

MADE IN MARYLAND

KEY TERMS

- Baltimore Manufacturing
- Fancy Furniture
- Federal Style
- Maryland Silver
- Trade



ARMCHAIR c. 1805

Wood, painted; with polychrome and gilt decoration

Makers: John Finlay (1771–1851) and Hugh Finlay (1781–1831)

Decorator: Francis Guy (1760–1820)

Gift of Lydia Howard de Roth and Nancy H. DeFord Venable, in Memory of their Mother, Lydia Howard DeFord; and Purchase Fund BMA 1966.26.6

CLOSE LOOKING

THE WILLOW BROOK CHAIR is part of a thirteen-piece suite of painted furniture, called “fancy furniture,” made in Baltimore at the turn of the nineteenth century. The set includes ten armchairs, two settees, and a marble-top table, all of which are part of the BMA collection. The furniture was made not for domestic use but for the Baltimore Dancing Assembly rooms, an exclusive club available by subscription to the area’s wealthiest residents whose fortunes came from the city’s booming import/export business. The assembly rooms, consisting of ball, supper, dressing, and card rooms, intended to encourage interactions for this social class in a private setting.¹



Willow Brook detail on chair rail

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

IN 1800, JOHN FINLAY WAS listed in the Baltimore City Directories as a painter on South Frederick Street near the Baltimore harbor. Though the Finlay's shop moved several times, it was always located in the cabinetmaking center of Baltimore bordered by Frederick, Baltimore, and Gay Streets. For the next three decades, city directories and newspaper ads record John and his brother Hugh Finlay as "fancy furniture manufacturers," painters, and coach makers. By 1819 they were also referred to as owners of a "fancy furniture warehouse." Ads noted that the furniture could be decorated with "views adjacent to the city," as was the Willow Brook chair. In the November 8, 1805, *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, the cabinetmaking Finlay brothers boasted their abilities to create furniture "of every description and all colors, gilt, ornamented and varnished in a stile not equaled on the continent."⁷

The Finlays's superior craftsmanship was highly sought after and helped Baltimore painted furniture receive national acclaim. At one time, their shop employed as many as sixty-eight artisans, including thirty men, twenty-five women, and thirteen boys. While the number of regional buyers was high, a great deal of fancy furniture crafted in Baltimore was made for export to the American South. Ads in newspapers as far away as New Orleans announced newly arrived shipments of Baltimore furniture for sale.

The highest achievement of the Finlays's career occurred in 1809, when architect Benjamin Latrobe hired the furniture makers to furnish the Oval Room of the White House. The Finlays created painted furniture after a design by Latrobe. Of the Oval Room furniture, only the drawings remain. The furniture was destroyed by the British when they set fire to the White House in 1814, during the War of 1812.

Each piece is painted with a vignette of a Baltimore-area home or public building. Willow Brook, a country retreat pictured on this chair, was built in 1799 by Thorowgood Smith, a wealthy merchant-ship owner and mayor of Baltimore. The home once stood west of Baltimore overlooking the city and the Patapsco River.² The image of Willow Brook was probably painted by English-born landscape artist Francis Guy. Called an "ornamenter," he was employed by cabinet makers John and Hugh Finlay to decorate these chairs.

Made of locally grown maple and ash woods, the chair's painted base color is black, though green, red, and chrome yellow were also popular choices for fancy furniture. Baltimore, in fact, was famous for its yellow pigment made of chromate of iron found in abundance seven miles north of the city on Falls Road.³ Painted furniture of locally felled wood was less expensive than imported mahogany. Similarly, gilt decoration made of pigment that resembles gold, such as that on the Willow Brook chair, cost less than three-dimensional mountings. Various gilt motifs, including oak leaves and curving vine decoration, contrast with delicate dots and heavy rectangular forms on each side of the Willow Brook image.

The chair's gently tapered legs and arms are slender, and the curve of the chair's back is echoed in the curve of the arms. From the front, the two painted medallions of bows and arrows lead the eye up the center of the chair to the elongated oval medallion of Willow Brook across the back rail. Painted green ribbons wind around the front legs that are rendered with alternating vertical stripes of dark and light color to give the appearance of a carved column. The seat of the chair is caned and would have been covered by a seat cushion, called a squab.

The shape and ornamentation of this chair have European precedents. The armchair is an American translation of the English and French style called Neoclassicism that was popular at the time. Neoclassical design elements included oak and laurel leaf decoration, cast metal ormolu, fluted columns, and bow and arrow motifs. The style developed, in part, following the excavations of ancient Roman cities such as Pompeii and Herculaneum and came to America through European design books and the import of European furniture.⁴ The American interpretation of Neoclassicism came to be known as the "Federal style," which was in vogue from approximately 1788–1825. Federal style, based on emblems of the democracies of ancient Greece and the republican values of Rome, perfectly suited a young America. This chair's painted decoration is a radical departure from the carved or inlaid treatment of European chairs of the period.

