoned into both legs, and an exterior rear rail secured to it.

Although the inner rear rail joinery of this group differs, the swing rails are identical throughout. All four examples have flat, five-knuckled hinges with the top, middle and bottom swinging and the second and fourth knuckles stationary. Each rear hinge has the same five knuckle height, measuring from the top knuckle down, fifteen-sixteenths, one-and-one-sixteenth, one-and-one-eighth, one-and-one-eighth, and one-and-one-sixteenth of an inch. The central hinge pins, only two are original, are distinctively large, round and protruding.

Four nails secure each stationary section of the swing leg from the back in no specific pattern. On three of the four examples, screws enter from the side, rear and

front skirts to secure the top to the base. On the MCNY's table, however, there are two screws in the back rail, one on each side rail and none at the front. Markings for placement onto the base appear at the bottom of the top.

Although two tables from this group had a drawer, neither retains it and only one has its original runners while the MCNY table has oxidation shadows and nail holes related to former runners. Nails secure the existing runners to the inner rear rail from behind, while on the front rail, rectangular cuts have been made, into which the runners are nailed. The iron hinges for the top are unstamped and there is no evidence that these tops had a cloth covering.

Decorative Examination of the Rural Group

These tables have distinct proportional characteristics. They all measure 27 and 1/2 inches high, have identical tops within the group that differ from the tops of other groups,⁹³ and have front skirts and moldings measuring three-and-one-half and one-half inches in height respectively. The tops on both non-New York City groups have rear width measurements equal to the front, although

⁹³ They are closer to the Shop 3 tops than any others but have a slightly smaller back width and larger front width although they do share the same depth of 16 and 5/8 inches.

the deepness in serpentine shape and overall frontal and rear width of the two non-New York City group's tops differ. However, both of their top's half round edge moldings are less severe than on the New York City tables.

There are important similarities on the carved elements of the three five-legged tables while the four-legged example has no decorative carving. The five-legged motif has floral sprays on each knee bracket that enter onto the leg, continue down the knee and terminate at a rounded point (see Fig. 7). Though very similar to the Van Cortlandt group carving, this carving overlaps more and has a busier feel to it. Similarly, the V-shaped void at the top of the knee is thinner than the corresponding section on the Van Cortlandt tables. The carved skirt moldings share the same thin and elongated gadroon pattern and all carvings appear to be the work of the same hand.

Finally, the feet on all four tables have a slightly raised and elongated front talon that appears on no other table. Below this central talon sits a fully round ball grasped by rounded claws. The legs all share the same cabriole shape revealing a greater curve than on the Van Cortlandt tables, although less than the New York City examples.

Significance of the Rural Group

Evidence suggests that the rural group of tables came from a different shop than the Van Cortlandt examples. This shop produced both four and five legged tables, that differ only where the lack of a fifth leg necessitates. However, like the Van Cortlandt shop these tables reveal structural similarities with New England craftsmanship rather than New York City. This and the completely different carving suggests that the location of the shop producing these tables was outside of New York City, and probably in upstate New York.

Significance of All Non New York City Tables

If, as the evidence strongly suggests, these tables are the product of workshops outside of New York City, then they signify a great deal about the influence of metropolitan cabinetmaking on less populated areas. Proof of New York City as an eighteenth-century style center appears in the similarity of northern New Jersey or southern Connecticut furniture to New York high style examples.⁹⁴ Clearly the city produced one of the greatest outputs of furniture in the New World, an output that

⁹⁴ For example, some Chapin chairs with a diamond-back splat are similar to New York's examples of this form.

influenced cabinetmakers and clients well outside its geographical range.

These tables also reveal transferral of ideas and style. Decoratively and formally the tables relate to New York City examples, but structurally they resemble New England work. This tension suggests that New York City designs influenced craftsmen trained outside the New York structural tradition.

The existence of at least seven tables from the two non-New York City shops provides insight into the wealth of non-city life. The Hudson River Valley and the Albany area were home to many of New York's wealthiest families. Families such as the Van Rensselaers, Van Cortlandts, Livingstons and Beekmans owned great manor homes and properties in these areas. It has been assumed, without any proof, that much of the fine furniture associated with these homes came from New York City craftsmen. However, the tables in this chapter suggest that local cabinetmakers produced urban forms of high quality and regard. Certainly the carving is less refined on the upstate examples, yet the figure in the mahogany and the security of construction reveal quality craftsmen whose work merited the patronage of New York's wealthy.

Although the quality of work was high, limited consumer choice appears to have existed. Surviving

examples from each shop suggest the limited variety available to consumers in the carving, proportions, and drawers. The Rural group tables revealed some differences, particularly the possible stylistic change from four to five-legged examples, although the three five-legged examples had nearly identical carving and proportion.

Finally, the volume of known output from these shops appears high, especially compared to the surviving output of the New York City shops. However, the bias for survival rate of these tables differs from New York City tables. Certainly the major fires in New York City, particularly the major fire in 1776, and the military disruptions that affected the city, destroyed many card tables. Upstate New York did not suffer as badly and thereby may produce a biased sample in relation to the city.

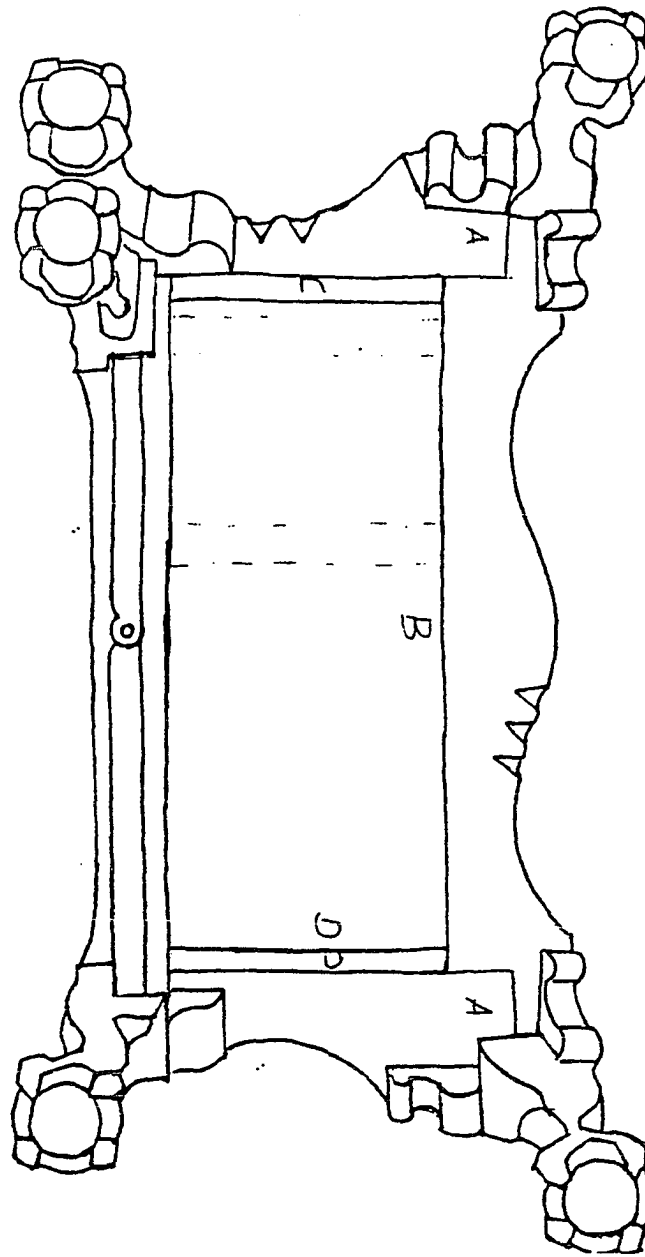


Figure 7. Construction of Van Cortlandt and Rural Tables.
Drawing by Stefan Dedecek.

