

Basic Detail Report



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Title Desk and Bookcase

Date 1785-1790

Primary Maker Calvin Willey

Medium Cherry primary wood, eastern white pine secondary wood, brass

hardware

Description Cherry desk and bookcase with a swan's neck pediment, and a slant front desk with serpentine drawer fronts, in the Chippendale, or rococo, style.

The desk and bookcase has local characteristics associated with the Colchester style, specifically the Calvin Willey group. The swan's neck pediment has a conforming roof, or bonnet top, which is open at the center. Each upper end of the pediment molding terminates in a carved, four-lobed pinwheel rosette. The pediment molding is decorated with dentils. At the top of the desk and bookcase, there are three finials, each in the shape of a flame. The center finial sits on a plinth with an applied, inverted, projecting shell. The two smaller side finials each sit on a small, fluted, rectangular plinth. The bookcase has a pair of doors with recessed center panels flanked by a stop-fluted pilaster, or fluted flat column with reeding on the bottom half. Each pilaster has applied shells, or demilunes, at the top and bottom. Below each bookcase door is a candle slide, a narrow shelf that extends forward to hold a candle. The bookcase fits inside the mid-molding of the slant-front desk top. The desk arrangement consists of a slant front above four graduated drawers, each with a serpentine front. The serpentine shaping consists of two recessed curves separated by a center

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projecting curve. The top drawer is slightly narrower and is flanked by lopers, or thin boards that pull out to form a support for the top when open. The ogee bracket feet have scrolled returns that terminate in a carved scroll. The interior arrangement of the bookcase includes one full-width shelf and two full-height vertical partitions. A short vertical partition creates a row of four pigeonholes at the top. Each pigeonhole has a bracket shaped with a cyma curve, or S-curve, and a reverse cyma curve. The vertical partitions that separate the pigeonholes have a shaped front edge, consisting of a C-curve over a half arch. The two outer sections created by the vertical partitions have a fixed shelf; the center section of the bookcase has two moveable shelves. The interior arrangement of the desk consists of a center shell-carved drawer flanked by four pigeonholes above two rows of drawers. Each pigeonhole has a bracket shaped with a cyma curve and a reverse cyma curve. Below this is the top row of drawers that contains five drawers in a line that are shaped to form an undulating curve along the interior of the desk. The center drawer has a recessed curve that corresponds to the inward curve of the carved shell drawer above. The bottom row of drawers contains three drawers in a line, which are also shaped to form an undulating curve. The center drawer has a recessed curve in the center. On both lines of drawers, the outer drawers are deeper than the center drawers. Hardware on the bookcase doors consists of a brass lock escutcheon on either side of the door and a latch on the lower interior of the left door; the right escutcheon is blind. Each candle slide has a small brass knob. The slanted desk has an elaborate pierced brass lock escutcheon. Hardware on the interior desk drawers

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consists of a brass-lined key hole on the shell-carved drawer; each drawer below

this has a button-shaped brass knob. Each loper also has a small brass knob.

Each drawer on the front of the desk has a central, pierced brass lock

escutcheon flanked by a brass escutcheon with a bail pull. There is one working

key for the bookcase doors and slant front. Condition: The finials are original.

The plinths under the side finials are replaced. The brasses are replaced. Design

and Construction Details: The rosettes are applied and carved with a four-lobed

pinwheel; between each lobe is an incised circle and line that connects it to the

center of the lobe. The carved shell on the center interior desk drawer consists

of eighteen projecting wavy rays with an incised medial line. The rays end in the

center with a raised, bell-shaped line that continues below the bottom of the

shell. The shell is surrounded by a pair of incised undulating lines. The back of

the bonnet is curved, or saddle-shaped; the bonnet lacks front to back vertical

supports. The tympanum has a semi-circular notch below each rosette. The

backboard of both the upper and lower case is nailed into rabbets in the case

sides and has a chamfered edge. The frames of the bookcase doors are joined at

the corners by a through tenon that is secured by a pair of offset wooden pins.

The desk and bookcase rests on a platform base constructed of two horizontal

bottom boards. The lower of the two bottom boards projects beyond the case

sides and rests in a rabbet in the side facing of the base molding and feet. No

glue blocks support the feet; instead, the front feet are joined with blind

dovetails. Oversized braces for the rear feet are triangular; they are attached to

the feet with sliding dovetails and nailed at the small end. The knee bracket

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returns on the ogee bracket feet have a distinctive inward curve, known as the

"Colchester curl". The lower case exterior drawer openings are surrounded by

cock beading on the case. The drawer dividers are dovetailed into the sides of

the case; a facing strip applied to the front of the case sides conceals the

dovetails. Drawer runners are nailed to the sides of the case. The drawer runners

for the top drawer of the lower case The serpentine drawer fronts on the interior

and exterior drawers are solid with a flat interior surface; the drawer sides are

rounded on top. The drawer bottoms fit into grooves in the front and sides of

each drawer and are nailed at the back. The dovetail pins are of average size and

angle. Please see attached essay by Dr. Thomas P. Kugelman for more

information about this piece.

Dimensions Primary Dimensions (overall height x width of lower case x depth of

lower case): 88 x 40 3/4 x 22 1/4in. (223.5 x 103.5 x 56.5cm) Other (height x width

x depth of lower case): 44 1/4 x 40 3/4 x 22 1/4in. (112.4 x 103.5 x 56.5cm) Other

(height x width x depth of upper case): 44 x 39 x 11 7/8in. (111.8 x 99.1 x 30.2cm)