"To Adorn This Past:"
Family Furniture Collection at the Blair House[1]

Margaret Means Newman

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[1] Gist Blair to President Franklin Roosevelt, undated draft of letter written between November 10, 1933 and January 13, 1934.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
List of Illustrations	iv
Introduction	1
The Family: First and Second Generations	12
The Third Generation	32
Turning Point: Fairs, Expositions and Exhibitions	40
Gist and Laura Shaping the Collection	51
Comparison of Contemporary Collectors' Motivations	62
Conclusion	81
Epilogue	85
Bibliography	86
Appendix I	94
Appendix II	98
Illustrations	99

List of Illustrations

Introduction

Figure	Page
1. Letter from Gist Blair to President Franklin Roosevelt (transcription)	99.
2. Letter from President Roosevelt to Gist Blair	100.
3. Letter from Minna Blair Ritchey to Senate Committee	100.
4. Portrait of Gist Blair	101.
5. Graph: Distribution of Blair family furniture by periods	102.

The Family: First and Second Generations

6. Maple bed slept in by President Lincoln	103.
7. Federal sideboard inherited by Mary Woodbury Blair	103.
8. Blair House additions by Montgomery Blair	104.
9. Graph: Distribution of furniture by value 1830-1876	105.
10. District of Columbia 1831 cabinetmakers price-book	105.
11. Curled maple bedpost	106.
12. Curled maple headboard	106.
13. Up-charge chart on maple bed	106.
14. American Empire Bureau	107.
15. Bureau profile	107.
16. Cripps Toilette Table	108.
17. 1833 advertisement of Joseph Meeks	109.
18. American Empire side table	110.

