

# NEW ENGLAND Antiques JOURNAL

April 2010

The Intimacies of Daguerreotypes



A Master of Philadelphia Windsors • Silver in Colonial New England

# The “Signatures” of Joseph Henzey

## The craftsmanship of a Philadelphia Windsor chair maker

Herb Lapp

*Editor's Note: This article is based on an earlier article on Herb Lapp's research into sack-back Windsors, originally published in Period Furniture Maker, 2008. In the original article, Lapp described a data analysis model based on detailed measurements, a complement to visual study when identifying Joseph Henzey's unbranded chairs. The work was based on a close study of all Henzey's chairs in Philadelphia's Carpenters' and Independence Halls, along with chairs at Pook and Pook, Inc. and Wm. Bunch auctions in southeastern Pennsylvania. J.F.*

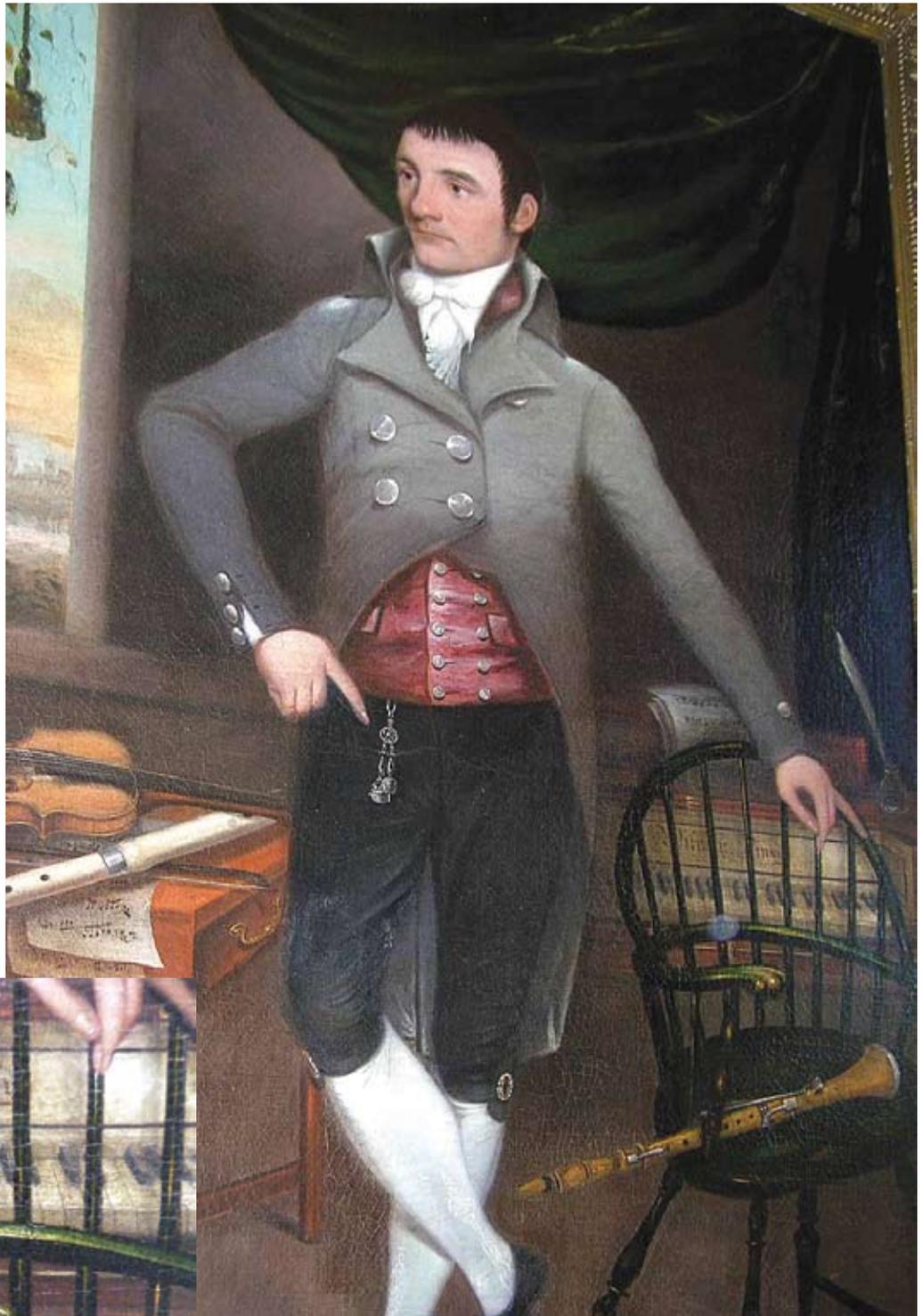
**E**ighteenth-century Philadelphia established itself as the Windsor chair capitol of the colonies, and its craftsmen took the British design to new heights, making the Windsor a truly American furniture art form. Windsor chairs are different from other furniture built during the colonial era. The styles of case furniture,



