

OVERSEAS REPORT

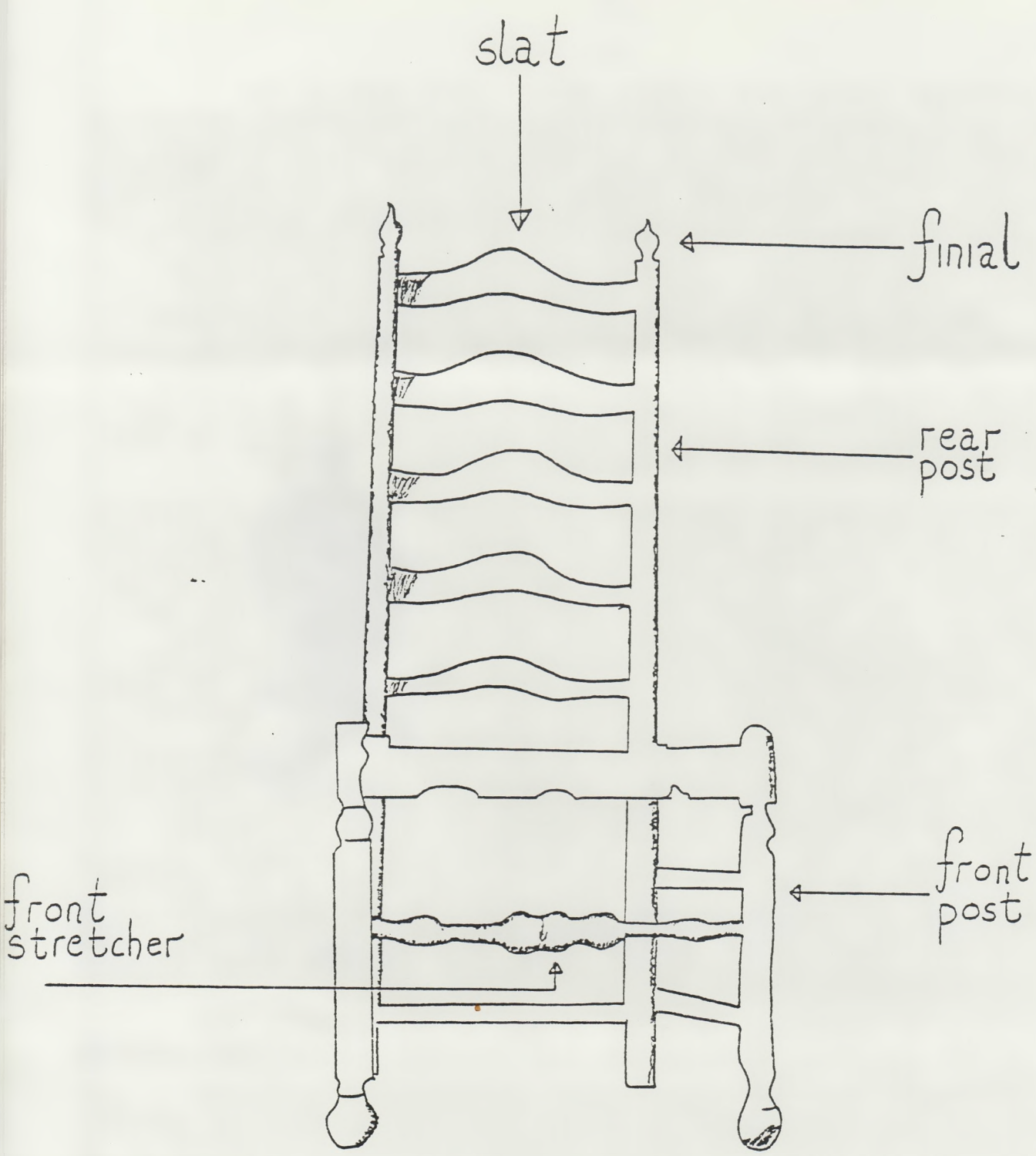
Hugo A. Freund of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania has been conducting regional research on slat back chairs in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. He is currently a graduate student in the Department of Folklore and Folklife at the University of Pennsylvania.

His article entitled "Pennsylvania Style Slat-Back Rush-Bottom Chairs: A Network Analysis and Regional Approach" appeared in the recent publication Challenge of Folk Materials for New Jersey's Museum (Trenton: Museums Council of New Jersey, 1986) pp.53-62. The rush-bottom slat-back chairs of eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and central Maryland are a well-known regional type. These chairs form a distinct regional type known as "Pennsylvania" or "Central" slat-back chairs. The bottoms of these chairs are commonly made of rush, a plant harvested from swamps and marshes. The rear posts are parallel to one another and are not turned except for the finials. The slats often number from four to six. In New England and New York (known as the "northern" region), there are usually fewer slats. Moreover, the "Pennsylvania" or "Central" chair often has only one

front stretcher turned with a heavy ball. Each side of the "Pennsylvania" chair has two stretchers. The Pennsylvania slat have a distinctive high arch and a curved outline (see drawing). This paper contextually situates the "Pennsylvania" chair by taking a short look at the indigenous process of chairmaking and the social use of the chairs. The emphasis of this presentation is on the response of chairmakers to this tradition as well as examination of their innovative impulses. Several chairmakers are the focus of this study: Frank Boccoardo, Henry Weldon and members of the Ware family. The origin of this chair style is difficult to determine because of the many gaps in the historical and material culture record. The shape of the slats are similar to regional English chairmaking styles. The proof is found in Bill Cotton's research of regionally distributed Lancashire chairs from the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The slats of these chairs, which number as many as five, match precisely the Pennsylvania style.

The New Jersey Historical Commission has awarded Mr. Freund a research grant to study "Slat Back Chairs in New Jersey". Beginning with the earliest days of settlement, slat back chairs have been manufactured in New Jersey. Until the Civil War, New Jersey was dominated by two major styles - the "northern" style associated with East Jersey and the "central" style closely linked with the Delaware Valley area. With the industrialization of chairmaking in the 1850s, central New Jersey became a major centre for large scale shop production and this style of chairmaking quickly influenced the "northern" and "central" patterns. This study will examine the effects of changes in technology on the two earlier styles in two stages. Firstly, this study will examine the two styles - northern and central in terms of distinguishing details such as construction and proportions - as indications of two distinct cultural subregions within New Jersey. The second stage of the study will be to examine the effect of industrialization on slat back chairs. Initial study of the question suggests mutual influences between earlier styles and central New Jersey chairmaking of the mid nineteenth century. In scholarly studies of slat back chairs, earlier forms have not been compared to the mid-nineteenth century New Jersey forms.

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slat

finial

rear post

front post

front stretcher

"Pennsylvania" slat back chair