

## THE LETTERBOOK OF JOHN DOGGETT 1828 - REFERENCES TO THE BOSTON EXPORT TRADE

I am currently making a study of the upholstered rocking chairs made in the Boston Workshop of William Hancock. These chairs are quite special as the upholstery demonstrates a very early attempt to incorporate springs into a cushion. The whole approach taken in upholstering these Windsor-style rockers was experimental and resulted in very unusual looking chairs. For the interest of members, I enclose a picture of one of the chairs (Fig. 12) c. 1825. Seven labelled examples, made between 1825 and 1832 have been recorded. To the historian, perhaps the most interesting feature of these odd chairs is the very early use of springs in the seat cushion. Hancock used a design for an "elastic spring cushion" by Sherman Blair of New Haven, Connecticut, which received a patent on 1st August 1923. These chairs were Hancock's signature products and he shipped them to the southern United States and, on at least two instances, to Great Britain. The reference to the exportation of the chairs to Liverpool comes from the John Doggett letterbook in the collection of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. The entry for 31st October 1928 reads

*"To Messrs. Charles Humberston & Co.  
(Liverpool) in the morning we shall have put on board  
the Amethyst, in charge of the mate of the said vessell, a  
rocking Chair ordered by Mr. S. Frodsham. The price of  
the chair will be 22 dollars, the same as the other, and  
the exchange being at 11 pc advance, we have charged  
you in account L4.90 Sterling therefor. Mr. Hancock  
feels uncertain, whether the curve of the back will exactly  
suit, but if it does not suit in every respect, you will  
please return it or sell it on his account and any  
alteration he may suggest shall be strictly attended to in  
the execution of another one"*



Fig. 12 Hancock Chair

The issue of Gore's General Advertiser, Liverpool for the 27th November 1828 records that the Amethyst delivered a miscellaneous cargo to Liverpool. The listed cargo included flaxseed, maple boards, apples etc. but does not mention rocking chairs or Humberston & Co. I am eager to learn if any member has additional information to add to this puzzle or ideally, a Hancock chair.

(Acknowledgements to the Brown, Picton & Hornby libraries, Liverpool for information from Gore's General Advertiser)

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