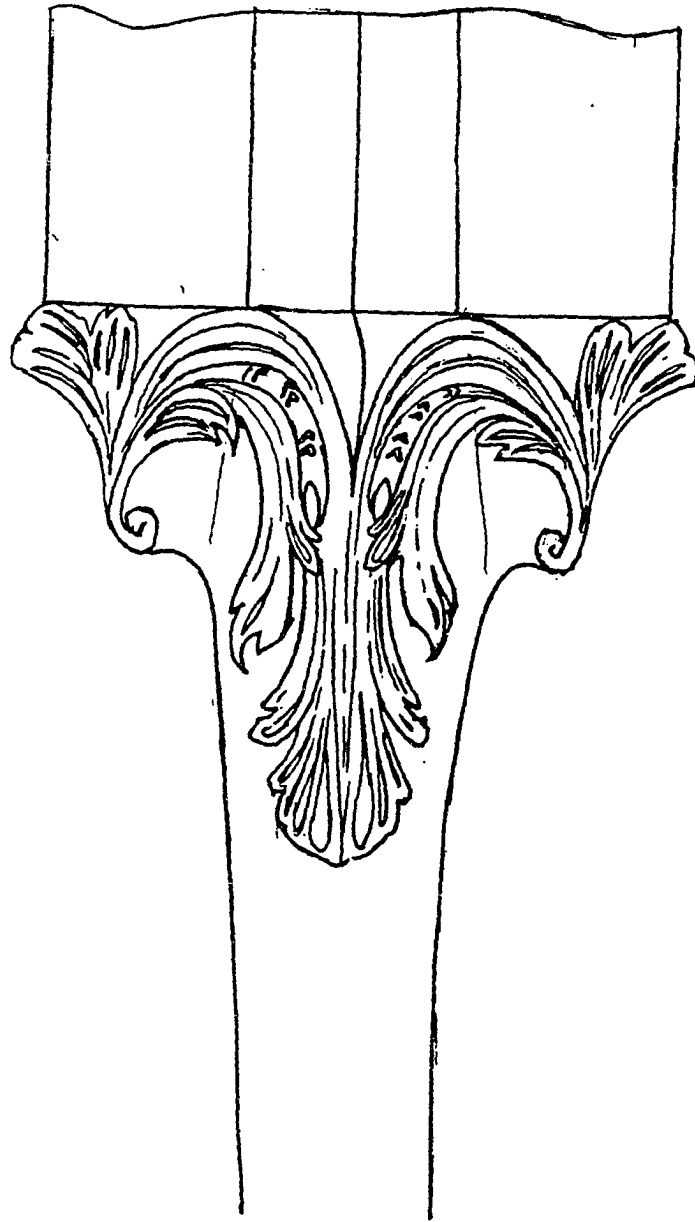


Figure 8. Knee and Bracket Carving on Van Cortlandt and Rural Tables. Drawing by Stefan Dedecek.

Chapter 7

THE WINTERTHUR AND FIVELEGGED GROUPS

Not all New York five-legged card tables from this period have the serpentine shape. A group of tables, including one at Winterthur, are characterized by rectangular bases, shaped skirts, central carved shells, and turret tops that do not correspond to the base. The five-legged tables of this type, which divide into two structural groups, have been associated with early dates or rural manufacture. However, no verification, either documentary or structural, exists for these assumptions. In fact, the discovery of a rectangular based table that appears to be from the Willett/Pearsee shop suggests that these tables are the work of highly qualified urban craftsmen contemporary with the Willett/Pearsee, Van Rensselaer and other major shops.⁹⁵

This section consists of two groups of tables. Of the three tables in the first group, one is at Winterthur

⁹⁵ A full discussion of the table, owned by Winterthur, appears in the catalog section. The table differs from the groups under discussion here in its structural and decorative make up, but it suggests that major urban craftsmen produced rectangular based card tables for certain clients. See TABLE 23.

(TABLE 40) and the others are privately owned (TABLES 39 and 41), as are both tables in the second group (TABLES 42 and 43). Separate discussion of the groups follows with the former called the Winterthur group and the latter the Fivelegged group.

Structural Examination of the Winterthur Group

Mortise and tenon joints secured by pins join the sides, front and inner rear rails to the four stationary legs of the table. The pins, though not identically spaced on all three tables, average two-and-a-quarter inches apart from each other, greater than other group's tables. However, these pins appear on all mortise and tenon joints, including behind the rear legs. Two of the tables, the Winterthur example excepted, have central drawers within the front skirt supported by two horizontal boards tenoned into the legs. These joints are not pinned.

Like most other five legged tables the inner rear rail forms the rear joinery while a two part exterior rear rail provides a mobile fifth leg. This one inch thick inner rear rail is about one-quarter of an inch thicker than usual. The privately owned tables have round rear hinges while Winterthur's has the flat, New England type hinge. All three tables have the hinges arranged so the top, middle and bottom knuckles swing while the second and

fourth remain stationary, and each knuckle is of the same size. Only one table retains its original central hinge pin, rendering the feature useless for group determination.

The tops on all three tables are identical in their design, shape and size in the front, although Winterthur's is one inch wider at the rear. Four screws, rather than the usual six, secure the tops to the base from below. On the tables with a central drawer, two screws enter through the top of the drawer opening and two screws enter through gouged sections in the inner rear rail. The Winterthur table, without a drawer opening, has four gouged-out sections, one on each side of the table. No marks gauge these crude unfinished niches in the side.

One final structural oddity about these tables concerns the saw marks on the inner surfaces of the mahogany sides. These are left unplanned so that the vertical saw marks are more obvious on these tables than on any others. Aside from some marks on the mortise and tenons of the legs, no gauging marks are visible and the tops are not tooth planed.

The central drawers are structurally and proportionally identical within this group. Dovetails secure the drawer sides to the front and back with two

tails of 1/2 and 3/4 inches wide. The bottoms are nailed into grooves on the bottom of the sides.

Decorative Examination of the Winterthur Group

The three tables from this group differ in their decorative aspects. The privately-owned tables each have a centrally located drawer placed above a carved shell motif, while the Winterthur table has only the carved shell. The lack of a drawer causes other decorative differences including the shaping of the front skirt base which, on the Winterthur table, consists of two S-curves leading to the central shell carving. In order to accommodate the central drawer, the other tables have deeper front skirts than the Winterthur example, with the central carved shell below the drawer and flanked by two S-curves arched together. On all three tables a thinner double S-curve arch appears on the bottom of the side skirts. The side S-curve arches are identical in size and shape on all three tables suggesting the use of a template or marking gauge.

The carved central shell on all three tables appears identical in design and execution. It is a semi-circular shell motif set within a slight incised semi-circle. The Winterthur table and a privately owned example have carved knees consisting of a foliate motif with a central v-shaped void filled with cross hatching. This motif

appears on the rear legs, although only on the visible sections, leaving the back of the legs and the entire swing leg uncarved. No carving appears on the third table's legs and brackets. All three tables have identical feet.

The tops are rectangular with turret shaped corners. Evidence indicates a dished top for chips and corner candlesticks as well as a cloth covering for all three tops. A larger than average overhang of the top beyond the understructure appears on all three tables. On each, the front corners of the frame are rounded.

