Southern furniture since 1952

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Fig. 1. Virginia wainscot chair; walnut throughout, c. 1680-1710. Note the two stretchers across front and sides, unusual on a wainscot but found on late Jacobean slat-backs and other turned chairs in the North. Although this chair is related to examples from eastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey, it has lighter seat rails and simpler turnings and lacks a crest, which on Middle Atlantic versions might be scalloped or carved. This type of seat, dished for a cushion, was not usual on chairs from the latter area, but is found on New England Brewster- and Carver-type chairs.

Fig. 2. Carver-type turned chair, from coastal Carolina; cherry, c. 1680-1710. This native wood was rarely employed so early, but in later examples it is characteristic of rural Southern furniture. While on Northern chairs the front post is generally capped by a finial, the projecting armrest has often been noted on Southern chairs of this type; it is also found on English chairs (ANTIQUES, December 1965, p. 796), and this may be an instance of direct English influence.

RECENTLY THERE ENTERED the MESDA collections a letter book of Peter Manigault, speaker of the colonial Assembly from 1765 to 1772 and member of one of the wealthiest and most influential families in Charleston. In the year 1771, while tension between the Colonies and England was increasing, he was ordering furniture and silver through an agent in London. In a letter of April 2, 1771, he sent a list of articles of furniture and plate, asking "to have them out as soon as possible & the plainer the better so that they are fashionable." A certain austerity in Southern furniture of the pre-Revolutionary period has always been puzzling, and this letter from Manigault, assuming that it expresses something more than his personal taste, may throw light on a seeming anomaly.

The MESDA collections, representing all of the agrarian South, have grown to an extent which has brought regional traits into sharper focus than they were at the

Except as noted, all illustrations are from the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.

Fig. 3. Virginia turned chair; cherry posts and horizontal back members, hickory stretchers; first half of the eighteenth century. Chairs like this, and the slat-back examples which are fairly frequent, are the Southern equivalent of the cane backs and split banister backs of New England. This one is unusual in having turned stretchers on all four sides and finials above the top rail.

time of the *Exhibition of Southern Furniture* in Richmond in 1952. Characteristics which can be called Southern in general are more in evidence. While larger areas, such as the Valley of Virginia and the Carolina and Georgia Piedmont, can be recognized as having local traits, it has not been possible to isolate a Norfolk-Portsmouth "school," or one for Richmond-Petersburg, Edenton, Wilmington, or Fayetteville. It was once thought that since many pieces have turned up which had historical association with these regions it would some day be possible to recognize their craftsmen. Only in the case of the Baltimore-Annapolis area and that of Charleston can urban schools be recognized. Some fine Kentucky work has been discovered but not enough to suggest characteristics peculiar to the region.

Walnut, the subspecies or Southern variety of *Juglans nigra*, most often used for finer furniture in the South, was employed as early as the Jacobean period. Charleston, however, favored mahogany at a remarkably early date, the Queen Anne period (Fig. 10). Walnut was used elsewhere with prodigality, often appearing as a secondary wood, but its figured grain was rarely employed as effectively as in the North. Possibly this was part of the taste for "the plainer the better." The native cherry was well liked as a primary wood in the later eighteenth century, supplanting walnut in rural areas. Eastern white pine, imported from the North, makes a frequent appearance as a secondary wood in the Federal period (Fig. 20). Tulip poplar also was increasingly a favorite, supplanting hard yellow pine to a large extent.

I am deeply indebted to Frank L. Horton for turning over to me his notes, records, and observations on the MESDA collections. His conclusions and attributions have greatly extended our view of Southern regional traits, and the generous manner in which he has shared the fruits of years of intensive study is gratefully acknowledged.

My thanks are due to Charles Navis for reporting on numerous subjects which have been added to Virginia collections in recent years, and to Lawrence Navis for going to much trouble to take snapshots of them for study purposes.

Henry D. Green has contributed valuable notes on Georgia furniture, with illustrations of subjects in his own collection which have not been heretofore published. John M. Graham II has sent me a full account of the extensive acquisitions of Southern furniture which he has been making since 1952 for Colonial Williamsburg, where a notable collection has been brought together. E. Milby Burton has kindly allowed me to illustrate several pieces from the Charleston Museum. My many obligations to his *Charleston Furniture* (1955) are acknowledged throughout the descriptions. I am also indebted to the Bayou Bend Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and to the White House Collection, Washington, D. C., for exceptionally fine illustrations of Charleston and Baltimore furniture.

