Maker and Marketplace

Account books, price books, trade catalogues, and estate inventories present data on monetary values that makers and users placed on objects. When we look at objects from this perspective, we focus on the role they played as commodities in a complex arena of exchange.[14] Makers needed to obtain raw materials, sometimes from distant sources. To fabricate these materials into finished goods, they drew on valuable training and skills, including those of other craftsmen, and used tools and equipment, some of which could be costly. Finally, purchasers had to buy. Newspaper advertisements and the existence of a few retail shops suggest that some individuals were actively creating markets, both locally and in distant communities, to enhance demand for their wares. Although much of what was produced in the colonial period was "bespoke" work (that is, made to satisfy a specific order), wares "ready made after the newest fashion" became increasingly available in urban areas after the mid eighteenth century. All of these participants combined to form a marketplace that, although different from today's, has many striking similarities and offers significant insight into early decorative arts and the forces that shaped them.

Objects result from many marketplace decisions and conditions such as choice, cost, availability, and marketing strategies (including advertising). To supply what a consumer was willing (or able) to pay, makers provided alternatives at various prices (figs. 63, 64).

[14] Recent studies on consumerism have increased our understanding of the role of objects in describing and defining culture. See, for example, Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

Figs. 63, 64. Inexpensive goods, such as this earthenware salt, were fashioned to imitate the form and decoration of more expensive objects, represented by this cut-glass salt. Fig. 63. Earthenware salt, England or United States, 1790–1820, glazed yellow earthenware, H. 3⅛" (acc. 60.615). Fig. 64. Cut-glass salt: England or Ireland, 1790–1810, lead glass, H. 3⅝" (acc. 69.1366).

Fig. 65. *(Overleaf pages 44, 45).* Seven plates suggesting the range of dinnerwares available in the 1810s. *Center:* Herculaneum Factory, England, 1800–1825, transfer-printed creamware, diam. 9⅝" (acc. 59.588); *Clockwise from bottom left:* William Davenport & Co., Longport, England, 1793–1810, pearlware, diam. 9⅞" (acc. 69.337.8; gift of Mrs. Alfred C. Harrison); China, 1800–1820, hard-paste porcelain with enamel decoration in "Fitzhugh" pattern, diam. 9¾" (acc. 56.548.10); William Yale, Jr., and Samuel Yale (1813–20), Meriden, Conn., 1813–20, pewter, diam. 8⅜" (acc. 56.59.8; gift of Joseph France); Staffordshire, England, 1800–1825, transfer-printed pearlware, diam. 8¼" (acc. 78.81.1); probably France, 1810–20, porcelain with enamel and gilt decoration, diam. 8¼" (acc. 73.164.10; gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Mayer); probably New England, eighteenth century, maple, diam. 9⁹⁄₁₆" (acc. 58.125.3).

Fig. 61

Fig. 62

Fig. 63

Fig. 64

Fig. 65

For utilitarian needs such as dinner and kitchen wares, as well as expensive furniture, silver, and fine textiles, consumers could select from a broad range of materials and levels of ornamentation (figs. 65, 66, 67, 68, 69).

Preindustrial makers employed production systems that relied in varying degrees on parts standardization, specialized labor, and other trade practices not generally associated with early American crafts. By interchanging standardized parts and patterns within their shops, makers could inexpensively multiply the variety of their products. This is readily apparent in numerous brass and pewter objects made up of separate cast elements. It is also apparent in specialist-supplied cast-silver decoration, wooden inlays and carved elements, and furniture parts. The interchangeable leg patterns on two different Chippendale-style chairs made in the same Massachusetts shop allowed their maker to supply what eighteenth-century price books described as side chairs with "cut through bannesters" and marlboro (straight) legs or "crooked" (cabriole) legs. The cost of carving or other "extraordinary work" on such chairs was added "in proporsion" (fig. 70).[15]

Fig. 66

[15] For metals, see Charles V. Swain, "Interchangeable Parts in Early American Pewter," *Antiques* 83, no. 2 (February 1963): 212–13. Lumber merchant Samuel Williams advertised in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* "mahogany and walnut tea table columns" September 9, 1767, and "two hundred sets of low and high post bedstead stuff, fit for immediate use" June 12, 1769, and "300 sets" of the same June 2, 1773. Philadelphia furniture maker David Evans recorded in his daybook that he bought "12 Setts of Bedstead Stuff" May 9, 1777. The earliest American price book, "A Table for Prices for Joiners' Work in Providence, R.I., in 1757," appears in Irving W. Lyon, *The Colonial Furniture of New England* (3d ed., 1925; reprint, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977), pp. 265–66. A more complete example of a Philadelphia cabinetmaker's price book of 1772 is discussed in Martin Eli Weil, "A Cabinetmaker's Price Book," in *American Furniture and Its Makers: Winterthur Portfolio 13*, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 176–92.

