

THE FURNITURE OF JOHN AND HUGH FINLAY

by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to the scholars who came before me and those who will come after me.
Your research is incredibly important in understanding our world's cultural history.

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I would like to thank my family and friends who didn't quite understand what History of Decorative Arts is, but supported me along the way. My knowledgeable and ever-positive thesis advisor Oscar Fitzgerald proofread every draft, provided me with helpful comments, and shared his expertise. Finally, I would like to thank the Smithsonian-Mason History of Decorative Arts community at large. I cannot say enough about your emotional support throughout my time in the program.

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ABSTRACT

THE FURNITURE OF JOHN AND HUGH FINLAY

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This thesis seeks to assess the stylistic evolution of Baltimore furniture makers John and Hugh Finlay. The brothers, who were active from 1803 to 1841, manufactured fanciful painted furniture for a wide variety of clientele. The Finlays' imaginative furnishings made their way up and down the east coast, into the Madison's White House, and even across the Atlantic to Europe. The brothers distinguished themselves from their competition by combining traditional Baltimore "fancy" furniture and a European aesthetic. Although many people today are unfamiliar with the Finlay brothers, their furniture lingers in the American consciousness. By analyzing samples of their work, the author intends to give a more nuanced picture of the Finlays and their work.

INTRODUCTION

America has an established tradition of celebrated furniture makers. There are the Townsends and Goddards from Newport, Rhode Island. John Townsend, 1733-1809, was probably the most prolific cabinet maker of the Townsend-Goddard family and is famous for his stately case furniture complete with shell motifs.¹ New York was home to Duncan Phyfe, 1770-1854, and Charles-Honore Lannuier, 1779-1819. Phyfe, an immigrant from Scotland, made a name for himself with his neoclassical designs executed in rich woods. Lannuier was an immigrant from France who brought French exuberance in the arts with him to New York. Both Phyfe and Lannuier would become two of the most renowned furniture makers in the north east.²

Boston lays claim to the Seymours, John, 1738-1818, and Thomas, 1771-1848. Father John immigrated from England, and he and his son Thomas worked in a conservative English Regency style that appealed to their elite clientele.³ Scottish

¹ Morrison H. Hecksecher and Lori Zabar, *John Townsend: Newport Cabinetmaker* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 35.

² Peter M. Kenny and Matthew Thurlow, "Duncan Phyfe (1770-1854) and Charles-Honore Lannuier (1779-1819)," http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/phla/hd_phla.htm (Accessed November 11, 2016).

³ Rebecca J. Bertrand and Robert D. Mussey, Jr, "One Family's Treasure: Newly Discovered Collection of Seymour Furniture," *Antiques and Fine Art Magazine*, May 10, 2012. <http://www.afanews.com/articles/item/1189-one-familys-treasure-newly-discovered-collection-of-seymour-furniture?tmpl=component#.WCX9uBIrK9Y> (Accessed November 11, 2016).

eccentric John Shearer worked in northern Virginia from around 1790 to 1820. Spotty records make it difficult to pin down details concerning Shearer's training and personal life, but his unique construction methods and loyalist leanings made him popular in Loudoun and Berkeley counties.⁴ This furniture tour of the Mid-Atlantic lacks an entry on Baltimore, Maryland. One of early America's most important port cities, Baltimore was a strategic location for merchants, businessmen, and the country's elite.

Baltimore

There was something special about Baltimore even before it was dubbed "Charm City" in 1975.⁵ Baltimore County was established in 1659, and within it the City of Baltimore was laid out in 1730.⁶ In 1768, the city was made the county seat.⁷ During the Revolutionary War, Baltimore repeatedly raised troops for General Washington and aided General Lafayette when he was nearby.⁸ Despite the city's obvious revolutionary attitude, the British never blockaded Baltimore harbor. The city's uninterrupted trade with Europe,

⁴ Elizabeth Davidson, *The Furniture of John Shearer, 1790-1820: "A True North Britain" in the Southern Backcountry* (Plymouth, UK: Altamira Press, 2011), 9-12.

⁵ Gilbert Sandler, "How The City's Nickname Came to Be," *The Baltimore Sun*, July 18, 1995, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1995-07-18/news/1995199190_1_charm-city-bill-evans-loden (Accessed November 11, 2016).

⁶ John Thomas Scarf, *History of Baltimore City and County, From the Earliest Period to the Present Day: Including Biographical Sketches of their Representative Men* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts, 1881), 42-49.

⁷ *Ibid*, 60.

⁸ *Ibid*, 76-79.

the Caribbean, and the East enticed immigration from Europe and other parts of the new United States of America. These merchants, land speculators, and other wealthy individuals created a market for luxury goods, which led to an influx of craftsmen in the 1780s and 1790s. The decorative arts community included furniture makers, carvers, gilders, upholsterers, and ebonists. Many artisans were immigrants as well, and they brought a variety of native European styles to Baltimore.⁹ Between the 1790 and 1850, there were 13 separate furniture making firms in the city creating furnishings for local consumption and export.¹⁰ One of the 13, a shop owned by John and Hugh Finlay, was active from 1803 to 1830.

The Finlay Brothers

According to Maryland census records, John Finlay is listed as having been born in Maryland in 1777.¹¹ His brother, Hugh, was born four years later in 1781. Older brother John Finlay began his career as a coach painter and was successful enough to take on an apprentice in 1801. Just two years later, John and younger brother Hugh announced the opening of their new shop in Baltimore's *Federal Gazette* newspaper on January 25, 1803. They advertised a variety of what they called "fancy and jappaned" furnishings including various tables, seating furniture, and fire screens. The Finlay brothers also

⁹ Gregory Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland, 1770-1840: The Collection of the Maryland Historical Society* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1984), 70-73.

¹⁰ Ibid, 76.

¹¹ Ibid, 94.

declared that their shop produced goods “equal to any imported.” The Finlay’s own assertions aside, their shop was very successful and catered to the upper echelons of society both locally and abroad.¹² From 1803 to 1841 at least one Finlay brother was at the helm of the shop. Their long tenure in the furniture business allowed them to experiment with different styles, and the Finlay’s shop went through three different phases. From 1803 to around 1810, the Finlay shop produced understated English-inspired painted furniture. The French Empire style crept into the Finlay’s work from 1810 through the beginning of the 1820s, which inspired an aesthetic that combined Greco-Roman motifs and furniture forms with the Finlay’s painted furniture from the decade before. The Finlays finished their career in the 1830s working almost exclusively with French designs.

¹² Ibid, 74-75.

EARLY PAINTED FURNITURE

Almost immediately after creating their cabinetmaking firm in 1803, Baltimore brothers John and Hugh Finlay began manufacturing furniture for the city's elite.¹³ The furnishings that their firm produced in its infancy are characterized by understated colors and gilt decoration, and are heavily inspired by English vernacular design as well as published sources. One of the brothers' earliest commissions was a 13-piece set which is associated with nineteenth-century Baltimore lawyer and banker John B. Morris.¹⁴ In addition to owning part of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, Morris was elected to the Baltimore city council several times throughout the 1820s and 1830s.¹⁵ Without a doubt, he was a very prominent member of Baltimore society. This set that Finlays created around 1805 included ten armchairs, two settees, and a pier table. One of the armchairs, nicknamed the "Rose Hill" armchair due to its painted decoration, is a good example of the Finlay's early style (fig. 1).

¹³ William Voss Elder and Jayne E. Stokes, *American Furniture 1680-1880 From the Collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1987), 45.

¹⁴ Lance Humphries, "Provenance, Patronage, and Perception: The Morris Suite of Baltimore Painted Furniture," *American Furniture*, 2003, <http://www.chipstone.org/article.php/671/American-Furniture-2003/Provenance,-Patronage,-and-Perception:-The-Morris-Suite-of-Baltimore-Painted-Furniture> (Accessed December 6, 2015).

¹⁵ Isidor Blum, *The Jews of Baltimore: An Historical Summary of Their Progress and Status as Citizens of Baltimore from Early Days to the Year Nineteen Hundred and Ten* (Baltimore: Historical Review Publishing Company, 1910), 43.



Figure 1: John and Hugh Finlay with Francis Guy, “Rose Hill” Armchair, 1805. Maple and ash painted black with gilt and polychrome decoration. 33 3/4 x 22 1/4 x 21 in. The Baltimore Museum of Art.

Seating Furniture

The “Rose Hill” armchair, like the other seating furniture in a suite connected with John B. Morris, has a painted black ground with gilt polychrome decoration.¹⁶ Turned legs with gilt reeding and spiral decoration support a caned seat. A gilt vine motif punctuated by a painted armorial trophy sits on the front rail. Gilt paterae on the chair’s knees further the aesthetic horizontally across the chair’s surface. The side rails are left unadorned, and allow the eye to drift upwards to the pierced splat, which sits upon a horizontal stay rail with a familiar gilt vine decoration. Underneath, two blocks with gilt paterae serve as a sturdy connection between the splat and the seat. The splat takes the shape of two pointed arches with another painted armorial trophy in the center. If we

¹⁶ Humphries.

pretend that two gothic arches in fact do create the splat, the gilt vine motif climbs to the top of the free-standing pillars, while a gilt cross-hatch pattern adorns the lower half of the shared pillar below the armorial trophy. Soft, gilt flames rise up from the trophy, and surround the peaks of the arches. The Finlays did not forget about the reeding and spiral decoration from the chair's legs, and added it to the stiles. The arms, which feature a familiar gilt vine motif, emerge from the very top of the stiles. The arms curve downwards towards the seat of the chair, then back towards the stiles, and finally plummet down to rest just outside the side rails.

A thick, tablet-like crest rail sits upon the very top of the arms, allowing a bit of the stiles to peek over. A painting of the chair's namesake, Baltimore elite William Gibson's home called Rose Hill, sits in the center.¹⁷ A pair of concentric rectangles made from an outer rectangle of gilt crosshatching and an inner gilt vine motif flank the miniature painting. The overall structure of the chair paired with extensive painting and gilding is very successful. The repeated vine motif, geometric forms and paterae, as well as a solid black background help maintain a sense of order. The design is symmetrical, with all elements lining up with the armorial trophies and the small architectural painting. This design scheme was apparently very successful for the Finlays, as they used a similar design scheme for William Buchanan's side chairs (fig. 2).¹⁸

¹⁷ Mary Ellen Hayward and Frank Shivers Jr., eds., *The Architecture of Baltimore: An Illustrated History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 15.

¹⁸ Elder and Stokes, 48.



Figure 2: John and Hugh Finlay with Francis Guy, Side Chair, 1800-1810. Mahogany, soft maple, tulip poplar, cane, paint, gilt. 33.437 x 19 x 17.75 in. Winterthur.

William Buchanan was another member of the Baltimore elite who commissioned work from the Finlays, and was the partial owner of a company which traded goods with the West Indies.¹⁹ He ordered his rather large set of Finlay furniture around the same time as Mr. Morris. Buchanan's set included ten side chairs, two window seats, two card tables, a settee, and a pier table. His set differs from Morris' ever so slightly in that Buchanan only ordered side chairs and architectural views of the city which are restricted

¹⁹ Archives of Maryland, "A Biographical Dictionary of the Maryland Legislature 1635-1789," vol. 426, 745-746.

to the tables.²⁰ Like the seating furniture from the Morris suite, the Buchanan side chair has a painted black ground with gilt decoration. Two stretchers on the sides and one stretcher in the front and back support the chair, sitting on turned legs with gilt vertical lines. A painted armorial trophy appears in the center of the flattened front stretcher, flanked by penciling.

The heavily decorated front rail draws the eye upward on the body of the chair. Gilt sawtooth rectangles sit on the knees and in the very center, and two gilt paterae frame the central rectangle. Additional gilt paterae adorn the blocks which support the horizontal stay rail, which features a gilt wheat stalk. On the splat, two small elongated arrows stand on either side of a larger and squatter arrow. A gilt band outlines each arrow, and they feature gilt foliage motifs. The splat connects to the tablet top rail via gilt knobs, while the black and gilt penciled stiles connect the whole back. On the tablet, gilt rectangular sawtooth decorations set against a black background stand on either side of a central musical trophy.

The “Rose Hill” armchair and the Buchanan side chair show the hallmarks of the Finlay shop during this period. At the most basic level, both chairs have painted black grounds with gilt decorations and have similar structures. Each chair is composed of a large tablet-top which sits upon turned stiles and a pierced splat above a stay rail. Turned legs with rather peculiar faux-tapered feet, which were quite common in Baltimore, support a square seat. The only real differences in construction are the arms on the “Rose

²⁰ Hayward and Shivers, 35.

Hill” armchair and the stretchers on the Buchanan chair. The chairs from the two sets also share basic design motifs, such as paterae on the stiles below the stay rail as well as the use of musical and armorial trophies. Additionally, both chairs have the same tablet crest rail formula of a central painted image flanked by two sawtooth rectangles.

The painted landscapes in particular were a favorite decorative motif in the Baltimore area, whose elite seemed to have celebrated their evolving city with scenes of local architecture painted on “fancy” furniture. The Finlay’s shop was one of two that specialized in this type of decoration, and they employed English landscape painter Francis Guy.²¹ Before moving to Brooklyn in 1817, Guy collaborated with the Finlay brothers and also created house paintings on commission.²² Guy may have also been responsible for painting the trophies, which appear to have a glossy sheen. This could be a nod to the Baltimore tradition of including eglomise on case furniture, or perhaps simply a stylistic choice by the artist.

These early examples of seating furniture produced by the Finlay’s firm rely heavily on English vernacular forms as well as published design sources. Up until around 1810, the Finlays primarily looked to the works of Thomas Sheraton and George Hepplewhite for ideas. Sheraton first published his design book, *The Cabinet Maker’s and Upholsterer’s Drawing Book* in 1791, and provided instruction on basic design

²¹ Ibid.

²² Carol Crown and Cheryl Rivers, eds., *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 23: Folk Art.

principals within it. He provides several designs for chairs and chair backs with pierced splats, which the Finlays translated into finished products for their Baltimore clientele.

The *Drawing Book*'s Plate 36 serves as one example (fig. 3). At the most basic level, all of the square-backed chairs feature a decorative pierced splat supported by a horizontal stay rail. Like the Finlay's chairs, Sheraton's chair backs also feature blocks which connect them to the seat rail below. While the Finlays may have taken design cues from the whole Plate, the bottom left-hand chair back is strikingly similar to the "Rose Hill" armchair. On Sheraton's design, three thin splats rise to create two pointed arches.

Sheraton illustrated this type of splat formation many times within his *Drawing Book*, but Plate 34 stands out in particular (fig.4).

