

FROM THE BLACK FOREST TO PHILADELPHIA: GOTTLIEB VOLLMER,
UPHOLSTERER AND CABINETMAKER, 1841-1883

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
History of Decorative Arts

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Date: _____	Fall Semester 2016 George Mason University Fairfax, VA

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1841-1883

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts at George Mason University

by

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Fall Semester 2017
George Mason University
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DEDICATION

To my nephew, Avery, and my niece, Addilyn: you were both born during the three-year long researching and writing process of this thesis, may you both pursue your passions and dreams in the many years to come with the same love and support I am blessed with. All My Love, Auntie A.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of the individuals and institutions that I have encountered during my research for this project who have been invaluable sources of information, and have provided me with support and willingness to exchange ideas and theories. A very special thanks goes out to my advisor, Dr. Oscar P. Fitzgerald. Without your feedback, critique, and encouragement I would probably still be writing my thesis instead of looking into publishing it.

John Child
Gerald Crawford
Elizabeth Holbrook
Leslie and John Koelsch
Nicole Luster
Nancy Staisey

Richard Branyan, *Director of Conservation at Lower Lodge Conservation and Museum Services*
Susannah Carroll, *Curatorial Coordinator at the Franklin Institute*
John A. Courtney, *Furniture Conservator at the Executive Support Facility*
Catharine Dann Roeber, *Curatorial Intern at Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library*
Susan G. Drinan, *Registrar at the Philadelphia History Museum*
Robert Edwards, *Antiques Dealer for www.americandecorativearts.com and Independent Scholar*
Alexandra Kirtley, *the Montgomery-Garvan Associate Curator of American Decorative Arts at the Philadelphia Museum of Art*
Melissa C. Naulin, *Assistant Curator of the White House*
Lucy Peterson, *Administrative Assistant in American Decorative Arts at the Philadelphia Museum of Art*
Jeffrey R. Ray, *Senior Curator at the Philadelphia History Museum*
Shannon Shoemaker, *Intern at the Campbell House Museum*
Carol Smith, *Archivist at the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company*
Page Talbott, *Interim President/CEO at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and Principal at Remer & Talbott*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
Abstract	xvi
Introduction	1
Chapter I: The Upholsterer and the Cabinetmakers	7
The Partner Years, 1843 to 1854	12
G. Vollmer's Place, 1855 to 1882	15
A Family Affair, 1883 to 1893	31
Chapter II: Vollmer Furniture	41
Labels	42
Materials and Finishes	46
Construction and Techniques	54
Decorative Motifs and Techniques	68
What makes Vollmer, Vollmer? The White House Case Study	76
Chapter III: Manufacturing Competition	89
Philadelphia: The Houses of Four Contemporaries	90
Philadelphia: The Furniture of Four Contemporaries	107
Exhibition Furniture at the Centennial	128
Conclusion	152
Author's Note on Appendices 1 and 2	157
Appendix 1: Catalogue of G. Vollmer Furniture, 1854-1883	158
Appendix 2: Catalogue of G. Vollmer & Son Furniture, 1883-1893	188
Appendix 3: Gottlieb Vollmer Business Chronology	198
References	199
Primary Sources	199
Secondary Sources	202

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
Table 1 shows the capital invested and the annual production values enumerated in the Non-population Census Schedule of Industry and Manufacturing for Philadelphia County in 1860, 1870, and 1880 with the calculated return on interest (ROI) for Daniel Pabst, George J. Henkels, Allen & Bro., and Gottlieb Vollmer. Not all data could be found for each cabinetmaker in the censuses for each year, any missing data is indicated by ---. By 1880 Henkels had retired from the industry and thus was not included in the census schedule for that year, indicated by n/a.	103
Table 2 shows number of men, women, and children enumerated in the Non-population Census Schedule of Industry and Manufacturing for Philadelphia County in 1860, 1870, and 1880 employed by Daniel Pabst, George J. Henkels, Allen & Bro., and Gottlieb Vollmer. Not all data could be found for each cabinetmaker for each census year, any missing data is indicated by ---. By 1880 Henkels had retired from the industry, and thus was not included in the census schedule for that year, indicated by n/a.	106

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure 1 (Left) <i>Center Divan from Blue Room Parlor Suite</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, gilded ash and blue brocatelle upholstery, 1860, accession number 1860.413.1, White House Collection, Washington, D.C. (photograph courtesy of the White House Curatorial Department) (Right) <i>Blue Room, White House, Washington, D.C.</i> , Frances Benjamin Johnston, gelatin silver print, ca. 1890, Frances Benjamin Johnston Collection No. 81302, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (image from the Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Online Catalog)	2
Figure 2 (Bottom) Miniature portrait paintings of a young Gottlieb Vollmer and Wilhelmine Gebhardt, collection of Nancy Staisey (Top) black and white portrait photographs of an older Gottlieb Vollmer and Wilhelmine Gebhardt, collection of Nancy Staisey	10
Figure 3 Vollmer's Building, illustrated in <i>Pennsylvania Illustrated</i> , (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1874), 82.....	17
Figure 4 (Left) steam hoisting machine for a warehouse elevator, illustrated in Edward H. Kknight (comp), <i>Knight's Mechanical Dictionary</i> (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, The Riverside Cambridge Press, 1884), 2353, (Right) steam heating apparatus for heating a building, illustrated in Edward H. Knight (comp), <i>Knight's Mechanical Dictionary</i> (Boston : Houghton, Mifflin and Company, The riverside Cambridge Press, 1884), 2352	20
Figure 5 Portrait of Gottlieb Vollmer, illustrated in Scharf and Westcott, <i>History of Philadelphia</i> (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts & Co., 1884), 2333	23
Figure 6 (Left) Advertisement for Sale of Furniture at 610 N Thirty-fifth Street, placed by Thomas Birch & Son Auctioneers, 10th January 1874, <i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i> (Center) Advertisement for Sale of Furniture at 1428 Walnut Street, placed by Thomas Birch & son Auctioneers, 6-9 June 1865, <i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i> (Right) Advertisement for Sale of Furniture at 412 N. Seventh Street, placed by Davis & Harvey Auctioneers, 17-18 April 1866, <i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i>	26
Figure 7 (Left) <i>Library Suite</i> exhibited at the Centennial Exhibition, Gottlieb Vollmer, 1876, illustration from George Titus Ferris, <i>Gems of the Centennial</i> (New York: D. Appleton & Company Publishers, 1877) (Right) <i>Wardrobe</i> from the chamber suite exhibited at the Centennial Exhibition, Gottlieb Vollmer, 1876, illustration from Prof. Walter Smith, "Industrial Arts", in <i>Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition</i> , 3 vols, (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barrie, 1877), 2: 73.....	29
Figure 8 (Left) Advertisement for G. Vollmer & Son warerooms and manufactory, 1885, printed in <i>Gopsill's Philadelphia Directory</i> , image from Fold3.com (Right)	

Advertisement for G. Vollmer & Son warerooms and manufactory, 1886, printed in <i>Gopsill's Philadelphia Directory</i> , image from Fold3.com	37
Figure 9 (Left) <i>Center Table</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, rosewood and marble, ca. 1860, accession number 1990.0079, Winterthur Museum, Wilmington, Delaware, (image from the Winterthur Museum Decorative Arts Photographic Collection), (Right) detail of paper label tacked on the inside apron of the center table in the Winterthur Museum collection (image taken by author)	43
Figure 10 (Left) <i>Nightstand from the John Child Chamber Suite</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, bird's eye maple, ca. 1876, collection of John Child, (image taken by author) (Right) detail of ink stamped label on the underside of the drawer from the nightstand in the collection of John Child (image taken by author).....	44
Figure 11(Left) <i>Desk</i> , G. Vollmer & Son, mahogany, ca. 1885, collection of Nancy Staisey (image taken by author) (Right) detail of stamped lock on top right drawer from the desk in the collection of Nancy Staisey (image taken by author).....	45
Figure 12 (Left) <i>Reception Chair from the Blue Room Parlor Suite</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, gilded walnut, 1860, accession number 1860.579.1, White House Collection, Washington, D.C. (Right) detail of water gilding showing the base wood, walnut, gesso, bole, and gold leaf (images taken by author).....	48
Figure 13 <i>Tête-à-tête</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, gilded cherry and modern silk damask, 1870-1875, accession number 1941-89-1, collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (image taken by author).....	49
Figure 14 Photograph of the main parlor at Bella Vista, published in <i>East Falls: three-hundred years of history</i> (Philadelphia: Lithographic Publishing, 1976), 22.....	50
Figure 15 (Left) <i>Armchair from the Dobson family parlor suite</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, ebonized cherry and modern silk damask, ca. 1875, accession number 1941-89-5, collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image courtesy of the American Decorative Arts Department at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Right) detail of top left knee on the leg of the armchair from the Dobson family parlor suite showing the cherry wood underneath the ebonized surface, image taken by author.....	51
Figure 16 (Left) <i>Piano stool</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, ebonized and gilded hardwood, mid-nineteenth century, collection of Nancy Staisey, image taken by author (Right) detail of scallop shell seat on piano stool in the collection of Nancy Staisey showing the carved and gilded striations of the shell, image taken by author.....	52
Figure 17 (Left) <i>Wardrobe from the John Child chamber suite</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, bird's eye maple, ca. 1876, collection of John Child, image taken by author, (Right) detail of carved and incised ornament on the top corner of the wardrobe door from the John Child chamber suite showing the swirly, eye-like grain of the varnished bird's eye maple, image taken by author	53
Figure 18 (Left) <i>Desk</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, bird's eye maple, ca. 1875, collection of Leslie and John Koelsch, image courtesy of John Koelsch, (Right) detail of the back of the desk in the collection of Leslie and John Koelsch showing panel construction and wooden dowel joints joining the inner side panels of the two cabinets in the base of the desk to the back panel, image courtesy of John Koelsch	55

Figure 19 (Left) detail of dovetail joints on the drawer from the nightstand from the John Child chamber suite (Middle) detail of dovetail joints on the drawer from the chest of drawers with mirror from the John Child chamber suite (Right) detail of dovetail joints from the drawer on the dresser from the John Child chamber suite, images taken by author	56
Figure 20 (Left) <i>Wardrobe from the lady's bedroom chamber suite</i> , attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer, rosewood, 1850-1860, accession number 1941.2.56, Campbell House Museum, St. Louis, Missouri (Right) detail of dovetail joints on the drawer of the wardrobe in the lady's bedroom chamber suite (images taken by author)	56
Figure 21 <i>Sofa from the library suite</i> , attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer, walnut, 1859, White House Collection, Washington, D.C., image courtesy of the White House Curatorial Department.....	58
Figure 22 <i>Sofa from the Blue Room parlor suite</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, gilded ash, 1860, accession number 1860.583.1, White House Collection, Washington, D.C., image taken by author	58
Figure 23 <i>Sofa from the Dobson Family parlor suite</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, ebonized cherry and modern silk damask, ca. 1875, accession number 1941-89-2, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Department	58
Figure 24 (Left) detail of the double wooden rounded dowel joint used to join the arm support in the Library sofa (Right) detail of the corner blocks nailed to either side of the back support for tacking down the upholstery on the seat, images taken by author.....	60
Figure 25 (Left) <i>Reception Chair</i> , attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer, rosewood, ca. 1860, collection of Gerald Crawford, image courtesy of Richard Branyan, (Middle) <i>Reception Chair from the Dobson Family parlor suite</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, ebonized cherry and modern silk damask, ca. 1880, collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Department, (Right) <i>Reception Chair from the John Child chamber suite</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, bird's eye maple, ca. 1876, collection of John Child, image taken by author	61
Figure 26 <i>Extension Table</i> in first floor boardroom, Gottlieb Vollmer, mahogany, 1860, Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image taken by author.....	62
Figure 27 detail of the base of extension table on the first floor of the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company showing the alignment pins in the pedestal of the table, image taken by author	63
Figure 28 details of the underside of the extension table on the first floor of the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company showing the heavy use of screws in its construction, images taken by author.....	63
Figure 29 detail of underside of extension table on the first floor of the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company showing the slide system with dovetail joints that allow the table to extend, image taken by author.....	64
Figure 30 (Left) <i>Center Table from the Green Room parlor suite</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, ebonized cherry, marble, and gilt mounts, 1859, accession number 1860.283.1, White	

house Collection, Washington, D.C. (Middle) detail of center table from the Green Room parlor suite showing the double wooden dowel joint joining the leg to the apron of the table (Right) detail of the center table from the Green Room parlor suite showing the wooden dowel joint connecting the X-stretcher to the center finial at the base of the center table, images taken by author	65
Figure 31 (Left to Right) details of center table legs from the collections of the Winterthur Museum, the parlor and lady's bedroom in the Campbell House Museum, and the Philadelphia History Museum showing that the legs and apron are joined through the base of the top of the knee, images taken by author	66
Figure 32 (Left to Right) details of center table support stretchers from the collections of the Winterthur Museum, the parlor and lady's bedroom in the Campbell House Museum, and the Philadelphia History Museum showing the support stretcher joined to the apron with a dovetail joint, images take by author	67
Figure 33 (Top Left) detail of the gadrooning on the center table from the Winterthur Museum collection (Top Right) detail of the gadrooning on the center table in the parlor from the Campbell House Museum collection (Bottom Left) detail of the gadrooning on the center table in the lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection (Bottom Right) detail of the gadrooning on the center table from the Philadelphia History Museum collection, images taken by author.....	69
Figure 34 (Top Left) detail of the gadrooning on the center table from the Winterthur Museum collection showing a wood divider between the globular heads of the gadrooning on top and the globular heads glued to the apron below (Top Right) detail of the gadrooning on the center table in the parlor from the Campbell House Museum collection showing the globular heads glued to the apron underneath the gadrooning along the edge (Bottom Left) detail of the gadrooning on the center table in the lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection showing the globular heads glued to the apron underneath the gadrooning on the edge (Bottom Right) detail of the gadrooning on the center table from the Philadelphia History Museum collection showing the globular heads glued to the apron underneath the gadrooning on the edge, images taken by author.....	70
Figure 35 (Top Left) detail of applied floral carving on the center table from the Winterthur Museum collection (Top Right) detail of applied floral carving from the center table in the parlor from the Campbell House Museum collection (Bottom Left) detail of applied floral carving on the center table in the lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection (Bottom Right) detail of applied shell carving on the center table from the Philadelphia History Museum collection, images taken by author	71
Figure 36 (Left) detail of the floral decoration on the seat rail of the piano stool in the collection of Nancy Staisey (Right) detail of the floral decoration on the seat rail of the ottoman from the Dobson Family parlor suite in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, images taken by author.....	72
Figure 37 (Left to Right) details of the carved scroll on the knees of the right legs on the center tables from the Winterthur Museum collection, in the parlor and lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection, and from the Philadelphia History Museum collection, images taken by author.....	73

Figure 38 (Top Left) detail of the X-shaped stretcher and center finial on the center table from the Winterthur Museum collection (Top Right) detail of the X-shaped stretcher and center finial on the center table in the parlor from the Campbell House Museum collection (Bottom Left) detail of the X-shaped stretcher and center finial on the center table in the lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection (Bottom Right) detail of the X-shaped stretcher and center finial on the center table from the Philadelphia History Museum collection, images taken by author.....	74
Figure 39 detail of perpendicular gouging on the C-scroll of the stretcher from the center table in the Winterthur Museum collection, image taken by author	75
Figure 40 (Left) <i>Armchair from the library suite</i> , attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer, walnut, 1859, White House collection, Washington, D.C., image take by author, (Right) <i>Sofa from the library suite</i> , attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer, walnut, 1859, White House collection, Washington, D.C., image courtesy of the White house curatorial department	77
Figure 41 Engraving of "the President's Library" printed in <i>Frank Leslie's Magazine</i> , 1866.....	78
Figure 42 (Left) <i>James Buchanan</i> , George Peter Alexander Healy, oil on canvas, 1859, accession number NPG.65.48, National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C. (Right) detail of the library armchair painted in George Healy's portrait of President Buchanan in the National Portrait Gallery, images taken by author.....	79
Figure 43 Armchairs from the library suite and the Blue Room parlor suite, image taken by author	80
Figure 44 (Top) detail of the seat rail on the library suite armchair showing a series of twelve perpendicular gouges (Bottom) detail of seat rail on the Blue Room parlor suite armchair showing a series of fifteen perpendicular gouges, images taken by author.....	81
Figure 45 (Left) detail of perpendicular gouging on the bed from the chamber suite in the lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection (Right) detail of perpendicular gouging on the carved corner of the wardrobe in the gentleman's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection, images taken by author	82
Figure 46 detail of perpendicular gouging on the C-scroll foot on the extension table in the upstairs boardroom from the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company collection, image taken by author	82
Figure 47 (Left) detail of rosette above the knee on the front legs of the library suite armchair (Right) detail of the rosette above the knee on the front legs of the Blue Room parlor suite armchair, images taken by author	83
Figure 48 (Left) details of the club-shaped legs on the armchairs from the library suite and Blue Room parlor suite in the White House collection showing the carved acanthus leaf and scaled decorations (Right) details of the scrolled arm supports on the armchairs from the library suite and the Blue Room parlor suite in the White House collection showing the carved acanthus leaf and scaled decorations, images taken by author	84
Figure 49 (Left) detail of the horizontal scroll on the arm support of the armchair from the library suite in the White House collection (Right) detail of the vertical scroll on the arm support of the armchair in the Blue Room parlor suite from the White House collection, images taken by author.....	85

Figure 50 (Left) detail of scroll on the central cartouche on the footboard of the bed from the chamber suite in the lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection (Right) detail of the scroll on the top right corner decoration of the wardrobe in the gentleman's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection, images taken by author	86
Figure 51 (Left) detail of the scroll on the legs of the extension table in the upstairs boardroom from the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company collection (Right) detail of the scroll on the foot of the extension table in the first floor boardroom from the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company collection, images taken by author .	86
Figure 52 (Left) detail of gadrooning on the crest rail of the sofa from the library suite from the White House collection (Right) detail of the gadrooning from the edge of the center table from the Winterthur Museum collection, images taken by author.....	87
Figure 53 Map of the showing the proximity between the locations of Gottlieb Vollmer's, Daniel Pabst's, Allen & Bro.'s, and George J. Henkels' warerooms in the late 1860s. Key to the left of the map provides the years in which each firm was at that specific address.	92
Figure 54 (Left) Allen's Building at 1209 Chestnut Street, illustration in I.L. Vansant, <i>The Royal Road to Wealth</i> (Philadelphia: Samuel Loag, 1869) (Right) Vollmer's Building at 1108 Chestnut Street, illustrated in <i>Pennsylvania Illustrated</i> (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1874)	94
Figure 55 (Left) <i>Sewing Box</i> , Daniel Pabst, mahogany veneer, star inlay, fitted interior with mirror glass, 1850, collection of Mrs. Joseph C. Schubert, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania (Right) interior view of sewing box showing the paper label, collection of Mrs. Joseph C. Schubert, images from David Hanks and Page Talbott, "Daniel Pabst: Philadelphia Cabinetmaker", <i>Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin</i> , vol. 73, no. 316 (April 1977): 9	108
Figure 56 (Left) <i>Pier Mirror</i> , Allen & Bro., unidentified wood and mirrored glass, ca. 1875-1885, sold at auction December, 2, 2006 by Kamelot Auction House, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Right) detail of ink stenciled label on back of pier mirror, images from new.liveauctioneers.com.....	110
Figure 57 (Left) <i>Oxford Armchair</i> , Allen & Bro., mahogany, ca. 1895, accession number 1974.5868 Decorative Arts Photographic Collection, Visual Resources, Winterthur Library, Wilmington, Delaware (Right) detail of embossed brass patent plate on the Oxford Armchair, images from the Decorative Arts Photographic Collection, Visual Resources, Winterthur Library.....	110
Figure 58 (Left) <i>Desk</i> , George J. Henkels, walnut and bird's eye maple, 1874-1877, Decorative Arts Photographic Collection, Winterthur Library, Wilmington, Delaware (Right) detail of engraved metal plate, images from Winterthur Library, Wintercat	111
Figure 59 Illustration of antique furniture showing the fall front desk, illustration from Samuel Sloan, <i>Homestead Architecture</i> (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott & Co., 1861), 347	112
Figure 60 (Left) <i>Bed</i> , attributed to George J. Henkels, bird's eye maple and rosewood trim, ca. 1875, Asa Packer Mansion, Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, image from Winterthur Library, Wintercat, (Middle) <i>Bed</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, bird's eye maple, ca. 1876,	

collection of John Child, image taken by author, (Right) *Headboard from Bed*, attributed to Daniel Pabst, maple veneer, walnut, yellow poplar, white pine, iron, ca. 1875-1880, accession number 1975-42-1, Philadelphia Museum of Art collection, image courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Curatorial Office 114

Figure 61 (Left) *Table*, attributed to Allen & Bro., walnut with gilding and ebonizing, ca. 1865-1880, accession number 2002-79-1, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Right) detail of carved sphinx on the table, images taken by author 117

Figure 62 (Left) *Cabinet*, attributed to Daniel Pabst, walnut, walnut veneer, burl veneer, maple veneer, yellow poplar, white pine, and glass, ca. 1868-1870, accession number F1938-1-80, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Right) detail of cabinet showing scaling, images from www.philamuseum.org/collections 120

Figure 63 *Fire Screen*, Herter Brothers, gilded wood, painted and gilded wood panels, brocaded silk, embossed paper, ca. 1878-1880, accession number 1997.58, Cleveland Art Museum, Cleveland, Ohio, image from www.clevelandart.org 122

Figure 64 (Left) *Table*, attributed to George J. Henkels, walnut, ca. 1875, Asa Packer Mansion, Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, image from Winterthur Library, Wintercat, (Right) *Tall Case Clock*, case made by Daniel Pabst, oak, mahogany, brass, steel, glass, fabric, 1884, accession number 1988-37-1, Philadelphia Museum of Art collection, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image from www.philamuseum.org 124

Figure 65 (Top Left) detail of the paw foot on tall case clock by Daniel Pabst, image taken by author (Top Right) detail of paw feet on the Egyptian sphinx on the table attributed to Allen & Bro., image taken by author, (Bottom Left) detail of paw foot on the library table attributed to George J. Henkels, image from Winterthur Library, Wintercat, (Bottom Right) detail of paw foot on the piano stool attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer, image taken by author 125

Figure 66 (Left) diploma received by Gottlieb Vollmer for his Centennial chamber suite, Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image taken by author (Right) bronze medal received by Daniel Pabst for his Centennial sideboard, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image from www.philamuseum.org 130

Figure 67 (Left) illustration of cabinet exhibited by Pottier & Stymus at the Centennial Exhibition, from George Titus Ferris, *Gems of the Centennial*, (New York: D. Appleton & Company, Publishers, 1877), 134. (Right) illustration of amaranth bedstead exhibited by Pottier & Stymus at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, from *Harper's Weekly*, (December 2, 1876), 969 132

Figure 68 (Top Left and Right) illustrations of the sideboard and doors exhibited by Allen & Bro. at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, from Prof. Walter Smith, "Industrial arts," in *The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barry, 1876), 2:13. (Bottom Left and Right) illustrations of two cabinets exhibited by Allen & Bro. at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, from George Titus Ferris, *Gems of the Centennial Exhibition*, (New York: D. Appleton & Company, Publishers, 1877), 145-146..... 134

Figure 69 *Washstand*, George J. Henkels, maple and marble, 1876, from the Winterthur Museum Library, Wintercat. Possibly the washstand made as part of the chamber suite

exhibited by George J. Henkels at the Centennial Exhibition as it bears a label reading "made from the wood of the maple tree that grew in Independence Square".	135
Figure 70 <i>Cabinet</i> , Giuseppe Ferrari, walnut, burl veneer, satinwood veneer, walnut veneer, yellow poplar, marble, 1876, accession number 1973-94-2, Philadelphia Museum of Art collection, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image from www.philamuseum.org	138
Figure 71 (Left) detail of the flamed-urn finial in the crest of Giuseppe Ferrari's cabinet exhibited at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, image from www.philamuseum.org (Right) detail of the four flamed-urn finials on the crest of Gottlieb Vollmer's wardrobe exhibited as part of his chamber suite at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, from Prof. Walter Smith, "Industrial Arts" in <i>The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition</i> , 3 vols, (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barry, 1876), 2:73.....	142
Figure 72 (Left) <i>Wardrobe from John Child chamber suite</i> , Gottlieb Vollmer, bird's eye maple, 1876, collection of John Child, image taken by author, (Right) illustration of the wardrobe exhibited by Gottlieb Vollmer as part of his chamber suite at the Centennial Exhibition, from Prof. Walter Smith, "Industrial Arts" in <i>The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition</i> , 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barry, 1876), 2:73.	143
Figure 73 (Left) detail of the central cartouche on the John Child wardrobe, image taken by author, (Right) detail of the central cartouche on the wardrobe from the Centennial wardrobe, from Prof. Walter Smith, "Industrial Arts" in <i>The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition</i> , 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barry, 1876), 2:73.	144
Figure 74 illustration of the bedstead exhibited by Herts & Co. as part of their chamber suite in the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, from Prof. Walter Smith, "Industrial Arts" in <i>The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition</i> , 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barry, 1876), 2:26.	146
Figure 75 <i>Herts & Co. image in Sample Album</i> -pg. 49, Centennial Photographic Co., albumen print, 1876, item number c050490, Centennial Exhibition Collection in the Free Library of Philadelphia, from https://libwww.freelibrary.org/digital/item/c050490	147
Figure 76 (Left) <i>Centennial Souvenir</i> , book, 1876, call number Wr.2953, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania collection, image taken by author. (Right) detail of the inside back cover of the Centennial Souvenir advertising G. Vollmer, image taken by author.	149

ABSTRACT

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George Mason University, 2017

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A massive completely gilt, blue brocatelle-upholstered Louis XVI revival parlor suite was made by Gottlieb Vollmer for the White House Blue Room during President James Buchanan's residency. Outside of this parlor suite little is known about Gottlieb Vollmer, who he was, and how he fit into the 19th-century American furniture industry. Through locating, examining, and identifying furniture made by and attributed to Vollmer, and analyzing federal and cultural documents like censuses, newspaper articles, and personal letters, a more comprehensive knowledge of Vollmer and his furniture is chronicled. By comparing his business and work to that of his contemporaries in Philadelphia and New York, Vollmer is firmly established as one of Philadelphia's most renowned cabinetmakers and upholsterers of the 19th-century. In addition, the analysis of Vollmer's work provides a basis on which future attributions to Vollmer of unidentified furniture can be made, further enhancing the scholarship in 19th-century furniture history.

INTRODUCTION

The City of Philadelphia must always be an object of particular and inexhaustible interest to the student of American institutions.

—Colonel Clayton McMichael, Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians

In 1858 the First Lady of the United States of America, Harriet Lane, was allotted \$20,000 by Congress for the redecoration of the White House during President James Buchanan's administration.¹ For this redecoration, the First Lady commissioned mostly Philadelphia firms, as opposed to firms in New York, the country's leading style center.² One of these Philadelphia-based firms was the upholstery and cabinetmaking business of Gottlieb Vollmer. Vollmer received two major commissions from the First Lady, one between 1858 and 1859, and the other between 1859 and 1860, which together amounted to more than half of her total redecorating budget.³

¹ William Seale, *The President's House: a History* (Washington D.C.: White House Historical Association with the cooperation of the National Geographic Society, 1986), 333; Betty C. Monkman and Bruce White, *The White House: Its Historic Furnishing and First Families* (Washington, D.C., New York: White House Historical Association and Abbeville Press, 2000), 119. Harriet Lane, niece to President James Buchanan, was initially allotted \$8,000, but was appropriated an additional \$12,000 in 1858.

² Monkman and White, *The White House: Its Historic Furnishing and First Families*, 119.

³ Gottlieb Vollmer, copy of the bill of sale to the White House dated January 21, 1859, White House Curatorial File, Washington, D.C.; Gottlieb Vollmer, copy of the bill of sale to the White House dated January 1, 1860, White House Curatorial File, Washington, D.C. The combined total of Gottlieb Vollmer's bills was \$11,781.14, about 59% of the total allotment.



Figure 1 (Left) *Center Divan from Blue Room Parlor Suite*, Gottlieb Vollmer, gilded ash and blue brocatelle upholstery, 1860, accession number 1860.413.1, White House Collection, Washington, D.C. (photograph courtesy of the White House Curatorial Department) **(Right)** *Blue Room, White House, Washington, D.C.*, Frances Benjamin Johnston, gelatin silver print, ca. 1890, Frances Benjamin Johnston Collection No. 81302, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (image from the Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Online Catalog)

While a majority of Vollmer's work for the First Lady dealt with reupholstering existing furniture, a distinctive and monumental entirely gilt Louis XVI revival parlor suite upholstered in bright blue brocatelle was made by Vollmer for the Blue Room as part of the second order Figure 1. It is this suite which he is most widely acknowledged for in current furniture scholarship. Despite having made one of the most recognizable suites of White House furniture today next to nothing is known about Vollmer, his Philadelphia furniture manufactory, or his furniture as a whole. For a city that was not the style center and a cabinetmaker whose name is only commonly recognized in association with the Blue Room suite, what made Harriet Lane take her business to Philadelphia, and who was Vollmer to his Philadelphia contemporaries that made him the First Lady's cabinetmaker of choice to patronize? As a German-immigrant upholsterer and cabinetmaker, Gottlieb Vollmer created a unique body of high quality furniture comparable to that of his

contemporaries, but distinguished by his own interpretations of design and his ability to not only furnish but decorate whole interiors.

While Philadelphia was the nucleus for the generation and dissemination of style in the second half of the 18th century, it relinquished its title as the leading style center to New York by the early 19th century. Despite this concession, Philadelphia cabinetmakers continued to produce furniture of a quality which rivaled their New York competitors.⁴ Philadelphia's continued superiority of furniture quality combined with the fact that both Harriet Lane and President James Buchanan were from Pennsylvania explain why most of her commissions were given to Philadelphia-based companies, such as Vollmer's.

Vollmer's German heritage and training are pertinent to understanding his role in the mid-19th-century American furniture industry. Philadelphia, and Pennsylvania as a whole, had a high concentration of Germans in its overall population in the 18th century. This population continued to grow throughout the 19th century as more people emigrated from Germany, especially the youth in order to avoid conscription into the army.⁵ While not all of these Germans entered the furniture industry in Philadelphia, first- and second-generation Germans did account for a substantial portion of the workforce, and a large handful were skilled and well-known cabinetmakers in their own rights. In Philadelphia furniture industry statistics from 1850 to 1880 compiled by furniture scholar, Page Talbott, Vollmer represented the average Philadelphia cabinetmaker as a first-generation German-immigrant working in a furniture manufactory.

⁴ Elizabeth Page Talbott, "The Philadelphia Furniture Industry from 1850-1880" (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1980), 1, ProQuest (288244206).

⁵ Talbott, "The Philadelphia Furniture Industry from 1850-1880," 2.

In 1850 the number of individuals who made up the furniture workforce was 2,260, of which 724 (or 32.0%) were German-born, second only to native white Americans in terms of the statistics.⁶ The total workforce and the percentage of first-generation Germans steadily increased over the next two decades, although German workers continued to remain second to the native white Americans category. In 1880 the number of people in the furniture industry was 3,698, a 66% increase from 1850.⁷ While the overall percentage of Germans had decreased since 1870, by 1880 they were the largest ethnic fraction within the furniture workforce at 1,484 (or 40.1%).⁸ Vollmer was one of the 724 Germans in the cabinetmaking business in 1850 and one of 1,484 in 1880.

While these numbers represent the ethnic makeup of individuals within the industry, they do not take into account the types of furniture establishments in which they worked. These types were categorized in a study by Bruce Laurie and Mark Schmitz as follows: artisan shops, sweat shops, manufactories, and factories.⁹ Their distinction among work places was determined primarily by size and secondly by presence of powered machinery.¹⁰ Artisan shops consisted of less than six employees and sweat shops of six to 25 employees, while manufactories and factories had a minimum of 25

⁶ Talbott, "The Workers", in "Philadelphia Furniture Industry from 1850-1880," 20-55. The ethnic composition of the Philadelphia furniture industry is mapped out into seven core ethnic groups: blacks, first-generation Irish, second-generation Irish, first-generation German, second-generation German, native white Americans (NWA), and residual (ethnic groups that make up a nominal percentage on their own.)

⁷ Talbott, "The Philadelphia Furniture Industry from 1850-1880," 20.

⁸ Talbott, "Table I-2: Ethnic Composition of the Furniture Workforce", in "Philadelphia Furniture Industry from 1850-1880," 27. In 1870 the number of Germans in the industry was 1,207 (or 40.8%).

⁹ Bruce Laurie and Mark Schmitz, "Manufacture and Productivity: The Making of an Industrial Base," in Theodore Hershberg (ed.), *Toward an Interdisciplinary History of the City: Work, Space, Family and Group Experience in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 32 study included in Talbott, "The Philadelphia Furniture Industry from 1850-1880," 88.

¹⁰ Talbott, "Philadelphia Furniture Industry from 1850-1880," 13.

employees.¹¹ The difference between a manufactory and a factory was machine power.¹² A factory had either steam or water powered machinery, or in some instances both, and a manufactory did not.¹³ Thus, during his lifetime, Vollmer's business was classified as a furniture manufactory, employing more than 25 men and operating without machine power.¹⁴

In their study on manufacturers and productivity Laurie and Schmitz determined the division of workers within the above types of establishments using a slightly different workforce number than the one used by Talbott in the aforementioned composition of ethnic groups in the Philadelphia furniture industry.¹⁵ That said, the percentages of workers to workplace from this study were as follows. For 1850, 18.7% were in artisan shops, 35.6% were in sweat shops, 36.2% were in manufactories, and 9.6% were in factories.¹⁶ At this point, the majority of employees were working in manufactories, like that of Vollmer's. By 1880 these numbers dramatically changed. Only 10.6% were in artisan shops, 20.3% in sweat shops, 24.1% in manufactories, and an overwhelming 44.9% were in factories.¹⁷ These percentages serve as numerical representations of not only growing establishment size based on number of workers, but also the increased use of powered machinery in the furniture industry nearing the end of the century.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ For an in depth discussion of Vollmer's business refer to sections *G. Vollmer's Place, 1855-1882* and *A Family Affair, 1883 to 1893* in "Chapter I: The Upholsterer and the Cabinetmakers."

¹⁵ Talbott, "The Philadelphia Furniture Industry from 1850-1880," 88.

¹⁶ Ibid. A hand-drawn table is included in Talbott's discussion which illustrates the work force numbers used by Laurie and Schmitz in their study on the Philadelphia furniture industry. These are the numbers being recounted here for 1850 and 1880.

¹⁷ Ibid.

When placed within the context of the ethnic composition of the furniture industry and the division of workforce to workplace, Vollmer represented what seems to be the norm of the Philadelphia furniture craftsman. He was a German-immigrant furniture manufactory owner. So then, what distinguished Vollmer from other Philadelphia furniture manufacturers, and how did he uphold Philadelphia's superiority of craftsmanship in comparison to other establishments?

The answers to these questions are found through a thorough analysis of Vollmer's family, firm, and furniture in conjunction with a comparison to those of his fellow Philadelphian contemporaries: Daniel Pabst, Allen & Bro., and George J. Henkels, and an examination of their exhibitions at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. These analyses will reveal that Gottlieb Vollmer was not only producing distinctive work of equal quality and level of craftsmanship to his Philadelphia contemporaries, but that he was a forward thinking businessman who unlike his competitors developed his firm to better compete with their New York rivals by incorporating interior decorating into his business model.

CHAPTER I: THE UPHOLSTERER AND THE CABINETMAKERS

Recognized and renowned for his upholstered and cabinet furniture in the United States, Gottlieb Vollmer arrived in Philadelphia equipped with immeasurable talent acquired from his extensive training in Germany. He was born Johan Friederich Gottlieb Vollmer on September 10, 1816 in Ludwigsburg, Kingdom of Württemberg to Carl and Charlotte Vollmer.¹⁸ As a youth, Vollmer followed his father, who purportedly was a cabinetmaker in Ludwigsburg, into the trade.¹⁹ In 1830, his parents and three younger siblings, Carl Friederich Wilhem Anton, Gottlieb Friederich Anton, and Wilhelmine Johana Friederiche, immigrated to Philadelphia, leaving Vollmer to complete his training, finish his father's trade, and pass his military examinations.²⁰ Although the details of Vollmer's training, as well as his father's shop, are not presently known, a general knowledge is provided through the history of Germany's well-established guild and apprenticeship system.

¹⁸ Vollmer Family Bible, Collection of Nancy Staisey; Col. Clayton McMichael, ed., *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians* (Philadelphia: The North American, 1891), 157; John Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia: 1609 to 1884* (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts & Co., 1884), 2333. A birth certificate for Gottlieb has not been found; however, the date of his birth was recorded in the Vollmer family Bible and is consistent with the date given in all post-mortem publications. In regards to his place of birth, census records from 1850 to 1880 list Germany, Bavaria, Württemberg, and Germany respectively. Several articles published in the last quarter of the nineteenth century state that he was born in the city of Ludwigsburg, listing both the Kingdom of Württemberg and the Kingdom of Bavaria as the country. Geographically, Ludwigsburg is located along the Neckar River at the Northern edge of the Black Forest in the Kingdom of Württemberg.

¹⁹ Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia: 1609 to 1884*, 2333. The exact nature of Carl Vollmer's business in Ludwigsburg is not known.

²⁰ Ibid.

At the time of Vollmer's birth, Germany was divided into 37 principalities and kingdoms, which had only been united—in terms of power and religion—since 1814.²¹ Ludwigsburg is located along the Neckar River on the Northern border of the Black Forest in what was formerly the Kingdom of Württemberg. Traditionally, the guild system controlled the number of Masters and their workmen in each specific guild and made certain that members of other guilds did not perform the same type of work.²² For example, a cabinetmaker made the cabinet, but if it had carved decoration, the cabinet was sent to a wood carver.²³ This ensured the availability of work to each guild Master, and also maintained the high quality of the crafts produced.²⁴ A Master from a specific guild worked with two apprentices and two journeymen.²⁵ Traditionally, a young man became an apprentice at the age of 14 and continued his apprenticeship for three to five years, at which point he became a journeyman.²⁶ Once a journeyman the young made wandered for several years to various cities and countries perfecting his trade until he was 30 years old and ready to become a master himself.²⁷ This timeline in the guild system is an ideal one, not by any means concrete, and was made harder to achieve in the 19th century as the guild system was slowly being torn apart.

At the beginning of the 19th century the guild system was abolished by individual cities and kingdoms in Germany, eventually being phased out by the middle of the

²¹ Hans Ottomeyer, "Germany" in *Herter Brothers: Furniture and Interiors for a Gilded Age* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1994), 22.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ George S. Werner, "Traveling Journeyman in Metternichian South Germany," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 125, No. 3 (Jun. 23, 1981): 194, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/986482>.