A sack-back Windsor with paw handholds at the Historical Society of Berks County, but was it by Henzey or Trumble? Both were excellent carvers, both produced beautiful knuckles on chairs for their more demanding customers, and both used paw handholds on their more economical chairs following the example of Thomas Gilpin nearly 20 years earlier on his famous comb-backs. Closer study of the chair revealed it to be made by Trumble.

at least when seen through the eye of a Windsor chair maker like myself, seem static, only slowly changing. Windsor style, on the other hand, changed dramatically. The Windsor chair is dynamic and was produced in large numbers, which meant that the chairs evolved quickly and exhibited many styles in a comparatively short period of time.

Joseph Henzey was one of the best Windsor chair makers, and brought the form to its apex, particularly the sack-back. He did not, however, invent the American sack-back style. That credit goes most probably to Francis Trumble, nearly a generation before Henzey. The sack-back, like other Windsor styles, is a furniture art form that generates eye motion as we look at it. First the eye takes in the entire chair. It then moves to the top of the bow; from there it quickly runs down along the bow to the ends of the arm. In this case, we see a carved knuckle. That is, in large part, why viewers see the knuckle on the chair arm in Whitman's portrait of Daniel Rose as being so distinctive.

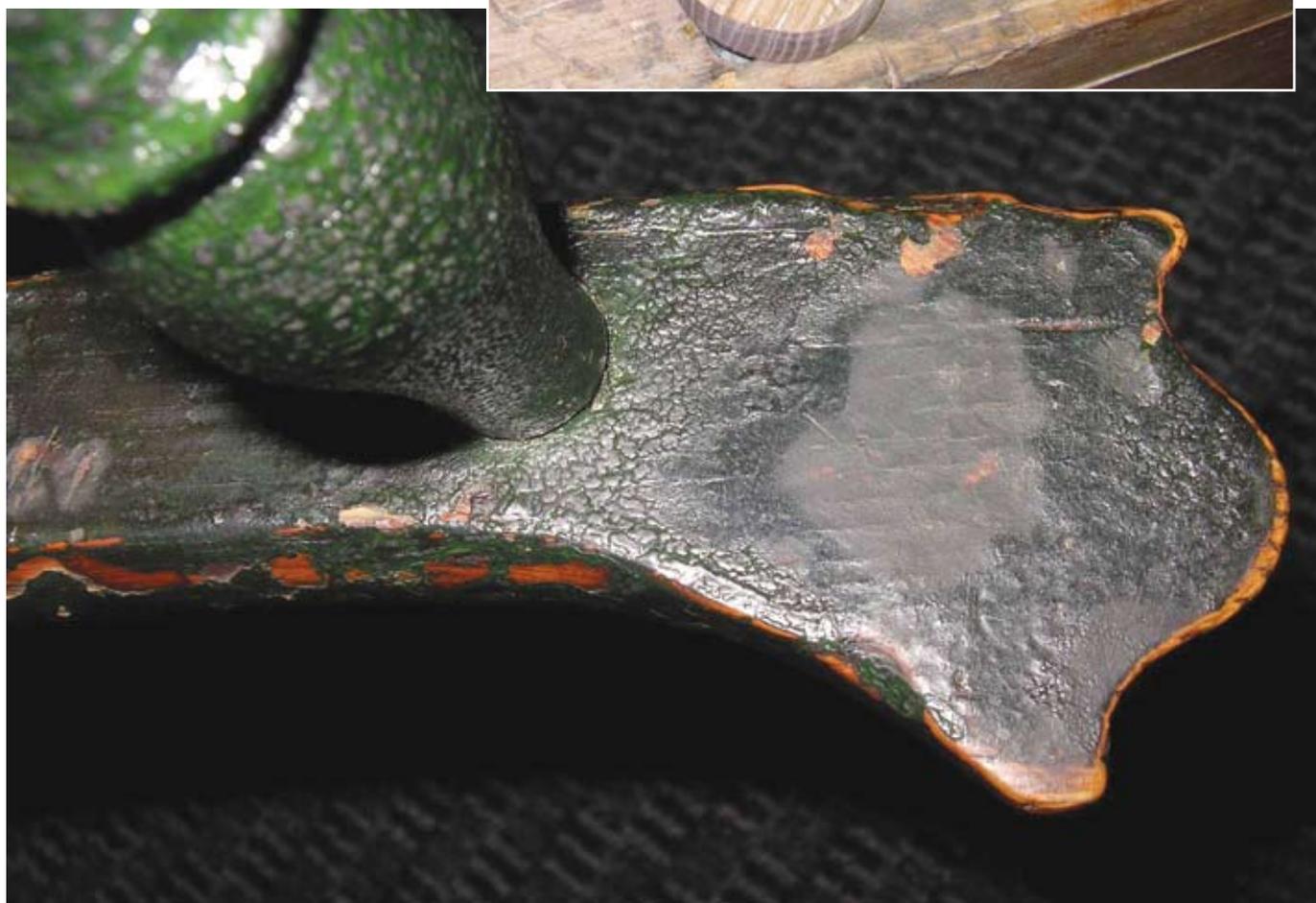
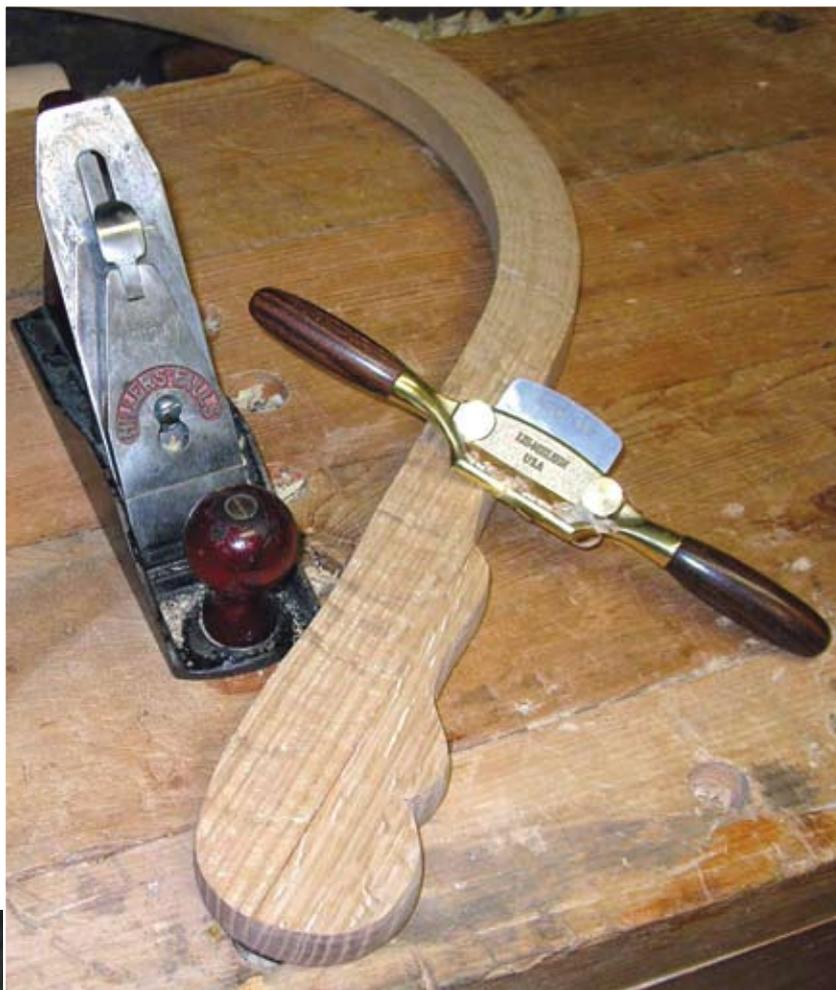


Portrait of Pennsylvania Revolutionary War hero Daniel Rose, 1795, by William Witman (1749-1827). Daniel Rose was a clock and instrument maker in Reading, Penn., and is shown among his prized possessions, proudly standing next to his sack-back Windsor chair, no doubt made by Henzey, and probably existing today only in this portrait. Witman most probably painted this chair with such attention to detail because it was so exquisite. By permission of the Historical Society of Berks County.

