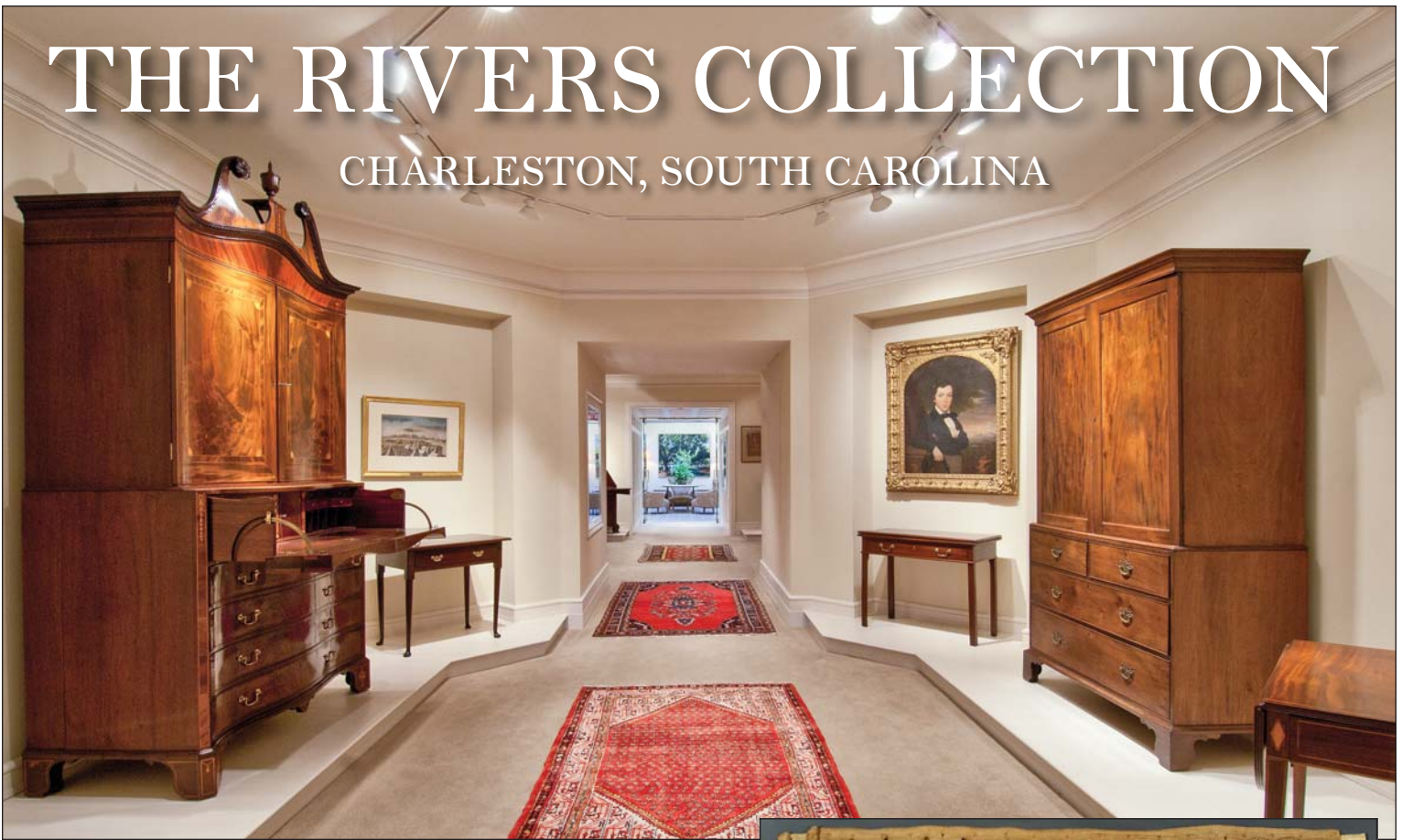


THE RIVERS COLLECTION

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA



Charleston, South Carolina, is fortunate to have many of its residents and institutions focused on preserving its history and architectural heritage. One of the wealthiest ports during the colonial period, large numbers of talented artisans produced luxury goods for their sophisticated local clientele. Unfortunately, much of the furniture and decorative arts made during this golden era either no longer survive or have been dispersed (see pages 298–299), leaving scant record of what was produced and owned. One individual—businessman and Charleston native John M. Rivers Jr.—set out to reclaim the city’s decorative heritage and has made a concerted effort to acquire and return locally made furniture, silver, and other objects that tell the story of Charleston and its inhabitants.

