



Set in the pier between the two rooms beyond is one of two Boston bombé chests of drawers in the collection. This chest was the first of the two purchased and was located by Jess Pavey when the couple lived in Michigan. It descended in the Crowninshield family of Salem, Mass. In the mid-eighteenth century, the form was among the most extravagant because of the skill necessary for its production and for the amount of expensive imported mahogany that was planed away in forming the kettle-shaped sides. A small box set on top shares the swelled sides of the chest. Although purchased prior to their move to this house, the eighteenth-century looking glass perfectly fits the space. It descended in the family of General Nathaniel Greene of Rhode Island, one of three generals to serve the entire length of the Revolutionary War, the others being Washington and Henry Knox.

A Sense of Place

by Johanna McBrien

photography by J. David Bohl

A deep respect for the history of this country and the material associated with its past is evident in the collections within this private residence. The owners have spent over three decades acquiring exemplary forms and objects with impeccable documentation and provenance. To help guide their collecting they have attended seminars and shows, gaining knowledge from both curators and leading dealers, and formed a large collection of reference books on American antiques. Over the years, they have acquired pieces from major dealers and through New York auctions. Two dealers were particularly important in helping to build their collection, Jess Pavey and Wayne Pratt. The result of this collecting journey is evident the moment one enters the house. Set between the entrances into the dining and living rooms is a bombé chest of drawers, circa 1770, the most coveted of Massachusetts case forms; this example descended in the Crowninshield family, one of the most prominent merchant dynasties of Salem, Massachusetts. The elaborate looking glass above the chest descended in the family of Nathaniel Greene, a Revolutionary War general upon whom Washington heavily relied.

The couple's education in antiques started with the furnishing of their first home. The wife initially purchased reproductions because she found them

This dressing table is one of only seven of its type known. It features rounded blocking on the façade and a row of brass hardware on the skirt intended to simulate a third row of drawers. Others from this unidentified shop are in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Winterthur, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Purchased from the Merriam family, it was originally owned by Josiah Merriam (1726–1809) of Concord, Mass. The Merriam's were among the first group of settlers who founded the town in 1635, and some of the skirmishing during the Battle of Concord took place on Josiah's property. Above it hangs a China trade painting, circa 1840, of the Canton Factories; it retains its original frame. The blue and white delft, circa 1700, includes a large tobacco jar with brass lid.





visually appealing. But then, she says, “I began to wonder what they were copying. When I learned that we could buy the originals, that’s just what we began to do.” At the time the couple lived in Michigan, and, as luck would have it, their home was close to the antiques shop of legendary dealer Jess Pavey. As beginning collectors, the couple couldn’t have been in better hands. As the husband says, “If he realized that you didn’t understand what he was talking about, he took the time to explain and teach.” Though a teenager at the time, the couple’s adult son recalls, “Jess Pavey was very much both a friend and a mentor to my parents, and a man of the highest integrity.”

Wasting no time, the wife gave Pavey a list of what she and her husband were looking for—a dining table and chairs to go around it. “The first thing he turned up was a pair of andirons,” she says. “They were lovely but I didn’t expect to start with andirons!” They made the purchase and waited to see what else he would find for them. “When Jess would return

The formal dining room contains objects and paintings associated with George Washington and the Revolutionary War, most of which are discussed in the body of the text. Among the other collections are the dining table purchased from Jess Pavey and a three-hundred-piece set of Chinese export porcelain from the DeWolf family of Rhode Island. The handsome Northwest Persian Serapi carpet dates from the late nineteenth century. Washington and Jefferson miniatures can be seen on the dressing table beside the fireplace. Over the mantel is a mid-eighteenth-century portrait of Henrietta Maria Dorsey of Annapolis, Md., painted by John Wollaston (1742–1775). She and her husband, Colonel Edward Dorsey, whose portrait hangs over the living room mantel, are distant members of the wife’s family.

from his buying trips out east,” says the wife, “we would go over to see what he had bought. At the time, Adolph and Virginia Meyer were his best clients, so they got the best things,” she laughs.¹

Buying antiques was a family event. When they visited Pavey’s home, the couple would occasionally bring a child or two. Their youngest daughter often sat under her favorite table in Pavey’s living room and listened to the dealer’s stories about the objects. So taken was she by the history and love for objects relayed by Pavey and reinforced by her parents, she later pursued a career in the museum field. The furniture didn’t mean much to her brother at the time, but he also liked the stories. “As I got older,” he says, “I started to appreciate the objects themselves, and later on I too became a collector. Now, my children are beginning to see what my parents and my wife and I see.” He adds, “There’s a comfort factor in living with old things.”