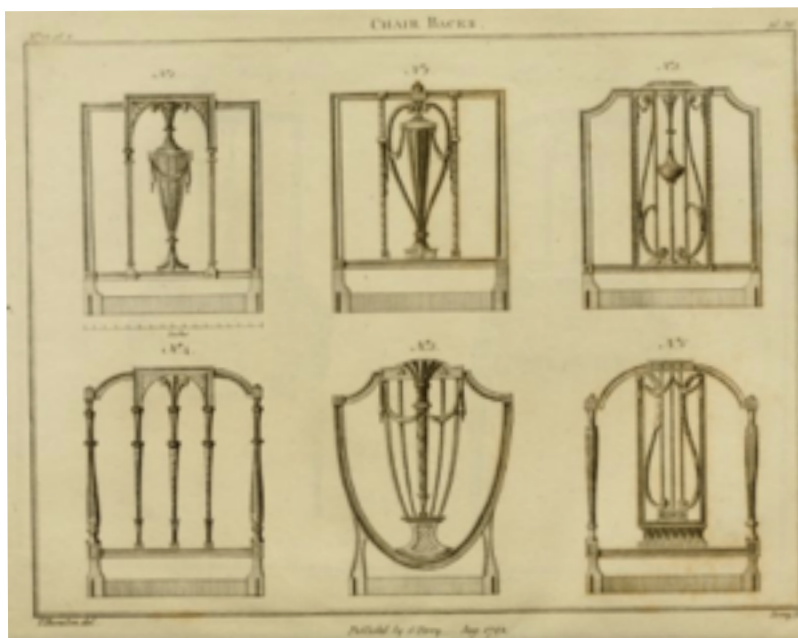


Figure 3: Thomas Sheraton, Designs for Chair Backs, 1802. Ink on paper.



Figure 4: Thomas Sheraton, Designs for a Dining Room Chair and a Parlor Chair, 1802. Ink on paper.

The splat design for the drawing room chair on the left has an architectonic feel, with turned elements that create “columns” which rise to form arches at the crest rail. Both the Sheraton chair and the “Rose Hill” armchair have arches bisected by a design placed inside a geometric shape. The similarities between Sheraton’s chair designs and the “Rose Hill” armchair are obvious. Sheraton’s chair and splat designs were varied, and he did produce a few illustrations which the Finlays might have drawn from in making the Buchanan suite. A design for a drawing room chair in Plate 13 shows an arm chair with a pierced splat which takes the shape of several arrows (fig. 5). Although the Finlays constructed the splat for the Buchanan chairs out of three arrows and raised them with a stay rail, there is a clear connection between Sheraton’s Plate and the Finlay’s finished product. The arrow shapes may have also derived from the vase-shaped splats from Sheraton’s designs for chair backs which have a central large vase in between two

columns, much like the Buchanan chair's central large arrow placed between two smaller arrows (fig. 3).²³



Figure 5: Thomas Sheraton, Designs for a Parlor Chair, 1802. Ink on paper.

Sheraton's *Drawing Book* was not the only printed English design source that the Finlays looked to for inspiration. They also drew from George Hepplewhite's *The Cabinetmaker and Upholsterer's Guide*, published by his wife in 1788.²⁴ Hepplewhite was a contemporary of Thomas Sheraton, and many of their furniture designs overlapped. Hepplewhite illustrated several pierced-splat chairs with architectonic qualities, but he also designed chair backs with large crest rails similar to the Finlay's Morris and

²³ Nancy Evans, *American Windsor Chairs* (New York: Hudson Hill Press, 1996), 135.

²⁴ Judith Gura, *The Guide for Period Styles for Interiors From the 17th Century to the Present*, 2nd ed. (London: Fairchild Books, 2016), 114.

Buchanan chairs. Plate 13 from Hepplewhite's *Guide* feature six designs for chair backs, some upholstered and others with pierced splats, with massive crest rails (fig. 6). While Hepplewhite's decorative designs diverge from the Finlay's chairs, the overall form remains. This is particularly evident if we look at the chair back at upper right-hand corner of the Plate, featuring turned "columns." From the design literature, it seems as though architectonic pierced splats for chair backs were fashionable and could be paired with a large tablet or crest rail, much like the Finlay's seating furniture.

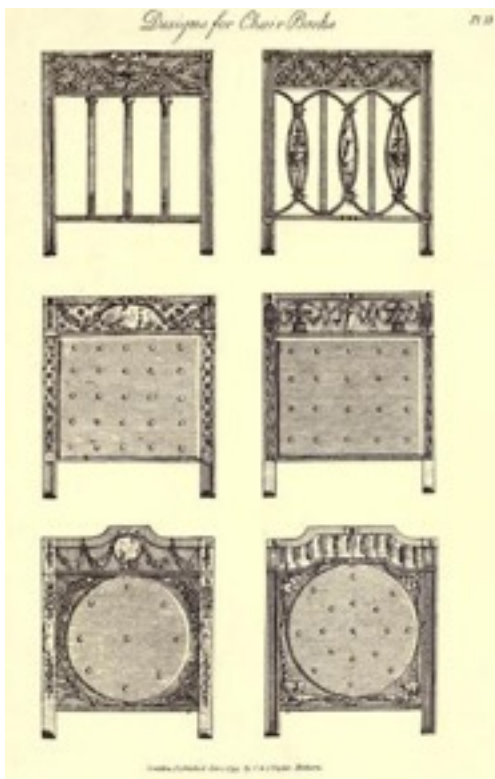


Figure 6: George Hepplewhite, Designs for Chair Backs, 1794. Ink on paper.

There are many vernacular precedents to the designs by Hepplewhite and Sheraton that the Finlays drew from for their own commissions. The Scottish “brander back” chair was probably the most influential to the authors of English 18th-century design books (fig. 7). The “brander back” chair has a square back with rows of plain balusters raised above the seat by a stay rail. Usually these chairs are left unadorned, with the natural wood left as the main attraction.²⁵ “Brander back” chairs remained popular in Scotland throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.²⁶



Figure 7: Brander Back Chair, 19th Century. Oak. 50 x 42 x 90 cm. Private Collection.

²⁵ J.M. Fladmark, ed., *Heritage: Conservation, Interpretation and Enterprise* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 328.

²⁶ Ibid.

The English had a similar vernacular chair. A print by S.H. Grimm from circa 1788 shows the parlor at Kings Weston with typical tables and rush-seated chairs (fig. 8). These square-backed chairs have turned balusters and stiles, stay rails, as well as turned legs and stretchers. With their vertical balusters and elevated stay rail, the chairs illustrated by Grimm are very similar to the Scottish “brander back” chair. Both the Scottish “brander back” chair and the English rush seated chair are “public” chairs; one could find them at inns, pubs, and in public rooms at home. The Finlays seemed to have understood the function and design of English and Scottish furniture, since their translations occupied the same spaces as their counterparts across the pond. The suite connected to John B. Morris was probably originally constructed for the Baltimore Dancing Assembly Rooms, and Morris acquired the suite secondhand.²⁷ In a similar vein, the side chairs from the Buchanan set probably found their way into a parlor.

²⁷ Humphries.



Figure 8: S.H. Grimm, “The Parlour at Kings Weston, Gloucestershire”, 1788. Ink on paper.

Not only were the Finlay’s decorative chair backs an amalgam of vernacular and high design, their overall chair forms were as well. For example, the arms on the “Rose Hill” armchair come straight out of Sheraton’s *Drawing Book*. His designs for stumps and elbows on Plate 10 of his *Drawing Book* shows a variety of choices, but elbow I is of particular interest. Elbow I, the design to the far left, is almost the exact shape that the Finlays use for the “Rose Hill” armchair (fig. 9). The elbow rises from a vertical stump at the chair’s knee and curves inward toward the seat. The arm swoops down from the stile and meets at the top of the concave elbow. The arms on the “Rose Hill” chair do not reflect the elaborate carving depicted in Sheraton’s rendering, but the overall form is the same.

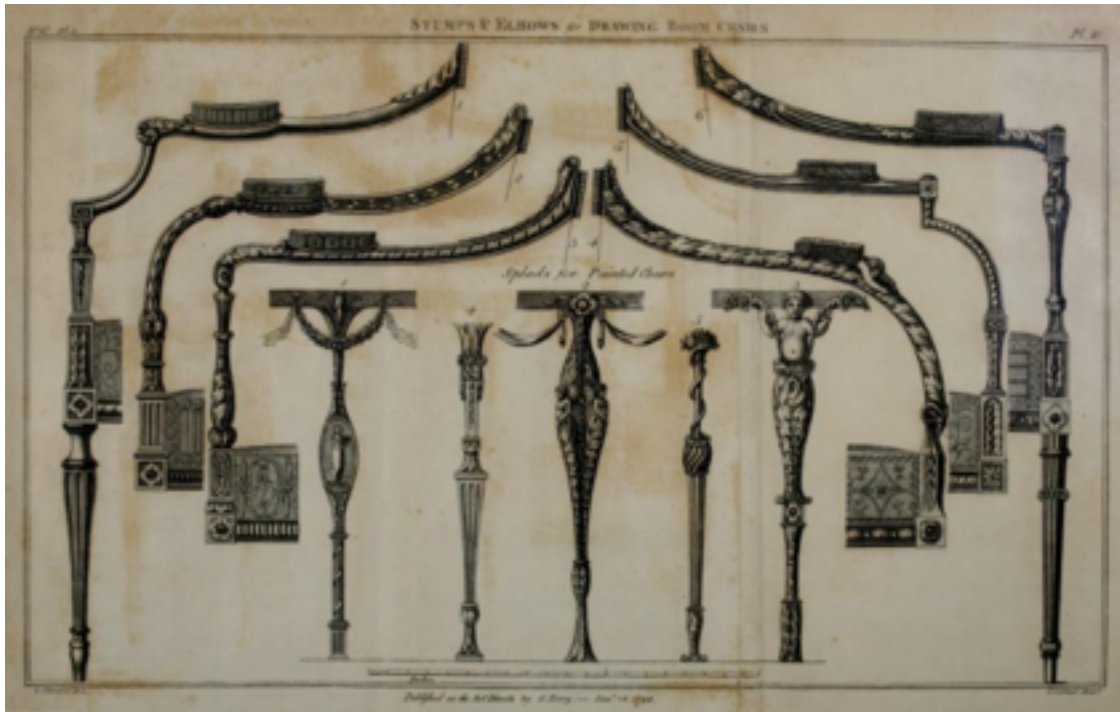


Figure 9: Thomas Sheraton, “Designs for Stumps and Elbows for Drawing Room Chairs,” 1802. Ink on paper.

The Finlays also seem to have been familiar with designs found in *The London Chair Makers and Carvers' Book of Prices*, which was the pervasive vernacular design book for everyday Englishmen. Originally intended to ensure craftsmen a fair wage, the *Book of Prices* shows what was popular in the city during the book's circulation. Plate 1 from the 1808 supplement to the *Book of Prices* features common arms and elbows (fig. 10). Figures 4 and 5 are the most similar to the arms on the “Rose Hill” chair, but without the small bulbous overhang and taller stump. While the supplement to the *Book of Prices* was published after the Finlays completed the “Rose Hill” armchair, these types were established enough to be included.

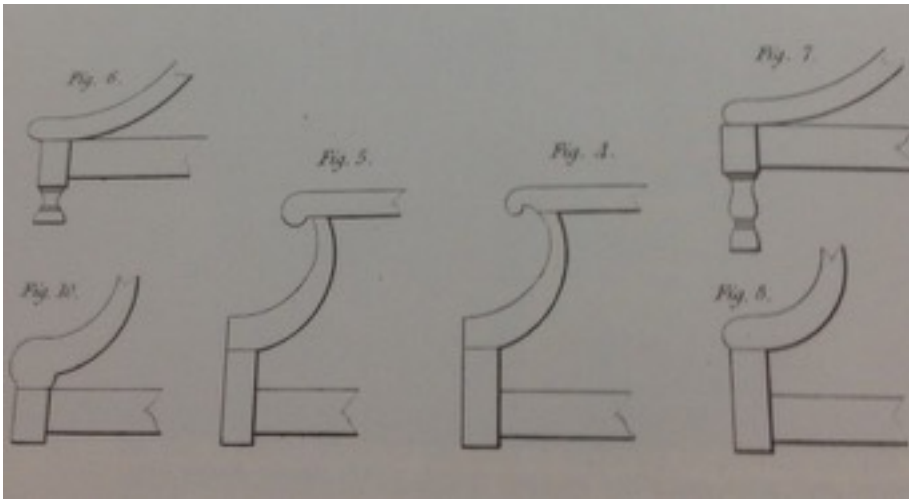


Figure 10: *Supplement to the London Chair Makers' and Carvers' Book of Prices*, Detail of Plate 1, 1808. Ink on paper.

The Finlays used cane seats on both the “Rose Hill” armchair and the Buchanan side chair. The cane is woven directly into the rails, creating a suspended seat with a little give. Cane seats were ideal in the American mid-Atlantic and southern states because they did not trap heat like traditional upholstery and they were seen as more hygienic. Practicality aside, the cane seat was a fashionable alternative employed by both high-style and village chair makers. For instance, George Hepplewhite provided many designs for chairs cane or rush seats in the *Upholsterer's Guide*. A design for a chair in Plate 1 is a good example of how he envisioned the combination of the pierced-splat back and cane seat (fig. 11). Hepplewhite himself advocated that japanned or painted chairs be finished with a cane or rush seat as opposed to regular upholstery.²⁸

²⁸ George Hepplewhite, *The Cabinetmaker and Upholsterer's Guide* (London: I. &J. Taylor, 1794), 2.



Figure 11: George Hepplewhite, Design for a Chair, 1788. Ink on paper.

Finally, we come to the legs, and see that the “Rose Hill” armchair and the Buchanan side chair have the same turned legs. Rather than totally cylindrical legs, the Finlays have opted to create a decorative foot similar in shape to the more fashion-forward spade or term foot. Although not as decorative as Sheraton’s chairs, it is clear that his designs and the Finlay’s chairs share the same aesthetic of a turned leg with a decorative foot (figs. 4 and 5). However, the “Rose Hill” armchair and the Buchanan side chair differ in that the side chair has stretchers. At a purely functional level, stretchers are meant to stabilize a chair. On the other hand, stretchers provide a visual and stylistic link to vernacular English seating furniture. A closer inspection of S.H. Grimm’s print reveals that these chairs, too, have one stretcher in the back and front, and two stretchers on each side. Based on the sturdy construction and materials used for Mr. Buchanan’s side chair,

the stretchers were probably unnecessary in a structural sense and may have been added to conform to a more conservative English taste.

