

Basic Detail Report



Title Slant-front Desk

Date 1780-1800

Primary Maker Calvin Willey

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

Description Cherry slant-front desk with a blockfront, in the Chippendale, or rococo, style. The desk has local characteristics associated with Colchester style

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production, specifically the Calvin Willey group. Both the slant front and the front of the case have blockfront shaping, which consists of a recessed vertical panel in the center flanked by a projecting vertical panel. The blockfront shaping is topped by three carved shells on the slant front, and it extends down through the drawers to the base molding and the front feet. The drawer arrangement consists of four graduated drawers below the slant front. The top drawer is slightly narrower than the others and is flanked by a loper, or thin board, that pulls out to form a support for the slant front when open. The base molding is complex, and the ogee bracket feet project beyond the front and sides of the case. The interior arrangement of the desk consists of three tiers: a shell-carved prospect drawer in the center flanked by four pigeonholes, over five drawers in a line, over three drawers in a line. Each tier is deeper and projects further out than the tier above it. At the top of each pigeonhole is a valance with a lower edge shaped with a cyma curve, or S-curve, and a reverse cyma curve. The five drawers in a line each have shaped fronts; the center drawer is flush with the shell-carved prospect drawer above it, and it has a recessed center panel that conforms to the shape of the shell. The two drawers to either side are deeper and project further out than the center drawer. These side drawers each have an undulating front. The three bottom drawers in a line also have shaped fronts; the center drawer has a recessed center panel, and the side drawers have undulating fronts. The side drawers are deeper than the center drawer and project further out. Hardware on the slant front consists of two brass lock escutcheons between the carved shells. Each exterior drawer has a brass lock

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escutcheon in the center flanked by a brass escutcheon with a bail pull; the center lock escutcheons on all but the top drawer are blind. Each loper and each interior drawer has a small brass knob. Condition: The top center edge of the slant front and the front center edge of the top have been worn and scraped over time; this is most likely the result of opening the desk without a key. The escutcheons are replaced. Design and Construction Details: Carving. The center shell at the top of the blockfront has eleven recessed rays, alternating with twelve projecting rays with an incised medial line; the rays give the shell an undulating outer edge. The rays end in the center with a raised, bell-shaped line that continues below the bottom of the shell. The bell shape contains a small shell with fifteen rays, each with an incised medial line; this smaller shell also has a bell-shaped line in the center. Each of the side shells at the top of the blockfront consist of twenty-three undulating, projecting rays that end with a raised, bell-shaped line in the center. The prospect drawer has a recessed shell with sixteen undulating, projecting rays, each with an incised medial line; the rays end in the center with a raised, bell-shaped line. Incised carving around the scalloped edge of the shell consists of ovals with punched circles in the center.

Case Construction. The top is dovetailed to the sides of the case. The backboard is nailed into rabbets on the sides of the case. The projecting portions of the blockfront shaping on the slant front are formed with applied wood. The case rests on a platform base constructed of two horizontal bottom boards laid one over the other. The lower board extends out at the front and sides; the base molding is applied to its edges. Each ogee bracket foot is constructed of molded

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ogee facing applied to the supporting frame. Each knee bracket return has a distinctive inward-curving scroll, called a "Colchester curl." Drawer

Construction. Each drawer and loper is outlined by cock beading on the case.

Drawer dividers are dovetailed into the case sides and are concealed behind a facing strip. Vertical partitions are dovetailed to the rail above and into the

drawer divider below and are concealed behind a facing strip. The drawer

runners for the top exterior drawer and the lopers are nailed to the back of the

case sides and are joined to the drawer divider in front; a drawer guide is nailed

down on top of these drawer runners. The drawer runners for the three full-

width drawers are nailed to the sides of the case. Each drawer front is solid, with

a flat interior surface. The drawer sides are flat on top and have chamfered

edges. Each drawer bottom fits into grooves in the front and sides of the drawer

and is nailed at the back. The two middle drawers have drawer stops glued to

the back of the exterior. Each interior desk drawer is constructed in a similar

manner, except that the bottom slides into a canted groove in the sides of the

drawer; the edges of each drawer bottom are canted as well. The bottom of each

interior drawer extends past the back of the drawer to form a drawer stop. The

dovetail pins on all drawers are small and triangular. Please see attached essay

by Dr. Thomas P. Kugelman for more information about this piece.

Dimensions Primary Dimensions (overall height x width x depth): 45 3/16 x 41 15

/16 x 21 11/16in. (114.8 x 106.5 x 55.1cm)