

Basic Detail Report



Title Desk and Bookcase

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Date 1800-1810

Primary Maker Benjamin Newberry

Medium Cherry primary wood, eastern white pine and tulip poplar secondary wood, brass hardware

Description Cherry desk and bookcase with a removeable swan's neck pediment in the Federal, or neoclassical, style. The desk and bookcase consists of a bookcase in the upper case and a desk with a secretary drawer with a fall front over a cabinet in the lower case. The swan's neck pediment is open at the center and has dentils. Each upper end of the pediment molding terminates in a rosette carved with spiraling scrolls. A cartouche, located at the top of the pediment between the rosettes, is in the shape of a seahorse; it sits on a rectangular plinth. Below the rosettes and molding, the pediment has fretwork, or two pierced panels of wood, decorated with C-scrolls and leaves. A line of horizontal molding, with a Greek key design, separates the pediment from the plain freeze below. Each of the bookcase doors is ornamented with rectangular molding that has quarter circles at the corners. The bookcase fits inside the mid-molding of the desk; the bookcase is not as deep as the desk, creating a flat surface on the top front of the desk. The drawer and door arrangement of the desk consists of one deep secretary drawer over two square cabinet doors; the secretary drawer front pivots forward to form the writing surface of the desk. The secretary drawer front and each cabinet door are ornamented with molding that has quarter circles at the corners. Each French foot is flared and has a bracket with a small spur, a C-scroll, and a curl at the top. The interior arrangement of the

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bookcase consists of three full-width, adjustable shelves; these fit into slots in the sides of the case. The interior arrangement of the secretary drawer includes a central prospect door flanked by four pigeonholes over three drawers, stacked two over one. The prospect door opens to a pigeonhole over a single, shallow drawer. A valance at the top of the pigeonhole forms the front of a second shallow drawer. The interior arrangement of the cabinet in the lower portion of the desk consists of one shallow tray over two full-width, graduated drawers. Hardware includes a pierced lock escutcheon on each bookcase door; the left escutcheon is blind. There is a latch at both the top and bottom interior edge of the left door. The exterior of the secretary drawer has an oval brass lock escutcheon centered at the top, flanked by a ring-and-bail pull. The prospect door has a small brass knob over a pierced lock escutcheon. The small drawer below the pigeonhole inside the prospect door has a small brass knob. The drawers below the pigeonholes each have a small brass pull, in the shape of a half circle. The secretary drawer front is supported by a brass quadrant at each side and two hinges evenly spaced on the bottom edge. The cabinet doors each have a pierced lock escutcheon; the left door's escutcheon is blind. The left door has a latch at the top and bottom interior edge. Each cabinet drawer has a pair of brass ring-and-bail pulls. There are two keys associated with the desk.

Condition: The right bookcase door panel has been repaired; two pieces of wood have been added to the back of the panel to repair a puncture and possible warping of the panel. The drawers in the desk cabinet have been rebuilt. A piece of molding from the front right side of the secretary drawer and a piece of the

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curl from the back left foot have fallen off. The cartouche is original. The

hardware is replaced. Design and Construction Details: Case Construction. The

removeable pediment is constructed of cornice molding, fretwork, and a plinth

that are applied independently to a rectangular, dovetailed frame. The

backboards of each case are horizontally oriented and are nailed into rabbets in

the sides of the case. The bookcase sides extend below the bottom board and

rest in pockets on the top of the desk. The bookcase doors and cabinet doors are

formed of panel-and-frame construction; the molding is applied to the front of

each panel. The base molding is applied to the bottom edges of the front and

sides of the cabinet; the molding is supported from behind by horizontal glue

blocks. Each French foot is constructed of facing applied to a vertical corner

block. Each knee bracket return is reinforced from behind with blocks that are

nailed in place. The rear of each back foot is supported by a long, diagonal

brace. Drawer Construction. Each drawer within the secretary drawer has a plain

front and a bottom that is nailed into rabbets in the sides of the drawer. The

shaped valance at the top of the pigeonhole inside the prospect is the front of a

drawer; the drawer is divided into one long center compartment and two

compartments at each side. The shaped lower edge of the valance has a hanging

half circle in the center, flanked by a short horizontal, a small raised half circle, a

second horizontal, and then a hanging quarter circle. The drawer runners in the

cabinet are thin strips of wood that are nailed to the sides of the case; the

cabinet has no drawer dividers. The drawers have a plain front and a bottom

that slides into grooves in the front and sides of the drawer and is nailed at the

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back. The cabinet tray is constructed in a similar manner at the sides, back, and

bottom; it has a shallow front rail. The front of each side of the tray tapers with a

cyma curve, or S-curve, down to the front rail. The bottom of the tray and the

top drawer both have glue blocks at the edges of the underside of the bottom.

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

about this piece.

Dimensions Primary Dimensions (overall height x width x depth): 100 1/2 x 50 1/2

x 23 5/8in. (255.3 x 128.3 x 60cm)