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The couple’s interest in and respect for George Washington is displayed along one of the dining room walls, on which hang copies of paintings of Washington and his family by artists contemporary with Gilbert Stuart and Edward Savage; the portrait on the left is attributed to A. Fischer. The box below, which retains its original liquor containers and glasses, is inscribed “A gift from Washington to Adams.” The top is inlaid with the seal of the United States. The bowfront server is attributed to Federal Boston cabinetmaker John Seymour (1738–1818).

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(Top) *The Bloody Massacre*, hand colored engraving, 1770, by Jonathan Mulliken, Newburyport, Mass. Mulliken, a clockmaker, was one of three people to engrave the scene shortly after the actual event; his version was based on Paul Revere’s. The other engraver was Henry Pelham.

(Left) *The Bloody Massacre*, hand colored contemporary copy of Revere’s original, published in London, ca. 1770. The massacre was fuel for the Whigs against the Tories; copies of the print appeared quickly in England.

(Right) *The Bloody Massacre*, hand colored engraving, 1770. Signed in the plate: “Engrav’d Printed & Sold by Paul Revere BOSTON.” Revere was the first of three engravers to produce and market this image, doing so within three weeks of the event. He apparently copied the work of a competitor, Henry Pelham, who was slower than Revere to market his work. This is the most famous and desirable of all of Revere’s engravings. Inscribed along the top edge “*The Bloody Massacre perpetrated in King Street BOSTON on March 5th 1770 by a party of the 29th REGt.*”





The family moved to New England in the 1980s. By then Jess Pavey had retired. "Every now and then," says the wife, "he would still find pieces for us and send them out." Still interested in adding to their collection, the couple continued to attend antiques shows. This is where they first met antiques dealer Wayne Pratt of Woodbury, Connecticut, and Nantucket, Massachusetts. They soon formed a strong bond with Wayne, working with him until his passing in 2007 and the dissolution of the company. "During those years we never had much to do with any other dealer," says the wife. "We were such good friends."

The wife also supplied Wayne with a list of items they were looking for, but like Pavey, Wayne also brought them things he thought they would like. His judgment was most always correct; he rarely left with what he had brought. As before, objects entered the collection that were both visually appealing and had important histories; among them a block-front

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One of the great masterpieces of Philadelphia furniture from the Queen Ann period, this rare dressing table belongs to a small group attributed to the shop of Henry Clifton and Thomas Carteret that includes several other dressing tables, high chests, and at least one tall clock. The girandole clock, by Lemuel Curtis (1790–1857) of Concord, Massachusetts, is one of a few such examples known. This vignette represents the type of exquisite objects brought to the couple by the two dealers with whom they worked almost exclusively, the dressing table from Wayne Pratt, and the clock from Jess Pavey. Wayne's business partner, Marybeth Keene, notes, "Wayne previewed auctions, visited dealers, and purchased from long-time private collections to acquire objects he knew would appeal to the high standards of the collectors and satisfy their criteria for excellence."



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Along one end of the living room is a sitting area. The camel-back sofa is signed along the back rail by John Harris, discovered during a re-upholstery. Before purchase by its present owners the Queen Anne walnut open armchair was acquired by Wayne Pratt from the Meyer sale in 1996. The tea table exhibits the rectangular form with molded top and slipper feet recognized as among the finer from Newport, Rhode Island. The table is flanked on the other side by a Massachusetts lolling chair. The Newport dressing table along the wall, from Wayne Pratt, is one of the earliest and most dramatic examples of its type. The paintings seen here are described in the article text.



This elegant room contains powerful examples of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century furniture from Philadelphia and New England. The elaborately carved high chest was purchased from the Lippincott estate. To the right is a Queen Anne side chair attributed to Philadelphia cabinetmaker William Savery (1721-1787) and owned by early collector Mrs. J. Amory Haskell. It was in the seminal *Girl Scout Loan Exhibition* of 1929 and illustrated in the catalogue as plate 551. Two Philadelphia armchairs are pulled up to a Massachusetts drop-leaf table of unusually large size, attributed to Boston cabinetmaker John Cogswell (1738-1819). The easy chair upholstered in yellow fabric is embellished with leaf-carved cabriole legs and is also attributed to Savery. It was also in the *Girl Scout Loan Exhibition* and catalogue (plate 630). The other Queen Anne easy chair is from Boston. The portrait over the mantel is of Colonel Edward Dorsey of Annapolis, Md., painted by John Wollaston. A portrait of Dorsey's wife hangs in the dining room. The carpet is a West Persian Bidjar of the late nineteenth century with a powerfully rendered split-leaf arabesque motif.

chest made for John Hancock; a set of four chairs that George Washington probably owned while residing in Philadelphia; and a Newport block-and-shell kneehole desk signed by John Townsend.

