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**Slant-front desk, signed by Amos Bradley (1769-1835), probably East Haven or Hartford County, 1790**

- **Rare example of 18th century case furniture documented to a New Haven-area cabinetmaker**
- **Unique placement of maker's signature and date on successive drawer backs (fig. 1)**

Although New Haven had the largest population in Connecticut in the latter part of the 18th century (7966 in 1782), surprisingly little is known about furniture produced there during that period. We are fortunate that at least one cabinetmaker, Amos Bradley of East Haven, had a penchant for signing and dating his work. This desk is one of four known examples. It is dated 1790, at which time Bradley would have been 21. Whether he was then working on his own or, as is more likely, as an apprentice or journeyman (working for wages) in someone else's shop is unknown. The location of the shop is likewise uncertain (see below).

The desk has no early provenance. CHS purchased it from Waterbury dealer, Harold E. Cole.

### **The Cabinetmaker**

Amos Bradley, a native of East Haven, is one of Connecticut's best-documented 18th-century cabinetmakers. His father died of smallpox aboard a British prison ship during the Revolution when Amos was 10. Four years later, his mother married Eliphalet Fuller (1749-1821) of East Haddam who moved the family to Hartland, then part of Litchfield County. Although the location of Amos's apprenticeship is unrecorded, the close similarity of his early work to that produced by Chapin school cabinetmakers (those who were trained or strongly influenced by Eliphalet Chapin) around Hartford suggests that he trained nearby. In any case, he was back in East Haven by 1792 to marry his cousin, Elizabeth Bradley (1770-1853), and remained there for the rest of his life. His account book, covering the years 1802-1815, is at Winterthur. It demonstrates that he produced a full range of furniture for a large clientele, including mahogany sideboards, Windsor chairs and coffins. It also indicates that, at any given time, he had up to three apprentices and/or journeymen, in addition to family numbers, working with him. Town tax assessments for the years 1797 and 1798 list him as the only cabinetmaker in town at a relatively high level of \$25 (the amount for most tradesmen was \$17). He served several terms as town selectman and representative to the State Legislature. He trained at least three of his five sons in his craft: Amos, Jr. (1798-1867), who remained in East (and New) Haven; Jared (1797-1836), who moved to Cleveland; and Elijah Augustus (1807-c. 1879), who took over Jared's shop in Cleveland after the latter's untimely death, and later worked for a time as a cabinetmaker in Macon, Georgia (1850 census) and Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin (1860 census) before returning to New Haven.

## Design

The desk's overall form and interior layout are conventional for the period. The splayed (outward-raking) ogee feet, in particular, are typical of those seen on contemporary Hartford County case furniture. An additional noteworthy feature is the shell in a recessed circle on the interior central prospect door. Similar shells have been observed on at least two other attributed (but unsigned) desks and seem to be a Bradley trademark (figs. 6 & 7).

## Construction

Bradley followed Hartford County Chapin school construction practices closely. Noteworthy are the following:

- The backboards are attached to the case by insertion into grooves in the top and sides. The lower board is then nailed to the case bottom.
- The splayed ogee feet are joined in the front with blind (concealed) vertical dovetails and supported by large horizontal triangular blocks (see fig. 2 and 1991.135.0 for details on "quadrant-base" construction). This sophisticated method of ogee foot assembly, a signature feature of Chapin school cabinet work, is seen infrequently outside Hartford County.
- An exception to Chapin school practice is the attachment of the drawer dividers (horizontal boards between exterior long drawers) to the case sides with exposed dovetails rather than a concealed double mortise-and-tenon joint.

The primary (exterior) wood is cherry; secondary (interior) is white pine. The brasses are replaced.

## Related examples

An important related piece is a privately owned cherry oxbow bureau, signed and dated by Bradley two years earlier, when he was only 19 (figs. 3 & 4). The inscription includes the location, East Haven, and, as in the case of the desk, raises the question whether he was then working there, or simply stating he was from there. Design and construction, once again, are virtually indistinguishable from work produced around Hartford. The New Haven Museum owns a "retro" cherry Chippendale-style lift-top blanket chest over three drawers signed by Bradley in 1802 (M1971.371, fig. 5). Its design and construction have little in common with the two earlier objects and demonstrate well that a cabinetmaker did not always retain the construction practices he learned as an apprentice (often termed "workmanship of habit"). He also signed a privately owned trendy inlaid mahogany Hepplewhite-style bureau a year earlier.

## Reference

Thomas P. Kugelman et al., *Connecticut Valley Furniture: Eliphalet Chapin and His Contemporaries, 1750-1800* (CHS, 2005), pp. 401-405

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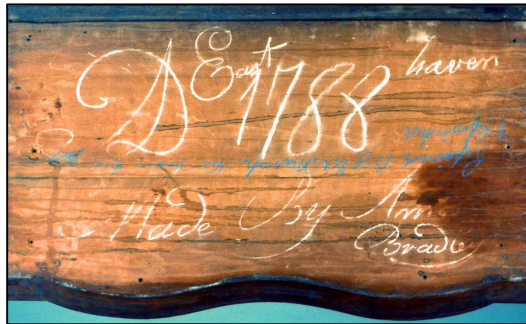
## Illustrations



Figure 1. CHS desk showing backs of long drawers with chalk inscription in sequence, "Amos Brad/Bradley/1790."



Figure 2. Underside of base of CHS desk showing "quadrant-base" construction. Horizontal blocks here are triangular rather than quarter-round. Pale areas represent missing vertical glue blocks or restorations.



Figures 3 & 4. Oxbow bureau with quarter columns. Extraordinary inscription on underside of top reading, "East haven/AD 1788/made by Amos/Bradley." Upside down inscription in blue is by a later restorer.



Figure 5. Lift-top chest over three drawers signed by Amos Bradley in 1802. Upper three drawer fronts are "false."



Figures 6 & 7. Desk and bookcase attributed to Amos Bradley with detail of interior prospect door shell. Bookcase probably a later addition. (Location unknown)