Similar proportions appear among these tables. Their heights are nearly identical, all very close to 28 inches, while the side and front skirts reveal little variation in their depth. The two tables with drawers have skirts that measure one inch deeper than the drawerless Winterthur example. There is no applied skirt molding.

The Fivelegged Group

The second group of straight front tables consists of two privately owned examples. Winterthur's Decorative Arts Photographic Collection has a picture of an unidentified third table that appears similar to the group. However, since decorative aspects alone do not determine groupings for tables, a definitive attribution

is impossible. Neither of the examined tables has a known provenance and are TABLE 42 and TABLE 43.

Structural Examination of the Fivelegged Group

The base of these tables consist of four rails tenoned into four stationary legs. Unlike the Winterthur group, vertically arranged glue blocks, not pins, secure the joints. Numerical inscriptions on some blocks appear to denote their proper position since the legs have corresponding inscriptions.

As on other five-legged tables, the two-part exterior rear rail consists of a stationary board, secured to the inner rear rail with nails from the front, and a swinging rail. Like many serpentine front tables, the swinging section moves on a five-knuckled, rounded hinge. However, only the second and fourth knuckles swing, and each knuckle measures nearly one-quarter inch shorter than the average for other tables. The central hinge pins are round with a small diameter and flat bottom that barely protrudes beyond the bottom knuckle. Since the protrusion is less than one-thirty-second of an inch below the bottom knuckle, wood shrinkage may explain its existence. The mortise and tenon at the rear of the top boards sits two inches to the proper left of the exterior rear rail hinge.

Though both tops have rear tenons of identical size and location, their attachment to the bases differ. On

TABLE 42, six one-inch-thick glue blocks, (two at the front, two in the back and one on either side,) secure the top in place. Although not typical, some four-legged examples have this kind of construction, as well as certain New York tea tables.

TABLE 43 has four wooden blocks tenoned into the four skirts and nailed to the bottom of the top securing it in place. This construction, though used in late 19th and 20th century cabinetmaking, has not been documented on any 18th century American furniture to date.⁹⁶ This structure allows for the top to move during changes in the relative humidity and thus reduces cracking.

Decorative Examination of the Fivelegged Group

The tables share many decorative and proportional characteristics. For example, both tables are 27 inches tall, have bases that are 29 1/8 inches wide and 13 1/2 inches deep, and have front skirts 4 3/4 high. Both tables have the same feet and sharp front corners of the base.

⁹⁶ This construction appears on other New York pieces including a serpentine front, five leg card table, a spider leg table and a dining table in the Winterthur Museum. The dining table does not retain any of the blocks, and has had its width reduced, but reveals the mortises along three rails. The fourth rail appears to be a replacement. The other three examples are in private collections.

The knee carving on the two tables is also similar. Both have foliate carving beginning at either side of the knee and continuing about one third of the way down, leaving a thin V-shaped void filled with cross-hatching. Only on TABLE 43 do the back legs have carving, which is identical to the front legs, and unlike the Winterthur group tables, this carving appears on the swing leg.

Like the Winterthur group tables, a carved shell motif appears at the center of the front skirt. However, the Fivelegged group's shells incorporate additional motifs and reveal important differences in execution from the other straight front group. The reticulated and incised central shell is unique having many more incisions than the Winterthur group shell, and sits within a deeper semi-circular depression. Some variations within the group exist since TABLE 42's shell has a central rosette while TABLE 43's incorporates a series of C-scrolls, swirls and foliate sprays at its base.

Although some decorative differences have been mentioned within the Fivelegged group already, the disparate top configurations, and varied front and side skirt shaping are most obvious. TABLE 42's top is turret ended, smaller and less shapely than any of the Winterthur group tables, while TABLE 43 has no turrets. There are also slight differences in the shaping of the front and

side skirts. Even with these formal differences both tables share a uniquely unsevere half round edge molding.⁹⁷

Significance of the Fivelegged and Winterthur Groups

Although some structural differences appear within each group discussed in this chapter, the majority of structural features indicate the groups. Because of possible changes within a shop, one must examine all of the aspects of the tables, and not focus on one element. In this case, the overall structural similarities are compelling enough to determine a group. In short, tables from one group need not share every structural detail to be considered the work of the same shop.

The decorative differences within this group indicate important aspects of the New York cabinetmaking market. Although all have the same rectangular base, the tables have different skirt designs, carving, and the Winterthur group varies in regard to a central drawer. One possible explanation for these differences assumes a price scale based on labor costs. In short, one could purchase a

⁹⁷ One interesting decorative aspect on table two is the remnants of gilding that appears on the molded edge of the top and within the central shell. Apparently at one point these sections were fully gilded, and it is possible that the original surface covering was this gilt decoration. Unfortunately with the trace amounts that remain, the age or authenticity of the gilding cannot be determined.

table either with or without knee carving, a drawer, or even a shaped top. This does not assume the custom production of these tables, however, as ready-made prices still could reflect labor costs of production.

Furthermore, the tables reveal additional competition within the New York card table market. The few known straight-front examples may indicate a small production of this type of table, although having at least two shops producing such tables suggests a significant demand.

Since these tables competed with the serpentine-front examples, consideration must be given to the importance and desirability of these examples. In short, were they viewed as second-rate examples below the serpentine form in the status of their ownership? Did their purchase depend on social prestige and wealth of the consumer, or personal taste?

Two tables, one in the Winterthur group and one in the Fivelegged group have histories of ownership in the Schuyler and Hamilton families respectively. Given the wealth and social importance of such names it appears that these tables had considerable social regard, and their purchase reflected a stylistic choice, not an economic one. Similarly, the amount of decoration on the tables, including extensively designed and executed shell and knee carving, and the proportioned skirts, reveal great care in

the presentation of the piece, care associated with high-style and expensive objects. Finally the faint traces of gilding on one of the Fivelegged group tables further indicates their importance. If the shell, top edge molding, and cut out sections of the top were gilded, as evidence suggests, the entire piece must have looked fancier and more like European examples. Even the value of material used for decoration, gold, indicates the importance of these tables.

The one table with its top applied by wood blocks tenoned into the side rails and nailed to the top board reveals care for changing conditions rarely seen on American eighteenth century furniture. Though other eighteenth century American cabinetmakers probably knew of this technique, only a handful of examples, all thought to be from New York, reveal such treatment.⁹⁸ This top application reveals a careful consideration of the properties of wood, and the needs of the table top. It also reflects the cabinetmakers' abilities and knowledge of materials. A common object might not have received this kind of concern, further suggesting the importance of the five-legged, non-serpentine card table.

⁹⁸ These are the only examples known to the author. There are probably other forms with this kind of top application that I am unaware of at this point.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

The structural examination of New York card tables presents new names, ideas and relationships heretofore unknown regarding New York cabinetmaking. First, nearly all the tops are the same size and shape, probably resulting from a shared template, indicate an extraordinary relationship among craftsmen. In addition, the Tibats hinges solidify 1765-1785 as the probable dates of New York five-legged card tables. Also, the relationship between the city and rural craftsmen appears within the tables, as does the apparent network of free-lance carvers. Moreover, the Apprentice group of tables adds to our understanding of the relationship between shops and the transferral of ideas and methods within a city.