²⁷ Ibid.

century.²⁸ This allowed guild Masters to perform the work of other guilds within the same shop, therefore producing the entire cabinet, decoration included, instead of just the cabinet itself. The Kingdom of Württemberg as a whole abolished this system and opened their markets in 1833.²⁹ While the strict rules and regulations of the guild system ended, the tradition of training by means of apprenticeship remained. Thus, in following the ideal timeline of learning a trade, Vollmer presumably began an apprenticeship in his father's shop in 1830 at the age of 14. In following the traditional apprenticeship rules, he was likely an apprentice there until 1833, at which point he became a journeyman. While this presumption fits within the confines of the traditional timeline for apprenticeship, it does not fit within the timeline of Vollmer's family. In 1830, the year Vollmer presumably began an apprenticeship, his entire family, father, mother, and three younger siblings immigrated to Philadelphia leaving Vollmer to finish his father's trade.³⁰ But how could he finish a trade that at the age of 14 he should only be beginning an apprenticeship in? Given that Carl Vollmer ran his own trade shop, as his eldest son Vollmer may have become an apprentice earlier than normal and by 1830 may have already achieved journeyman status. As the son of the master craftsman he was eligible to continue his father's shop.³¹

Sometime between 1832 and 1834, after he was released from his military duties in Germany, Vollmer joined his family in Philadelphia.³² Carl and Charlotte Vollmer had

²⁸ Ottomeyer, "Germany" in *Herter Brothers: Furniture and Interiors for a Gilded Age*, 24.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia: 1609 to 1884*, 2333.

³¹ Werner, "Traveling Journeyman in Metternichian South Germany," 194.

³² Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia: 1609 to 1884*, 2333, list 1832 as the year in which Gottlieb Vollmer immigrated to Philadelphia; McMichael, ed., *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 157, lists

their last child, a daughter, Christina Catharina, in 1833.³³ Less than a year after her birth, Carl Vollmer died, and the responsibility of his mother and younger siblings (ages nine, six, two and one respectively) fell upon the 18-year old Vollmer.³⁴ He managed to support himself and his family by pursuing work as a cabinetmaker; first as a journeyman, later as an upholsterer, and finally as a furniture manufacturer.³⁵



Figure 2 (Bottom) Miniature portrait paintings of a young Gottlieb Vollmer and Wilhelmine Gebhardt, collection of Nancy Staisey **(Top)** black and white portrait photographs of an older Gottlieb Vollmer and Wilhelmine Gebhardt, collection of Nancy Staisey

1834 as the year in which Vollmer immigrated to Philadelphia. The exact year of his arrival has not been found in any type of immigration or naturalization document, and it is not consistent in his limited biographical articles.

³³ Vollmer Family Bible, Collection of Nancy Staisey.

³⁴ Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia: 1609 to 1884*, 2333.

³⁵ McMichael, ed., *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 157. References Gottlieb Vollmer working as a journeyman upon his immigration to Philadelphia.

During his first few years in Philadelphia, Vollmer met Wilhelmine Fredericka Gebhardt, a German immigrant from the Kingdom of Bavaria.³⁶ On April 6, 1840, Gottlieb Vollmer and Wilhelmine Gebhardt, pictured Figure 2 were married in Philadelphia.³⁷ In the following year, 1841, they had their first child, a son, Carl “Charles” Frederick Vollmer on November 12th.³⁸ In the next 11 years they had five more children, two sons and three daughters: Frederick Gebhardt (November 15, 1843), Rudolph (April 25, 1846), Emelia “Emilie”(July 17, 1848), Wilhelmine “Mina” (May 19, 1850), and Louisa Fredericka (June 24, 1852).³⁹ Of their six children, all but one, Mina, lived into their adult years. Mina died at four years, four months, and eleven days old succumbing to typhoid fever.⁴⁰ Although all three of Vollmer’s sons worked as upholsterers in the family business, only Charles F. remained with the business throughout its entirety. Frederick died prematurely in 1876 of phthisis at the age of 33 while in Paris; and Rudolph, according to family tradition, was disowned by Vollmer after he married his first wife, Louise, while abroad in Germany.⁴¹

³⁶ “United States Census, 1860,” index and images, *Fold3* (<http://www.fold3.com/image/#85874855> :accessed 29 November 2012), Wilhelmine Vollmer 1860; “United States Census, 1870,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1/MZR5-HSQ> :accessed 19 April 2013), Wilhelmine Vollmer, Pennsylvania, United States; citing p. 23, family, NARA microfilm publication M593, FHL microfilm 552936.

³⁷ “Pennsylvania, Marriages, 1790-1940,” index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1/V26B-F3C> :accessed 17 February 2013), Johann Gottlieb Vollmer and Wihelmine Gebhard, 1841.

³⁸ Vollmer Family Bible, Collection of Nancy Staisey.

³⁹ Vollmer Family Bible, Collection of Nancy Staisey.

⁴⁰ Vollmer Family Bible, Collection of Nancy Staisey, recorded the exact age of Mina when she died. “Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803-1915,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1/JK9D-M97> :accessed 13 Jul 2013), Mina Volmer, 1854, recorded the cause of death for Mina.

⁴¹ “Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803-1915,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1?JK7S-FJB> :accessed 13 July 2013), Frederick Gebhardt Vollmer, 1876. Phthisis is an old term for tuberculosis and was the term listed as the cause of death on the New York State Health Department certificate giving permission to remove Frederick’s remains to Philadelphia.

It was while they started a family of their own that Vollmer established himself in the Philadelphia furniture industry. While he purportedly began his business in 1841, it was not until 1842 that he was first listed in *A. M'Elroy's Philadelphia Directory* as an upholsterer at rear 11 Prune Street.⁴² In his early years he was in partnerships with two men—David Klauder and H. Montre—but by the mid-1850s Vollmer owned a business of his own, a business which was continued by his son Charles F. after Vollmer's death in 1883.

The Partner Years, 1843 to 1854

During the first 12 years or so as an upholsterer Gottlieb Vollmer shared a business moniker with David Klauder and H. Montre in two separate companies: Vollmer & Klauder (1843 to 1844), and Vollmer & Montre (1844 to 1854). While both firms were listed as 'upholsterers' in the Philadelphia City Directory, Vollmer, Klauder, and Montre were listed individually as: 'upholsterer,' 'cabinetmaker,' and 'cabinetmaker' respectively.⁴³ Although the specifics of each individual's role within the firm are not known, the difference in occupations quite possibly indicates a distinction between each man's role in the two firms. In other words, Vollmer may have primarily upholstered the furniture, while both Klauder and Montre constructed the furniture.

Elizabeth Holbrook, e-mail message to author, October 19, 2012. Holbrook, a descendent of Rudolph Vollmer, described the relationship between Gottlieb Vollmer and his son Rudolph.

⁴²McMichael, ed., *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 157, lists 1841 as the year Vollmer started his firm. "A. M'Elroy's Philadelphia Directory for the year 1842", database and images, *Fold3* (www.fold3.com/image/#110927834 : accessed 27 November 2012), Gottlieb Vollmer, upholsterer, 275. This is the first listing of Vollmer in the Philadelphia City Directory.

⁴³ For the years 1842 through 1848 and 1851 through 1854 see, "A. M'Elroy's Philadelphia Directory," database and images, *Fold3.com*; for the years 1849 and 1850 see, "Bywater's Philadelphia Business Directory and City Guide," database and images, *Fold3.com*.

Vollmer and Klauder were approximately the same age and both emigrated from Germany; only Klauder came from Hesse-Darmstadt just north of the Kingdom of Württemberg.⁴⁴ Their firm Vollmer & Klauder was located at 3 Assembly Building in Philadelphia.⁴⁵ After only a year or two they parted ways and Klauder, who remained at 3 Assembly Building before moving to 286 Chestnut Street, formed a business with Michael Deginther called, Klauder, Deginther & Co. between 1845 and 1846.⁴⁶ Their company was another one of the Philadelphia-based firms commissioned by Harriet Lane to supply furniture to the White House, a walnut table. This commission was one of the last seen by Klauder as he left the firm sometime between 1858 and 1859, and moved out to Montgomery County where he was a farmer until his death in 1901.⁴⁷

Unlike Vollmer's business with Klauder, more is known about the firm Vollmer & Montre, which existed for the better part of a decade. In 1844, Vollmer was listed as working with both Klauder and Montre, very clearly a transitional period between

⁴⁴ "United States Census, 1880," index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/MWNL-FV2>; accessed 13 July 2013), David Klauder 1880.

⁴⁵ "A. M'Elroy's Philadelphia Directory for the year 1843," database and images, *Fold3.com* (www.fold3.com/image/#110932141; accessed 28 November 2012), Vollmer & Klauder, upholsterers, 289.

⁴⁶ Klauder, Deginther & Co. was first listed in the 1846 Philadelphia City Directory. "A. M'Elroy's Philadelphia Directory for the year 1846," database and images, *Fold3.com* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/240/110976332>; accessed 13 July 2013), Klauder, Deginther & Co., upholsterers, 193.

⁴⁷ "A. M'Elroy's Philadelphia Directory for the year 1858," database and images, *Fold3.com* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/148585327>; accessed 13 July 2013), Klauder, Deginther & Co., upholsterers, 367, is the last listing for Klauder, Deginther & Co. "United States Census, 1860," index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/MXR8-RC4>; accessed 13 July 2013), David Klauder 1860, lists Klauder's occupation as a farmer. *FindAGrave.com* digital images, (www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=85141222; accessed 13 July 2013), photograph by mdr, gravestone for David Klauder (1815-1901), West Laurel Hill Cemetery, Bala Cynwood, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, Find A Grave Memorial #85141222, provides a date of death for Klauder.

firms.⁴⁸ However, by 1845 Vollmer was only associated with H. Montre, a man who remains an enigma.⁴⁹ Their establishment was on the corner of S.E. 11th and Chestnut Streets, not too far from Philadelphia's City Hall.⁵⁰ It was here that Vollmer & Montre produced both upholstered and cabinet furniture, and where Vollmer remained and expanded the company when it became his between 1854 and 1855.

Within the first year of their partnership, in 1845, Vollmer & Montre entered a suite of parlor furniture in the Exhibition of American Manufacturers at the Franklin Institute, which "attracted much attention, both for its workmanship and good taste. [And] the Committee deem[ed] it worthy of the First Premium."⁵¹ Unfortunately, the suite is not known to have survived in person or in print; however it consisted of sofas, parlor chairs, arm chairs, ottomans, and a center table.⁵² The suite listed in the Franklin Institute's Exhibition of American Manufacturers along with an oak étagère and a walnut serving stand listed on a bill of sale in the craftsman's file at the Philadelphia Museum of Art are the only references to Vollmer & Montre furniture known.⁵³ While no visuals were provided in either the bill of sale or the notes from the 1845 Exhibition of Manufacturers at the Franklin Institute, these two surviving references indicate that

⁴⁸ "A. M'Elroy's Philadelphia Directory for the year 1844," database and images, *Fold3.com* (www.fold3.com/image/#110948956 :accessed 28 November 2012), Vollmer & Klauder and Vollmer & Moutre, upholsterers, 324.

⁴⁹ H. Montre has not been found in any census, birth, marriage, or death records. In the 1855 Philadelphia City Directory a Xavier Montre is listed as working at Gottlieb Vollmer's establishment on S.E. 11th and Chestnut, and also living at the same address as H. Montre, 4 N 11th. Given that Xavier and H. have the same surname and reside at the same address, it is probably that they are related.

⁵⁰ "A. M'Elroy's Philadelphia Directory for the year 1845," database and images, *Fold3.com* (www.fold3.com/image/#110972091 :accessed 28 November 2012), Vollmer & Montre, upholsterers, 359.

⁵¹ Susannah Carroll, e-mail message to the author, October 25, 2012.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Vollmer & Montre, bill of sale, Philadelphia Museum of Art Curatorial File, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

although the firm was listed as ‘upholsterers’ Vollmer & Montre produced both upholstery and cabinet work.

In 1854, H. Montre no longer worked at S.E. 11th and Chestnut Streets, and likely retired, selling his share to Vollmer. H. Montre only remained in the Philadelphia City Directory for one more year listed only with a home address of 4 N 11th Street and no occupation. A probable relative of his, Xavier Montre, was listed at the same home address and worked as a cabinetmaker for Vollmer’s new firm, G. Vollmer.⁵⁴ This was the only year, except for 1862, that Xavier worked for Vollmer.⁵⁵ Most of his time from 1856 to 1876 was spent switching between careers, from cabinetmaker to grocer back to cabinetmaker and finally to billiards and bartender, which was his occupation at the time of his death in 1876.⁵⁶

G. Vollmer’s Place, 1855 to 1882

The year 1855 marked the start of Gottlieb Vollmer’s very own upholstery and cabinet furniture business. No longer a partnered firm, G. Vollmer was run by Vollmer for more than a quarter of a century, and became one of the most well known furniture manufactories in Philadelphia. He kept the space that was formerly occupied by Vollmer & Montre on S.E. 11th and Chestnut Streets, until 1858, at which time the city was re-

⁵⁴ “A. M’Elroy’s Philadelphia Directory for the year 1855,” database and images, *Fold3.com* (www.fold3.com/image/#1109443291 :accessed 13 July 2013), Xavier Montre, cabinetmaker, 392.

⁵⁵ “A. M’Elroy’s Philadelphia Directory for the year 1862,” database and images, *Fold3.com* (www.fold3.com/image/#110972091 :accessed 13 July 2013), Xavier Montre, cabinetmaker, 359.

⁵⁶ “A. M’Elroy’s Philadelphia City Directory,” database and images, *Fold3.com*, lists occupation for Xavier Montre 1856 to 1868. “Gopsill’s Philadelphia City Directory,” database and images, *Fold3.com*, lists occupation for Xavier Montre 1868 to 1875. “Pennsylvania, Philadelphia city Death Certificates, 1803-1915,” database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/JNFF-49W> : accessed 9 December 2014), Xavier Montre, 13 July 1876; citing, Philadelphia City Archives and Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; FHL microfilm 2,027, 461.

zoned and the premises became 1108 Chestnut Street.⁵⁷ It was at this address that he confirmed a place for the name “Vollmer” in the Philadelphia, and eventually the American, furniture industry of the mid-19th century.

⁵⁷ “A. M’Elroy’s Philadelphia City Directory for the year 1858,” database and images, *Fold3.com* (www.fold3.com/image/#1109148596479 :accessed 28 November 2012), Gottlieb Vollmer, upholsterer and cabinet furniture, 702, is the first listing of 1108 Chestnut Street as Vollmer’s address.

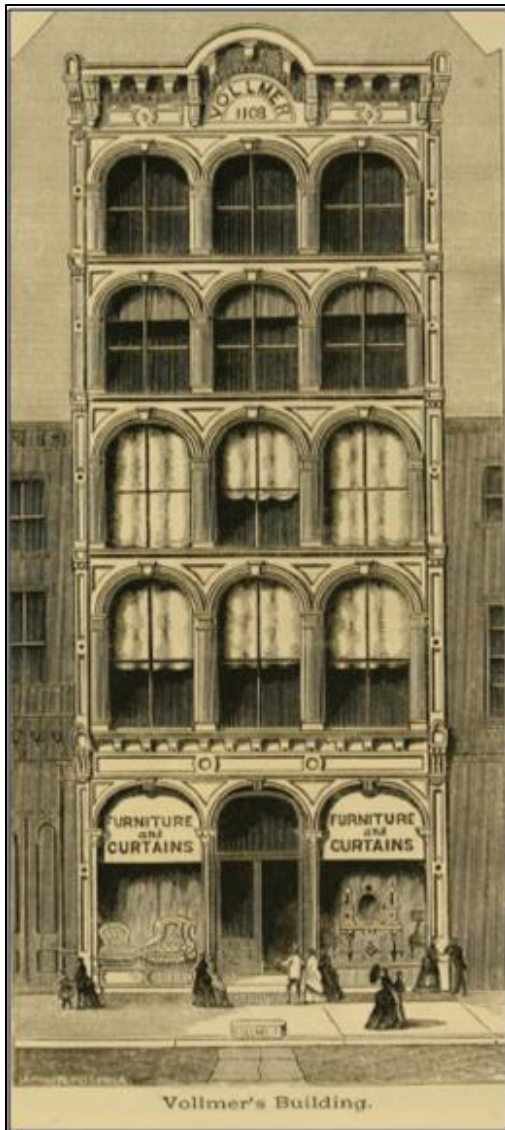


Figure 3 Vollmer's Building, illustrated in *Pennsylvania Illustrated*, (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1874), 82

The establishment of G. Vollmer at 1108 Chestnut Street, illustrated in Figure 3, was in all aspects representative of the many furniture firms that made up one of Philadelphia's most important industries.⁵⁸ While the store front was located on Chestnut Street, the building extended back to front on 1105 Sansom Street. The façade of 1108

⁵⁸ *Pennsylvania Illustrated: a General Sketch of the State: Its Scenery, History and Industries*, (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1874), 82.

Chestnut Street was five stories high and was described as being an iron front in the Corinthian style.⁵⁹ The front at 1105 Sansom Street on the other hand was six stories high, with only the first story made of iron and the rest with brick.⁶⁰ The five stories visible from Chestnut Street measured 24 feet by 235 feet, with a basement that measured 270 feet in length.⁶¹ Unfortunately, no measurements were recorded for the sixth story on the Sansom Street side of the building. Like many firms of its kind, each level of the property was utilized for a specific purpose, and in 1874 those uses were recorded as follows:

the front part [of the basement] is used as a drawing and pattern department, and the rest mostly for fine woods; in the rear on Sansom street, is the steam hoisting and heating apparatus. The ground floor is used as the fine furniture and curtain department, and also contains offices. The second floor is devoted exclusively to chamber furniture; the third to stuffed and upholstered furniture; the fourth for storing and for finishing in varnish and oil; the fifth as a workroom for upholstery and finishing. The sixth story on Sansom street is used exclusively in finishing the finest work.⁶²

Although a good portion of the finishing work was done at 1108 Chestnut Street and 1105 Sansom Street, Vollmer also had a factory which occupied nos. 20, 22, 24, 26, and 28 S. 15th Street, just above Market Street, where most of the cabinet-work was done by hand.⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ *Pennsylvania Illustrated*, 82, provides a general reference to the location of Vollmer's manufactory on Market and 15th Streets. "Gopsill's Philadelphia City Directory for the year 1884", database and images, Fold3 (www.fold3.com/image/#85269115 :accessed 28 November 2012), G. Vollmer & Son, furniture mfrs., 1621, specifies nos. 20 through 28 S. Fifteenth Street as the location of Vollmer's manufactory.

An emphasis on hand-craftsmanship was a popular advertising theme, particularly in the furniture industry of the 19th century. However, it by no means meant that all work, from start to finish, was done without the assistance of absolutely any modern machinery. In the 1874 article from *Pennsylvania Illustrated* the author mentions “a steam hoisting and heating apparatus” in the rear of the basement on the Sansom Street side of Vollmer’s warerooms.⁶⁴ This is the earliest mention of steam power in Vollmer’s shop. However, neither steam as a source of motive power nor any specific machinery powered by steam is recorded in the 1860 through 1880 Philadelphia Manufacturer’s Censuses for Vollmer’s firm.⁶⁵ The exclusion of steam from the manufacturer’s censuses may be explained by the nature of a steam hoist and a steam heating apparatus themselves. According to Edward M. Knight in *Knight’s American Mechanical Dictionary*, a steam hoist was “an elevator or lift worked by a steam engine, frequently portable” and a steam heating apparatus was “an arrangement in an apartment or building of pipes or boxes receiving steam from a boiler and returning the condensed steam thereinto.”⁶⁶ Figure 4 illustrates a steam hoisting machine for a warehouse elevator and a steam heating apparatus.

⁶⁴ *Pennsylvania Illustrated*, 82.

⁶⁵ 1860 U.S. Non-Population Census Schedule, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, Industry and Manufacturing Schedule, p. 72, line 3, Gottlieb Vollmer entry; in-house microfilm T1157, roll 8, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. 1880 U.S. Non-Population Census Schedule, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, Industry and Manufacturing Schedule, p. 145, line 30, Gottlieb Vollmer entry; in-house microfilm M1796, roll 8, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁶ *Knight’s American Mechanical Dictionary: A Description of tools, instruments, machines, processes, and engineering history of inventions; general technological vocabulary; and digest of mechanical appliances in the sciences and the arts*, Vol. 3—REA-ZYM, comp. Edward H. Knight (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, The Riverside Cambridge Press, 1884), s.vv. “steam hoist,” “steam heating apparatus.”

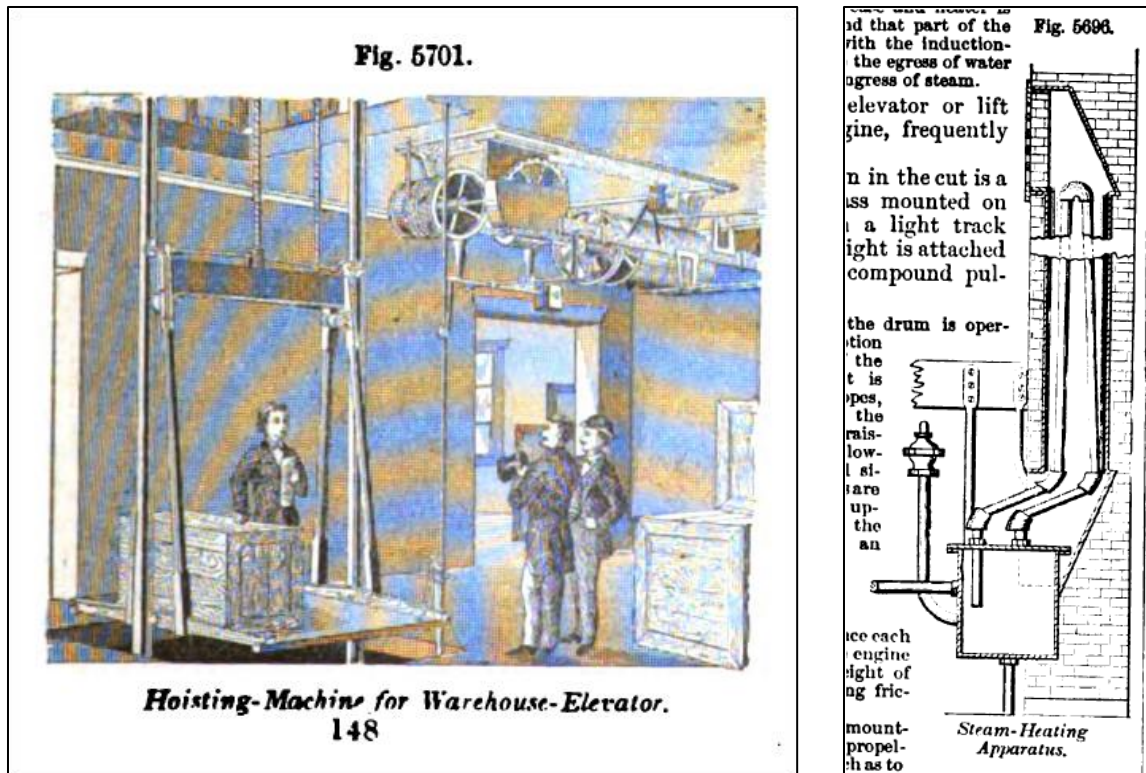


Figure 4 (Left) steam hoisting machine for a warehouse elevator, illustrated in Edward H. Knight (comp), *Knight's Mechanical Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, The Riverside Cambridge Press, 1884), 2353, **(Right)** steam heating apparatus for heating a building, illustrated in Edward H. Knight (comp), *Knight's Mechanical Dictionary* (Boston : Houghton, Mifflin and Company, The Riverside Cambridge Press, 1884), 2352

Given the location of the steam hoist and the steam heating apparatus in the basement of Vollmer's building where the raw lumber was kept and Knight's description of these mechanisms their uses manifest themselves. The steam hoist eased the movement of lumber and furniture between the six floors of Vollmer's warerooms throughout the varying stages of upholstery and finishing; and the steam heating apparatus not only heated the building, but also exposed the lumber to heat vital to the seasoning of wood. Vollmer's adoption of steam technology for the purposes of streamlining the wareroom's operations and preparing raw lumber combined with no machinery being listed on the manufacturers censuses support his claim that all work was done at the hands of a skilled

craftsman. This is confirmed through the analysis of his surviving furniture in Chapter II.

With hand-craftsmanship as an attribute that separated Vollmer from firms mass-producing furniture, he had to have a substantial workforce in order to fulfill custom orders. As previously stated, Vollmer's firm is classified as a manufactory, which means he employed no less than 25 men.⁶⁷ Of the men at this time, three of them were his sons: Charles F., Frederick, and Rudolph.

The exact years of each son's entry into the family business is not known; however, each of them was involved to some extent in June of 1863 when they sailed to Paris with their younger sister Emelia.⁶⁸ At this time Charles F., Frederick, and Rudolph were 21-years, 19-years, and 17-years old respectively. The trip likely served as an educational and business experience for the three sons on behalf of their father.⁶⁹ By 1869, at the age of 28, Charles F. was listed as a carver in the Philadelphia City Directory, and as living at the same residence as Vollmer on E. Washington Lane in Germantown.⁷⁰ While neither Rudolph or Frederick are ever mentioned in the city directories, it is known that both were intended to be a part of the family business had

⁶⁷ Talbott, "Philadelphia Furniture Industry 1850-1880," 13.

⁶⁸ Journal entry, likely written by Emelie Vollmer, dated June 18, 1863, described their sail to Paris on the steamship America. While the author of the entry is not known for certain, given the date of 1863, the reference to "Father", and all three brothers by name, it was most likely written by Emelia who would have been about to turn fifteen years old at the time, see, Chas. Vollmer, "Merchandising Ledger, Fine Cabinet Work Furniture Etc. 1860 to 1864," (1860-1864, Pennsylvania Historical Society), 87-88.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Holbrook, e-mail message to author, October 19, 2012. According to family tradition Rudolph was educated abroad in Germany to learn the family trade, and it was on one of these trips that he met and married Louise Vollmer, much to his father's dismay. McMichael, ed., *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 157. Charles F. was trained in England and France for seven years before joining his father's business.

⁷⁰ "Gopsill's Philadelphia City Directory for the year 1869", database and images, *Fold3* (www.fold3.com/image/#77695279 :accessed 28 November 2012), Charles Vollmer, carver, 1498.

Rudolph not been disowned by his father and had Frederick not died prematurely in Paris.

Similar to his sons, Vollmer provided rigorous training for his employees. They were required to attend the art and design school five nights a week, and those who demonstrated exceptional talent were then sent to further their education in Paris at his expense.⁷¹ While other firms such as Trymby, Hunt & Co. sent over for European workers if a skilled craftsman was not found locally, Vollmer trained both American and European immigrants locally, and if excellence was seen.⁷² It was likely this focus on training and workmanship that helped the firm G. Vollmer to build its reputation of quality and fineness in the furniture industry.

⁷¹ McMichael, ed., *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 157. In the article there is not a mention of the specific art and design school Vollmer's employees attended classes at, just that they attended classes five nights a week at a local art and design school.

⁷² McMichael, ed., *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 166. Discusses the business of Trymby, Hunt & Co.



Figure 5 Portrait of Gottlieb Vollmer, illustrated in Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts & Co., 1884), 2333

By almost all known accounts, Vollmer, pictured above in Figure 5, was highly respected by his colleagues and clients alike. In articles written post-mortem, the success of his firm was largely attributed to his “indefatigable perseverance and strict probity of character” and his possession of “a large measure of artistic skill, executive ability and enterprise.”⁷³ In an 1861 letter from Samuel Sloan, the Philadelphia architect, to his client Haller Nutt, Sloan wrote of Vollmer’s visit to Nutt’s residence, and made mention of both Vollmer’s character and shrewd business qualities:

⁷³ For “indefatigable perseverance and strict probity of character” see, Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia: 1609 to 1884*, 2333; for “a large measure of artistic skill, executive ability and enterprise” see, McMichael, ed., *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 157.

Our Volmer thinks it the greatest establishment he ever saw and expressed himself highly gratified with his visit to you. He told me he would not have missed it for 10,000 dollars, (I would not like to tempt him). He was, however, greatly pleased with your kindness and speaks of the most laudable terms, I was since pleased to hear him speak with such warmness....⁷⁴

Sloan's side remark, "I would not like to tempt him," indicates that Vollmer never missed a business opportunity and implies that he was tightfisted about money.

This hypothesis is further supported in letters between John B. Blake, the Commissioner of Public Buildings, and Vollmer regarding the 1860 bill to the White House which included the gilded Blue Room parlor suite. The initial total of the bill was \$9,794.94.⁷⁵ Upon Blake's receipt of the bill in early January of that year, Blake was outraged at the expense, and wrote back to Vollmer on January 18, 1860: "I regret to inform you the charges in about every particular exceed your proposals so enormously that I do not feel authorized to pay it. Perhaps if you were to visit this place the matter might be arranged to our mutual satisfaction, but as the bill now stands I decline to pay it."⁷⁶ Vollmer sent a revised bill to Blake, of an amount unknown. However, Blake was still not satisfied and wrote a second time to Vollmer on January 30, 1860:

Your revised bill has been received and does not in the slightest manner remove my objection to the original bill. I object to such of the charges as

⁷⁴Gottlieb Vollmer's visit to Haller Nutt's residence was nothing more than him delivering a letter from Sloan to Nutt in the middle of the Civil War, when postage to the South was difficult if not sometimes near impossible. In the letters collected in the following source, Gottlieb was in the area of Nutt's residence doing installations for one of his own clients, a Col. Ventress. These letters have often been cited in conjunction with Gottlieb making furniture and doing the upholstery work for Longwood Estate; however, nowhere in the letters does it mention that Gottlieb did such work. For reference see, Samuel Sloan, letter to Haller Nutt, August 19, 1861, reproduced in Ina May Ogletree McAdams (ed.), *The Building of "Longwood"...Natchez, Mississippi. Transcribed from original sources.* (Austin: Ina May Ogletree McAdams, 1972), 74.

⁷⁵ Gottlieb Vollmer, copy of bill of sale to the White House dated January 1, 1860.

⁷⁶ John B. Blake, Commissioner of Public Buildings, letter to Gottlieb Vollmer, 18 January 1860, White House Curatorial File, Washington, D.C.

exceed your proposals for doing the work, and am astonished to find so great a difference between the account as rendered and the proposals upon which the work was ordered ... The charge for travelling and incidental expenses would not be allowed in the present form at the Treasury. The particulars should be stated...Whenever you are disposed to render a bill corresponding with your agreement and in other respects reasonable, it will afford me pleasure to pay it.⁷⁷

It is clear from this letter that both Blake and Vollmer were unwilling to compromise. In the end, Vollmer took \$1,794.94 off the bill, and the total paid was an even \$8,000.⁷⁸ Presumably this is the amount from the initial proposal, though it also may be a price satisfactory to both parties.

Dispute over the 1860 bill aside, Harriet Lane and President James Buchanan were two of Vollmer's most renowned clients. Even after Buchanan left office and returned with Harriet Lane to his home Wheatland in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Vollmer continued to provide his services. According to Vollmer's merchandising ledger in 1861, the year Buchanan retired from office, he did work for the former president.⁷⁹ Although it has most often been written that Vollmer made furniture for Wheatland, it is possible, especially given the extensive re-upholstery work listed on both White House bills, that he only provided new upholstery and matching window treatments.⁸⁰ While Buchanan, or more probably Harriet Lane, was a steady client of Vollmer's, he did work for other notable people as well, especially within the city of Philadelphia.

Two ledgers survive from his firm spanning the years between 1860 and 1866.

Within them are names like Hon. James Buchanan (former President of the United

⁷⁷ John B. Blake, Commissioner of Public Buildings, letter to Gottlieb Vollmer, 30 January 1860, White House Curatorial File, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁸ Gottlieb Vollmer, copy of bill of sale to the White House dated January 1, 1860.

⁷⁹ Chas. Vollmer, "Merchandising Ledger."

⁸⁰ Ibid. The account ledger only states the total debts owed or paid, not the specifics of the bill.

States), A. McElroy (publisher of the Philadelphia City Directory), Miss Cadwalader (one of Philadelphia's most influential families), and Gov. Coles (former Governor of Illinois).⁸¹ While Vollmer clearly worked for individuals and their private residences, his firm was also utilized by businesses, such as the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company, Drexel & Co. brokerage firm, and others throughout Philadelphia to make furniture for their offices and boardrooms.⁸² The furniture made for his clients ranged from made-to-order pieces to general stock designs. While there are several made to order suites and pieces that survive, such as the Blue Room parlor suite, there are several more which are documented in estate sale advertisements printed in the Philadelphia Inquirer.

AUCTION SALES: FINE
BY THOMAS BIRCH & SON, AUCTIONEERS
 No 1110 Chestnut and No 1109 Ransom street
SALES OF HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE EVERY
FRIDAY AT THE AUCTION STORE.
SALES AT PRIVATE RESIDENCES RECEIVE
PERSONAL ATTENTION.
 Sale at No 1110 Chestnut street, second story
 VALUABLE GOLD, SILVER AND COPPER COINS
 MEDALS, TOKENS, &c.
ON TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY
AFTERNOONS.
 Jan. 19, 14 and 15, commencing each day at 3 o'clock
 in our second story saleroom, will be sold over 1100
 a of coins, &c.
 Catalogues ready at the auction store. The coins
 can be examined on the day of sale.

Sale at No 610 N Thirty-fifth street.
 HANDSOME OIL PAINTED WOODEN FURNITURE
 NITEL CABINET PIANO, FORTS, FINE FOL-
 LISH, HOUSEHOLD AND OTHER CARPETS, &c.
 DING, CHINA AND GLASSWARE, &c., &c.
ON WEDNESDAY MORNING
 At 10 o'clock, by catalogue, will be sold the entire
 household furniture comprising handsome oil painted
 walnut parlor, dining room and chamber furniture, fine
 French and English cabinet glassware, made by Colliard
 & Colliard London, fine English, Brussels and other
 carpets, bedding, china and glassware, kitchen uten-
 sils, &c.
 The furniture was made to order by Vollmer and
 Allen & Bros., and is equal to new.
 May be examined early on the morning of sale.

Sale No. 1428 Walnut street.
ELEGANT FURNITURE
 On Friday Morning.
 June 9th, at 10 o'clock, at No. 1428 Walnut street, by
 catalogue, the elegant furniture, including 2 sets rose-
 wood drawing room furniture, pair elegant mantel and
 pier mirrors, handsome chandeliers, very elegant
 Austerlitz carpets, rosewood piano, made by Stein-
 way, superior oak dining room furniture, walnut book-
 cases, superior chamber furniture, &c.
 Full particulars in catalogue.
 The furniture was made to order by Vollmer, and is
 equal to new.
 May be examined at 3 o'clock on morning of sale.

DAVIS & HARVEY, AUCTIONEERS, (LATE
With M. Thomas & Sons), Store No. 33 CHESTNUT
Street.
FURNITURE SALES at the Store every Tuesday.
SALES AT RESIDENCES will receive particular
attention.
 Sale No. 33 Chestnut street.
SUPERIOR FURNITURE, MIRRORS, BRUSSELS
CARPETS, FINE OIL, CLOTHS, &c.
 This Morning.
 At 10 o'clock, at the auction store, an extensive as-
 sortment of superior second hand furniture, French
 plate pier mirror, fine Brussels carpets, 10 yards and
 English oil cloths, about 200 yards Canton matting,
 superior office desk, &c.
TO RENT-KEEPERS.
 Also, 20 walnut washstands, marble tops.
 Sale at No. 412 N. Seventh street.
SPLendid FURNITURE, ELEGANT VELVET
CARPETS, &c.
 On Wednesday Morning.
 At 10 o'clock, the furniture of a gentleman declining
 housekeeping, comprising elegant suite of drawing
 room furniture, covered with crimson brocade, fine
 superb suit library furniture, finished in oil, handsome
 dining room and chamber furniture, superior book-
 cases, rich velvet and Brussels carpets, &c.
 Full particulars in catalogue.
 The cabinet furniture was made to order by W. & J.
 Allen and G. Vollmer, is of beautiful design and finish
 and has been used only six months.

Figure 6 (Left) Advertisement for Sale of Furniture at 610 N Thirty-fifth Street, placed by Thomas Birch & Son Auctioneers, 10th January 1874, *Philadelphia Inquirer* **(Center)** Advertisement for Sale of Furniture at 1428 Walnut Street, placed by Thomas Birch & son Auctioneers, 6-9 June 1865, *Philadelphia Inquirer* **(Right)** Advertisement for Sale of Furniture at 412 N. Seventh Street, placed by Davis & Harvey Auctioneers, 17-18 April 1866, *Philadelphia Inquirer*

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² For reference to Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Co. see Judith Cressy, "Seating the Board: the Victorian ideal of corporate comfort at the Philadelphia Contributionship's insurance offices," *Art & Antiques*, April 1987, 99. For reference to Drexel & Co. see Chas. Vollmer, "Merchandising Ledger, Fine Cabinet Work Furniture Etc. 1860 to 1864."

Figure 6 shows three such advertisements from 1865, 1866, and 1874, where the furniture being auctioned is proudly listed as “made to order by Vollmer” and “equal to new.”⁸³ Unlike his made-to-order pieces, his general stock design pieces are not as well documented. An example of this type of furniture produced by G. Vollmer survives in the boardrooms of the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company today. They included two Louis XVI revival style extension tables which were purchased from G. Vollmer on April 4, 1860: one with two leaves and the other with four leaves.⁸⁴

Although a substantial portion of his clients were based in Philadelphia and other parts of Pennsylvania, Vollmer had a number of clients all along the East Coast, particularly in the South. Philadelphia’s location made it easy to ship furniture to cities in the South. Along with having a major port, Philadelphia was able to transport by means of the Pennsylvania Railroad to the Ohio Canal, which connected to the Mississippi River.⁸⁵ Geographic location combined with the extravagant furniture produced by Philadelphia firms, such as G. Vollmer’s, made Philadelphia, as well as New York, a desirable place for plantation owners looking to fill their homes with furniture of superior taste and quality to shop.⁸⁶ However, with the onset of the Civil War, shipping, let alone

⁸³ “Thomas Birch & Son, Auctioneers: Sale at No. 1428 Walnut Street,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6-9 June 1865, p.7. Adds like this one and others featured throughout the mid-nineteenth century by Davis & Harvey, Auctioneers, and Thomas Birch & Sons, Auctioneers, were printed in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and other Philadelphia newspapers featuring furniture firms like Gottlieb Vollmer and Allen Bro. to highlight the made-to-order furniture available at the estate sales.

