

Posset Pot, 1628–1651. Southwark, Montague Close, or Pickleherring Pottery, London, England. Tin-glazed earthenware, 8¼ x 9¾ x 7½ inches (21 x 24.8 x 19.1 cm). The Bayou Bend Collection; gift of Katharine Prentis Murphy. B.59.128. Photography by Miguel Flores-Vianna.

In 1959, Ima Hogg enlisted her great friend and fellow collector Katharine Prentis Murphy to assist as she embarked upon creating a historic interior to display the earliest objects at Bayou Bend. Mrs. Murphy began making gifts for the room. When she sent down a pair of andirons, Miss Hogg protested, “Now, let us have an understanding about them at once! If they are to go into the room I am going to buy them! Please, Katharine, dear, don't embarrass me by giving me so many things.... This room is to be in your honor and I can't think of having you supply the things which I would want to place there anyhow! It is my greatest pleasure!” Among the pieces Mrs. Murphy gave for the room was this great, early London posset pot, which would become, and remains, the focal point of the British pottery in the museum's collection. Upon the interior's completion, Miss Hogg named it the Murphy Room in homage to her friend.



BY MICHAEL K. BROWN
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BAYOU BEND

CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS

In 1957, the philanthropist Miss Ima Hogg (1882–1975) donated her mansion, Bayou Bend, and her collection of American decorative arts and paintings to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Located in one of Houston's his-

toric neighborhoods, the elegant 1920s home is surrounded by fourteen acres of landscaped gardens and natural woodlands. The collection is rooted in Miss Hogg's idea of providing a bridge to

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High Chest of Drawers, 1700–1730, Boston. Black walnut, burlled walnut veneer, brass; aspen, birch, eastern white pine, hemlock, soft maple, 68¼ x 40¼ x 22¼ inches (173.4 x 102.2 x 56.5 cm). The Bayou Bend Collection; gift of Miss Ima Hogg. B.69.43. Photography by Miguel Flores-Vianna.

Ima Hogg recognized the William and Mary, or Early Baroque, high chest as the quintessential furniture form of the period. By 1953, when she began to consider this example, she already owned two others but questioned if they were of the quality she was trying to establish for the Bayou Bend Collection. Between May and July there was a brisk correspondence with her advisor Vincent Andrus: “I can’t resist the feminine last word about the William and Mary highboy at Walton’s. I had glanced at it so hurriedly when I was in his shop that my impressions were vague, but spontaneous and without suggestions from anyone else. The only reason I had thought it was English at first was because of veneering on the mouldings, which was unfamiliar to me in Wm & Mary American furniture. As soon as Walton sent the photographs I knew from the leg turnings that it was American, but I did not know; of course, how much of the period it was. I was very glad to hear from you concerning it. It will be interesting to see if you think the one I have is any good. I really need a fine one, and perhaps a matching lowboy. Maybe you know where they are.” (Ima Hogg to Vincent D. Andrus, June 1, 1953.).



High Chest of Drawers, 1730–1760, Boston. Paint, gesso, gold leaf, eastern white pine, soft maple, brass; eastern white pine, 87 x 41½ x 23 inches (221 x 105.4 x 58.4 cm). The Bayou Bend Collection; gift of Miss Ima Hogg. B.69.348. Photography by Miguel Flores-Vianna.

