

Alan Miller

Antique Furniture Consultant

Representation at auction, brokering, authentication, research, and restoration

2315 Township Road

Quakertown, PA 18951

610 346 8938 fax 610 346 7830

alanmillerantiques@verizon.net

The Master estate Philadelphia mahogany high chest

This is a genuine Philadelphia high chest in excellent condition dating from the mid 1750's. It is ornamented with a singular combination of carved detail; the shell drawer and rosettes are the work of the carver of the Garvan collection high chest and the scroll-board appliqué is by the important carver of the earlier generation, Samuel Harding. Samuel Harding is now best remembered as one of the carvers of Independence Hall; his carving for the stair tower is completely documented. Based on surviving evidence, Harding seems to have been more prolific as an architectural carver than as a furniture carver. The scroll-board appliqué of this high chest is very similar—almost a quote—of the appliqué of the formerly Copeland and now Chipstone desk and bookcase. Harding's work is also clearly present on the formerly Kenmore desk and bookcase that sold at Sotheby's and the Wood clock case at the Metropolitan Museum. The carver of the Garvan Collection high chest was in the process of becoming the most important Philadelphia artisan in the 1750's; his prolific output is too extensive to catalogue here. The odd and interesting furniture history story of this high chest is this combination of the progressive and forward directed Garvan high chest carver, embodying the new rococo style, with the leading exponent of the earlier Georgian, or late baroque style, Samuel Harding. We can only speculate as to the nature of the forces that brought about this fascinating hybrid—custom order, family connections to Harding, or perhaps some sort of memorial. At any rate, the combination is singular.

The unusual combination of carvers and, by extension, eras, coupled with the fact that the sides and backs of the drawers of the base are oak while those of the upper case

are not, inevitably gave rise to speculation that this high chest is married. It is not. The upper and lower case drawers are made in exactly the same fashion and their bottoms and blocks are identical. The borings for the posts of the brass handles in base and top are the same and, except for the top rank of drawers, the brass is original. The locks are original and the upper and lower case drawer locks are identical. This high chest was made by the same prolific shop responsible for all the early work of the Garvan high chest carver and it is important to point out that this means both the lower *and* upper cases and both these components are completely within the vocabulary of *this* shop at *this* same time—the mid 1750's. Samuel Harding died in 1757. The two outer finial urns are original; I need to re-check the flames to catalogue them. The center finial is new. I received detail photographs of the back of the scroll board and top of the center plinth cap and it seems likely that the center ornament was originally an urn and flame finial like those of the sides. I would like to get better information on the hole for the center finial's pin to confirm this. There are a few drawer blade patches at the lock bolt sites and other small repairs but none of these are consequential to this a large and powerful high chest from a major shop with a singular mix of carved detail.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alan Miller". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

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