ART IN CONTEXT

BY 1803, BALTIMORE HAD BECOME the third largest city in America, surpassed only by New York and Philadelphia, due to the import/export business conducted through the bustling port. Grain from the Midwest came to Baltimore, was ground, and then was shipped to American and foreign ports. Sugar arrived from the Caribbean and was ground in Baltimore. From increased manufacturing and mercantilism emerged a new middle class with more disposable income and taste for fashionable goods such as fine furniture and expensive silver. These tastes were fed by a thriving community of artisans, including skilled cabinet makers such as the Finlay brothers and master silversmiths including Charles Louis Boehme and Samuel Kirk.

New wealth also meant an increased market for larger, upscale homes, which meant an even greater market for luxury goods to fill them. Some of these homes dotting the outskirts of the city were painted on the Finlay furniture suite. Sadly, only two homes survive. They are Homewood, built by Charles Carroll of Carrollton, and Mount Clare, home of Charles Carroll, the former's cousin. The Finlay suite has become a record of Baltimore houses and public buildings that no longer exist. The Willow Brook residence was demolished in 1965. However, the wood and plaster work, flooring, windows, and other architectural elements of the oval drawing room and entrance hall were restored and installed at The Baltimore Museum of Art.⁶



LADY'S WRITING DESK 1800–1810
Mahogany, mahogany veneer, satinwood inlay; secondary woods: satinwood, tulip poplar, red cedar; paint, reverse-painted glass, brass
Gift of Maria Groome Tracy, Jamesville, New York
BMA 2000.378

RELATED ARTWORK

CREATED BY AN UNKNOWN Baltimore cabinet maker, the *Lady's Writing Desk* (above, right) is an example of American taste for English design that continued even after the American Revolution. The maker of this lady's desk followed the 1793 specifications of English cabinetmaker Thomas Sheraton (1751–1806). "[It] is intended for writing on, and to hold a few small books in the back of the upper part... at each end... are formed small cabinets of drawers, & c." Rolling casters instead of feet allow for easy movement, perhaps to take advantage of changing sources of light.⁹

The figural elements are created with rare *églomisé* (reverse painting on glass). Temperance and Justice appear in the two side panels, and Diana and Endymion are featured between them. The latter two would have been considered perfect subjects for a lady's desk as Diana is the Greco-Roman goddess of women and childbirth. Her relationship with the handsome youth Endymion, whom she kisses every night before returning to the heavens, would have added a particularly romantic touch to the decoration.



Diana cradles Endymion in this detail from the *Lady's Writing Desk*.

WHEN JOSEPH BRUFF DIED IN 1785, his silversmithing tools and shop were willed to his son Thomas, who was the fourth generation of the family to work as a silversmith on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.¹⁰ Thomas made this spoon (right) which has a relatively spare design consisting of an oval handle engraved with the initials JGA that tapers to an oval bowl. The bowl is misshapen, probably because of heavy use.

The BMA collection includes 225 spoons, far outnumbering the collection's forks. Why so many spoons? Spoon-like scoops are the oldest known eating utensils and were fashioned originally of shell or wood. Prior to the late 1600s, two-pronged forks were used primarily for cooking and serving meat. Spoons and knives could essentially handle anything a human hand could not. It was not until approximately 1700 that forks with three or four tines for eating appeared.¹¹ Families in later centuries might have dozens of teaspoons because serving tea was very much a social custom.

WEALTHY BALTIMORE merchants bought expensive items such as silver flatware and serving pieces to furnish their homes. The possession of silver was a show of taste and wealth, but it served a dual purpose. Because a silver service could be melted and recast in the latest style, it was a practical investment and a way of storing wealth.¹²

Baltimore was home to innovative silversmiths whose work ranged from the clean lines of this classically inspired soup tureen (next page, top left) to the highly decorated, raised surface called *repoussé*, represented by the "Gilmor" pitcher, described below.

Born in Philadelphia, Charles Louis Boehme moved to Baltimore at the age of twenty-four and became one of Baltimore's most masterful and prolific silversmiths. He had a shop in the silvermaking district of the city. The soup tureen is an example of American interest in classical forms. The tureen shape is reminiscent of a Greek *kantharos*, a vessel that has two large vertical handles and a stemmed foot. The tureen's lid is crowned by an urn finial. The piece's smooth surfaces are in direct contrast to the rich ornamentation of the Samuel Kirk "Gilmor" pitcher, discussed below, that was made only a few decades later.¹³

SILVERSMITH SAMUEL KIRK arrived in Baltimore from Philadelphia in 1815, at the age of twenty-one. By the time the Gilmor pitcher (next page, right) was made around 1840, Kirk had become Maryland's leading silver maker and achieved international fame. His work became so sought after that by 1828 more than ninety percent of the silver assayed (tested for purity) by the Baltimore assay Office was Kirk silver.¹⁴ Once the silver was tested, an assay mark was impressed upon it.