⁸⁴ Gottlieb Vollmer, bill of sale dated April 4, 1860, Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Carol A. Wojtowicz, “Furnishing a Nineteenth-Century Boardroom 1835 to 1900,” *The Philadelphia Contributionship Annual Report* (Philadelphia: The Philadelphia Contributionship, 1978), 17; and, Cressy, “Seating the Board: The Victorian Ideal of Corporate Comfort at the Philadelphia Contributionship’s Insurance Offices,” 99.

⁸⁵ Jason T. Busch, “Furniture Patronage in Antebellum Natchez,” *The Antiques Magazine*, (May 2000): 806 and 809.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

travelling, to the South was difficult at best. In Vollmer's letter to Haller Nutt, thanking him for a welcomed visit to his home Longwood, he wrote: "All my friends were much pleased to see me home again and many did never expect to see me alive again, but as I assured you, I have so far been able to make a fair, reasonable and open explanation, which all letters and certificates could not do..."⁸⁷ His letter to Nutt noted the life-threatening risk of traveling between Philadelphia and the South at this time. Despite the risks, Vollmer continued to travel and maintain a client-base in the South. Some of these Southern clients are recorded in his account ledgers at the Pennsylvania Historical Society. In his 1860 to 1864 account ledger are over 100 names of clients with either full or partial addresses. Among these names are 13 from outside of Pennsylvania. Of these 13 are five from the South: Dr. F.R. Wurm of Athens, Georgia; R.M. Green of East Bay Charlestown, South Carolina; John Le-Bonte of Columbia, South Carolina; James Alfred Jones of Richmond, Virginia; and John N. Robinson of Norfolk, Virginia. The inclusion of these names in Vollmer's account ledgers from 1860-1864 demonstrate that he continued to conduct business with Southern patrons during the Civil War. However, this Southern client-base was presumably, and most probably, much higher before the Civil War than during or even after.

⁸⁷ Gottlieb Vollmer, letter to Haller Nutt, August 19, 1861, reproduced in McAdams (ed.), *The Building of "Longwood"*, 75.

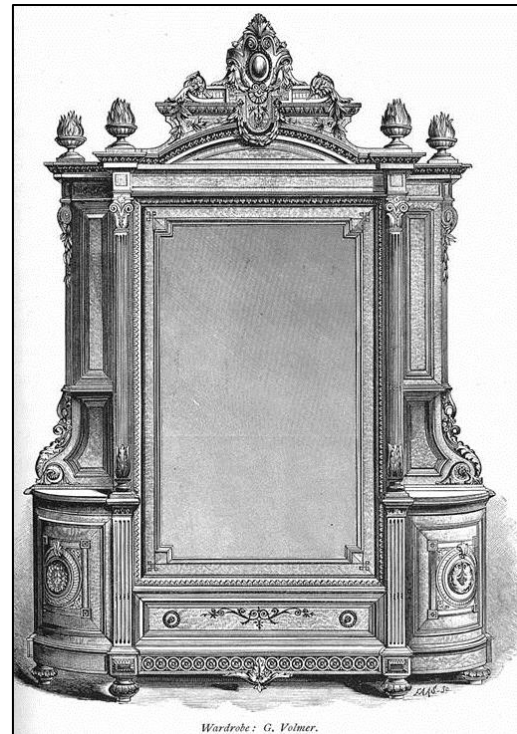


Figure 7 (Left) *Library Suite* exhibited at the Centennial Exhibition, Gottlieb Vollmer, 1876, illustration from George Titus Ferris, *Gems of the Centennial* (New York: D. Appleton & Company Publishers, 1877) **(Right)** *Wardrobe* from the chamber suite exhibited at the Centennial Exhibition, Gottlieb Vollmer, 1876, illustration from Prof. Walter Smith, “Industrial Arts”, in *Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition*, 3 vols, (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barrie, 1877), 2: 73

In addition to a steady profit-producing client base, Vollmer received great acclaim at the 1876 Philadelphia Exhibition, where he and many of his contemporaries displayed their best product. Vollmer exhibited two entries in the Centennial Exhibition: a suite of Louis XVI revival chamber furniture and a suite of library furniture in the same style (Figure 7).⁸⁸ The success of his suites is marked by the presentation of an award of merit for his chamber suite.⁸⁹ His suites at the Centennial Exhibition are the first

⁸⁸ Pennsylvania Board of Centennial Managers, *Pennsylvania and the Centennial Exposition, Comprising the Preliminary and Final Reports of the Pennsylvania Board of Centennial Managers Made to the Legislature at the Sessions of 1877-8...* Vol. II, Part III, (Philadelphia: Gillin & Nagle, 1878), 466.

⁸⁹ United States Centennial Commission, award presented to Gottlieb Vollmer, September 27, 1876, Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

documentation in which he showcases his abilities as a cabinetmaker, but also an interior decorator. In a description from *Pennsylvania and the Centennial Exhibition* Vollmer's entry is described as "bedstead, with canopy and curtains complete, dressing bureau, washstand, nightstand, lady's secretary, lounge, armchair, small chair, window curtain and cornice to match furniture, and the ceiling decorated to correspond."⁹⁰ The inclusion of "window curtain and cornice to match furniture" is certainly not surprising for a cabinetmaker and upholsterer like Vollmer. Window draperies were part of his repertoire as seen in the White House bills of sale from 1859 and 1860 and in the illustration of his storefront from *Pennsylvania Illustrated* in which his windows advertise "FURNITURE & CURTAINS." Additionally, a surviving cornice made by Vollmer for Bella Vista, the home James Dobson owner of the Philadelphia textile firm Dobson Mills, survives in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. While the curtains and cornices were part of a room's interior decoration, they were also a large part of an upholsterer's job in the 19th century. Thus they are not on their own indicative of Vollmer interest in furnishing whole interiors. However, the "ceiling decorated to correspond" indicates that Vollmer was actively pursuing interior decoration. Vollmer's inclusion of entire interior decorations as part of his services by the 1876 Centennial Exhibition is important because through this he set himself apart from his Philadelphia peers and began to align himself with his New York rivals. While there is still much to uncover about the extent of decorating whole interiors during Vollmer's time with the firm, it was very much an interest to his son, Charles F. Vollmer.

⁹⁰ Pennsylvania Board of Centennial Managers, *Pennsylvania and the Centennial Exposition*, 466.

At this point, Charles F. who at the age of 34 had recently married Bertha Engel on February 17, 1876, was a major part of the firm of G. Vollmer.⁹¹ He had received extensive training both at home from his father and abroad in Paris, which encompassed not only the design and construction of the furniture, but also the management of business. As the oldest and only recognized living son, it is likely that Vollmer entrusted Charles F. with a number of responsibilities within the business, and by 1883 Charles F. was included in the firm's moniker.

A Family Affair, 1883 to 1893

Between 1882 and 1883 Vollmer's business, G. Vollmer, became G. Vollmer & Son.⁹² The name change occurred not too long before Vollmer's death. On May 17th, 1883, Gottlieb Vollmer died of apoplexy, or a stroke as it is known today.⁹³ His friends and family were invited to pay their respects at 10 o'clock the morning of May 21st at his residence on East Washington Lane, with carriages provided by the family at Walnut Lane Station and a request that floral offerings be omitted.⁹⁴ Vollmer was buried that same day at Philadelphia's Monument Cemetery in a cream, satin-lined, walnut casket.⁹⁵

⁹¹ "Pennsylvania, Marriages, 1709-1940," index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/V26B-LF6> :accessed 19 April 2013), Charles Friedrich Vollmer and Bertha Engel, 1876.

⁹² "Gopsill's Philadelphia City Directory for the year 1883," database and images, *Fold3* (www.fold3.com/image/#85510855 :accessed 27 November 2012), G. Vollmer & Son, furniture, 1633. The exact date of change is not yet known. However, it was between 1882 and 1883 that the change in company name occurs in the Philadelphia city directory, as it is in the 1883 Philadelphia City Directory that Vollmer's business appears as G. Vollmer & Son.

⁹³ "Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803-1915," index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/VK8Q-4JZ> :accessed 17 February 2013), Gottlieb Vollmer, 1883.

⁹⁴ "Death Notice for Gottlieb Vollmer," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 19 May 1883, p. 4, (Early American Newspapers, database and images, *infoweb.newsbank.com*).

⁹⁵ Historical Society of Pennsylvania, "Pennsylvania, Church and Town Records, 1708-1985," index and image, *Ancestry.com* (http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=PACHurchTownRecords&h=5830014&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=2535 : 17 February 2013), Gottlieb Vollmer; Historic Pennsylvania Church and Town Records; Reel: 88.

Two days later on May 23, 1883, an application for his estate was given to the Registrar of Wills of the City of Philadelphia. In the petition for probate of the Last Will and Testament of Gottlieb Vollmer his executors: Wilhelmine Vollmer (wife), Charles Frederick Vollmer (son), Otto Eisenlorr (son-in-law by his youngest daughter Louisa), and Charles M. Stout (business associate), stated that at the time of his death Vollmer's personal property amounted to "\$200,000 or thereabouts and [his] real estate (less encumbrance) to the value of \$300,000 or thereabouts."⁹⁶ These values indicated that between 1860 and 1883 his business had done considerably well, especially given that in 1860 he valued his personal property at \$15,000 and his real estate at \$20,000.⁹⁷

With the petition for probate granted, his executors were able to carry out his Last Will and Testament. A majority of his Will outlined his business affairs, and it was evident from this self-written testimony that Vollmer wished the business to be a family affair. On July 6, 1880, he wrote:

It is my will and I do freely direct that my business after my decease shall be continued and carried on by my Executors herein after named.... It being my desire and will that my Grandsons, the sons [Frederick Wick Vollmer and Adrian Vollmer] of my deceased son Frederick G. Vollmer and also the sons [William Gottlieb Gramm and Frederick Emil Gramm] of my daughter Amelia Gramm, now living, as they each one shall arrive to mature age, shall be taken into the said business and be instructed in the art and mystery thereof, so that when they shall each one arrive at the full age of twenty-one years, they each one shall be taken into the said business and shall be entitled to such interest therein as my said Executors consider equitable and just.... The management of my said business shall

⁹⁶ Gottlieb Vollmer, "Last Will and Testament for Gottlieb Vollmer," 6 July 1880, registered 23 May 1883, Philadelphia County, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, W565 1883, 11, (Philadelphia City Hall Registrar of Wills, 1 Penn Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107).

⁹⁷ "United States Federal Census, 1860," index and images, *Fold3* (<http://www.fold3.com/#85874814> :accessed 29 November 2012), Gottlieb Vollmer 1860. Values of property, both personal and real estate, were asked for on the 1860 and 1870 United States Federal Censuses. Unfortunately, Gottlieb's were not recorded in the 1870 Federal Census.

be under the control of my son Charles Frederick Vollmer, subject however to the inspection of my said Executors who shall have the power and right at all times of examining the books of account and looking into all the affairs of the said business...⁹⁸

When his Last Will and Testament took effect, Vollmer's grandsons, Frederick Wick, Adrian, William Gottlieb, and Frederick Emil were ten-years, eight-years, 13-years, and seven years old respectively, nowhere near the age specified by their grandfather to enter the business. Charles F., who was already the son in G. Vollmer & Son, was well prepared to take on management of the business per his father's Will.

By the time he took over full management of the business Charles F. had already undergone seven years of training abroad in London and in Paris, and had himself been active with the business for about 20 years.⁹⁹ In order to reassure his clients that the business was to be continued as it was, he ran an advertisement in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on the 23rd of May 1883, stating that the firm G. Vollmer & Son was keeping its name and being managed by Charles F. Vollmer.¹⁰⁰

Under the lead of Charles F., G. Vollmer & Son not only produced made-to-order furniture, but expanded the interior decoration portion of the business, thereby continuing Vollmer's legacy.¹⁰¹ While Vollmer did some architectural work, like window treatments and mantels, G. Vollmer & Son added wall coverings, flooring, and interior decorations to the company's list of services, and thus changed their title from "Upholsterer and

⁹⁸ Gottlieb Vollmer, "Last Will and Testament for Gottlieb Vollmer," July 6 1880, registered 23 May 1883, Philadelphia County, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, W565 1883, 11, (Philadelphia City Hall Registrar of Wills, 1 Penn Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107).

⁹⁹ McMichael, ed., *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 157. Charles F. spent five years in Paris and two years in London studying and learning the art of decorative finishing.

¹⁰⁰ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 May 1883, p.5.

¹⁰¹ McMichael, ed., *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 157.

Cabinet Furniture” to “Manufacturers of Cabinet Furniture and Interior Decorations—Importers of Tapestries, Curtain Materials, Paper Hangings, Etc.”.¹⁰² While there are no known surviving examples of G. Vollmer & Son interiors, moving the firm in the direction of decorating and furnishing whole interiors was very clearly a priority interest of Charles F. Vollmer’s.

In 1892 Charles F. partnered with George Hertzog, Alfred Goodwin, J.E. McClees, and Sharpless & Watts to form the Associated Art Workers.¹⁰³ The Associated Art Workers was much like the Associated Artists in New York from 1879 to 1883 who aimed to produce whole “artistic interiors” for public, private, or commercial institutions, and was only active a decade later from 1892 to 1895.¹⁰⁴ Together the men in the Associated Art Workers remodeled and decorated the interior of 1518 Chestnut Street as a show-house for their firm where they demonstrated that an “artistic interior” was possible in a Philadelphia rowhouse.¹⁰⁵ The show-house of the Associated Art Workers opened March 28th, 1893, but only appeared in Philadelphia directory in 1894.¹⁰⁶ Despite the short-run of the Associated Art Workers, Charles F. Vollmer’s participation in the business proves his obvious interest in offering whole interior design services to his clients.

¹⁰² G. Vollmer & Son, bill of sale to Mr. Henry Cochran, dated 1 July 1893, Winterthur Library Archives, Wilmington, Delaware. The letter head at the top of the bill indicates that they were importers of tapestries and paper hangings.; B.F. Merrill on behalf of G. Vollmer & Son, correspondence to James J. Hill, dated June 21, 1890, Hill House Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota. This correspondence references a proposal for floor coverings for Hill House in St. Paul, Minnesota.

¹⁰³ Mark C. Luellen, “The Decorative Work of George Hertzog 1851 to 1920” (Thesis in Master of Science in Historic Preservation, University of Pennsylvania, 1992), 51, Hathitrust.

¹⁰⁴ Wilson H. Faude, “Associated Artists and the American Renaissance in the Decorative Arts,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 10 (1975), 104-105, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1180561>.

¹⁰⁵ Luellen, “The Decorative Work of George Hertzog 1851 to 1920,” 51.

¹⁰⁶ Luellen, “The Decorative Work of George Hertzog 1851 to 1920,” 51 and 52.

Comparatively little is known about G. Vollmer & Son's clientele. A few names of patrons are known from surviving pieces of G. Vollmer & Son furniture which have substantiated histories with their original patrons. These include a desk made for Thomas Moore Jr. ca. 1885 in the collection of Nancy Staisy, a library bookcases made for Peter Widener ca. 1887 in an unknown private collection, and a religious repository originally made for the parlor of John and Gertrude Pitcairn estate to hold the Bible in 1888 now residing in the Cairnwood estate chapel in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania.¹⁰⁷ The only other G. Vollmer & Son client known to date is Mr. Henry Cochran of New York, who was among one of the last people G. Vollmer & Son did work for in 1893.¹⁰⁸ During the years of G. Vollmer & Son the motto remained, "[we] do not desire so much to excel in the volume of [our] work as in the quality."¹⁰⁹ In other words quality rather than quantity came first, and therefore they aimed to please select patrons in made-to-order furniture rather than the general consumer through mass production. However, quality, just like hand-craftsmanship, did not mean that absolutely no machines were used. Just like his father, Charles F. used machinery for the preparation of raw lumber.¹¹⁰

In April of 1885 G. Vollmer & Son requested an ordinance from the Common Council of the City of Philadelphia authorizing them "to lay an underground steam pipe

¹⁰⁷ G. Vollmer & Son, bill of sale to John Pitcairn, dated January 31st, 1888, John and Gertrude Pitcairn Archives, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. Ed Gyllanhaal, "Family Worship at Cairnwood and Glencairn," *Glencairn Museum News*, vol. 25, no. 2, (2003), 1-3. Unlike the desk and bookcases which remained in their respective families until auctioned off and both bear locks signed G. Vollmer & Son, the repository is documented as made by G. Vollmer & Son through a surviving bill of sale in the John and Gertrude Pitcairn Archives, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania.

¹⁰⁸ G. Vollmer & Son, bill of sale to Mr. Henry Cochran, dated July 1, 1893, Winterthur Library Archives, Wilmington, Delaware.

¹⁰⁹ McMichael, ed., *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 157.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

under and across Sansom street, west of Eleventh street, in the Eighth Ward.”¹¹¹ The ordinance was granted on May 28, 1885, and G. Vollmer & Son was “authorized to lay a six-inch connecting pipe, enclosing a three-inch steam pipe, under and across Sansom Street, to connect premises 1105 with premises 1110, for the purpose of obtaining steam through said pipe....”¹¹² The ordinance not only confirmed that G. Vollmer & Son used steam power, but it also shows that by 1885 the firm had expanded to yet another set of buildings on Sansom Street. The ordinance allowed G. Vollmer & Son to connect their already existing steam power from 1105 Sansom Street to their new manufactory at 1110 Sansom Street. This manufactory included buildings 1112, 1114, and 1116 Sansom Street as well and replaced the firm’s old manufactory along Market and 15th Streets.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Pennsylvania Common Council, “Journal of the Common Council, of the City of Philadelphia from April 6, 1885, to September 24, 1885,” Vol. I, Appendix No. 105, (Philadelphia: Dunlap & Clarke Printers, 1885), 33.

¹¹² Ibid, 116-117.

¹¹³ In 1885 the manufactory for G. Vollmer & Son was listed as “Nos. 20, 22, 24, 26, 28 15th Street” in: “Gopsill’s Philadelphia City Directory for the year 1885,” database and images, *Fold3* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/240/84449749>: accessed 25 October 2016), G. Vollmer & Son, furniture, 1785. In 1886 the manufactory for G. Vollmer & Son was listed as “Nos. 1110, 1112, 1114, 1116 Sansom Street” in: “Gopsill’s Philadelphia City Directory for the year 1886,” database and images, *Fold3* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/240/84033235>: accessed 25 October 2016), G. Vollmer & Son, furniture, 1767.



Figure 8 (Left) Advertisement for G. Vollmer & Son warerooms and manufactory, 1885, printed in *Gopsill's Philadelphia Directory*, image from Fold3.com **(Right)** Advertisement for G. Vollmer & Son warerooms and manufactory, 1886, printed in *Gopsill's Philadelphia Directory*, image from Fold3.com

The change in location of their manufactory between 1885 and 1886 is documented in advertisements placed by G. Vollmer & Son in *Gopsill's Philadelphia Directory* shown in Figure 8. The convenience of the new manufactory right across from the warerooms probably cut down on the transport time of moving nearly complete pieces to be finished and displayed in the warerooms of 1108 Chestnut Street and 1105 Sansom Street.

In addition to moving the manufactory across the street from their main warerooms and continuing to develop the firm's focus on interior decorations, Charles F. also procured a location for them in New York City.¹¹⁴ G. Vollmer & Son established their shop in New York City sometime after May of 1886. They were not listed in *Trow City Directory for the year ending May 1886*, but were noted as having a New York City premise on the South-East corner of Fifth Avenue and 21st Street in an article from the *Pennsylvania Historical Review* published in 1886.¹¹⁵ In 1887 the New York address for

¹¹⁴ *Pennsylvania Historical Review: gazetteer, post-office, express and telegraph guide : City of Philadelphia : leading merchants and manufacturers.* (New York: Historical Pub. Co., 1886), 93.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

G. Vollmer & Son is listed as 145 Fifth Avenue in the New York City directory.¹¹⁶ The exact nature of the location in New York City remains unknown, but given that G. Vollmer & Son's manufactory continued to be listed as "Nos. 1110, 1112, 1114, and 1116 Sansom Street" in Philadelphia, the New York City location was most likely a second set of warerooms for displaying and selling their "artistic furniture and interior decorations."¹¹⁷ G. Vollmer & Son was only listed in the New York City directory in 1887, indicating that their presence in New York City lasted about a year.

Based on the expansion of G. Vollmer & Son in Philadelphia and New York, business seemed to be booming, but by 1891 labor unions started to revolt. Unions in all types of business, not just furniture, were changing. In a November issue of the *New York Times* an article titled, "To Fight the Labor Unions—Manufacturers who intend to run their Own Business" discussed the Union's demand for a nine-hour work day instead of ten. At the end of the article it stated that the firm G. Vollmer & Son was the first to grant the demand because "his [Charles F. Vollmer] men had taken him by the throat, so to speak, and given him the option of granting their demand or closing up."¹¹⁸ In a similar article written up in the *Boston Daily Globe*, Charles F. stated, "I am very much against the nine-hour system and would certainly be against eight hours, which might be the next

¹¹⁶ "Trow City Directory for the year ending May 1887," database and images, *Fold3* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/238/84030103>; accessed 24 October 2016), G. Vollmer & Son, furniture, 2017.

¹¹⁷ *Pennsylvania Historical Review*, 93.

¹¹⁸ "To Fight the Labor Unions—Manufacturers who intend to run their Own Business," *New York Times*, November 24, 1891, 1.

thing. I was helpless or I wouldn't have made the change.”¹¹⁹ With competition high and orders to fill, Charles F. and his firm G. Vollmer & Son must have taken the time-cut in the work day fairly hard. As recorded in the 1880 manufacturer's census, Vollmer employed a total of 75 people who during the months of May to November worked an average of ten hours a day and from November to May worked an average of 12 hours a day.¹²⁰ If these average hours were maintained by Charles F. in his management of the firm, and given his rapid expansion they likely were, then cutting it down to a nine-hour work day was a huge hit to his overall production.

As far as is known, even with the change in work hours, the firm continued to focus on the quality of the work, as opposed to its quantity. It is believed that this continued in focus was one of many causes of the firm's ultimate demise. By the turn of the century few cabinetmakers, Philadelphia or elsewhere, were able to make a living, selling hand-carved, original furniture to primarily upper class clientele.¹²¹ On the 1st and 21st of November in 1893 an Executor's Sale was held at 1108 Chestnut Street through Thomas Birch & Son, auctioneers, the same company that used to advertise Vollmer's made-to-order furniture in estate auctions.¹²² The sale sold all furniture and upholstery goods. Charles F. and Otto Eisenlorr were the two remaining Executors as per Vollmer's Will and they were the ones who oversaw the dissemination of the goods and property of the former firm.

¹¹⁹ “Fighting for Nine Hours Opposition Made by Hale and Kilburn, Some of the Other Firms May Reconsider the Concession Made. Carpenters Will Not Work Overtime as Present System is Satisfactory,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 24, 1891.

¹²⁰ 1880 U.S. Non-Population Census, Philadelphia Co., PA, ind. Sch., p. 145, Gottlieb Vollmer.

¹²¹ Talbott, “The Philadelphia Furniture Industry from 1850-1880,” 179.

¹²² “Executor's Sale, Est. G. Vollmer ‘Deceased’,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 27, 1893, 1.

Although Charles F. ran the firm G. Vollmer & Son for approximately ten years after his father's death, the changes in economy and society in conjunction with ambitious expansion and continued focus on quality as opposed to quantity took their toll on the business. Sadly, only two of Vollmer's grandsons, William Gottlieb Gramm and Frederick Wick Vollmer, had exceeded the age of 21 in 1893, and were only able to see the business at its end. After a couple partnerships, a change in name, and around 40 years of steady business, G. Vollmer & Son closed its doors permanently after the last auction on November 21st, 1893.

CHAPTER II: VOLLMER FURNITURE

Between 1841 and 1893, when Gottlieb Vollmer and his son Charles F. Vollmer were active in the Philadelphia furniture industry, the turnover of furniture styles was more rapid than ever before. As a result of technical progresses, increased consumer culture, and changes in social classes, these swift shifts in style brought about variances in materials, techniques, and motifs. These variances not only account for the overall visual difference between furniture styles, but also particular makers. While the most well known and recounted example of Vollmer's furniture is the gilded ash and blue brocatelle parlor suite made for the White House Blue Room in 1860, it is not the only documented suite of G. Vollmer, or G. Vollmer & Son, furniture that survives.

In the following analysis of Vollmer's furniture only pieces and suites with known whereabouts are included. However, documented and attributed examples with whereabouts unknown are included into the catalogues of G. Vollmer and G. Vollmer & Son Furniture in Appendices 1 and 2. Of the pieces and suites being discussed six are documented by label (three represent G. Vollmer and three G. Vollmer & Son), six more are documented with a bill of sale, seven are recorded as made by Vollmer through family lore, and an additional six are attributed to G. Vollmer based on characteristics present in the formerly mentioned 19 pieces and suites. When these 25 pieces/suites are analyzed as a whole their similarities in materials and finishes, construction techniques,

and decorative motifs are more apparent than their differences. By identifying similar characteristics found in Vollmer's furniture, additional attributions can be made and using these characteristic it is possible to compare Vollmer's furniture to that of his contemporaries in Philadelphia and New York.

Labels

Labels, unlike bills of sale and family lore, are physical marks that cabinetmakers and upholsterers, such as Vollmer, used to attach their name and place of establishment to their finished product. They are typically found in a discrete place on the furniture, usually an underside of one of the parts, so that the label does not distract from the aesthetics of the piece.¹²³ Quite often the form of a label varies based on the type of furniture it is attached to. In the case of Vollmer, label forms identified to date consist of a paper label, an ink stamp, and for the later firm of G. Vollmer & Son a stamped lock. Paper labels for any cabinetmaker are the rarest survivors in labeled furniture due to the fact that both paper and adhesive (if used) naturally decay.¹²⁴ Furthermore, paper is easily torn off if tacked in place, and if on seating furniture easily discarded in the re-upholstering process. Due to the general lack of surviving of paper labels it is not surprising that of the six labeled examples of known Vollmer furniture only one of them is paper.

¹²³ Marvin D. Schwartz, Edward J. Stanek, and Douglas K. True, *The Furniture of John Henry Belter and the Rococo Revival*, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981), 11. For instance, on case furniture this usually means the underside of a drawer or surface top, on tables the inside of the rail or underside of the top, and on seating furniture the inside of the seat rail or adhered to the dust cover on the underside of the seat.

¹²⁴ Schwartz, Stanek, and True, *The Furniture of John Henry Belter and the Rococo Revival*, 11.



Figure 9 (Left) *Center Table*, Gottlieb Vollmer, rosewood and marble, ca. 1860, accession number 1990.0079, Winterthur Museum, Wilmington, Delaware, (image from the Winterthur Museum Decorative Arts Photographic Collection), **(Right)** detail of paper label tacked on the inside apron of the center table in the Winterthur Museum collection (image taken by author)

The paper label is on a Rococo revival center table dated 1860 to 1864 in the Winterthur Museum Collection (Figure 9) and is the earliest surviving example of labeled G. Vollmer furniture. Found on the inside of the rosewood rail the paper label is held in place with six tacks: three across the top of the label and three across the bottom. Printed in black ink is: “G. VOLLMER, CABINET & UPHOLSTERY WAREROOMS AND MANUFACTORY, 1108 Chestnut and 1105 Sansom Street, PHILADELPHIA.” While this paper label is the only one known to date, ones like it were probably used on his seating furniture as well. As none of his known examples of seating furniture bear any sort of label or mark it is hypothesized that a paper label was probably adhered to the underside of the original cambric and lost to re-upholstery.

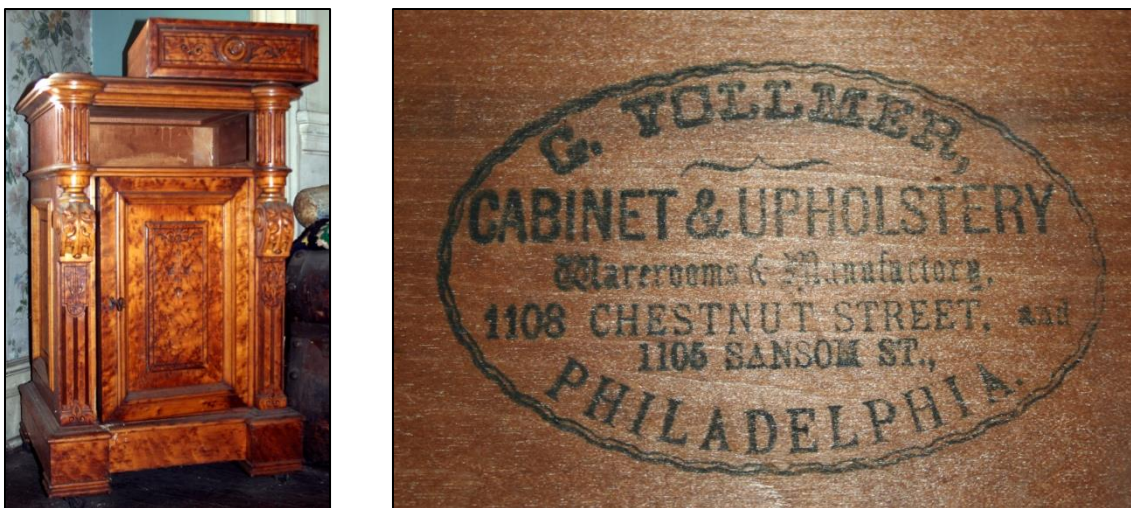


Figure 10 (Left) Nightstand from the *John Child Chamber Suite*, Gottlieb Vollmer, bird's eye maple, ca. 1876, collection of John Child, (image taken by author) **(Right)** detail of ink stamped label on the underside of the drawer from the nightstand in the collection of John Child (image taken by author)

Fortunately, Vollmer did not solely use paper labels; he also stamped his pieces. A pastiche Eastlake and Renaissance revival 11-piece bird's eye maple chamber suite dated ca. 1876 in the collection of John Child includes a nightstand with a stamped label (Figure 10). On the underside of the drawer is an ellipse-shaped ink-stamp label with a scalloped boarder that reads: "G. VOLLMER, CABINET & UPHOLSTERY Warerooms & Manufactory, 1108 CHESTNUT STREET, and 1105 SANSOM ST., PHILADELPHIA." Although the shape of the label and the placement of the text vary slightly from the earlier dated paper label, the information provided remains the same. This same stamp appears again on the underside of the top right drawer in a desk of the same style dated 1875 to 1880 in the collection of Leslie Koelsch.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ An additional cabinet dated ca. 1875 with whereabouts unknown was photo-documented by Kamelot Auction House in Philadelphia as having this same stamp on the underside of a spring-loaded secret drawer. It was sold at auction November 20th, 2010.



Figure 11 (Left) Desk, G. Vollmer & Son, mahogany, ca. 1885, collection of Nancy Staisey (image taken by author) (Right) detail of stamped lock on top right drawer from the desk in the collection of Nancy Staisey (image taken by author)

The last form of label known to be used by Vollmer's business is stamped hardware in the form of a metal lock pictured to the right in Figure 11. This label is found exclusively on case furniture made after 1883 when Charles F. Vollmer headed the firm. Unlike Gottlieb Vollmer's labels, the stamped locks Charles F. used only have the company's name, city, and state, reading quite simply: "G. VOLLMER & SON PHILA, PA." in the bottom left corner of the lock. Three examples of case furniture are signed in this fashion: a combination Renaissance revival and Aesthetic chest of drawers without mirror dated 1883 to 1893, an Aesthetic and Eastlake desk pictured left in Figure 11 dated ca. 1885, and an Aesthetic chest of drawers with mirror dated 1883 to 1893, all in the collection of Nancy Staisey. The lock is the same on all three pieces, but is located on

the top drawer in both the chest of drawers with mirror and the chest of drawers without mirror, and in the top right drawer of the desk.¹²⁶

The labels discussed above not only illustrate the variety of labels used by Vollmer for both of his firms, but also represent three different decades within his career: 1860s paper label on a Rococo revival center table; 1870s ink stamp label on two Renaissance revival and Eastlake case pieces; and the 1880s stamped lock on three Renaissance revival and Aesthetic case pieces. With more research and the discovery of more labeled pieces, these labels may help to further narrow down production dates of Vollmer furniture. While labels are a desired part of a piece's attribution to a particular maker, they are not the only means by which a piece can be identified. By analyzing Vollmer's labeled furniture along with those pieces documented with bills of sale and identified by family lore similar characteristics in materials and finishes, construction techniques, and decorative motifs are revealed. The compilation of these similar characteristics will assist in making future attributions to Vollmer.

Materials and Finishes

By the middle of the 19th century cabinetmakers like Gottlieb Vollmer had access to more native and imported woods than ever before.¹²⁷ As a result Vollmer utilized a variety of woods in the construction of his furniture, including: rosewood, mahogany, walnut, bird's eye maple, and cherry. The choice of woods for a particular piece

¹²⁶ An additional library bookcase, three-piece chamber suite, and a dresser dated late-nineteenth century were recorded in three separate auction catalogues as having stamped locks marked "G. Vollmer & Son, Phila. PA" two through Neal Auctions and one through Kamelot Auctions.

¹²⁷ Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, Katherine S. Howe, Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, "Herter Brothers Furniture" in *Herter Brothers: Furniture and Interiors for a Gilded Age*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1994), 106.

depended on the placement of the furniture within the home, the taste and budget of the patron (or intended buyer if it was a stock piece), the overall design and style, and how it was finished (i.e. varnished, ebonized, gilded, etc.).

Recorded in Vollmer's account ledger dated 1860 to 1864 is a "Lumber" list with the names of four suppliers and the wood purchased from them in 1862: "Mitchell & Edwards (pine, poplar, walnut), E. & J.H. David (ash, con. pine), Lewis Thompson & Co. (walnut), and Eisenbrey & Son (walnut)."¹²⁸ Although these were probably not the only woods bought in 1862, insight into both the types of primary and secondary woods used and the identity of some of his local suppliers are documented in this short list. In choosing the primary wood for constructing a piece of furniture the overall design of the piece and the finish are taken into consideration.

¹²⁸ Chas. Vollmer, "Merchandising Ledger Fine Cabinet Work Furniture Etc. 1860-1864," Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1860-1864.



Figure 12 (Left) Reception Chair from the Blue Room Parlor Suite, Gottlieb Vollmer, gilded walnut, 1860, accession number 1860.579.1, White House Collection, Washington, D.C. **(Right)** detail of water gilding showing the base wood, walnut, gesso, bole, and gold leaf (images taken by author)

An example of Vollmer's furniture illustrating how he chose his material to suit his finishing technique is the Louis XVI revival Blue Room parlor suite in the White House collection. Ash, which is typically used as a secondary wood, was chosen as the primary wood in this instance for its ease in carving and cheaper cost. As the entire frame on each of the 19 pieces is heavily carved and finished using the time-consuming and expensive water gilding process, it made sense for Vollmer to choose a close-grained and inexpensive wood like ash. In the water gilding process the area intended to be gilt is first layered with a gesso to prepare the surface.¹²⁹ Then wetted bole, a clay and iron oxide composite, is applied on top of the gesso to adhere the gold leaf.¹³⁰ Once the gold adheres

¹²⁹ Clive Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Furniture Materials, Trades and Techniques*, (Aldershot, England and Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2000), 90.

¹³⁰ Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Furniture Materials, Trades and Techniques*, 27 and 90.

to the bole and is dry, it is burnished, or rubbed to the desired level of shininess.¹³¹ Of the gilding processes, water gilding is both more costly and more time-consuming, but it is also more durable and allows for the extra burnishing step.¹³² Figure 12 illustrates the layers involved in the water gilding process on the reception chair in this suite: wood, gesso, bole, and gold leaf. To date, the Blue Room parlor suite at the White House is the only full suite of furniture made by Vollmer to be completely gilded. Only one other piece made by Vollmer is known to be fully gilded using the water gilding process. It is an Aesthetic tête-à-tête (Figure 13) from the Dobson family parlor suite in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The tête-à-tête was a later addition to the parlor suite, which accounts for its difference in style and in finish from the rest of the suite.



Figure 13 *Tête-à-tête*, Gottlieb Vollmer, gilded cherry and modern silk damask, 1870-1875, accession number 1941-89-1, collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (image taken by author)

¹³¹ Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Furniture Materials, Trades and Techniques*, 90.

¹³² Ibid.

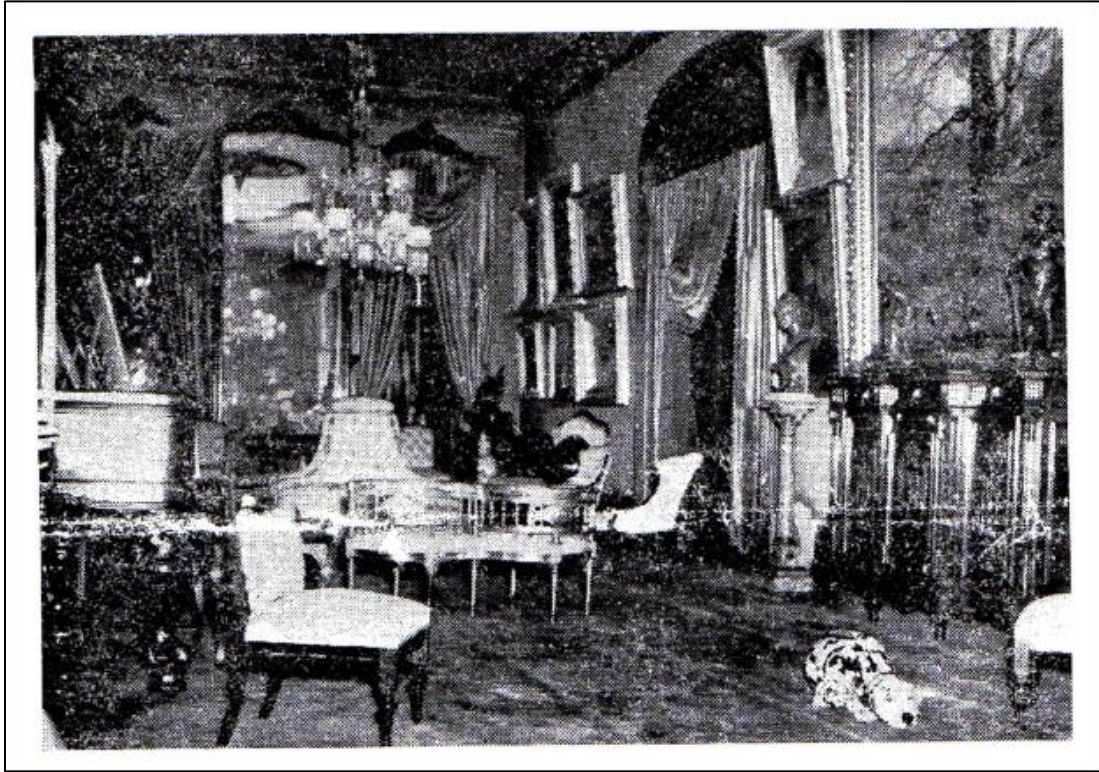


Figure 14 Photograph of the main parlor at Bella Vista, published in *East Falls: three-hundred years of history* (Philadelphia: Lithographic Publishing, 1976), 22

The Dobson family parlor suite was made, according to Dobson family tradition, by Vollmer for James Dobson's main parlor (Figure 14) in his home Bella Vista, located along the Schuylkill River outside of Philadelphia. It was upholstered in silk damask made at Dobson's textile manufactory, Dobson Mills, in 1875.¹³³ It is a much smaller parlor suite in comparison to the Blue Room parlor suite with 16 total pieces: the original 13 in

¹³³ Philadelphia Museum of Art, *Philadelphia: Three Centuries of American Art, Bi-Centennial Exhibition, April 11 to October 10, 1976*, (Philadelphia: The Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1976), 377. While the original suite stylistically fits a date of 1865 rather than 1875, the descendants of James Dobson donated the suite to the Philadelphia Museum of Art with the date of purchase being 1875.

the Rococo revival, and another three in the Aesthetic style. With the exception of the aforementioned tête-à-tête, the entire suite is ebonized cherry.