Fig. 4. Virginia Jacobean gate-leg table with eight legs and single gates; walnut, with secondary wood hard yellow Southern pine; c. 1700. The exceptionally fine paired vases in each turning, with the well-defined balls and rings separating them, produce a richness of effect seldom seen in American examples of this style from any region. This table has been seen in ANTIQUES (June 1964, p. 687) in a view of the hall at Toddsbury, Gloucester County, Virginia. *Collection of Mrs. Charles Beatty Moore; photograph by Thomas L. Williams.*

Fig. 5. William and Mary gate-leg table; Virginia, c. 1710; walnut with secondary wood hard yellow pine. The double-vase-and-ring turning, while not peculiar to Virginia, is found frequently in that state and in Maryland. This style was popular for a long period during which the turnings became softened and simplified in comparison with the bold forms in Fig. 4. A detail may be noted here which is possibly characteristic of these later Virginia gate-leg tables: both horizontal members of the gates are turned. This has been noticed in other examples known to Mr. Horton. The additional turning is in contrast to earlier examples, such as the Toddsbury table and Figures 143 and 144, *Southern Furniture* (ANTIQUES, January 1952), where the upper horizontal member of each gate is invariably plain.

Fig. 6. William and Mary corner table; Virginia, c. 1720; walnut throughout. Note the downward emphasis on the elongated vase turning, a characteristic of tables from Virginia and the Carolinas. The corner table with triangular frame and drop leaf supported by a pivoting leg remained a great favorite in the South and occurs frequently in the Queen Anne style, with tapering legs and pad feet. This earlier example is of particular interest.

Fig. 7. Stretcher table with turned legs and medial stretcher, c. 1710; yellow-pine top and rails, cypress legs and stretcher. Descended in the Joyner family of Franklin, Virginia, near the Great Dismal Swamp, the farthest north cypress *(Taxodium distichum)* grows in America. The turning with attenuated cone shape, related to that in Fig. 6, has become almost a signature of Southern work; when it occurs in the Middle Atlantic area the forms are more crisp and shapely.

Fig. 8. Georgia splay-leg walnut table of early date and large size, from Clarke County; the only one of its kind which has so far turned up. It measures 52 inches in length and dates from the first half of the eighteenth century. The turnings are crude but the design has vigor and a feeling for proportion. *Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Henry D. Green; photograph by Vic Curtis Studio.*

Fig. 9. Valley of Virginia blanket chest, walnut, with semicircular and pinwheel inlay; late 1700's. Geometric and floral inlays are often found in this region, and such inlay was also favored in the Carolina and Georgia Piedmont and in Kentucky. The Valley of Virginia, with its five rivers of which the greatest is the Shenandoah, was the roadway to Virginia's southern neighbors and provided the geographic route for the migration of a decorative detail. *Toddsbury, Moore collection; Williams photograph.*

Fig. 10. Charleston Queen Anne dressing table, or lowboy; mahogany with cypress secondary wood, c. 1740. The unusually abrupt turn of the knee and the general form relate it closely to English design; this relationship is often noted in Charleston work of the Queen Anne and Chippendale periods. The chased brasses, two of them original, are of early eighteenth-century type. So much Charleston Queen Anne furniture is of mahogany it seems this region led the South in the use of this wood, possibly because of its close connection with the West Indies and the migration of planters from those islands to Charleston. The Charleston pad foot is softly rounded at the base compared with the sharp clear-cut outline found in Northern work.

Fig. 11. Maryland Queen Anne desk-and-bookcase, walnut with yellow-pine and poplar secondary woods; unusually high broken-arch pediment, heavily molded, with arched doors one of which has its original engraved and beveled mirror glass; c. 1730-1740. It is worth noting, however, that an unusually high broken-arch pediment is also found on the two Maryland Chippendale case pieces shown in the Baltimore loan exhibition catalogue of 1947. This piece descended in the family of Dr. Luke Philip Barber, who came to America in 1654; his grandson Edward is believed to have belonged to the first of eight generations who owned it. The early date assigned to it is substantiated by the chased brasses, most of which are original, of the second quarter of the eighteenth century; also by the small fall-board supports and the well containing a working drawer.