American history is an overarching theme of the collection. "It is amazing," says the husband, "that this is such a young country, and yet, through the determination and forthrightness of its founders, became what it is today... It is one thing to understand the relevance of such an accomplishment through books," he adds, "it is another to gain perspective by owning a part of history."

Objects with associations to the country's Revolutionary War heroes and its early political leaders are evident throughout the house. In the living room over the sofa, *The Death of General Wolfe*, painted



by a contemporary of Benjamin West's (1738–1820), is flanked by Michele Felice Corne's (1752–1845) *The Constitution vs. Guerriere* and *United States vs. Macedonian*. An ancestor of the wife's served as an officer on the *Constitution* during the engagement with the *Guerriere*, as well as during the vessel's two other major battles in the War of 1812. The secretary bookcase in the guest sitting room holds a twenty-piece Chinese export porcelain tea service made for Abigail Adams and monogrammed "A A."

The historic figure most represented in the collection is George Washington. "When you consider what Washington did for this country," says the husband, "it is truly astounding." Interest in Washington is shared by his wife, who, years ago, became a member of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, furthering the couple's connection with the first president. The largest concentration of

The block-front slant-lid desk has massive claw-and-ball feet, characteristic of the best eighteenth-century case piece furniture from Massachusetts. It is flanked by two fan-back Windsors. The center painting on the wall dates to circa 1840 and depicts a battle scene between a British warship attacking the Boca Tigris forts forty miles below Canton. The surrounding China trade paintings show the making of pottery.



Against the back wall of the guest sitting room is one of three known tall clocks with a case by Sutton, Mass., cabinetmaker Nathan Lombard (1777–1847). Along the same wall is a secretary block-front bookcase attributed to Boston cabinetmaker George Bright (1726–1805). It descended in the family of General Arad Hunt. Its shelves contain part of the twenty-piece porcelain tea service with the monogram of Abigail Adams, purchased for her by her husband, John Adams. The rare Boston turret-top table in the center of the room is one of six known examples. Behind it is a sofa from the Meyer collection. Beside the fireplace is a rare diminutive turret-top Boston Queen Anne card table, one of two flanking the fireplace.

Washingtonia is in the formal dining room. Three paintings line one of the walls: two portraits, one after Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828) and one attributed to A. Fischer, and a copy of Edward Savage's (1761–1817) *The Washington Family* by a contemporary artist. Two portrait miniatures of Washington are displayed together on an early Queen Anne Boston dressing table; one is attributed to the acclaimed French sculptor Jean A. Houdon (1741–1828), who visited the president at Mount Vernon in 1785 to take his likeness for the sculpture at the Virginia Capitol. A small liquor box on top of an elegant Boston Federal server was a gift from Washington to John Adams. Then there is the set of four elaborately carved curly walnut Philadelphia side chairs noted previously and associated with Washington's tenure when he lived in the City of Brotherly Love.





ABOVE

The library is comfortably furnished with a Newport easy chair and a dressing table, which has a double-incised fan. Over the mantel hangs a portrait of Major John Berrien holding the Laws of Parliament, painted by Charles Wilson Peale (1741–1827) in 1789. Berrien was a Revolutionary War officer decorated with the “Eagle of the Cincinnati” by George Washington for his services during the war. Later he became a New Jersey judge. The painting was part of the Meyer collection.

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One of the icons of American colonial furniture is the Newport block-and-shell kneehole desk. Signed “J. Townsend,” this superb example is among the most important of the form. Cabinetmaker John Townsend (1733–1809) was arguably the most talented of the Newport craftsmen working in the eighteenth century. The case piece descended in the Waterman family of Providence. On top of the piece is one of two Green family pastel portraits in the collection by Pennsylvania artist James Sharples (1751–1811); the other is in the library, seen above. On the wall hangs a China trade painting; a view of the hong (commercial trading houses) in Hong Kong. It is in its original frame.



The dining room also contains a Chippendale mahogany chest of drawers with bold claw-and-ball feet, originally owned by Colonel Thomas Pickering, a Revolutionary War officer and, later, secretary of war and then secretary of state in Washington's cabinet. A grand painting attributed to George Cook (1793–1849), *City of Washington from Beyond the Navy Yard*, circa 1833, depicts the nascent Washington, D.C., showing the original Capitol and the first White House, which, along with other structures, was destroyed by

the British in 1812. Among the couple's most notable collections are *three* hand-colored engravings of *The Bloody Massacre*, one by Revere himself, dating to 1770, the other two by contemporaries of Revere. A portrait miniature of Thomas Jefferson and several mezzotints also hang in the room, one of Captain John Paul Jones published by R. Sayer & J. Bennett of London, still in its original frame.