Figure 15 (Left) *Armchair from the Dobson family parlor suite*, Gottlieb Vollmer, ebonized cherry and modern silk damask, ca. 1875, accession number 1941-89-5, collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image courtesy of the American Decorative Arts Department at the Philadelphia Museum of Art **(Right)** detail of top left knee on the leg of the armchair from the Dobson family parlor suite showing the cherry wood underneath the ebonized surface, image taken by author

Figure 15 shows where the flower motif above the front left leg of the armchair has been chipped revealing the cherry wood beneath the ebonized surface. While any wood can be ebonized, cherry was the choice of wood to ebonize for Vollmer, as well as his contemporaries, because it is close grained and gave a smooth surface. Another example of Vollmer's ebonized furniture is the Green Room parlor suite made for the White House in 1859.



Figure 16 (Left) *Piano stool*, Gottlieb Vollmer, ebonized and gilded hardwood, mid-nineteenth century, collection of Nancy Staisey, image taken by author **(Right)** detail of scallop shell seat on piano stool in the collection of Nancy Staisey showing the carved and gilded striations of the shell, image taken by author

Although ebonizing and gilding have a beautiful effect when used separately, they are even more impressive when used together because of the contrast between them. This contrast is best seen in a pastiche of Renaissance and Rococo revival piano stool pictured left in Figure 16. The piano stool was passed down through Vollmer's daughter Emilie's line of the family with the tradition that it was made by Vollmer. Here, Vollmer used an unidentified hardwood, ebonized it, and then oil gilded select areas to bring more definition to the already intensely carved piece. Oil gilding, unlike water gilding, does not require gesso and bole and can be applied to an unprepared surface.¹³⁴ The oil gilding process allows for more precision because the mordant, unlike the gesso and bole, is not

¹³⁴ Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Furniture Materials, Trades and Techniques*, 90.

as messy or visible as the gold leaf wears off over time, making it ideal for pieces that are decoratively gilded like the piano stool. From the shell-shaped seat to the lion's paw feet, highlight gilding is seen throughout the piece. However, its use in the very precisely carved striations of the scallop shell seat, pictured right in Figure 16, illustrate how ebonizing and gilding together create a striking finish on an already impressive piece.

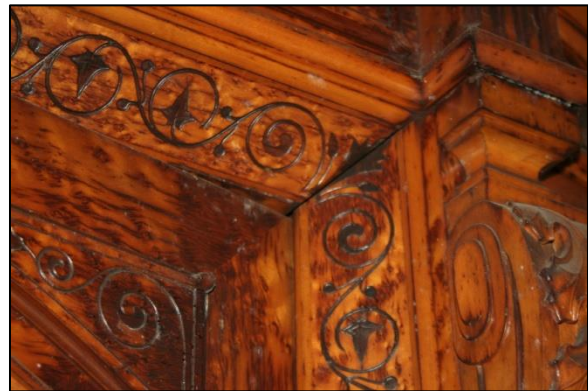


Figure 17 (Left) *Wardrobe from the John Child chamber suite*, Gottlieb Vollmer, bird's eye maple, ca. 1876, collection of John Child, image taken by author, **(Right)** detail of carved and incised ornament on the top corner of the wardrobe door from the John Child chamber suite showing the swirly, eye-like grain of the varnished bird's eye maple, image taken by author

Unlike ebonizing and gilding which change the appearance of the wood altogether, varnishing allows the beauty of the wood's figure to prevail by coating it in a

relatively transparent film of resins.¹³⁵ Thus, the choice of wood used is vital to the appearance of the overall piece. The 11-piece Renaissance revival and Eastlake John Child chamber suite made of bird's eye maple dated ca. 1876 is exemplary of Vollmer's use of a spirit-based varnish. Figure 17, depicting the wardrobe in this suite, shows how the varnish enhances the swirly, eye-like figure of the solid bird's eye maple. Instead of disguising the wood like with gilding or ebonizing, Vollmer selected superbly figured bird's eye maple to construct the suite with the intent that the wood's natural figure shows through the finish.

Construction and Techniques

Vollmer's use of materials and finishes is only part of what defines the high quality of his furniture; the other part is its construction. Like many of his contemporaries, Vollmer's business was known for the skill of its craftsmen and the quality of work they produced. This is documented not only in period text like *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphian's*, but it is visually evident when examining his documented case furniture, seating furniture, and tables.¹³⁶

There are few identified case pieces that were made by Vollmer's firm, G. Vollmer. Five case pieces are part of the John Child chamber suite, and a sixth piece is a desk in the collection of Leslie Koelsch. Many of the other surviving case pieces were

¹³⁵ Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Furniture Materials, Trades and Techniques*, 230.

¹³⁶ The skill of craftsmanship was commented on in many period reviews of his firm, stating "the work is done by hand by the most skillful workmen." *Pennsylvania Historical Review*, 93. Many auction advertisements recount Vollmer's made-to-order furniture and the materials: "the elegant furniture, including 2 sets rosewood drawing room furniture, pair elegant mantel and pier mirrors,..., superior oak dining room furniture, walnut bookcase, superior chamber furniture, etc....The furniture was made to order by Vollmer, and is equal to new." "Thomas Birch & Son Auctioneer: Sale No. 1428 Walnut Street—Elegant Furniture," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 6-9, 1865, p.7

made after Vollmer's death when G. Vollmer & Son was run by his son, Charles F. Vollmer.

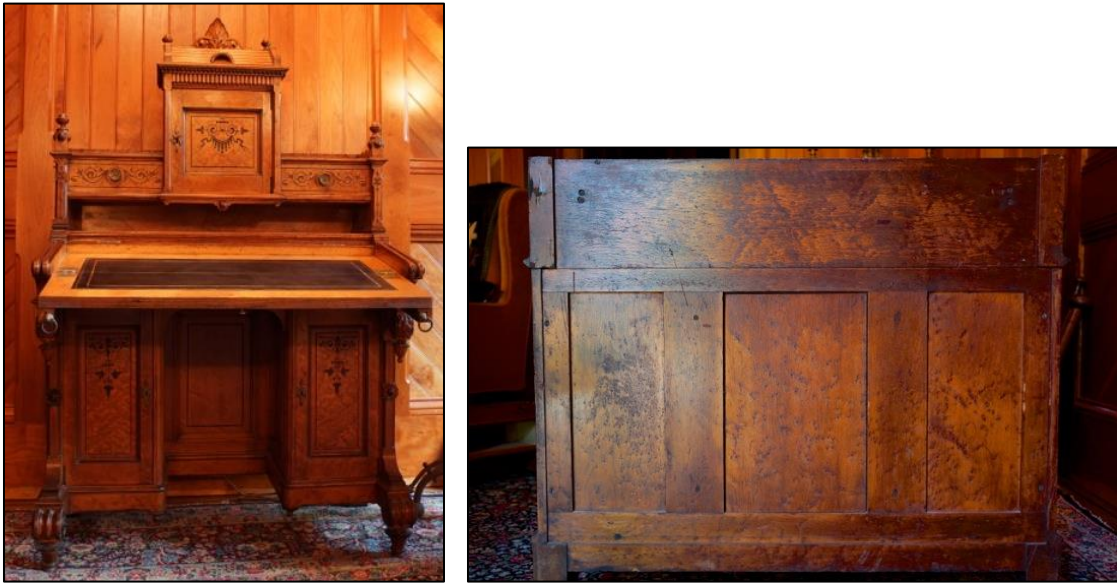


Figure 18 (Left) Desk, Gottlieb Vollmer, bird's eye maple, ca. 1875, collection of Leslie and John Koelsch, image courtesy of John Koelsch, **(Right)** detail of the back of the desk in the collection of Leslie and John Koelsch showing panel construction and wooden dowel joints joining the inner side panels of the two cabinets in the base of the desk to the back panel, image courtesy of John Koelsch

Included in the John Child chamber suite are a wardrobe, a dresser, a washstand, a chest of drawers with mirror, and a nightstand. All of these pieces, as well as the Leslie Koelsch desk, use solid bird's eye maple as the primary wood. Panel construction is the primary jointing technique used. For the back of the desk (Figure 18) Vollmer used few nails or screws to assemble his panels. The inner panels of the two cabinets in the base are joined to the back panels of the desk using two exposed rounded dowel joints, one at the top of the frame and one at the base as pictured in Figure 18. Although panel construction with visible dowels is by no means unique to Vollmer, it is seen in

Vollmer's known case pieces. Thus, while it is not a definitive detail, its presence or non-presence can be used to add or eliminate his name from a possible attribution list.



Figure 19 (Left) detail of dovetail joints on the drawer from the nightstand from the John Child chamber suite **(Middle)** detail of dovetail joints on the drawer from the chest of drawers with mirror from the John Child chamber suite **(Right)** detail of dovetail joints from the drawer on the dresser from the John Child chamber suite, images taken by author



Figure 20 (Left) *Wardrobe from the lady's bedroom chamber suite*, attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer, rosewood, 1850-1860, accession number 1941.2.56, Campbell House Museum, St. Louis, Missouri **(Right)** detail of dovetail joints on the drawer of the wardrobe in the lady's bedroom chamber suite (images taken by author)

Along with jointed frame and panel construction Vollmer utilized dovetail joints on all of his drawers known to date. The front, back and both side panels are secured together using very precise dovetail joints with tiny pins and wide tails. Figure 19 shows the dovetails on the drawers from the nightstand, the chest of drawers with mirror, and the dresser from the John Child chamber suite. Dovetails very similar to these are found on the attributed wardrobe from the Campbell House Museum's lady's bedroom chamber suite as shown in Figure 20. Although the dovetails on the wardrobe are not as perfectly spaced as the others, they are executed with tiny pins and wide tails.

Seating furniture made by Vollmer represents the majority of his presently known work. Although they do not have their original upholstery, they do all have their original frames. The forms of seating furniture by Vollmer include: the armchair, bergère chair, arm chair, side chair, reception chair, slipper chair, tête-à-tête, priedieu, ottoman, piano stool, sofa, chaise lounge, and center divan. While some of these forms only exist in one or two examples, others are found in multiple collections. Such as the armchair, the reception chair, and the sofa.



Figure 21 *Sofa from the library suite*, attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer, walnut, 1859, White House Collection, Washington, D.C., image courtesy of the White House Curatorial Department



Figure 22 *Sofa from the Blue Room parlor suite*, Gottlieb Vollmer, gilded ash, 1860, accession number 1860.583.1, White House Collection, Washington, D.C., image taken by author



Figure 23 *Sofa from the Dobson Family parlor suite*, Gottlieb Vollmer, ebonized cherry and modern silk damask, ca. 1875, accession number 1941-89-2, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Department

Eight sofas made by or attributed to Vollmer are known to exist. Two sofas were made as part of the White House library suite (Figure 21), four more as part of the gilded Blue Room parlor suite (Figure 22), and two additional sofas as part of the Dobson family parlor suite (Figure 23). In looking at a sample sofa from each suite certain construction characteristics are evident despite the fact that they are designed in two different styles (Louis XVI revival and the Rococo revival) and executed in three different types of woods and finishes (gilded ash, varnished walnut, and ebonized cherry.) While each sofa has a slightly different shape, each is comprised of four varying cabriole front legs joined to a fully exposed seat rail. The rear legs on both White House Louis XVI revival sofas are saber legs, while the rear legs on the Philadelphia Museum of Art Rococo revival sofa has cabriole legs matching the front. The arms on all three sofas have manchettes, but the Blue Room sofa also has padding under the arm that extends around to a fully upholstered back instead of exposed wood between the arm support and stile as in the other two. The arm supports are not a continuous piece of wood to the front legs and neither are the stiles to the rear legs in each sofa; rather they are each separately connected to the seat rail. In joining together the frame, Vollmer used a double wooden rounded-dowel joint as pictured left in Figure 24 on the arm support of the Library sofa. He also added small blocks of wood to the inside of the scrolled stiles and supports where the upholstered seats could be tacked down. These corner blocks were secured using a single central nail illustrated to the right in Figure 24. Unlike the frame which needs the structural support provided by a wooden dowel joint, the corner blocks are not subject to

stress like the frame, so a nail is sufficient. These same construction techniques are also found in the armchairs that match the sofas from each of these suites.



Figure 24 (Left) detail of the double wooden rounded dowel joint used to join the arm support in the Library sofa **(Right)** detail of the corner blocks nailed to either side of the back support for tacking down the upholstery on the seat, images taken by author

The construction of the reception chairs and side chairs on the other hand, are slightly different. Examples of Vollmer's reception chairs are found in four collections. There are a total of four gilded reception chairs in the Blue Room parlor suite pictured left in Figure 12, two in the John Child chamber suite picture right in Figure 25, two in the Dobson family parlor suite pictured middle in Figure 25, and two additional attributed reception chairs in the collection of Gerald Crawford pictured left in Figure 25.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ The attribution of the two reception chairs in the collection of Gerald Crawford is based on their style and form being identical to the reception chairs in the Blue Room parlor suite, only varnished instead of gilded.



Figure 25 (Left) *Reception Chair*, attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer, rosewood, ca. 1860, collection of Gerald Crawford, image courtesy of Richard Branyan, **(Middle)** *Reception Chair from the Dobson Family parlor suite*, Gottlieb Vollmer, ebonized cherry and modern silk damask, ca. 1880, collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Department, **(Right)** *Reception Chair from the John Child chamber suite*, Gottlieb Vollmer, bird's eye maple, ca. 1876, collection of John Child, image taken by author

Unlike the armchairs and sofas, the rear legs on Vollmer's reception chairs are an extension of the back stiles. That is they are a continuous piece of wood from where the top of the stile attaches to the crest rail all the way down to the foot. The method of joining is not visible in any of the four reception chairs, but it is likely that dowel joints were used in the gilded reception chairs and the Crawford reception chairs based on their relation to the rest of the Blue Room parlor suite and the thickness of the wood. The frames of the reception chairs in the John Child chamber suite and the Dobson family parlor suite are likely joined using a mortise and tenon joint because their stiles are connected by thin rectangular top rails, mid rails, and bottom rails. Structurally, the

mortise and tenon joint is a more sturdy choice for these pieces than the double wooden rounded dowel joint seen in his sofas because of the thinness of the rails.



Figure 26 *Extension Table* in first floor boardroom, Gottlieb Vollmer, mahogany, 1860, Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image taken by author

Tables represent the fewest known examples of Vollmer's furniture. One center table and two extension tables are firmly established as made by Vollmer, and an additional four center tables are attributed to him. The two extension tables are in the collection of the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company: one in the first floor boardroom and another larger extension table in the second floor boardroom. Unlike most of the pieces analyzed so far, the extension tables represent Vollmer's stock furniture

made explicitly for businesses, in this case the board rooms in the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company.¹³⁸



Figure 27 detail of the base of extension table on the first floor of the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company showing the alignment pins in the pedestal of the table, image taken by author



Figure 28 details of the underside of the extension table on the first floor of the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company showing the heavy use of screws in its construction, images taken by author

¹³⁸ “Furnishing a Nineteenth-Century Boardroom, 1835-1900,” *Annual Report of the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company*, vol. 226, 1978, 17.

Both extension tables are constructed in the same fashion. Only one table has two leaf inserts and the other has four. On the smaller of the two extension tables (Figure 26) the bulk of the table is supported by a central pedestal with four legs and a slide system when the table is extended. When fully extended the pedestal splits in half, two legs on each part. One half of the pedestal is fitted with four round holes, one in each corner, while the other half of the pedestal is fitted with four rounded pegs or alignment pins in the same places as seen in Figure 27. These four pegs and holes ensure that the two halves of the pedestal meet up when the table is not extended. The pedestals are attached to a board that runs width-wise underneath the top and is attached to the apron using a rebated joint and is reinforced with screws as shown left in Figure 28.



Figure 29 detail of underside of extension table on the first floor of the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company showing the slide system with dovetail joints that allow the table to extend, image taken by author

In order for the table to extend a series of slides are utilized under the top. In both tables two complete slides (a total of three boards) are used, although in the larger table the slides are longer. They are connected to each other using a giant dovetail joint with a wide pin. The innermost slide is attached to the apron on each end of the table, while the other two slides are joined to the inner slide and each other to allow the table to extend (Figure 29). Unlike the seating and case furniture, screws are actually used quite heavily throughout both extension tables as reinforcement for various pieces (Figure 28). The presence of so many screws is another indication that these two extension tables were ready-made stock pieces as opposed to made-to-order tables.



Figure 30 (Left) *Center Table from the Green Room parlor suite*, Gottlieb Vollmer, ebonized cherry, marble, and gilt mounts, 1859, accession number 1860.283.1, White house Collection, Washington, D.C. **(Middle)** detail of center table from the Green Room parlor suite showing the double wooden dowel joint joining the leg to the apron of the table **(Right)** detail of the center table from the Green Room parlor suite showing the wooden dowel joint connecting the X-stretcher to the center finial at the base of the center table, images taken by author

While the extension tables are constructed quite differently from the construction of the case and seating furniture, Vollmer's center tables are not. Of the five center tables identified, only the center tables in the Winterthur Museum (Figure 9) and the White

House (Figure 30) are considered to be made by Vollmer as proven by the paper label tacked to the inside of the apron and the listing in the 1860 bill of sale respectively. The other three (two at the Campbell House Museum, and one at the Philadelphia History Museum) are attributed to Vollmer based on both similarities in construction and design compared to the Winterthur and White House center tables.¹³⁹

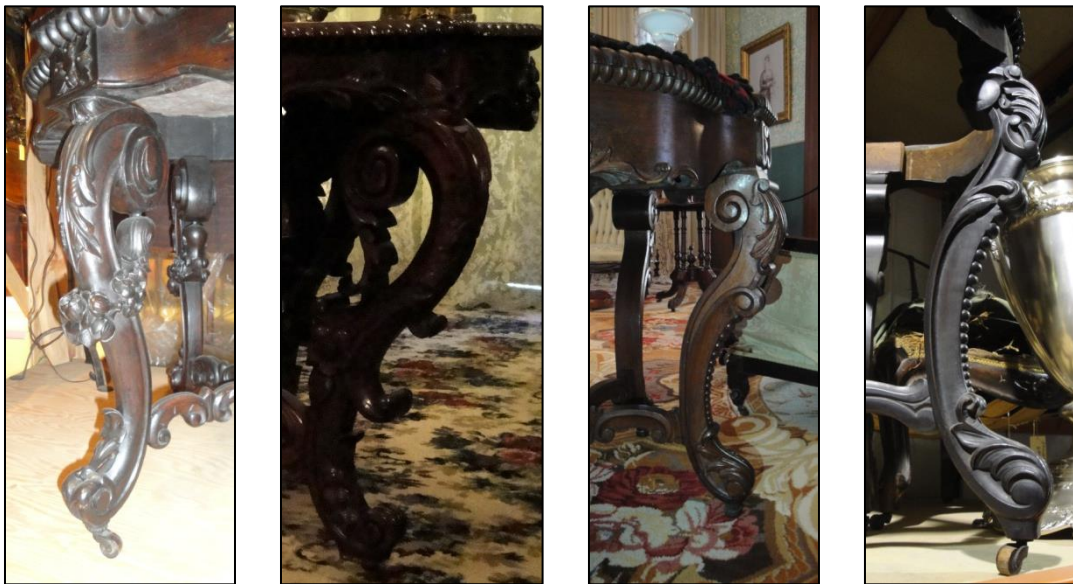


Figure 31(Left to Right) details of center table legs from the collections of the Winterthur Museum, the parlor and lady's bedroom in the Campbell House Museum, and the Philadelphia History Museum showing that the legs and apron are joined through the base of the top of the knee, images taken by author

All five tables have a marble turtle-back shaped top which rests on cabriole legs supported by an X-shaped stretcher with a center finial. Among the five tables, the center table in the White House is the anomaly. Unlike the other four, its turtle-back shaped

¹³⁹ The White House center table is also documented in photographs of the Green Room with the suite of seating furniture Vollmer made for President Buchanan. This entire suite, including the center table is also documented in the 1860 bill of sale. Gottlieb Vollmer, copy of the bill of sale to the White House dated January 1, 1860, White House Curatorial File, Washington, D.C.

marble top is not inset into the apron, but rather rests on top of it. Its legs are also joined to the inside of the apron using double dowel joints as pictured in middle of Figure 30, rather than the top of the scrolled legs being joined through the bottom of the apron as shown in Figure 31. The same double dowel joint is used to connect the X-shaped stretchers to the legs and the center finial in the White House center table depicted right in Figure 30. Unfortunately, the jointing method is not visible on the other four center tables, but since the double dowel joint is used in the White House center table as well as the sofas discussed earlier, it is probable that it was used in these four center tables too.

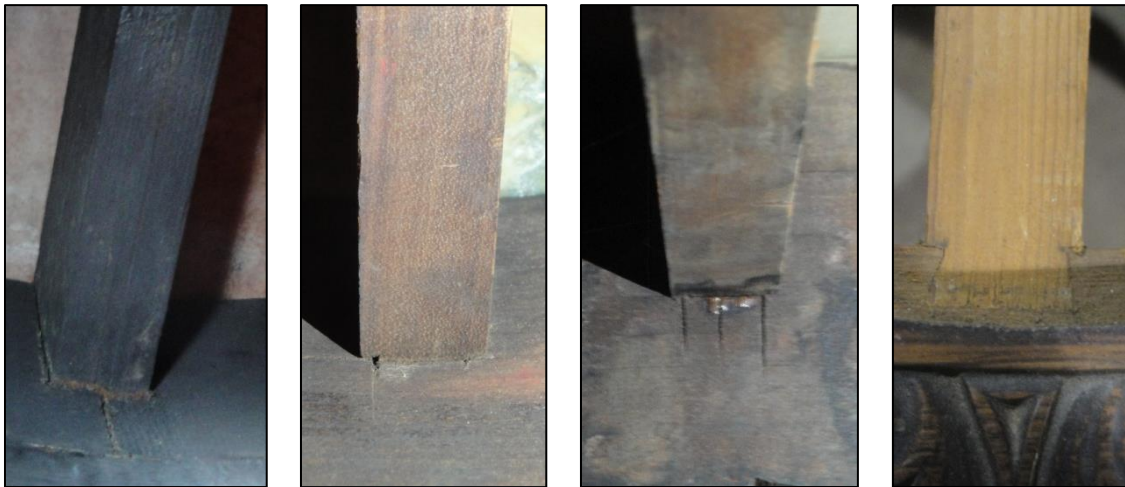


Figure 32 (Left to Right) details of center table support stretchers from the collections of the Winterthur Museum, the parlor and lady's bedroom in the Campbell House Museum, and the Philadelphia History Museum showing the support stretcher joined to the apron with a dovetail joint, images take by author

Despite not having visible joints that match the White House center table, the Winterthur Museum center table, the two Campbell House Museum center tables, and the Philadelphia History Museum center table possess one structural characteristic that the

White House center table does not: a support stretcher. The support stretcher is dovetailed to the inside of each apron across each of their widths. The dovetail joint is seen most clearly in the Philadelphia History Museum center table seen right in Figure 32, whose marble top has been removed for storage. In the other three center tables the joint is only seen from the underside of the table as the marble tops are not removed shown as the first three images in Figure 32.

All of the construction techniques discussed above: panel construction, mortise and tenon joints, double wooden dowel joints, dovetail joints, corner blocks, nails, screws, alignment pins, and support stretchers, none of them are unique to Vollmer. These techniques are used by all skilled cabinetmakers throughout the cabinetmaking trade. However, the execution of these construction techniques and the prevalence of some of them throughout all forms of furniture are unique to Vollmer. In the analysis of Vollmer's case furniture, seating furniture, and tables, he used the double wooden dowel joint as the primary means of joining parts. They are seen in the Kolesch desk, the Blue Room parlor suite, the library suite, and the Green Room center table. Vollmer's consistency in using the double wooden dowel joint throughout all forms of furniture is one indicator for a possible attribution. Although these techniques are not unique to Vollmer their presence or non-presence paired with their carved decorative motifs can affirm an attribution to Vollmer.

Decorative Motifs and Techniques

Similar to the construction techniques previously discussed Vollmer's choice of decorative motifs are not unique to him in terms of their design, but his interpretation and

execution of the motifs are unique. The decorative motifs of particular interest are: gadrooning, acanthus leaves, flowers, scrolls, and gouging.¹⁴⁰ All of these motifs and techniques are present in the labeled Winterthur center table, as well as the three attributed center tables in the Campbell House Museum and the Philadelphia History Museum collections and many other known pieces. For the purpose of a streamlined comparison of the decorative motifs and techniques the analytical focus is on the center tables, with other pieces brought in for additional support of the motifs and techniques used.



Figure 33 (Top Left) detail of the gadrooning on the center table from the Winterthur Museum collection **(Top Right)** detail of the gadrooning on the center table in the parlor from the Campbell House Museum collection **(Bottom Left)** detail of the gadrooning on the center table in the lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection **(Bottom Right)** detail of the gadrooning on the center table from the Philadelphia History Museum collection, images taken by author

¹⁴⁰ “Gouging” refers to deep/wide grooves made in furniture by the use of a gouge tool and differs from incising by the size of the mark. It was a term used by John Courtney, Furniture Conservator for the National Park Service, Executive Support Facility, in our discussion of Gottlieb Vollmer’s furniture in the White House collection in May 2013.

All four tables have a turtle-back shaped top with an inset marble slab. The edge of the marble on all four tables is completely surrounded by elongated gadrooning, a series of convex curves with rounded globular heads transitioning to thin wispy tails against the marble tops (Figure 33). Additional globular heads on each element of gadrooning are mounted along the aprons of each table underneath the gadrooning giving the illusion that the gadrooning was carved in the round. However, the heads mounted underneath are not perfectly in line with the heads of the gadrooning above as shown in Figure 34.



Figure 34 (Top Left) detail of the gadrooning on the center table from the Winterthur Museum collection showing a wood divider between the globular heads of the gadrooning on top and the globular heads glued to the apron below **(Top Right)** detail of the gadrooning on the center table in the parlor from the Campbell House Museum collection showing the globular heads glued to the apron underneath the gadrooning along the edge **(Bottom Left)** detail of the gadrooning on the center table in the lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection showing the globular heads glued to the apron underneath the gadrooning on the edge **(Bottom Right)** detail of the gadrooning on the center table from the Philadelphia History Museum collection showing the globular heads glued to the apron underneath the gadrooning on the edge, images taken by author

Although the gadrooning among the four tables is very similar, the gadrooning on the Winterthur center table has thin ridges between each convex curve and a slender wood divider between the globular heads on the edge and the globular heads on the apron. The

addition of the ridges and divider in the Winterthur center table may be explained by its more elaborate design than the other three center tables, which was probably influenced by the taste and budget of the three different patrons for the four tables.



Figure 35 (Top Left) detail of applied floral carving on the center table from the Winterthur Museum collection **(Top Right)** detail of applied floral carving from the center table in the parlor from the Campbell House Museum collection **(Bottom Left)** detail of applied floral carving on the center table in the lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection **(Bottom Right)** detail of applied shell carving on the center table from the Philadelphia History Museum collection, images taken by author

Below the gadrooning, on the apron of three of the four center tables, are applied floral designs. They are centered between each leg on the center tables from the Winterthur Museum collection and the Campbell House Museum collection. The center table in the collection of the Philadelphia History Museum has carved shell motif applied in place of a floral arrangement as shown in Figure 35. Unlike John Henry Belter, who is known for botanical accuracy in his floral carvings, Vollmer's flowers are stylized

blossoms. These stylized flowers range from four short and wide petals to nine long slender petals to stylized roses. While the variety of stylized flowers may be different their execution is not. Whether the flower has four petals, five petals, or nine petals each flower has a distinct button-like center that protrudes from the middle of the petals. Surrounding the button-like centers on each petal are two to three little incised lines, imitating the texture of a flower as depicted in Figure 35.



Figure 36 (Left) detail of the floral decoration on the seat rail of the piano stool in the collection of Nancy Staisey **(Right)** detail of the floral decoration on the seat rail of the ottoman from the Dobson Family parlor suite in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, images taken by author

These flowers are also found on the seat rails of the Dobson family parlor suite in the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the attributed piano stool in the collection of Nancy Staisy pictured in Figure 36. In addition to the stylized blossoms each center table also has a stylized version of a rose. The rose is found on the aprons of both Campbell House Museum center tables, and on the leg of the Winterthur Museum center table. Each rose has a deep center created by three petals, and two more layers of petals surrounding the center set. In the outside layer of rose petals from the Campbell House Museum parlor center table and the Winterthur Museum center table are the same incised lines found on the petals of the other flowers again imitating the texture of a real petal.

While the decorations on the tops of the tables are very similar, the bases of all four tables are almost identical. All four bases are comprised of four cabriole legs reinforced by X-shaped stretchers with a center finial. In looking at the legs of each table (Figure 31) the very basic design is a cabriole leg with acanthus leaves on the knee flowing down the leg and on the foot flowing up the leg. Again, that overall design is not exclusive to Vollmer, but if the legs are examined closer, certain characteristic techniques in the carving come to light. On the acanthus leaves over the knees the widest part of the leaves has an incised triangular design, a stylized imitation of the actual veins in a leaf. These incised veins are repeated in the acanthus leaves on the feet of the Philadelphia History Museum center table and the Campbell House Museum bedroom center table. Whereas the Campbell House Museum parlor center table and the Winterthur Museum center table have leaves that are almost feathery looking on their scrolled feet.



Figure 37 (Left to Right) details of the carved scroll on the knees of the right legs on the center tables from the Winterthur Museum collection, in the parlor and lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection, and from the Philadelphia History Museum collection, images taken by author

In comparing the scroll in the knees of each cabriole leg it is seen that they are deeply carved to exaggerate the scroll. However, the scrolls on the Philadelphia History Museum center table and the Campbell House bedroom center table are smaller and more circular than the scrolls on the Campbell House parlor center table and Winterthur center table, which are larger and more ovular shown in Figure 37. These larger and more ovular scrolls seem to be more prevalent in Vollmer's than others. They are found on the Blue Room parlor suite, the extension tables in the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company, and the attributed wardrobe in the gentleman's bedroom at the Campbell House Museum.

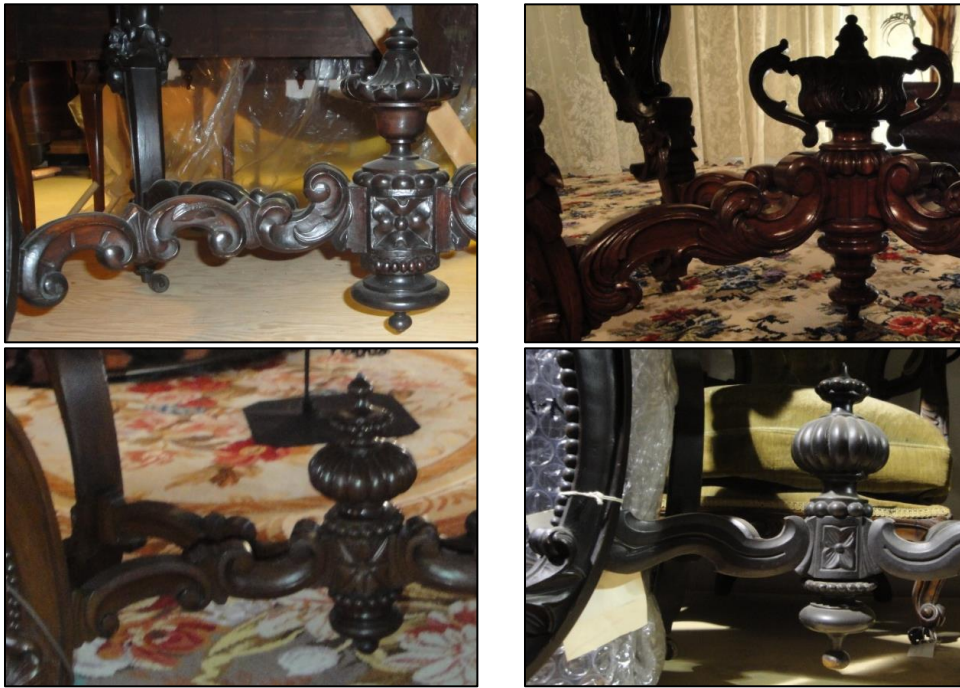


Figure 38 (Top Left) detail of the X-shaped stretcher and center finial on the center table from the Winterthur Museum collection **(Top Right)** detail of the X-shaped stretcher and center finial on the center table in the parlor from the Campbell House Museum collection **(Bottom Left)** detail of the X-shaped stretcher and center finial on the center table in the lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection **(Bottom Right)** detail of the X-shaped stretcher and center finial on the center table from the Philadelphia History Museum collection, images taken by author

Supporting the scrolled cabriole legs on each table is an X-shaped stretcher with a center finial. While the Philadelphia History Museum center table has a sort of S-scroll stretcher, the Campbell House Museum center tables have stretchers made up of two C-scrolls, and the Winterthur Museum center table has a stretcher made up of three C-scrolls (Figure 38).



Figure 39 detail of perpendicular gouging on the C-scroll of the stretcher from the center table in the Winterthur Museum collection, image taken by author

On the first of the C-scrolls on the Winterthur Museum center table is a series of three gouges that are perpendicular to the C-scroll as seen in Figure 39. These gouges are deeper and wider than an incised line and are rounded at the ends, making a sort of elliptical indent in the wood. They are also found as a series of nine gouges in a smaller scale on the C-scrolls along the apron of the Campbell House Museum parlor center table, but are not present on the Campbell House Museum bedroom center table or the Philadelphia History Museum center table. However, gouging similar to the Winterthur

center table is found on the seat rails of the Blue Room parlor suite and the C-scrolls on the feet of the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company extension tables.

While the tables make for a great comparison due to their similarity in form, design, and time period within Vollmer's career (1854 to 1864), they are just a sample of his furniture. The gouging, scrolls, acanthus leaves, flowers, and gadrooning present in all four turtle-back shaped center tables are also found on many other pieces attributed to Vollmer. These decorative motifs in conjunction with structural characteristics, materials, and surviving documentation are vital evidences used to make an attribution to Vollmer of an unattributed piece or suite of furniture.

What makes Vollmer, Vollmer? The White House Case Study

The commissions from First Lady Harriet Lane between 1858 and 1860 are once again brought to the forefront in the discussion of Gottlieb Vollmer. They no doubt played a pivotal role in establishing Vollmer's reputation as one of Philadelphia's most prominent cabinetmakers, and the bills of sale associated with these commissions are likewise fundamental in establishing the attribution to Vollmer to a previously unidentified suite of library furniture (Figure 40) still present in the White House collection.



Figure 40 (Left) Armchair from the library suite, attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer, walnut, 1859, White House collection, Washington, D.C., image take by author, **(Right)** Sofa from the library suite, attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer, walnut, 1859, White House collection, Washington, D.C., image courtesy of the White house curatorial department

Listed in the 1859 bill of sale, the first of two commissions completed for the White House, is an entry that reads “2 sofas [upholstered in] green morocco, 4 [sofa] pillows [in green morocco], 4 window chairs [in green morocco], [and] 2 arm [chairs in green morocco....]”¹⁴¹ Although the window chairs and pillows do not survive in the White House collection, the two sofas and two armchairs, a sample of each pictured in [figures] are believed to be the sofas and armchairs documented in this entry.

¹⁴¹ Gottlieb Vollmer, copy of bill of sale to the White House dated January 21st, 1859, White House Curatorial File, Washington, D.C.



Figure 41 Engraving of "the President's Library" printed in *Frank Leslie's Magazine*, 1866

Further affirming the possibility that these two sofas and armchairs are the ones listed in the 1859 bill of sale is an engraving of "the President's Library" from *Frank Leslie's Magazine* dated 1866. In the illustration (Figure 41) is one of the two sofas next to a rather intriguing taxidermic bear chair and the second sofa to the left of the globe. The presence of the sofas in this illustration places them in the White House collection prior to 1866, enhancing the probability that they were made by Vollmer.



Figure 42 (Left) *James Buchanan*, George Peter Alexander Healy, oil on canvas, 1859, accession number NPG.65.48, National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C. **(Right)** detail of the library armchair painted in George Healy's portrait of President Buchanan in the National Portrait Gallery, images taken by author

In addition to the 1859 bill of sale and the 1866 illustration, a portrait dated 1859 by George Healy depicts President James Buchanan standing in front of one of the armchairs (Figure 42), which dates the armchair more precisely to the time of Vollmer's commission from the White House. Although this textual and pictorial evidence sustains the attribution to Vollmer, comparisons to other known Vollmer pieces, most especially the Blue Room parlor suite, further support an attribution to Vollmer of the unidentified library sofas and armchairs.



Figure 43 Armchairs from the library suite and the Blue Room parlor suite, image taken by author

In comparing the Blue Room suite to the sofas and armchairs it is instructive to view an arm chair from each suite side by side (Figure 43). While one is gilt ash and the other is varnished walnut, the armchairs from each suite have a clear relationship to each other. Both armchairs are heavy and stout in appearance, with thick wood frames and wide seats. The decorative motifs on each include gouges, rosettes, acanthus leaves, scales, and scrolls.



Figure 44 (Top) detail of the seat rail on the library suite armchair showing a series of twelve perpendicular gouges
(Bottom) detail of seat rail on the Blue Room parlor suite armchair showing a series of fifteen perpendicular gouges, images taken by author

Along the seat rails of the Library armchair and the Blue Room armchair are a series of deep, elliptically-shaped gouges that are perpendicular to the seat rail, 12 on the Library armchair and 15 on the Blue Room armchair (Figure 44). The discrepancy in the number of gouges is accounted for by the added length of the Blue Room armchair's serpentine-shaped seat rail verses the slightly curved seat rail on the Library armchair, and the addition of the applied scroll work on the Library armchair which interrupts the continuity of the perpendicular gouges. These gouges are found on a remarkable number of Vollmer's furniture, including the center tables depicted in (Figure 39), as well as the Campbell House Museum wardrobe from the gentleman's bedroom (Figure 45), the Campbell House Museum bed from the lady's bedroom (Figure 45), and the larger

extension table in the upstairs boardroom at the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company (Figure 46).