How does Rose's chair compare with Henzey examples that survive? Henzey's sack-back style was at its best when he added carved knuckles, which, incidentally, are found on all of the Carpenters' Hall chairs. His simpler paw handholds undoubtedly allowed him to price chairs less expensively to compete with his competitors. Interestingly, not many of these simpler designs were found in my study, which leads me to believe that the paw chairs were more likely made for export and were shipped out of Philadelphia. Most discriminating local Philadelphia customers seemed willing to pay more to own his more stylish model. Each pair of carved knuckles was precisely executed from chair to chair, remarkable craftsmanship even on single chairs not made as part of a set. One issue has been found dealing with his carved knuckles; the lower glue block on many eventually fell off.

**RIGHT:**  
Reproducing a paw handhold in the author's workshop.

**BELOW:**  
The underside of a knuckle handhold missing its glued block – a common loss.





Details of a Henzey carved knuckle. By permission of the Carpenters' Company of the City and County of Philadelphia.

What else makes Henzey's sack-backs so special? He used superior, more complicated mortise and tenon joinery to affix the bow to the arm.



Henzey's seven-spindle sack-back with carved knuckles was his mid-range sack-back offering. This was a very popular design. He pulled out the stops, achieving even higher levels of style when he made commissions for his nine-spindle masterpieces. In his nine-spindle chairs, he also added another small spindle under the arms, which is an indication of his sense of style, since it was not structurally necessary; it was there for style alone. His nine-spindle chair is exceptionally symmetrical, while providing a rich and stately appearance compared to his simpler offering. When viewed against the seven-spindle design, the nine-spindle appears to be much more complete.

Henzey's sense of style motivated him to sculpt his bows where they run down to meet the arm, removing just enough wood to add grace to the robust Philadelphia Windsor chair style. This gives the bow a more elegant, three-dimensional form that brings style and grace to the chair not seen in those from other regions.



**LEFT:**  
Typical Henzey seven-spindle sack back with carved knuckles.

**ABOVE:**  
A Henzey nine-spindle sack back with carved knuckles and original paint. From the collection of Dr. & Mrs. Donald Shelley. Pook & Pook, Inc., Downingtown, PA.

**INSET:**  
The subtle sculpting of the bow just before it meets the arm, a typical finishing touch by Henzey.

## Seat and legs

A little-noticed detail is his deepened seat saddle. Typically it is at least an inch deep, making his chairs among the most comfortable to sit in; so important for a wooden chair.

The undercarriage on his chairs also expresses his highly developed Windsor chair style among the conservative Philadelphia Quaker chairmakers. Henzey's leg turnings are very similar to those made by Trumble, but Henzey used a more dramatic leg geometry, making his chairs far more exciting. Henzey's chairs display undercarriage boldness using different leg rake and splay angles. Henzey's work says "I make chairs that have an attitude," while his competitors were just making a chair.