TABLESPOON c. 1795

Silver

Maker: Thomas Bruff

Born: Easton, Maryland c. 1760

Died: probably Chestertown, Maryland after 1803

Gift of Virginia P.B. White, Baltimore

BMA 1935.33.3

**TUREEN** (left) c. 1800

Silver

Maker: Charles Louis Boehme

Born: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 1774

Died: Baltimore, Maryland 1868

Gift of Virginia P.B. White, Baltimore

BMA 1933.54.42

"GILMOR" PITCHER (below) 1835–1843

Sterling silver

Maker: Samuel Kirk

Born: Doylestown, Pennsylvania 1793

Died: Baltimore, Maryland 1872

Purchased as the gift of the Young Friends of the

American Wing, in honor of Catherine Stewart

Thomas, Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts,

1997–2005, BMA 2005.34

The "Gilmor" pattern is associated with the famous wealthy Baltimore art patron Robert Gilmor, Jr. (1774–1848), one of America's first serious art collectors, who played an important role in the cultural life of Baltimore. Though Gilmor never owned the pitcher, Samuel Kirk paid tribute to the collector by naming the piece after him. The body of the pitcher is joined to a handle supporting a bird and a hound, and its spout is in the shape of a bearded mask. The ornate body was hammered from the reverse side in a technique called *repoussé* to create flower and vegetal designs in low relief. The style was so popular that it was eponymously named Baltimore Repoussé and found its way into wealthy homes up and down the East Coast.



¹ John Thomas Scharf, *History of Baltimore City and County, From the Earliest Period to the Present Day*; Including Biographical Sketches of Their Representative Men (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881), 679.

² William Voss Elder III, *Maryland Period Rooms: The Baltimore Museum of Art* (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1987), 21.

³ Lance Humphries, "Provenance, Patronage, and Perception: The Morris Suite of Baltimore Painted Furniture," in *American Furniture*, ed. Luke Beckerdite. (Milwaukee, WI: Chipstone Foundation, 2003), 142.

⁴ Philip D. Zimmerman, *American Federal Furniture and Decorative Arts from the Watson Collection* (Columbus, Georgia: The Columbus Museum, 2004), 9.

⁵ Elder, *Maryland Period Rooms: The Baltimore Museum of Art*, 22.

⁶ William Voss Elder III and Jayne E. Stokes, *American Furniture 1680–1880: From the Collection of The Baltimore Museum of Art* (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1987), 45.

⁷ Elder, *Baltimore Painted Furniture 1800–1840*, 11.

⁸ <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/grecian-couch-44352>

⁹ James Abbott, "Recent Accession: Baltimore Lady's Writing Desk," *BMA Today*, July/August 2001, 8.

¹⁰ Goldsborough, *Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Maryland Silver in the Collection of The Baltimore Museum of Art*, (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1975), 136.

¹¹ Sarah Goldsmith, "The Rise of the Fork" http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/design/2012/06/the_history_of_the_fork_when_we_started_using_forks_and_how_their_design_changed_over_time_.html

¹² Esther Singleton, *The Collecting of Antiques* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1926), 137.

¹³ Goldsborough, *Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Maryland Silver in the Collection of The Baltimore Museum of Art*, 82.

¹⁴ Goldsborough, *Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Maryland Silver in the Collection of The Baltimore Museum of Art*, 136.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1:

Exploring Baltimore painted furniture

Grades: 3–5

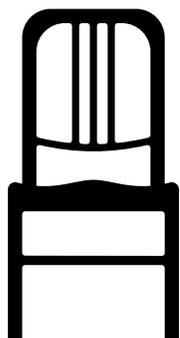
Subjects: English Language Arts, History/Social Studies, Visual Arts

Within a unit on Maryland history, students will look closely at the Willow Brook armchair, using the following questions to guide their observations. Teacher will record student responses on a white/black board.

- Describe the art elements—line, color, shape, texture, space, and form—that you see in this work (including the form of the chair and the painted image).
- Why might someone paint an image of a building on a chair?
- What kind of person do you think might own this chair? Explain your response.

Teacher will share with students information on the history of the Willow Brook armchair, and information on Willow Brook itself. In pairs, students will discuss what buildings or sites in their community would be suitable to decorate a chair for their classroom.

