HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

The article Collection Spotlight showcases an Art Deco desk from the collection, an impressive piece of craftsmanship made in 1927. A primer of substyles of nineteenth century furniture follows which we hope will enhance your appreciation of the furniture of the collection. With tongue planted firmly in cheek, we report on the apparent suicide of a collection chair and discuss methods of preventing future similar tragedies. Our collection policy and process is discussed in The How and Why of It. We close this special furniture collection issue where the collection began with Photo-Op, featuring the very first object catalogued into the collection.

Two articles, History for Sale and Collection Resume, illustrate the rise in status of Victorian era antiques. While the former recounts a rather bleak period of under valuation of nineteenth century furniture, the latter tells quite a different story. The list of forty-one exhibitions, books, catalogues, and periodicals which have featured collection objects over the past twenty years demonstrates the scope and importance of this collection beyond its functional and decorative uses.

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IN THE BEGINNING

The OAHP "Castle" Collection of 19th century decorative arts owes its existence to three men: S. Dillon Ripley, Richard H. Howland and James M. Goode. Together, they formed a triumvirate of taste, talent and tenacity, making the collection what is today - one of the most important collections of 19th century American furniture in the United States.

Recently, Richard H. Howland and James M. Goode shared their memories about the beginnings of the collection and their years at the Smithsonian. Richard Howland's own interest in furniture and the decorative arts began in 1920 when at age ten he discovered a copy of eminent British designer John Claudius Loudon's 1846 book Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture in his grandfather's Rhode Island house. "I cut my teeth on Victorian furniture. My father and grandfather were concerned with the retail trade of furniture. I read the furniture catalogues my father would bring home from trade shows in Grand Rapids," reminisced Howland about his family's Household Furniture Company in Providence with its alcoves of period furniture. Soon, the young Howland saved up enough money to purchase his first piece of furniture, a four-slat ladder-back chair with a rush seat for $5.00. "My six year old brother was so envious that the dealer sold him a chair with only three slats for $1.00," chuckled Howland.

Richard H. Howland's Smithsonian career began in 1960 when he came to the Institution as the head Curator of Civil History. At that time, Civil History included Political History, Cultural History, Numismatics and Philately. One of his duties as Curator included the furnishing of the Reception Room at the new National Museum of History and Technology (now American History). Howland decided the furnishings of the new Reception Room would reflect the period between James Smithson's death and the opening of the Castle in 1855 - "loosely Empire." Although the building's architect Walker Cain suggested a budget between $75,000 to $100,000 to furnish the room, funds were not forthcoming and Howland volunteered to furnish the room for nothing. "I raided Cultural History and we had a number of things in Political History. I lent some of my own things and cajoled firms in New York to give us things," says Howland.

Shortly after Secretary S. Dillon Ripley arrived at the Institution in 1964, he appointed Howland as his special assistant in charge of restoring the Smithsonian Institution Castle to its original 19th century ambiance. This included furnishing selected rooms of the building with 19th century antiques. "I never had a budget," says Howland. "I just bought! And all with trust funds," Howland hastens to add. "A number of things I bought myself and subsequently gave to the collection. Dillon Ripley also provided suggestions. I began to go to Philadelphia and Baltimore to buy. I bought eight or nine Empire sofas for $10.00 each. I bought the two corner cupboards in the Secretary's reception room for $75.00 which I thought was rather high." In selecting furniture, Howland says "I was very careful to buy things that could be used and not thought of as rare objects. It was meant to be a furniture collection for use."

In 1970, Richard Howland hired James Goode from the Library of Congress' Prints and Photographs Division as Chief of the new Architecture Records Office at the Smithsonian. "Howland was in-
interested in creating a national repository of architectural drawings through World War I," says Goode. Unfortunately, a million dollar grant to set up the repository fell through and Goode turned his attention to the furniture collection. Under the supervision of Howland, Goode became the "Curator" of the Smithsonian Institution Building. As Curator and later Keeper of the Castle, Goode's duties included such wildly varied tasks as purchasing 19th century antiques for the Smithsonian Furnishings Collection, supervising the removal of the ivy on the walls of the Castle, collecting photographs of the history of the building, the restoration of the crypt and the installation of exhibits in the Lounge.

James Goode credits Richard Howland for passing on his vast knowledge of nineteenth century furniture. "I was taught by Richard Howland to know the different furniture styles of the 19th century and was able to judge good design and quality," says Goode. "At that time both Baltimore and Philadelphia were wonderful places to buy Victorian furniture. You could buy museum quality pieces for very little. For $5,000 I would buy a whole truckload of good quality Rosewood and mahogany furniture which today would cost $50,000. It was an exciting time to look for furniture."