Fig. 67

Fig. 68

Fig. 69

Figs. 66, 67, 68, 69. The form and amount of decoration on four Delaware valley armchairs reflect different price ranges. Additional labor and materials made more ornate or complicated objects more costly. Fig. 66. Four-slat armchair, eastern Pennsylvania, 1725–75, maple, rush seat, H. 43" (acc. 67.761). Fig. 67. Five-slat armchair: eastern Pennsylvania, 1725–75, maple rush seat, H. 45½" (acc. 59.2382). Fig. 68. Six-slat armchair with cabriole legs, probably Solomon Fussell/William Savery shop tradition, Philadelphia, 1735–60, maple, rush seat, H. 45⅛" (acc. 52.236). Fig. 69. Solid-splat armchair with cabriole legs, probably Solomon Fussell/William Savery shop tradition, Philadelphia, 1750–65, maple, rush seat, H. 44½" (acc. 64.1523).

Fig. 70

Fig. 70. A marlboro leg and a cabriole leg from two side chairs that are otherwise identical. Boston, 1765–90, of mahogany with maple as secondary wood. Cabriole-leg chair: H. 38" (acc. 61.140.1; figure 5 shows a full view of another chair from this set). Marlboro-leg chair: H. 38¾" (acc. 53.166.3).

Fig. 71

Craftsmen of different trades collaborated to make the complex and ornate goods that some wealthy buyers demanded. Furniture makers supplied clockmakers with cases; framemakers worked with glassmakers to produce looking glasses; textile manufacturers provided sumptuous fabrics to upholsterers; and brass founders made drawer pulls, hinges, and other furniture fittings. Specialists such as woodcarvers not only carved furniture but also produced the patterns used by iron founders to impress sand molds before casting (fig. 71). Large-scale ceramics firms employed engravers to prepare copperplates used to produce transfer-printed images for their mugs and plates (fig. 72).

Makers' marks and inscriptions help us unravel complex working relationships and illuminate some early marketing practices. Although the workplace was largely unregulated in America, marking styles and practices drew heavily from European conventions dictated by guilds and regulatory groups. In Europe these marks identified makers, places of business, and occasionally times of manufacture and quality of materials.

Fig. 71. Woodcarvers provided iron founders with wooden patterns that were used for making impressions in sand molds. Andiron: United States, 1840–70, iron, H. 17" (acc. 64.1546.1). Andiron pattern: United States, 1870–1900, wood, H. 20½" (acc. 88.27; gift of Edward B. Thomas).

Fig. 72. Robert Hancock was among a number of English engravers who made copperplates for transfer printing designs onto ceramics and porcelains. His transfer-printed signature, "RH. Worcester," is visible below the military emblem. A portrait of the King of Prussia appears on the other side. Worcester Porcelain Factory (1751–), Worcester, England, ca. 1757, soft-paste porcelain, H. 4 11/16" (acc. 58.722).