Fig. 12. Virginia Queen Anne walnut drop-leaf table of small size, with drawer; secondary wood, hard yellow pine; mid-eighteenth century. The legs, typical of Virginia workmanship, are of ridged cabriole form with a subtle taper. The corner brackets on the apron are noteworthy, and the tops of the pivoting legs fit smoothly into similar brackets. This table was found in the Albemarle Sound region of North Carolina, just over the Virginia line. *Collection of Dr. and Mrs. J. Kirk Richardson; Williams photograph.*

Fig. 13. Queen Anne walnut cellaret from Virginia; secondary wood, yellow pine; probably mid-1700's. The rudimentary cabriole legs are slightly ridged and end in thick slipper feet. There are twelve compartments for bottles; partitions are scalloped. While the cellaret is an individual form peculiar to the South, where it must have been developed at an early date, examples of the Queen Anne and Chippendale periods are not common. *Colonial Williamsburg.*

Fig. 14. Charleston Chippendale mahogany pedestal-base tea table with piecrust edge, elongated leaf-carved vase pedestal, similar acanthus carving on cabriole ending in claw-and-ball feet; no secondary wood; c. 1770. An unusual detail, as distinctive as Newport's undercut talon, is seen in the open C scrolls on the base; although a delicate construction, these are intact. An illustration showing a very similar table then in the Charleston home of the Middletons is in *Colonial Furniture and Interiors* by N. W. Elwell (Boston, 1896; Vol. I, Pl. LX). These tables do not have the bird-cage construction and may be tilted but not turned. The elongated vase pedestal is noted on other Charleston tripod tables, such as Burton, Fig. 130. *Bayou Bend Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.*

Fig. 15. Charleston Chippendale mahogany easy chair, c. 1760-1775; distinguished by the unusual incurved back legs which have been observed on other chairs from Charleston. The entire seat rail is of mahogany, the upper frame of poplar and yellow pine, the arm cones of red bay. The silk damask covering copies a mid-eighteenth-century document. Surviving easy chairs are extremely rare, although inventories and advertisements indicate they were in general use in the last half of the eighteenth century in Charleston (Burton, p. 52). Noteworthy are the firmly cut claw-and-ball feet and the richly detailed acanthus carving.

Fig. 16. Masonic chair, Charleston, c. 1770, mahogany with ash seat; glue blocks missing. The rather square back legs ending in block feet have been seen on several chairs of Charleston origin (ANTIQUES, January 1952, Fig. 62); carved rosettes at the yoke and arm terminals are also characteristic. The painted Masonic emblems are confined here to the bowed cresting rail. This came from a lodge in Charleston and is one of the scarce eighteenth-century American Masonic chairs from any region; most of those known are of the nineteenth century.

Fig. 17. Marble-top sideboard table, mahogany (or walnut) with oak secondary wood; c. 1770. The gray-veined marble top, probably imported, is original; its underside has a slight curve and the frame has been shaped to accommodate this. The marble resembles the mantelpiece in Wetherburn's Tavern in Williamsburg (now in process of being restored). This table, which probably originated in coastal Virginia, is an attempt to render a Chippendale style in simplified form, with a pendant on the apron and corner brackets uniting this to the straight, grooved legs. Oak rarely appears as a secondary wood, but the rural maker used whatever was available. *Colonial Williamsburg.*

Fig. 18. Baltimore Chippendale mahogany side chair with interlacing strapwork splat; secondary wood, tulip poplar; from a set which belonged to General Mordecai Gist (1743-1792) of Baltimore and Charleston; c. 1760-1780. Gist grew up in Baltimore and at the outbreak of the Revolution was captain of the Baltimore Independent Company; later rose to the rank of commander of the 2nd Maryland Brigade; served in the Southern army under Greene, and after the Revolution lived on his plantation near Charleston (ANTIQUES, February 1949, p. 131). *Colonial Williamsburg.*

Fig. 19. Virginia Chippendale table or candlestand of cherry with poplar secondary wood; from the Norfolk area, c. 1770. The shaped apron and delicately carved claw-and-ball feet are typical of the sophisticated treatment often found in pieces from the coastal regions. *Colonial Williamsburg.*

Fig. 20. Charleston mahogany inlaid side table with white pine and red cedar secondary woods; c. 1790. A triple band of inlay decorates the lower edge of the frame, and stringing forms panels on skirt and legs; at the top of each leg an inlaid medallion; leaf-carved brackets (similar brackets are found on two other pieces with a long Charleston history). The medallions and applied spade feet invite comparison with Burton, Fig. 68, a cabinet and lady's desk, where the similarity is so marked as to suggest the hand of the same cabinetmaker. White pine frequently appears as a secondary wood in Charleston furniture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was brought from New England and was known locally as northern pine, or Albany pine. See Burton, p. 34.