Periodically the State Department would offer items that were official gifts to the Secretary of State. Goode would visit the vast repository and select rather whimsical items to augment the growing collection. These included a Russian Boar's head, which was a gift from Brezhnev to Henry Kissinger, a Pakistani oriental rug commemo-rating their Air Force, oriental rugs from Morocco and a tea service from Bahrain.

Goode continued a tradition begun by Howland of offering certain pieces of furniture to American History. These pieces, usually too fragile or important for everyday use, included those with original upholstery and labels. Goode worked closely with Rodrigo Roth and Anne Golovin of the Division of Domestic Life to ensure they received their choice of furniture.

Goode said in reference to the almost 2,000 pieces he acquired during his sixteen year career at the Institution: "We had very little money to buy furniture, I would ask for money at the end of the fiscal year and for donations. At the time, Victorian furniture was not desirable and people were giving it to us." Goode feels that the 1876 Exhibit was a turning point for a new awareness in 19th century furniture. "It had a national impact on reviving interest in Victorian design." Today, James Goode feels that the most important pieces in the furnishings collection are the Renwick Chairs in the Regents' Room and a variety of large dining tables. These tables are used throughout the Smithsonian building as conference tables. "Some of the tables are very unusual designs and are operated by cranks. You'll never find a collection like that anywhere else," says Goode.

Richard Howland and James Goode left the Smithsonian in 1986 and 1987 respectively, both with happy memories of their years at the Institution. Their legacy lives on in the OAHP Castle Collection, as Ripley, Howland and Goode envisioned: in daily use in an appropriate 19th century Victorian setting. "It was an exciting time because Mr. Ripley was adding so many new museums and bureaus. It was a period of great growth, improvement and innovation," says Goode of his years at the Smithsonian.
HISTORY FOR SALE

Where Is/As Is

When you walk through the halls and offices of the Castle and look at the many antiques which furnish the historic spaces there, try to imagine a time when these objects were of little or no value. Even at the Smithsonian, an institution known for collecting virtually everything, Victorian furnishings were once considered hopelessly out of date. In the nineteen thirties and again in 1955, in an effort to modernize the administrative offices, the Smithsonian initiated a series of four auctions to dispose of the "old furniture."

April 14, 1955 was the date of the fourth auction held in the basement of the Castle; furniture was offered for sale "where is" and "as is." The previous three sales had been held ca. 1932, ca. 1936, and in 1939 according to interviews with retired personnel conducted by James M. Goode in 1981, then Curator of the Castle. From information obtained in these interviews plus a 1955 memo found in the Smithsonian Archives, Mr. Goode reported to Secretary Ripley that the sales had been open only to staff members and that the objects were not government owned, but solely the property of the Smithsonian Institution. He further stated that no object went for more than $20 and that most went for an average of 75 cents each. The grand total from the sixteen antique items sold in 1955 amounted to a mere $67.56.

What kind of furniture was disposed of at such prices you may ask? Mr. Goode's interviews revealed that:

Nancy Powars bought two Victorian armchairs from the Regents' Room (not our Gothic arm chairs by Renwick, however) in the 1939 sale for 50c each. Paul Oehser, in the second sale, ca. 1936, bought Secretary Langley's six foot long mahogany flat-top desk for 75c. Paul Gardner bought a Victorian wash stand with bowl and pitcher for $2 in the 1955 sale.

Other objects listed on the 1955 memo included a revolving bookcase ($10), a large cherry flat-top desk ($4.10), and a caned seat swivel chair ($6). Since 1964, when Secretary Ripley assigned Richard H. Howland the task of furnishing the Castle's interior spaces with Victorian furniture and lighting fixtures, the value of nineteenth century antiques such as these has risen considerably.

While writing The Castle, An Illustrated History of the Smithsonian Building, we often compared photographs of the offices in the building taken in the 1880's with others dating from the 1940's and 50's. We were always struck by how incongruous the modern furniture appeared and how well the antique furniture suited the building's interiors. That impression is reinforced daily as we pass through the Castle and see people sitting on antique chairs and at work at antique desks and tables similar to those for which in 1955 "the Institution... [had] no further use."
COLLECTION SPOTLIGHT:

Masterwork From Mexico

Though the heterogenous Victorian period, with its numerous substyles and movements, is the undeniable focus of the Castle Collection of Decorative arts objects, some exceptional pieces of furniture from other periods and styles have made their way into the Smithsonian’s possession. One of the most remarkable of these pieces is an Art Deco desk, whose exceptional elegance and workmanship exemplifies the aesthetic focus of its period and enhances the richness of the collection.