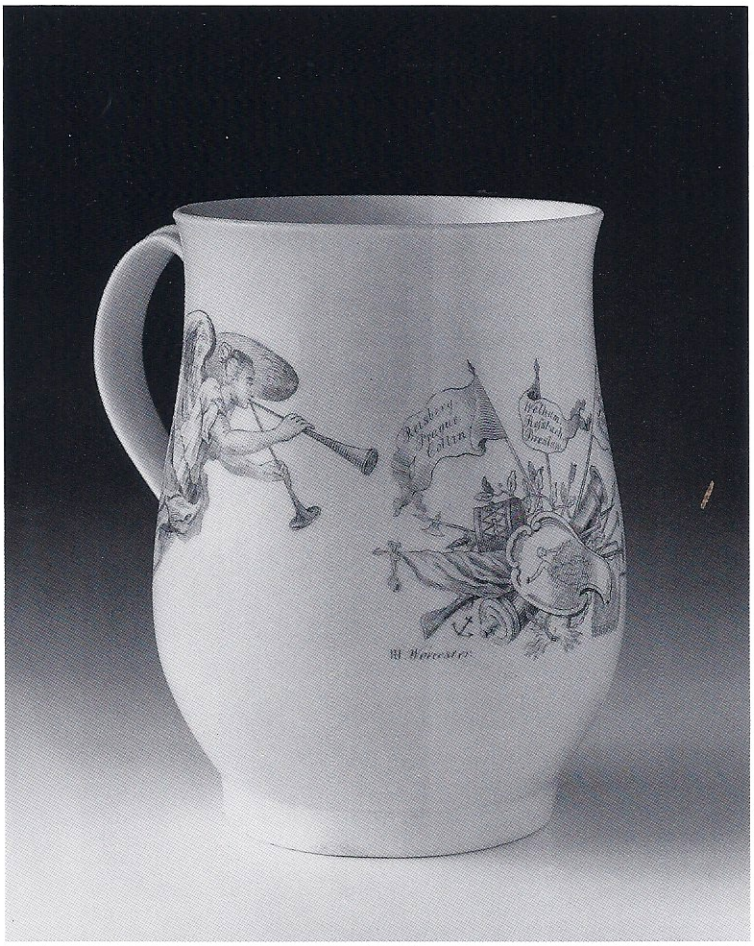

Fig. 72

In the colonies, marks tended to identify the names of makers and occasionally places (figs. 73, 74). Marks also provided a convenient way to advertise. A fine pewter coffeepot by William Will, a Philadelphia pewterer of excellent reputation, carries marks with his name and city, thus informing anyone who might see the object where another like it could be acquired (figs. 75, 76). That Will marked this object also may have altered, if only modestly, how people perceived it: his object was not just a coffeepot, it was the product of a highly skilled craftsman.

Advertising—whether in newspapers, on bill heads (illustrating different wares that presumably were available through that source), on printed labels, or on signs—invested objects with additional meanings by associating them with names, places, ideas, or other cultural values. Makers hoped that fashionability might stimulate demand. Manipulation of these associations might also enhance an object's market value in the minds of potential consumers. The Will coffeepot, for example, although made in Philadelphia, is also stamped "LONDON," apparently to suggest to potential buyers that Will's work was equal in quality to London wares, which enjoyed a worldwide reputation.