Figure 45 (Left) detail of perpendicular gouging on the bed from the chamber suite in the lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection **(Right)** detail of perpendicular gouging on the carved corner of the wardrobe in the gentleman's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection, images taken by author



Figure 46 detail of perpendicular gouging on the C-scroll foot on the extension table in the upstairs boardroom from the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company collection, image taken by author

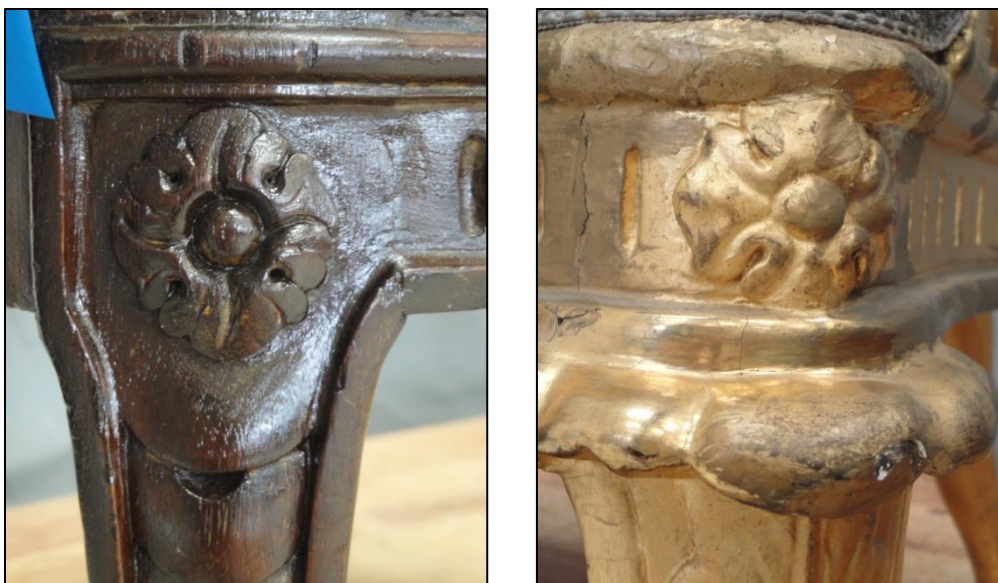


Figure 47 (Left) detail of rosette above the knee on the front legs of the library suite armchair **(Right)** detail of the rosette above the knee on the front legs of the Blue Room parlor suite armchair, images taken by author

At the ends of each seat rail on the Blue Room armchair and the Library armchair are stylized rosettes (Figure 47). They are carved directly above each front leg and are comprised of a rounded center encircled by four petals that are pinched together at the ends to create an illusion of eight petals. To date, these specific rosettes are only found on the pieces in the Blue Room parlor suite and the Library sofas and armchairs.



Figure 48 (Left) details of the club-shaped legs on the armchairs from the library suite and Blue Room parlor suite in the White House collection showing the carved acanthus leaf and scaled decorations **(Right)** details of the scrolled arm supports on the armchairs from the library suite and the Blue Room parlor suite in the White House collection showing the carved acanthus leaf and scaled decorations, images taken by author

Below and above these rosettes are two club-shaped front legs and two thick scrolled arm supports that connect the arms to the medallion-shaped backs (Figure 48). Along with the similarity in silhouettes the legs and arm supports possess similar decorative motifs: the acanthus leaf and scaling. The acanthus leaf motif is found on the scrolled stiles of both armchairs and on the club-shaped leg of the Blue Room armchair. The acanthus leaf on each armchair is carved with three top blades, an incised mid-rib, and smaller incised veins in each blade. Although the incised detail of the acanthus leaves is obscured by the layers of gesso and bole from gilding on the Blue Room armchair compared to the library suite acanthus leaves, the same incised lines are still visible. Scaling decorates the legs on the Library armchair and the upper portion of the arm supports on the Blue Room armchair. The scales fall gradually down the front of the legs

and the front of the arm supports respectively, with small gouged crescents at the top of each scale creating a fish-scale like effect. Again, the scales on the Blue Room armchair are slightly distorted from the layers of gesso from gilding and re-gilding.



Figure 49 (Left) detail of the horizontal scroll on the arm support of the armchair from the library suite in the White House collection **(Right)** detail of the vertical scroll on the arm support of the armchair in the Blue Room parlor suite from the White House collection, images taken by author

When looking at the acanthus leaf and scale-adorned arm supports from the side, their scrolled shape is easy to see in Figure 49. Instead of perfectly rounded scrolls, Vollmer's are more ovular in shape and have deeply gouged recesses that spiral around and up forming the arm support of each chair. Scrolls like these are found on several other pieces made by Vollmer. These include two of the center tables (Figure 37), the lady's bedroom chamber suite from the Campbell House Museum (Figure 50), a wardrobe in the gentleman's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum (Figure 50),

and both extension tables from the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company (Figure 51).



Figure 50 (Left) detail of scroll on the central cartouche on the footboard of the bed from the chamber suite in the lady's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection **(Right)** detail of the scroll on the top right corner decoration of the wardrobe in the gentleman's bedroom from the Campbell House Museum collection, images taken by author

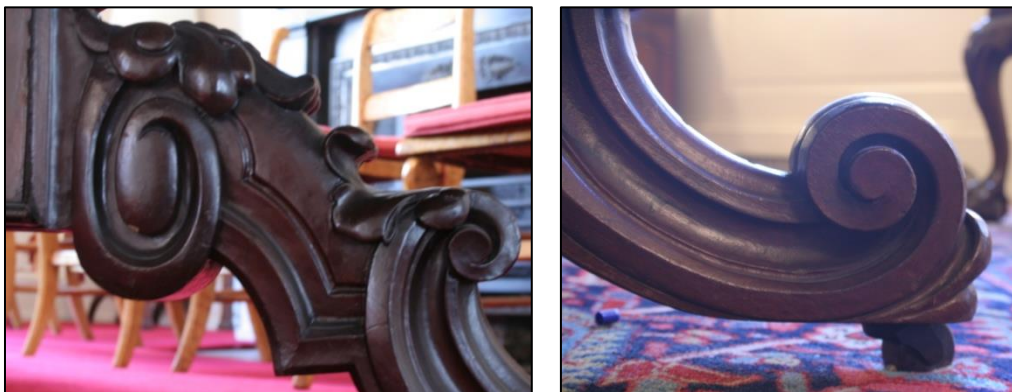


Figure 51 (Left) detail of the scroll on the legs of the extension table in the upstairs boardroom from the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company collection **(Right)** detail of the scroll on the foot of the extension table in the first floor boardroom from the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company collection, images taken by author



Figure 52 (Left) detail of gadrooning on the crest rail of the sofa from the library suite from the White House collection **(Right)** detail of the gadrooning from the edge of the center table from the Winterthur Museum collection, images taken by author

Last but not least is a detail on the Library armchair that, while it is not present on the Blue Room parlor suite, is present on the Winterthur Museum center table: gadrooning. The detail of the crest rail on the Library sofa in the left of Figure 52 shows distinctive gadrooning, a series of convex curves that are formed by a globular head transitioning into a wispy tail with a thin ridge carved in between each convex curve. The gadrooning on the Library sofa is almost identical to the gadrooning that lines the edge of the labeled Winterthur Museum center table shown right in Figure 52.

Based on decoration and construction similarities between the Blue Room parlor suite, the labeled Winterthur Museum center table, the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company extension tables, the Philadelphia History Museum center table, and a number of individual pieces and suites from the Campbell House Museum, as well as supporting evidence from the 1859 bill of sale, the 1866 illustration of “the President’s

Library” in *Frank Leslie’s Magazine*, and the portrait painting of President James Buchanan in the National Portrait Gallery, the two previously unattributed armchairs and sofas can be firmly attributed to Vollmer. While the Library furniture both visually and historically make for an excellent case study, the same methodology can be applied to attribute other unknown pieces to Vollmer. The analysis and methodology here can now be used to differentiate Vollmer’s furniture from that of his contemporaries in Philadelphia and New York and confirm his importance in the 19th-century furniture industry as a whole.

CHAPTER III: MANUFACTURING COMPETITION

In the early years of the 19th century, Philadelphia fell second to New York as the leading style center of the United States of America. Yet it continued to produce some of the most prolific cabinetmakers of the century. Between 1840 and 1900 both cities spawned a handful of cabinetmakers whose names have become synonymous with 19th-century American furniture. Among them were Daniel Pabst, Allen & Bro., George J. Henkels, and Gottlieb Vollmer. From the previous discussions of Vollmer's family, firm, and furniture what makes Vollmer, Vollmer is clear, but what of his relevance? What is Vollmer's significance as one of Philadelphia's most prominent cabinetmakers and upholsterers?

By comparing Vollmer's business to those of his fellow Philadelphians, Daniel Pabst, Allen & Bro., and George J. Henkels it is evident that like them he was producing furniture of high quality and superior craftsmanship, which is further substantiated through a thorough analysis of each firm's furniture. The analysis of the four firm's furniture will demonstrate that Vollmer was manufacturing at the same level and of equal skill as the other three. However, an analysis of their Centennial exhibits will reveal that unlike his Philadelphia contemporaries Vollmer was beginning to include interior decorating into his business, which likens him to his competitors in New York rather than his Philadelphia neighbors. Through these comparisons and analyses a basis for future

attributions of unknown furniture is formed and Vollmer's significance as one of Philadelphia's great 19th-century cabinetmakers is substantiated in furniture history.

Philadelphia: The Houses of Four Contemporaries

The furniture warerooms of Daniel Pabst, Allen & Bro., George J. Henkels, and Gottlieb Vollmer were all representative of Philadelphia's furniture industry in the mid-19th century. All four were either native white Americans (Allen & Bro. and Henkels) or first-generation German immigrants (Pabst and Vollmer) working in a furniture manufactory.¹⁴² Despite being in the majority percentile for both Philadelphia's ethnic and business type composites, their firms were not as average as these percentages seem to reveal. All four businesses catered primarily to the city's wealthier citizens and businesses, furnishing the homes of some of Philadelphia's (and the country's) most noteworthy people.

Vollmer's background best mirrors that of fellow cabinetmaker, Daniel Pabst. Both men immigrated to Philadelphia from Germany in the 1830s and 1840s. Pabst came from Langenstein, an area within the region of Hesse-Darmstadt, in 1849, and Vollmer from Ludwigsberg, in the Kingdom of Württemberg, most probably between 1832 and 1834.¹⁴³ As both men were young adults when they immigrated, Pabst being approximately 23 and Vollmer somewhere between 16 and 18, they had learned their

¹⁴² In 1850 native white Americans and first-generation German immigrants were the top two percentiles in the ethnic composite of Philadelphia's furniture industry. In that same year manufactories made up the largest percent of the types of establishments ran in the furniture business. For full analysis of the ethnic composite of the Philadelphia furniture industry see Talbott, "The Workers" in "Philadelphia Furniture Industry 1850-1880, 20-55. For definition of a manufactory see, Talbott, "The Philadelphia Furniture Industry from 1850-1880", 88.

¹⁴³ For immigration date of Daniel Pabst see, David A. Hanks and Page Talbott, "Daniel Pabst—Philadelphia Cabinetmaker," *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 73, no. 316 (April 1977): 7. For immigration dates of Gottlieb Vollmer see, Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, 2333, and McMichael, *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 157.

trade as cabinetmakers in their hometowns. Pabst was taught cabinetmaking in a trade school, the Höhere Gewerbschule, later called the Grossherzoglichen Technischen Hochschule zu Darmstadt, which was established in 1836 when Pabst was ten years old.¹⁴⁴ Vollmer learned the trade as an apprentice to his father, who was already an established cabinetmaker in Ludwigsberg.¹⁴⁵ Upon immigrating to Philadelphia, both men became active in the furniture industry as journeymen. By 1849, when Pabst immigrated to the city, Vollmer was four to five years into his cabinet and upholstery partnership with H. Montre, which lasted until 1854. In that same year both Pabst and Vollmer opened their very own furniture manufactories and warerooms within Philadelphia's furniture district.

Located between Chestnut and Spruce Streets, and stretching between 13th and Front Streets on City Hall's southeast side was Philadelphia's furniture district in the mid-19th century.¹⁴⁶ It was within this centralized area that Philadelphia's most prominent cabinet and upholstery firms, like Daniel Pabst (active 1849-1896), George J. Henkels (active 1843-1877), Allen & Bro. (active 1835-1902), and G. Vollmer (active 1841-1893), housed their warerooms. Here they fulfilled orders for some of the city's, and the country's, most notable patrons. Their patrons included Charles Henry Lea of Philadelphia, Haller Nutt of Mississippi, and President James Buchanan, to name a

¹⁴⁴ Hanks and Talbott, "Daniel Pabst—Philadelphia Cabinetmaker, 7.

¹⁴⁵ Schaf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, 2333.

¹⁴⁶ Talbott states that "the concentration of firms continued to be on Front, Second, Third, and Walnut Streets, although by 1880 there was a secondary nucleus of firms in Germantown and in Kensington." While she lists these four specific streets, three running North/South (Front, Second, and third), and one running East/West (Walnut), her maps showing the centralization of the furniture industry in Philadelphia encompass a much larger square space than these four specific streets. Front and 13th Streets and Chestnut and Spruce Streets roughly squaring off that mapped-space with designated North, South, East, West boundaries. Talbott, "Philadelphia Furniture Industry, 1850-1880," 4, 41, 42.

few.¹⁴⁷ Like many cabinetmakers, their addresses changed throughout their business years. George J. Henkels, for instance, relocated the most out of the four, moving upwards of ten times during his 34 year career. However, each time his establishment remained within the nucleus of Philadelphia's furniture district.

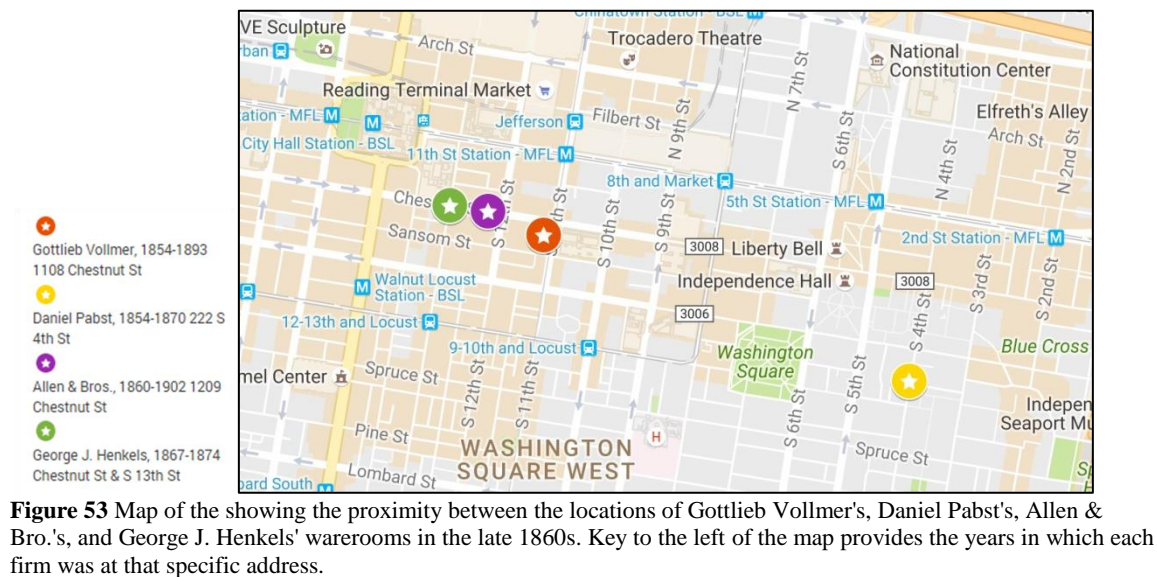


Figure 53 Map of the showing the proximity between the locations of Gottlieb Vollmer's, Daniel Pabst's, Allen & Bro.'s, and George J. Henkels' warerooms in the late 1860s. Key to the left of the map provides the years in which each firm was at that specific address.

Between 1867 and 1874, Henkels' warerooms were located on the northwest corner of Chestnut and 13th Streets (Figure of warerooms).¹⁴⁸ At the same time, only one block down Chestnut Street on the corner of 12th Street was the Allen & Bro. establishment (Fig. 1209 Chestnut St.)¹⁴⁹; and just one block further, on the corner of

¹⁴⁷ For reference to Henry Charles Lea see Hanks and Talbott, "Daniel Pabst—Philadelphia Cabinetmaker," 9. For reference to Haller Nutt see McAdams, Ogletree (ed.), *The Building of "Longwood"*, 76.

¹⁴⁸ Kenneth L. Ames, "George Henkels, nineteenth-century Philadelphia cabinetmaker," *The Magazine Antiques* (October 1973): 641.

¹⁴⁹ I.L. Vansant (ed.), *The Royal Road to Wealth: An Illustrated History of the Successful Business Houses of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Samuel Loag, 1869): 45-46.

Chestnut and 11th Streets, were the cabinet and upholstery warerooms of G. Vollmer (Fig. reference chapter 1). Pabst, on the other hand, was located on Spruce and 5th Streets, at the opposite end of the furniture hub, closer to the water-front.¹⁵⁰ (Figure) depicts the physical relationship of the establishments of Pabst, Henkels, Allen & Bro., and Vollmer in the years between 1867 and 1874.

¹⁵⁰ Hanks and Talbott, “Daniel Pabst—Philadelphia Cabinetmaker,” 8.

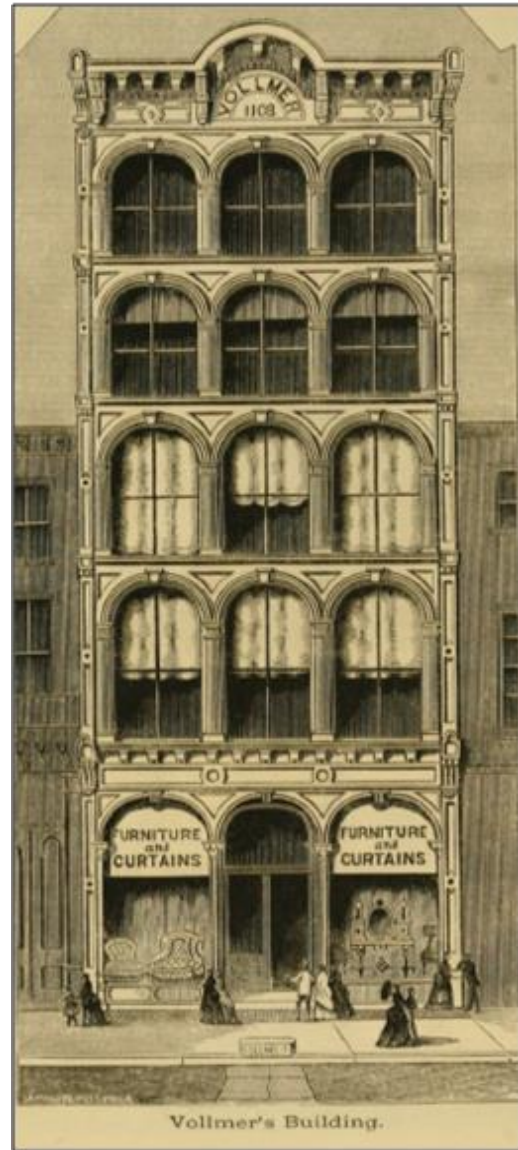
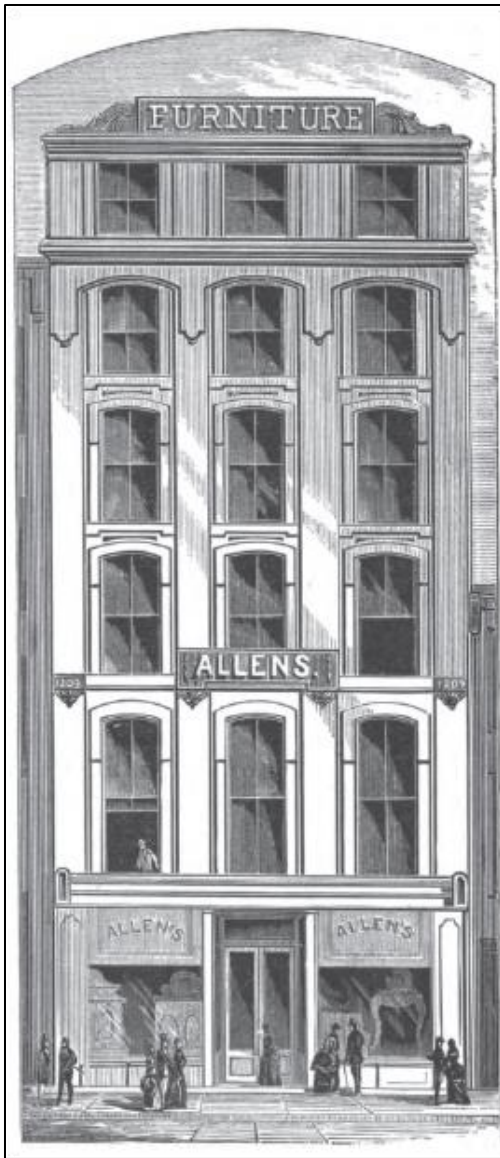


Figure 54 (Left) Allen's Building at 1209 Chestnut Street, illustration in I.L. Vansant, *The Royal Road to Wealth* (Philadelphia: Samuel Loag, 1869) **(Right)** Vollmer's Building at 1108 Chestnut Street, illustrated in *Pennsylvania Illustrated* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1874)

The illustration of the Allen & Bro. firm at 1209 Chestnut Street from the 1869 publication, *The Royal Road to Wealth* (Figure 54), and the illustration of Vollmer's firm, G. Vollmer, at 1108 Chestnut Street from the 1874 publication, *Pennsylvania Illustrated*

(Figure 54), provide a street view of what shopping on Chestnut Street looked like. Both illustrations depict a frontal view of the six-story façade of the Allen & Bro. warerooms and the five-story façade of G. Vollmer's warerooms.

Above both display windows, on either side of the double-door entry, of 1108 Chestnut Street, Vollmer had signs reading "FURNITURE and CURTAINS." Placed in the window to the left were elaborately upholstered, tufted and fringed, chairs, possibly slipper chairs for a lady's boudoir based on the apparent low seat without arms and high back. Opposite the main doors in the right display window were a dressing table and chair, most likely designed as a pair. With one door ajar, Vollmer's warerooms were open for daily business. Welcoming all present and prospective clients, a man is depicted with his left arm extended toward Vollmer's door leading two ladies into the warerooms. Once inside the ladies will find an array of fine furniture and upholstery, such as the chairs and dressing table viewed in the shop window.

Had these two ladies ventured one block further to 1209 Chestnut Street, they would have encountered a very similar situation at the warerooms of Allen & Bro. Like Vollmer's establishment, Allen & Bro. had a sign above each window display that read simply, "ALLEN'S," referring of course to the proprietors rather than the goods. In both windows they displayed samples of their cabinet furniture. Placed in the window left of the main doors are two large cabinet pieces, possibly a sideboard to the left and a double mirrored-door wardrobe to the right. Opposite the entry, in the right display window, is, what appears to be, a cabriole legged dressing table and a second piece, most probably a

chair or stool to match. Obstructing the view of this piece is a couple admiring its design. Shown to the couple's left a lady enters Allen & Bro. through their right main door.

Although what the ladies in these two illustrations of 1108 Chestnut Street and 1209 Chestnut Street encounter once inside the buildings was not depicted, the inside of the warerooms were described by the authors of the following articles. The 1874 article in *Pennsylvania Illustrated* described G. Vollmer's warerooms as follows:

the building is twenty-four by two hundred and thirty-five feet, five stories high, with an iron front in the Corinthian style on Chestnut street, and six stories—the first iron, the rest brick—on Sansom street. The basement is two hundred and seventy feet in length; the front part is used as a drawing and pattern department, and the rest mostly for fine woods; in the rear, on Sansom street, is the steam hoisting and heating apparatus. The ground floor is used as the fine furniture and curtain department, and also contains offices. The second floor is devoted exclusively to chamber furniture; the third to stuffed and upholstered furniture; the fourth for storing and for finishing in varnish and oil; the fifth for a workroom in upholstery and curtain finishing. The sixth story on Sansom street is used exclusively in finishing the finest work.¹⁵¹

This excerpt on Vollmer's warerooms reveals that the ladies depicted in the illustration had the first three floors for their shopping pleasure where they saw samples in the variety of fine furniture and upholstery which Vollmer offered his clients in made-to-order requests.

The Allen & Bro. establishment was described similarly in an 1869 article from *The Royal Road to Wealth*. The author wrote, "Its dimensions are twenty-two by one hundred and fifty feet, six stories high. The three lower floors are used for sales-rooms,

¹⁵¹ *Pennsylvania Illustrated*, 82.

the upper ones for upholstering and finishing purposes.”¹⁵² Although not as detailed as to what types of furnishings were kept in each sales room, the intrinsic layout of the two warerooms was the same: three show rooms and three levels for finishing touches. Following the description of the Allen & Bro. layout, the author praised, “This is one of the most convenient furniture warehouses in the city, having been perfectly adapted to all wants by improvement which a long experience in the business suggested as necessary.”¹⁵³ At the time the article was published, Allen & Bro. had been in business for 34 years, and Vollmer for 28 years. With only six years difference between the total duration of their businesses, and warerooms laid out almost identically to each other, it seems fair to say the Vollmer’s warerooms also qualified as “one of the most convenient furniture warehouses in the city....”¹⁵⁴

In conjunction with having the most convenient furniture warehouses in the city, Allen & Bro. and G. Vollmer had manufactories of equal praise, where “all the work is hand-made and of the most elaborate designs, no machinery being used.”¹⁵⁵ This too was true of Pabst and his shop, which in an 1889 description said that the furniture was “done all by hand—each part receives the most minute attention—remarkable for beauty, finished workmanship, durability and handsome appearance.”¹⁵⁶ The emphasis on hand-

¹⁵² Vansant, *The Royal Road to Wealth*, 46.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Quote by Charles Robson describing the Allen & Bro. firm in, *The Manufactories and Manufacturers of Pennsylvania in the Nineteenth Century*, Philadelphia: Galaxy Publishing Co., 1875, 22, taken from Talbott, “Allen and Brother, Philadelphia furniture makers,” 718. While this quote does not directly refer to Vollmer, it is applicable as his work is described as all being “done by hand, with no machinery being used”. *Pennsylvania Illustrated*, 82; and described as “the most elegant and desirable which can be made”. *Pennsylvania Historical Review*, 93.

¹⁵⁶ *Illustrated Philadelphia its Wealth and Industries*. 2nd edition. (New York: American Publishing and Engraving Co., 1889), 274, taken from Talbott, “The Philadelphia Furniture Industry 1850 to 1880,” 178.

made work, without use of machinery, was a marketable attribute for the firms of Pabst, Allen & Bro., and Vollmer's caliber. However, this stress on hand-made work may have been just that, a marketing ploy. It set them apart from other firms in the industry, which as the 19th century progressed, were adapting new technologies in "wood conversion by machinery," allowing for production focused on quantity, rather than artistic quality.¹⁵⁷ These mechanical innovations included machines like the band saw and the circular saw, which were initially developed as a more economical means of converting felled logs at the saw mills in the early part of the century. The adoption of the circular saw and band saw in saw mills means that Pabst, Allen & Bro., Henkels, and Vollmer likely bought lumber that was already prepared by machines from their lumber suppliers, like Lewis Thompson Co. one of the lumber suppliers listed by Vollmer in his 1860-1864 account ledger.¹⁵⁸ Thus, it is probable that their emphasis on hand-craftsmanship refers to the overall assembly and finishing of the furniture, rather than the entire preparatory to finishing process.

While the circular saw was first developed for use at saw mills, by the middle of the century a more compact bench saw was invented for the woodworker's workshop.¹⁵⁹ The circular saw, according to M. Powis Bale in *Woodworking Machinery*, was the machine "in most general use in all parts of the world, as before the wood can be

¹⁵⁷ M. Powis Bale, *Woodworking Machinery: its rise, progress, and construction with hints on the management of saw mills and the economical conversion of timber*, Second edition, with additions, (London: Crosby Lockwood and Son, 1894), 1.

¹⁵⁸ Chas. Vollmer, *Merchandising Ledger, fine cabinet work furniture etc. 1860-1864*. Historical Society of Pennsylvania. (call # Amb.8966) [Gift Presented by Mrs. J. E. Gramm, March 24, 1942]

¹⁵⁹ Bale, *Woodworking Machinery*, Ch. II through IV.

submitted to any other process...it must first be prepared on the saw bench.”¹⁶⁰ Machines for the “other processes” included: the machine planer, the fret saw (for scrollwork), and the mortising, boring, tenoning, and dovetailing machines (for joint work). By the third quarter of the 19th century many of these machines were patented to perfection, especially in America where patent costs were comparatively low.¹⁶¹ Machines like these are probably the “machinery” referenced in the four cabinetmaker’s emphasis on “no machinery being used.”¹⁶² This hypothesis is supported through descriptions of Henkels’ and Vollmer’s warerooms, as well as the manufacturing censuses from 1860 through 1880. Henkels, who himself emphasized that all of his work was hand-made, wrote in his publication, *Household Economy*,

Hand-made work is much better than machine-work and all cabinet-makers of reputation have their shop and work their own designs, so as to have a pattern exclusively to themselves. The machine-work is sold mostly by those who have no factory, but merely keep furniture stores. Persons who understand this prefer to pay the price for good hand-made work.¹⁶³

Here Henkels voiced his opinion on the overall pre-eminence of hand-made furniture, eluding that machine-work was the product of a sales-man, not a trained cabinetmaker. Although Henkels has an overall condescending tone in regards to those who utilize machinery in their cabinetmaking shops, he is quoted in the same source saying, “those who manufacture by hand avail themselves of the advantage of machinery for heavy slit

¹⁶⁰ Bale, *Woodworking Machinery*, 18.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, v-vi.

¹⁶² Quote by Charles Robson describing the Allen & Bro. firm in, *The Manufactories and Manufacturers of Pennsylvania in the Nineteenth Century*, Philadelphia: Galaxy Publishing Co., 1875, 22, taken from Talbott, “Allen and Brother, Philadelphia furniture makers,” 718.

¹⁶³ George J. Henkels, *Household Economy*, (Philadelphia: King & Bairde, printers..., 1867): 36, taken from Hanks and Talbott, “Daniel Pabst—Philadelphia Cabinetmaker”, 6.

and scroll-sawing and turning,” thereby acknowledging the benefits of using woodworking machinery.¹⁶⁴ While Henkels, as well Allen & Bro., Pabst, and Vollmer, all asserted that their furniture was made by hand, it did not mean their manufactories were entirely devoid of machinery.

In a description of Henkels’ workshop at 173 Chestnut Street, furnaces, turning lathes and other machinery were referred to.¹⁶⁵ The furnace, which Henkels had in the cellar, was used in the preparation of raw lumber.¹⁶⁶ The lumber, “mostly of the imported kinds,” was “stowed away, exposed to ventilation and furnace heat for years, in order to season it thoroughly.”¹⁶⁷ The status of the lathes was not elaborated on in the description of Henkels’ workshop; were they machine-lathes or the more traditional man-operated lathes? However, they were described as being located on the first floor with “other machinery,” the use of “other” indicating that whatever the turning lathes’ form were the author considered them a type of machinery.¹⁶⁸ Since Henkels’ workshop was not entirely without machinery, the question posed is this: what was the motive power being used by Henkels, and the others, to operate their machinery? The answer is found in the manufacturers censuses from 1860, 1870, and 1880. In these documents the entries for Pabst, Allen & Bro., Henkels, and Vollmer all list “hand” as the means of motive power, and only one machine is listed among all of the entries in all three censuses: a sewing

¹⁶⁴ George J. Henkels, *Household Economy*, (Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1867), 36, quoted in Talbott, “The Philadelphia Furniture Industry from 1850 to 1880,” 152.

¹⁶⁵ Talbott, “The Philadelphia Furniture Industry 1850 to 1880,” 148.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

machine powered by hand in the shop of George J. Henkels in 1870.¹⁶⁹ Henkels' exclusion of the lathe from the previous description of Henkels' shop from his list of machinery in 1870 indicates that he, or the enumerator, viewed the lathe as a tool and not as a machine. Furthermore, all four firms list hand power as their only form of motive power enabling the production of their products from 1860 through 1880.

Their listing of only hand power in the manufacturing censuses of 1860 to 1880 is very interesting because the 1874 article from *Pennsylvania Illustrated* mentions the presence of a steam hoisting and heating apparatus in the basement of Vollmer's Sansom Street building.¹⁷⁰ If in 1874 he had steam power, why was it excluded as a form of motive power in the 1880 manufacturing census? As previously mentioned the steam hoisting and steam heating apparatus were for moving furniture between floors and for seasoning raw lumber. They were not directly used in the making of furniture. Perhaps this is the reason for its absence in the manufacturer's censuses from 1870 and 1880, which also conforms to the idea that hand-made referred to assembly and finishing, rather than the whole cabinetmaking process from start to finish.

Of course, emphasis on handcraftsmanship was not the sole reason behind how Pabst, Allen & Bro., Henkels, and Vollmer became four of the most renowned cabinetmakers in Philadelphia during the second half of the 19th century. In examining the Allen & Bro. firm, I.L. Vansant wrote in *The Royal Road to Wealth*, "If I were asked the secret of the extensive business of this House, I should answer at once—Their

¹⁶⁹ 1870 U.S. Non-Population Census Schedule, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, Industry and Manufacturing Schedule, p. 22, line 2, George J. Henkels entry; in-house microfilm M1796, roll 3, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

¹⁷⁰ *Pennsylvania Illustrated*, 82.

reputation.”¹⁷¹ He went on to say that “the value of reputation [is] the only guarantee the inexperienced eye of the buyer has that the integrity of the upholsterer has comported with the skill of the joiner, carver and finisher.”¹⁷² Vansant continued with the statement that reputation was something which was built, not handed to.

A reputation of this kind is not made in a year. It is not the result of chance, but slow and laborious plodding at first, of fixed system all the time; of a careful, vigilant and constant attention to minor details; of superior skill in design and workmanship, and the use of nothing but the best of material. It is to these sources that Allen & Bro. owe their enviable reputation.¹⁷³

Vansant’s words were a glowing testament to the Allen & Bro. firm, words, which after the analysis here, can be further extended to include Pabst, Henkels, and Vollmer, all of whom had built reputations of similar standing.

In an equally gleaming statement, the high quality and reputable nature of Pabst’s shop was described:

Mr. Pabst designs and manufactures art and antique furniture of all kinds, which, for beauty and originality of design, superior and elaborate finish are unexcelled.... It [his shop] is so well known and has retained its old customers for so long a time, that its reputation for honorable, straightforward dealing is established beyond the requirements of praise.¹⁷⁴

While his furniture, and its design and quality are referred to in the above, they are only a fraction of what maintained his loyal customer base; the rest, stemmed from his reputation as an honorable, straightforward-dealing businessman.

¹⁷¹ Vansant, *The Royal Road to Wealth*, 43.

¹⁷² Ibid, 44.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ *Pennsylvania Historical Review*, 167.

Vollmer, like Pabst, also had a well-established customer base and a “remarkable steadiness of business.”¹⁷⁵ This steadiness was due to the fact that “Mr. Vollmer confined himself strictly to his own extending business, eschewing public life, and his success, which is to be measured by the business he established and maintained, was due to the most indefatigable perseverance and strict probity of character.”¹⁷⁶ Through his perseverance and possession of “a large measure of artistic skill, executive ability and enterprise,” Vollmer established himself among the great reputable firms in Philadelphia’s furniture industry.¹⁷⁷

	1860			1870			1880		
	Capital Invested \$	Annual Production \$	ROI %	Capital Invested \$	Annual Production \$	ROI %	Capital Invested \$	Annual Production \$	ROI %
Pabst	---	---	---	2,000	30,000	1400	---	---	---
Henkels	55,000	150,000	172.7	50,000	120,000	140	n/a	n/a	n/a
Allen & Bro.	---	---	---	165,000	200,000	21.2	214,000	125,000	-41.5
Vollmer	60,000	75,000	25	---	---	---	125,000	122,000	-2.4

Table 1 shows the capital invested and the annual production values enumerated in the Non-population Census Schedule of Industry and Manufacturing for Philadelphia County in 1860, 1870, and 1880 with the calculated return on interest (ROI) for Daniel Pabst, George J. Henkels, Allen & Bro., and Gottlieb Vollmer. Not all data could be found for each cabinetmaker in the censuses for each year, any missing data is indicated by ---. By 1880 Henkels had retired from the industry and thus was not included in the census schedule for that year, indicated by n/a.

¹⁷⁵ *Pennsylvania Illustrated*, 82.

¹⁷⁶ Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, 2333-4.

¹⁷⁷ “Being possessed of a large measure of artistic skill, executive ability and enterprise, his productions quickly acquired a reputation which gave them wide-spread fame, and this reputation he maintained for the forty years of his business life.” This is the full quotation describing Gottlieb’s character and reputation from McMichael, *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 157.