Art Deco, known in its own time as "Art Modern" or "Jazz Modern", began in part as a reaction to earlier movements in design, in particular to the late 19th/early 20th century Art Nouveau period. This earlier movement varied in focus from country to country but generally emphasized curvilinear shapes, an abundance of complex detail and abstracted organic forms. Art Deco designers restrained the Art Nouveau decorative exuberance in favor of cleaner, more classical lines, simpler shapes and planar surfaces. Emphasis on craftsmanship and attention to minute details enhanced the beauty of the simplified forms. Art Deco designers also employed many exotic woods and rare materials for their work, revealing the color and grain of the materials and restricting the use of obscuring surface treatments and decorations. As Charles Boyce defines Art Deco in his Dictionary of Furniture: [This] French decorative style of the 1920s... is characterized by the restrained stylized use of ornament, simple furniture shapes, an emphasis on fine craftsmanship and an opulent use of precious and exotic materials.

The Castle Collection desk expresses clearly the character of the Art Deco style. The soft, curvilinear lines of the desk form gently rounded edges and smooth planar surfaces. On the back of the desk, the designer confined the ornamental elaboration to the contrasting wood grains and regular inlay patterns, accenting the edges of the body and rectilinear forms of the drawers. The graceful, bowed front of the desk received the most elaborate decorative treatment, where squared borders frame a wood panel displaying a marquetry image of the Churubusco Monastery near Mexico City. The designer and craftsmen used over 5,500 separate pieces of wood to complete the body and its ornate marquetry inlays. The desk is composed of seventeen different types of wood, only four of which are indigenous to the creator’s home country of Mexico: striped lemon, mostochi, black ebony and agrito. The rest come from around the globe: walnut burl and citronite from France, beech burl from Finland, rosewood from Brazil, brown mahogany from England, saepeli majogany from Italy, beech from Canada and the remaining six from the United States (maple burl, elm burl, oak burl, gum, walnut and maple). The complex desk required a total of 1,350 working hours to complete.

The use of a landscape image, in lieu of more conventional Art Deco abstraction, hints at the unusual lineage of this piece. The desk was given to the Smithsonian in September 1981 by George W. Sims, who originally acquired the piece in 1951 from the cabinet-maker who created it, Jesus Salmon of Guadalupe, Zacatecas, Mexico. Mr. Salmon had spent much of his early life in the Mexican army. He retired in the early 1920s as a major after being injured. He then studied marquetry in Mexico and designed this desk as his final project to acquire a master’s certificate in cabinet-wood marquetry. Whether the atypical design of this desk derives from its unusual place of origin, far from the Art Deco centers of Europe, or because it was intended to be a marquetry "tour de force" displaying the skills of its creator, this desk provides a beautiful contrast to elaborate Victorian prevalent in the Castle.
SUBSTYLES OF NINETEENTH CENTURY FURNITURE

The furnishings of the Castle Collection are a comprehensive assemblage of nineteenth-century objects often categorized as American Victorian. However, household furnishings of the period were produced in several distinct styles, many based on historical prototypes. Since none of these styles is characteristic of the entire era, calling all furniture produced during the period 1840-1900 "Victorian" is a bit simplistic.

The proliferation of historical styles in furniture design was in part due to the fact that the underlying intellectual currents of romanticism and historicism dominated the literature, influenced the aesthetics, and forged the ideals of the period. Furthermore, the great movement toward industrialization coupled with a profusion of technological innovations facilitated the mass-production of furniture in many different styles, thus satisfying the demands of an emerging middle class. This variety of styles, while complicating the categorization of nineteenth-century furniture, adds a richness to our understanding of the people and trends of the time. Once you can distinguish between the styles, you cannot any longer lump all nineteenth-century furniture under the heading "Victorian".

The following is a partial list of Victorian substyles, borrowed and adapted from the first book of its kind, Field Guide to American Victorian Furniture, authored in 1952 by Thomas Ormsbee. It may be enlightening and fun to keep these categories in mind when looking at the nineteenth-century American furniture in the Castle Collection.

TRANSITIONAL, 1840-1850
The design of this furniture reveals the broad classicism of the American Empire style with the addition of more florid naturalistic shapes and details. These details, such as moldings and applied carvings, tend to be drawn less from a rectilinear, architectural vocabulary and more from a curvilinear and organic sensibility of nature. This change in ornament reflects an increasing appetite for decoration, which was becoming cheaper to produce.