## Child's Windsor

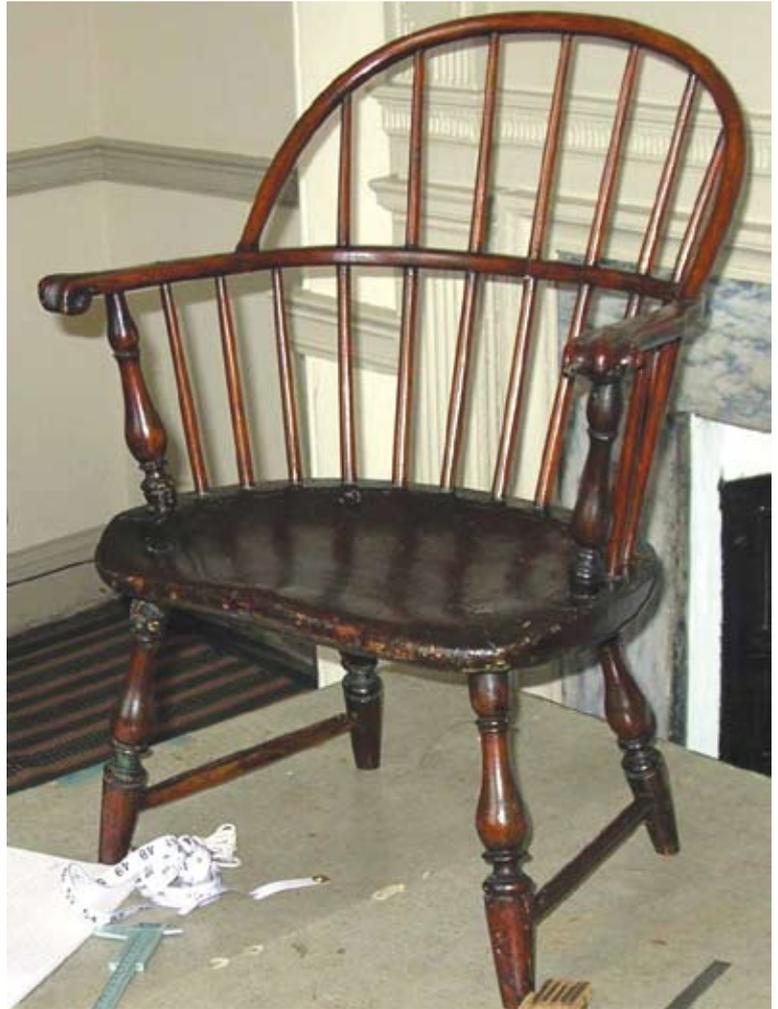
Henzey made a child's sack-back, a very demanding chair to make. I found and studied two examples. I believe he made both of them during the Revolutionary period. The first child's chair was found at Philadelphia's Fairmount Park Lemon Hill mansion, and it retains a trace of the original verdigris paint under an arm. Henzey, like his peers, made his own verdigris by grinding copper acetate and mixing it with linseed oil. A second surprise discovery of another child's sack-back occurred on a visit to Pook and Pook, Inc. when they auctioned Dr. and Mrs. Donald Shelley's Americana collection in April 2007. This chair was branded but the brand wasn't discernable by the naked eye. Subjective and objective analysis using the model previously described revealed that Henzey made this chair. Under-seat photographic analysis revealed the presence of Henzey's brand.

Henzey's challenge was to scale down the adult chair to proportions suitable for a child. All the details we've seen in the adult chair are evident in these smaller versions, including the carved knuckles. I have made three reproductions of this chair and found each time that it was much harder to make than the adult version. Bending the bows and shaping parts with smaller radii and drilling holes in a thinner bow are some of the reasons child's chairs are much more challenging for the maker. I suspect the customers who commissioned these children's chairs were very special to Henzey to warrant this degree of effort and quality.

Henzey was indeed not only one of Philadelphia's premiere Windsor chair makers: He was also one of the best of all time. His craftsmanship helped define the most popular Windsor chair style for both children's as well as adult forms.

Copyright 2009. All photographs by the author.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Herb Lapp is an independent researcher and Windsor chair maker who lives in Southern Berks County, Penn. Today he is researching the life of eighteenth-century Philadelphia merchant miller, Thomas Livezey, started by the discovery and study of Livezey's 1750 Philadelphia comb-back chair descended through his family now exhibited at the Germantown Historical Society. He can be reached at [hlapp@dejazzd.com](mailto:hlapp@dejazzd.com).



The Henzey child's chair found at the Fairmount Park Lemon Hill Mansion in the author's workshop. By permission of the Colonial Dames, Philadelphia, Chapter II.



The brand and a remnant of original verdigris paint on the chair.



Child's sack-back. Pook & Pook, Inc.

# ROGALLERY AUCTIONS.COM

live & timed art auctions  
in-house shipping & framing  
easy to bid, easy to win!

seeking consignments  
for upcoming sales

800.888.1063  
718.937.0901  
art@rogallery.com

**SALVADOR DALI**  
Michelin Slave  
Bronze Sculpture

Gallery by Appt.  
47-15 36th Street  
LIC, NY 11101

over 5000 artists  
paintings, prints, photos, & sculpture



## RT Deliveries

SPECIALIZING IN THE MOVING AND  
DELIVERY OF FINE ANTIQUES & ART

— SERVING THE —  
Eastern seaboard and beyond

*20 years in business*  
*Fully insured*

351 Sanford Road | Wells, Maine 04090

**207.205.1254**



**APRIL 24 & 25 · CONCORD ARMORY**  
91 EVERETT STREET · CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS  
Saturday 10-5 · Sunday 11-4

Produced by Marvin Getman of  
New England Antique Shows  
(781) 862-4039  
www.antiquingconcord.com

WEEKEND PASS - \$7  
Save \$1 off each weekend pass  
with ad (limit 2 tickets)  
Special Sunday price - only \$5 with ad