



Discoveries from the Field

A Charleston Linen Press?

BY JOHN SHERRER AND RUSSELL BUSKIRK

A previously unknown early nineteenth-century furniture form from Charleston, South Carolina, was recently discovered over 114 miles away in an unassuming 1930s Columbia, South Carolina, neighborhood. Research is currently underway to identify the cabinetmaker, believed to be one of the Scottish artisans working in Charleston during the Federal period.

Initially, the piece appears simply to be a standard regional linen press. Closer inspection, however, reveals it to be a variation of the form. What appear to be four half-width drawers over two full-width drawers, in actuality enclose a surprising combination: The upper left dressing drawer is fitted with a ratcheted looking glass and covered compartments; to the right, behind the double faux

fronts, is a diminutive secretary complete with an inlaid prospect drawer and four small drawers above four valenced pigeonholes. More typical of a linen press are the five linen drawers that rest within the piece's upper case.

The upper section is crowned by a richly decorated cornice with arched center tablet featuring a stylized inlaid heart flanked by inlaid oval floral paterae. (The oval paterae appear to be imported; the heart locally made. An usual feature, the heart could symbolize a wedding union or gift.) Primary woods consist of mahogany, mahogany veneer, Jamaican ebony, and holly; secondary woods are white pine, red cedar, and yellow poplar. While its brass drawer pulls are original, the urn finials were installed during recent conservation and are based on

patterns from related presses. To view this apparently unique treasure, visit Historic Columbia Foundation, where it is on display within the circa-1823 Robert Mills House.

For more information call 803.252.7742 or visit www.historiccolumbia.org. The Robert Mills House is located at 1616 Blanding Street, Columbia, SC. @

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Photography by Russell Buskirk.