GOTHIC, 1840-1865
This style is exactly contemporaneous with the construction of the Smithsonian "Castle". The Gothic style, which supersedes the classicism of the Empire style, clearly expresses the romantic movement of the mid-nineteenth century. The finest examples of this style are custom made ensembles designed by architects for specific settings, such as the Regents' chairs by James Renwick Jr., the architect of the Smithsonian building.

ROCOCO REVIVAL or LOUIS XV, 1845-1870
This is the substyle that is most commonly associated with Victorian furniture.

Ormsbee defines this style as the survival of French rococo designs with the lines and proportions adjusted to accommodate the British ideal of comfort. The rococo revival is characterized by curvilinear forms and naturalistic carving. This style evolved into many specialized furniture forms which are most evident in the Victorian parlor suite.

SPOOL-TURNED, 1850-1880
Spool-turned furniture shows a clear relationship between popular style and the increasing technol...
simple design and familiar domestic scale, shaped the first generally mass produced, factory made furniture. Spool-turned furniture was manufactured on the mechanically driven lathes that came into general use by the middle of the century.

**RENAISSANCE REVIVAL**, 1860-1875 This substyle represents the reemergence of a neo-classical aesthetic, developing around the middle of the century. *The Crystal Palace Exhibition* of 1851 in London first popularized this style in Europe. Structural and decorative elements of this style are creative interpretations of Renaissance architectural ornament, rather than the archaeological reproduction of furniture forms of the earlier Empire style. The forms of the Renaissance revival are characterized by large side boards with pedestal bases, arched pediments and architectural decoration further embellished with fruit or game carvings.

**LOUIS XVI**, 1865-1875 During the 1850’s the French Empress Eugenie, wife of Napoleon III, encouraged a revival of the baroque Louis XVI style. This style, used mostly for parlor furniture was often specialized in function, such as the music cabinet, and formal in presence.

**EASTLAKE, 1870-1880** Charles Locke Eastlake was an English architect and aesthetic reformer whose famous volume, *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and Other Details* caused his name to become associated with a reduced aesthetic of rectangular outlines and shallow, incised carving. Like the reformers who proceeded him, Eastlake promoted a return to an earlier respect for attention, comprehensive workmanship which was being lost by the advance of the factory system.

**ARTS AND CRAFTS, 1890-1914** The Arts and Crafts style evolved from the writings and theories of an earlier English reformer, William Morris, who advocated a simpler, more "honest" style of furniture and a return to the medieval guild system of manufacture. Morris, like John Ruskin, who popularized the Gothic style, was a medievalist. American Arts and Crafts furniture is most familiar as the Craftsman style of Gustave Stickley and the Greene brothers of Pasadena, California.

**AESTHETIC MOVEMENT, 1885-1895** The Aesthetic Movement also originated in England, and was promoted by American painter James McNeill Whistler and Irish writer Oscar Wilde. The ideals of the Aesthetic Movement were expressed by applying a high degree of craftsmanship with an imaginative and eclectic vocabulary of decoration drawn from disparate sources, such as Japan and medieval England. The ideals of the Aesthetic Movement were practiced in the United States by Louis Comfort Tiffany and the Herter brothers of New York.

*PLM*
CHAIR COMMITS SUICIDE!

An antique Castle Collection chair was discovered "dead" this morning. Almost invariably, such deaths are reported in the morning, when there are seldom any witnesses. "I came in today and that leg was lying on the floor under the chair," says one office worker. Furniture-users are quick to provide alibis, untraceable clues, or to suggest suicide: "I was across the room and the chair just fell over!" But was it really suicide, or death by natural causes? Investigative reporting often points to random, senseless chair-slaughter. What can be made of people who show us how loose a chair's arm is by pulling it off, or who bounce on a seat in order to plead for new upholstery? The modus operandi vary: broken arms, legs or backs, shattered joints, unsightly skin disorders, hot coffee lap spills, or even the dreaded, tragic "dead seat."

Almost a third of the Castle Collection is comprised of seating furniture, made between 1815 and 1910. Think about being that old, and then think about being a chair. For 85 to 180 years, people of all shapes and sizes have been sitting, standing, bouncing and leaning on you. You may have been covered with wet overcoats, files, purses, boxes of memoranda, stacks of books, office budgets or Strategic Plans. You've lived in dry rooms and damp rooms, hot and cold, maybe been left in the sun too long. Little wonder, then, that your joints shrink, your glue dries up, and your stuffing flattens out. Of course, legs, or pulling a chair forward without actually picking it up. Remember that the back of your chair is probably held to the seat frame only by four small dowels, maybe only two, or by thin wooden tenons. Upholstery places tremendous stress on the frame all by itself, with stretched webbing, compressed seating furniture is intended for use, but overuse causes not only pain and weakness for the chair, but possibly irreparable damage.