Despite the pierced splats and graceful arms, the visual interest of the Finlays' chairs hinges on the painted decoration. The painted chair aesthetic was imported to Baltimore from England, where both everyday and more formal chairs could be painted. The vernacular chairs we have already discussed were usually painted a solid dark color, while painted motifs were directly applied to the natural wood on elaborate chairs. The Finlays combined the two treatments, with light colors or gilt on top of a black ground, possibly in keeping with Thomas Sheraton's own instructions in the *Drawing Book*. He wrote that the designs for his parlor chairs should be "finished in white and gold, or the ornaments may be japanned...."²⁹ The Finlays mimicked the japanning with black paint and added gilt decorations as Sheraton specified.

Although the Finlays may have used different motifs than Sheraton or Hepplewhite, the brothers' painted decoration follows the overall schemes that the two illustrators put forth. The Finlays replaced carved elements with painted ones. For example, Sheraton's design for a drawing room chair on the left-hand side of Plate 36 from the *Drawing Book* shows a carved, decorative rectangle in the middle of the pierced splat (fig. 3). The Finlays may have adapted this design for the "Rose Hill" armchair, and replaced the carved rectangle with a painted hexagon. Sheraton's design for a parlor chair

²⁹ Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet-Makers and Upholsterer's Drawing-Book in Four Parts*, 3rd rev. ed. (London: T. Bensley, 1802): 387.

underwent a similar translation, in which the carved decoration on the arrow-shaped splats became a painted vine motif on the Buchanan side chair.

In addition, George Hepplewhite's design for a chair probably provided some inspiration as well for the Buchanan chair (fig. 11). In particular, the Finlays' front rails have an overall design very similar to the Hepplewhite's illustration. Like the "Rose Hill" armchair, the knees of Hepplewhite's chair are punctuated by rosettes or paterae and the front rail's central medallion is flanked by two rectangles. The Finlays just substituted the rectangles with a vine motif for the "Rose Hill" armchair, and extended the paterae while foregoing the central medallion on the Buchanan side chair. This combination of English styles was very popular in the Baltimore area in the first half of the 19th century. John and Hugh Finlay's shop was just one of several furniture shops in the Baltimore area that worked in this tradition.³⁰ Known as "fancy" furniture, short for "fanciful," this style was defined by elaborately painted and gilt furniture especially with cane seating. Most middle-class and upper-class Baltimorean households had a variety of "fancy" furniture.³¹

Tables

With a black ground as well as gilt and painted decoration, William Buchanan's card table produced by the Finlays has the same aesthetic as his side chairs (fig. 12). The

³⁰ Gregory Weidman and others, *Classical Maryland, 1815-1845: Fine and Decorative Arts from the Golden Age* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1993), 74.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

kidney-shaped table sits atop four thin, turned legs. Gilt reeding up the leg connects the feet and apron. The apron's decoration is split into three parts, punctuated by gilt paterae. The left and right sections feature a painted armorial trophy in between two gilt sawtooth rectangles. The decoration on the central section is set up in much the same way, except that the armorial trophy is replaced by an miniature architectural painting. Gilt sawtooth decoration sits on the edges of the table's top, which rests upon a fly leg when opened. There is no decoration on the back of the table, as it would have been placed against the wall when not in use. Like the chairs discussed previously, Mr. Buchanan's card table is another example of the Finlay's "fancy" furniture.



Figure 12: John and Hugh Finlay with Francis Guy, Card Table, 1803-1806. Yellow pine with mahogany veneer, maple oak, painted black with polychrome, and gilt and bronze decoration. 30 3/8 x 38 3/4 x 17 3/16 in. Baltimore Museum of Art.

Additionally, the Buchanan card table is also related to English design. For example, it shares some elements with Thomas Sheraton's illustrations for card tables from Plate 11 in his *Drawing Book* (fig. 13). Although the table shapes are different, both the Buchanan card table and Sheraton's tables have similar aprons, legs, and feet. The forward-facing apron on Sheraton's left-hand card table is split into three parts with decorations on the knees. Each part has a central medallion framed by an elongated rectangle. This table's legs are tapered and end with spade feet, which contrasts with the right-hand table's legs; they are elaborately turned and carved with flower-shaped feet. Its apron has a similar decorative structure with one central trophy or design flanked a vine motif which stretches to the table's knees. Clearly, the Buchanan card table takes cues from both of Sheraton's designs. Like the table on the left, the Finlays separated the front apron of their card table into three parts with decorated knees, and each section of the apron has a similar central placed in between rectangles. Sheraton's illustration for a card table on the right-hand side probably guided the execution of the Buchanan card table's turned legs.

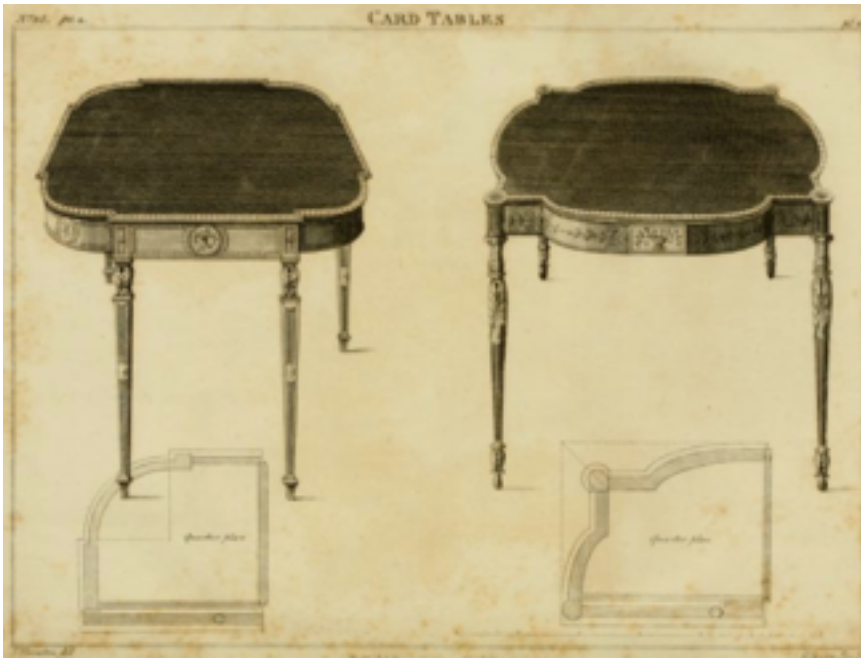


Figure 13: Thomas Sheraton, Designs for Card Tables, 1802. Ink on paper.

Thomas Renshaw and Other Competitors

Fancy furniture was not specific to the Finlay shop nor Baltimore; in fact, “fancy” furniture could be found from Boston to Washington, D.C. One of the Finlays’ competitors, Thomas Renshaw, was listed as a Windsor chair maker in Georgetown before coming to Baltimore in 1811.³² Although Renshaw was active in Baltimore for only five years, his furniture is well-documented because he signed most of his pieces.³³ Not only is Renshaw’s furniture a good indicator of the range of styles in Baltimore, Renshaw’s furniture gives us a glance at what may have been popular in other parts of the

³² Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 76.

³³ Elder and Stokes, 62.

country. One particular settee from his shop is signed by both Renshaw himself and the decorator, John Barnhart (fig.14).³⁴



Figure 14: Thomas Renshaw with John Barnhart, Settee, 1814-1815. Painted maple, tulip polar, walnut, polychrome and gilt decoration, replaced cane seat. 35 3/8 x 75 7/8 x 123 3/8 in. Baltimore Museum of Art.

Created around 1814, the settee shows a different side of painted furniture. Turned legs and stretchers support a caned seat. Rectangular pieces decorated with paint and gilt in a sawtooth motif connect the stretchers to the seat. Arm supports come up from the knees, and the arms connect to the back of the settee about three-fourths the way up the back. Each of the four sets of arrow-shaped splats are punctuated by small polygons in

³⁴ Although Barnhart's signature appears on the settee, Elder and Stokes contend that Dutch painter Cornelius de Beet was responsible for the landscape scenes, while Barnhart was in charge of the overall design scheme.

the center. The large, rectangular tablet extends over the tapered stiles and is outlined by the same sawtooth decoration that is present on the stretchers. Small landscape paintings are evenly spaced on the tablet. Polychrome and gilt decoration covers the whole piece.

Between Renshaw and the Finlay's shop, we see similar design motifs and construction executed in almost opposite colors. The Renshaw settee and the Finlay chairs discussed above both feature sawtooth decoration punctuated by painted scenes on the tablet tops. They also share gilt paterae on the blocks that supports the stay rail. Other similarities include pierced splats, stay rails supported by blocks, cane seats, painted stretchers, and turned legs. The execution of the painted decoration is where Renshaw and the Finlay brothers diverge. While the Finlays have taken an imitation lacquer route with a contrast of black and gilt, Renshaw used white as his ground and then added gilt and darker paint to create designs.

Competition in Baltimore was fierce for furniture makers, but only a few specialized in "fancy" furniture like Thomas Renshaw or the Finlay brothers. Robert Fisher was prolific until 1810 when Renshaw took over his shop. Matthew McColm started his business in 1803, the same year as John and Hugh Finlay. McColm's self-described "fancy and Windsor chair factory" was active into the 1820s. Some of the Finlays' own apprentices, Watson and Etschberger struck out on their own as well. They

had a brief partnership from 1810 until 1814 when John Etschberger left to focus on “fancy” furniture with painter U.B. Stammen.³⁵

Although the Finlays showed a great mastery of English design books, many of their competitors drew from the same resources which were ubiquitous in Baltimore. Booksellers began advertising such publications as early as 1783 and the Library Company of Baltimore, founded in 1795, had a copy of Hepplewhite’s *The Cabinetmaker and Upholsterer’s Guide*. Hugh Finlay was the only Baltimore furniture maker to actually go abroad and acquire some of these publications for himself. On December 9, 1810, the firm published Hugh’s travels in the *Baltimore American*, advertising “a number of Drawings, from furniture in the first houses in Paris and London, which enable them to make the most approved articles in their line...N.B. Any articles not easily procured here may be obtained through the medium of H. Finlay, who will remain in Europe several months.”³⁶

Summary

John and Hugh Finlay’s proficiency in working with contemporary design books and vernacular English furniture embodied the close relationship that Baltimore had with Great Britain, even after the Revolutionary War. The steady flow of goods and immigrants between Baltimore and England created a more conservative market reliant

³⁵ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 76.

³⁶ Ibid, 77.

upon designs from the mother country.³⁷ The Finlays satisfied their clients' need for an English-American style by fusing together the regional aesthetic geared towards "fancy" furniture and English forms. Their work was considered the best in the Baltimore area, and they received a great deal of notice from the city's elite.³⁸ Soon the brothers would collaborate with Frenchman Benjamin Latrobe on furnishing the Madison's White House, an experience that would shift the Finlays towards neoclassicism.

³⁷ Gregory Weidman, "The Neoclassical Style in Philadelphia and the South," in *American Furniture: from the Kaufman Collection*, ed. Michael J. Flanigan (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1986), 104.

³⁸ Elder and Stokes, 62.

NEOCLASSICISM

In 1809, British architect Benjamin Latrobe collaborated with John and Hugh Finlay to create furniture for President Madison's drawing room at the White House (fig. 15). The set, which was once thought to be the first example of archaeologically-informed neoclassical furniture, included 36 chairs, 2 sofas, and 4 settees. The Madison's furniture was largely inspired by Philadelphia's William Waln's set, created by Latrobe and decorator George Bridport in 1808 (fig. 16). Weidman explains that Latrobe was probably inspired by both Thomas Hope and Thomas Sheraton.³⁹ Hope, who lived from 1769 to 1830, was an avid traveler and interior designer. The Dutchman became very passionate about antique ornamentation after concluding a ten year tour around the ancient Mediterranean. The rooms in Hope's townhouse in London, England, were decorated according to the antique fashions of the places he visited. Hope published a volume of his own furniture and interior design sketches entitled *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* in the first decade of the 19th century. His designs differed from his contemporaries, like Thomas Sheraton, because Hope looked to archaeology for inspiration. This breed of archaeologically-influenced neoclassical design was very popular in London in the beginning of the 19th century, but was not widespread in the United States until after 1810s.

³⁹ Gregory Weidman, "The Painted Furniture of John and Hugh Finlay," *The Magazine Antiques*, May 1993, 745.



Figure 15: Benjamin Latrobe, Drawing for President and Mrs. Madison's White House Drawing Room, 1809. 5 13/16 x 5 5/16 in. Ink and water-color on paper. Maryland Historical Society.



Figure 16: Benjamin Latrobe and George Bridport, Side Chair, 1808. 34 1/4 x 20 x 20 in. Gesso, paint, gilt, tulip poplar, oak, silk upholstery. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

This departure from earlier expressions of neoclassical design, which looked mainly to a classical sense of order and architectonic Greco-Roman decorations, was largely due to increased scholarship and interest in ancient civilizations. For example, the discovery of Pompeii provided the world with actual Roman domestic interiors. Intense archaeological investigation under Bonaparte rule from 1801 to 1816 grasped the imagination of Europe and America.⁴⁰ Architect John Soane was particularly taken with the bright colors that the ancient Pompeians used to decorate their homes. He is credited with popularizing “Pompeian” red, rich and vibrant, as well as “Pompeian” yellow, an almost mustard-like color.⁴¹ Another color that became popular during this time was vert antique, a dark green that resembles bronze. This color, which could be painted or applied via faux finish, was used to mimic bronze furniture elements found during 19th-century archaeological excavations. As it did in real life, the actual bronze patina color varied from workshop to workshop, but the idea behind vert antique remained the same.

The Waln set is an absolute explosion of this new neoclassicism. The furniture is elaborately painted and decorated with familiar neoclassical motifs, like acanthus leaves and griffons. Latrobe and Bridport also used “Pompeian” red and yellow on the table’s apron. The set also takes cues from Greco-Roman furniture forms. For example, the Waln side chairs are relatives of the saber-legged klismos chair with a curved back and tablet

⁴⁰ Colin Amery and Brian Curran Jr., *The Lost World of Pompeii* (Los Angeles: J.P. Getty Museum, 2002), 36-42.

⁴¹ Ibid, 158.

crest rail. On the other hand, it appears as though the Madison's drawing room set was less flamboyant. Based on Latrobe's drawings, the side chairs appear to have a similar dramatic and curvaceous form compared to the Waln set, but there is very little decoration. Unfortunately, there is no way to tell how the actual suite was executed since the Madison's drawing room set burned with the White House in 1814.

This new neoclassical expression, which drew from the Greeks and Romans themselves, lent itself well to America after the War of 1812. As a new nation struggling to find an identity, the United States intertwined its stylistic lexicon with that of ancient Greece and Rome. As a bustling port city, Baltimore was a repository for the latest information and tastes. The city's elite were fascinated by reports from local newspapers as well as fiends and family abroad detailing archaeological discoveries. Both sources, and many in between, cemented an interest in all things classical. Influenced by their collaboration with Benjamin Latrobe, the Finlay brothers were happy to participate in this celebration of antiquity. Their work from 1810 to 1820 integrates Baltimore "fancy" furniture with French and English design sources.