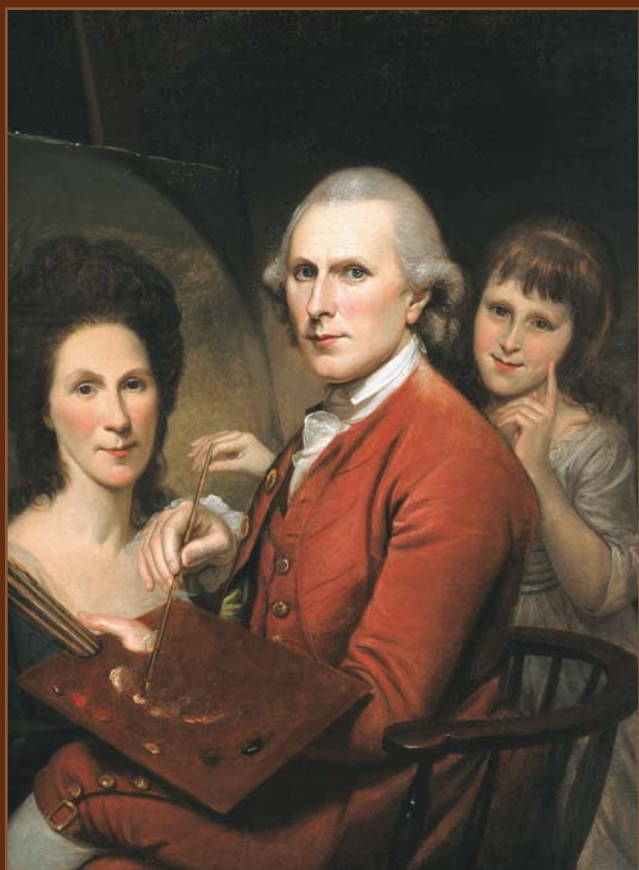
Shortly after New Year’s 1955, Miss Hogg acquired this Boston high chest, resplendent with its japanned facade, from dealer John Walton. It arrived with an impressive pedigree, having been published by Joseph Downs and been on loan to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA, now Historic New England). Before the chest was purchased, her advisor Vincent Andrus expressed to Miss Hogg and the dealer his reservations about the condition of the decoration. Walton disagreed and elaborated on his invoice, “The original japanning has been touched up, restored in parts and varnished with spar varnish to preserve.” Months later, correspondence reveals that Miss Hogg was beginning to have second thoughts about the piece. She wrote Andrus, “I regret to say that I am very fond of this highboy, but I certainly would not wish to offer it to our Museum if it were embarrassing in any way to them.” With help from Andrus and Walton, she assembled an impressive dossier that included correspondence from the previous owner and director of SPNEA, Bertram Little, reaffirming the condition of the decoration, as well as a letter from Andrus in which he revised his original position: “In regard to the highboy, I had meant to write you after a recent visit to Winterthur. One of their japanned highboys of which they are very proud would appear to be in the same condition as yours. As you write, how much new work has been done would appear to be important but very difficult to determine. All in all I think you should feel that it deserves a place in the museum. There will probably never be an opportunity to get another.”





Portrait of a Boy, ca. 1758–1760, John Singleton Copley (1738–1815), Boston. Oil on canvas, 48 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (123.5 x 92.1 cm). The Bayou Bend Collection; gift of Miss Ima Hogg, B.54.31. Photography by Thomas R. DuBrock.

In 1954, Miss Hogg acquired her first painting by John Singleton Copley, more than a decade before the major retrospective exhibition and catalogue of Copley's career that definitively established him as one of the great eighteenth-century painters of any nationality. As told by Boston art dealer Robert C. Vose, Miss Hogg acted quickly. At the moment he secured the painting from former Massachusetts governor Alvan T. Fuller, he called Miss Hogg, only to learn that she was staying at the historic Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. When he called her at the inn, she agreed to see the painting and immediately purchased it on the spot, even though the dealer mispronounced her name "Hoag." This bold, early work by one of America's greatest masters was an astute purchase and beautifully conveys the hallmarks of Copley's early style. Characterized by strong color, theatrical lighting, and attention to fine detail, Copley surrounds this jaunty boy with a profusion of props—the signs of privilege, wealth, and social standing expected of aristocratic eighteenth-century portraiture.



Self-Portrait with Angelica and Portrait of Rachel, ca. 1782–1785, Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827), Philadelphia. Oil on canvas, 36 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (91.8 x 68.9 cm). The Bayou Bend Collection; gift of Miss Ima Hogg, B.60.49. Photography by Thomas R. DuBrock.