The Willett/Pearsee shop however, adds the most to our understanding of the New York card table market. The indications of a large shop, the variation of decoration and amenities, the importance of the owners, and the various types of business interactions that took place all

add to our understanding. Moreover, for the first time a name can be attributed to a group of New York card tables.⁹⁹ Overall, the tables reveal a complex commercial network within the New York cabinet-making world.

⁹⁹ All of the Gilbert Ash attributions had no basis other than a cross-hatch carving design. Such a singular, decorative trait cannot determine the work of one shop.

CATALOG

TABLE 1

Owner: Winterthur Museum 58.1791

Height: 27 1/2 Width: top: 34 base 32 3/4 Depth: top:
16 5/8 base: 15 7/8

Description: One of Shop 1's Beekman type tables with a shaped rear skirt. Unlike any other Beekman type tables it has carved rear legs and a gadrooned side molding. Evidence for a drawer remains on the table although the drawer is missing. The top boards have a small rectangular mortise and tenon at their rear. The table has veneered front corners to hide the seam of the leg and front rail joinery.

Provenance: Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont

Reference: Downs, 338 (The full citation for these books appears in the bibliography at the end of the work.

TABLE 2

Owner: Diplomatic Reception Rooms, Department of State
75.25

Height: 27 9/16 Width: top: 34 base: 30 7/8 Depth:
top: 16 9/16 base: 15 5/8

Description: Typical Beekman-type table. The drawer appears to be new, as does the gadrooned molding across the front rail. The top boards have a small rectangular mortise and tenon at their rear. The back skirt is flat.

Provenance: Varick Family, Israel Sack, Inc.

Reference: Sack, Volume IV, 1032

TABLE 3

Owner: New York Historical Society 1962.61a

Height: 27 13/16 Width: top: 34 Base: 32 3/4 Depth:
top: 16 1/2 base: 15 3/4

Description: Thought to be a pair with table 1962.61b. Typical Beekman type construction with additional mahogany veneers on the front corners to hide the seam of leg and front skirt joinery. The back rail is flat and the skirt moldings gadroons are of equal size. The top boards have a small mortise and tenon on their rear.

Provenance: Family tradition states that the table was originally owned by James W. Beekman whose initials appear on the bottom of 1962.61b, (TABLE 4). This table may not be a pair to that one however.

TABLE 4

Owner: New York Historical Society 1962.61b
The height and depth of this table are identical to the preceding one.

Description: This table has veneers across the front corners hiding the seam of joinery. The table also has a shaped back rail, very similar to the TABLE 1. The gadrooned molding reveals a pattern where each individual gadroon decreases in width the farther away from the center point one gets. There are sixteen individual gadroons compared to the 18 on 1962.61a.

Provenance: As far as records say the tables descended through the Beekman family together so officially these tables share the same provenance. This table has a chalk inscription "JWB" under the top, probably referring to James W. Beekman who built a country house, Mount Pleasant, on Turtle Bay in 1763.

Reference: For both TABLE 3 and 4, Antiques, May, 1973, page 981.

TABLE 5

Owner: Metropolitan Museum of Art 37.122
Height: 29 **Width:** top: 34 base: 32 3/8 **Depth:** top: 17 base: 15 3/4

Description: This is one of a few tables American triple top tables. The inlaid chess/checker board and backgammon section indicate those uses for one surface, while the baize covered and dished second top was probable for cards. The key hole in the center of the front skirt indicated the use of the base as a drawer which could be entered by lifting the bottom board of the top. The

special treatment of the back rail is discussed within the text as is the fairly typical Beekman type construction. The gadrooning on the front skirt molding is particularly small in comparison to the other tables and reveals 47 individual gadroons, 23 on either side of a rectangular central piece. On the proper right middle hinge appears the stamp H: TIBATS. The top boards have a small mortise and tenon at their rear.

Provenance: Bought at an auction of Susan Weir's belongings in Garrison, New York by Ginsburg & Levy. It had a history of belonging to the painter Robert Weir. The table was then sold to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1937. Ownership prior to Robert Weir is not known, although the wealth of the Weir family, and the importance of other Weir family pieces does not preclude their original ownership.

Reference: Heckscher, American Furniture, 103.

TABLE 6

Owner: Museum of the City of New York 71.120
Height: 27 5/8 Width: Top: 33 15/16 Base: 32 3/8
Depth: Top: 16 1/2 Base: 15 5/8

Description: This table is a Beekman-type table of Shop 1. It does not have the veneered front corners hiding the joinery of front skirt to the legs. Only the front skirt has a gadrooned molding, and the gadroons are all of identical size and symmetrical around a central rectangular piece. Repairs to the swing leg appear on the table. There is a mortise and tenon at the rear of the top.

Provenance: Gift of Mrs. Giles Whiting.

Reference: Antiques, November, 1956, page 454

TABLE 7

Owner: Henry Ford Museum 29.837.20
Height: 28 1/2 Width: Top: 34 1/8 Base: 32 1/4 Depth:
Top: 16 5/8 Base: 15 1/2

Description: The Ford table from Shop 1. Table has a full dustboard underneath the drawer runners. This is the only Shop 1 table to have such a dustboard although it may not be original to the table. The drawer is also not

original to the table. This table, although not having any molding below the side skirts does have a carved rear legs. The gadrooned front skirt has angular graduated gadroons. There is no mortise and tenon on the rear of the top.

Provenance: The table appears to be part of a suite with two chairs, one also at the Henry Ford museum and one at Bayou Bend. The chairs have identically carved knees as this table both in their design and execution. This shell design on the knee has been seen on Philadelphia chairs, although those shells are not as dimensional as on these New York pieces. The chairs, sold by Ginsburg & Levy, came from Placentia, Hyde Park, New York. The table's provenance is not known.

Reference: For the chairs, Warren, 79.

TABLE 8

Owner: Joe Kindig III

Provenance: Oral tradition of descent in the Staats family.

Reference: Antiques, April, 1964

TABLE 9

Owner: Private Collection

Height: 28 Width: Top: 34 Base: 32 1/2 Depth: Top: 16 1/2 Base: 15 3/8

Description: A typical Beekman-type table without the veneer across the front corners. The gadroon is the graduated type that are angular in their orientation. Three of the blocks on this table appear to be original and their chamfer may be telling. However, with so few tables available having original blocks very little can be determined with this information. The tops of this table have a rectangular mortise and tenon at their rear.

Provenance: Unknown

TABLES 10 and 11

Owner: Private Collection

Height: 27 Width: Top: 30 Base: NA

Description: Both tables are discussed as the Imitative group of Shop 1. Although constructed identically, there are major differences on the bracket carvings and front skirt molding. The front skirt molding is not gadrooned like the other tables of this type, but has a vine motif carved into it. Both tables appear to have the dustboard apparent on the Henry Ford example. Their tops are smaller than the tops of the other tables from Shop 1.

Provenance: The provenance of these tables is tricky. As stated in the text there is little compelling evidence to call these tables a pair. One table came from David Stockwell, Inc. and was sold to Israel Sack, Inc., who owned the second table. The second table was then sold to the private collector who still owns the tables. Whether one, both or none of these tables belonged to either George Washington or John Berrien has not been satisfactorily proven to the author. That these two tables do not appear to be a pair is equally disturbing in regard to the Washington-Berrien tradition.

Reference: Antiques, February, 1962, page 193

TABLES 11 and 12 WERE NOT PERSONALLY EXAMINED BY THE AUTHOR

TABLE 12

Owner: Bernard & S. Dean Levy, Inc.