Fig. 21. Charleston mahogany serpentine chest of drawers with canted corners; secondary woods, poplar and white pine; drawer fronts cut out of a solid piece of mahogany; stringing on drawer fronts and corners; late eighteenth century. Charleston developed the decorative possibilities of the canted corner with string inlay, sometimes enclosing grained or darker wood. A chest with similar detail is illustrated by Burton (Figs. 13, 14). Inlaid canted corners are found on two Hepplewhite masterpieces, the Holmes breakfront bookcase at the Heyward-Washington house (Comstock, *American Furniture*, Fig. 414) and the Yale bookcase (Burton, Fig. 2). Figured wood enclosed in stringing is found on the card table shown in Fig. 22, a fine early example of Charleston's "canted-corner school." *Charleston Museum; photograph by E. K. Webb.*

Fig. 22. Charleston card table, mahogany with eastern white pine secondary wood; Chippendale-Hepplewhite transition, about 1780. The leaf-carved brackets relate this piece to Fig. 20, while the canted corners represent a fine development of the canted-corner style in Charleston (Fig. 21). This distinguished table has received further study since it was shown in the Southern furniture exhibition (ANTIQUES, January 1952, Fig. 134) and its secondary wood has been positively identified. Its basic similarity to some of the late eighteenth-century Charleston works, which may be taken as conclusive evidence of Charleston origin, has also been established.

Fig. 23. Charleston Hepplewhite mahogany clothespress with label of Robert Walker (1772-1833), one of two labeled pieces by Walker in the Charleston Museum (the other is a somewhat later kidney-shape chest of drawers). Walker is the only Charleston maker known by labeled work, although two signed pieces by others are known. The clothespress was acquired by the museum too late for inclusion in Burton's *Charleston Furniture,* but its label is shown (Fig. 139) with a 39 Church Street address. This provides a terminal date of 1810, for in that year Walker moved to 19 Elliott Street. Between 1813 and 1819 he worked at 53 Church Street, the address on a labeled satinwood secretary mentioned by Burton (p. 125). While Baltimore was the undoubted master of the use of ovals, Charleston also produced fine examples, such as this case piece in which the careful selection of paired panels of figured wood is evident. These are enclosed in superimposed mitered borders, also with carefully matched grain, while the string-inlaid frieze and pediment with tablet supporting a graceful urn show further attention to fine detail. *Charleston Museum; Webb photograph.*

Fig. 24. Baltimore Hepplewhite mahogany card table with bellflower pendants and dark cuffs on the legs, which are surmounted by inlaid conch-shell medallions intercepting panels of patterned veneer on the apron. The exceptionally beautiful top shows a semicircular design in shaded inlay emphasizing radiating forms of leaves and flowers; the radiating design is carried further in a weblike pattern of matched segments of figured grain outlined in stringing. In the superb execution of intricate detail the Baltimore-Annapolis area is unsurpassed by any center of American cabinetmaking. *White House Collection; photographs by Willard Stewart, Inc.*

Fig. 25. Hepplewhite inlaid mahogany corner sideboard or mixing table with secondary woods mahogany and poplar, early 1800's. The white marble top replaces the original, only a part of which had survived. This piece comes from Newberry, South Carolina, in the western part of the state, far from coastal influence but on the main path of travel and settlement of the Southern Piedmont from the middle states. The sophistication of this piece suggests that it may have been the work of a Baltimore-trained itinerant cabinetmaker. The use of poplar as a secondary wood in many parts of the South, like that of white pine in Charleston, is to be expected in furniture of the Federal period. *Collection of Mr. and Mrs. G. Dallas Coons; Williams photograph.*

Fig. 26. Hepplewhite double-tiered sideboard with recessed center and incurved ends; birch with contrasting walnut ovals, and sap-grained walnut in cross-banded edges; yellow pine principal interior wood; c. 1800-1810. There are two small braces of poplar, and the understructure of the upper tier for the display of silver is of maple and eastern white pine (this pine was found to be secondhand, its many nail holes indicating previous use at crating). This sideboard comes from the Augusta area of inland Georgia and is the only instance known to Mr. Horton in which a bold contrast of dark and light woods is employed by a Southern maker in a manner reminiscent of New England.