The reputations of Pabst, Allen & Bro., Henkels, and Vollmer are further affirmed when looking at the capital invested and the value of annual product produced by each firm. These values are recorded in the Philadelphia county manufacturing censuses from 1860 to 1880 and are shown in Table 1. The 1870 manufacturing census includes entries for Pabst, Allen & Bro., and Henkels, but Vollmer was either not included or more likely is recorded on one of the pages which have faded over time and become illegible. However, both of his entries from 1860 and 1880 are legible, and these numbers serve as an adequate comparison to the 1870 entries of the other three firms. In 1870 the total capital invested in both real and personal estate for Pabst, Allen & Bro., and Henkels were \$2,000, \$165,000, and \$50,000 respectively. Vollmer's numbers from 1860 and 1880 are a total capital invested of \$60,000 and \$125,000. These amounts suggest that in 1870 he probably had a total capital invested somewhere between the amounts of Henkels' \$50,000 and Allen & Bro.'s \$125,000. Pabst's total capital invested is very interesting because it reveals that he had significantly less invested in furthering his business. However, Pabst's annual production value in 1870 was \$30,000, while Allen & Bro. was \$200,000 and Henkels was \$120,000. Meanwhile Vollmer's were \$75,000 in 1860 and \$122,000 in 1880.¹⁷⁸

In looking at the annual production values alone, it appears that Daniel Pabst was not as successful as Allen & Bro. and Henkels, but when putting their annual production

¹⁷⁸ The numbers involving the capital invested by and annual production of Pabst, Allen & Bro. Henkels, and Vollmer were compiled by looking at their recorded entries in the industrial and manufacturers census schedules from 1860 to 1880. 1860 U.S. Non-Population Census Schedule, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, Industry and Manufacturing Schedule, in-house microfilm T1157, roll 8, National Archives building, Washington, D.C. 1870-1880 U.S. Non-Population Census Schedule, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, Industry and Manufacturing Schedule, in-house microfilm M1796, rolls 3 and 8, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

values into the context of their total capital invested, the return on their investment (ROI) can be calculated. The ROI reveals the efficiency of their investment at producing a profit, in other words how much money was made on the investment in the form of a percentage. The ROI percentage is calculated by subtracting the capital invested from the annual production value, dividing that number by the capital investment, and multiplying the result by 100. In this calculation Pabst's capital invested actually generated a 1,400% ROI, whereas Henekls' ROI was 140% and Allen & Bro. was only a 21.2% ROI. The return on investment is important in the analysis of these cabinetmakers because it shows that while Allen & Bro. and Henkels were investing and producing more, Pabst was actually making more money on his investment. As the enumeration of Vollmer in the 1870 census is missing, an exact comparison of the efficiency of his capital investment cannot be made. However, if the speculation that his capital invested and annual production values from 1870 fell between those of Henkels and Allen & Bro. based on his increase in both from 1860 to 1880, then his return on investment likely fell somewhere between Henkels and Allen & Bro. as well. From the analysis of the capital invested, annual production value, and the calculated return on investment it is evident that Allen & Bro., Henkels, and Vollmer were managing large operations. However, despite having a smaller operation Pabst was actually making more money on his investment.

	1860		1870			1880		
	Male	Female	Males above 16 years	Females above 13 years	Children and Youths	Males above 16 years	Females above 15 years	Children and Youth
Pabst	---	---	22	0	0	---	---	---
Henkels	105	2	45	1	0	n/a	n/a	n/a
Allen & Bro.	---	---	100	4	0	84	3	11
Vollmer	60	0	---	---	---	65	10	0

Table 2 shows number of men, women, and children enumerated in the Non-population Census Schedule of Industry and Manufacturing for Philadelphia County in 1860, 1870, and 1880 employed by Daniel Pabst, George J. Henkels, Allen & Bro., and Gottlieb Vollmer. Not all data could be found for each cabinetmaker for each census year, any missing data is indicated by ---. By 1880 Henkels had retired from the industry, and thus was not included in the census schedule for that year, indicated by n/a.

The obvious difference in the size of Pabst's firm compared to those of Allen & Bro., Henkels, and Vollmer is more clearly defined in the number of men employed by each firm from 1860 through 1880. Table 2 references the number of employees working for each firm as enumerated in the manufacturing censuses. In 1870 Pabst employed 22 men compared to Henkels' 45 men and 1 woman, and Allen & Bro.'s 100 men and 4 women. In 1860 Vollmer employed 60 men, and in 1880 he employed 65 men and 10 women. Given that his number of employees increased by only 15 people in 20 years, he most likely had an average of 68 people working for him in 1870. The huge difference between 22 men employed by Pabst and the 104 people employed by Allen Bro. provide context for Pabst's dramatically lower annual production value of \$30,000 compared to Allen & Bro. \$200,000. Through the analysis of these numbers the actual size and scope of the four cabinetmakers firms are realized and provide a monetary measure of the success of their businesses referenced in the period articles written on their warerooms and manufactories.

Through the thorough analysis of the identity, location, reputations, and businesses of Pabst, Allen & Bro., Henkels, and Vollmer it is apparent that they are undoubtedly all prominent cabinetmakers representative of the great furniture establishments of 19th century Philadelphia. What is not ascertained through their business and character assessments is how their product, however high quality and artistic it was, differed from one another's. After all, as Vansant wrote when speaking about Philadelphia cabinetmakers, “‘all that glitters is not gold.’ Time and use alone will test your furniture.”¹⁷⁹ A sentiment which is proved through the surviving examples made by or solidly attributed to Pabst, Allen & Bro., Henkels, and Vollmer.

Philadelphia: The Furniture of Four Contemporaries

In the following analysis comparing the furniture of Gottlieb Vollmer to that of Daniel Pabst, Allen & Bro., and George J. Henkels only pieces and suites that are known to be *made by* or are *solidly attributed to* each cabinetmaker are discussed. For the intent and purpose of forming the most well-founded comparisons between each cabinetmaker, a piece or suite *made by* a cabinetmaker is one which bears a label or is documented in a bill of sale. Whereas, a *solidly attributed* piece is considered to be a piece which has either family lore dictating the maker; has supporting evidences, like period illustrations, which confirms the attribution to a particular maker; or has similarities in decorative motifs and techniques. Although it is always ideal to look solely at pieces known to be *made by* each cabinetmaker rather than *attributed to*, the number of known surviving pieces with bills of sale still accompanying them or labels intact is unfortunately few.

¹⁷⁹ Vansant, *The Royal Road to Wealth*, 44.

Thus, pieces of furniture in both categories must be examined in order to form a full comparison of the work of Pabst, Allen & Bro., and Henkels to Vollmer.

It is important to first review the surviving labeled pieces from the four firms, as these are the only pieces which are with absolute certainty made by Pabst, Allen & Bro., Henkels, and Vollmer. The labeled pieces include a sewing box made by Pabst, a mirror and chair made by Allen & Bro., and two desks made by Henkels. While these pieces are the only known labeled pieces for Pabst, Allen & Bro., and Henkels, several known labeled pieces made by Vollmer survive. A brief examination of these labeled pieces reveal interesting information about their makers through the types of labels used and provide unique characteristics of their maker, which are useful in attributing unknown furniture.

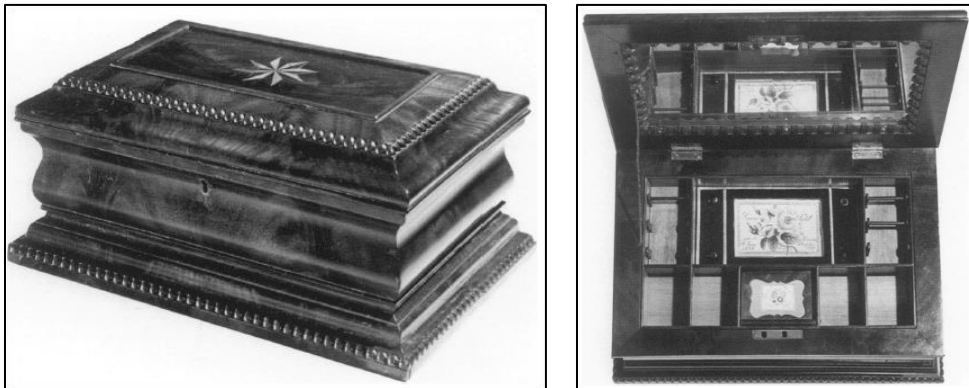


Figure 55 (Left) *Sewing Box*, Daniel Pabst, mahogany veneer, star inlay, fitted interior with mirror glass, 1850, collection of Mrs. Joseph C. Schubert, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania **(Right)** interior view of sewing box showing the paper label, collection of Mrs. Joseph C. Schubert, images from David Hanks and Page Talbott, “Daniel Pabst: Philadelphia Cabinetmaker”, *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 73, no. 316 (April 1977): 9

Inside the sewing box made by Pabst for his wife Helena, who he called Salina, is a small paper label (Figure 55).¹⁸⁰ Instead of containing business information, like the type of goods produced or the location of his firm, it bears Germanic water colored flowers with the following inscription in his handwritten script on paper:

Daniel Pabst gbr [born] 11 June 1826.
Philadelphia 11 June 1850
Remember me Salina Gross 1850.¹⁸¹

The date inscribed on the label is both that of Pabst's birthday and the couple's marriage. The forget-me-not sentimentality of the Pabst label makes it less like a label and more like an affectionate note from husband to wife, which leaves room for speculation.¹⁸² Perhaps Pabst did not label his furniture, after all his shop was significantly smaller than his competitors as seen through the analysis of his starting capital and annual production from the manufacturing censuses. Or maybe the sentimentality behind the label is the reason for its survival? Nonetheless, it is the only surviving example of Pabst's work known to date that physically bears his name. Furthermore, the box does not possess any of the characteristics that are so often attributed to Pabst. It is not heavily and elaborately carved; instead it is inlaid with traditional Germanic designs.¹⁸³ The uniqueness of the sewing box forces the study of Pabst furniture to heavily rely on family lore as a basis for attribution. From these attributed pieces characteristics of Pabst's furniture have been compiled.

¹⁸⁰ Hanks and Talbott, "Daniel Pabst—Philadelphia Cabinetmaker," 9.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Hanks and Talbott, "Daniel Pabst—Philadelphia Cabinetmaker," 9.



Figure 56 (Left) *Pier Mirror*, Allen & Bro., unidentified wood and mirrored glass, ca. 1875-1885, sold at auction December, 2, 2006 by Kamelot Auction House, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania **(Right)** detail of ink stenciled label on back of pier mirror, images from new.liveauctioneers.com



Figure 57 (Left) *Oxford Armchair*, Allen & Bro., mahogany, ca. 1895, accession number 1974.5868 Decorative Arts Photographic Collection, Visual Resources, Winterthur Library, Wilmington, Delaware **(Right)** detail of embossed brass patent plate on the Oxford Armchair, images from the Decorative Arts Photographic Collection, Visual Resources, Winterthur Library

Likewise, the study of Allen & Bro. furniture has also been confined by the general lack of labels relying heavily on family lore and similarity to engravings of their Centennial furniture as a basis of attribution. Only two labeled pieces by Allen & Bro. are known:

the patented “Oxford Armchair” and an ink-stencil labeled pier mirror. Though unlike Pabst’s sentimental label, both Allen & Bro. labels are used for commercial purposes including the name and location of their business, much like a trade card as seen in a surviving example of one of Pabst’s trade card figure.

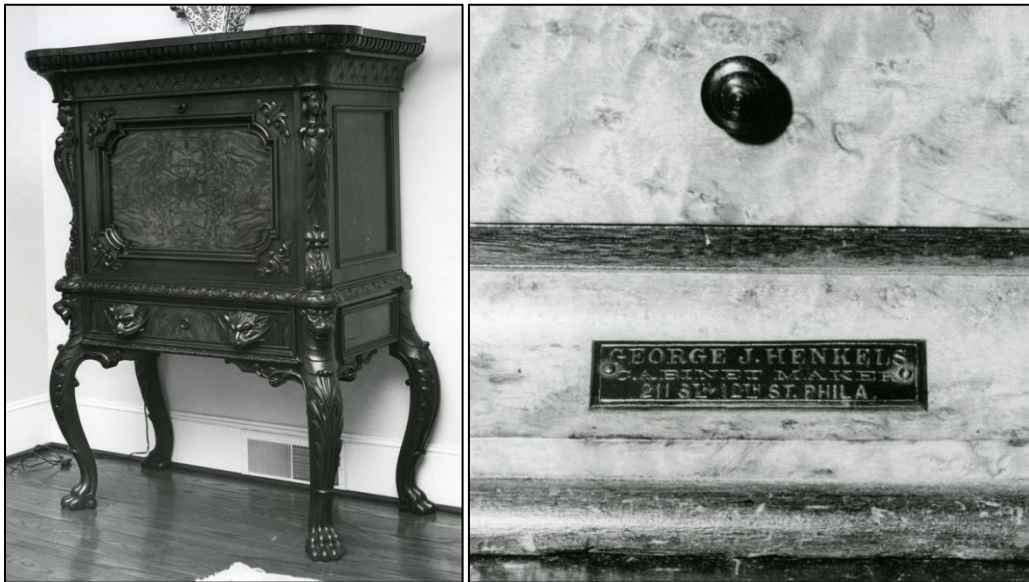


Figure 58 (Left) *Desk*, George J. Henkels, walnut and bird’s eye maple, 1874-1877, Decorative Arts Photographic Collection, Winterthur Library, Wilmington, Delaware **(Right)** detail of engraved metal plate, images from Winterthur Library, Wintercat

Similarly Henkels used furniture labels, as documented through photographs of a fall-front desk (Figure 58) in the Decorative Arts Photographic Collection Winterthur. Henkels’ metal plate (Figure 58) shows his address as 211 S. 12th street, indicating that it must have been made between 1874 and 1877 when his business was located at this address.

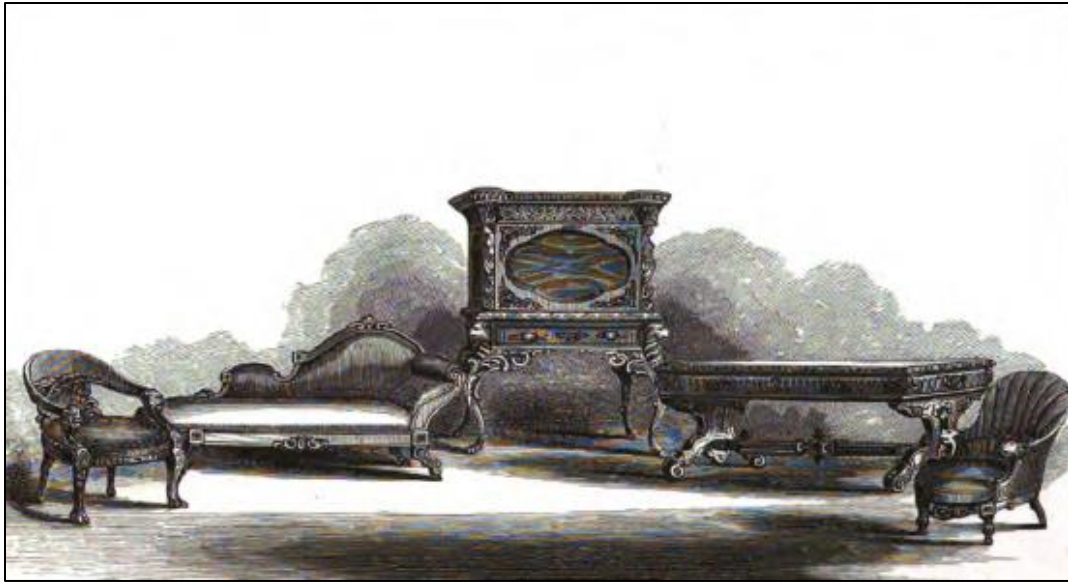


Figure 59 Illustration of antique furniture showing the fall front desk, illustration from Samuel Sloan, *Homestead Architecture* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott & Co., 1861), 347

This is most interesting because an illustration of this desk (Figure 59) by Henkels was first printed in Samuel Sloan's *Homestead Architecture* in 1861, nearly fifteen years earlier than the labeled desk. The popularity of its design is confirmed as two other variations on this desk are known: the one with the engraved signature on the counterweight previously at the High Museum in Atlanta, Georgia and another at the Asa Packer Mansion in Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania. While the desk at Asa Packer does not bear his name it strongly resembles the illustration in *Homestead Architecture*. Despite their differences in labels these two Henkels' desks and their likeness to the illustrations in *Homestead Architecture* are very important as they serve as solid supporting evidence of the attribution to Henkels of several other pieces and suites in the Asa Packer Mansion which are also illustrated and discussed in *Homestead Architecture*.

The forms of labels used by Allen & Bro. and Henkels were also used by Vollmer. They include a paper label, an ink stamp, and a stamped lock. The paper label and ink stamp are both in the style of a trade card, just as Allen & Bro. stenciled pier mirror, and the use of labeled hardware is similar in the choice of location of Henkels' engraved signature on the High Museum desk. While the Vollmer paper label is the only known paper label to date, there are other pieces of furniture with the ink stamp and stamped locks by him. Vollmer's labeled pieces of furniture amount to more than Pabst's, Allen & Bro.'s, and Henkels' combined. The comparatively large quantity of surviving labels on Vollmer's furniture is invaluable to the study of his furniture. From these labeled pieces characteristics unique to Vollmer are compiled and they can be used in conjunction with family lore to attribute an unknown, unlabeled piece. Whereas, the studies of Pabst, Allen & Bro., and Henkels are forced to use pieces attributed to them through family lore to compile characteristics unique to their furniture.

In order to determine the quality of piece of furniture, many things must be considered: design, material, techniques used in the execution, decorative motifs, finishes, etc. Unsurprisingly, these considerations are also made by the cabinetmaker at the conception of a piece, beginning with the craftsman's choice of material. As mentioned in the former chapter, cabinetmakers in the middle of the 19th century had a wider access to larger variety of woods than ever before. In the "Furniture Appendix" from *Homestead Architecture* Henkels writes in depth about the foreign and domestic woods "which are most in favor for beauty and durability."¹⁸⁴ Among the woods he

¹⁸⁴ Samual Sloan, *Homestead Architecture* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott & Co., 1861): 312.

mentioned was maple, which was in “great demand in Europe” to replace satinwood for the purposes of interior finishes.¹⁸⁵ Despite its high demands in Europe around the early 1860s, maple had not yet found itself in such demand in America, though Henkels predicted its future praise in his concluding remarks, “no doubt in a few years maple will be foremost in the manufacture of all kinds of furniture; but it must bide its time until fashion demands it.”¹⁸⁶ As it happened, maple did become a popular wood used in bedroom furniture of the Eastlake or modern Gothic style of the 1870s.



Figure 60 (Left) *Bed*, attributed to George J. Henkels, bird's eye maple and rosewood trim, ca. 1875, Asa Packer Mansion, Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, image from Winterthur Library, Wintercat, (Middle) *Bed*, Gottlieb Vollmer, bird's eye maple, ca. 1876, collection of John Child, image taken by author, (Right) *Headboard from Bed*, attributed to Daniel Pabst, maple veneer, walnut, yellow poplar, white pine, iron, ca. 1875-1880, accession number 1975-42-1, Philadelphia Museum of Art collection, image courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Curatorial Office

In three bedroom suites dated ca. 1875, one each attributed to Pabst and Henkels, and the third made by Vollmer, the choice of bird's-eye maple as the primary wood is the

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 315.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

distinguishing feature.¹⁸⁷ While the primary wood for each suite is the same, their designs are actually quite different. Looking at Figure 60 a progression in design from Renaissance Revival to “modern Gothic” can be seen from left to right. The bed from the Henkels chamber suite shown left in Figure 60 is executed in the Renaissance revival, or “the new style” as a suite of similar design pictured in figure from *Homestead Architecture* is called,¹⁸⁸ whereas the bed made by Daniel Pabst shown right in Figure 60, is designed in the Eastlake or “modern Gothic” style. The Henkels headboard has a broad flat surface topped with a pediment split in the center by a densely carved C-scroll cartouche. Underneath the pediment are applied pieces of carved rosewood, matching the trim found throughout the rest of the bed frame. The Pabst headboard on the other hand is more architectural in its form. It is comprised almost solely of straight lines and steep angles. A turned column-like pole breaks up the smooth veneered center of the headboard terminating in an orb-like roundel in the middle of the steeply angled pediment. Aside from the roundel, there is little in the way of high relief or applied carving in the “modern Gothic” Pabst bed. Most of Pabst’s ornamentation comes from using a bird’s-eye maple veneer on top of walnut. Stylized floral designs were cut out of the bright golden bird’s-eye maple veneer to reveal the much darker chocolaty color of the walnut underneath.¹⁸⁹

This cameo technique not only resulted in a striking contrast between the two woods, but

¹⁸⁷ The bed attributed to Daniel Pabst is based on Pabst family tradition. According to the family, who donated the set to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the set was made by Pabst for his daughter Emma in 1878 when she was 18 years old. It is further noted that this set duplicates a suite made by Pabst for General Thomas McKean, one of Pabst’s known clients. Hanks and Talbott, “Daniel Pabst—Philadelphia Cabinetmaker,” 16. The bed attributed to George J. Henkels in the collection of the Asa Packer Mansion is based on the text and illustrations of furniture made by Henkels in Sloan, *Homestead Architecture*, 340-41. The bed made by Gottlieb Vollmer is the bed in the same suite as his labeled nightstand in the collection of John Child.

¹⁸⁸ Sloan, *Homestead Architecture*, 341

¹⁸⁹ Hanks and Talbott, “Daniel Pabst—Philadelphia Cabinetmaker,” 16.

also required great skill, another marker of the high quality of Pabst's craftsmanship.¹⁹⁰ These differences in design and execution of similar techniques speak to Pabst's and Henkels' choices and interpretations of two different styles, Renaissance revival and "modern gothic," while using the same material, bird's-eye maple, widely praised for its beauty and quality and a fashionable choice for use in bedroom suites of the time.

Unlike the Pabst and Henkels beds, which are representative of a single style, Vollmer's bed shown in the middle of Figure 60 is an amalgamation of both Renaissance revival style and "modern Gothic" styles in form and decoration. Comparing the three beds side by side aspects like the carved cartouche and the applied trim from Henkels' bed are blended together with the more straight-lined architectural frame and incised decoration of Pabst's bed to create Vollmer's bed. While the central cartouche is predominately the Renaissance revival style, with its swags, scrolling acanthus leaves, and antefix, it also shows hints of the "modern Gothic" in the incised detail of the leaf at the very top of the roundel. The incised designs on Vollmer's bed are carved into solid bird's-eye maple, rather than cutting through veneer to expose the wood underneath. In order to achieve the light and dark contrast between the surface and the incised design Vollmer used a darker finish within the incised detail than he did on the rest of the surface. This produced the same stunning contrast with the golden bird's-eye maple surface as Pabst's cameo technique and Henkel's use of rosewood trim. This combination of Renaissance revival applied carving and "modern Gothic" incised leaf and vine motifs are repeated by Vollmer throughout the rest of the suite. While Pabst's cameo technique

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

required more skill than Vollmer's incising and dual finishing technique, Vollmer's use of predominately solid bird's-eye maple as the primary wood in his chamber suite speaks just as much to the quality of his furniture, as it cost significantly more to use solid pieces of bird's-eye maple rather than veneers. Through analyzing these beds it is obvious that each cabinetmaker possesses a high level of skill in craftsmanship which places them in the forefront of the Philadelphia furniture industry. More importantly, these comparisons distinguish individual interpretations of the Renaissance revival and "modern Gothic" styles by Pabst, Henkels, and Vollmer through variations of similar concepts of design in the same primary material achieved through the use of different techniques.



Figure 61 (Left) Table, attributed to Allen & Bro., walnut with gilding and ebonizing, ca. 1865-1880, accession number 2002-79-1, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania **(Right)** detail of carved sphinx on the table, images taken by author

Contrast between light and dark is not only achieved by using different woods, but also through different finishes. Two examples of this are a table (Figure 61) attributed

to the Allen & Bro. firm and a piano stool (Figure 16) attributed to Vollmer.¹⁹¹ In these examples both firms used ebonizing and gilding. The table attributed to Allen & Bro. was made of walnut and burl Circassian walnut veneer between 1865 and 1870 in the Neo-Grec style, featuring a combination of Egyptian and Ancient Greek motifs. Two ornate sphinxes carved out of solid walnut act as fifth and sixth supporting legs at either end of the center table. They are of particular interest in the examination of the center table because they demonstrate the use of three finishing techniques by Allen & Bro.: polishing, ebonizing, and gilding. Most of the sphinxes are finished with a polish, which illuminates the beautiful grain of the walnut. In the details of the nemes (striped headdress) and the breast plate worn by the sphinx Allen & Bro. rely on ebonizing and gilding to produce the full splendor of the mythical sphinx. In the nemes alternating stripes of the walnut are ebonized, or darkened. The ebonized stripes are further distinguished by gilded incised lines on either side separating them from the polished walnut stripes. The end result is to emphasize the magnificence, grandeur, and stature of the Egyptian sphinx.

Similarly, Vollmer's piano stool is comprised of a scalloped-shell seat atop three cabriole legs which terminate in lions paw feet. While the choice in design and motifs brings theatricality to the piano stool, so does Vollmer's choice of finishing. Like the Allen & Bro. firm did in their table, Vollmer used ebonizing and gilding to bring the stool to life and complete its design through a dazzling contrast of light and dark. This is most

¹⁹¹ The table (now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art) has been attributed to Allen & Bro. on the basis of its similarity to two of their cabinets exhibited at the Centennial, both of which have surviving illustrations. Talbott, "Allen and Brother, Philadelphia Furniture Makers," 722. The piano stool is attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer based on family tradition and similarities to two labeled dressers also in the collection of Nancy Staisy.

notable in the scalloped-shell seat (Figure 16). The seat itself is perfectly smoothed until the sides of the shell curve up to form a slight back to the seat, which is finished with scalloped edges. From the beginning of the curve all the way up to the scalloped edge Vollmer has very expertly incised lines to mimic the ribs of an actual shell. These incised lines are on both the inside and the outside of the shell seat and meet along the scalloped edge, which is about a half inch thick and also incised producing a texture similar to that of a molar tooth. Almost every other incised line on the outside of the shell seat is gilded or has evidence of gilding. The same was applied to the inside of the shell, although much more of that gilding has worn away with time. The dual uses of ebonizing and oil gilding by Allen & Bro. and Vollmer show off their precision and skill in finishing techniques as well as their competence in design. This is particularly well demonstrated in Vollmer's piano stool. The slenderness and perfection of the incised line and the remarkable steadiness and precision needed to oil gild every other incised line speaks enormously to the skill and quality of his craftsmanship.

Gilding was not only reserved for highlighting and creating a contrast between light and dark as in the previous two examples. It was also used as a means of finishing an entire piece, as in the Blue Room parlor suite made by Vollmer for the White House in 1860. This parlor suite is the only known example among the four cabinetmakers in which gilding is used for the entire finishing process. This is quite impressive considering the time and money required to gild a piece of furniture, let alone an entire 19-piece parlor suite. Furthermore, the richness and sumptuousness of this entire gilt blue brocatelle suite is more reminiscent of furniture created in New York, by firms like

Herter Brothers and Pottier & Stymus, than Philadelphia. While the entirely gilt suite has astonished people over a century for this very reason, other aspects of its design merit discussion, namely Vollmer's use of scrolls and scales. Although these designs are not unique to Vollmer, their execution is distinctive when comparing them to other cabinetmakers.



Figure 62 (Left) *Cabinet*, attributed to Daniel Pabst, walnut, walnut veneer, burl veneer, maple veneer, yellow poplar, white pine, and glass, ca. 1868-1870, accession number F1938-1-80, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania **(Right)** detail of cabinet showing scaling, images from www.philamuseum.org/collections

An excellent example of this is found by comparing Vollmer's furniture made for the White House to a cabinet attributed to Pabst made for the historian, Charles Henry Lea.¹⁹² In both examples each cabinetmaker uses scales and scrolls. The Pabst cabinet is a

¹⁹² The cabinet attributed to Daniel Pabst is based on Lea family tradition, and one that has not been disputed since at the time of its donation to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Daniel Pabst was not a name well-known to Art Historians in the Philadelphia furniture circles. Hanks and Talbott, "Daniel Pabst—Philadelphia Cabinetmaker," 9.

Renaissance revival piece. It is trapezoidal in shape with concave sides. The front of the cabinet is fitted with a four-paned glass and burled walnut veneered door with carved wreath and mask motifs centered between the four glass panes. Directly above the glass door is a drawer that runs the length of the front of the cabinet. It is along this drawer, and also under the acanthus scrolls on either side of the door, that Pabst uses scales (figure). The scales decorate the drawer front flowing outward from either side of the pull. They are shaped with three curved edges, each outlined by an incised line following the three curves of the scale. Right after the middle curve of the incised line to the scale is a small gouged out area to give the perception of depth and a sense of overlap to the scales. This trifold scale motif is unique to Pabst's furniture. These same trifold scales are also found on the dining room suite attributed to Pabst, also made for Charles Henry Lea and in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and in a second almost identical cabinet attributed to Pabst in the High Museum of Art.

Similar to Pabst's furniture, the Louis XVI revival parlor and library suites made by Vollmer for the White House also possesses scaled decoration. However, the design and execution of the scales are quite different. In the parlor and library suites Vollmer used the scales flowing downward to decorate the arm supports and the legs (Figure 48). The scales are much more prominent on the library suite. Looking at the leg from the library seat the differences between Vollmer's scales and Pabst's trifold scales are obvious. Instead of the edge of the scale being shaped with three lobes, Vollmer's have just a single curved edge like the shape of a horseshoe. There is also not a second incised line following the shape of the scale as in Pabst's piece. However, Vollmer did follow

each scale with a gouged out semi-circle providing the same illusion of depth and overlap as Pabst did with his scales.



Figure 63 *Fire Screen*, Herter Brothers, gilded wood, painted and gilded wood panels, brocaded silk, embossed paper, ca. 1878-1880, accession number 1997.58, Cleveland Art Museum, Cleveland, Ohio, image from www.clevelandart.org

The scale motif present in both Pabst's cabinet for the Leas and Vollmer's seating furniture for the White House is quite unusual. Presently it is only known on furniture which is attributed to or known to be made by either Pabst or Vollmer. The only other example of a design similar to the scaling motif on Pabst's and Vollmer's furniture is seen in a completely gilded fire screen (Figure 63) made by Herter Brothers in the Cleveland Art Museum.¹⁹³ The stiles of the fire screen are decorated with a motif described by Catherine Hoover Voorsanger as "vertical rows of 'strung coins,' or

¹⁹³ Howe, et.al., "catalogue" in *Herter Brothers Furniture and Interiors for a Gilded Age*, 186.

overlapping gold discs.”¹⁹⁴ They are similar to the scales of the pieces by Pabst and Vollmer in that they overlap and cascade down the pieces, but are much different in that their shape almost forms a complete circle rather than a horseshoe or trifold shape. Furthermore, a carved string in each hollowed out gouge in the coin gives an illusion of them being strung together, much different than the scales of Pabst’s cabinet and Vollmer’s seating furniture. Nonetheless, the “strung coins” are conceptually similar to the scales present in Pabst’s and Vollmer’s pieces. The significance here is that these particular details are not a common motif and each of the three cabinetmakers executes the scale motif in three very distinct ways. The trifold scale is unique to Pabst, the horseshoe scale to Vollmer, and the “strung coins” to Herter Brothers. Thus, the presence of scales or “strung coins” on an unknown piece provides a solid foundation on which to base an attribution to one of these three makes.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 187.



Figure 64 (Left) *Table*, attributed to George J. Henkels, walnut, ca. 1875, Asa Packer Mansion, Jim thorpe, Pennsylvania, image from Winterthur Library, Wintercat, **(Right)** *Tall Case Clock*, case made by Daniel Pabst, oak, mahogany, brass, steel, glass, fabric, 1884, accession number 1988-37-1, Philadelphia Museum of Art collection, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image from www.philamuseum.org

Another motif used by Pabst and Vollmer, as well as Allen & Bro. and Henkels, is the lions paw foot. A sample of each can be seen once again in the attributed Allen & Bro. table (Figure 61) and Vollmer piano stool (Figure 16), a table by Henkels in the Asa Packer Mansion (Figure 64), and a tall case clock made by Pabst in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Figure 64).¹⁹⁵ Each of these four pieces bares a sample of each company's use of the lions paw foot motif. In the pieces by Pabst, Henkels, and Vollmer the lions paw feet are used just as that, feet, whether at the bottom of a cabriole leg as on the table by Henkels and the piano stool by Vollmer or as shaped pad feet at the base of a clock case. Whereas on the Allen & Bro. table they are part of the sphinx pilaster at either end of the table.

¹⁹⁵ The attribution of the table to George J. Henkels is based on its likeness to a library table illustrated in Sloan, *Homestead Architecture*, 344.



Figure 65 (Top Left) detail of the paw foot on tall case clock by Daniel Pabst, image taken by author **(Top Right)** detail of paw feet on the Egyptian sphinx on the table attributed to Allen & Bro., image taken by author, **(Bottom Left)** detail of paw foot on the library table attributed to George J. Henkels, image from Winterthur Library, Wintercat, **(Bottom Right)** detail of paw foot on the piano stool attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer, image taken by author

In comparing the four feet side by side (Figure 65) different details are apparent which make each foot unique to their respective firm. The feet on the sphinxes of the Allen & Bro. table, for instance, do not have as much detail as the other three. They are carved in proportion to the sphinx, which perhaps accounts for their lack of much detail. They are short and bulbous without defined claws and have a completely polished surface. The paws on the Henkels desk, on the other hand, consist of four elongated and slender fingers with small pointed claws. These claws are defined ever so slightly with small

incised recesses carved all the way around the claw. Unlike the smooth and polished form of the Allen & Bro. and Henkels paws, Pabst's and Vollmer's paws possess more detail on and around the knuckles. The Pabst paws are very subtly hairy paw feet. They consist of three fingers with the top and bottom knuckles proportionate to each other, unlike the elongated lower knuckle in the paws on Henkels' desk. The claws themselves are made more prominent through their elongated shape and more defined deeply carved recesses on either side of the length of the claw. Outlining the claw on the lower knuckle of each finger are little incised lines flowing down the knuckles meant to look like the fur of an actual lion's paw. Although the hair is not carved in high relief, the inclusion of stylized hair adds a more life-like dimension to the paws than the idealized paws on the Allen & Bro. and Henkels pieces. In contrast, the paws on Vollmer's piano stool exaggerate the actual form so that they appear animated and theatrical. Like the Pabst paws the top and bottom knuckles of the Vollmer paws are both rounded, instead of elongated like Henkels' paws. However, the top knuckles are just a bit smaller than the bottom knuckles to form the overall rounded shape of a lion's paw. The knuckles on Vollmer's paws are much more exaggerated than those on Pabst's and the others' paws, almost arthritic in nature, creating an animated appearance. Across each of the top knuckles are six very small horizontally incised lines. These same incised lines are repeated on the bottom knuckles of Vollmer's paws, only in sets of five rather than six. These little incised lines are not found on the paws of the Pabst, Allen & Bro., and Henkels pieces. However, similar horizontally incised lines are used by Vollmer to accentuate the designs on acanthus leaves from the John Child chamber suite and a prie-dieu, or prayer stool,

attributed to Vollmer in the same collection as the piano stool.¹⁹⁶ Unlike Pabst's claws, which are almost feathery in nature, Vollmer's claws are broad at the top terminating in a sharp point at the bottom, and were once fully gilded for an even more dramatic effect. Around the perimeter of the claws is a deeply gouged recess which brings the claws into the forefront of the paw, similar, though more intense than the claws in Pabst's paw. While each of the paws on the four pieces by Pabst, Allen & Bro., Henkels, and Vollmer have their own unique characteristics, their precision in details and execution in overall design fit within each of their respective characteristics, speaking not only to the craftsmanship of their makers, but also their eye for a comprehensive design.

After comparing Vollmer's furniture with that of Pabst, Allen & Bro., and Henkels it is clear that his level of quality and skill in design and craftsmanship is on par with his Philadelphia contemporaries. Through the differences and similarities made apparent in the detailed comparisons of their material, techniques, and overall design, as well as the analysis of their respective businesses, it is clear that Pabst, Allen & Bro., Henkels, and Vollmer are four of Philadelphia's most prominent 19th century cabinetmakers. Furthermore, these comparisons of individual pieces bring out the differences in interpretation and design of similar styles and motifs to highlight attributes which distinguish Vollmer's work from that of his fellow Philadelphians, and which can be used for the future attribution of unknown pieces. This place of prominence is further substantiated in an analysis of their entries in the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition.

¹⁹⁶ The prie-dieu, like the piano stool, is attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer based on Vollmer family tradition.

Exhibition Furniture at the Centennial

On May 3rd of 1871 Congress approved an act that “the centennial anniversary of the promulgation of the Declaration of American Independence in Philadelphia should be celebrated in that city ‘by holding an International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures, and Products of the Soil and Mine.’”¹⁹⁷ For the next five years members of the Centennial Commission and their various boards set forth in organizing and building the exhibition space on 230 acres in Philadelphia’s Fenway Park.¹⁹⁸ In order to make a clear and comprehensive presentation of the goods of the world, exhibitors were divided into seven departments, and within each department individual classes.¹⁹⁹ Furniture was exhibited in the Main Building as part of department II, manufactures, and class 217, “Heavy Furniture—Chairs, tables, parlor and chamber suit[e]s, office and library furniture, vestibule furniture. Church furniture and decoration.”²⁰⁰ It was in this main exhibition space that Gottlieb Vollmer and his peers exhibited examples of their best furniture, showcasing their skill, craftsmanship, and overall good taste in quality furniture to the world.

Like any major exhibition, a series of awards were granted to exhibitors whose entries deserved honor based on the following elements of merit: “originality, invention, discovery, utility, quality, skill, workmanship, fitness for the purposes intended,

¹⁹⁷ United States Centennial Commission, *International Exhibition 1876 Official Catalogue* (Philadelphia: John R. Nagle and Company, 1876): 7.

¹⁹⁸ Frank Leslie, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition of 1876 with a new introduction by Richard Kenin*, (Paddinton Press Ltd. 1874 United States of America) ii.

¹⁹⁹ United States Centennial Commission, *International Exhibition 1876 Official Catalogue*, 8.

²⁰⁰ United States Centennial Commission, *International Exhibition 1876: The Report of the Director General* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880): 30.

adaptation to public wants, economy and cost.”²⁰¹ “Class 217—Heavy furniture, etc.” was part of judge’s “Group VII: Furniture, Upholstery, Wooden-Ware, Baskets, Etc.” The judges for Group VII were Addison Boyden of Boston, Chauncey Wiltse of Omaha, Robert Mitchell of Cincinnati, Le Marquis Eugene Achille de Rochambeau of France, Theodore Snyers Fils of Belgium, and Francois Thonet of Austria.²⁰²

The judging of the exhibits and subsequent issuing of awards at the final Awards Ceremony was designed in a three step process. These steps were divided as follows:

- 1st. The individual work of the Judges.
- 2nd. The collective work of the groups of judges.
- 3rd. The final decisions of the United States Centennial Commission.²⁰³

The judges walked the exhibition space and wrote an opinion of the various exhibits they saw, with the instructions that when they saw an exhibit worthy of an award they wrote down in as few words as they found suitable, why that entry was worthy.²⁰⁴ For judges’ Group VII, which consisted of eight different classes, the six judges “made three-hundred and seventeen recommendations for award.”²⁰⁵ Of the total 317 recommendations, 165 awards were granted to “Class 217—Heavy furniture, etc.,” 89 to American firms and 76 to foreign firms.²⁰⁶ Of the American firms a total of 20 awards were given to Philadelphia-based firms and a total of 23 to their competitors in New York. From these numbers it is clear that the Philadelphia and New York furniture industries had a

²⁰¹ United States Centennial Commission, *International Exhibition 1876, Reports and Awards Group VII* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1877):iii.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, vi.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, v.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ United States Centennial Commission, *International Exhibition 1876, Reports and Awards Group VII*, 3.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, iv.

prominent presence at the Centennial Exhibition, each taking nearly a quarter of the awards given to American firms in Class 217. Among the Philadelphian recipients for the awards of merit were Pabst, Allen & Bro., and Vollmer. On the 27th of September 1876 a presentation of the judge's report was held at Judges Hall, as illustrated in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Registrar of the United States Centennial Exposition*. At this presentation Vollmer and a few of his contemporaries received three mementos: a special report of the judges on the subject of the award, a diploma, and a bronze medal.



