
FEDERAL PARLOR

Wall Clock

Aaron Willard, Jr., *Wall Clock Patent Alarm Timepiece*, c. 1802–30, gilded eastern white pine, basswood, mahogany, and black cherry, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Bayou Bend Collection, gift of Alice C. Simkins, B.79.290.



MISSION

During and after the American Revolution, Americans wished to demonstrate their identity as an independent nation worthy of respect from themselves and people of other nations. With this in mind, what do these historic objects tell us about American identity—what it meant to be an American—during this time period?


Wall Clock

This clock was made between 1802 and 1830 by Aaron Willard. Clocks like these were intended to make less expensive timepieces available to those who could not afford a tall-case (grandfather) clock.

TRIVIA QUESTIONS

 What is so special about this clock?

It is a much smaller timepiece than the very tall clocks we are used to seeing so it doesn't take up as much room as the tall-case clocks. There is usually an American eagle sitting on the very top of the clock. These clocks were very popular for a number of years.

 What are the decorative elements on the clock?

The curved brass along the sides of the clock follows its shape. The rectangular glass is painted in reverse—a technique called eglomisé. It depicts Aurora, the goddess of dawn, riding her chariot across the sky.

 What connection does the clock have with this new country?

The clock was made in the United States and the new national symbol, the bald eagle, is displayed atop the clock.

FEDERAL PARLOR

Tambour Desk

John Seymour, *Tambour Desk*. 1793–96, mahogany and mahogany veneer, secondary woods, ivory inlays, brass and enameled copper hardware, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Bayou Bend Collection, gift of Miss Ima Hogg, B.65.12.



MISSION

During and after the American Revolution, Americans wished to demonstrate their identity as an independent nation worthy of respect from themselves and people of other nations. With this in mind, what do these historic objects tell us about American identity—what it meant to be an American—during this time period?

Tambour Desk

This small desk was intended to be used by a woman. New forms of furniture intended for women start appearing in the early 1800s.

TRIVIA QUESTIONS



How does this desk work?

The doors are made with flexible canvas and slide back into the case. The desk has a hinged front, which can be opened up for writing. Each drawer has a lock.



Why is this desk significant to women's history?

This is a brand-new furniture form, made specifically for a woman. Furniture for women, which gave them private spaces within the home, was a new idea in the early 1800s. Many people believed that the new American nation called for changing roles for women, including better education, and thus requiring new objects as well.



What was changing about the roles of women in America?

Many people believed that having educated (male) citizens who would govern the country well required having educated women to raise them properly. The number of private schools for women increased. Subjects studied included languages, literature, needlework, art, and music.

FEDERAL PARLOR

Mantel

Robert Wellford, *Mantel*,
c. 1800, wood, paint,
composition, the Museum
of Fine Arts, Houston, the
Bayou Bend Collection, gift
of Miss Ima Hogg, B.6743.



MISSION

During and after the American Revolution, Americans wished to demonstrate their identity as an independent nation worthy of respect from themselves and people of other nations. With this in mind, what do these historic objects tell us about American identity—what it meant to be an American—during this time period?

Mantel

The fireplace mantel is decorated with designs referring to ancient Rome. The decorations were not carved from wood; instead they were molded from a material called composition.

TRIVIA QUESTIONS



Why would an American want a mantelpiece with decorations from ancient Rome?

Furnishings with classical design elements were becoming fashionable in Europe as exploration of ancient ruins and sites helped people learn more about Greek and Roman society. European fashion was still considered the model for good taste in America, even though it was now an independent nation. Also, ancient Greek and Roman government had been models used in forming the new American government.



Do we know who made the decorations on the mantelpiece?

Yes, a craftsman named Robert Wellford made the decorations. His signature appears under the central block, as well as a notation that he worked in Philadelphia. He emigrated from London, where he had trained under a French immigrant craftsman. Having been trained in London would have been attractive to Wellford's American customers, who still looked to Europe for leadership in the latest fashions.



How does the mantelpiece reflect changes in American craftsmanship in the early 1800s?

Americans were beginning to produce more luxury and specialized goods for themselves, instead of importing them from Europe. The foreign trade embargo imposed by President Jefferson was very hard on those whose living depended on imports and exports, but it was helpful to those like Robert Wellford who competed with European goods.

FEDERAL PARLOR

Work Table

Work Table, 1800–20, mahogany and mahogany veneer; eastern white pine, mahogany, and hard maple, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Bayou Bend Collection, gift of Miss Ima Hogg, B.69.383.