A Burst of Color

During this period of their business, the Finlays had a large export business which catered to clients in Western Maryland, Virginia, and other southern states.⁴² In order to keep up with demand, the Finlays employed a large staff of 68 individuals.⁴³ One of their

⁴² Weidman, *Classical Maryland*, 90.

⁴³ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 75.

many customers was Hagerstown, Maryland, merchant Richard Ragan, who purchased a set of a dozen chairs from the Finlays in 1815.⁴⁴ The chairs combine a more conservative taste with new expressions of neoclassicism. A surviving side chair from this suite at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation lends itself to further study because of its unique shape (fig. 17). It defies categorization as it is not quite a Windsor chair, related to the English sources discussed in the previous chapter, or an archaeologically-inspired klismos chair like the ones produced for the Madisons. The most eye-catching feature of the chair is probably the tablet, which features a gilded eagle and wreath motif set inside a red rectangle, outlined by yellow and black bands. The rest of the chair is painted yellow.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 90.



Figure 17: John and Hugh Finlay, Side Chair, 1815. 31 5/8 x 18 x 20 1/4 in. Tulip poplar, maple, and black walnut. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

The stiles run from the bottom of the tablet, through the shallow square caned seat, and morph into the back legs. The front of the stiles are faceted with painted torches filling the voids, while the back legs are turned. A painted horizontal pinecone-topped staff covered with ivy associated with the Greco-Roman Dionysus sits on the stay rail connecting the stiles. The front legs are a combination of turning and tapering, accented with gilt bands. They are turned at the top, tapered in the middle with a painted bellflower motif, and end with tapered feet. A rectangular stretcher decorated with a rinceau motif connects the front legs. Two turned stretchers on the sides of the chair and one turned stretcher in the rear support the structure.

Some elements from the Ragan side chair the Finlays used before. Tablet crest rails are typical of Finlay furniture, seen on the Buchanan and Morris chairs discussed previously, although the Finlays have exaggerated the tablet on the Ragan side chair in comparison to the Buchanan or Morris examples. Additionally, the Buchanan side chair and the Ragan side chair have a decorative front stretcher. Moreover, the Finlays have not departed from the square, caned seat. For all the similarities, it is apparent that the Ragan side chair begins a new stylistic phase for the Finlays. The most noticeable difference between this and other previous chairs is the color scheme. The Finlays' furniture from the first decade of the 1800s has black grounds with gilt decoration. In the 1810s, the Finlays have moved on to include vibrant Pompeian red and yellow.

The Finlays also began to include Greco-Roman iconography, such as the thyrsus on the stay rail or the eagle on the tablet. The eagle, adopted as the symbol of American democracy and French Imperialism under Napoleon Bonaparte, originally was the emblem of the Roman Empire. Additionally, the laurel wreath surrounding the eagle on the tablet represented victory to the Greeks and Romans, and was later embraced by other western countries. These and other classical motifs were popularized by French architects Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine, who published a design book titled *Receuil de Decorations Interiors* in 1812. Their use of archaeological forms and colors became very popular in France, and thus the pair were the source of

inspiration for many furniture makers.⁴⁵ Percier's and Fontaine's good reputation expanded under the patronage of the Bonapartes, which perhaps accounted for their popularity in both Europe and the United States. Hugh Finlay made one of his many trips abroad in 1810, and sent home a selection of English and French designs which may have included some from Percier and Fontaine.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the Finlays were absolutely familiar with the French designers' work due to their relationship with Benjamin Latrobe, and possibly from Hugh Finlay's trip to Europe in 1810.⁴⁷

Based on their decorative choices, the Finlay brothers were most likely looking at Percier's and Fontaine's designs while creating the Ragan side chair. The French designers had a proclivity for using figures, including eagles, in roundels flanked by floral decoration as seen in their publication *Receuil de Decorations Interiors*. Their design for a commode in Plate 40 features a central motif on the apron that fits this description (fig. 18). Although Percier's and Fontaine's decorations are a little more formulaic and rigid than the Finlays', there appears to be a common thread. The Finlays may have taken some inspiration from Percier's and Fontaine's freehand foliage drawings from Plates 16 and 17 while designing the Ragan suite (figs. 19 and 20). The Finlays combine the foliage with the roundels of Percier and Fontaine's drawing for a commode

⁴⁵ Wendy Cooper, *Classical Taste in America: 1800-1840* (New York: Abbeville Press 1993), 26.

⁴⁶ Gregory Weidman, "The Painted Furniture of John and Hugh Finlay": 747.

⁴⁷ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 77.

while maintaining an organic feel with the winding vine and berry motif. The Finlays may also have drawn inspiration for the thyrses from Plates 16 and 17. The French designers render the thyrsus on Plate 17 in a rather stocky manner, like the Finlays have done on the stiles. Additionally, each thyrsus they depict is wrapped in foliage, just as the Finlays' workshop has done.

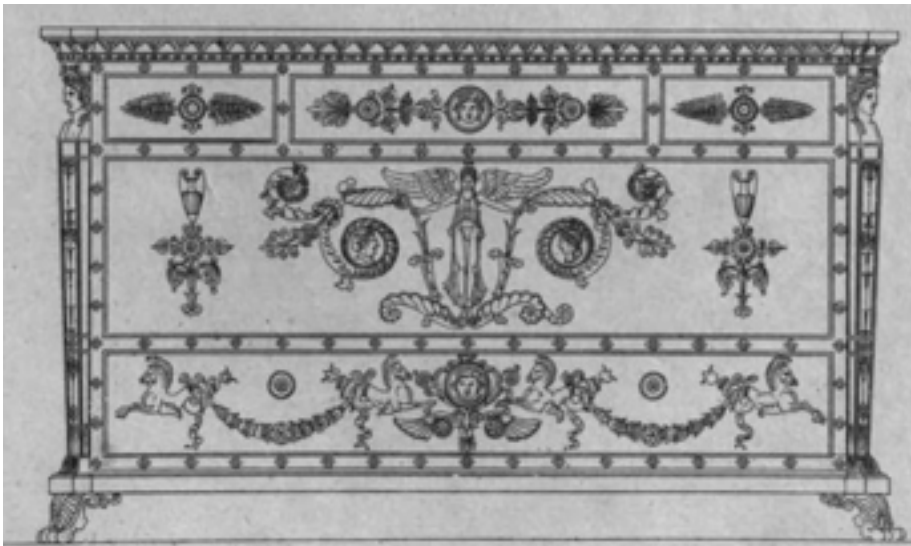


Figure 18: Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine, Design for a Commode, 1812. Ink on paper.

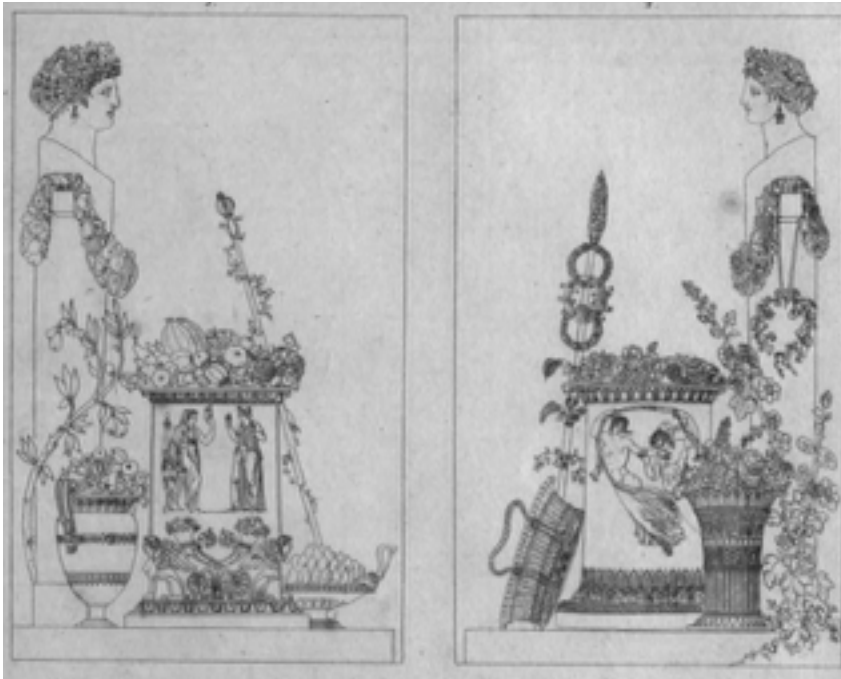


Figure 19: Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine, Detail of Plate 16, 1812. Ink on paper.



Figure 20: Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine, Detail of Plate 17, 1812. Ink on paper.

Percier and Fontaine were not the Finlays' only inspiration. If Hugh Finlay did indeed go abroad as John had advertised, he surely came across *Ackermann's Repository of Arts*. Commonly known as *Ackermann's Repository*, the influential British periodical ran from 1809 through 1829 and covered a myriad of topics. Publisher Rudolph Ackermann included politics, literature, fashion, the arts, architecture, and interior decoration. The furniture plates that he included are invaluable in determining popular styles in the United Kingdom in the 1810s and 1820s. The chairs from the Ragan suite may attribute their form from designs for "Bed Room Chairs" seen in *Ackermann's Repository* Series I Volume II, July through December 1814 (fig. 21).



Figure 21: *Ackermann's Repository of Arts*, Bed Room Chairs, 1814. Ink on paper.

Ackermann's chairs and the Ragan side chair have shallow cane seats, turned members, and stretchers. Although it appears that the chairs included in Ackermann's illustration have curved stiles, the Finlays opted for faceted stiles. In addition, both chairs are brightly painted with decorative gilding over the ring-turnings. As far as painted decoration is concerned, the English chairs are more subdued than the contemporary pieces coming out of the Finlays' shop. Although retaining a conservative English form, the Finlays produced a dynamic suite for Richard Ragan using French decorative motifs and relying upon the Baltimore tradition of painted "fancy" furniture.

Despite the brothers' booming business, the Finlay brothers dissolved their partnership in 1816. John went on to manage the "Pavilion Baths," a classically-inspired club and bathing establishment, while Hugh continued the furniture business.⁴⁸ The shop under Hugh Finlay's direction was retitled "Hugh Finlay and Company" and adopted a more avant-garde aesthetic.⁴⁹ Of the two brothers, Hugh took a greater interest in the trade and in pursuing the most fashionable styles of the time. In this transitional period, the Finlay shop created a set of eleven neoclassical klismos-style chairs for Arunah Shepherdson Abell, founder of the *Baltimore Sun* newspaper (fig. 22).⁵⁰ This suite

⁴⁸ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*: 76

⁴⁹ Nancy Goyne Evans, *Windsor Chair Making in America: From Craft to Consumer* (Lebanon, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2006), 14-15.

⁵⁰ Weidman, "The Painted Furniture of John and Hugh Finlay": 751.

possesses the trademark colorful exuberance we expect from the Finlay shop during this period.



Figure 22: John and Hugh Finlay, Side Chair, 1815 - 1820. Maple, paint, cane seat. The Kaufman Collection.

The yellow side chairs have very antique and gilt decoration. Turned front legs with ring-turnings at the top highlighted in very antique taper down to a blunt point with another very antique ring at the bottom. A painted swag and anthemion surrounds the upper third of the front legs. The curves of the saber back legs are highlighted with gilt and very antique penciling. Roman fasces decorate the front rail and rosettes decorate the forward-facing knees, while winged thunderbolts embellish the sides of the knees. An anthemion and diamond motif sit on the side rails. The stiles swoop from the front of the

square cane seat, and curve up to meet the large concave tablet. Like the back legs, the curvature of the stiles are accented with penciling in black and gilt. A horizontal Roman standard sits on the stay rail, bisected by a laurel wreath and crossed torches. Above, a yellow border matching the frame of the chair encloses the vert antique tablet. Here, two yellow griffons face each other, separated by what appears to be an urn. The mythical beasts' tails terminate in acanthus flowers and leaves. Black, red, light blue, and white details define the tablet's decoration.⁵¹

The Abell suite appears to be a logical evolution from the Ragan suite. The curved tablet remains the same, but the stiles take a more dramatic curve in the Abell side chair. Although Hugh Finlay retained the stay rail and the square cane seat, he made the seat rail thicker on the Abell suite. Turned front legs persist, as was the fashion in Baltimore, while saber legs take over in the rear of the chair.⁵² Hugh Finlay also included painted rosettes, a motif the shop used previously for the Morris set. The Abell suite has more in common with the White House suite that the Finlays created in 1809 than with the Finlay shop's previous work. The Abell suite and Waln suite differ in overall construction and color palette, but the tablets are very much the same. Both Latrobe and Hugh Finlay made use of Plate 56 from Thomas Sheraton's *Drawing Book*, which features the griffon and altar motif (fig. 23).

⁵¹ Peter L. Fodera, Kenneth N. Needleman, and John L. Vitagliano, "The Conservation of a Painted Baltimore Sidechair (ca. 1815) Attributed to John and Hugh Finlay," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 36 (Autumn - Winter 1997), 186.

⁵² Weidman, "The Painted Furniutre of John and Hugh Finlay": 748.



Figure 23: Thomas Sheraton, Design for a Tablet, 1802. Ink on paper.

Hugh Finlay also seems to have looked to Thomas Hope as well as Percier and Fontaine. Hope's klismos chairs are very similar to the Abell set, with sweeping stiles that connect to the rear of the seat with a curved tablet (fig. 24). For another design, Hope instructs his readers that the illustrated decoration should be executed with metal inlay on "a ground of ebony or dyed wood."⁵³ Hugh Finlay seems to have translated Hope's vision from dyed wood to painted wood and from metal inlay to vert antique decoration. The diamond and anthemion motif on the chair's side rails certainly come from Percier and Fontaine. The reclining couch illustrated on Plate 14 from *Recueil des Decorations Interieures* has almost identical decoration on the seat rail (fig. 25). Percier and Fontaine repeat this pattern on Plate 37, a design for wall treatment which also includes an

⁵³ Thomas Hope, *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orne, 1807), 35.

anthemion and swag motif near the top which Hugh Finlay might have adapted for the front legs of the Abell side chair (fig. 26).