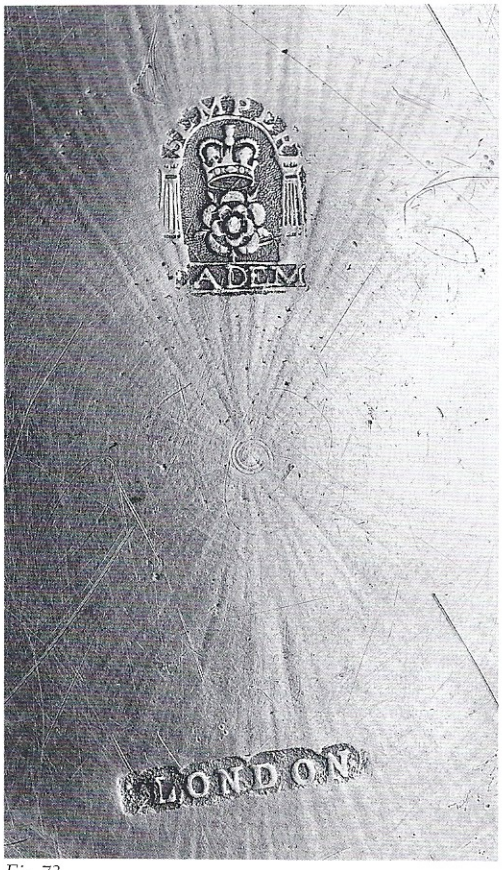

Fig. 73

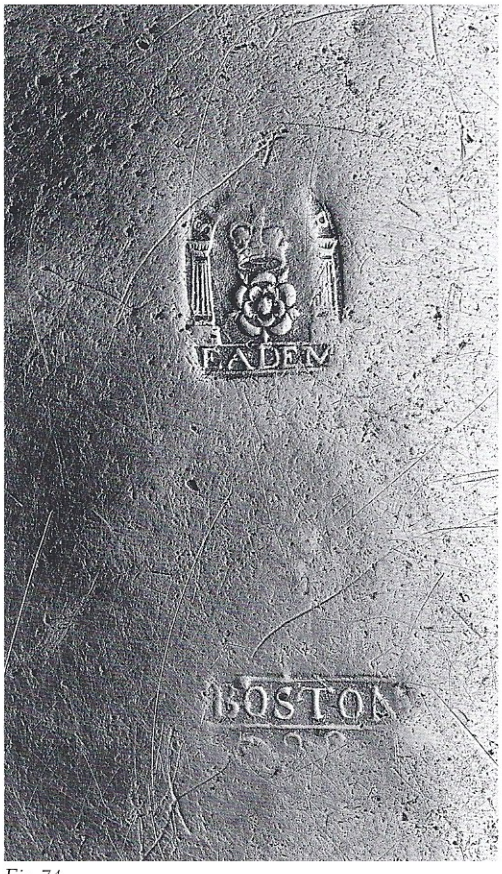

Fig. 74

Figs. 73, 74. "SEMPER EADEM" appears with "LONDON" on the bottom of one pewter plate, and with "BOSTON" on a second plate. Spectroanalysis revealed that the "London"-stamped plate was of a low-quality pewter alloy similar to products made in Bristol, England (some of which were also stamped "London"). Researchers must now determine whether the "Semper Eadem" pewterer was a Bristol emigrant who carried his craft and goods with him or was a Boston craftsman who imported low-quality, unmarked wares that he then stamped "London" to suggest a higher quality. Fig. 75. "London" plate, probably England, 1760–80, 64% tin and 29% lead, diam. 8½" (acc. 56.59.14; gift of Joseph France); "Boston" plate, Boston, 1760–80, 90% tin and 7% lead, diam. 7 13/16" (acc. 56.59.12; gift of Joseph France).

Figs. 75, 76. A "LONDON" mark, stamped into the inside bottom walls of this fine coffeepot at the time of its manufacture, appears in addition to the touchmark "WM WILL / PHILADELPHIA," suggesting that maker William Will (1742–98) took advantage of the known quality of London wares. Philadelphia, 1780–98, pewter, H. 15⅞" (acc. 54.33).

Fig. 75

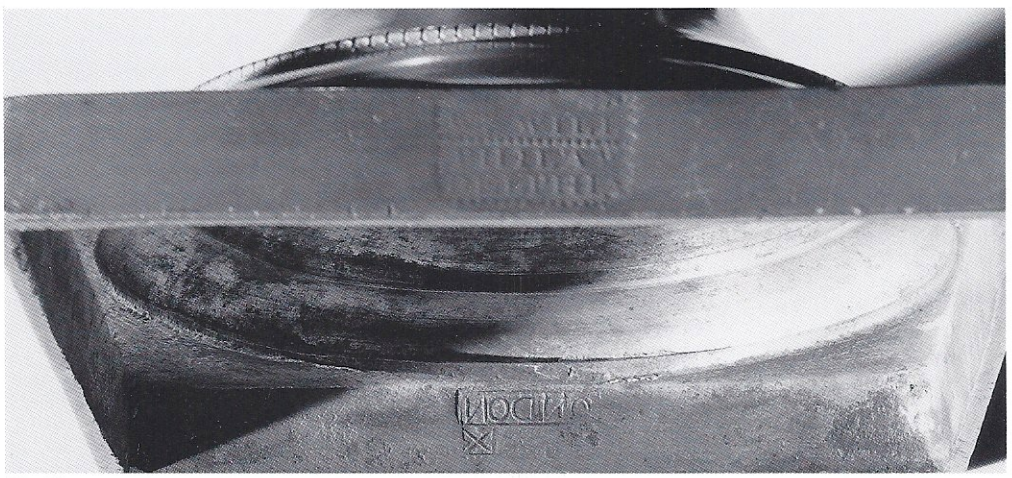

Fig. 76

Fig. 77. This gentleman's secretary, dating from 1795–98 and labeled on the back of each case section by cabinetmaker Nehemiah Adams (1769–1840) of Salem, Mass., was found in Capetown, South Africa, where it was owned throughout the nineteenth century. Mahogany, mahogany veneer, inlays, and secondary woods of white pine and red cedar, H. 90″ (acc. 57.796).