Figure 66 (Left) diploma received by Gottlieb Vollmer for his Centennial chamber suite, Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image taken by author **(Right)** bronze medal received by Daniel Pabst for his Centennial sideboard, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image from www.philamuseum.org

Surviving examples of the bronze medal and the diploma are today in the collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Historical Society, respectively (Figure 66). The bronze medal in figure is the medal issued to Pabst for his

walnut sideboard, the whereabouts of which are unknown, and no other illustrative or photographic documentation of the sideboard is known. A sample of the diploma pictured in figure is the diploma issued to Vollmer for his chamber suite, the wardrobe of which is illustrated in *Masterpieces of the Centennial Exhibition 1876*, but the whereabouts of the suite itself are unknown. These two awards were no doubt cherished by the Pabst and Vollmer families as they signified a great achievement in both of their careers.

The full list of awards and their reports is recorded in the “Reports on Awards—Group VII” in *International Exhibition Reports on Awards*. The reports on the reason for the awards; for example, Peter C. Doremus of New York was presented an award for a sofa spring bed and lounge, which was “commended for usefulness and comfort, combined with cheapness.”²⁰⁷ It was an award clearly in line with the elements of merit outlined by the Commission for “adaptation to public wants” in that it is a multipurpose product directed at the ever growing middle class. In direct contrast to Peter C. Doremus’ usefull, comfortable, and cheap exhibit, was Pottier & Stymus Manufacturing Co. of New York, whose firm was commended for the “superior workmanship” and “artistic style” of their furniture and interior decorations in the following report:

An exhibit of furniture draperies, ceiling, hangings, and other articles, all of which are, in every respect, commended as examples of superior workmanship, being artistic in style, faithful in the details of mechanism, and ornate in general effect. The carvings are superb in design, and elaborately yet delicately wrought by experienced artists. The draperies, interior decoration, and paneling are fine specimens of decorative art. The whole exhibit shows structural correctness, skillful use of materials, happy blending of colors, and ornamentation of the highest order of art.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ United States Centennial Commission, *International Exhibition 1876, Reports and Awards Group VII*, 6.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 12.

In the length of this report alone it is very clear that the judges were impressed by the Pottier & Stymus exhibit. They praise it as the “highest order of art” and speak to its overall “superior workmanship.”

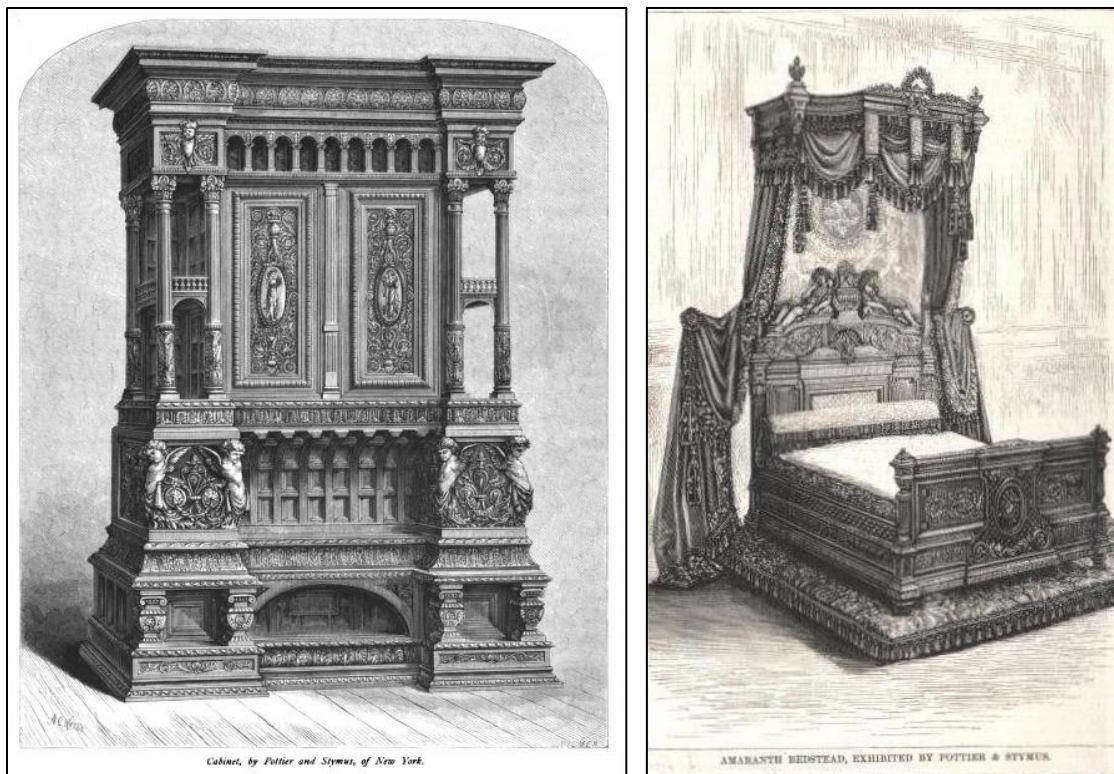


Figure 67 (Left) illustration of cabinet exhibited by Pottier & Stymus at the Centennial Exhibition, from George Titus Ferris, *Gems of the Centennial*, (New York: D. Appleton & Company, Publishers, 1877), 134. **(Right)** illustration of amaranth bedstead exhibited by Pottier & Stymus at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, from *Harper's Weekly*, (December 2, 1876), 969

In a separate report, *Memorial of the International Exhibition*, author Samuel J. Burr described the Pottier & Stymus exhibit with two rooms between which was the firm’s “masterpiece,” an ebony cabinet, and lists the total value of their exhibit at \$80,000, far

from cheap.²⁰⁹ The exhibit of Pottier & Stymus is the only one for which Burr lists the total price of the exhibit. While Burr does not list all of the pieces shown by Pottier & Stymus in his description he does mention three individual pieces and their prices: a cabinet (Figure 67) worth \$6,500, a bedstead (Figure 67) worth \$12,000, and a sideboard worth \$8,500.²¹⁰ Although the firms of Peter C. Doremus and Pottier & Stymus could not be more different, they serve to illustrate the scope of the participants exhibiting in the Centennial Exhibition, from firms manufacturing product aimed at the lower and middle classes to up-scale houses manufacturing completely furnished interiors for the predominately higher social classes. Pabst, Allen & Bro., Henekels, and Vollmer fell somewhere in between Peter C. Doremus and Pottier & Stymus, exhibiting made-to-order furniture aimed for the higher class, but their exhibits were not as rich and sumptuous as Pottier & Stymus.

²⁰⁹ Burr, *Memorial of the International Exhibition*, 304.

²¹⁰ Ibid.



Figure 68 (Top Left and Right) illustrations of the sideboard and doors exhibited by Allen & Bro. at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, from Prof. Walter Smith, "Industrial arts," in *The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barry, 1876), 2:13. **(Bottom Left and Right)** illustrations of two cabinets exhibited by Allen & Bro. at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, from George Titus Ferris, *Gems of the Centennial Exhibition*, (New York: D. Appleton & Company, Publishers, 1877), 145-146.

Pabst exhibited only a single sideboard, to which no value was assigned by Samuel Burr. Allen & Bro. exhibited a set of folding doors (Figure 68), a sideboard (Figure 68) worth \$900, and two cabinets (Figure 68), one of which was worth \$1,600.²¹¹



Figure 69 *Washstand*, George J. Henkels, maple and marble, 1876, from the Winterthur Museum Library, Wintercat. Possibly the washstand made as part of the chamber suite exhibited by George J. Henkels at the Centennial Exhibition as it bears a label reading "made from the wood of the maple tree that grew in Independence Square".

Henkels exhibited a chamber suite “made with the wood of a maple tree that grew in Independence Square.”²¹² No price was given for Henkels’ suite, nor did it win an award of merit. In fact it was not particularly well received by the public. The suite was described in *the American Architect and Building News* as:

One of the eccentricities of the Exhibition... ‘in the style of 1776’...It showed how little can be done in the way of imitation by one who does not understand the true spirit of what he is imitating. This was nothing

²¹¹ Ibid..

²¹² These are words dictated on a label attached to the washstand of the suite, a photograph of which is in the Decorative Arts Photographic Collection in the Winterthur Library in Wilmington, Delaware.

more than a caricature of the substantial surroundings which our ancestors possessed. The fact that it was made from an old maple-tree which grew in Independence Square could not lend sufficient sentiment to the subject to redeem it from this charge.²¹³

It is no surprise from this review that Henkels did not receive an award of merit like his other three Philadelphia contemporaries. A photograph of a washstand (Figure 69) containing a paper label indicating that it was made of maple from a tree in Independence Square is in the Decorative Arts Photographic Collection at the Winterthur Library. From the label on the washstand it is likely that this washstand was part of the Centennial chamber suite exhibited by Henkels and provides a visual to accompany the *American and Architect and Building News* review. In 1877, the year this article was written, Henkels retired from the furniture business.

Unlike Pabst, Allen & Bro. and Henkels who exhibited only pieces and suites of furniture, Vollmer exhibited two whole interiors: a bedroom and library (Figure 7). In these rooms were a full chamber suite valued at \$3,225 and mantel with connecting bookcase worth \$1,037.²¹⁴ The prices listed for the Allen & Bro. sideboard (\$900) and Vollmer's chamber suite (\$3,225) are of particular interest in comparison to those of Pottier & Stymus, whose sideboard was valued at \$8,500 and whose amaranth bedstead alone was valued at \$12,000. Allen & Bro.'s sideboard is nearly a tenth of the total cost of Pottier and Stymus', and Vollmer's entire chamber suite is nearly a quarter of the cost of their bedstead. These differences in prices illustrate the range of artistic skill and design even among the higher class firms such as Vollmer and Pottier & Stymus.

²¹³ "Decorative Fine-Art Work at Philadelphia: American Furniture (concluded)," *The American Architect and Building News*, Vol. 2, No. 54, January 13th, 1877 (Boston: James R Osgood & Co.): 12.

²¹⁴ Burr, *Memorial of the International Exhibition*, 304.

As previously mentioned, there are no known surviving depictions of the “large walnut sideboard” for which Pabst was given an award commending him “for utility, durability, and beauty.”²¹⁵ Furthermore, there is nothing more descriptive recorded of the sideboard beyond “an elegant black walnut sideboard,” which describes almost every mid-nineteenth-century American sideboard.²¹⁶ All that is known to survive are his bronze medal and the many listings in publications relating to the Centennial Exhibition which state that his entry for the exhibition was a walnut sideboard. While there is little information on Pabst’s Centennial sideboard, a look at Giuseppe Ferrari’s award winning Centennial cabinet (Figure 70) and the Allen & Bro.’s Centennial sideboard (Figure 68) provide insight to what the Pabst sideboard may have looked like.

²¹⁵ United States Centennial Commission, *International Exhibition 1876, Reports and Awards Group VII*, 5.

²¹⁶ Burr, *Memorial of the International Exhibition*, 304.



Figure 70 *Cabinet*, Giuseppe Ferrari, walnut, burl veneer, satinwood veneer, walnut veneer, yellow poplar, marble, 1876, accession number 1973-94-2, Philadelphia Museum of Art collection, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, image from www.philamuseum.org

Like Pabst, Ferrari exhibited a single piece rather than a full suite or interior, a “cabinet, richly carved, in Italian style of the fifteenth century.”²¹⁷ The cabinet, like Pabst’s sideboard, was primarily made of walnut. However, it also incorporated sections of mixed wood in the form of solid pieces and veneers. Whether Pabst used woods other than black walnut is unknown. Ferrari’s cabinet is handsomely and abundantly carved with a variety of flora, fauna, mythical, and classical motifs, as well as a relief bust of the

²¹⁷ United States Centennial Commission, *International Exhibition 1876 Official Catalogue*, 10.

Italian poet, Dante Alighieri.²¹⁸ In an exploration of Ferrari's cabinet, art historian David Raizman discusses the concept of exhibiting "the masterpiece" at the World's Fairs of the 19th century. The masterpiece, as Raizman states, was "a feature of the guild system, [it] was not designed and manufactured on commission for a patron, but rather was a test piece submitted by a skilled craftsman (journeyman) to be judged by peers before conferring the designation of 'master.'"²¹⁹ In the context of the Centennial Exhibition, the masterpiece became the presentation piece—a piece designed specifically for exhibition—and was used by exhibitors to show off their skill and competency in design through massive, complex, and ornately carved case pieces.²²⁰ These case pieces were usually grand cabinets or sideboards, "most often in a hybrid style associated with the Italian Renaissance."²²¹ The speculation that Ferrari's cabinet was indeed a presentation piece stems from more than just its spectacularly carved and embellished exterior, but also from its dimensions. As Raizman observed, "while standing an imposing eight feet (nearly two and a half meters) in height, the marble surface above the drawers is but a mere eighteen inches (forty-six centimeters) deep, rather shallow for either storage or the display of plate."²²² This shallowness in depth, he argues, further indicates of Ferrari's intended use of the cabinet as a presentation piece, not as a fully functional cabinet.²²³

While the dimensions of Pabst's sideboard are not known, his choice to exhibit only one

²¹⁸ David Raizman, "Giuseppe Ferrari's Carved Cabinet for the 1876 Centennial Exhibition: Presentation Furniture in the Cultural Context of World's Fairs," in *West 86th*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring-Summer 2013), Chicago: The University of Chicago Press in behalf of Bard Graduate Center, 2013, 66-68.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*, 65.

²²³ Raizman, David, "Giuseppe Ferrari's Carved Cabinet for the 1876 Centennial Exhibition: Presentation Furniture in the Cultural Context of World's Fairs," 65.

piece—and a sideboard at that—suggests that, like Ferrari’s cabinet, Pabst’s sideboard was conceived as a presentation piece. In further support of this hypothesis that Pabst’s sideboard was like Ferrari’s a presentation piece is that values were not assigned to their sideboards by Samuel J. Burr in *Memorial of the International Exhibition*. Four other cabinetmakers were listed by Burr who only exhibited a sideboard, and they too have no value assigned to them.²²⁴

Unlike Pabst and Ferrari, both of whom were commended for a single piece of furniture, the Allen & Bro. firm was presented an award for their entire exhibit of “furniture and parlor doors,” not just a single piece.²²⁵ Although the whereabouts of their Centennial furniture is not known, illustrations of a selection of their furniture are found in *Gems of the Centennial* and *Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition 1876*. One of particular interest, in terms of its relation to the sideboard and cabinet by Pabst and Ferrari, is the sideboard exhibited by Allen & Bro., illustrated here in (Figure 68). The sideboard, like the two pieces by Pabst and Ferrari, was made primarily of walnut, and was elaborately carved with a variety of Renaissance motifs.²²⁶ Of particular interest are the paneled doors of the cabinets, which have relief carvings of “artistic designs,” some type of fowl or game bird in the center cabinet and possibly instruments of the hunt on the left and right doors of the cabinets.²²⁷ These relief carvings are very

²²⁴ The four other cabinetmakers are F. Schafft of Detroit, D. M. Karcher’s Sons of Philadelphia, Geo. A. Schastey of New York, and E. W. Hutchings & Son of New York. Burr, *Memorial of the International Exhibition*, 304 to 307.

²²⁵ United States Centennial Commission, *International Exhibition 1876, Reports and Awards Group VII*, 6.

²²⁶ Prof. Walter Smith, *Industrial Art*, vol. 2 of *Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition Illustrated*, (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barrie, 1876), 14.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

similar to the carved panels on Ferrari's cabinet. In the illustration of the Allen & Bro. sideboard are items displayed on the shelves and the surface of the base, which suggests that, unlike Ferrari's cabinet, the sideboard was full size and made, not as a presentation piece, but as a functioning sideboard. In further support of the functional nature of the Allen & Bro. sideboard is the inclusion of a sale value of \$900 for the sideboard by Samuel J. Burr.²²⁸ The comparisons between the cabinet by Ferrari and the sideboard by Allen & Bro. provide insight into what Pabst's carved walnut sideboard might have looked like and also its function as a presentation piece or a functional example of Pabst's best product. While the exact nature of Pabst's sideboard in the Centennial Exhibition is not certain, it does seem more likely that it was indeed a presentation piece like Ferrari's cabinet.

Similar to Allen & Bro., who along with their sideboard exhibited at least two other cabinets and a pair of parlor doors, Vollmer exhibited more than one piece of furniture. While he did not exhibit a presentation piece, like Ferrari or possibly Pabst, he no doubt exhibited examples of his best work. Two full suites of furniture are known to have been exhibited by Vollmer: a library suite and a chamber suite (Figure 7). He won the award of merit with his chamber furniture "for perfection in design, combined with superior workmanship and finish in all respects; also for strictness in adherence to particulars in their respective style."²²⁹ The suite included a bedstead with canopy, wardrobe, dressing bureau, washstand, nightstand, lady's secretary, lounge, arm chair,

²²⁸ Burr, *Memorial of the International Exhibition*, 304.

²²⁹ United States Centennial Commission, *International Exhibition 1876, Reports and Awards Group VII*, 5.

small chair, window curtain and cornice to match.²³⁰ The wardrobe from this suite is depicted in (Figure 7), from *Masterpieces of the Centennial Exhibition*. Executed in the style of Louis XVI revival, it was made of a bird's eye maple accompanied by mahogany trim and decorations.²³¹ It consists of a broad door with a large plate glass mirror, with niches on either side and a drawer and two cabinets below. The wardrobe is decorated with both carved and incised decorations of acanthus leaves, swags, flamed-urn finials, and an elaborate central cartouche in the crest.



Figure 71 (Left) detail of the flamed-urn finial in the crest of Giuseppe Ferrari's cabinet exhibited at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, image from www.philamuseum.org **(Right)** detail of the four flamed-urn finials on the crest of Gottlieb Vollmer's wardrobe exhibited as part of his chamber suite at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, from Prof. Walter Smith, "Industrial Arts" in *The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition*, 3 vols, (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barry, 1876), 2:73.

The flamed-urn finials are reminiscent of the finial found in the middle of the broken pediment on Giuseppe Ferrari's cabinet (Figure 71). Vollmer's flames, as depicted in the

²³⁰ Pennsylvania Board of Centennial Managers, *Pennsylvania and the Centennial Exhibition*, vol. II, part III (Philadelphia: Gillin & Nagel, 1878), 466.

²³¹ The main wood is documented as three different woods: bird's eye maple, satinwood, and maples in the following three sources respectively: Pennsylvania Board of Centennial Managers, *Pennsylvania and the Centennial Exhibition*, 466; Smith, *Masterpieces of the Centennial Exhibition*, 74; and Burr, *Memorial of the International Exhibition*, 304.

illustration of the wardrobe, are carved broadly atop a sculpted urn base, while Ferrari's flame is carved with a wider bottom terminating to a pointed top and sits upon a much larger urn with handles. The likeness between Ferrari's and Vollmer's flame finials serves to illustrate the comparable skill set of Vollmer and Ferrari, even if the intention behind their pieces at the exhibition differed.

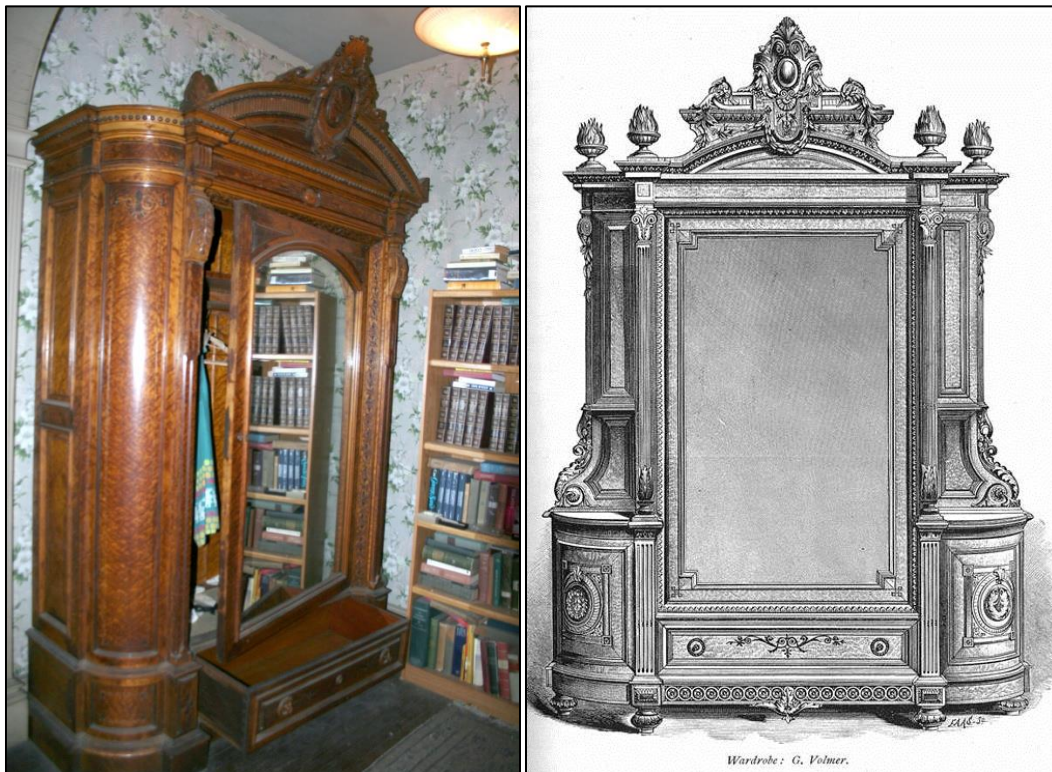


Figure 72 (Left) *Wardrobe from John Child chamber suite*, Gottlieb Vollmer, bird's eye maple, 1876, collection of John Child, image taken by author, **(Right)** illustration of the wardrobe exhibited by Gottlieb Vollmer as part of his chamber suite at the Centennial Exhibition, from Prof. Walter Smith, "Industrial Arts" in *The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barry, 1876), 2:73.

Further support of Vollmer's skill in craftsmanship and quality of design is seen in comparing the central cartouche from the wardrobe in the collection of John Child to

the central cartouche on the Centennial wardrobe illustrated in *Masterpieces of the Centennial Exhibition*. According to Child family tradition the chamber suite in their collection is Vollmer's Centennial chamber suite, and was bought by John Child at the exhibition where he served on the Board of Finance.²³² While there are certainly many likenesses between the two suites, which provide insight into the craftsmanship of the Centennial wardrobe, there are also some major differences which make it unlikely that the Child wardrobe and the Centennial illustration are not one in the same (Figure 72). The Child wardrobe is comprised of a broad door, which is fitted with an equally broad sheet of plate glass, and below the door is a drawer the same length as the door. Instead of having rounded corner cabinets with shelves above them on either side of the plate glass door as the Centennial wardrobe does, it has rounded sides up to the top of the wardrobe which allows for greater space inside the door.



Figure 73 (Left) detail of the central cartouche on the John Child wardrobe, image taken by author, **(Right)** detail of the central cartouche on the wardrobe from the Centennial wardrobe, from Prof. Walter Smith, "Industrial Arts" in *The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barry, 1876), 2:73.

²³² Certificate certifying shares bought and service to the Centennial Board of Finance in the collection of John Child.

The tops of the two wardrobes best reveal Vollmer's level of skill in craftsmanship and design. Although the Centennial wardrobe's pediment is more angular and the Child wardrobe's pediment is arched, there is similarity between their two central cartouches. Each cartouche is comprised of the same general makeup—a smooth convex medallion centered among acanthus leaves with spiraling scrolls and an antefix above it, and a swag or garland motif below as seen in (Figure 73). The difference between the two is that the detail around the Centennial wardrobe's cartouche is much more elaborate with a greater amount of carved motifs than the cartouche in the Child wardrobe. While the central cartouche from the Child wardrobe helps to illustrate the level of craftsmanship in Vollmer's Centennial wardrobe, the differences in design and amount of carved detail between the John Child wardrobe and the illustration of the Centennial wardrobe indicate that the two are not one in the same. This suggests the possibility that after seeing Vollmer's suite exhibited at the Centennial Exhibition, John Child commissioned a very similar chamber suite for his own use. This suggestion based on the differences between the Child wardrobe and the illustration relies heavily on the accuracy in the depiction of Vollmer's wardrobe illustrated in *Masterpieces of the Centennial*.

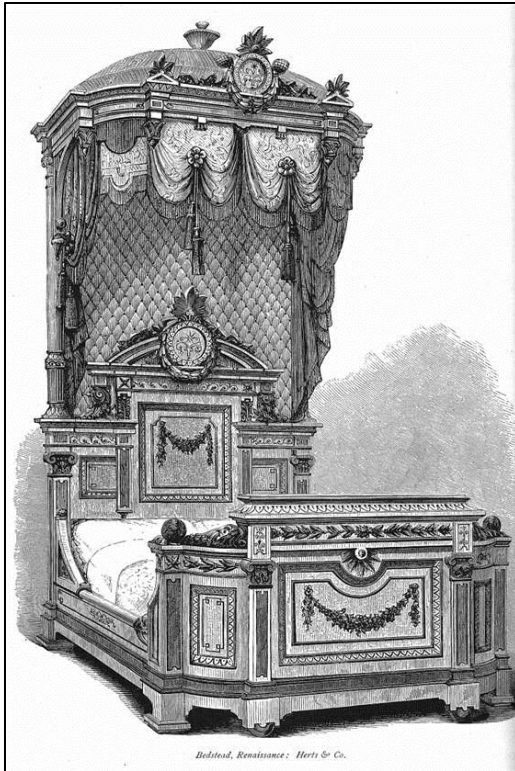


Figure 74 illustration of the bedstead exhibited by Herts & Co. as part of their chamber suite in the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, from Prof. Walter Smith, “Industrial Arts” in *The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barry, 1876), 2:26.

An analysis of the award-winning chamber suite exhibited by Herts & Co., a New York firm whose bedstead was also illustrated in *Masterpieces of the Centennial*, proves that the illustrations are accurate.²³³ The Herts & Co.’s chamber suite, like Vollmer’s, was also made of bird’s eye maple and trimmed with mahogany and valued at a price of \$3,500, only slightly more costly than Vollmer’s \$3,225.²³⁴ It is described as being designed in the “Renaissance” style, as opposed to Vollmer’s Louis XVI revival.²³⁵ In comparing illustrations of Vollmer’s wardrobe (Figure 72) to the Herts & Co. bedstead

²³³ United States Centennial Commission, *International Exhibition 1876, Reports and Awards Group VII* 9.

²³⁴ Burr, *Memorial of the International Exhibition*, 304.

²³⁵ Smith, *Masterpieces of the Centennial Exhibition*, 27.

(Figure 74) from *Masterpieces of the Centennial Exhibition*, the level of superiority in craftsmanship and overall quality of design for which they both won awards for is obvious, at least considering the two illustrations. This sparks the question, are the illustrations an accurate representation of the pieces they exhibited? The answer is an unequivocal yes. While the whereabouts of neither of the suites are known, an albumen print (Figure 75) of the Herts & Co. exhibit are in the Centennial Collection at the Free Library of Philadelphia.



Figure 75 Herts & Co. image in *Sample Album*-pg. 49, Centennial Photographic Co., albumen print, 1876, item number c050490, Centennial Exhibition Collection in the Free Library of Philadelphia, from <https://libwww.freelibrary.org/digital/item/c050490>.

In the albumen print almost the entirety of their display is visible. These photographs not only provide a visual of the other pieces in the Herts & Co. chamber suite, but a clear view of the bedstead. Comparing the photograph of the bedstead with the illustration of it from *Masterpieces of the Centennial Exhibition*, the overall shape and design of the bedstead is done with close to pin-point precision. There are only two discernible differences between the illustration and the albumen print. The first is the exclusion of the finials on top of the two column-like posts at the back of the canopy. The exclusion of the finials from the illustration may be explained by the differences in perspective of the illustrator versus the cameraman. The second difference is the rendering of the drapery hanging from the half-tester's frame. Instead of a single flounced swag with tassel in the middle of the valance, there are two in the illustration. This is perhaps due to the obviously dramatized proportions of the illustration, as the draperies also do not fall as close to the bed as they do in the albumen print. Overall there are few differences between the illustration of the bedstead by Herts & Co. and the actual bedstead as photographed in the albumen print. Thus, the illustration of Vollmer's wardrobe is almost certainly an accurate depiction of the actual wardrobe exhibited by him at the Centennial Exhibition. So there should not be any hesitation when referring to published illustration from the Centennial exhibit.

Aside from providing a life image of the Herts & Co. bedstead to compare with its illustration in *Masterpieces of the Centennial Exhibition*, the albumen print also provides a view of their actual display of furniture. In the print the furniture is displayed by Herts & Co. on a display stage enclosed by rails on two sides. The furniture is arranged as a

mock chamber room with a sample window cornice and draperies on the right side wall. No matching wall coverings or any other interior decorations are displayed with the furniture. Herts & Co. is highlighting their skill as upholsterers and cabinetmakers without furnishing and decorating an entire room, quite the opposite of Pottier and Stymus, who exhibited their skills in the form of entire interiors. While photographic evidence of Vollmer's display has not yet been found, it was most likely a blend between the display styles of Herts & Co. and a very subdued Pottier and Stymus. This hypothesis is based on the similarities between the Herts & Co. chamber suite and Vollmer's, and the fact that along with a list of the nine pieces in the suite were "window curtain and cornice to match furniture, and the ceiling decorated to correspond."²³⁶ The fact that he had a "ceiling decorated to correspond" with the Louis XVI style chamber furniture, suggests that Vollmer was dabbling with whole interior design schemes too.



Figure 76 (Left) *Centennial Souvenir*, book, 1876, call number Wr.2953, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania collection, image taken by author. **(Right)** detail of the inside back cover of the *Centennial Souvenir* advertising G. Vollmer, image taken by author.

²³⁶ Pennsylvania Board of Centennial Managers, *Pennsylvania and the Centennial Exhibition*, 466

This postulation is further supported in the souvenir book (Figure 76) he handed out at the Centennial Exhibition. In this souvenir are illustrations of thirteen of Philadelphia's most important buildings, including Vollmer's warerooms at 1108 Chestnut St.²³⁷ The very back of the souvenir gives the details of Vollmer's shop and states "Furniture and Decorations Of Every Description." Vollmer's inclusion of decorations in the description of his shop indicates that he was taking orders for more than just furniture and curtains, which explains the "ceiling decorated to correspond" in the display of his Centennial chamber suite.²³⁸ To accommodate a ceiling and window treatments with cornices Vollmer's exhibit must have been almost enclosed, like the rooms of Pottier and Stymus. Decorations beyond the ceiling and window treatments are unknown, so it is possible that the rooms were not fully decorated like Pottier & Stymus and were set up in a showcase manner like Herts & Co. who also displayed window treatments, but did not decorate a ceiling to correspond. Whether or not displayed in a showcase style or a fully decorated interior, the fact remains that Vollmer chose to exhibit a ceiling in the style of Louis XVI revival alongside his furniture, something his other Philadelphia contemporaries did not do. This is important because it shows a change in direction of Vollmer's firm from cabinetmaker and upholsterer to an interior decorator, a direction that many of his New York competitors, like Pottier & Stymus, were already going. The incorporation of interior designs distinguishes him from Daniel

²³⁷ The buildings pictured in the souvenir are Girard Ave Bridge, University of Pennsylvania, Academy of Fine Arts, Academy of Natural Science, Masonic Temple, Academy of Music, the Mint, Girard College, Public Building (present day City Hall), Independence Hall, Agriculture Hall (Centennial exhibition building), and the Ladies Pavillion (Centennial Exhibition building.) Centennial Souvenir, 1876, call # Wr.2953, Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

²³⁸ Pennsylvania Board of Centennial Managers, *Pennsylvania and the Centennial Exhibition*, 466.

Pabst, Allen & Bro., and George J. Henkels in Philadelphia. The direction of whole interiors continued to be developed in Vollmer's business by his son Charles F. Vollmer after Gottlieb died in 1883. Over the next ten years Charles F. continued his father's legacy as "G. Vollmer & Son, manufacturers of cabinet furniture and interior decorations. Importers of tapestries, curtain material, paper hangings, etc."²³⁹

From the exhibition of presentation pieces to fully furnished and decorated interiors the Centennial Exhibition showcased "the richest display of the best made furniture ever exhibited in the country,"²⁴⁰ including the library and chamber suites made by Gottlieb Vollmer. While the award for Vollmer's chamber suite implies the positive reception of his exhibits, their true excellence in design and superior workmanship is evident when compared with the exhibits of his fellow competitors in Philadelphia and New York. He not only made furniture of comparable quality to Daniel Pabst, Allen & Bro., and George J. Henkels through his use of valued materials, popular styles, and comprehensive interpretation of good design, but Vollmer set himself apart from them by evolving his furniture and upholstery firm to incorporate whole interior decorations into his business model as proven by the way he exhibited his chamber suite. Although none of his interior decorating schemes are presently known, the quality and skill of craftsmanship and design in his Centennial chamber suite, his surviving furniture, and his business reputation, all confirm that Gottlieb Vollmer was undoubtedly one of Philadelphia's prominent 19th-century cabinetmakers and upholsterers.

²³⁹ Gottlieb Vollmer, bill of sale to Mr. Henry Cochran dated July 1st, 1893, Winterthur Library Archives, Wilmington, Delaware.

²⁴⁰ Burr, *Memorial of the International Exhibition*, 304.

CONCLUSION

It is not every one that hangs out his sign as a cabinetmaker that is entitled to use the name.

--George J. Henkels, Household Economy

Walking through the hustle and bustle of the ever fashionable Chestnut Street, with many of its shops projecting signs for various cabinetmakers, First Lady Harriet Lane, the niece of President James Buchanan, found herself at the doors of G. Vollmer. Her predilection to redecorate the White House using Philadelphia-based firms instead of firms from New York, the country's leading style center, is explained by her home state being Pennsylvania. But why would the First Lady choose to patronize Gottlieb Vollmer when Allen & Bro. was only one block up Chestnut Street, and George J. Henkels and Daniel Pabst were just a few blocks away from Vollmer's shop? As a prominent German-immigrant cabinetmaker and upholsterer working in the furniture industry of 19th-century Philadelphia, Gottlieb Vollmer produced a vast body of superior quality furniture comparable to that of his Philadelphia contemporaries, but is distinguished by his own interpretations of design and his ability to not only furnish but decorate whole interiors.

A thorough analysis of his family, firm, and furniture has revealed that Vollmer was a more significant factor in the history of Philadelphia cabinetmakers than he is presently credited with. He is not just the German-immigrant cabinetmaker and upholsterer commissioned by the First Lady to make the gilded parlor suite for the White

House Blue Room. He is one of Philadelphia's most prominent cabinetmakers of the 19th century, an indisputable fact given the many surviving accounts of his business, estate sale advertisements by Thomas Birch & Son, Auctioneers highlighting his "made to order" suites, and most of all through the high quality his surviving furniture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Winterthur Museum, and many other private collections.

The examination of his labeled pieces and those with solidly based attributions provide a solid body of work from which to catalogue characteristics of Vollmer's furniture. These unique characteristics distinguish his work from other nineteenth century cabinetmakers. This was most aptly demonstrated in the analysis of "the White House Case Study," in which an unknown suite of library furniture in the White House collection is now known to be made by Vollmer. After comparing the library suite's characteristics to the Blue Room parlor suite and the labeled center table in the Winterthur collection, repeated motifs executed in the same fashion and similarity in construction reveal Vollmer as the maker. These characteristics include double dowel joints, scaling, gouging, and gadrooning to name a few. It is the execution of these characteristics that is unique to Vollmer, not the motifs themselves, and their combined presence in the library suite are the primary factor in the attribution to Vollmer. The attribution is further substantiated through an illustration of the library suite in *Frank Leslie's Magazine*, and the presence of the chair in President James Buchanan's own presidential portrait painting hanging in the National Portrait Gallery. While "the White House Case Study" is but one example of attributing an unknown suite of furniture, the analysis of Vollmer's furniture and its characteristics in the preceding chapters, as well as

the catalogue entries in the subsequent appendices, provide a foundation on which scholars and collectors alike can attribute future pieces of furniture to Vollmer.

The comparison of Vollmer's furniture and business to his Philadelphia contemporaries Pabst, Allen & Bro., and Henkels further affirms his status as a leading cabinetmaker in the Philadelphia furniture industry. The location and layout of his warerooms are nearly identical to those of his neighbor's, Allen & Bro., as seen through a pictorial and textual comparison of their shops in *Pennsylvania Illustrated* and *The Royal Road to Wealth*. Furthermore, his marketing claims of work "done by hand, with no machinery being used" is in line with that of Pabst, Allen & Bro., and Henkels, and the manufactory censuses from 1860 to 1880 support this claim with all of them listing hand as the only means of motive power.²⁴¹ However, Vollmer's warerooms were equipped with a steam heating apparatus and steam hoist, which allowed Vollmer to adapt machinery to assist in the operational aspects of his shop while still producing hand-made furniture. His use of steam power for operating a hoist and providing heat in the basement to season lumber set his workshop apart from that of Pabst, Allen & Bro., and Henkels. All the documentation surrounding the four firms' indicates an equal measure of high praise for their skill in craftsmanship and design, but only "time and use alone will test your furniture."²⁴² The quality in workmanship of the four firms is evident when analyzing the lion's paw feet and "Assyrian" lion motif used by each firm in several different pieces ranging in form from seating furniture, to tables, to case pieces. In these

²⁴¹ *Pennsylvania Illustrated*, 82.

²⁴² Vansant, *The Royal Road to Wealth*, 44.

pieces the skill and level of craftsmanship possessed by each of the four firms is clearly distinguished by their different interpretations of the same motif.

Despite producing work of similar quality and design, Vollmer distinguished himself from his Philadelphia competitors by incorporating whole interior decorations into his business. This is confirmed with his exhibition at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. His entry of the Louis XVI revival chamber suite, for which he won an award, was exhibited as a full room with “ceiling decorated to correspond.”²⁴³ The exhibition of an entire room was much more in line with that of his contemporaries in New York, like Pottier and Stymus, than his Philadelphia neighbors who exhibited either a single piece or a collection of individual pieces. Vollmer’s expertise in interior decorations is further supported by his “Centennial Souvenir” which advertises his firm as making “furniture and decorations of every description.”²⁴⁴ Though this direction was just forming towards the end of Vollmer’s career, his son Charles F. Vollmer continued with it until G. Vollmer & Son closed its doors in November of 1893.