MISSION

During and after the American Revolution, Americans wished to demonstrate their identity as an independent nation worthy of respect from themselves and people of other nations. With this in mind, what do these historic objects tell us about American identity—what it meant to be an American—during this time period?

Work Table

A woman could store her needlework in the sliding fabric basket below this work table. Work tables like these were often fitted up to serve as small desks or to store the tools needed for handwork.

TRIVIA QUESTIONS



Where did the ideas for the design of this work table come from?

Although this work table was made by an American craftsman, the United States still looked to England and France as the source of good taste and fashionable style. The craftsman might have been trained in Europe, have copied an object made in Europe, or have seen one of the new design books that suggested ideas for stylish furniture.



Why is this work table significant to women's history?

This is a brand-new furniture form, made specifically for women. Furniture specifically for women, which gave them private spaces within the home, was a new idea in the early 1800s. Many people believed that the new American nation called for changing roles for women, including better education, and thus new objects as well.



What was changing about the roles of women in America?

Many people believed that having educated (male) citizens who would govern the country well required having educated women to raise them properly. The number of private schools for women increased. Subjects studied included languages, literature, needlework, art, and music.

FEDERAL PARLOR

Composition Armchair

Composition Armchair, 1785–1815, ash; painted and gilded, composition decoration; original linen and horsehair foundation; gilded brass tacks; and modern silk cover, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Bayou Bend Collection, museum purchase funded by the Theta Charity Antiques Show, B.91.51.



MISSION

During and after the American Revolution, Americans wished to demonstrate their identity as an independent nation worthy of respect from themselves and people of other nations. With this in mind, what do these historic objects tell us about American identity—what it meant to be an American—during this time period?

Composition Armchair

This delicate gold-and-white chair was decorated with molded composition rather than carved wood. Although it was made in Philadelphia, it was inspired by French styles.

TRIVIA QUESTIONS



Where would a chair like this have been used in the home?

It probably would have been used in the space where the most formal entertaining took place. In the early 1800s, homes were beginning to move toward more specialized spaces like dining rooms and formal drawing rooms



Why would someone in Philadelphia want a French-style armchair?

Although this armchair was made by an American craftsman, in the early 1800s the United States still looked to England and France as sources of good taste and fashionable style. Philadelphia had a large French-speaking community after the American Revolution, including those who had fled unrest in France and a slave rebellion in Haiti, and those who were just looking for new opportunities in a friendly country. There would have been many people there who knew French style well.



Would composition ornament be practical for an armchair?

Not very. It looks impressive, especially with the gold-and-white finish, but it is quite easily damaged. This armchair was in very poor condition when the Museum bought it, and it required a lot of work from the conservation staff to restore its original elegance. That may be why very few chairs like this survive.

FEDERAL PARLOR

Portrait of Sarah Hope Harvey Trumbull

John Trumbull, *Portrait of Mrs. John Trumbull (Sarah Hope Harvey, 1774–1824)*, 1820–23, oil on panel, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Bayou Bend Collection, museum purchase funded by the Theta Charity Antiques Show, B.91.25.



MISSION

During and after the American Revolution, Americans wished to demonstrate their identity as an independent nation worthy of respect from themselves and people of other nations. With this in mind, what do these historic objects tell us about American identity—what it meant to be an American—during this time period?

Portrait of Sarah Hope Harvey Trumbull

Artist John Trumbull painted this portrait of his wife, Sarah Hope Harvey Trumbull. She was one of his favorite subjects and he painted her many times during her life.

TRIVIA QUESTIONS



Why is Sarah Trumbull wearing that unusual hat?

At this time it was considered appropriate for women, especially older married women, to cover their hair. Having a fancy ruffled cap in the latest style was one way to demonstrate that they were knowledgeable about current fashions, especially because it was less expensive to have an up-to-date cap than a whole new dress. No respectable adult woman would wear her hair down around her shoulders.



Where did John Trumbull learn about painting?

Like most American artists, Trumbull moved to England to study art because there were no art schools in the colonies before the American Revolution. He worked with an American-born artist named Benjamin West who trained other artists whose work appears in the Bayou Bend Collection. Trumbull also met his wife Sarah in England. They later returned to America, where his British training made his work very desirable.



What kind of paintings is John Trumbull most famous for?

In the late 1700s, history paintings were considered the most prestigious kind of painting. Trumbull, who served in the American Revolution as an aide to George Washington, painted scenes from the American Revolution. Several were purchased by Congress for the U.S. Capitol building. He also painted a number of portraits of notable Americans, including Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and John Adams.