Height: 27 Width: Top: 30 1/8 Base: 28 3/8 Depth: Top: 15 Base: 13 1/2

Description: The third table of the Imitative group of Shop 1. It differs from the other tables in the group with a more elaborately carved front skirt gadrooning, and a different edge molding around the top. As with the other two the table is made of mahogany veneers on an oak frame. Has a shaped swing rail, but not a shaped interior rear rail.

Provenance: George Horace Lorimer Collection.

Reference: Levy Catalog V, page 56

TABLE 13

Owner: Private Collector

Height: 27 1/2 Width: Top: 34 Base: 32 1/4 Depth: Top: 16 3/4 Base: 15 1/8

Description: Table has inscribed in chalk on the inner rear rail "Willett." It also has a chalk inscription in script on the bottom that begins with Pea.... but the rest is illegible. It could be the signature of Jonathan Pearsee. An ink stamp indicates another previous owner. The table has its original drawer, original baize lining and original leather surround with a gilded design. It also has a vine, grape and floral motif carved onto the skirt moldings of the front and side skirts. The table has carved back legs. It is part of the Willett/Pearsee group.

Provenance: Pirnie family, Parsons family, Dermot Gale, Bernard and S. Dean Levy, Inc., private collector.

Reference: Levy Catalog III, page 65.

TABLE 14

Owner: Yale University, Garvan Collection. 1936.308
Height: 27 3/4 **Width:** Top: 34 1/8 **Base:** 32 1/8 **Depth:** Top: 16 7/8 **Base:** 15 1/8

Description: One of the tables from the Willett/Pearsee group. The table has a chalk "X" mark on its front skirt and a similarly inscribed "2" on the back. The "2" may denote this table being the second of a pair. The table retains an original drawer and also has one hinge stamped H:TIBATS.

Provenance: The table is thought to have descended in the Van Lieu family. The patriarch of the family was a Frederick Van Lieu who settled first in Jamaica, Queens, and later moved to Northern New Jersey. No other table with this provenance has surfaced, nor has a table of similar design with the number "1". Therefore we can only estimate that it is one of a pair.

Reference: Yale Alumni Magazine, January, 1962, page 11

TABLE 15

Owner: The Museum of the City of New York, 71.72
Height: 27 5/8 **Width:** Top: 34 **Base:** 32 1/8 **Depth:** Top: 16 3/4 **Base:** 15

Description: A member of the Willett/Pearsee group. The table has chalk "X"'s on the bottom of the top, the right

side rail, and the front. The table also retains its original drawer and a hinge marked H:TIBATS.

Provenance: Gift of Virginia T. Nicholas through whose family the table descended.

Reference: Antiques, May, 1973, 974, detail of the leg carving.

TABLE 16

Owner: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Collection
Height: 26 5/8 Width: Top: 34 3/32 Base: 32 3/16

Descriptions: The table is from the Willett/Pearsee group. One chalk "X" appears on the rear rail. The right hinge is stamped H:TIBATS.

Provenance: Unknown

Reference: Warren, 109

This table was examined by Michael Brown

TABLE 17

Owner: Bernard & S. Dean Levy, Inc.
Height: 27 5/8 Width: Top: 34 1/8 Base: 32 1/4 Depth:
Top: 16 3/8 Base: 15 1/8

Description: Typical member of Willett/Pearsee group. No side gadroon or rear leg carving. A chalk "X" on the bottom of the front skirt's gadrooned molding. No other chalk marks.

Provenance: Unknown

TABLE 18

Owner: Bernard & S. Dean Levy, Inc.
Height: 27 5/8 Width: Top: 34 1/8 Base: 32 1/8 Depth:
Top: 16 3/4 Base: 15

Description: Typical Willett/Pearsee construction. Decoration differs from others having smaller and more plentiful gadroons on front molding than seen on most other tables. The side skirts have the gadrooning while the rear legs are uncarved. One of the two iron hinges is marked H:TIBATS. On the interior of the swing leg is an

ink signature "H. F. Seton." The table never had a drawer.

Provenance: A Harriet Francis Seton lived in Summit, New Jersey and died in 1906. It is possible that this is the H. F. Seton on the rear rail. At any rate the Seton family was an important one in the New York area with Mary Seton being perhaps the best known. Whether Willett/Pearsee sold the table directly to the Seton's is not known.

TABLE 19

Owner: Pendleton Collection, Rhode Island School of Design. 04.131

Height: 27 1/2 Width: Top: 34 1/8 Base: 32 1/4 Depth: Top: 16 1/2 Base: 15

Description: Typical Willett/Pearsee construction. Has a floral, vine and grape motif across the front and side skirts although this segment differs slightly from the signed table. A chalk "X" appears on the bottom, and a number of illegibly smudged chalk marks appear throughout the table's base and top. The table was scraped down at one time presumably for cleaning so the carving on the knees is not as crisp as most other tables.

Provenance: Unknown

Reference: Monkhouse and Michie, 77

TABLE 20

Owner: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Height: 27 3/4 Width: Top: 34

Description: Decoratively resembles Table 18 very closely with the same small gadroons on the front skirt molding and a similar carved motif on the knee. However, this table has been extensively repaired on the interior and certain structural elements removed. It does however appear to be a Willett/Pearsee structure as the shaped interior, fairly angular cuts to the corners, and rounded front corners indicate. With the repairs and possible loss of the swinging mechanism it is impossible to use the rear skirt for any kind of identification.

Provenance: From the collection of Mrs. Stephen Webb, Salem Mass to her granddaughter Mrs. K. Sanders,

Birchboro, Haverhill; Mass. Henry Weil bought the table from Mrs. Sanders and sold it to J. Amory Haskell. The table was then purchased by French and Co. in the April 29, 1944 Parke-Bernet sale of the Americana collection of the late Mrs. J. Amory Haskell. No. 716. It then entered the Nelson-Atkins Museum collection.

Scott Erbes, Assistant Curator at the Nelson Atkins Museum examined this table for me.

TABLE 21

Owner: Private Collection

Height: 27 1/2 Width: Top: 34 Base: 32 1/4 Depth: Top: 16 1/2 Base: 15 1/4

Description: Typical Willett/Pearsee construction. Entire back skirt, including inner rear rail, appears to be replaced as does the front and side skirt vine and grape carved molding. A chalk "X" appears on the front rail of the table.

Provenance: Unknown

TABLE 22

Owner: Private Collection

Height: 27 1/2 Width: Top: 34 1/8 Base: 32 1/4 Depth: Top: 16 5/8 Base: 15 1/2

Description: Typical Willett/Pearsee construction. Has no drawer. Gadrooned skirt consists of small gadroons. A chalk "x" appears on the inner rear rail, the left side rail and the front rail.

Provenance: Ginsburg & Levy, Inc.

TABLE 23

Owner: Winterthur Museum, 51.0073

Height: 27 3/4 Width: Top: 33 3/16 Base: 27 1/8 Depth: Top: 15 1/2 Base: 12 1/8

Description: Since this table does not appear in the main text, a full description will be done here. The table has a rectangular base below a turret cornered top. However, the color of the top, and odd cuts and markings indicate that it is not original to the table. Therefore, my

description will consider only the base's decoration and structure.

The rectangular base shares many of the decorative and structural characteristics of the Willett/Pearsee group, although since it is not serpentine in form, it is very difficult to strongly attribute this table. The four skirts are mortise and tenoned into the four stationary legs with two pins securing each joint. A fifth board, nailed to the inner rear rail, serves as the swing rail. Without serpentine rails there is no extra wood around the joinery.

