



1415 Hyde Park Avenue, Suite 302 • Boston, Massachusetts 02136  
617.364.4054 • Fax 617.361.4105

## CONDITION REPORT

OBJECT: Neoclassical Card Table  
ACCESSION NUMBER: n/a  
MAKER: New York, possibly Duncan Phyfe  
PERIOD/STYLE: *ca.* 1820

DIMENSIONS (*inches*): H: 29 3/8" W: 36 1/4" D: 18 1/4"  
MACRO WOOD ID.: mahogany, rosewood veneer, primary; ash, pine, and possibly birch  
secondary woods  
OTHER MATERIALS: cast brass mounts, brass wire, and brass castors  
FINISH: varnish, gilt and painted  
LABELS/INSCRIPTION: no labels; inscribed in pencil on underside "M. Grand (or Granel) 23  
Rue Madrid"

CLIENT: Stanley Weiss  
JOB NUMBER: 4128  
CONSERVATOR: Chris Shelton and Robert D. Mussey, Jr.  
DATE: November 8, 2008  
ORIENTATION: *viewers left and right facing the object*

---

## Object Description

Neoclassical swivel top card table with canted-corner top and apron supported in front by two lyre-back caryatids and in back with two turned columns on a scotia-molded, hollow-sided base with carved paw feet. Decorated with cast and stamped brass mounts, gilt caryatids and moldings, and a dark green vert antique paint on the lyres and caryatid bases and feet.

## Condition Description

### *Structure*

The table is well built and generally in stable condition. The hinges and swivel mechanism appear to work well, although the top can not be opened fully because of shrinkage of the interior felt lining.

There have been many previous repairs made to the table. The lyres and wings of the caryatids have been repaired more than once. Some of these repairs necessitated dismounting the table base to insert dowels down into the breaks from the top. The wings are secured with small blocks held on with modern wire nails. The wood is damaged around the lyre strings, indicating that they have been removed and/or repaired before as well. There is a large veneer patch on the upper edge of the apron when the table visible when the table top is swivelled. The original nails securing the drawer bottom are gone and have been replaced with modern wire nails similar to the nails holding the caryatid wings in place.

The following structural damage was noted:

- The folding top has a narrow 1/16th inch wide split for approximately 20" along the grain through the main panel. This split is in line and appears to be exclusively due to shrinkage of the core of the table top.
- The back right corner of the folding top is missing a 3/16" chip broken out above the hinge. This damage appears to be due to stress at the hinge.
- Approximately 5" of the mahogany facing on the right rear edge of the fixed top is missing. This area has been repaired before.

### *Surface*

The table has dramatic rosewood veneer as well as carved elements. The veneers have been re-glued locally and there are patches on the base. The poor fit of the mitered joints of the veneer on the top suggest that they may have been cut or repaired previously.

The following areas of loose or missing veneer were noted:

- The veneer on the inside of the fixed top is damaged in proximity to the left hinge. This is related to the loss of the facing on the back edge of the top.
- The veneer on the canted face of the right front corner of the apron is loose
- There are large chips missing from the back corners of the base plinth

- The veneer is missing from the base over the left rear leg
- The veneer is missing from the base over both the right front and rear legs.
- The veneer is missing from above the scotia molding on the incurvate area of the right side of the base.
- The veneers above and below the scotia molding on both sides of the base are glued out of alignment (repair or restoration)

The facings applied to both the fixed and folding tops are loose in several places. It appears that the top edges of some of the facings are replaced. All of the facings probably were decorated with a double line of inlaid brass stock, although none of it survives. The channels where this decoration would have been secured are worn and rounded over now and vary in both width and depth. Perhaps more importantly, the top and bottom edges of the facings have been planed or sanded back approximately 1/16" from the height of the molding in the middle. This would make it very difficult to restore.

The caryatids' wings have been broken and repaired previously and blocks have been added and nailed in place with modern wire nails to support their connection to the table. These are the same type of nails used to re-nail the drawer bottom. The proper right caryatid is missing 1" of its left hair braid and a portion of the carved block supporting it at the base.

### *Finish*

The table has a clear finish on the decorative veneers and green and gilt painted decoration on the carvings. While condition of the finishes is highly variable, they are mostly well secured.

The clear finish on the decorative veneers is not well saturated and has an uneven sheen. There are stains and rings on the top. The finish is soft, soluble in naphtha, and has no significant autofluorescence when viewed under ultraviolet light, suggesting it is primarily wax. The vert antique decoration is eroded and blanched on feet and with areas of repair on legs and wings. The gilt decoration has a noticeable brush texture in many areas and is oxidized and dirty.

The off-white colored primer and green paint are modern since they are applied over restorations with wire nails on the caryatid figures. Both layers have been applied in sloppy manner over edges, onto the undersides of the case, and even over some of the brass strings and mounts. On the feet, the ash grain of the wood is visible through the paint, suggesting that even the traditional preparatory layer of gesso has been removed.

*The painted and gilt surfaces were examined carefully in both visible and ultraviolet light and it appears that there is virtually no original finish, paint, or gilding remaining on the table.*

To further confirm these observations, several small samples of the decoration were removed from the edges of existing losses and cracks in areas of interest to document the cross-sectional layering of the paints and/or finishes microscopically at high magnification.

The samples were embedded and then polished perpendicular to the paint surface to expose the paint layers in cross section. Each sample was examined in white light and in ultraviolet light.

Samples of the painted surface were taken from:

1. Green paint on the back of the right front leg
2. Green paint on the underside of the base adjacent to the right front leg
3. Green painted right wing of the right side caryatid
4. Gilt edging of the right caryatid's clothing
5. Gilt hair of the right caryatid
6. Gilt carved ridge of the right front foot
7. Green painted support block behind right caryatid's right wing
8. Green painted support block behind right caryatid's left wing

No reclaimable early finish layers were found under the present green and bronze powder paints in any of the samples. The paint materials were found to be consistent between the samples:

- The white primer is very thin. It contains a mix of particles and chalk, and is only one coat thick in the areas sampled.
- The green paint is an extremely dense green ground to a fine and even proportion of 1-5 micron size particles consistent with modern grinding mills.
- The gilt decoration is exclusively a thick layer of very evenly ground bronze powder in a solvent soluble binder.

Some green pigment particles were found under the glue attaching one of the blocks to the caryatid wings. These are not a layer of paint, but rather the mixed-up residue of earlier paints that has been stripped off of the surface. The particles are larger and more consistent with a hand-ground paint and could be identified with polarized light microscopy at a later date.

A photographic comparison of the site and the cross section has been provided.

### *Attachments*

The table has both cast and stamped brass mounts, possibly with a gold finish fired onto them originally. The surfaces are now well worn and have a noticeable build-up of polish residues in the crevices and on the adjacent wood. The rosettes applied to the feet have been painted over with the same bronze powder paint used to decorate the rest of the table.

The casters are all brass and appear to be original to the table. They are moderately corroded and have been covered locally with passages of the green paint applied to the feet. The brass collars around the post are splitting and bent out of alignment.