The study of 19th-century American furniture has long focused on New York, the leading style center of the time, but in researching and analyzing the family, firm, and furniture of Vollmer it is clear that 19th-century Philadelphia has much to offer the inquisitive furniture historian. The investigation into the role of Vollmer in the 19th-century Philadelphia furniture industry has revealed him to be more significant than just the maker of the Blue Room parlor suite, but there is still much to be learned. How

²⁴³ Pennsylvania Board of Centennial Managers, *Pennsylvania and the Centennial Exhibition*, 466.

²⁴⁴ Centennial Souvenir, 1876, call # Wr.2953, Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

extensive was his business in Philadelphia and around the country? It is known that he catered to a primarily high class clientele, but how influential were they in society? A more thorough investigation into the names listed in Vollmer's account ledgers at the Pennsylvania Historical Society may lead to new insight about the workings of his shop and perhaps the Philadelphia furniture industry as a whole. Are there any surviving photographic documents of his interior schemes, and just how much of an impact did decorating interiors have on his business before his death? Only more archival research in the many Philadelphia repositories, libraries, and universities, as well as an active interest in Vollmer and the nineteenth century Philadelphia furniture industry will answer that. At present, unremitting investigations into his life, business, and furniture continue to reveal more information about Vollmer as well as new pieces of furniture made by and attributed to him. The compilation of the findings from this exploration of Gottlieb Vollmer, not only reveal his prominence in the 19th-century Philadelphia furniture industry, but also identifies characteristics to allow for the future attribution of Vollmer furniture so that scholars can continue to expand our understanding of a previously unrecognized master of 19th-century Philadelphia cabinetmaking.

AUTHOR'S NOTE ON APPENDICES 1 AND 2

The ultimate goal of Appendices 1 and 2 is to organize all of the known recorded furniture attributed to or made by G. Vollmer and G. Vollmer & Son for the purposes of furthering scholarship on Gottlieb Vollmer and his firm. In a total of 73 entries spanning the years between 1854 and 1893, these catalogues serve as a visual and descriptive accounts of the furniture made by or attributed to G. Vollmer and G. Vollmer & Son discovered, researched, and recorded in the compilation "From the Black Forest to Philadelphia: Gottlieb Vollmer, upholster and cabinetmaker, 1841-1883."

Appendix 1 includes furniture made by G. Vollmer between 1854 and 1883, the year when Vollmer first struck out on his own and the year in which he died. Appendix 2 includes furniture made by G. Vollmer & Son between 1883 and 1893, the years during which Charles F. Vollmer continued his father's legacy. Within each catalogue the individual pieces are organized by category: case furniture, seating furniture, tables, and interior elements; form within their category; and finally by date earliest to latest. The entries include information on dates, materials, and collections (if known), and any pertinent information as to the object's known provenance is recorded as a note at the end of the entry.

APPENDIX 1: CATALOGUE OF G. VOLLMER FURNITURE, 1854-1883



Entry 1:1

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Wardrobe

Maker: G. Vollmer

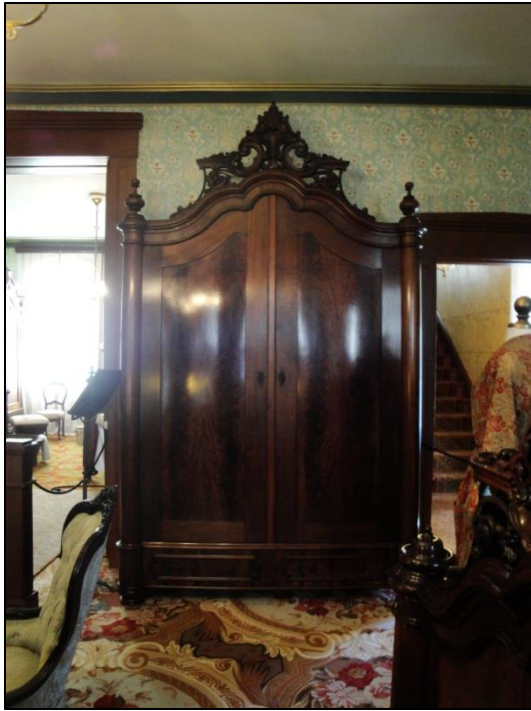
Date(s): 1859

Materials(s): walnut and silvered glass

Collection: White House (Washington, D.C., United States of America), accession number 1960.53.1

Image: courtesy of the White House Curatorial Department

Notes: Listed in the January 1st, 1859 bill of sale as “1 wardrobe, 2 large mirrored doors” for \$175. The mirrored glass originally on the doors have been removed and preserved by the Executive Support Facility collections and conservation staff. The whereabouts of the original urn finials and scrollwork crest with central cartouche are unknown.



Entry 1:2

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Wardrobe

Maker: att. G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1850-1860

Materials(s): hardwood

Collection: Campbell House Museum, accession number 1941.2.56

Image: taken by author

Notes: one piece of a seven piece chamber suite in the lady's bedroom; attribution based on similarity in construction and decorative motifs to other known G. Vollmer pieces



Entry 1:3

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Wardrobe

Maker: att. G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1850-1860

Materials(s): walnut and other wood

Collection: Campbell House Museum, accession number 1941.2.57

Image: taken by author

Notes: located in the gentleman's bedroom; attribution based on similarity in construction and decorative motifs to other known G. Vollmer pieces



Entry 1:4

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Wardrobe

Maker: G. Vollmer

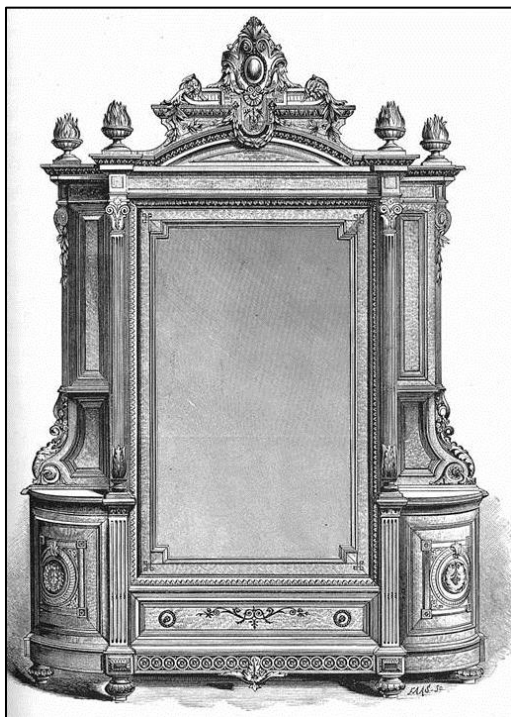
Date(s): ca. 1876

Materials(s): bird's eye maple

Collection: collection of John Child

Image: taken by author

Notes: one piece of an 11 piece chamber suite, the nightstand of which bears an ink stamp label with the name "G. Vollmer"; according to Child family tradition the suite was purchased from Vollmer at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition



Entry 1:5

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Wardrobe

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1876

Materials(s): bird's eye maple

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: Prof. Walter Smith, "Industrial Arts" in *The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barry, 1876), 2: 73.

Notes: part of the chamber suite exhibited by Gottlieb Vollmer at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition; won an award of merit for the chamber suite



Entry 1:6

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Chest of Drawers with Mirror

Maker: att. G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1850-1860

Materials(s): wood and marble

Collection: Campbell House Museum, accession number 1941.1.27

Image: taken by author

Notes: one of a seven piece chamber suite in the lady's bedroom; attribution based on similarity in construction and decorative motifs to other known G. Vollmer pieces



Entry 1:7

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Chest of Drawers with Mirror

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1876

Materials(s): bird's eye maple

Collection: collection of John Child

Image: taken by author

Notes: one of an 11 piece chamber suite, the nightstand of which bears an ink stamp label reading, "G. Vollmer/Cabinet & Upholstery/warerooms & manufactory/ 1108 Chestnut and 1105 Sansom Street/ Philadelphia"; according to Child family tradition the suite was purchased from Vollmer at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition



Entry 1:8

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Dresser

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1876

Materials(s): bird's eye maple

Collection: collection of John Child

Image: taken by author

Notes: one of an 11 piece chamber suite, the nightstand of which bears an ink stamp label reading, "G. Vollmer/Cabinet & Upholstery/ warerooms & manufactory/ 1108 Chestnut and 1105 Sansom Street/ Philadelphia"; according to Child family tradition the suite was purchased from Vollmer at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition



Entry 1:9

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Washstand

Maker: att. G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1850-1860

Materials(s): wood and marble

Collection: Campbell House Museum, accession number 1941.1.218

Image: taken by author

Notes: one of a seven piece chamber suite in the lady's bedroom; attribution based on similarity in construction and decorative motifs to other known G. Vollmer pieces



Entry 1:10

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Washstand

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1876

Materials(s): bird's eye maple and marble

Collection: collection of John Child

Image: taken by author

Notes: one of an 11 piece chamber suite, the nightstand of which bears an ink stamp label reading, "G. Vollmer/Cabinet & Upholstery/ warerooms & manufactory/ 1108 Chestnut and 1105 Sansom Street/ Philadelphia"; according to Child family tradition the suite was purchased from Vollmer at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition; the lock on the right door is engraved with "G. BAYER PAT'D FEB 6 1872"

Entry 1:11

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Nightstand

Maker: att. G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1850-1860

Materials(s): wood and marble

Collection: Campbell House Museum

Image: taken by author

Notes: one of two in a seven piece chamber suite in the lady's bedroom; attribution based on similarity in construction and decorative motifs to other known G. Vollmer pieces





Entry 1:12

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Nightstand

Maker: G. Vollmer

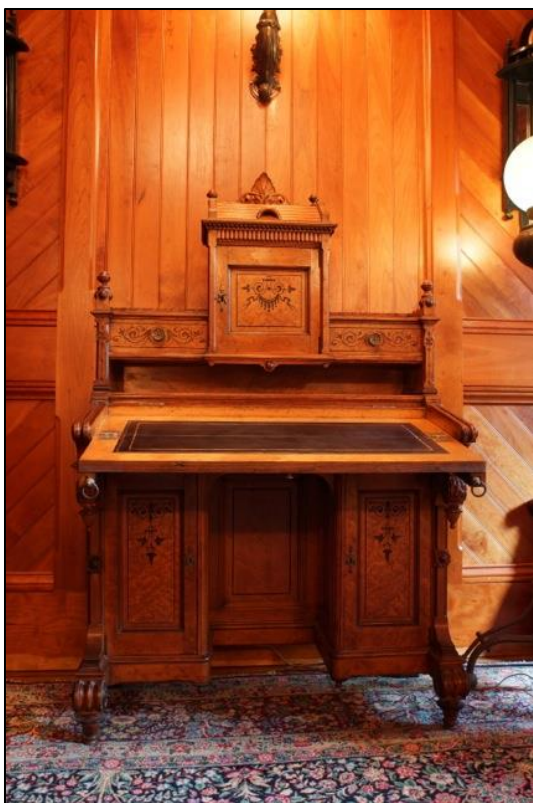
Date(s): ca. 1876

Materials(s): bird's eye maple

Collection: collection of John Child

Image: taken by author

Notes: one of an 11 piece chamber suite; bears an ink stamp label reading, "G. Vollmer/Cabinet & Upholstery/ warerooms & manufactory/ 1108 Chestnut and 1105 Sansom Street/ Philadelphia" on the underside of the drawer; according to Child family tradition the suite was purchased from Vollmer at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition



Entry 1:13

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Desk

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1875-1880

Materials(s): bird's eye maple

Collection: collection of John and Leslie Koelsch

Image: taken by John Koelsch

Notes: bears an ink stamp label reading, "G. Vollmer/Cabinet & Upholstery/ warerooms & manufactory/ 1108 Chestnut and 1105 Sansom Street/ Philadelphia" on the underside of the desk drawer



Entry 1:14

Category: Case Furniture, Seating Furniture, Interior Elements

Object Form: Bookcase, mantel, mirror, and library chair

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1876

Materials(s): ebony and embossed leather

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: George Titus Ferris, *Gems of the Centennial Exhibition*, (New York:D. Appleton & Company, Publishers, 1877), 144.

Notes:



Entry 1:15

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Cabinet

Maker: att. G. Vollmer or G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): mid- to late-19th century

Materials(s): wood and mirrored glass

Collection: collection of Nicole Luster

Image: taken by Nicole Luster

Notes: according to Vollmer family tradition the cabinet was made by Gottlieb Vollmer and passed down through his son Rudolph's side of the family; carved characteristics such as the twist turning fit with G. Vollmer, but the grotesque motif fits more with G. Vollmer & Son so it is possible that this piece was made as the company was transitioning between Gottlieb and Charles F. Vollmer



Entry 1:16

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Cabinet

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1875

Materials(s): walnut and burl walnut veneer

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from Kamelot Auction on www.liveauctioneers.com/item/8195302

Notes: on the underside of the spring-loaded top drawer is an ink stamp label with the name "G. Vollmer"; sold at auction on November 20th, 2010 through Kamelot Auction House



Entry 1:17

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Cabinet

Maker: G. Vollmer

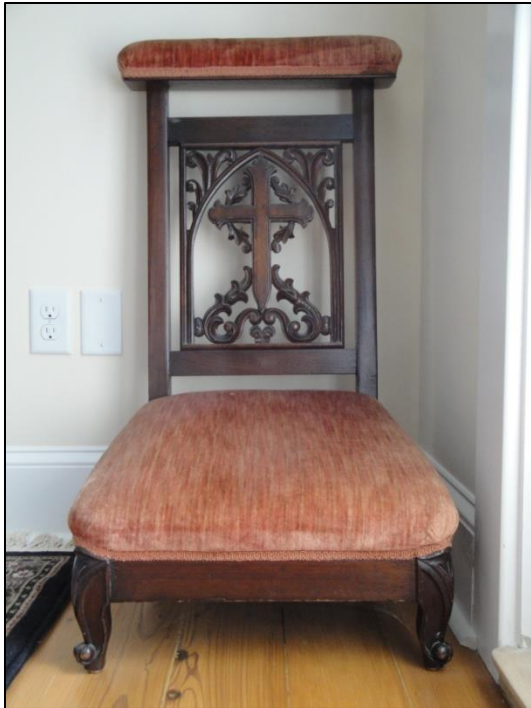
Date(s): ca. 1870

Materials(s): wood, inlaid materials

Collection: private collection, whereabouts unknown

Image: Eileen and Richard Dubrow, *American Furniture of the 19th Century 1840-1880*, (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2000)21

Notes:



Entry 1:18

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Priedieu or Prayer Stool

Maker: att. G. Vollmer

Date(s): mid-19th century

Materials(s): hardwood with modern upholstery

Collection: collection of Nancy Staisey

Image: taken by author

Notes: according to Vollmer family tradition it was made by Gottlieb Vollmer for one of his daughters; as it has been passed down through his first-born daughter, Emilie's side of the family, it seems likely that it was made for her; attribution further supported through similarities in the decorative details to other known Vollmer pieces



Entry 1:19

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Piano Stool

Maker: att. G. Vollmer

Date(s): mid-19th century

Materials(s): ebonized and gilded hardwood

Collection: collection of Nancy Staisey

Image: taken by author

Notes: according to Vollmer family tradition it was made by Vollmer and passed down through his eldest daughter, Emilie's side of the family



Entry 1:20

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Ottoman

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1860

Materials(s): gilded ash

Collection: White House, accession number 1860.581.1

Image: courtesy of the White House Curatorial Department

Notes: one of a pair in a 19-piece parlor suite made for the Blue Room; documented in a bill of sale dated January 1st, 1860



Entry 1:21

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Ottoman

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1875

Materials(s): ebonized cherry and modern silk damask

Collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art, accession number 1941-89-15

Image: taken by author

Notes: one piece in a 16-piece parlor suite; according to family tradition the suite was made by Vollmer for James Dobson's estate, Bella Vista, located of the Falls of the Schuylkill in 1875



Entry 1:22

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Reception Chair

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1860

Materials(s): gilded walnut with modern upholstery

Collection: White House, accession number
1860.579.1

Image: taken by author

Notes: one of four reception chairs made for the 19-
piece Blue Room parlor suite; documented in a bill
of sale date January 1st, 1860



Entry 1:23

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Reception Chair

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1860

Materials(s): hardwood with modern upholstery

Collection: Collection of Gerald Crawford

Image: courtesy of Richard Branyan

Notes: one of a pair; attributed to Vollmer based on their similarity to the White House gilded reception chairs



Entry 1:24

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Reception Chair

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1880

Materials(s): ebonized cherry with modern silk damask

Collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art, accession number 1941-89-13,14

Image: courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Curatorial Department

Notes: one of a pair; according to family tradition a later addition to a pre-existing Rococo revival parlor suite made by Vollmer for James Dobson's estate, Bella Vista, on the Falls of the Schuylkill



Entry 1:25

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Reception Chair

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1876

Materials(s): birds eye maple and early 20th-century upholstery

Collection: Collection of John Child

Image: taken by author

Notes: one of a pair in an 11-piece chamber suite, the nightstand of which has an ink stamp label reading, "G. Vollmer/Cabinet & Upholstery/warerooms & manufactory/ 1108 Chestnut and 1105 Sansom Street/ Philadelphia"; according to family tradition the chamber suite was exhibited by Vollmer at the Centennial Exhibition



Entry 1:26

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Side Chair

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1860

Materials(s): gilded ash with modern upholstery

Collection: White House, accession number

Image: taken by author

Notes: one of four made for the 19-piece Blue Room parlor suite; documented in a bill of sale dated January 1st, 1860



Entry 1:27

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Side Chair

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1875

Materials(s): ebonized cherry with modern silk damask

Collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art, accession number 1941-89-9,10,11,12

Image: courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Curatorial Department

Notes: one of four in a 13-piece parlor suite; according to family tradition the suite was made by Vollmer for James Dobson's estate, Bella Vista, located of the Falls of the Schuylkill in 1875



Entry 1:28

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Side Chair

Maker: formerly attr. G. Vollmer, presently attr. To New York or Philadelphia

Date(s): 1850-1875

Materials(s): ebonized cherry, gilt metal mounts, modern upholstery

Collection: Virginia Museum of Fine Art

Image: courtesy of the Virginia Museum of Fine Art Curatorial Department

Notes: one of four in a seven-piece suite; originally attributed to Vollmer based on his extensive work in ebonized cherry in *Magazine Antiques*, May 1978, pp.1062; all but this side chair were de-accessioned from the VMFA and later sold at auction through Neal Auction Company on December 4th and 5th, 1999



Entry 1:29

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Slipper Chair

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1876

Materials(s): painted hardwood and early 20th century upholstery

Collection: Collection of John Child

Image: taken by author

Notes: part of an 11-piece chamber suite, the nightstand of which has an ink stamp label reading, "G. Vollmer/Cabinet & Upholstery/ warerooms & manufactory/ 1108 Chestnut and 1105 Sansom Street/ Philadelphia"; according to family tradition the chamber suite was exhibited by Vollmer at the Centennial Exhibition; this is the only piece in the suite where the wood is painted to mimic the bird's eye maple wood used in the rest of the suite



Entry 1:30

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Bergère Chair

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1875

Materials(s): ebonized cherry with modern silk damask

Collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art, accession number 1941-89-7, 8

Image: courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Department

Notes: one of a pair; according to family tradition a later addition to a pre-existing Rococo revival parlor suite made by Vollmer for James Dobson's estate, Bella Vista, on the Falls of the Schuylkill



Entry 1:31

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Armchair

Maker: attr. G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1859

Materials(s): walnut

Collection: White House

Image: taken by author

Notes: one of a pair in a four-piece library suite; documented in the bill of sale dated January 21st, 1859



Entry 1:32

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Armchair

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1860

Materials(s): gild ash with modern upholstery

Collection: White House, accession number 1860.571.1

Image: courtesy of the White House Curatorial Department

Notes: one of four in a 19-piece parlor suite; documented in the bill of sale dated January 1st, 1860



Entry 1:33

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Armchair

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1875

Materials(s): ebonized cherry and modern silk damask

Collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art, accession number 1941-89-5, 6

Image: courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Curatorial Department

Notes: one of a pair; according to family tradition a later addition to a pre-existing Rococo revival parlor suite made by Vollmer for James Dobson's estate, Bella Vista, on the Falls of the Schuylkill



Entry 1:34

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Armchair

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1876

Materials(s): bird's eye maple with early 20th century upholstery

Collection: Collection of John Child

Image: taken by author

Notes: one piece in an 11-piece chamber suite, the nightstand of which has an ink stamp label reading, "G. Vollmer/Cabinet & Upholstery/ warerooms & manufactory/ 1108 Chestnut and 1105 Sansom Street/ Philadelphia"; according to family tradition the chamber suite was exhibited by Vollmer at the Centennial Exhibition



Entry 1:35

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Armchair

Maker: attr. G. Vollmer

Date(s): mid-19th century

Materials(s): ebonized cherry, gilt metal mounts, modern upholstery

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from *The Magazine Antiques* May 1978, p. 1062

Notes: one of a pair part of a parlor suite initially in the collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; originally attributed to Vollmer based on his extensive work in ebonized cherry in *Magazine Antiques*, May 1978, pp.1062; de-accessioned from the VMFA and later sold at auction through Neal Auction Company on December 4th and 5th, 1999



Entry 1:36

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Tête-à-tête

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1870-1875

Materials(s): gilded cherry and modern silk damask
Collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art, accession number 1941-89-1

Image: courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Curatorial Department

Notes: one piece in a 13-piece parlor suite; according to family tradition the suite was made by Vollmer for James Dobson's estate, Bella Vista, located of the Falls of the Schuylkill in 1875

Entry 1:37



Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Sofa

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1859

Materials(s): walnut

Collection: White House

Image: courtesy of the White House Curatorial Department

Notes: one of a pair in a four-piece library suite; documented in the bill of sale dated January 21st, 1859

Entry 1:38



Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Sofa

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1860

Materials(s): gilded ash and modern upholstery
Collection: White House, accession number 1860.583.1; Smithsonian Institution

Image: taken by author

Notes: two pairs, one pair in the White House collection and one pair in the Smithsonian Institution collection; documented in the bill of sale dated January 1st, 1860



Entry 1:39

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Sofa

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1875

Materials(s): ebonized cherry with modern silk damask

Collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art, accession number 1941-89-2, 3

Image: courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Curatorial Department

Notes: one of a pair in a 13-piece parlor suite; according to family tradition the suite was made by Vollmer for James Dobson's estate, Bella Vista, located on the Falls of the Schuylkill in 1875

Entry 1:40



Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Settee

Maker: attr. G. Vollmer

Date(s): mid-19th century

Materials(s): ebonized cherry, gilt metal mounts, modern silk upholstery

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: take from *The Magazine Antiques* May 1978, p. 1062

Notes: one piece in a parlor suite initially in the collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; originally attributed to Vollmer based on his extensive work in ebonized cherry in *Magazine Antiques*, May 1978, pp.1062; de-accessioned from the VMFA and later sold at auction through Neal Auction Company on December 4th and 5th, 1999



Entry 1:41

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Chaise Lounge

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1876

Materials(s): bird's eye maple, early 20th century upholstery

Collection: Collection of John Child

Image: taken by author

Notes: one piece in an 11-piece chamber suite, the nightstand of which has an ink stamp label reading, "G. Vollmer/Cabinet & Upholstery/ warerooms & manufactory/ 1108 Chestnut and 1105 Sansom Street/ Philadelphia"; according to family tradition the chamber suite was exhibited by Vollmer at the Centennial Exhibition



Entry 1:42

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Center Divan

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1860

Materials(s): gilt ash and pine, modern upholstery

Collection: White House, accession number 1860.413.1

Image: courtesy of the White House Curatorial Department

Notes: one piece in a 19-piece parlor suite; documented in the bill of sale dated January 1st, 1860



Entry 1:43

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Center Divan

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1875

Materials(s): ebonized cherry, modern silk damask

Collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art, accession number 1941-89-4

Image: courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Curatorial Department

Notes: one piece a 13-piece parlor suite; according to family tradition the suite was made by Vollmer for James Dobson's estate, Bella Vista, located of the Falls of the Schuylkill in 1875

Entry 1:44



Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Bed

Maker: attr. G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1850-1860

Materials(s): wood

Collection: Campbell House Museum, accession number 1941.1.219

Image: taken by author

Notes: one piece in a six-piece chamber suite; attributed to Vollmer based on similar characteristics in other known Vollmer pieces



Entry 1:45

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Bed

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1876

Materials(s): bird's eye maple

Collection: collection of John Child

Image: taken by author

Notes: one piece in an 11-piece chamber suite, the nightstand of which has an ink stamp label reading "G. Vollmer/Cabinet & Upholstery/ warerooms & manufactory/ 1108 Chestnut and 1105 Sansom Street/ Philadelphia"; according to family tradition the chamber suite was exhibited by Vollmer at the Centennial Exhibition



Entry 1:46

Category: Tables

Object Form: Bouquet Table

Maker: attr. G. Vollmer

Date(s): mid- to late-19th century

Materials(s): hardwood

Collection: Philadelphia History Museum

Image: taken by author

Notes: attributed to Gottlieb Vollmer by art historian, Peter Strickland, for its tightly and precisely twist-turned legs



Entry 1:47

Category: Tables

Object Form: Center Table

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1859

Materials(s): ebonized cherry, gilt metal mounts, marble

Collection: White House, accession number 1860.283.1

Image: taken by author

Notes: one of an original 19-piece parlor suite made for the White House Green Room; documented in the bill of sale dated January 21st, 1859; the other 18 pieces included two sofas, four armchairs, eight window chairs, and four reception chairs upholstered in green and gold brocatelle; all but the center table was sold off at auction in 1882



Entry 1:48

Category: Tables

Object Form: Center Table

Maker: attr. G. Vollmer

Date(s): mid-19th century

Materials(s): ebonized hardwood and marble

Collection: Philadelphia History Museum

Image: taken by author

Notes: attributed to Vollmer based on decorations by art historian, Peter Strickland



Entry 1:49

Category: Tables

Object Form: Center Table

Maker: attr. G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1850-1860

Materials(s): wood and marble

Collection: Campbell House Museum, accession number 1941.1.221

Image: taken by author

Notes: attributed to Vollmer based on similar characteristics found in other Vollmer pieces



Entry 1:50

Category: Tables

Object Form: Center Table

Maker: attr. G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1850-1860

Materials(s): rosewood, walnut, marble

Collection: Campbell House Museum, accession number 1941.1.816

Image: taken by author

Notes: attributed to Vollmer based on characteristics similar to other Vollmer pieces



Entry 1:51

Category: Tables

Object Form: Center Table

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1860-1864

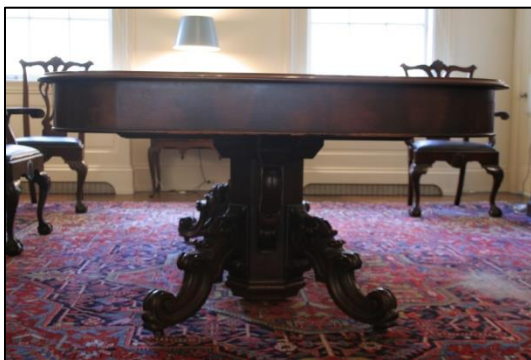
Materials(s): rosewood, iron, marble

Collection: Winterthur Museum, accession number 1990.0079

Image: from

<http://museumcollection.winterthur.org/>

Notes: paper label tacked to the inside of the apron reading "G. Vollmer/Cabinet & Upholstery/warerooms & manufactory/ 1108 Chestnut and 1105 Sansom Street/ Philadelphia"



Entry 1:52

Category: Tables

Object Form: Extension Table

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1860

Materials(s): mahogany

Collection: Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company

Image: taken by author

Notes: documented in bill of sale dated April 4th, 1860



Entry 1:53

Category: Tables

Object Form: Extension Table

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): 1860

Materials(s): mahogany

Collection: Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company

Image: taken by author

Notes: documented in bill of sale dated April 4th, 1860



Entry 1:54

Category: Interior Elements

Object Form: Window Cornice

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1875

Materials(s): yellow poplar

Collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art

Image: courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Curatorial Department

Notes: one of six cornices made to match a 13-piece chamber suite; according to family tradition the suite was made by Vollmer for James Dobson's estate, Bella Vista, located on the Falls of the Schuylkill in 1875



Entry 1:55

Category: Interior Elements

Object Form: Mirror

Maker: G. Vollmer

Date(s): ca. 1875

Materials(s): ebonized cherry and mirrored glass
Collection: 1941-89-16

Image: courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art
American Decorative Arts Curatorial Department

Notes: part of a 13-piece parlor suite; according to family tradition the suite was made by Vollmer for James Dobson's estate, Bella Vista, located on the Falls of the Schuylkill in 1875

APPENDIX 2: CATALOGUE OF G. VOLLMER & SON FURNITURE, 1883-1893



Entry 2:1

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Chest of Drawers with Mirror

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): ca. 1880

Materials(s): walnut, brass inlay, bronze mounts

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from Neal Alford Company. *Auction:* Saturday, April 28th, 1990, at 10:00am. New Orleans: Neal Alford Company, 1990. Lot No. 631.

Notes: the auction notes indicate the maker as Gottlieb Vollmer, but stylistically it matches a lot more of the pieces made by G. Vollmer & Son; no label listed in the catalogue description; could be a transition piece between the two firms



Entry 2:2

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Chest of Drawers with Mirror

Maker: attr. G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): late 19th-century

Materials(s): mahogany with mother of pearl inlay

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from

<http://www.nealauction.com/archive/0803/lot/lottext/1-100.html>

Notes: the auction notes indicate the maker as Gottlieb Vollmer, but stylistically it matches a lot more of the pieces made by G. Vollmer & Son; no label listed in the catalogue description; could be a transition piece between the two firms



Entry 2:3

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Chest of Drawers with Mirror

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): ca. 1883 - 1893

Materials(s): hardwood with metal, mother-of-pearl inlay, marble

Collection: collection of Nancy Staisey

Image: taken by author

Notes: stamp lock on top drawer reading "G. Vollmer & Son/Phila PA"



Entry 2:4

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Chest of Drawers

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): 1883-1893

Materials(s): hardwood

Collection: collection of Nancy Staisey

Image: taken by author

Notes: according to family tradition it is made from "blonde mahogany"; mirror missing; passed down through Vollmer family; top drawer has a stamped lock label reading, "G. Vollmer & Son/Phila PA"



Entry 2:5

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Chest of Drawers with Mirror

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): 1883-1893

Materials(s): hardwood

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from

<https://new.liveauctioneers.com/item/30660651>

Notes: stamped-lock label on drawer reading, "G. Vollmer & Son/Phila PA"; sold by Dutch Auction Sales, October 8th, 2014



Entry 2:6

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Dressing Stand with Mirror

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): ca. 1880

Materials(s): walnut, brass inlay, bronze mounts

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from Neal Alford Company. *Auction:* Saturday, April 28th, 1990, at 10:00am. New Orleans: Neal Alford Company, 1990. Lot No. 631.

Notes: the auction notes indicate the maker as Gottlieb Vollmer, but stylistically it matches a lot more of the pieces made by G. Vollmer & Son; no label listed in the catalogue description; could be a transition piece between the two firms



Entry 2:7

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Dresser

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): 1883-1893

Materials(s): walnut, rosewood faux bois, light wood, mixed metal and mother-of-pearl inlay

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from

<http://www.nealauction.com/archive/0202/lot/furniture/american/>

Notes: stamped lock reading "G. Vollmer & Son/Phila PA"; sold by Neal Auction Company first in a sale February 21st -22nd 2002 and again November 21st-22nd, 2009



Entry 2:8

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Desk

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): ca. 1885

Materials(s): mahogany and cherry

Collection: collection of Nancy Staisey

Image: taken by author

Notes: belonged to Joseph Moore, Jr., the benefactor of Moore College of Art & Design in Philadelphia, PA; stamped lock label reading, "G. Vollmer & Son/Phila PA"



Entry 2:9

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Library Bookcase

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): ca. 1887

Materials(s): walnut

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from

<https://new.liveauctioneers.com/item/33885481>

Notes: according to auction description the bookcases were made by Vollmer for Peter A.B. Widner when he built his mansion on Broad St. and Girard Ave. in Philadelphia in 1887; noted in the auction description the locks are sign "G. Vollmer" (more probably G. Vollmer & Son/Phila PA if the date is accurate, no picture of lock included); sold at auction by Kamelor Auctions February 7th, 2015



Entry 2:10

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Bookcase

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): late-19th century

Materials(s): mahogany

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from

<http://pages.antiquesbylisebohm.com/5039/PictPage/1205509.html>

Notes: according to sale listing the piece is signed "Gottlieb Vollmer", but not pictures or further description of the label were provided; stylistically the carved panels compare favorably to other carved decoration on G. Vollmer & Son furniture



Entry 2:11

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Repository

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): 1888

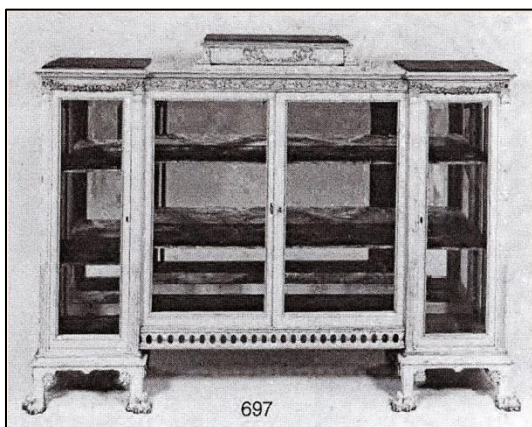
Materials(s): mahogany

Collection: Glencairn Museum

Image: from

<http://www.newchurchhistory.org/articles/ceg2003/ceg2003.php>

Notes: originally made for John and Gertrude Pitcairn to hold the "Word" (or bible) and the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg; documented in a bill of sale dated January 31st, 1888



Entry 2:12

Category: Case Furniture

Object Form: Vitrine

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): 1883-1893

Materials(s): cream painted and gilt wood

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from Neal Auction Company. *Auction: Saturday, October 2, 1993, at 10:00 a.m. Lot Nos. 1-750, Sunday, October 3, 1993, at 11:00a.m. Lot Nos. 751-End of Sale.* New Orleans: Neal Auction Company, 1993. Lot No. 697.

Notes: according to auction catalogue locks are signed "G. Vollmer & Son/Philadelphia"; sold at auction by Neal Auction Company October 2nd-3rd, 1993



Entry 2:13

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Corner Chair

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): ca. 1885-1890

Materials(s): mahogany

Collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art, accession number 1991-28-3

Image: courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art American Decorative Arts Curatorial Department

Notes: carved work on the splat is similar to the carving of Charles Elliot who worked for Vollmer, but not known for certain if it was done by him



Entry 2:14

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Reception Chair

Maker: attr. G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): ca. 1890

Materials(s): wood

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from Robert Edwards, independent scholar and antiques dealer, taken at the Delaware Antiques Show in 2000

Notes: one piece in a three piece collection; at the Delaware Antiques show they were listed as possibly G. Vollmer & Son based on the shell carving



Entry 2:15

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Armchair

Maker: attr. G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): ca. 1890

Materials(s): wood

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from Robert Edwards, independent scholar and antiques dealer, taken at the Delaware Antiques Show in 2000

Notes: one piece in a three piece collection; at the Delaware Antiques show they were listed as possibly G. Vollmer & Son based on the shell carving



Entry 2:16

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Settee

Maker: attr. G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): ca. 1890

Materials(s): wood

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from Robert Edwards, independent scholar and antiques dealer, taken at the Delaware Antiques Show in 2000

Notes: one piece in a three piece collection; at the Delaware Antiques show they were listed as possibly G. Vollmer & Son based on the shell carving



Entry 2:17

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Bed

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): ca. 1880

Materials(s): walnut, brass inlay, bronze mounts

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from Neal Alford Company. *Auction:* Saturday, April 28th, 1990, at 10:00am. New Orleans: Neal Alford Company, 1990. Lot No. 631.

Notes: the auction notes indicate the maker as Gottlieb Vollmer, but stylistically it matches a lot more of the pieces made by G. Vollmer & Son; no label listed in the catalogue description; could be a transition piece between the two firms



Entry 2:18

Category: Seating Furniture

Object Form: Bed

Maker: G. Vollmer & Son

Date(s): 1883-1893

Materials(s): hardwood

Collection: whereabouts unknown

Image: from

<https://new.liveauctioneers.com/item/30660651>

Notes: stamped-lock label on drawer reading, "G. Vollmer & Son/Phila PA"; sold by Dutch Auction Sales, October 8th, 2014

APPENDIX 3: GOTTLIEB VOLLMER BUSINESS CHRONOLOGY

- 1841-42** began his business as an upholsterer in Philadelphia in 1841, at Rear 11 Prune (Prune Street is present-day Locust Street).
- 1843-44** formed a partnership David Klauder. Vollmer & Klauder is located at 3 Assembly B.
- 1844-54** left Vollmer and Klauder to partner with H. Montre. Vollmer & Montre at S.E. 11th and Chestnut.
- 1845** Vollmer & Montre placed an entry of parlor furniture in the Manufacturer's Exhibition at the Franklin Institute which won an award for its workmanship and good taste of the First Premium.
- 1854-55** started his own furniture and upholstery warerooms, G. Vollmer, at 1108 Chestnut (formerly S.E. 11th and Chestnut)
- 1858-1860** billed the White House for work commissioned by First Lady Harriet Lane for redecorating the White House during President James Buchanan's term. The work performed included re-stuffing and re-upholstering existing furniture and also the making of several suites and individual pieces. These included the Blue Room and Green Room parlor suites. The sum of the reupholstering and furnishing for the White House was \$11,781.14.
- 1860** billed the Philadelphia Contributionship Insurance Company for one two-leaf extension table and one four-leaf extension table for a total of \$160.50.
- 1876** exhibited two entries in the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition: a chamber suite and a library suite. The chamber suite consisted of a bedstead with canopy, wardrobe, dressing bureau, washstand, nightstand, lady's secretary, lounge, arm chair, small chair, window curtain and cornice and ceiling to match; it was valued at \$3225. The library suite consisted of a mantel, mirror, connecting bookcases, and a library chair; it was valued at \$1037.
- 1882-1883** changed the name of the firm from G. Vollmer to G. Vollmer & Son, incorporating Charles F. Vollmer into the firm.
- 1883** died on May 17th, leaving the business to his son Charles F. and three other executors of his estate: his wife, Wilhelmine, Charles M Stout, and Otto Eisenholm.
- 1884** advertised G. Vollmer & Son manufactory at nos 20, 22, 24, 26 South 15th St
- 1885** laid a steam pipe under and across Sansom street to connect steam from their warerooms to their manufactory.
- 1886** advertised their manufactory at 1110, 1112, 1114, 1116 Sansom St.
- 1886-1887** opened a location in New York at 145 Fifth Avenue
- 1893** G. Vollmer & Son closes down November 21st.

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