Offered to Miss Hogg in 1960, this renowned self-portrait of Charles Willson Peale at his easel painting his wife, Rachel, with playful daughter Angelica at his side, was deemed too expensive by Miss Hogg's advising committee at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. According to Rudy Wunderlich of Kennedy Galleries, which represented the painting, Miss Hogg turned the painting down. Wunderlich, as he was departing for the airport to return the painting to New York, received an early morning phone call from Miss Hogg, who said, "Would you do an old lady a great favor and hold that painting for a day or so until I can make up my mind? I simply have not been able to sleep all night, thinking about the picture." By the time Wunderlich reached New York, a telegram from Miss Hogg awaited him, advising that, regardless of the committee's advice, she was going to purchase the painting. Her instincts, despite (or because of) the sleepless night, could not have been sharper. This self-portrait by one of the country's greatest artists continues to be one of Bayou Bend's most important masterpieces.



Easy Chair, 1750–1800, Eastern Massachusetts. Mahogany, original wool show cover; birch, soft maple, unidentified secondary woods, original upholstery foundation, $45\frac{1}{2} \times 32\frac{3}{4} \times 31\frac{3}{4}$ inches (115.6 x 83.2 x 80.6 cm). The Bayou Bend Collection; gift of Miss Ima Hogg, B.60.89. Photography by Miguel Flores-Vianna.

About the time that Bayou Bend was dedicated to the public in 1966, Miss Hogg reflected upon her years of collecting: “I never felt that anything here belonged to me. I always bought with the idea that everything would one day go to a museum.” Unique among the many masterpieces in the collection is this eastern Massachusetts easy chair, recognized as one of the most highly prized survivals among eighteenth-century upholstered furniture — only two others, at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Winterthur, have come down with their original needlework covers. At the time Miss Hogg acquired the chair, she conceded she was also assuming responsibility to be its steward—as is evident in a letter she wrote to Ernest LoNano, who was going to work on the chair for her: “Now, on the advice of Mr. Charles Montgomery, we feel it best not to take the covering off the chair, but cleaning it and mending only those places which are urgently needed.”



Desk-and-Bookcase, 1755–1800, Newport. Mahogany, brass; cedrela odorata, chestnut, eastern white pine, poplar, red cedar, soft maple, white oak, 99¾ x 44¼ x 26¼ inches (253.4 x 112.4 x 66.7 cm). The Bayou Bend Collection; gift of Miss Ima Hogg, B.69.22. Photography by Thomas R. DuBrock.

Ima Hogg's correspondence reveals her appreciation of how an object's provenance contributes to one's understanding and interpretation of a piece. In 1952, she purchased from dealer John Walton this iconic Newport desk-and-bookcase. Walton was often forthcoming with information about where he had acquired a piece, but in this instance he was less helpful. Miss Hogg wrote to him, "Though I am pleased to have purchased the beautiful block front secretary with shells, I am very disappointed not to have its pedigree or something of its previous ownership.... I would be willing to hold the name of the former owners in confidence... but would greatly appreciate being able to have the secretary recorded with as much history as possible for my files. All my pieces of furniture of any value go to a museum. I may add that a fine piece like this secretary deserves to be identified better, don't you think?" Years later, the reason for Walton's reticence became evident. The desk had been found in Britain and purchased for Winterthur, only to have Mr. du Pont turn it down. It was then brokered through Walton and Israel Sack.

Pair of Side Chairs, 1808. Designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764–1820). Painted decoration attributed to George Bridport (1783–1819), Baltimore or Philadelphia. Paint, gold leaf, cane; maple, yellow-poplar, composition. Each: 34½ x 20 x 20½ inches (87.6 x 50.8 x 52.1 cm). The Bayou Bend Collection, museum purchase with funds provided by Agnes Cullen Arnold Endowment Fund, B.90.9.1–2. Photography by Miguel Flores-Vianna.

