

Kelton House Farm

Kelton House Farm, an early 18th-century 'salt box' house transported from Massachusetts to Wisconsin, is now home to Joseph Gromacki and his rich collection of 17th- and 18th-century furniture, textiles, ceramics and metalware. The furniture is primarily from New England and the middle colonies and was largely made by turners and joiners of English descent following vernacular conventions. British, Netherlandish and Germanic influences are more evident in the Pennsylvania and New York furniture that dates from 1710.

'Hadley' (Massachusetts) chests are a well-known late 17th /early 18th century group, richly carved and brightly painted.² Such chests would have been vibrant additions to an early 18th-century home, and are characterised by mannerist-inspired decoration, flat carving and painted surfaces in a bold palate of Prussian blue, deep red, black, and white. The Kelton example is a characteristic six-boarded chest with lilies and vines; it is one of a small group decorated by an anonymous Connecticut artist active in the 1710s. Other examples are at Chipstone, Historic Deerfield and the Metropolitan Museum of Arts. It retains the original painted surface, featuring intricate foliate and pinwheel carving. The initials 'RC' and oral history suggest that Rebecca Cowles of Amherst (Massachusetts, founded in 1658) owned it.

An altogether grander piece in the collection is a baroque high chest made in Boston. The chest is elaborately veneered in burr maple and walnut herringbone, the legs and feet having their original faux-walnut finish. The same dramatic decorative surface effect was being produced in London at the end of the 17th century by Coxed & Wooster. The effect was achieved by applying nitric acid to open the wood grain and then rubbing in lampblack to create a contrast, possibly intended to simulate tortoiseshell.

As we left Joseph was heard to say, 'That was fun wasn't it!' and it was.

Diana Halliwell

2 For further information on Hadley chests, see C. F. Luther, *The Hadley Chest* (Hartford, 1935); P. E. Kane, 'The Seventeenth-Century Furniture of the Connecticut Valley: The Hadley Chest Reappraised' in I. M. G. Quimby, ed., *Arts of the Anglo-American Community in the Seventeenth Century* (Winterthur, 1975); P. Zea and S. L. Flynt, *Hadley Chests* (Deerfield, 1992); F. G. Safford, *American Furniture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I Early Colonial Period* (New York, 2007); S. L. Buck, 'Early Polychrome Chests from Hadley, Massachusetts: A Technical Investigation of Their Paint and Finish', *American Furniture*, 2009.