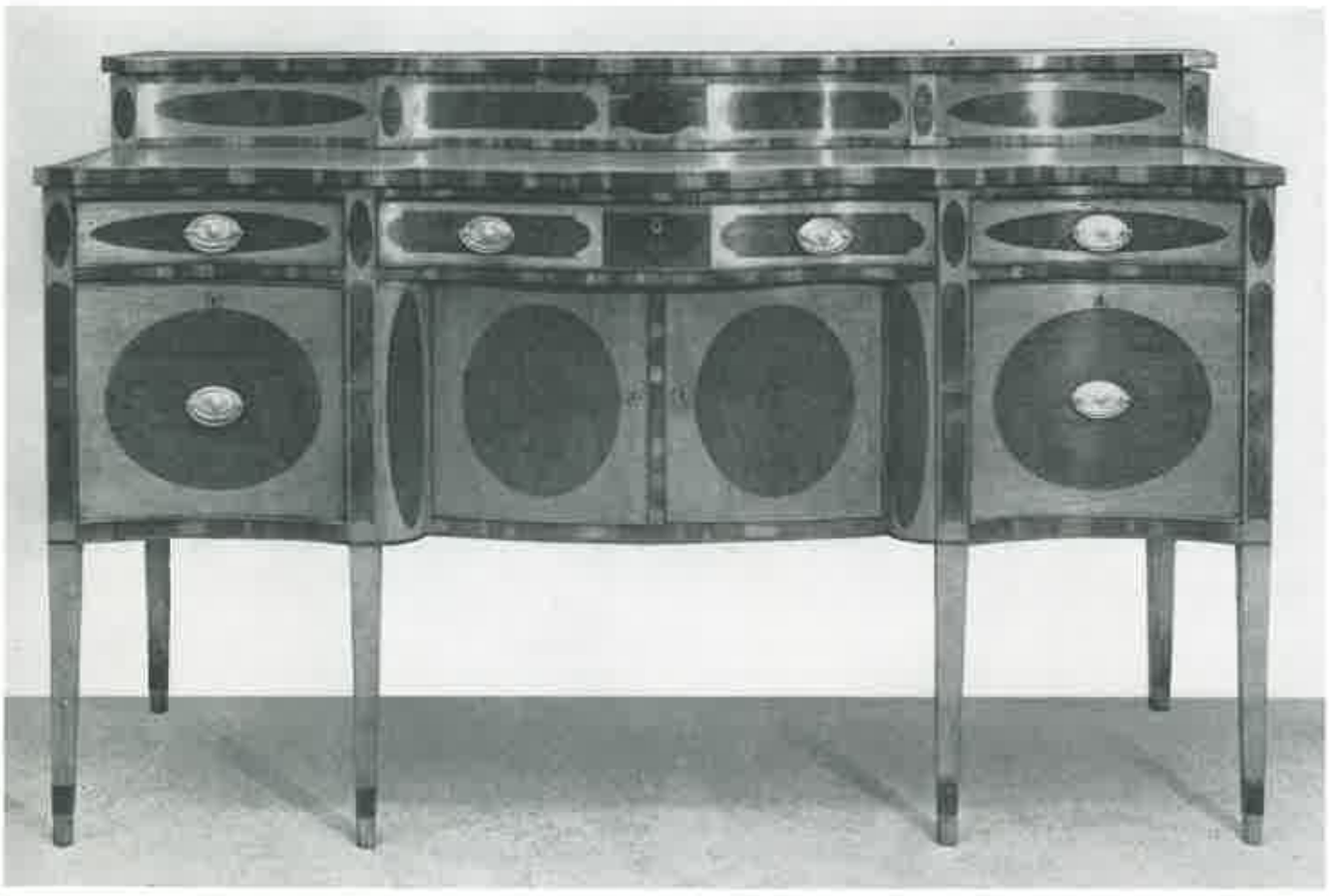

Fig. 27. Georgia Hepplewhite mahogany cellaret with secondary wood hard yellow pine, early 1800's; found in Clarke County in the Georgia Piedmont. The vine ornament at the sides, often seen in the work of this region, is related to a style of inlay which seems to have been carried southward through the Valley of Virginia into the Piedmont of the Carolinas and Georgia. *Green collection; Curtis photograph.*

Fig. 28. Georgia Hepplewhite huntboard, from Oglethorpe County in the Georgia Piedmont. This is unusually large, nearly 40 inches in height. It shows well the distinctive grain of the hard Georgia pine. The form, popular in the South, to which it is indigenous, was particularly well liked in the Piedmont. In light woods, such as maple and pine, these pieces were often painted. *Green collection; Curtis photograph.*

Fig. 29. Hepplewhite serpentine chest of drawers with flaring bracket feet; cherry, with yellow-pine interior; Valley of Virginia, c. 1800. Fluted, chamfered corners and reeding around the top display the sophistication sometimes found in this region. The use of native woods is characteristic of furniture from Southern rural areas. The name *Joseph Culbertson* is inscribed in several places on the chest but whether it represents maker or owner has not been determined.