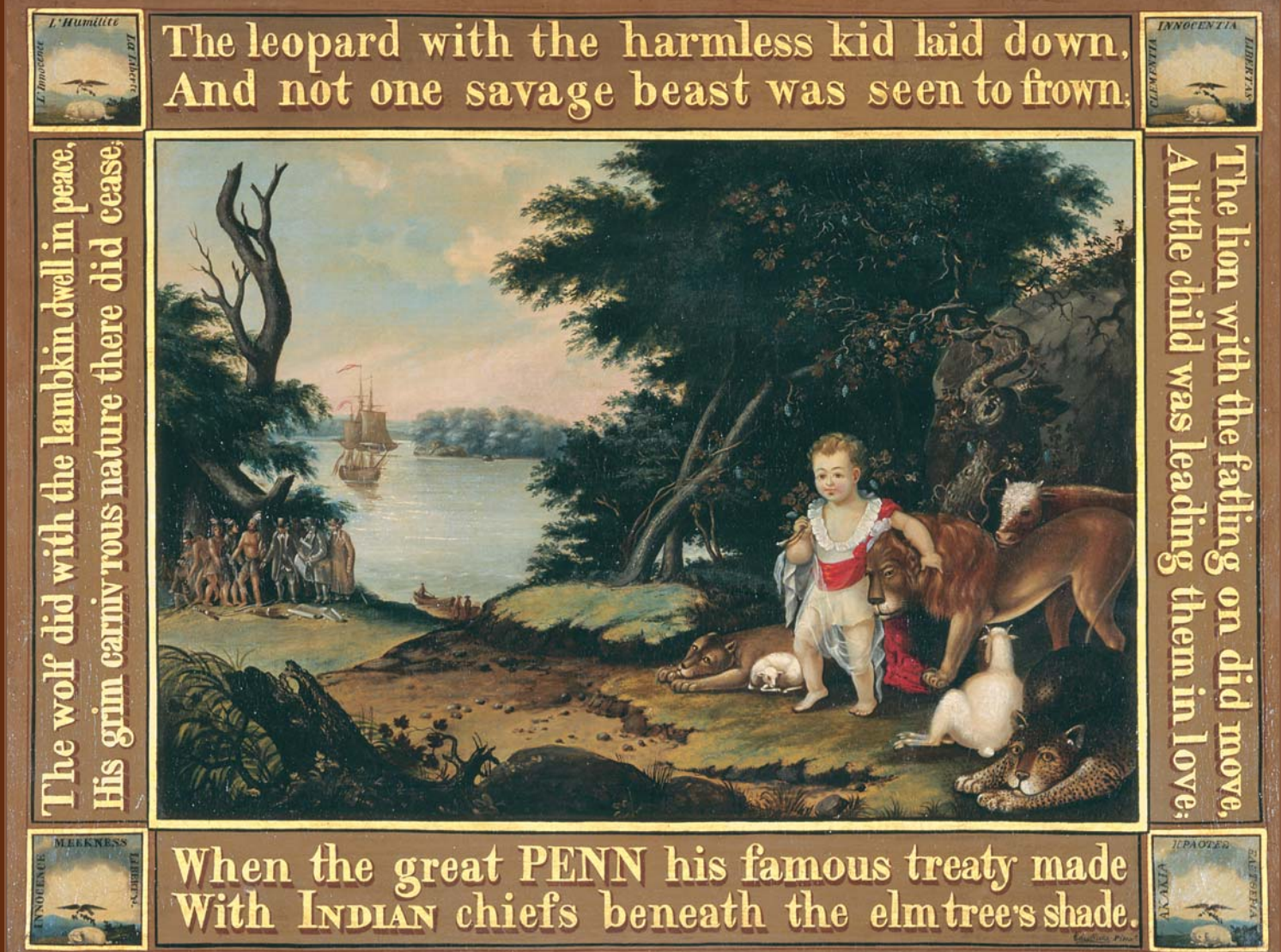
In 1963, Berry B. Tracy organized the landmark exhibition *Classical America 1815–1845* at the Newark Museum, highlighting a chair from the same suite as the pair at Bayou Bend to grace the catalogue cover. The chair was lent by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which had received it as a gift almost thirty years earlier; at the time of the Newark show, its history had yet to be unearthed. In the intervening half-century, additional pieces from the suite emerged from different branches of the family in which it had descended. With some genealogical sleuthing, Beatrice Garvan, a curator at the museum, was able to reconstruct their provenance, but more importantly, to identify them as part of the commission that Benjamin Henry Latrobe, the brilliant architect who was the nation's leading proponent of Grecian design, completed for William Waln in 1808. Placing them among the earliest of the American manifestations of the style, they must have been quite grand in the Waln drawing room.