There are many reasons why chairs break. Wood is a natural material which swells and shrinks in response to the temperature and humidity around it. To accommodate these movements, old wood often cracks and old glue lets go. Improper pressure is bad for the frame, like pushing a chair by its back, leaning back on the two rear springs, and rows of tacks driven into the wood, holding stuffing and fabric in place.

As you read this, an antique may be falling apart somewhere in the Castle. Quite possibly, it is the chair you are sitting on. Only you can prevent chair-slaughters. Please respect the antique seating furniture in your care for its age as well as for its style.

MCH
THE HOW AND WHY OF IT

Many people who see the antique furniture and lighting fixtures which grace the hallways and offices of the Castle do not realize that these objects, while in use on a daily basis, are part of a collection which is governed by many of the same standards which control the Smithsonian’s museum collections. Under the guidelines of SD-600, the Smithsonian’s policy paper on collection management, a collection management policy was developed for the collection which spells out in great detail its purpose, scope, and the procedures for its operation and management. The policy, while taking into consideration its unique nature, nevertheless imposes strict controls for the care and monitoring of the collection. Many of the procedures for collection management are the same as those used in museum collections throughout the Institution.

When an object is purchased or given for the collection, it is first assigned a number. It is then catalogued into the collection. A catalogue card is made which includes vital information such as measurements, provenance, maker, and other curatorial background. A photograph of the object is attached to the card to provide a visual record, while a file is created to contain all written records pertaining to the object. These records constitute one aspect of collection guardianship, the intellectual care of the collection.

The physical care of the collection is also given a great deal of attention. The stress on objects caused by almost constant use keeps two full time staffers busy repairing damage as well as preventing future damage. Environmental damage, caused by fluctuations in temperature and humidity inherent in a building in use, takes a toll on some of the more fragile pieces in the collection. Regular monitoring of two of the building’s most historic rooms is conducted in an attempt to maintain environmental stability. All repairs and restoration treatments are documented and a written record is kept in the object’s file.

Perhaps one of the most frustrating but vitally important tasks mandated by the collection management policy is the annual inventory. Its importance is obviated by the need for accountability and access to the collection; the frustration springs from the very nature of the collection. As a "working collection" the movement of objects is almost a daily occurrence. Inventory control is achieved by using a computerized data base to record the locations of objects.

Once a year, a complete inventory of the collection is conducted and the data base is updated, noting all location changes. It is a long and arduous task, dreaded by all involved.

The question is frequently asked, "Is it really worth all this effort just to furnish the offices of the Castle with antiques?" The answer is always "yes". The Smith-

Restoration of a Boule table from the Castle Collection.
COLLECTION RÉSUMÉ

The OAHP Castle Collection was established in 1964 to serve as a working collection of furnishings for the offices and reception rooms of the Castle (see In the Beginning, in this issue). Over the past twenty years, however, objects from the collection have been loaned to museums for exhibitions in this country and England. Concurrently, collection pieces have been featured in scholarly books, periodicals, and catalogues on the subjects of nineteenth century furniture, lighting, and design. Following is a résumé of the significant exhibitions and publications in which collection pieces have been featured.

EXHIBITIONS
(Arranged Chronologically)

Non-Smithsonian:
» Treasures From the Smithsonian Institution, Edinburgh Festival, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1984.

Smithsonian Exhibitions and Events:
» Smithsonian Exhibitions and Events:
» Russia, the Land, the People: Russian Painting 1850-1910, Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibitions, 1987.
The World of Antiques, Art, and Architecture in Victorian America
Robert Bishop and Patricia Coblentz

Cover from The World of Antiques, Art & Architecture...

Publications
(Arranged Alphabetically)

Books and Exhibition Catalogues:

- The American Chair, Three Centuries of Style, Robert Bishop, New York, 1983.


Periodicals and Newspaper Articles:

- Past Glory, Pat Bryant, Richmond Times Dispatch, Richmond, Virginia, April 16, 1989.

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We'd also like to recognize the invaluable assistance of present and former south group building management staff. Thank you all for a job well-done!
PHOTO-OP

» What: Gothic Revival armchair, ca. 1850, one of a pair.
» Where: Gothic Influences on American Furniture exhibition, third floor, S.I. Building.
» Why: First object accessioned into the Castle Collection. Purchased from an antique shop on Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C. in May, 1964 for $50.00 for the pair.

Notice

Movement or breakage of any "Castle" collection objects should be reported at the earliest convenience to the OAHP Preservation Studio. E-Mail may be addressed to AHHPMEMO1, or phone messages may be left at 357-1409.

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