Like the Willett/Pearsee tables, the rear swing hinge on this table is rounded, consisting of five knuckles with the top middle and third knuckle moving while the second and fourth remain stationary. The pin around which these knuckles move does not protrude through the bottom of the hinge and is sharpened to a blunt point like all of Willett/Pearsee tables. The six screws to the top enter from neatly cutout areas whose measurements are equal to those on the other Willett/Pearsee tables. Also, the stationary part of the rear swing rail is secured to the inner rear rail with five nails arranged in the same pattern as on all the Willett/Pearsee tables, although on this table they enter from the interior and not from the front. Finally, the original drawer construction is identical to the other Willett/Pearsee drawers with one large dovetail.

Decoratively, the knee carving appears to be by the same hand and of the same design as two Willett/Pearsee tables owned privately. Also, the rounded front corners and 4 and 5/8 inch high front skirt add to the Willett/Pearsee attribution.

Provenance: Gift of Henry Francis du Pont

Reference: Downs, 339

TABLE 24

Owner: Chipstone Foundation 1958.3

Height: 27 3/16 Width: Top: 33 7/8 Base: 32 1/4 Depth:
Top: 16 5/8 Base: 15 1/8

Description: A typical Van Rensselaer Shop table with the sheath of wheat knee carving. This knee carving is much tighter in its execution than on any other tables from this group. A gadrooned molding appears on the side skirts and leads to a carved back leg. The table retains

an original drawer and has the small rectangular mortise and tenon at its rear. The front right side of the table has been repinned and one of the drawer runners is missing.

Provenance: John Walton, Inc.

Reference: Roque, 148

TABLE 25

Owner: Winterthur Museum, 59.2843

Height: 27 $\frac{3}{8}$ Width: Top: 34 $\frac{1}{16}$ Base: 32 $\frac{5}{16}$ Depth: Top: 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ Base: 15 $\frac{1}{4}$

Description: This table is from the Van Rensselaer Shop and has a sheath of wheat knee carving which is much freer than on the Chipstone table. There is a small mortise and tenon at the tops' rear and a side gadroon leads to a carved back leg. The drawer appears to be original as does the drawer support structure although a ten inch horizontal board has been added to the front of this for additional support. Unlike all other tables from this group, the front skirt molding is not shaped in the back to echo the shaping of the skirt's interior. It overhangs the small central cut out of the front.

Provenance: Gift of Henry Francis du Pont.

Reference: Downs, 340

TABLE 26

Owner: The New Jersey Historical Society

Height: 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ Width: Top: 34 Base: 32 $\frac{3}{16}$ Depth: Top: 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ Base: 15 $\frac{1}{4}$

Description: Only one exception keeps this table from being typical of Van Rensselaer Shop work. There is no interior cut of the front skirt behind the center of the serpentine rail. However, every other structural concern on the table echoes that shop's work. The sheath of wheat knee carving is more elaborate than on any other Van Rensselaer table, as are the carved back legs and gadrooned side skirt. The table had a drawer which is missing. The top has a small circular mortise and tenon at the rear, possibly indicating a later addition.

Provenance: This table has been associated with Arendt Schuyler and came to a Clarence Schuyler from the estate of Sarah J. Rensselaer. Clarence Schuyler gave the table to the Newark Museum in 1925 and then had it moved to the New Jersey Historical Society in 1931.

TABLE 27

Owner: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1973.564
 Height: 27 3/8 Width: Top: 33 7/8 Base: 32 1/4 Depth:
 Top: 16 3/4 Base: 15

Description: This table is a typical table of Van Rensselaer Shop construction. The knee carving is a central C-scroll with a foliate design emanating down from it. The side skirts have a gadrooned molding and the rear legs are carved. The drawer sides, front and back on this table appear to be original while the bottom is questionable.

Provenance: Bought for the Museum at Sotheby Parke-Bernet Los Angeles, June 25, 26 and 27, Lot 32. Has a Ginsburg & Levy, Inc., label on the front skirt.

Reference: Naeve, Identifying American Furniture, 30

TABLE 28

Owner: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 47.35
 Height: 27 3/4 Width: Top: 34 1/8 Base: 32 5/16 Depth:
 Top: 16 3/4 Base: 15 1/2

Description: Van Rensselaer shop table that does not have the rear tenon on the top boards. Has a gadrooned side skirt with rear leg carving. The knee carving is a C-scroll with foliate decoration emanating from it. The swing leg foot has been repaired.

Provenance: Van Rensselaer family, Ginsburg & Levy, Inc.

Reference: Heckscher, 102

TABLE 29

Owner: Private Collection
 Height: 27 3/4 Width: Top: 34 Base: 32 1/2 Depth: Top:
 16 5/8 Base: 15 1/2

Description: Typical Van Rensselaer Shop construction. This table has the sheath of wheat carving on the legs, as well as a gadrooned side skirt molding and carved back legs. The back of the tops have a rectangular mortise and tenon.

Provenance: The table belonged to a part of the Van Rensselaer family as a small card attached to the drawer attests. Ginsburg & Levy, Inc., Private Collection.

TABLE 30

Owner: The Museum of the City of New York, 71.120.1
Height: 27 1/2 Width: Top: 34 1/8 Base: 33 1/4 Depth: Top: 17 Base: 15 1/2

Description: An Apprentice group table. The table has a very slight overhang of the top beyond the base, especially relative to all the other tables of similar form. The table had a drawer but does not retain it.

Provenance: Descended in the Frost family of Rochester, New York, although there were Frost's in Southern Westchester County during the period of probable construction of the table, 1760-1785. The table then was inherited by a Miss Kate B. McKnight who sold it to the donor, Mrs. Giles Whiting.

Reference: Antiques, March, 1956, page 228.

TABLE 31

Owner: The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1960.132
Height: 27 1/2 Width: Top: 34 Base: 32 1/8 Depth: Top: 16 1/2 Base: 14 15/16

Description: An Apprentice group table. The table has its original baize covering with a surround of gilt decorated leather. The table also has a chalk inscription "CB" on the bottom of the top, although the meaning of this inscription is unclear. A chalk mark "1" and "2" appear on the back of the original drawer.

Provenance: The table descended in the family of Jacobus Van Natta, Ginsburg & Levy, Inc.

Reference: Randall, 84

TABLE 32

Owner: Private Collection

Height: 28 1/4 Width: Top: 34 Base: 32 1/2 Depth: Top: 16 5/8 Base: 15 3/8

Description: A Van Cortlandt Group table. Although the measurements of the table top appear to be the same, the design and shaping of the tops are different from the others as the top's back is 34 inches wide. It has no baize covering. There is a mortise and tenon at the rear of the table top.

Provenance: Van Rysma family of Haverstraw, New York. Ginsburg & Levy, Inc., current private collector.

TABLE 33

Owner: Historic Hudson Valley, Inc., Van Cortlandt Manor 58.106

Height: 28 1/2 Width: Top: 34 Base: 31 7/8 Depth: Top: 16 1/2 Base: 15 1/4

Description: A Van Cortlandt group table. The table has no baize covering. The swing leg has been repaired, although the original material remains. The rear of the top has a small mortise and tenon.

Provenance: The table has been in the Van Cortlandt family since its manufacture.

Reference: Joseph T. Butler, Sleepy Hollow Restorations: A Cross-Section of the Collection, 63

TABLE 34

Owner: Diplomatic Reception Rooms, Department of State, 69.53

Height: 28 1/2 Width: Top: 34 Base: 32 Depth: Top: 16 3/4 Base: 15 3/8

Description: A Van Cortlandt group table. This table appears to have a new back swing rail, although it has been remade in the proper, nine knuckle, form. Two of the corners and two of the blocks have numbers that relate to each other, indicating their placement on the table.