Colonial craftsmen joined retailers and factors in market speculation. In the first half of the eighteenth century, furniture makers began advertising "ready-made" wares, sold their goods to neighboring towns and hinterlands, and occasionally shipped products to distant markets. In 1742, for example, Plunkett Fleeson of Philadelphia, responding to competitive imports, advertised that he had "Several Sorts of good Chair-frames, black and red leather Chairs, finished cheaper than any made here, or imported from Boston." Shipping records and account books of the 1750s and 1760s indicate that furniture makers from Newport, Rhode Island, to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, shipped large numbers of chairs and case furniture south as far as the Carolinas and West Indies and north as far as Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.[16]

By 1800 New England coastal furniture-making centers supported many craftsmen who engaged in "adventures," shipping their goods across the North and South Atlantic (fig. 77). In 1804 Nehemiah Adams shipped on the *Franklin* twenty-one pieces of furniture, including an expensive gentleman's secretary, two other secretaries, and nine lady's writing desks, and instructed the captain to sell them "for the most they will fetch at the Isle of France (Mauritius) [off the east coast of Africa] or elsewhere."[17] These same cabinetmakers also imported and sold foreign furniture, from Europe or made in the Orient to Western designs, in their market regions (fig. 78).

Fig. 78. This Grecian-style couch is labeled on the frame by Thomas Needham of Salem, Massachusetts, but the design details, which differ from those on other furniture made in Salem during the early nineteenth century, and the use of caning to support loose cushions suggest that the couch was made in China for the Western market. Needham was among a number of Salem cabinetmakers active in trade with the Orient. Ca. 1820, mahogany with aspen secondary wood, H. 30¾" (acc. 57.575).

[16] Fleeson advertisement, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 23, 1742. Fleeson was an upholsterer who apparently employed chairmakers. For examples of furniture being exported to other regions see, Jeanne Vibert Sloane, "John Cahoone and the Newport Furniture Industry," and Brock W. Jobe, "An Introduction to Portsmouth Furniture of the Mid-Eighteenth Century," *Old-Time New England* 72, *New England Furniture* (1987), pp. 90–91 and 164–65; and Brock Jobe, "The Boston Furniture Industry, 1720–1740," in *Boston Furniture of the Eighteenth Century*, Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts 48 (Boston, 1974), pp. 4–5. Sales and consignments of late eighteenth-century Philadelphia silver to silversmiths and agents in the Carolinas are described in Harrold C. Gillingham, "Philadelphia Silverware in the South," *Antiques* 31, no. 1 (January 1937): 22–23. Additional research will likely broaden our understanding of this kind of trade.

[17] William Appleton and Josiah Austin shared ownership in this vnture. Other Salem cabinetmakers actively engaged in export trade at this time included William Hook, Edmund Johnson, and Jacob and Elijah Sanderson (see "Furniture Exported by Cabinetmakers of Salem" from notes left by Henry Wyckoff Belknap published in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 85 [1949]: 335–59).

Many of the more expensive objects used in early America were imported by merchants. Peter Kalm observed in 1748: "England, and especially London, profits immensely by its trade with the American colonies; for not only in New York but likewise all the other English towns on the continent import so many articles from England that all their specie, together with the goods which they get in other countries must all go to Old England to pay their accounts there, for which they are, however, insufficient."[18] Some imports arrived as speculation, and others were special ordered. As the decades passed, foreign manufacturers began making objects with specific meaning for Americans, such as numerous images of George Washington and fellow patriots, historic events, and notable places on clocks, ceramics, and glasswares, to encourage sales in American markets. Many special orders augmented the voluminous trade with the Orient in particular. Factors, acting for American merchants, arranged to have porcelain wares brightly decorated with initials, armorial devices, or specialized motifs (fig. 79). When completed, these higher-priced special orders accompanied the tons of blue-and-white Canton and Nanking porcelains, teas, silks, and other wares bound for ready markets in America.

[18] November 2, 1748, entry in *Peter Kalm's Travels in North America*, vol. 1 (1770; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1966), p. 134.

Fig. 79. This fruit basket, decorated with "SOCIETAS CINCNNATORUM [sic] INSTITUTA.1783" and the initials "SS," was probably made for Samuel Shaw (1754–94), a revolutionary war officer and secretary to the Order of Cincinnati, who sailed to the Orient in 1784 as supercargo aboard the *Empress of China*. China, 1784–90, hard-paste porcelain, H. 14⅞" (acc. 59.2934).

Fig. 79