

Basic Detail Report

Title Desk and Bookcase

Date 1870-1880

Primary Maker Bowditch & Co.

Medium Walnut primary wood, eastern white pine secondary wood, leather, metal hardware

Description Walnut desk and bookcase with a pitched pediment in the Renaissance Revival style, with Neo-Grec ornamentation. The desk and bookcase consists of a bookcase over a slant-front desk in the upper case, over a chest of drawers in the lower case. The pitched pediment is ornamented in the center with a woman's head and neck; she wears a pointed headpiece and a draped costume. There is an opening in the pediment to either side of the woman. Beyond the open space, the pitched portions of the pediment each have a raised panel. At the far end of the pediment, at each corner, is a projecting anthemion, or a stylized spray of leaves. The cornice molding below the pediment has a deep cove at the bottom. Each bookcase door consists of an arched panel of glass surrounded by molding; a woman's head is applied at the top of each arch. Below the bookcase is the slant front of the desk. The front has two recessed, rectangular panels surrounded by molding; an applied ornament in the center of each panel consists of Neo-Grec-style geometric motifs and stylized leaves. The slant front pivots down to form the writing surface of the desk; when open, its only support is the top front edge of the chest of drawers. The bookcase and desk is not as deep as the chest of drawers, creating a

Basic Detail Report

shallow, flat surface at the top front of the chest of drawers. The drawer arrangement of the chest of drawers consists of three full-width, graduated drawers, each outlined in molding. Each drawer has two carved wooden handles, each shaped like a projecting, stylized leaf. The front skirt has a hanging half circle, flanked by a cyma curve, or S-curve, a small horizontal, a second cyma curve, and a projecting spur at the corner. Each side skirt has a small hanging half circle flanked by an elongated cyma curve and a projecting spur at the corner. The interior arrangement of the bookcase consists of two full-width, adjustable shelves; there are supports for a third shelf (now missing). The interior arrangement of the desk includes two vertical dividers supporting a shelf over a drawer over an open space. There is a tall, vertical open space to the outside of these dividers. Beyond each open space is another tall, vertical divider; each of these dividers support two pigeonholes over a shelf over an open area. When open, the slant front becomes a writing surface that is lined with red leather and that has a stamped, gilded border. The middle interior edge of each bookcase door, the top center edge of the slant front of the desk, and the top center edge of each full-width drawer all have a round wooden escutcheon and a metal locking mechanism. Condition: The top shelf is missing from the bookcase. The adjustable supports for the bookcase shelves have been nailed into place. The left drawer runner and drawer guide for the lowest exterior drawer have disconnected from the back leg post, because the lower corner of the groove on the back left leg post has broken off. The lower portion of many of the drawer sides has been replaced or repaired. Many of the dovetails

Basic Detail Report

in the drawers are broken or loose. The right drawer handle of the bottom

drawer is loose. The wooden lock escutcheon on the right bookcase door is

disconnected. The shallow, flat surface at the top of the chest of drawers and the

lower molding on the slant front are scratched and worn. Design and

Construction Details: Upper Case Construction. The uppermost portion of the

pediment is removeable, and consists of a single shaped panel with applied

carving, molding, and projecting panels; the pediment attaches to the cornice

molding with dowels. The elaborate cornice molding projects above the top of

the bookcase and is nailed to the case sides from above. The backboard of the

bookcase and desk consists of vertically oriented boards that are nailed at the

top, bottom, and center; these boards have circular saw marks. The bookcase

doors are formed with panel-and-frame construction; a single panel of glass is

inserted into each door from the back and is held in place in the front by the

molding and the applied, carved figure. A strip of molding is applied to the left

edge of the right door. Strips of wood run the full height of the bookcase, one

strip in the front corner and one in the back corner of each interior case side;

these strips have notches cut into them. Supporting strips of wood run between

the corner strips, fitting into the notches and forming a support for each of the

bookcase shelves to rest on. The front edge of each shelf has applied molding

consisting of a fillet flanked by a bead. The bottom of the bookcase consists of a

panel of wood that is nailed to the backboard; this also forms the top of the desk

that is at the bottom of the upper case. The desk front is formed of panel-and-

frame construction. The vertical and horizontal partitions in the desk interior

Basic Detail Report

slide into grooves in the sides and bottom of the case, in the top, or in the full-

height vertical partitions. Lower Case Construction: The molding at the front and

sides of the top of the chest of drawers is shaped with a cyma curve. The chest of

drawers is formed of panel-and-frame construction. Each corner has a leg post

that runs the full height of the case. The backboard is formed by four

horizontally-oriented boards that slide into vertical grooves on the interior

edges of the back leg posts. The sides are constructed in a similar manner, with

one rail above and one rail below a recessed panel. These three components

slide into a vertical groove in the leg post. Each leg post extends down to form a

support for each foot; each support is concealed and ornamented by the applied

front skirt and the side skirts. Drawer Construction. The drawer dividers are

tenoned into the leg posts. The drawer runners are nailed to the leg posts in

back and into the drawer guides in front; the drawer guides have tenons at each

end that slide into vertical grooves in the leg posts. Each exterior drawer front

consists of a solid board with applied molding on all four sides, creating a

recessed panel at the front of each drawer. The drawer sides are flat on top. The

drawer bottoms slide into grooves in the front and sides of each drawer and are

nailed at the back. The dovetails are machine-cut; the rear drawer dovetails

extend past the back of the drawer to form stops. The interior desk drawer has a

plain front. It is formed with nailed rabbet and butt joints at the corners; the

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

the back.

Basic Detail Report

Dimensions Primary Dimensions (overall height x width x depth): 96 x 47 1/2 x 18

1/2in. (243.8 x 120.7 x 47cm)