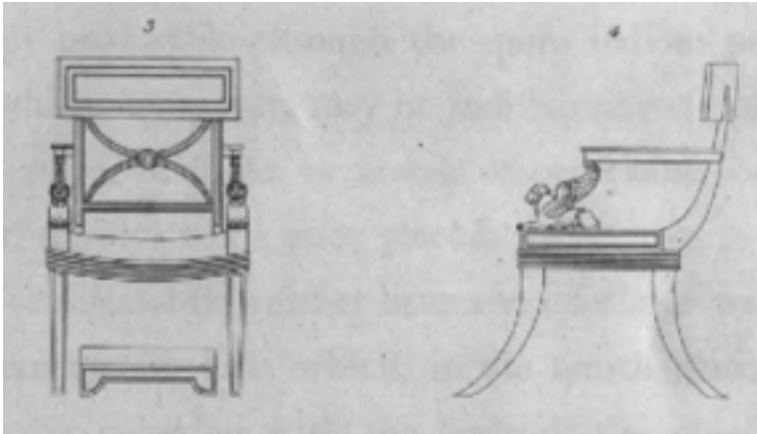


Figure 24: Thomas Hope, Armchairs, 1807. Ink on paper.

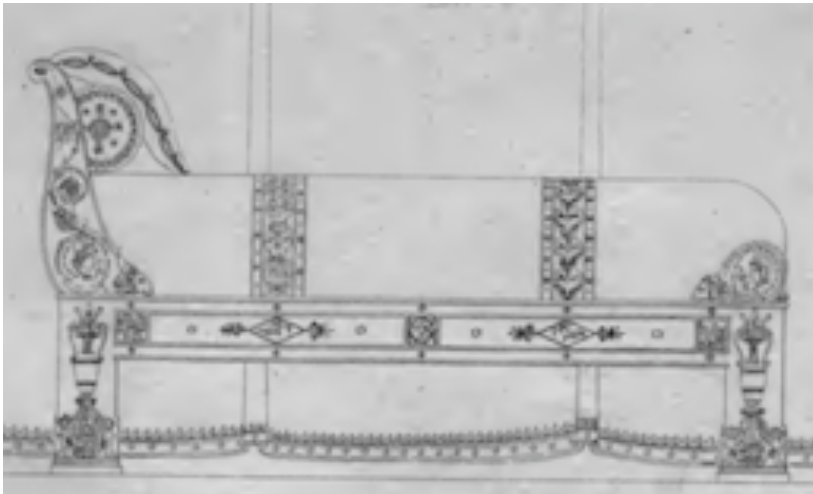


Figure 25: Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine, Reclining Couch, 1812. Ink on paper.

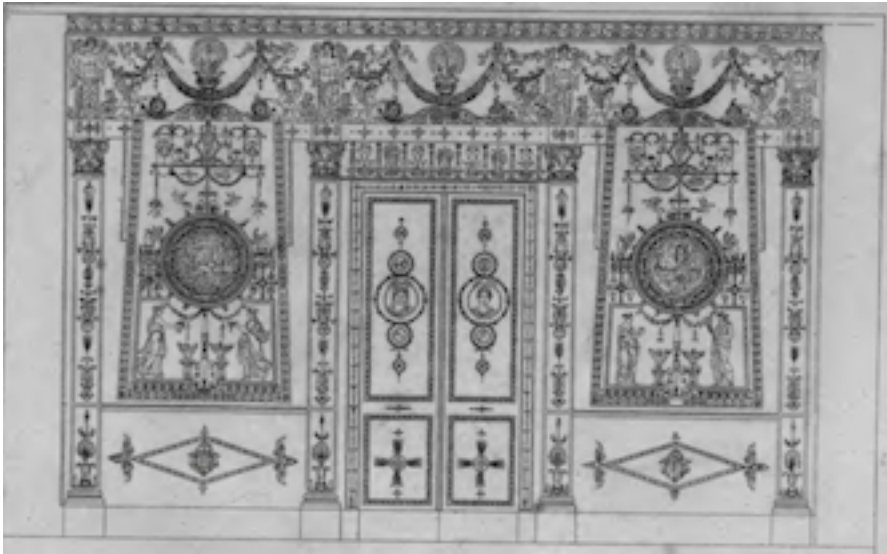


Figure 26: Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine, Wall Design, 1812. Ink on paper.

Additionally, Gregory Weidman points out that Hugh Finlay probably looked to *Recueil des Decorations*' Plate 33 for the design of the winged thunderbolts (fig. 27).⁵⁴ Her observation seems to be spot on, as both the Frenchmen's and the Finlay shop's designs have very similar shapes. As was the case for the Ragan suite, *Ackermann's Repository* seems to be another influence for the Abell chairs. A design for dining and drawing room chairs from Series I Volume XXIV, July through December 1815, includes a klismos-style chair with turned front legs (fig. 28). Although the decoration on the chair is depicted as carved decoration, it does show that turned front legs were popular in England as well as in Baltimore. The connections among *Ackermann's Repository*, the designs of Percier and Fontaine, and the Abell suite means that elite Baltimoreans were attuned to English tastes as well as French ones.

⁵⁴ Gregory Weidman, "The Painted Furniture of John and Hugh Finlay:" 751.



Figure 27: Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine, Design, 1812. Ink on paper.



Figure 28: *Ackermann's Repository of Arts*, Drawing and Dining Room Chairs, 1815. Ink on paper.

A card table created by the Finlay shop around the same time for John W. Stump of Oakington,⁵⁵ a large estate on Maids Island in Northeast Maryland, has a stylistic connection to the Abell suite (fig. 29).⁵⁶ Like the Abell side chair, the Stump card table has a yellow body with vert antique decoration. The square, plain mahogany top is

⁵⁵ Weidman, "The Painted Furniutre of John and Hugh Finlay" 753.

⁵⁶ William B. Cronin, *The Disappearing Islands of the Chesapeake* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 18.

supported by a colorful skirt, which is painted “Pompeian” yellow with a vert antique decoration. Winged thunderbolts sit at either end, while a gilt griffon and altar motif sit inside a vert antique rectangle in the center. The pedestal which supports the table’s top is crafted to look like Roman fasces, with vertical yellow and vert antique stripes forming the many rods and similarly-colored horizontal bands “binding” the whole together. A geometric band at the base of the pedestal marks the beginning of the table’s feet. Four yellow saber-like supports, accented with vert antique linear decoration, arch down to the floor and terminate in lion’s paw feet on small casters. Painted vert antique anthemions adorn the voids between the legs.



Figure 29: John and Hugh Finlay, Card Table, 28 in x 36 in., 1815 - 1820. Mahogany, paint, gold leaf. The Kaufman Collection.

The Stump card table solidifies the hallmarks of the Finlay shop during this period, including the central griffon motif from Thomas Sheraton. In addition, we see the distinctive single anthemion possibly derived from Percier and Fontaine's anthemion and diamond motif that Hugh Finlay used for the Abell side chair. This motif has become a defining feature on Finlay furniture. Gregory Weidman suggests that the base of the card table may have been inspired by Latrobe's card table for the Waln suite (fig. 30).⁵⁷ The connections that Weidman draws between the saber legs on both pieces as well as the table top's construction are convincing. While the Finlay shop did not repurpose the X-base from the Waln card table for the Stump piece, it is a design choice that we see for other Finlay tables.

⁵⁷ Weidman, "The Painted Furniture of John and Hugh Finlay:" 751.



Figure 30: Benjamin Henry Latrobe and George Bridport, Card Table, 29 1/2 x 36 x 17 7/8 in., 1808. Mahogany, tulip poplar, white pine, brass, gilded and painted decoration, iron, cotton velvet. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Grecian Couches

Although the Finlay shop may be best known for cane seating furniture and brightly-painted tables, it did create upholstered furniture with the help of its upholstery department.⁵⁸ The “Grecian” couches are perhaps the most recognizable with their sumptuously-painted bodies and vibrant upholstery. Josiah Bayly, a Maryland politician elected as Attorney General of the state in 1831, purchased a suite of furniture from the Finlay shop between 1819 and 1821 that included one such couch with rosewood graining along with gilt and painted decoration (fig. 31). The “recamier” or reclining couch, based on the Greek “klismos” couch-bed, is asymmetrical.

⁵⁸ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 72.

The half reverse-serpentine back begins from the outside curve of the right arm, slopes upwards above the arm, and then back down to a height almost level with the left arm three-fourths the way across the couch. The sloping back terminates in a volute with an applied brass ornament at the center.⁵⁹ The couch's left arm curls inward towards the upholstered slip seat and connects to the frame supporting the seat. The right arm curls outward away from the body of the couch and terminates at a greater height than the left arm. Gilt rosettes sit in the volutes of both arms, while elongated rosette and foliate motifs adorn the seat rail. The couch sits on four saber legs, which are decorated with foliage and acanthus leaves, and small casters. The red upholstery wraps around the arm scrolls and covers the back.

⁵⁹ The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Online Catalog, "Couch," <http://emuseum.history.org/view/objects/asitem/search@/2/title-asc?t:state:flow=37901969-279b-4661-b1ca-2da794a794fd> (Accessed October 10, 2016).



Figure 31: Hugh Finlay, Grecian Couch, 30 x 16 1/2 x 90 x 79 x 23 7/8 in., 1819-1821. Tulip poplar, webbing, iron, linen, hair, wool, silk, brass. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

The Finlay shop made a number of these couches for various Maryland families, including perhaps James Wilson of Baltimore. Based on stylistic attribution, furniture historian J. Michael Flanigan connects a Grecian couch from the Kaufman Collection to Wilson's suite created by the Finlay shop (fig. 32).⁶⁰ If Flanigan is correct, then the couch was manufactured after the Bayly set in 1825.⁶¹ The Grecian couch from the Kaufman Collection has a back that matches the curvature of the arms, as opposed to extending over the top of it. This small detail makes the Kaufman couch appear to be more refined, and may lend legitimacy to Flanigan's claim. Other than the shape of the back, the

⁶⁰ J. Michael Flanigan, *American Furniture: from the Kaufman Collection*, (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1986), 156.

⁶¹ Gregory Weidman, "The Painted Furniture of John and Hugh Finlay": 753.

Kafuman couch differs from the Bayly couch ever so slightly. Here we see bright yellow upholstery, an upholstered rosette instead of an applied brass ornament on the back, and the overall lighter stained body. However, the two Grecian couches are constructed in the same manner.



Figure 32: John and Hugh Finlay, Grecian Couch, 31 7/8 x 90 1/4 x 24 1/8 in., 1810-1830. Walnut, cherry, paint, gold leaf. Kaufman Collection.

Like the other pieces by Hugh Finlay and Co. discussed so far, the Grecian couches are an amalgam of elements from different sources. It is very likely that Hugh Finlay looked to the designs from Benjamin Latrobe that he and his brother executed in 1809 for the Madison White House (fig. 33).⁶² Hugh Finlay keeps the curled right arm, although a bit less dramatic than Latrobe's drawing, and volute. By just looking at the

⁶² Weidman, "The Painted Furniture of John and Hugh Finlay:" 750.

drawing it is unclear if Latrobe wanted the upholstery to wrap around the arms, but the Bayly and Wilson couches make it clear that Hugh Finlay's shop was quite proficient in upholstering. Two Grecian couches are featured on Plate 28 from Hope's *Household Furniture*, but Number 6 is the most similar to Hugh Finlay and Co.'s Grecian couches (fig. 34). It too has a curled arm that terminates in a volute and a bolster pillow as was common practice. Hope's design also suggests a vine or fauna motif on the arm and knee much like on Latrobe's drawing.

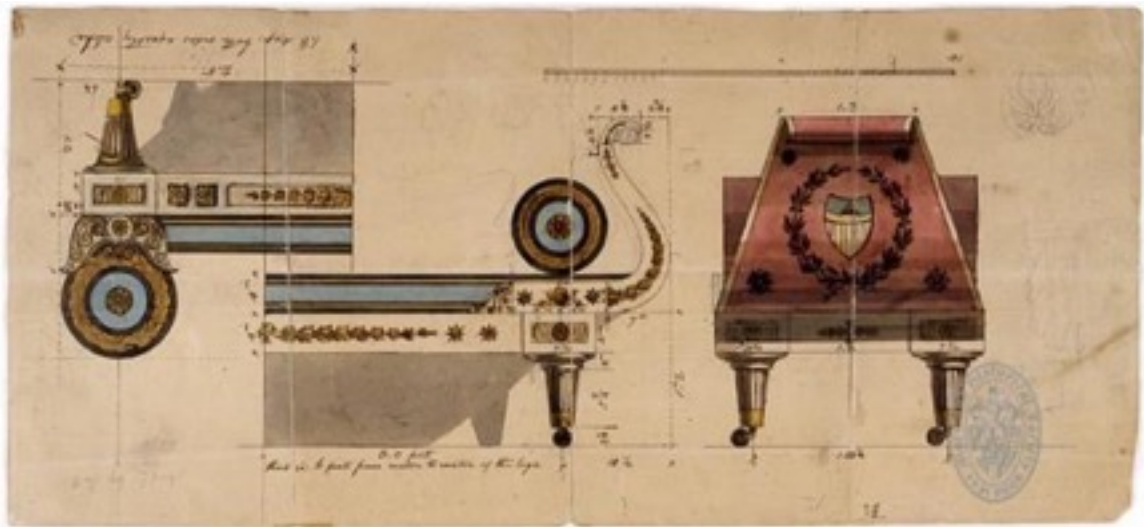


Figure 33: Benjamin Latrobe, Drawing of a Sofa for the President's House, 1809. Watercolor, pen, and ink on paper Maryland Historical Society.



Figure 34: Thomas Hope, Couch, 1807. Ink on paper.

There are convincing similarities between the Bayly and Wilson couches and two couches from *Ackermann's Repository* which suggest that Hugh Finlay was looking to *Ackermann's* for inspiration as well. The “chaise lounge” from Series I, Volume I, January through June 1809, has the same unibody look as the couches coming from Hugh Finlay’s shop (fig. 35). Although the illustration seems to suggest that the decoration on the body would ideally be carved, it is clear that there is an attenuated painted wheat stalk and rosette motif. The second couch is titled “library couch,” published in Series I Volume VI, July through December 1811 (fig. 36). It shares the most characteristics with the Finlay couches, and it is the only design so far that features saber legs on casters and two arms like the Bayly and Wilson couches. The “library couch” has one taller arm and one shorter arm which connect almost seamlessly to the seat rail. The volutes created by the scrolling arms are filled with rosettes, while the seat rail is adored with a central rinceau motif and stylized vines on the knees. The illustration also shows decoration on the cabriole legs. The Bayly and Wilson couches have an almost identical shape except for that they have smooth knees and the lower arms curl inward. The “library couch” is

also the only example to feature defined rosettes in the arm volutes, which further suggests that Hugh Finlay and Co. were well aware of this design even before they created the Grecian couches.