Rivers started collecting seriously about twenty years ago when he read that the earliest known piece of Charleston furniture, a 1733 writing desk, had been sold to the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in neigh-



THIS PAGE, TOP:

The Rivers Collection. **LEFT:** Charleston neoclassical serpentine press with secretary drawer, circa 1783–1790, with inlaid urns, bellflowers, and escutcheons; watercolor of the 17th Regiment of the South Carolina Militia, by A. Grinevald, 1861, hangs above a dressing table, with pad feet, Charleston, ca. 1740–1760. **RIGHT:** Pembroke table, made and signed by Thomas Lee (active 1804–1813), Charleston; Linen press, Charleston, ca. 1775–1785; Mahogany and cypress gaming table, Charleston, ca. 1770–1785, over which hangs a portrait of a child, believed to be of Alexander Mazyck’s family, Charleston (whose mother’s and sibling’s portraits are also shown in the gallery), painted by Thomas Wightman, ca. 1850. Courtesy, the Rivers Collection, Charleston, S.C. Photography by Rick McKee.

THIS PAGE, BOTTOM:

Attributed to Emma Louisa Lanneau Gildersleeve (American, 1804–1859). *Embroidery*, Charleston, S.C., ca. 1820/25. Silk. 22 x 24 inches. Stitched top middle: Gildersleeve (in cross-stitch); signed back top right: “T” (in ink). Courtesy, the Rivers Collection, Charleston, S.C. Photography by Russell Buskirk.

This rare needlework is the only known silkwork with this type of scene made in Charleston; the majority of others depict biblical, mythological, or classical subjects.

boring North Carolina. Believing that Charleston's historic objects should remain locally, Rivers visited the dealer who had sold the object to MESDA and asked that he be contacted when other Charleston pieces were found.

Rivers was initially drawn to period furniture and silver, but having little knowledge in these areas he engaged the dealer, a consultant, and a museum professional conversant with Charleston material to assist him in his collecting efforts. All four had to agree on an object before a purchase was made, and the stipulations were that the object had to be of museum quality, and be Charleston made or at least have a local provenance (such as the English silver loving cup made for Philip Porcher that descended in the Drayton family). Rivers has since added portraits of Charlestonians, including three of the Alexander Mazyck family, and a collection of nineteenth-century Charleston rifles and pistols.

Rivers has broadened his efforts to not only preserve historic material, but to collect art and objects that represent all time periods of Charleston's history, interspersing items that have a provenance dating from the late 1600s to the present. Among the contemporary crafts, Rivers has acquired carvings by Grainger McKoy; commissioned a series of drawings by Charleston native Douglas Balentine, which were executed over a ten-year period and culminated in a masterwork in oil; and pottery by S. Ferrell of Edgefield, South Carolina, whose wares relate to ceramics by "Dave," a slave who made pottery prior to the Civil War.

An important component of Rivers' quest to preserve local material is to share his collection with the city of Charleston. To this end, he converted a suite of rooms in his offices to create a gallery in which the Rivers Collection is shown. Over the years he has also loaned objects to museums within the city, including Historic Charleston Foundation, as well as to locations in Atlanta, Palm Beach, and New York. Currently, a selection of outstanding furniture can be seen at the Gibbes Museum of Art. Because of Rivers' efforts, more than 200 objects have been retained or commissioned with the purpose of enriching the community. Charleston is fortunate to have such a civic-minded and passionate preservationist. [AFA](#)

*Those interested in visiting the **Rivers Collection** may inquire about a private tour by calling Tricia Cordina at 843.723.9900, extension 14.*

LEFT:

Horse Racing Trophy, William Fountain, London, England, ca. 1803. Inscribed "Roxana Winning a / Jockey Club Purse / at Washington Course / in Charlestown [sic], South Carolina / Feby [sic], 1802" and bearing the McPherson crest and arms. Silver. H. 16½, L. 15½ in. Courtesy, the Rivers Collection, Charleston, S.C. Photograph provided by the Gibbes Museum of Art.

Among his military and political accomplishments, General John McPherson (1756-1806) was one of the top horse breeders in early America, and one of the twenty who developed the Washington Race Course, so named for the president. Courtesy, the Rivers Collection, Charleston, S.C. Photograph provided by the Gibbes Museum of Art.

RIGHT:

Kettle Stand, Charleston, S.C., ca. 1750-1760. Mahogany. H. 27½, Diam. 21 in. Courtesy, the Rivers Collection, Charleston, S.C. Photograph provided by the Gibbes Museum of Art, where it is currently on view.

The kettle stand is a rarity in American furniture. Used in conjunction with a larger tea table of similar design and decoration, the simple, bold pattern and heavy veining of this stand is in the Baroque style of such early carvers as Henry Burnett (American, d. 1761), the chief carver of St. Michael's Church in downtown Charleston.

