

# RICH AND TASTY: VERMONT FURNITURE TO 1850 AT THE SHELBURNE MUSEUM JULY 25—NOVEMBER 1



*Sofa attributed to Nahum Parker (1789–1876), circa 1830, Middlebury. Mahogany, white pine, mahogany veneer and brass; 35 by 84 by 20½ inches. Collection of J. Brooks Buxton. This sofa with lyre-ornamented arm supports has been attributed to Parker based on three similar examples.*

*(Right) Fancy chair attributed to Samuel Nichols (1793–1869) and John Herrick (1792–1839) or John Abbott (1792–1839) and Thomas Wood (circa 1798–date unknown), decoration attributed to Charles Curtis (1801–1876), circa 1822, Burlington. Painted white pine, ash and basswood; 32¾ by 17 by 15¾ inches. Fleming Museum of Art, University of Vermont. Photograph courtesy of owner. This chair is one of three surviving members from an original set of 12 made for the Bank of Burlington. The scenic painting on each chair illustrated a different building in town. This example shows the University of Vermont’s Main Building, which burned in 1824.*

By Kate Eagan Johnson

**S**HELBURNE, VT. — American furniture lovers who despair that their progeny do not share their passion might make a family excursion to the Shelburne Museum. That delightfully quixotic outdoor museum is the perfect setting for “Rich and Tasty: Vermont Furniture Before 1850,”



opening at the museum's Pizzagalli Center for Art and Education on July 25. The exhibition is a feast of innovation and ornament. Specials of the day include inventive design and

extraverted decoration bound to intrigue even the novice. The exhibition and accompanying catalog are the result of a fruitful collaboration between Jean M. Burks,



*Chest, circa 1825, probably Shaftsbury. Painted eastern white pine, 24½ by 42¼ by 19 inches. Private collection. This confection is part of a group of chests with ornamental painting associated with the Matteson family, which the authors present as a mystery not yet completely untangled. It bears the shipping inscription "E. Harwood/Hartford/Conn."*



curator emerita of Shelburne Museum, and Philip Zea, president of Historic Deerfield. Who better than these two seasoned experts to take on this project? The banquet they have laid for us includes approximately 40 luscious objects drawn from private and public collections. Many of the selections have never previously been on public view. Lenders include the Vermont Historical

*Pier mirror by George Fisher (1820–1896), before 1841, Woodstock. Gilt, eastern white pine and glass; 31¼ by 22¼. Private collection. The paper label on the reverse reads: "GEORGE FISHER ... Pleasant Street/WOODSTOCK, VT."*



Society, Woodstock Historical Society, Fleming Museum of Art, Historic Deerfield, J. Brooks Buxton and Norman and Mary Gronning, among others. With a foreword by Shelburne Museum director Thomas Denenberg, "Rich and Tasty: Vermont Furniture to 1850" is published by the museum and distributed by University Press of New England.

*Two-drawer stand by Nathan Burnell (1790–1866), 1853, Milton. Maple, yellow birch, maple veneer, basswood and eastern white pine; 28¾ by 16¼ (32¾ open) by 197/8 inches. Private collection. "Nathan Burnell, 1853" appears in pencil on bottom drawer, yet no stand or worktable is listed in Burnell's detailed ledger, which runs from 1822 to 1866. In 1853, he made a "Chamber Sett." Burks and Zea wonder if this piece could have been part of that suite.*





This companion guide features insightful, highly researched entries for some 70 objects in total, thus expanding upon the assemblage of objects on view. The authors have arranged object entries thematically under such headings as “A Legacy of Specialization: Chairmaking,” “Neoclassical Vermont,” “Three Vermont Furniture Puzzles” and “One Vermont Town’s Furniture — Woodstock.” In her essay on cabinetmakers Zachariah Harwood and

*Comb back Windsor rocking chair, circa 1825, Woodstock. Mixed woods and paint, 41 by 17¾ by 19½ inches. Private collection.*

John Marshall, Burks shows how these woodworkers' approaches reflected the "rich and tasty" formula. Similarly, Zea includes a connoisseurship model he has developed and here applied to Vermont furniture. The result is a sophisticated, scholarly offering featuring fresh artifacts, historical

information and commentary.

Burks called attention to their other partner, J. David Bohl, whose object photography she views as critical to the success of the project. "David Bohl is the master...

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