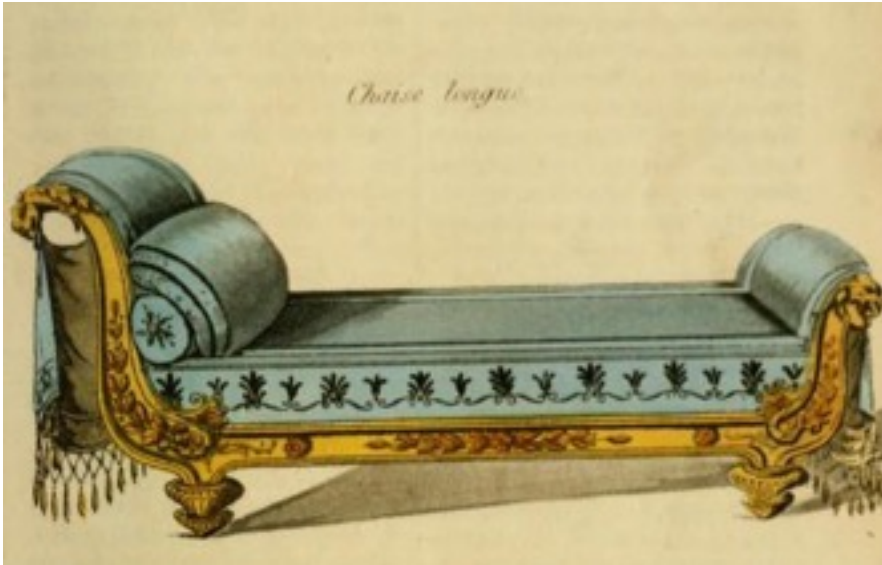


Figure 35: *Ackermann's Repository of Arts*, Chaise Lounge, 1809. Ink on paper.



Figure 36: Ackermann's *Repository of Arts*, Library Couch, 1811. Ink on paper.

The rather frothy foliage on the saber legs from the Bayly and Wilson couches may have derived from Thomas Sheraton's "Specimens of Ornament for the Exercise of Learners," a section from his *Drawing Book* intended to teach decorators how to render different leaves (fig. 37). The *Drawing Book* is the only design source that goes into this much detail about artistic execution. A close-up of the Wilson couch reveals short, pointed leaves, which corresponds with Sheraton's description of the parsley leaf, illustration F (fig. 38).⁶³ To create the repeating stalk and rosette motif along the seat rail, Hugh Finlay certainly looked to design Number 3 on Plate 16 from Percier and Fontaine's *Recueil des Decorations* (fig. 39). Percier and Fontaine's illustration of a rosette bisected by a staff covered in foliage is very closely related to the painted decoration on the Winson and Bayly couches. In addition, the front rail on the armchair

⁶³ Sheraton, *Drawing Book*, 698.

Plate 29 from *Recueil des Decorations* has a similar motif (fig. 29). In this drawing, Percier and Fontaine created a rosette and stylized foliage hybrid that takes a linear path across the front rail. The similarities between Hugh Finlay and Co.'s decoration and Plate 29 are undeniable. Both have a central rosette with leafy foliage on either side ending with an anthemion. Plate 29 was most likely the inspiration for what Gregory Wiedman calls the “elongated anthemion” motif.⁶⁴



Figure 37: Thomas Sheraton, “Specimens of Ornament for the Exercise of Learners,” 1802. Ink on paper.

⁶⁴ Weidman, *Classical Maryland*, 100.



Figure 38: Detail, John and Hugh Finlay, Grecian Couch, 31 7/8 x 90 1/4 x 24 1/8 in., 1810-1830. Walnut, cherry, paint, gold leaf. Kaufman Collection.



Figure 39: Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine, Design Number 3 from Plate 16, 1812. Ink on paper.

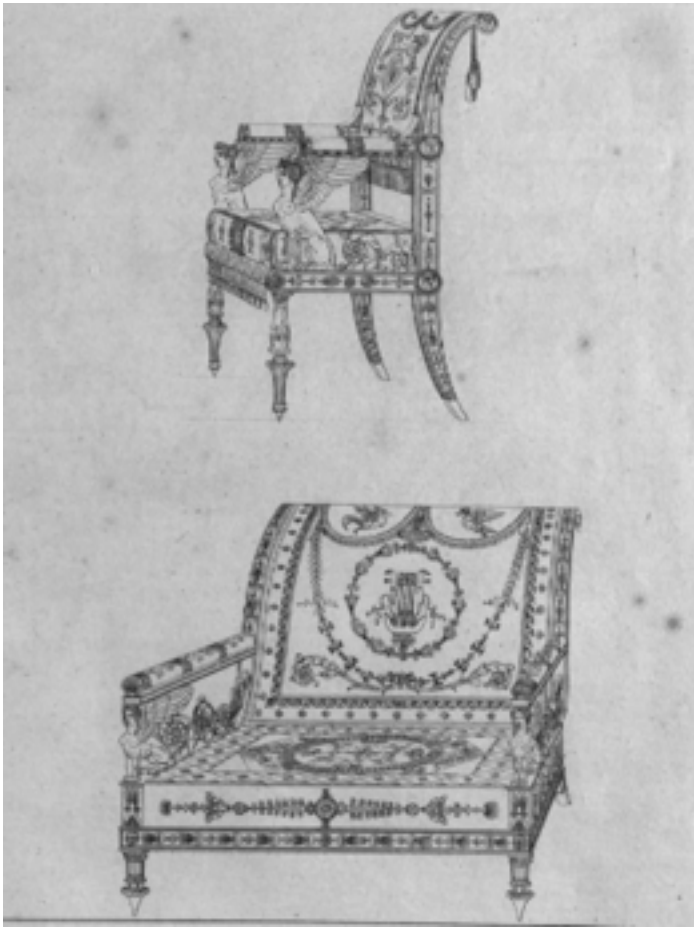


Figure 40: Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine, Design for an Armchair, 1812. Ink on paper.

The Bayly Suite

The pier tables and side chairs from the Bayly suite show a different side of Hugh Finlay and Co. The pier tables have a rectangular top which sits upon a turned pedestal supported by a winged X-base on four turned feet without casters (fig. 41). Like the Grecian couch from the Bayly suite, the tables are also painted to look like rosewood.

The tops are marbled, while the rest of the decoration is gilt.⁶⁵ The front skirts feature two painted scrolls with cornucopias at each end as well as winged thunderbolts and crossed torches in a wreath at the center. Gilt bands accent the turned pedestals, which also feature six brass rosettes. Another gilt band marks the beginning of the base where a gilt anthemion sits in between the voids of the gilt wings, which also have applied brass rosettes. An additional gilt band marks the beginning of the base. The Bayly pier table takes on a new shape, diverging from the cylindrical pedestal on the Stump card table. This is also the first example of a winged X-base from Hugh Finlay and Co. Additionally, the color palette on the Bayly pier table is more subdued with a dark rosewood faux grain and decoration limited to only gilt. The applied brass rosettes are perhaps most important, as Hugh Finlay and Co. relied solely on painted decoration up until this point.

⁶⁵ The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Online Catalog, "Pier Table," <http://emuseum.history.org/view/objects/asitem/search@/2/title-asc?t.state:flow=37901969-279b-4661-b1ca-2da794a794fd> (Accessed December 6, 2016).



Figure 41: Hugh Finlay, Pier Table, 34 1/4. x 37 x 19 in, 1819-1821. Tulip poplar, black walnut, paint, brass, and gilt. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Like the Stump card table, the Bayly pier tables have a central pedestal and X-base, which ultimately comes from Latrobe's Waln set. The painted elements of the pier tables are all staples of Hugh Finlay and Co.'s work. The lone anthemion on the base, which also appears on the Stump card table, originates from Plate 14 of *Recueil des Decorations*, (fig. 25). The central winged thunderbolt and torch motif on the front of the skirt comes from Plate 33 in Pericer and Fontaine's *Recueil des Decorations* and the rinceau with rosettes derives from Thomas Sheraton (figs. 27 and 23). The gilt anthemions on the wings of the X-base are also from Plate 29 in *Recueil des Decorations*, and are also part of the inspiration behind the Bayly Grecian couch. However, instead of painting the rosettes, Hugh Finlay and Co. used brass ornaments. While Hugh Finlay's shop was most known for its proficiency in painted decoration, it did use applied brass

for many pier tables dating from the early 1820s. All of the aforementioned design features are so common in Finlay furniture that have been used to confirm attribution.⁶⁶

The side chairs in the Bayly suite also have a rosewood faux-grain body (fig. 42). These klismos chairs have turned legs and stretchers accented with gilt stringing. The chairs have rolled front seat rails, caned seats, side seat rails which join the stiles at a high elbow. A stay rail sits just above the elbow, and the chairs have tablet tops. The front rail, stay rail, and tablet top all feature the same rinceau and wreath design as the pier tables. The rolled front rail as well as the high elbow which joins the back legs and stiles together are all indicators of the the Finlay's shop last aesthetic phase.⁶⁷ The Bayly suite looks forward to the next stylistic phase of Hugh Finlay and Co., which departed from English-inspired designs and relied heavily on Percier and Fontaine

⁶⁶ Weidman, *Classical Maryland*, 105.

⁶⁷ Weidman, "The Painted Furniture of John and Hugh Finlay": 748.



Figure 42: Hugh Finlay, Side Chairs, 32 x 18 3/4 x 21 3/4 in, 1819-1821. Tulip poplar, white poplar, maple, hickory, paint, and gilt. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Neoclassicism in Baltimore and Beyond

In Baltimore, William Camp was the biggest competitor of Hugh Finlay and Co.

Camp was active in Baltimore from 1801 until his death in 1822.⁶⁸ He was at the fore of neoclassical furniture and created the earliest Grecian furniture set known in Baltimore around 1812.⁶⁹ Camp had the largest factory in the city from 1815 to 1819 and opened a wareroom in 1817. He was known to work in a restrained English style with influences from his home state of Philadelphia. Camp's workshop created a variety of furnishings, from upholstered seating furniture to secretaries. Camp's workshop produced a couch in 1819 which shows that he relied upon carved decorative elements (fig. 43). With a unibody appearance and rosettes in the volutes of the arms, the overall form of the couch is similar to Hugh Finlay and Co.'s creations circa 1820; however William Camp and

⁶⁸ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 74.

⁶⁹ Weidman, *Classical Maryland*, 100.

Hugh Finlay were attracting different clientele. To create his couch, Camp looked exclusively to Thomas Sheraton, as opposed to Hugh Finlay who was interested in French designs. Camp's sumptuous wood and upholstery were the defining elements of pieces coming out of his shop.⁷⁰



Figure 43: William Camp, Couch, 1819. Mahogany with poplar. The Maryland Historical Society.

Due to interstate trade and immigration, Philadelphia was also related stylistically to Baltimore. A painted chair from the Winterthur collection illustrates a common thread between painted furniture from Baltimore and Philadelphia (fig. 44). The chair has saber front legs and back legs, which merge into the seat rail and become the stiles. A stay rail sits in between the styles, which support a scrolled tablet. The seat is upholstered over the rail and leaves the two side rails exposed. The front legs connect to the seat inside the

⁷⁰ Ibid, 110-114.

side rails. The design scheme of this chair and the Abell side chair are very similar. Both painted chairs feature a tablet top with Sheraton's griffon motif, painted decoration on the stay rail, and saber rear legs. However, upholstering over the rail becomes more common in Baltimore in the late 1820s. Given the similarities between the two pieces, it is entirely possible that Hugh Finlay and Co. would have strong competition in nearby states.



Figure 44: Chair, 31 3/5 x 20 x 21 1/2 in, 1815-1825. Cherry, maple, tulip. Winterthur.

Summary

Despite the changes in John and Hugh Finlay's business, the shop reached new heights between 1810 and 1820. After working with Frenchman Benjamin Latrobe, they began to gravitate towards French designs. The Finlays struck a balance between English and French influences, drawing from a myriad of sources to create their stunning

furniture. This period also marks the beginning of patterns in Finlay furniture. Scholars can now recognize pieces from Hugh Finlay and Co. based on decorative elements such as the lone anthemion on table bases or the elongated anthemion and rosette design on their couches. A drive to produce furniture on par with European examples made the shop invaluable. The demand for Finlay furniture was so high that as of 1820, Hugh Finlay and Co. was the largest chair-making factory in the 1820 Census of Manufactures within the state of Maryland.⁷¹ The intense interest in French neoclassicism that the shop showed at the beginning of the 1820s pushed the company away from English design sources, which were taking more cues from Gothic architecture. Hugh Finlay and Co.'s dependence on French sources steered the shop into a final phase from 1820 to 1830.

⁷¹ Evans, *Windsor Chair Making in America: From Craft to Consumer*, 14-15.

1820 TO 1830

Baltimore bounced back very quickly from the recession of 1819-1820. By the mid-1820s, many business that were affected by the economic downturn were prospering.⁷² From the 1820s onward, Baltimore began looking back to England for stylistic inspiration. George Smith's *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture and The Cabinetmaker and Upholsterer's Guide*, published in 1808 and 1828 respectively, dominated furniture design.⁷³ Smith, who was active from 1800 to 1830, was an English cabinetmaker who developed the antique aesthetic set forth by Thomas Hope and other similar designers. Smith's publications also had a hand in spreading Egyptian Revival and Gothic Revival.⁷⁴ The Finlay shop remained committed to a sculptural neoclassical style although the "French Restauration" or late Empire style, defined by large pillars and scrolls, emerged in Baltimore at the end of the 1820.⁷⁵

New Forms and Decoration

The birth of the "center table" marked a shift towards more stationary interior decorating which utilized the center of a room as a focal point. A center table manufactured between 1820 and 1830 now at the Baltimore Museum of Art illustrates

⁷² Weidman, *Classical Maryland*, 100.

⁷³Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 90.

⁷⁴ Richard G. Carrott, *The Egyptian Revival: Its Sources, Monuments, and Meaning, 1808-1858* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 32.

⁷⁵ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 90.

how the Finlay shop accommodated this shift (fig. 45). The center table has a circular top which is supported by a turned pedestal upon a winged x-base with four saber legs on casters. The curve of the saber legs is pretty dramatic and lifts the table higher off of the floor. In comparison to earlier Finlay pieces, furniture produced between 1820 and 1830 is simply bigger than examples from the 1810s.⁷⁶



Figure 45: Hugh Finlay, Center Table, 1820-1830. 29 3/4 x 32 5/8 in. Wood, paint, gilt, plaster, brass. The Baltimore Museum of Art.