19. American Empire pier table 110.

20. American Empire center table 110.

21. Foot detail of American Empire center table 111.

22. Gothic Revival clock 111.

23. Elizabethan Revival shaving stand 112.

24. Rococo Revival side chair 112.

25. Blair Samson Cariss mirror 113.

26. Ridgley Samson Cariss mirror 113.

The Third Generation

27. Floor plan Blair House first floor 114.

28. Floor plan Blair House second floor 114.

29. Floor plan Blair House third floor 115.

30. Floor plan Blair House fourth floor 115.

31. Francis Blair/Montgomery Blair study, now Lincoln Room 116.

32. Maple High Chest 117.

33. Slant top Desk 117.

34. Slant Top Desk Interior 117.

35. Simon Willard tall clock 118.

36. Federal Tabernacle Mirror 118.

37. Eglomise tablet pier mirror 119.

Turning Point: Fairs, Expositions, and Exhibits

38. Brooklyn Sanitary Fair 1864 119.

39. New England Kitchen, Centennial International Exhibition of 1876 120.

40. Mary Woodbury Blair's Lacquered Sewing Table 120.

41. Blair Japanned Tall Clock 121.

42. Letter to Mary Blair from antique dealer regarding tall clocks 121.

43. William and Mary era andirons given to Mary Blair by Gist Blair 122.

44. Lap-desk given to Mary Blair by Woodbury Blair 122.

45. Interior of Mary Blair lap-desk 122.

46. Thomas Jefferson lap-desk 123.

47. Jefferson lap-desk interior 123.

48. Lady's writing desk from Lizzie Blair to Minna Blair 123.

49. Interior of Minna Blair's writing desk 123.

50. State of Massachusetts Building World's Columbia Exposition 1893 124.

51. Essex Institute parlor Massachusetts State Building 1893 124.

52. Connecticut State Building World's Columbia Exposition 125.

53. Kentucky Parlor, Woman's Building World's Columbia Exposition 125.

54. Hudson-Fulton Exhibit, eighteenth century display 126.

55. Hudson-Fulton Exhibit, nineteenth century display 126.

Gist and Laura Shaping their Collection

56. English William and Mary period burled walnut desk and bookcase 127.

57. Blair English chest 127.

58. George II pier mirror 128.

59. Chippendale plate 169 128.

60. District of Columbia War Memorial 129.

61. Home of Mr. and Mrs. L.C. Strong 129.

62. Gist Blair's retreat 130.

63. Blair House Library 130.

64. Blair Library book cases 131.

65. Blair Library door 131.

66. Blair Library Ceiling 131.

67. Blair Library ceiling corner 132.

68. Front Entrance of Blair House 132.

69. Wallace Nutting *Vogue* advertisement 133.

70. Potthast Brothers advertisement 134.

71. Potthast Brothers side table 134.

72. Blair Banjo Clock 135.

Comparison of Contemporary Collectors' Motivations

73. Collection of Henry Wood Erving 135.

74. Blair family glass collection 136.

75. Collection of Eugene Bolles 136.

76. Value comparison of furniture collected by Gist Blair 137.

77. John Brown House purchased by Marsden Perry 137.

78. Henry Sleeper's kitchen 138.

79. Winterthur Pine Kitchen 138.

80. Wayside Inn 1926 renovation 139.

81. Decatur House, 1822 139.

82. Truxton Beale riding past the Blair House 140.

83. Tudor Place drawing room 140.

84. Morris Philadelphia serpentine sofa 141.

85. Morris Philadelphia chest on chest 141.

Conclusion

86. Blair Family China 142.

87. Blair's Paul Revere tankard 142.

88. Blair family silver 143.

89. 1936 Blair House Lincoln room 144.

90. Eisenhower greeting King of Saudi Arabia 144.

Introduction

"I little thought a few weeks ago, when you invited me to see you and asked me to make you a report on historic sites and sources I should so soon have to plead with you about the preservation of my own home, the 'Blair House.'. . . My poor little [effort] has been to try to preserve these things and bring into these walls, American silver, china, and furniture—memorials of our country's art and craftsmen—so as to try and adorn this past."[2] Those were the words of Major Gist Blair in a letter to President Franklin Roosevelt written between November 10, 1933, and January 13, 1934 (Figure 1.). Roosevelt responded on January 13, 1934, "I think that you can set your mind at rest in regard to your splendid house. There is no intention or prospect of buying that block—certainly at this time"[3] (Figure 2.). Those letters reflected an intermittent struggle dating back to 1902 between the Blair family, along with other Lafayette Square residents, and the federal government over the prospect of the government seizing their property around the square to construct a quadrangle of government buildings (Figure 3.).

Major Gist Blair was the third generation of Blairs to reside in the historic home, now known as Blair House, at 1651 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest, Washington, D.C. As a boy growing up diagonally across from the White House, Gist was surrounded by mementos of his notable family's nineteenth century political contributions. By 1911 he bought his siblings' shares of the inherited property in anticipation of his marriage to Laura Lawson Ellis. The Major, as steward of his ancestral home, was a life-long student

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[2] Gist Blair to President Franklin Roosevelt, undated draft of letter written between November 10, 1933 and January 13, 1934.

[3] President Franklin D. Roosevelt to Gist Blair, January 13, 1934, photocopy of signed letter on White House letterhead, BH-LH File 1

of American history and material culture (Figure 4.). For the years before his death in 1940, he sought a way to save and share his family's legacy through official recognition of his home as a historic landmark when there was no means, yet, to do so.

Finally, legislation leading to the first Historic Sites Act of 1935 proclaimed "a national policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States."[4] Before 1935, preservation of historic structures was the job of individual citizens or small groups concerned with maintaining the country's cultural history and honoring its leaders of significant accomplishment and high character. The alliance that developed among the leader of the Democratic Party, President Roosevelt, and a force of the Republican Party Major Gist Blair is a story of men who shared a respect for distinctively American history, decorative arts, and architecture. United in the effort to encourage the legislation, Gist Blair, Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, and Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, advised the President. As a result President Roosevelt was credited with creating the Historic Preservation Act. The timing of the act was poignant. Citizens saw how quickly the American economy was destroyed during the Depression. Perhaps they baulked at the prospect of losing reminders of their history as well. For Major Blair the timing was superb, for he finally had the vehicle he believed would protect his family's home.

It took five years following the passage of the Historic Sites Act, for Blair House to earn the designation of National Historic Site. Major Blair repeatedly positioned his

[4] Candace Shireman, "To Be Preserved for All Time" *White House History* (2009), 22-23. http://www.whitehousehistory.org/whha_publications/publications_documents/whha_publications-blair-house.pdf

home as a prototype for each stage of the qualification process. The first survey of the house stated:

> . . . notable for its construction in which hand-hewn lumber and hand-made nails and hardware were used . . . on one of 19 lots in that square [#167] bought by Commodore Stephen Decatur. . . now a treasure house of valuable documents, china, silver, [furniture], Copley and Stuart portraits of national celebrities, a priceless library and a wealth of unusual books and pamphlets, much of which is relating to the Gist, Woodbury, Hancock, Qunicy, Dearborn, and Blair families and their participation in great events of American history.[5]

