



*Lesser Known Treasures of the*  
**The Moffatt-Ladd  
House and Garden**  
*Portsmouth, New Hampshire<sup>1</sup>*

by Barbara McLean Ward



The elegant Georgian mansion known as the Moffatt-Ladd House (Fig. 1) was built by merchant John Moffatt in 1763 for his only son, an aspiring young merchant. The house was occupied by six generations of the Moffatt and Ladd families, including Katharine Moffatt Whipple and her husband William Whipple, one of New Hampshire's three signers of the Declaration of Independence; John Moffatt's great granddaughter Maria Ladd, and his great, great, grandson Alexander Hamilton Ladd. Several rooms are furnished to reflect occupancy by the Moffatts and Whipples who lived in the house from 1764 through 1814. The first Ladds to live in the house, Maria T. H. Ladd and her husband Alexander Ladd made numerous changes to the house. They updated the Dining Room and Parlor, and installed French scenic wallpaper in the Great Hall and main staircase (Fig. 2).

The Dining Room, Great Hall, and Parlor are now furnished to reflect the Ladd period of occupancy, as is an upstairs bed chamber. All include some furnishings that belonged to the Ladds and prominent local families. Among the most recognized examples of Portsmouth owned furniture are the set of London-made Chinese Chippendale furniture that belonged to New Hampshire's last royal governor.<sup>2</sup> A kettle stand (Fig. 3), attributed to the immigrant London craftsman Robert Harrold is another example of the impact of the London rococo style on Portsmouth taste. The arched stretchers and central pierced finial—distinctive to Portsmouth—and the sophisticated detail of the cluster-column legs distinguish this stand as one of the finest expressions of Portsmouth furniture in the rococo style. Other items in the collection, however, are less well known, and these are featured here.



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**Fig. 1:** Northeast or Front Facade, Moffatt-Ladd House, Portsmouth, NH. Built between 1760 and 1763 by Michael Whidden III, the structure was the first three-story domestic building in Portsmouth. The entrance porch was probably added to the house about 1820. Photography by Richard Haynes.

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**Fig. 2:** The Great Hall was well suited to lavish entertaining. The fluted, vase, and spiral balusters are characteristic of Portsmouth high-style houses of the mid to late eighteenth century. The carved elements of the woodwork are documented to Ebenezer Dearing. The Ladds added wallpaper by Dufour of Paris in the "Vues d'Italie" pattern about 1820. The "Grecian" sofa was made by Portsmouth cabinet-maker Langley Boardman for his own use. Photography by Richard Haynes.

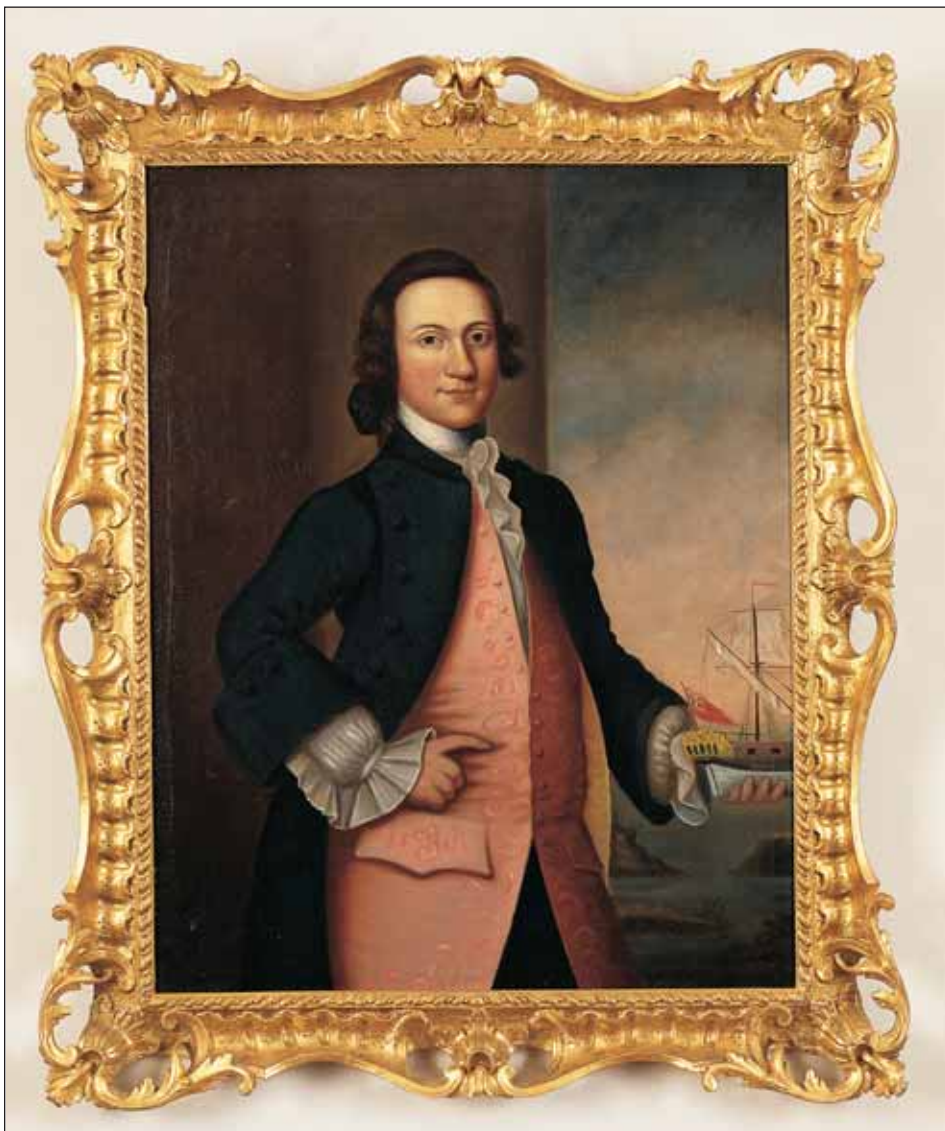
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**Fig. 3:** Kettle Stand, attributed to Robert Harrold (w. 1765–1792), Portsmouth, NH, 1765–1775. Mahogany with white pine and cherry glue blocks. H. 26 $\frac{1}{8}$ , W. 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ , D. 12 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. Promised gift. Photography by J. David Bohl.