Sardine Box, 1866–1867, William Gale, Jr. (1825–1885), New York. Silver, 4 1/2 x 5 7/8 x 4 7/8 inches (11.4 x 15 x 12.4 cm). The Bayou Bend Collection, gift of Chris and Tom Allan Cunningham in honor of Jeanne Moran Cunningham at “One Great Night in November, 2002,” B.2002.30. Photography by Miguel Flores-Vianna.

Ima Hogg was motivated to bring together a group of objects that speak to our national history and identity. However, she was always attracted to pieces principally for their aesthetic qualities rather than their historical associations. Ultimately, the genius of the Bayou Bend Collection lies in the diverse approaches it presents to American material culture. For example, take this little sardine box by William Gale, Jr. It is satisfying for its design and notable for its rarity, as it is the only silver American sardine box known. Yet it can be appreciated in myriad other ways, as evocative of the social history and technical achievements of the period. At one time, sardines, due to their perishability, would rarely have been found on the dining table, but with the invention of canning in the 1820s, these delicacies could be preserved and became more widely available. And, what would be more fitting to celebrate their introduction to the dining room table than in a silver casket, elevated by a quartet of sprightly dolphins, and capped by a silver knob that disclosed the nature of its choice contents.





Peaceable Kingdom, ca. 1826–1828, Edward Hicks (1780–1849), Bucks County, Pennsylvania.
Oil on canvas, 32 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 42 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches (82.2 x 107.6 cm). The Bayou Bend Collection;
gift of Miss Ima Hogg, B.54.1. Photography by Thomas R. DuBrock.

Few American artists are as beloved as Edward Hicks, a devout Pennsylvania Quaker preacher and painter. Throughout his life, Hicks obsessively painted the subject of the biblical promise of a peaceable kingdom on earth. More than sixty of these paintings are known. Naively and at times crudely painted, Hicks' canvases nonetheless radiate passion and charm. Toylike animals; placid landscape scenes, mostly of the Delaware Water Gap; and renditions of William Penn's Treaty with the Indians consistently populate Hicks' kingdoms — so peaceable in their ideal of universal harmony, yet weighted with national and religious concerns of the time. Bayou Bend's kingdom is one of eight known versions that include rhymes in its borders that refer to the biblical prophecy of Isaiah, in which is expressed the hope and promise of peace on earth. Intertwined in rhyme with the Bible is the historical event of William Penn's treaty, believed by Hicks to represent a partial fulfillment of Isaiah's biblical prophecy. Hicks' canvases may appear naive, but their underlying sources and motivations suggest a rare complexity in the field of so-called American "folk art."



Exterior of Bayou Bend. Photography by Rick Gardner.


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America's past, from the earliest colonies of the Eastern seaboard up to the 1870s, when industrialization took hold. Initially, Miss Hogg concentrated on building a collection of early furniture, but once she decided to give her house as a museum, she focused on creating room settings and on acquiring works to complement the furniture. Miss Hogg had various advisors as she formed her collection, among them prominent collectors of Americana and leading professionals. Vincent Andrus, a curator of American decorative arts at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, was her principal advisor from 1953 to 1957. John Walton, a prominent antiques dealer active in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, sold a number of important pieces to Miss Hogg, who also recognized that the collection would be strengthened by encouraging gifts from others. In 1966, reflecting on her years of collecting, Miss Hogg remarked, "I never felt that anything here belonged to me. I always bought with the idea that everything would one day go to a museum."

This fall, to mark the golden anniversary of Miss Hogg's remarkable gift to her native Texas and the nation, one hundred of the collection's



The Murphy Room, 1620–1730. Photography by Miguel Flores-Vianna.

masterpieces: fifty exceptional objects from early American life—furniture, paintings, ceramics, and metalware—collected by Miss Hogg, and fifty extraordinary objects donated by others will be published in *America's Treasures at Bayou Bend: Celebrating Fifty Years*. 

America's Treasures at Bayou Bend: Celebrating Fifty Years (Scala Publishers in association with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2007) is written by Michael K. Brown with an introduction by decorative arts historian Jonathan Leo Fairbanks and contributions from Emily Ballew Neff. To purchase the book (\$45) or for information call 713.639.7300, or visit www.mfah.org or www.scalapublishers.com.

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