However, the overall structure of the table is ultimately derived from Latrobe's Waln card table, and thus corresponds to the Bayly pier tables. Turned pedestals accented with gilt bands and applied brass rosettes support the tops. All of the tables have the X-

⁷⁶ Weidman, *Classical Maryland*, 103.

base with wings, also known as S-scrolled brackets, decorated with the applied rosette and elongated gilt foliage which derives again from Percier and Fontaine.⁷⁷ A Finlay X-base pier table would not be complete without the gilt lone anthemion, inspired by Percier and Fontaine, in the voids created by the legs. Like the Bayly pier tables, this center table also has a gilt band that separates the base from the legs. The decoration on this table shows Hugh Finlay's continuing interest in utilizing French design sources. Between the two, the center table shows a bit more growth and sophistication from Hugh Finlay and Co. The scrolled brackets on the base are more pronounced and closely follow the pattern set forth by Plate 29 of *Receuil de Decorations Interiors*. Gilt winged thunderbolts from Percier and Fontaine appear on the knees, which support additional applied brass rosettes. This implies that Finlay shop is more comfortable working with this new decoration. Instead of turned legs, the center table has saber legs with brass paw feet on casters. These are executed much in the same way as the Grecian couches previously discussed with gilt foliate embellishments probably from Thomas Sheraton (fig. 37). The outside of the saber legs are also home to an anthemion motif most likely from the elongated anthemion pattern found on the front rail of the armchair from Plate 29, in *Receuil de Decorations Interiors*, which was also used for the Grecian couches.

New manners of decorating came along with new forms. One major difference between furniture from Hugh Finlay and Co. from the 1810s and 1820s is the body color. While the 1810s were dominated by bright colors or vibrant faux rosewood graining, the

⁷⁷ Ibid, 105.

1820s almost look back to the Finlays' work from the 1800s. The rosewood graining had become so dark by the 1820s that unless otherwise stated in a bill of sale, one can only speculate if the body is grained or painted black to imitate ebony.⁷⁸ Additionally, scagliola tops became an important feature of center tables. Scagliola is a mixture of ground gypsum and glue applied to a surface and polished to resemble marble. Scagliola table tops were imported by the Baltimore elite from Italy to be used in interior decorating.⁷⁹ Most scagliola table tops used for furnishings in Baltimore included a central painted scene surrounded by a foliate border. This becomes a major design feature for the Finlay shop through the 1830s.

Another new decorative feature involved a shift from hand painting to stenciling. For example, the stenciled polychrome decoration of fruit and foliage on the table's apron was a motif in development starting in 1819 when it was applied to a card table for the Prestwood family.⁸⁰ Based on successive renderings of the motif, this rather unique departure from Hugh Finlay and Co.'s standard rinceau decoration seems to have reached maturity in 1825.⁸¹ The inspiration for the stenciled fruit and foliate frieze may have

⁷⁸ Hampton National Historic Site Online Catalog, "Side Chair," https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/hampton/exb/Furnishings/Empire/HAMP2892_chair.html (Accessed December 6, 2016).

⁷⁹ Weidman, *Classical Maryland*, 103.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 99.

⁸¹ Ibid, 102.

come from the artists who once specialized in miniature landscape paintings found in Baltimore furniture during the 1810s or from “fancy” chair makers working in the 1820s. In this time of change which includes new forms and decorative elements, Hugh Finlay and Co. mostly depended on designs from Percier and Fontaine.

The center table from the Baltimore Museum of Art does not have a specified original owner, but the form and decoration of the circular top is similar to one made for Baltimore’s James Wilson in 1825 (fig. 46). The Wilson center table has a round top supported by a turned pedestal, winged X-base, and saber legs with gilt decoration that precisely matches the center table from the Baltimore Museum of Art. Other similarities include a scagliola top surrounded by a painted foliate design. Although it is unclear if this center table was purchased with an identified suite, its form and decoration exhibit recognizable features from Hugh Finlay and Co. during the 1820s.



Figure 46: John Finlay, Center Table, 1825. 30 3/8 x 33 x 33 in. Wood, brass, gilt, plaster (scagliola). The Brooklyn Museum.

The Ridgley Family

The commission from the Ridgely family that included 14 chairs, a sofa, a pier table, and a center table, makes up a large quantity of documented furniture from the Finlay shop's last stylistic period.⁸² The seat of the Ridgely family was "Hampton," a large Georgian house built in the late 18th century north of Towson.⁸³ The Ridgelys were part of the Baltimore elite since the family's patriarch Captain Charles Ridgely made a large profit from his Northampton ironworks during the Revolutionary War.⁸⁴ The

⁸² Ibid, 109.

⁸³ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 248.

⁸⁴ Hampton National Historic Site Online Catalog, "Captain Charles Ridgely," https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/hampton/exb/people/Captain_Charles_Ridgely/HAMP1144_Captain_Charles_Ridgely.html (Accessed December 6, 2016).

Ridgely fortune increased under Captain Ridgely's nephew Charles Carnan Ridgely and they became one of the wealthiest families in the county. Charles Carnan not only inherited Captain Ridgely's commercial investments, he also had a political career serving as the Governor of Maryland for three terms.⁸⁵ John Ridgely was the third generation of the family to occupy the house, and he and his wife Eliza lived at "Hampton" from 1828 until their deaths in 1867.⁸⁶ The wealth of the Ridgely family dwindled after the death of his father Charlens Carnan. John Ridgely was more interested in improving "Hampton" than running for office or growing the family business.⁸⁷ He and his wife Eliza undertook an ambitious redecorating plan which reflected the changing tastes of the 1830s.⁸⁸ "Hampton" remained in the Ridgely family until 1947 when John Ridgely Jr. sold the home along with some of its furnishings and 43 acres of land to the National Park Service.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Hampton National Historic Site Online Catalog, "Charles Carnan Ridgely," https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/hampton/exb/people/Charles_Carnan_Ridgely/HAMP1189_Charles_Carnan_Ridgely.html (Accessed December 6, 2016).

⁸⁶ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 248.

⁸⁷ Hampton National Historic Site Online Catalog. "John Carnan Ridgely." https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/hampton/exb/people/John_Carnan_Ridgely/HAMP1114_John_C_Ridgely.html (Accessed December 6, 2016).

⁸⁸ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 248.

⁸⁹ Hampton National Historic Site Online Catalog. "John Ridgely, Jr." https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/hampton/exb/people/John_Ridgely_Jr/HAMP2604_John_Ridgely_Jr.html (Accessed December 6, 2016).

Eliza and John Ridgley were familiar with the work of Hugh Finlay and Co.; the firm created a pier table for “Hampton” in 1822 when Governor Charles Carnan Ridgely was the master of the house (fig. 47).⁹⁰ This pier table is almost identical to the ones made for the Bayly family, as both tables have a rectangular tops outlined with gilt stringing with the same rinceau and wreath motif from Percier and Fontaine. Both the Bayly and Ridgley examples have turned pedestals upon winged X-base supports. The major structural difference that the Ridgley table has saber legs with gilt paw feet, while the Bayly table has turned feet that extend from the base. The decoration of the pedestal, base, and legs are identical to the center table from the Baltimore Museum of Art (fig. 45). By 1822, this decorative scheme was synonymous with the work of Hugh Finlay and Co. The marble top, which was unusual for Hugh Finlay and Co. in the 1810s, which became a popular feature for wealthy clients as the 1820s continued.

⁹⁰ Hampton National Historic Site Online Catalog, “Pier Table,” https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/hampton/exb/Furnishings/Empire/HAMP1162_pier_Table.html (Accessed December 6, 2016).



Figure 47: Hugh Finlay and Co., Pier Table, 1822. 78.7 x 107.2 x 53.5 cm. Poplar and other woods. Hampton National Historic Site.

Hugh Finlay and Co. continued to produce furniture for the Baltimore elite through the 1820s. Finlay's company had successfully cornered the market as the most fashionable manufacturer of furniture sets. In the late 1820s, John Finlay returned to coach making. Hugh Finlay's unexpected death in November 1830 prompted John to take over the furniture business. Although Hugh Finlay was at the helm when John Ridgely ordered his suite, John actually finished it in 1832.⁹¹ It is unclear if John Finlay had a major impact on the designs for the Ridgely suite, but the decoration remained rooted in French iconography.

The klismos-inspired side chairs for the Ridgely suite are crafted in very much the same way as the Abell side chairs, and thus share the same design influences (fig. 48).

⁹¹ Weidman, *Classical Maryland*, 109.

The chair has front turned legs accented with gilt penciling and saber back legs outlined in gilt penciling. The seat is upholstered over the rail, which is new for the Finlay shop, so only the side rails are visible. A gilt rectangle accents the chair's elbow while a horizontal palmette sits on the rest of the side rail. The crest rail sits inside arched stiles, which are decorated with a wide gilt strip. A small turned gilt ornament sits at the base of each stile just above the seat rails. The crest rail has a gilt elongated anthemion and rosette motif flanking a central single anthemion, while two swans flanking a floral design make up the gilt decoration on the splat. Like the stiles, the stay rail has one large gilt stripe. The whole suite of furniture is painted black to imitate ebony.⁹²



Figure 48: John Finlay, Side Chair, 1832. 84.1 x 48 x 43.2 cm. White pine, maple and gum. Hampton National Historic Site.

⁹² Hampton National Historic Site Online Catalog, "Side Chair."

Although the overall shape of the chair and the quality of the decoration are common to the Finlay shop, the details are different from previous examples. The design on the crest rail departs from the griffon and altar motif from Thomas Sheraton that Hugh Finlay and Co. used regularly in the 1810s. The composition on the Ridgely side chairs may come from Percier and Fontaine's Plate 29 which features prominently on Finlay tables in the 1820s (fig. 40). It could also have derived from Plate 23 from Thomas Hope's *Household Furniture* (fig. 49). The scroll and anthemion decoration at the top of the upright piano forte in the illustration has a similar composition where a central anthemion is flanked by a subordinate pattern. *Household Furniture* may also have been the source for the swans on the splat. The bottom of the design for a stand from Plate 21 features a design where two swans flank a central stylized flower (fig. 50) While the motif on the Ridgely side chair is more detailed, Thomas Hope seems to be a likely source. The lyre-shaped splat is unusual for Baltimore chairs, which may point to an influence from Duncan Phyfe, based in New York, or from Philadelphia chair makers. This is the same case for the plamette on the seat rail.

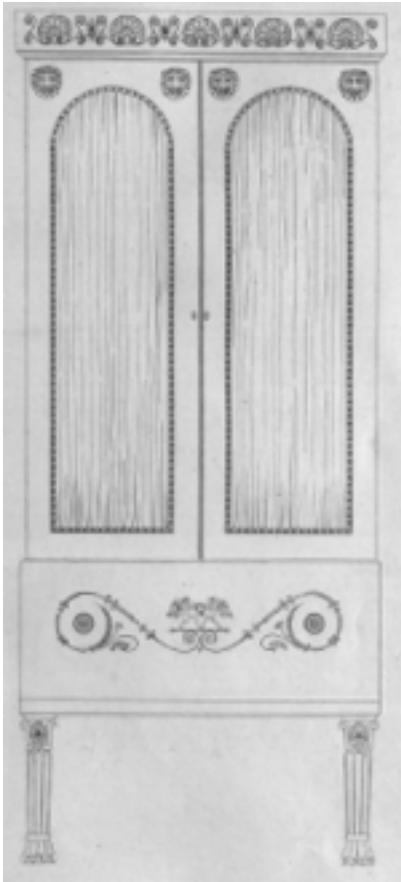


Figure 49: Thomas Hope, Upright Piano Forte, 1807. Ink on paper.



Figure 50: Thomas Hope, Stand of Bronze and Gold, 1807. Ink on paper.

In contrast, the Ridgely center table is less of a deviation from the Finlay's *modus operandi* (fig 51). In keeping with the suite, the center table has a black body and gilt decoration. Like the center table discussed at the beginning of this section, the Ridgely center table has a circular scagliola top, which depicts a pastoral scene complete with ancient ruins and a napping tourist. Surrounding the table's skirt is a painted gilt foliate rinceau motif composed of rosettes, cornucopias, and anthemions. which may have been based on Plate 50 from *Receuil* which depicts an illustration for a bed (fig. 52). Like the motif on the Ridgely center table, Percier and Fontaine's rinceau is compact with small

rosettes and central anthemions. The design for the lotus-shaped gilt pedestal for the Ridgely center table also originates from *Receuil*. Percier and Fontaine's design for a candelabra has a lotus column in which each petal is articulated (fig. 53). The Finlay shop rendered their lotus column in much the same way. A squat X-base lined with gilt penciling supports the table, and the whole stands on four gilt winged paw feet. While the X-base with gilt stringing is a familiar feature of Finlay tables, the enlarged winged paw feet are not. They are most likely based on Percier and Fontaine's *Receuil*. The illustration for a table on Plate 22 has winged lion monopodia for feet (fig. 54). It is reasonable to believe that the Finlay shop modified this design for their purposes.



Figure 51: John Finlay, Center Table, 1832. 75.5 x 90.0 cm. Poplar and other woods, scagliola. Hampton National Historic Site.

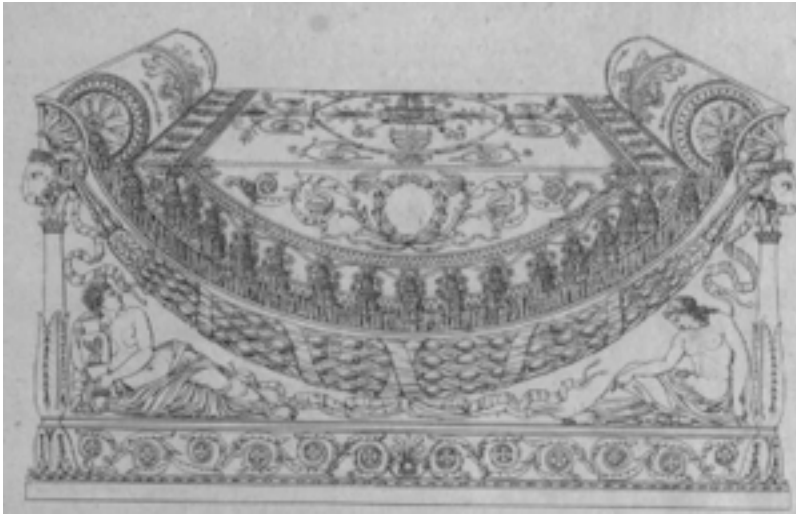


Figure 52: Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine, Design for a Bed, 1812. Ink on paper.

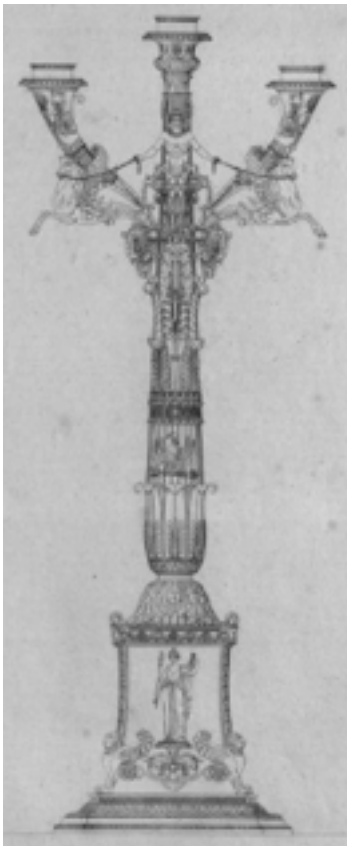


Figure 53: Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine, Design for a Candelabra, 1812. Ink on paper.