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Tea Table. Salem, MA, circa. 1740–65. Mahogany, pine blocks, maple or cherry medial brace. H: 26½, W. 26¾, D. 18 in. Gift of Miss Anna Stearns. Photography by Ralph Morang. 1988.14.

This table has exceptionally fine attenuated cabriole legs and delicate pad feet. There is no evidence that the skirt was ever decorated with pendant drops, and the applied knee brackets are original. The shape of the skirt relates to some Portsmouth examples with splayed legs.



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Attributed to John Greenwood (American, 1727–1792), Samuel Cutt Moffatt (1738–1780), circa 1751. Oil on canvas, carved and gilt frame, H. 45, W. 36⅞ in. Gift of Marguerite L. Odiorne. Photography by Richard Haynes. 1977.93.

John Greenwood painted several members of the Moffatt family during his sojourn in Portsmouth.<sup>3</sup> Greenwood chose to paint young Samuel Moffatt holding a ship in his hand in reference to the substantial shipping concerns that Samuel would soon inherit from his father. The rendering of the ship is particularly interesting. Held up against the background of the harbor, the ship appears simultaneously as a model or toy, and as an actual sailing vessel. Unfortunately, Samuel Moffatt's business affairs did not go well, and in 1768 he was forced to flee to the Dutch island of St. Eustatius to escape his creditors. The contents of his house were inventoried and sold (to his father and his friends, who returned them to the house) providing excellent documentation of the furnishings of the house just five years after it was built.



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Secretary Bookcase, Portsmouth, NH, circa 1805–1820. Mahogany, with ebony and light wood inlays, mahogany and birch veneers, birch and pine, and original brass hardware. H. 85½, H. to top of eagle finial 95, W 71, D. 20¾ in. Gift of Mrs. Albert A. Clemons. Photography by J. David Bohl. 1977.114.

This imposing secretary bookcase has the arched Gothic glazed doors characteristic of Portsmouth examples, and simple pendant bellflower inlay like that found on some furniture from the community. The central eagle finial is in remarkable condition, and although the other finials have some repairs, all appear to be original, as does the brass hardware. The turned legs, however, have lost as much as one or two inches of their original height. Although this example does not have a family history, a similar example sold by Israel Sack is said to have been a Ladd piece, and late nineteenth-century photographs show a large breakfront desk of this type in the Great Hall. The script initials “WNH,” which are painted in white on the back, are perhaps those of an early owner who has not yet been identified.



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Side Chair, attributed to Langley Boardman, Portsmouth, NH, circa 1800–1810. Mahogany and mahogany veneer. H. 35¾, W. 20½, Seat Height 17¾, Seat Depth 17¾ in. Gift of Mrs. Theodore Lyman Storer (Katharine Ladd Storey Storer). Photography by Ralph Morang. 1977.13.

Several sets of chairs in this distinctive style are documented to Portsmouth and Portsmouth-area families. George Ffrost of Durham purchased a set of six side chairs and two arm chairs in this design from Langley Boardman in 1806. Other well-documented sets were owned in the Rundlet, Coe, and Wendell families. Like the Ffrost and Rundlet family chairs, this example, which descended in the Ladd family, has matched mahogany veneer on the crest rail. Joseph and Temperance Coe of Durham also owned a Portsmouth settee that was recently donated to the Moffatt-Ladd House by Sarah P. Ford in memory of her mother Serena Coe Paine Hurlburt. At the time of this article’s publication, the settee was undergoing restoration.



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Needlework Picture, worked by Mary Park Ladd while in school in Salem, MA, circa 1766–1776. Silk on silk, H. 10½, W. 15¾ in. Gift of Dorothy B. Hammond in memory of Roland Bowman Hammond, Jr., great, great, great grandson of the maker. Photography by J. David Bohl. 1999.13.