Teacher will make outlines of life-sized chairs from a frontal view on butcher paper and cut it along the lines, ensuring that each paper chair has enough space for decoration. (Please see illustration below.) Each student pair will receive a paper chair. On separate pieces of paper or blank index cards (no more than 4" x 6"), individual students will then use colored pencils to draw sites from their community. They will then attach these images to the chair. Each paper chair will then be placed on the wall of the classroom and pairs will present their work to the entire class, sharing their choices of the sites and the artistic choices they made to depict them.



ACTIVITY 2:

Creating an advertisement for Maryland silver

Grades: 3–5

Subjects: English Language Arts, History/Social Studies, Visual Arts

Students will examine the *Tureen* and the “*Gilmor*” *Pitcher*. In teams of four, they will brainstorm as many words as they can to describe each of the objects. Each team will then share their words with the class. Teacher will record all words in a Venn Diagram on a white/black board to show the differences and similarities identified by students.

Teacher will share the information on the *Tureen* and “*Gilmor*” *Pitcher*, including information on the silversmiths who created the objects. In pairs, students will select one of the silver objects. They will then collaboratively write a newspaper advertisement for the object of their choice, using their previous knowledge of Maryland history and the information from this resource. Using the descriptive words recorded on the Venn Diagram, they should create a persuasive and descriptive advertisement to appeal to the customers of the day.

ACTIVITY 3:

Connecting Maryland products of the past and present

Grades: 3–5

Subjects: English Language Arts, History/Social Studies, Visual Arts

Within a unit on Maryland history, students will look closely at the Willow Brook armchair, using the questions below as guidelines for their discussion. Teacher will record all student responses on the white/black board.

- Describe the art elements—line, color, shape, texture, form, and space—you see in this work.
- Why might someone paint an image of a building on a chair?
- What kind of person do you think might own this chair? Explain your response.

Teacher will share with students the information about the Willow Brook armchair, the local resources used to make the armchair, and its popularity in the national market as far away as New Orleans using information and images of Maryland silver provided in this resource. Working in teams of four, student groups will select a product made in Baltimore and sold nationally and/or internationally. Using print publications, online resources, and correspondence with businesses, students will research what the products do, local resources (if any) used to make the products, where they are sold, how they are transported to national and/or international markets, and what customers think of the products. Teams will then share their research in an oral report to the class. Teacher will follow up with a class discussion on the differences between how products are made and sold in Baltimore now versus when the Willow Brook armchair was made.

STANDARDS AND CURRICULUM

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts

Grade 4

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.SL.4.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.W.4.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.W.4.7. Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

Grade 5

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.W.5.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.W.5.7. Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

MARYLAND STATE CURRICULUM

History/Social Studies

Grade 4

4.B.1.b. Give examples of the kinds of goods and services produced in Maryland during different historical periods.

Visual Arts

Grade 4

1.2.b. Create and describe artworks that communicate mood and point of view.
2.1.a. Analyze selected works of art and describe how different artists express ideas and feelings about the human experience.
2.2.a. Identify technologies, processes, and materials used to create visual art.
2.3.a. Compare selected artworks from different times or cultures to determine similarities and differences in them, content, form, and style.

Grade 5

1.2.b. Create and describe thematic artworks that communicate personal narratives.
2.1.a. Analyze and interpret the content of selected works of art and compare different ways artists express ideas and feelings about life experiences.
2.2.a. Identify artistic styles and forms of expression.



Armchair, c. 1805, Wood, painted; with polychrome and gilt decoration
Makers: John Finlay (1771–1851) and Hugh Finlay (1781–1831)
Decorator: Francis Guy (1760–1820)
Gift of Lydia Howard de Roth and Nancy H. DeFord Venable, in Memory of
their Mother, Lydia Howard DeFord; and Purchase Fund, BMA 1966.26.6



Lady's Writing Desk, 1800–1810, Mahogany, mahogany veneer, satinwood inlay; secondary woods: satinwood, tulip poplar, red cedar; paint, reverse-painted glass, brass
Gift of Maria Groome Tracy, Jamesville, New York, BMA 2000.378



Tablespoon, c. 1795, Silver
Maker: Thomas Bruff
Born: Easton, Maryland c. 1760
Died: probably Chestertown, Maryland after 1803
Gift of Virginia P.B. White, Baltimore, BMA 1935.33.3



Tureen, c. 1800, Silver
Maker: Charles Louis Boehme
Born: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 1774, Died: Baltimore, Maryland 1868
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"Gilmor" Pitcher, 1835–1843, Sterling silver

Maker: Samuel Kirk

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