Figure 54: Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine, Design for a Table, 1812. Ink on paper.

The Ridgely pier table is very similar to the center table in the suite (fig. 55). The pier table has a black body and gilt decoration. It has a rectangular scagliola top and the apron features the same rinceau motif as the center table, but with thick gilt rectangles at the knees. A solid back with a central mirror and two piers outlined in thick gilt penciling on either side as well as marble columns with ormolu mounts support the top.⁹³ The back legs are turned, while the front legs repeat the winged lion's paws from the center table.

⁹³ Weidman, *Classical Maryland*, 107.



Figure 55: John Finlay, Pier Table, 1832. 94 x 106.8 x 45.7 cm. Poplar and other woods, scagliola. Hampton National Historic Site.

Pier tables were a very popular furniture form in the early 19th century and the overall form of the Ridgely pier table was quite common. The Finlay shop did produce pier tables similar to this one. In 1815, the shop made a colorful pier table as part of a suite of furniture for Baltimore's Alexander Brown (fig. 56) The rectangular mirror in the back and the Egyptianate columns on the front create the same form as the Ridgely pier table, which is more somber.⁹⁴ While the Finlay shop produced tables with marble tops,

⁹⁴ Ibid, 94.

this is the only table to have marble supports. This was a design choice made by the client, who specifically requested the marble pillars.⁹⁵



Figure 56: John and Hugh Finlay, Pier Table, 1815. Poplar and other woods. Hampton National Historic Site. The Maryland Historical Society.

The true highlight of the Ridgely suite is the sofa (fig. 57). With a black body and gilt decorations, the red upholstery makes quite a statement. Two front winged lion's paws and two back turned feet support the sofa's seat rails which contains a slip seat. Two carved swans from the base of the flat upholstered armrests. The arms attach to the stiles via a curled leaf, and the stiles continue up past the crest rail and terminate in palmette finials. Like the other pieces in the Ridgely suite, the lion's paw feet are gilt and the seat

⁹⁵ Ibid, 107.

rail repeats the same rinceau motif from the Ridgely pier table with thick painted gilt rectangles at the knees (fig. 55). The swans and curled leaves that create the arms are also gilt. Each stile has a thinner gilt rectangle that provides visual separation from the arms to the gilt finials. The crest rail is reeded and also gilt.



Figure 56: John Finlay, Sofa, 1832. 98.4 x 207.5 x 50.5 cm. Poplar and other woods, scagliola. Hampton National Historic Site.

The basic square sofa form is just as ubiquitous as the pier table. What truly makes this piece special are the carved swans and finials. Although the swan is an animal associated with classical myths, it became a French symbol as the personal device of Napoleon's wife, Empress Josephine.⁹⁶ However, the Finlay shop executed the swans in

⁹⁶ Hampton National Historic Site Online Catalog. "Sofa." https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/hampton/exb/Furnishings/Empire/HAMP1160_couch.html (Accessed December 6, 2016).

the style of Thomas Hope. Design Number 2 on Plate 40 from his *Household Furniture* shows a swan elbow meant to be used for seating furniture (fig. 58). Like Hope's swan, the swans on the Ridgely sofa face downward and have extended wings to support an arm. The finials for the Ridgely sofa are also from *Household Furniture*. Plate 44 shows a side view of a cradle, which has an anthemion at the top (fig. 59). While the Finlay shop rendered the finial sculpturally, there seems to be a strong resemblance to this design.



Figure 58: Thomas Hope, Swan Elbow, 1807. Ink on paper.

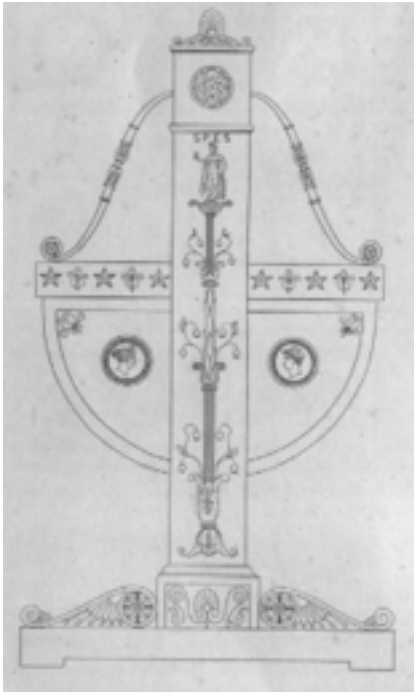


Figure 59: Thomas Hope, Design for a Cradle, 1807. Ink on paper.

Given the repeated motifs from Percier and Fontaine in the Ridgely suite, it is safe to say that there was a heavy French influence. Ridgely was very specific with design instructions and the Finlay shop had the means and reputation to produce this set of Empire furniture. It is of interest to note that the Ridgely family did have a copy of Pierre La Mesangere's *Collection des Mobiles et Objects de Gout*, which indicates an interest in French decorative arts.⁹⁷ While most furniture makers in Baltimore did not draw upon French sources for their designs, the Finlay shop seems to have embraced them alongside Thomas Hope. The Ridgely suite represents the height of style for Finlay furniture making, and was clearly a special order from a very wealthy and influential client.

⁹⁷ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 90.

Transitioning Styles

Although the Finlay shop was the most proficient at creating elaborate suites of furniture, its seating furniture was very similar to other Baltimore examples during this period. Fashionable chairs had decorative turned front legs with plain turned back legs. The large tablet top and rolled front seat rail with an elbow that joined the stiles, seat, and back legs as seen on Finlay chairs were popular elements in the city.⁹⁸ “Wheel-back” chairs had a characteristic large circular elbow.⁹⁹ There was a cacophony of styles in Baltimore during the 1820s, from standard brander-back chairs to painted fancy chairs. New forms of seating furniture made an appearance in the 1830s.¹⁰⁰ Pier tables that had mirrored backs and platform bases were a rare form in Baltimore as the distinctive Baltimore X-base pier table was the popular style.

Baltimore furniture maker Thomas Sewell worked in this typical style. Active in from the 1820s to the 1840s, Sewell advertised “fancy” and Windsor chairs in local newspapers.¹⁰¹ His chairs also have a dark painted body with gilt and polychrome decoration. A wheel-back chair produced by Sewell between 1820 and 1830 has reeded front legs with turned feet and plain turned back legs (fig. 60). His chairs also have a dark painted body with gilt and polychrome decoration. The chair has one plain turned

⁹⁸ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 91

⁹⁹ Ibid, 116.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 91.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

stretcher at the back, turned stretchers with beading on the sides, and one large reeded stretcher between the front legs sitting rather high just below the knees. The front rail is recessed inside the knees, which makes the chair look like it is upholstered over the rail, when in reality it is a slip seat. The side rails have a carved anthemion at the knees and a polychrome foliage motif in the center which is set off by gilt bands. Round elbows adorned with a large anthemion connect the back legs, side rails, and stiles. The turned stiles are decorated with one anthemion each, while the stay rail is carved into two anthemions with a central stylized rosette. The curved tablet is outlined with gilt stringing and sports gilt painted frieze featuring a swan and lyre.



Figure 60: Thomas Sewell, Side Chair, 34 x 19 x 22 in., 1820 -1840. Poplar, and gilt. The Maryland Historical Society.

In comparison to the chair from the Ridgely suite, the Sewell chair seems chunky. The reeded front legs are heavy and the concave side rails add to the mass. The turning and carving are very prominent, almost overshadowing the painted decoration. In addition, the rendering of the swans on tablet's frieze is naive. Sewell's swans have short necks, large bodies, and exaggerated dolphin-like tails. The swans on the Finlay chair are more streamlined and graceful, which complements the overall composition. The Ridgely chair's clean lines created by the back saber legs and sweeping stiles create a sophisticated look fit for a grand manor such as "Hampton." The Finlays were clearly still the premiere furniture manufacturers in Baltimore.

"Fancy" chairs in a style popularized by Lambert Hitchcock's Farmington, Connecticut, factory were exported by many makers to Baltimore and elsewhere.¹⁰² Hitchcock began his career in the 1810s as an apprentice and had a three-story factory with a waterwheel to power machinery by 1825.¹⁰³ A handful of chairs featuring Hitchcock's most recognizable motif, the stenciled gilt fruit and flora decoration, appear in Baltimore. One of these examples sat in the townhouse of Benjamin Cohen and Kitty Etting (fig. 61). Created between 1824 and 1845, the chair has red faux graining and stenciled gilt decoration. This example has turned legs and stretchers as well as a rolled cane seat. The faceted stiles curve, which curve away from the seat, support a concave

¹⁰² Evans, *American Windsor Chairs*, 72.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 442.

stay rail and crest rail. The crest rail is similar to other examples of fancy chairs from New York.¹⁰⁴ The crest rail, stay rail, and seat rail are adorned with stenciled fruit and floral motifs, while the facets have gilt penciling.



Figure 61: Side Chair, 34 7/8 x 17 1/2 x 17 7/8 in., 1825 -1845. Beech, birch, paint, and gilt. The Maryland Historical Society.

Chairs like this could inhabit the same house as Finlay pieces. Benjamin Cohen and Kitty Etting had their chair in one of their private rooms, while more grand furniture was reserved for public rooms. Although chairs such as this were still fashionable,

¹⁰⁴ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 118.

objects made in factories were thought to be of inferior quality.¹⁰⁵ The stenciled gilt fruit and flora decoration also appear on a few Finlay pieces. The center table from the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Prestwood card table are two examples. There was an additional ottoman made in 1825 (fig. 62). The stenciled decoration on the Prestwood card table is the most similar to this floral design because it is confined to one area of the table. The motif on the ottoman and center table fills every space and looks more like a garland. Although these “fancy” chairs and Finlay furniture differed in construction and style, similarities between the two underscores the role of interstate commerce in dispersing styles.



Figure 62: Hugh Finlay, Ottoman, 1825. Poplar and other woods. The Maryland Historical Society.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Summary

The 1820s and early 1830s marked a stylistic shift towards French sources for the Finlay shop. Percier and Fontaine became the main source for designs, while Thomas Hope played a supporting role. *Ackermann's*, a resource that the Finlay shop used in the 1810s, ceased to be useful as its furniture designs reflected a growing interest in Gothic revival. The Finlay shop's development of a rigid decorative formula in the 1820s reflects its dependence on one decorating source. For example, all of the X-base pier tables have scrolled brackets on the base as well as identical gilt bands and applied brass rosettes. Whereas the Finlay's innovative designs may have contributed to their rising success in the 1810s, their fine craftsmanship kept them in business through the 1820s. Although the Finlay shop remained open until 1841, there are no documented examples of the shop's work from the 1830s other than the Ridgely suite.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland*, 76.

CONCLUSION

John Finlay would continue to operate the family's furniture business until his retirement at the age of 60 in 1841.¹⁰⁷ As the prevailing style evolved into the Late Empire phase, characterized by large sculptural pillars and scrolls, the Finlay shop was unable to maintain its command of the luxury painted furniture market. The shop's inability to branch out from new interpretations of neoclassicism may have proved to be its undoing. As the decades passed, the Finlays dissolved into relative obscurity. In reality, John and Hugh Finlay should be heralded as some of the most imaginative furniture makers of the 19th century. The brothers immediately gained the attention of Baltimore's tastemakers and created elaborate suites of furniture for members of the elite. A conservative English style based on the furniture designs of Thomas Sheraton and George Hepplewhite prevailed. In addition, continuing contact with Great Britain meant that indigenous Scottish and English furniture forms were also quite fashionable. From 1803 to around 1810, the Finlay shop created a multitude of furnishings painted black with gilt and polychrome decoration. Popular motifs included armorial and musical trophies, vine and berry patterns, as well as miniature landscapes. In collaboration with painter Francis Guy, the Finlays successfully created handsome suites of furniture for the several influential families.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

When the Finlays collaborated with French architect and designer Benjamin Henry Latrobe, their shop started to reflect a growing French influence. The Finlays added the designs of Napoleon's court decorators, Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine, who represented a growing archaeological awareness in their neoclassical designs. The same could be said for English interior decorator Thomas Hope, whose *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* was also an influential source for the Finlays. After supplying furnishings for President Madisons' drawing room, the Finlay shop began to produce archaeologically-inspired painted furniture for their clients. From 1810 to the first few years of the 1820s, the Finlay shop created neoclassical furniture of all sorts. Motifs such as the winged thunderbolt and stylized anthemions derived from Percier and Fontaine, while the shop looked to Thomas Sheraton for their ubiquitous griffons with urn frieze. In addition, *Ackermann's Repository* became an indicator of English styles, which included Grecian couches and klismos-inspired chairs with turned Roman front legs. As the decade progressed, Hugh Finlay and Co. began to rely heavily on Percier and Fontaine's *Recueil de Decorations Interiors* as a colorful phase in the 1810s shifted into an imposing aesthetic. The side chairs created for the Ragan family at the beginning of the period and the suite made for the Bayly family at the start of the 1820s illustrate an aesthetic evolution for Hugh Finlay and Co. While the shop used a wide range of bright colors and a cacophony of painted decoration at the beginning of the 1810s, Hugh Finlay and Co. adopted a more restrained decorative

scheme by the beginning of the 1820s with a subdued color palette and more compact furniture forms.

The firm entered its last phase in 1820, which is defined by dark massive furnishings. As Hugh Finlay and Co. abandoned Sheraton, Heplewhite, and *Ackermann's*, their furnishings reflected the influence of Percier and Fontaine. However, the shop production did retain some similarities with designs illustrated by Thomas Hope. The Finlay shop developed an almost formulaic approach to making furniture in the 1820s, particularly when it came to tables. Center tables and pier tables alike had barrel-turned pedestals on a winged X-base with the same gilt decoration and applied brass rosette decoration. Any individual features, like the stenciled frieze on the center table from the Baltimore Museum of Art, were restricted to the apron. Hugh Finlay and Co. did have to adjust to new forms such as the center table along with new materials, like scagliola tops.

The Finlay brothers' furniture business was in a constant state of evolution during its 40-year lifetime. Baltimore was a city bombarded by different cultures and artistic expressions. While this thesis outlines a few of the Finlays' influences, it may be impossible to catalog every design feature and its origin. However, this thesis does give the Finlays their own stage and highlights the scope of their work. Few furniture shops were open long enough to experiment in different aesthetic expressions, let alone were they interested in doing so. The Finlays continued to chase after the most fashionable furniture designs on the European continent. In doing so, they created a prodigious body of work that is finally receiving attention.

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