Provenance: The table came through the firm of Florene Maine, Inc., and is the gift of Mrs. Catherine Breyer Van Bomel.

Reference: Antiques, June, 1969, page 733.

TABLE 35

Owner: Private Collection

Height: 27 1/2 Width: Top: 34 Base: 32 1/2 Depth: Top:
16 5/8 Base: 15 3/8

Description: A Rural group table. Just like the previous three tables the top measurements of this table seem to conform to the other tables previously catalogued. However, a comparison of rear width, 33 1/2 on this table, and degree of serpentine shape to the top, one realizes that the previous three tables fit into a group having the same top, and this table and the following three fit into a separate and distinct group. This table has both front and rear leg carving and a side skirt with a gadrooned molding. Had a drawer at one time as the opening and runners suggest.

Provenance: Ginsburg & Levy, Inc., Tarradash collection

TABLE 36

Owner: The Museum of the City of New York, 53.150.22

Height: 27 5/8 Width: Top: 34 1/4 Base: 32 5/8 Depth:
Top: 16 1/2 Base: 15 3/8

Description: Same as TABLE 35 except that the runners are no longer with the table and neither is the drawer. There is, however, an opening.

Provenance: Bought from Mrs. J. L. Van Houten, through C. W. Lyon, Inc., by Mrs. J. Insley Blair. The table was donated by Mrs. Blair's daughter, Mrs. Screven Lorillard.

TABLE 37

Owner: David Stockwell, Inc.

Height: 28 7/8 Width: Top: 33 Base: 30 3/4 Depth: Top:
16 1/8 Base: 15 1/8

Description: A Rural group table. The only difference occurs in the security of the top with glue blocks that is not apparent on any of the other rural tables. Nevertheless, the other structural aspects of this table appear throughout this group. Decoratively, the same carved motif appears on this table as on the others,

although there are two indentations on either side of the central V shape of the descending foliate carving. However, even with the different method of application of the top to the base, this table reveals enough of the structural characteristics to be a part of this group. The glue blocks all appear to be replacements however.

Provenance: Unknown

Reference: Antiques, January, 1989

TABLE 38

Owner: Private Collection

Height: 27 7/8 Width: Top: 34 1/4 Base: 32 1/2 Depth: Top: 16 5/16 Base: 15 1/4

Description: A Rural group table. This is the only four legged table included in this examination. I did examine 27 other four legged tables however and only this one fit in with a five legged groups. That is not to say that shops were not making both four and five legged tables, only to indicate that structural concerns appear to be different regarding the two tables. Structurally the table is identical to the other Rural group tables.

Provenance: Ginsburg & Levy, Inc.

TABLE 39

Owner: David Stockwell, Inc.

Height: 27 7/8 Width: Top: 33 Base: 25 1/4 Depth: Top: 15 5/8 Base: 12 5/8

Description: A Winterthur group table. A chalk mark "CD" appears on the bottom of the top. The knees on this table are devoid of carving unlike other examples from this group.

Provenance: David Stockwell, Inc.

Reference: Antiques, May, 1981, page 1104

TABLE 40

Owner: Winterthur Museum 59.2841

Height: 28 1/2 Width: Top: 33 Base: 25 1/2 Depth: Top: 16 Base: 14 3/16

Description: A Winterthur group table. It has a flat knuckled rear hinge unlike the others in the group, and does not have a centrally located drawer. In all other respects this table fits in the Winterthur group. In fact the knee carving of this table and table 41, are identical. There is absolutely no basis for the attribution of this table, or any other card table, to Gilbert Ash.

Provenance: Gift of Henry Francis du Pont

Reference: Downs, 337

TABLE 41

Owner: Private Collection

Height: 28 1/2 Width: Top: 32 3/4 Base: 25 1/2 Depth: Top: 15 7/8 Base: 14 1/8

Description: A Winterthur group table.

Provenance: Descended in the family of Anna Helana Emmet Hall

TABLE 42

Owner: Private Collector

Height: 27 Width: Top: 30 1/8 Base: 27 3/16 Depth: Top: 14 1/2 Base: 13 3/8

Description: A Fivelegged group table. The bottom of the top has an illegible chalk inscription. Similar to table 34, the vertical corner blocks are numbered to correspond with the numbered corner joint. The rear of the top of this table has a small rectangular mortise and tenon that is slightly to the right of the round wooden rear hinge. The top is rectangular.

Provenance: Jonathan Trace, Bernard & S. Dean Levy, Inc, Private Collector.

Reference: Levy Catalog, Volume VI, page 113

TABLE 43

Owner: Private Collection

Height: 27 Width: Top: 31 Base: 26 1/4 Depth: Top: 17 Base: 14

Description: A Fivelegged group table. Blocks, mortise and tenoned into the skirts and nailed to the top secure the top in place on this table. This kind of construction allowed the top to adjust to changes in relative humidity. The construction is rare and has been found on only a minimal amount of Eighteenth Century American furniture including another New York five legged card table, Table 46, a spider leg table from either New York or Newport, Rhode Island, and on a dining table also from New York. Only the dining table is in a public collection, at Winterthur, although it has been cut down severely and possibly had its top replaced so only the mortises remain visible. Table 43 reveals traces of gilding on the molded edge of the top and within the carved central shell. It is possible that these sections were originally gilded furthering a European look to this American example. Finally, the table has a small rectangular mortise and tenon at the rear of the top that is slightly to the right of the rounded wooden hinge.

Provenance: Bernard & S. Dean Levy, Inc., Private Collector.

TABLE 44

Owner: The Museum of the City of New York, 34.462.1
Height: 27 3/8 **Width:** Top: 34 **Base:** 32 3/16 **Depth:** Top: 16 1/2 **Base:** 15 7/8

Description: This table did not fit neatly into any of the groups discussed in the main text, although it is closest to the Imitative type of Shop 1. The table has a maple or cherry frame veneered with vertical strips of mahogany facing. The front and side skirts are tenoned into the legs with glue blocks supporting this joint. The sides meet behind the leg on a miter and the front skirt is serpentine in front and flat on the back. At the rear, the sides and inner rear rail are mortise and tenoned into the legs, and quarter round glue blocks support these joints. The interior rear rail and the swing leg rail are less severely shaped than some Shop 1 tables, although they are serpentine. The swing rail consists of two boards, one secured to the inner rear rail with six nails from the inside, and a swinging rail. The swing leg moves around a rounded hinge on which the second and fourth knuckles swing and the top middle and bottom knuckles remain stationary. Unlike Shop 1 tables, the central pin on this hinge does not protrude through the bottom knuckle and appears to be sharply pointed. The original secret

drawer has two dovetails on the front and back, and a bottom nailed into place from below. The tails of these dovetails measure $5/8$ of an inch wide each.

Decoratively the table resembles only a few other New York tables, a four legged table owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and a five legged example owned by the Brooklyn Museum, Table 45. However, since the construction of these tables differ, it is impossible to say that any of these tables were made in the same shop. The Museum of the City of New York table has a completely plain molding below the front skirt, and only two shell carvings on the knees of the table. The figured veneer of the front adds to the decoration of the table however. Also, the top is shaped and proportioned exactly like the tops seen on many other tables including the Willett/Pearsee group, the Beekman type of Shop 1, the Van Rensselaer Shop and the Apprentice Shop tables. Finally, a chalk inscription "Nash" appears on the bottom of the drawer.