At every turn in the couple's home is an object of beautiful form. When one inquires about a past owner or maker, there is more

Dominating the master suite sitting room is a block-front bonnet-top linen press. The rare Boston form is signed on the underside of the case with the initials of Charlestown, Mass., cabinetmaker Benjamin Frothingham (1734–1809). The mahogany and bird's-eye maple dressing glass was made by Salem, Mass., cabinetmaker William Hook (1777–1867), for his sister Hannah, who married Peter Folsom in 1809. The dressing glass was part of a suite of furniture Hook made for the occasion. Other pieces from the suite are in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



A sitting area in the master bedroom harkens to the eighteenth century, when guests were frequently invited to share tea and conversation in these private chambers. The diminutive drop-leaf table is flanked by a rare Federal serpentine, inlaid lolling chair that has an exuberant back and crest profile. On the other side is a Massachusetts Queen Anne easy chair. English creamware sits on the mantel, above which hangs a dated 1860 painting of the Methil, Fife area on the east coast of Scotland, by Scottish artist John Burr (1831-1893). A dazzling New York looking glass with carved urn and drapery swags and eglomisé panel surmounts a very rare diminutive Chippendale carved cherrywood block-front chest from New London County, Connecticut. It is one of less than half a dozen known three-drawer chests from this recognizable group, all carved with shells in the Newport fashion. Not shown is a rare pair of matching Boston block-front chests of drawers. The figured mahogany used for both chests was cut from the same tree and the drawers are interchangeable. The carpet in this room is a Northwest Persian Bakhshayish from the late nineteenth century, which features a tree motif that provides a mille-fleur effect in the background.

often than not a response that makes one nod in admiration or express pure joy in what the object represents. The passion of purpose with which this couple has formed their collection is admirable. And while the husband and wife are due full credit for a remarkable collection, they are quick to acknowledge the assistance of the two dealers who brought so many significant objects to their attention and the rapport, trust, and friendship that flourished among them. Both Jess Pavey and Wayne Pratt helped educate their clients on the finer points of each object they would bring, building on the couple's knowledge and keen interest in the material.



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There are no less than four block-front chests in this room (three are shown). All are very fine examples from Wayne Pratt, one of which is attributed to George Bright. The chest seen on the left was originally owned by John Hancock; a letter from the family provides the line of descent from Hancock's wife's niece. Another bold block-front form in the room is the slant-front desk. One of the finest examples of its type, it additionally features a central double-lobed drop, fine mahogany, and desirable narrow size. A small watercolor of a young girl, by J. A. Davis (1821-1855) of Rhode Island, is on top of the Philadelphia Pembroke table. On the back wall hangs one of two very fine full-length silhouette portraits signed by Auguste Edouart (1789-1861) and dated 1841; each features a pencil-drawn room interior.

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This chest is from the Mahantongo Valley of Pennsylvania, and is dated 1835. Chests from this region are distinctive in their color scheme and selection of imagery, each with individual combinations of stamped, stenciled, and hand-painted elements. Of the known group, the decorative scheme of this chest most closely relates to a desk at Winterthur. The condition of this example is among the most pristine of all known, retaining its original aged shellac-resin coating. A portrait of Anne Byrde of Baltimore, Md., painted by William Matthew Prior (1806-1873), rare for the full-length depiction of the sitter, hangs above the chest, which is flanked by two Nantucket fan-back Windsor armchairs, considered among the finest of their form. All were acquired through Wayne Pratt Antiques.



Contented with the “friends” they have brought together, the couple no longer collects. More to the point, there is no more room in the house. In fact, they have given some objects to their children, thereby sharing the joy of their collecting experiences and passing on to their children a respect for this country's past. As their son says about collecting, “It touches one's soul.” @

The author would like to thank Cory Bowie and Marybeth Keene, of Wayne Pratt Antiques, for their assistance in researching the material.

1. The Meyers' collection was sold at Sotheby's on January 20, 1996.



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The upstairs sitting room contains the second of two bombé chests in the collection, this one from Wayne Pratt. It is flanked by a pair of circa-1780 Chippendale side chairs attributed to Eliphalet Chapin (1741-1807) and Aaron Chapin (1753-1835), of East Windsor, Conn. The pair is from the same set now in the Garvan Collection at Yale. They were once owned by Jess Pavey and were brought to the couple by Wayne Pratt; a serendipitous connection between the two dealers and the clients. The Federal oval-inlaid card table was made in New York; the other is either from Boston or Salem, Mass. The three portraits are of members of the husband's family, painted by John Inscoe Williams of Cincinnati, Ohio.

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Rosewell Park (dates unknown), *Allegorical Painting of American Independence*, Oxford, New York.