Mary (Park) Ladd (1756–1824) was the daughter of Joseph and Alice (Boyd) Park of Windham, New Hampshire. After her schooling in Salem, she married Eliphalet Ladd of Meredith, N.H., and lived there for the remainder of her life. Threads visible on the back of this embroidery reveal that the woman’s dress was originally a bright salmon pink, and the man’s waistcoat a golden yellow. The trees were stitched in hues ranging from a deep Kelly green to a soft yellow-green. The wool of the lambs is rendered in French knots, and the remainder of the picture is worked entirely in satin stitch. This “long-stitch” style is one of the hallmarks of Salem needlework of this period. Betty Ring suggests that the originator of the style may have been Abigail Fowler (1701–1771). Other teachers under whose tutelage Mary Park may have worked include Anstis Phippen (1724–1782) and Susannah Becket Babbage (1714–1804).



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Dressing Table or Server, Portsmouth, NH, circa 1800–1810. Mahogany with light wood inlays. H. 36¾, W. 41½, D. 22½ in. Gift of Isabel Marvin King (Mrs. Archer E. King, Jr.). Photography by J. David Bohl. 1993.4.

According to the donor, this dressing table was among the furnishings of Langley Boardman’s Middle Street mansion when her father, William Edward Marvin, purchased the house from Boardman’s grandchildren in 1900. The dressing table has been variously attributed to Boardman and to the firm of Jonathan Judkins and William Senter (w. in partnership 1808–1826). The strongly contrasting veneers of the facade suggest the work of Judkins and Senter, while the history and delicately turned legs suggest an attribution to Boardman. This piece entered the collection after the publication of *Portsmouth Furniture* (1993).




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Lady's Desk, Portsmouth, NH, circa 1800–1810. Mahogany with bird's-eye maple veneer. H. 35, W, 29 $\frac{3}{8}$ , D. 17 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. Gift of Emily Sullivan Loughton Holman. Photography by J. David Bohl. 1994.2.

This desk is very close in form and ornament to a desk at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which is branded with the name “J Haven.” The owner was probably either Joseph (1757–1829) or John Haven (1766–1845) of Portsmouth, brothers of Nathaniel Haven (1762–1831), who was the father of Maria T.H. Ladd (1787–1861). It is conceivable that Maria owned a desk similar to this one. The beautiful bird's-eye maple veneered front makes this a particularly fine example. It differs from other known examples in that the drawer extends the entire width of the case and there are no sliding supports for the desktop. This desk descended in the family of John Loughton of Portsmouth and the Isles of Shoals. It entered the collection after the publication of *Portsmouth Furniture* (1993).

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Card table, Portsmouth, NH, 1805–1820. Mahogany, mahogany veneer, birch veneer; maple and white pine. H. 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ , W. 38 $\frac{1}{8}$ , D. 17 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. Gift of Mrs. Sherman Whipple in Memory of Mrs. Lucien B. Blough. Photography by Ralph Morang. 1977.83.

The design of the façade is characteristic of Portsmouth card tables in its use of contrasting veneers; though this arrangement is a bit more unusual. The inside of the back rail is branded “I. FOLSOM” indicating that the original owner of the table was probably Jonathan, Josiah, or Josiah Gilman Folsom. Owner-branded furniture from Portsmouth is relatively common in Portsmouth, with forty-eight brands having been identified. Jonathan Folsom (1785–1825) was by trade a joiner. He was born in Exeter, had a house in Portsmouth on Islington Street, invested in shipping, and was a member of the Friendly Fire Society. Josiah Folsom (1763–1837) worked in Portsmouth as a chairmaker from 1788 to 1812. 

The Moffatt-Ladd House is owned and operated by The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America in the State of New Hampshire (NSCDA-NH) and is a National Historic Landmark. It has been open as a museum under the auspices of NSCDA-NH since 1911. For information call 603.436.8221, or visit [www.moffatladd.org](http://www.moffatladd.org).

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<sup>1</sup> This article was prepared with the assistance of Gerald W.R. Ward, Cheryl E. Cullimore, and Stephanie Rohwer. The author would like to acknowledge Nancy D. Goss for her work over the years in building and researching the collection. Many of these objects came to the museum due to her efforts. See also Brock Jobe et al, *Portsmouth Furniture: Masterworks from the New Hampshire Seacoast* (Boston: SPNEA, 1993); the Sack Archive of Portsmouth Furniture; Betty Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers & Pictorial Needlework, 1650–1850*, Vol. I [New England] (New York: Knopf, 1993), 100–105.

<sup>2</sup> The chairs were profiled the 6th Anniversary issue (January-February 2006) of *Antiques & Fine Art*, 278–279.

<sup>3</sup> Greenwood's portraits of John Moffatt, Katharine Cutt Moffatt, and Katharine Moffatt Whipple are in the collections of the Moffatt-Ladd house; Elizabeth Moffatt Sherburne's portrait is in the Yale University Art Gallery.