Provenance: A metal plaque is attached to the table and reads: 1780 Catherine (Ogden) Paulding/ to/ Euphena Graham/ to/ Henrietta (Graham) Youngs/ to / Lavine Graham (Youngs) Meyer, to Margaret Palmer (Meyer) Norton.

The table was given to the museum in 1934 by Margaret Palmer Norton.

TABLE 45

Owner: The Brooklyn Museum, 42 118.2

Height: 27 $1/2$ Width: Top: 34 $1/4$ Base: 31 $15/16$ Depth: Top: 16 $1/2$ Base: 15 $1/16$

Description: This table does not fit into any of the groups discussed within the text. The serpentine front rail has a straight back to it, and it joins the legs with a mortise and tenon joint supported by pins. The excess wood of the corner of the front and side skirts is removed with a steep angle to the cut. The side rails meet the back legs on right angles where they and the interior rear rail are supported by vertical glue blocks and pins. The stationary half of the rear swing rail attaches to the inner rear rail with four nails from the front, and a single nail from the back. The rear hinge is of the flat knuckle variety and the top, middle and bottom knuckles swing around a squared, slightly protruding pin.

Decoratively the table differs from other five legged examples. The skirt molding is plain except for a wavy string carving that makes its way across the front.

The two front legs are carved with two foliate motifs coming down the leg and meeting at the center. Within the central void of this carving cross hatching has been added. The top of this table, as well as the frontally carved table are both identical to the tops of the Willett/Pearsee and other New York groups.

Provenance: Gift of Mrs. J. Amory Haskell

Reference: Antiques, May, 1979, page 1000

TABLE 46

Owner: Private Collection

Height: 28 Width: Top: 34 Base: 32 5/8 Depth: Top: 16 1/2 Base: 15 3/4

Description: This table's outer appearance looks like it could belong to any of the major New York City groups. The top is identical to the tops on those groups, the proportions and choice of finely grained woods is consistent with the other groups, and even the carved motif on the knees appears to echo Willett/Pearsee carving. It is a central C-scroll with a foliate motif descending below, and a series of pinwheels and peanuts on the C-scroll's mantle. However, the character of the incised lines indicate a different carver's work. Finally the feet on this table have practically no webbing and are much rounder than the blocky foot associated with the Willett/Pearsee shop.

Nevertheless, the main difference between this table and the other tables discussed regards its interior construction. As with Shop 1 tables, the front and side skirts are joined to the front legs with a mortise and tenon joint, with the excess wood mitered behind the leg. Two quarter round blocks help support these joints. The joinery of the rear does not correspond to other five legged tables as the inner rear rail joins directly to the side skirts and is not mortise and tenoned into the rear legs. The method of joinery for this section is hidden, although experience leads one to believe these sections are dovetailed together. Again, quarter round glue blocks support this joint. This method of joinery in the rear section, where the inner rear rail is dovetailed on both sides appears on some four legged tables, including an example at Chipstone where all four sides are dovetailed together. The swing rail is more than 1/2 an inch thicker than the average of one inch on most tables, and the rounded central hinge has thicker knuckles than normal.

The stationary swing rail is tenoned into the leg and further secured by nails from the front. Importantly, as far as could be told, this is the only table where the stationary swing leg is tenoned into the rear leg.

One final structural difference is the top's application. As with Table 43, blocks are tenoned into the sides and screwed, not nailed like 43, into the top. As stated above, there are four other pieces with this construction, one at Winterthur, and two other forms in private collections. There may be many more pieces in other collections with this kind of construction that have not been discovered yet.

Provenance: This table originally belonged to Mary Henderson Miller, the wife of Captain Paul Miller whom she married on October 23, 1759; then to their daughter Mary Miller who married Arent Schuyler, (b. February 10 1776-d. 1858). The table then went to their daughter Mary Miller Schuyler who married in 1831 to Jacob Crowninshield, Jr. (1801-1875). Jacob Crowninshield, Jr. was the great grandfather of Lansing S. Hoskins the last family member owning the table. The table then belonged to Bernard & S. Dean Levy, Inc. and was then sold to the private collector.

Reference: Antiques, October, 1986, page 555

Appendix

THE MARINUS WILLETT BIOGRAPHY

Marinus Willett was the great-grand son of Thomas Willett, a man who emigrated from England to New York in the 1620s. Thomas Willett served as the first mayor of the city from 1665 until the Dutch revolt in 1673.

Marinus Willett was born on July 31, 1740 in Jamaica, Long Island, the youngest of six sons to Edward and Anita Clowes Willett. In 1749 the family moved into New York City where Marinus' father ran a tavern. At the age of 18, a commission as second lieutenant in De Lancey's New York Regiment placed Marinus in the campaign against Fort Frontenac and other French and Indian War battles.

Following the war, Willett returned to New York and took an apprenticeship under cabinetmaker Jonathan Pearsee. In 1760 Willett married Pearsee's daughter Mary and probably became a partner in the cabinetmaking firm. Throughout the 1760s Willett's social standing elevated as revealed by his 1769 election as constable for the West Ward.

By 1773 the firm of Pearsee and Willett advertised cabinet work in the "neatest fashion." Their

advertisements continued between 1773 and 1775, stopping, one can assume, because of Marinus Willetts' political and military interest in the American Revolution. As an important figure in the Sons of Liberty, Willett played a major leadership role among New York radicals. In June of 1775, Willett was among a group that seized arms from the British forces in New York. Soon thereafter, Marinus joined the Revolutionary army serving from June 28, 1775 to May 9, 1776 as a captain in the New York regiment. During this time he participated in the invasion of Canada under General Montgomery. In early November, following the successful invasion, Marinus was left in command of Fort St. Johns. However, his tenure at Fort St. Johns was short lived and Willett returned to New York on November 21, 1776 to command Fort Constitution. A transfer in May of 1777 sent Willett to Fort Stanwix as second in command under Colonel Gansevoort. There Willett was so successful in thwarting a British attack that Congress, on October 4, 1777, voted to present Willett with an "elegant sword" to honor his courage and success. The sword, crafted in France, is now owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and is displayed next to Ralph Earl's portrait of Colonel Willett.

In 1778, Willett joined Washington's army and by 1780 he was appointed lieutenant-colonel commandant of the

Fifth regiment of New York. After the consolidation of the New York regiments, Governor Clinton appointed him to lead the entire New York army. In 1781, as commander of this group, he led a successful attack in the battle of Johnstown.

After the war Willett was elected to the State Assembly, a position which he vacated to become sheriff of the City and County of New York. He was also chosen as a member of the Society of Cincinnati. In 1790 President Washington sent Willett to negotiate with the Creek Indians, and in this position Marinus was able to produce a treaty signed by the President on August 7, 1790. In 1807 Governor George Clinton appointed Willett to serve as Mayor of New York City.

Little is known of the later years of his life, although he ran unsuccessfully for Lieutenant-governor of New York in 1811, losing to DeWitt Clinton. Marinus Willett died in 1830 and was buried in a coffin made out of wood from the different battlefields on which he had fought.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ The biographical information came from: Dumas Malone, ed., Dictionary of American Biography: Volume 20, Werden-Zunser, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936): 244-245; Marinus Willett Papers, New York Historical Society's Manuscript Collection, New York; Minutes of the Common Council of New York, and The Marinus Willett Papers in the NYHS collection. In all of these sources only a minor mention is ever made of Willett's cabinet-making.

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