

PREFACE

This volume evolved from a tiny segment of my study of the Cabinet of Curiosities of the American Philosophical Society. One of the divisions of this Cabinet is “*Objets d’Art*” and I included furniture in this division. As time passed, awareness grew of several fascinating and valuable antiques in the Society, beginning with 1769. Most of the *objets* pertain to various presidents of the Society, although a few are from members whose activity in the Society was memorable. Some items were purchased, also, or made, for the Society.

No work has been done hitherto on this furniture as a unit. Several pieces are well known and have been researched at various times: Franklin’s library chair, the Rittenhouse astronomical timepiece, the chair which Jefferson purchased in Philadelphia in 1776 and used while he wrote the Declaration of Independence, for example. Little is known of most of the various artifacts, however, or their provenance.

Considerable reliance has been placed on *A Catalogue of Instruments and Models in the Possession of the American Philosophical Society*, by Robert Multhaupt, for descriptions of the mechanisms of the various timepieces. Also, *A Catalogue of Portraits and Other Works of Art in the Possession of the American Philosophical Society* was most helpful. The Minutes of the Society, the Archives, the Treasurers’ Records, etc., provided the skeleton for the history of these furnishings. The physical descriptions of the items themselves were made by David Borodin, of Frisk and Borodin Appraisers, Ltd., outstanding authorities on furniture. I have relied, wherever possible, on the memoirs published by the Society for a descriptive note of the members who owned, or in whose memory, the furniture listed herein was presented.

I am indebted to Dr. Herman H. Goldstine, Executive Officer of the Society, for asking me to prepare this manuscript for publication. The Staff of the Society, especially Carole Le Faivre, have been unusually helpful and I thank them for their help. Frank Margeson, photographer for the Library, provided the excellent reproductions included here. Richard Ahlborn, Smithsonian Institution, and Dr. Isadora Rose-de Viejo, Associate Curator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts of the Hispanic Society of America, provided much of the material used in the description of the Spanish-type armchair. Roger Moss, Director of The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, gave generously of his time while I was researching the history of the Joseph Bonaparte chair. I am deeply grateful for the interest and help Dr. Silvio Bedini, Keeper of Rare Books, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, gave me. His insight and penetrating questions improved the manuscript considerably.

Most of all, however, I wish to thank David Borodin for his unfailing help and interest over the years and his concise descriptions of the articles listed in this volume.

