

Letter from America

Dear Friends in the Regional Furniture Society,

I hope that you all had a happy holiday season and that your year is off to a great start. 2020 promises to be an exciting year for the study of American regional furniture. In this letter I would like to highlight some of the many reasons that this year is the perfect time for a trip to the United States!

In my last letter I wrote about the Henry D. Green Symposium of the Decorative Arts (January 30-February 1) at the Georgia Museum of Art in Athens, Georgia, and the Colonial Williamsburg Antiques Forum (February 20-25) in Virginia. These symposia are the two largest gatherings of American decorative arts



A view from *Material Georgia 1733–1900: Two Decades of Scholarship* at the Georgia Museum of Art on the Campus of the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. Photo by Michael Lachowski

curators, collectors and connoisseurs, and well worth a trip across the pond. Even if you can't make it to the Green Symposium, I strongly encourage you to see the exhibit *Material Georgia 1733–1900*, a wide-ranging look at Georgia-made regional furniture and the people who made it. The exhibit, which closes March 15, and the accompanying publication, are important contributions to the study of regional furniture in America. More information can be found at GeorgiaMuseum.org.

In April the Winterthur Museum in Delaware will host a conference called *The Beltway and Beyond: Neoclassical Furniture of Washington D.C., Baltimore, and the Coastal Mid-Atlantic*. The conference will bring together top scholars, curators, and craftspeople to explore how American and immigrant craftsmen embraced the neoclassical style. In addition to a day of lectures, participants will also have a chance to examine examples of American neoclassical furniture from Winterthur's collection up close, including a newly-acquired truly over-the-top secretary from near



Secretary, possibly Georgetown, Maryland or Alexandria, Virginia, c. 1810, mahogany, tulip poplar, red cedar, and possibly white pine. *Photo courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Gift of Elizabeth C. Weld and Elizabeth B. Weld, in memory of Louis Mackall Weld, Jr*

Washington, D.C. The conference is scheduled for April 23–24. For more information visit: Winterthur.org.

Over the past five years the Decorative Arts Trust has become one of the most important organizations supporting research in American regional furniture. Through their grants, scholarships, and fellowships, they support the work of museums and scholars across the United States. The Decorative Arts Trust also produces public programs across the United States to share the fruits of this new research; they also host highly successful international travel programs as well! Each year the Decorative Arts Trust hosts two multi-day symposia focused on regional decorative arts. Next year's symposia will be in Kentucky and Massachusetts. Their Spring Symposium is titled *Kentucky Bluegrass From Lexington to Louisville* and will be held in Kentucky April 15–19. Their Fall Symposium is titled *Salem and the North Shore* and will be held in Massachusetts September 10–13. These events combine lectures and tours of private and public collections and are a great way to dive deep into the furniture and other decorative arts of a particular American region. For more information visit DecorativeArtsTrust.org.

In October, the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts will host its own deep-dive into a particular American region with its biennial MESDA Conference. The MESDA Conference will be held in Columbia, South Carolina, October 22–24. The conference includes a day of lectures and optional one and two-day rambles to explore sites across the South Carolina Midlands and the Georgia Piedmont. This



Chest of drawers, workshop of Gerrard Calvert (1765–1840), Mason County, Kentucky, c. 1800, cherry, light and dark wood inlays, poplar. This chest of drawers combines elements of American neoclassicism from the mid-Atlantic with the small cabriole legs found more often along the Gulf of Mexico in cities like New Orleans. *Photo courtesy of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, MESDA Purchase Fund*



Work table, Camden, South Carolina, 1810–1819, mahogany, maple, poplar, and yellow pine. Attributed to William Parker (1775–1819), a London-born cabinetmaker who arrived in America in 1802. He resided in New York before moving to South Carolina where he worked in Charleston, Columbia, and finally Camden. *Photo courtesy of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, gift of Mrs. Richard D. McCarthy*

region was home to craftsmen and consumers of diverse origins who brought their own life experiences to the objects they created and used. For more information visit MESDA.org.

Finally, for over forty years the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts has been home to the MESDA Summer Institute, a graduate-level summer course in American southern decorative arts and material culture. The MESDA Summer Institute is a multi-disciplinary course that uses the museum's unparalleled collection and research resources to teach about the furniture and other objects made and used in the early South. The 2020 MESDA Summer Institute will center on the objects, buildings, and landscapes of the Chesapeake Bay region, from the seventeenth century to the Civil War, and the diverse craftsmen and consumers who called the region home. The month-long curriculum includes lectures and collection studies with leading curators and scholars, hands-on workshops with master

craftspeople, and an intensive week-long study trip to important private and public collections in northeastern North Carolina and southeastern Virginia. Thanks to generous donors we are able to offer significant fellowships to attract the best students, museum professionals, and scholars possible. On a personal note, the 2020 MESDA Summer Institute will be my first as both director and professor, and I welcome the help of the Regional Furniture Society in finding the best and most diverse class possible. More information about the MESDA Summer Institute can be found at MESDA.org/SI.

With best wishes from the United States,

Daniel Kurt Ackermann, Ph.D.

American Secretary
Curator, the Museum of Early Southern Decorative
Arts at Old Salem Museums & Gardens
Winston-Salem, North Carolina
DAckermann@oldsalem.org