FEDERAL PARLOR

Side Chair

John Townsend, *Side Chair*, 1800, mahogany; birch, soft maple, eastern white pine, and poplar, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Bayou Bend Collection, gift of Miss Ima Hogg, B.66.11.2.



MISSION

During and after the American Revolution, Americans wished to demonstrate their identity as an independent nation worthy of respect from themselves and people of other nations. With this in mind, what do these historic objects tell us about American identity—what it meant to be an American—during this time period?

Side Chair

This chair was made by Newport, Rhode Island, craftsman John Townsend. We know this because a handwritten label is attached under the chair seat.

TRIVIA QUESTIONS



Are labels common on early American furniture?

No, they are extremely rare. Most fine furniture was commissioned by the customer directly from the furniture maker so there was no need to label it—the customer knew exactly who had made it because he had placed the order in the craftsman’s shop. However, Newport was a seaport and some craftsmen made furniture to be sold as part of a ship’s cargo. In that case, those craftsmen might want to label their work so their customers, whom they had never met, could request more. Around 1800, wider distribution affected how crafts were being made and sold, so even more furniture makers started using labels.



Where did the craftsman get the idea for this chair’s design?

Although this chair was made by an American craftsman, the United States still looked to England and France as sources of good taste and fashionable style. The craftsman might have been trained in Europe, have copied an object made in Europe, or have seen one of the new design books that suggested ideas for stylish furniture.

FEDERAL PARLOR

Bust of George Washington

Ralph Wood, Jr., *Bust of George Washington*, c. 1782–95, lead-glazed earthenware (pearlware) with overglaze enamel, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Bayou Bend Collection, museum purchase funded by family and friends in memory of Harold Richardson “Dick” Borus, B.2013.26.



MISSION

During and after the American Revolution, Americans wished to demonstrate their identity as an independent nation worthy of respect from themselves and people of other nations. With this in mind, what do these historic objects tell us about American identity—what it meant to be an American—during this time period?

Bust of George Washington

This bust of George Washington was made in England but might have been sold to an American.

TRIVIA QUESTIONS



Why would an American want a sculpture of George Washington?

George Washington was perhaps the best-known and best-loved figure in late-1700s America. His likeness appeared on prints, clocks, dishes, sculptures, paintings, needleworks, and even glassware and printed fabrics. Clearly there was a very strong market of people who were interested in having a likeness of Washington in their homes.



Why would an English ceramics factory want to make statues of the general who had just led a revolution against Great Britain?

Americans were great customers for English goods. At the time of the American Revolution, the Atlantic colonies were buying one-quarter of all the goods England exported. Many English manufacturers were more than happy to make items that catered to such a lucrative market. Also, it is important to keep in mind that not all English citizens had approved of the government's policies toward the American colonies that led to the revolution.



Why not just buy an American version?

Americans were unable to make fine ceramics until the early 1800s because they were too complicated and expensive to produce with the resources available in the new country. If they wanted an elegant and fashionable figure like this, they had to import it.

FEDERAL PARLOR

Card Table with Eagle

Card Table, c. 1790–1820, mahogany; unidentified secondary woods, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Bayou Bend Collection, museum purchase funded by The Brown Foundation, Inc., B.2011.9.



MISSION

During and after the American Revolution, Americans wished to demonstrate their identity as an independent nation worthy of respect from themselves and people of other nations. With this in mind, what do these historic objects tell us about American identity—what it meant to be an American—during this time period?

Card Table with Eagle

This card table made in Boston would unfold to provide a playing surface for cards or other games. The eagle inlay would have been an extremely stylish addition.

TRIVIA QUESTIONS



Why does this table have an eagle on it?

The eagle was a symbol of the new American nation and was often used to decorate objects in the home. However, the eagle had also been used as a symbol by the Romans, who had created the world's first republican government. The Roman government had been one of the examples studied in the creation of the United States Constitution.



Why would an American want to own a table like this?

The original owner probably had two—card tables usually came in pairs! Playing cards was an extremely popular pastime in early 1800s America. Among other things, it represented one of the rare opportunities for men and women to socialize together. However, card tables could also be used as small, flexible tables for serving food at a party, dining, or other purposes.



Would this table be affordable for an ordinary American?

Actually, it would have been quite expensive. It was made of imported mahogany and the fancy inlaid eagle and other inlaid designs would have added to the cost. However, it demonstrates that Americans of all income levels loved owning household items with patriotic symbols; there are also many examples in museums of less costly items depicting George Washington, an eagle, or other symbols.