Fig. 30. Transitional Chippendale-Hepplewhite linen or china press with writing section, walnut with yellow-pine and white-oak secondary woods; from northeastern North Carolina, c. 1785. The intaglio carving in a leaf design in the pediment is stained brown and contrasts with the light-toned inlaid stars and medallion framing the owner's initials, *C R T*. There is a bonnet behind the pediment, a feature seldom seen on Southern furniture. Several corner cupboards and two other pieces of this type have been traced to an area centering around Halifax, North Carolina (see the cellaret, ANTIQUES, January 1952, Fig. 39).

Fig. 31. Hepplewhite tall clock cherry with yellow-pine secondary wood; fluted quarter columns and string-inlaid panel with fans and sunburst in the base; turned and inlaid finials; feet replaced. There is an inscription on the clockface, *Jno McKee / Chester / S. C.* The maker's label on the inside of the door says McKee makes all kinds of clocks with or without cases, "packed up and warranted to go safe to any distance." This clock shows a refinement of detail unexpected in "country" furniture. The region is north of Columbia in the Piedmont; c. 1815.

Fig. 32. Hepplewhite inlaid cherry desk-and-bookcase with yellow-pine secondary wood; from the North Carolina Piedmont, c. 1780-1800. The individual style and inlaid decoration, as well as use of cherry, proclaim its Piedmont origin. One other desk-and-bookcase has been found which repeats the unusual pediment and inlay; both come from Iredell County in western North Carolina.

Fig. 33. Mahogany oval-top dining table with shell-carved cabriole legs and claw-and-ball feet (somewhat worn or cut down); secondary woods consist of an oak cross brace and a frame of maple with gates of beech; from Randolph County, North Carolina, c. 1770. One of three found in this Piedmont region; the other two have Queen Anne pad feet. Mahogany was seldom used so far inland, and this table is a rare exception to the rule that most rural furniture was made of native woods.

Fig. 34. North Carolina drop-leaf breakfast table; North Carolina Piedmont, c. 1800. Walnut throughout except for inlay of undetermined wood which is used in an extravagant fan design on the end apron and as a crude border with incurved corners formed by double string inlay edging a band of diamonds. The fan is outlined with a similar diamond band. This inlay is set in separately, piece by piece, not applied as a band as in sophisticated cabinetry. Bold inlay is typical of the Piedmont; compare ANTIQUES, January 1952, Figs. 94, 108.

Fig. 35. Kentucky cherry desk-and-bookcase, c. 1800; inscribed on inner back of desk, *Made by my hans* [sic] / *Isaac Evans, Maysville, K*[entucky]; secondary wood, poplar. The cabinetwork on this austere piece is of the first quality. Evans obviously worked in a transitional Chippendale-Hepplewhite style. It may be that he was an itinerant maker, stopping only briefly in this Ohio River town northeast of Frankfort and Lexington. So far no other record has been found: he is not included in the list of Kentucky cabinetmakers of Mary James Leach published in ANTIQUES for February 1954 (p. 139).

Fig. 36. Gothic sideboard, mahogany, made in Virginia a decade or more before the earliest known examples of the Gothic style in American furniture appeared; lancet arches are used here on a basically late Sheraton form. This exceptional piece is signed on the underside of the right upper drawer, *I Thomas . . . . dall maker of this work Lynchburg 1813.* Lucille McWane Watson, who found the sideboard in a Lynchburg collection, calls attention to the fact that Thomas Crandall advertised in the Lynchburg *Star,* November 18, 1813, that "he has commenced the Cabinet Business . . . on the main street Lynchburg. He has on hand a good assortment of excellent Mahogany, Cherry and Walnut . . ." Mrs. Watson also found Crandall listed as a member of the Lynchburg Rifles for a brief tour of duty in the summer of 1814 at the conclusion of the War of 1812. Crandall is one of three Lynchburg cabinetmakers of this period whose advertisements she has discovered; the others are Benjamin A. Winston (1804) and Peter Dougherty (1813). *Private collection, Lynchburg; photograph by Gene Campbell.*