Unfortunately, that first evaluation was not enough to receive the coveted designation, but Gist Blair persisted until the next report commended the home on the grounds of its association with Andrew Jackson. The third attempt determined the home showed the "intellectual and artistic tastes and interests of an intelligent and well-to-do family of the past century."[6] The fourth report stated that if the house with its furnishings came, intact, to the government, it could be as a museum to demonstrate Washington, D.C. life during the Jackson through Lincoln era. Finally, meeting all qualifications for designation, on November 18, 1940, the marker identifying Blair House as a National Historic Site was ready. While President Roosevelt dealt with the pressing international situation in the months leading up to World War II, Secretary Ickes presided over the early December ceremony. A week later to the surprise of everyone, the robust and determined eighty year old Major Blair died suddenly.

Instructions in Gist's will were clear, ". . . it is the wish of myself and wife to preserve the house, its historic associations and its accumulated treasures . . . expressing

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[5] Edna M. Coleman, historian report to Vern E. Chatelain, Acting Assistant Director, Branch of Historic Sites and Buildings, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, February 20, 1936. BH-LH File 1

[6] Shireman, "To Be Preserved for All Time," 24.

American life and craftsmanship . . . keep these articles together . . . [and form] an American museum, deeding it to the City of Washington or the Government of the United States."[7]

Why did a busy President give attention to this individual citizen's request? In part, the shared passion for collecting Americana was the common ground of President and Mrs. Roosevelt, and Major and Mrs. Blair, but it went deeper than a mutual hobby. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, like Gist, was raised with a sense of history. As a young Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt was entrusted to refit the U.S.S. *George Washington.* Adding significance to this assignment, Roosevelt was aware that the *George Washington* would soon transport President Woodrow Wilson to the 1918 Versailles peace conference officially ending World War I. Inspired by the vessel's name, Roosevelt determined the interior should reflect the colonial taste. He personally scoured New York department stores for the proper décor. One of his purchases was a copy of the desk that stood in George Washington's Mount Vernon study. A collector himself, F.D. R. expressed the theme of democracy against imperialism.[8] The success of the ship re-fit impressed upon Roosevelt the importance of an American historical backdrop to the country's diplomacy.

In 1927, then as the New York governor's wife, Eleanor Roosevelt was the enthusiastic organizer and sponsor of Val-Kill Industries. It functioned as a colony of craftsmen whose copies of colonial era furnishings combined the tenants of the Arts and

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[7] "Last Will and Testament of Gist Blair," March 9, 1934, 5-6, Family History File, Legal Papers and Related Documents—Blair Family, Office of the curator, Blair House.

[8] Karen Ann Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revival and American Culture 1876-1986.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 179.

Crafts concept of partially hand-created objects with the Colonial Revival taste. Mrs. Roosevelt and Val-Kill's head designer consulted with experts like Charles Over Cornelius, Assistant Curator of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's American Wing, to develop accurate prototypes. Her involvement with Val-Kill and furnishing the "Little White House" at Warm Springs, Georgia, with Val-Kill made furniture, gave the First Lady a lasting appreciation for all arts of the colonial and federal periods.

Both President Roosevelt and Major Blair would have agreed with the sentiment, later stated by Colonial Revival architectural expert Richard Guy Wilson, "The concept of style as a carrier of nationalistic ideology grew out of a belief that architecture and art provide an index to a country's stature, morality and, of course, taste."[9] Among it's many objectives, President Roosevelt's Depression era Works Progress Administration supported the revival of colonial crafts by employing artists to devise the *Index of American Design* that included detailed illustrations of old American objects. According to the index's director, Holger Cahill, the index was to provide craftsmen and designers a ". . . steadying influence and source of refreshment."[10] For Gist, having his home designated as a national historic site was his way of indexing the accomplishments of his family and the breadth of his collections.

What was it about Blair's house that Secretaries Hull and Ickes considered worth saving? Frances and Cordell Hull and Anna and Harold Ickes moved in the same social circle as Gist and Laura Blair. Over the years the couples were entertained frequently at

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[9] Richard Guy Wilson, *The Colonial Revival House (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004),* 14.

[10] Janet Kardon, ed., *Revivals! Diverse Traditions 1920-1945.* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 47.

Blair dinner parties.[11] Touring Gist's house and collections, Hull and Ickes understood how the house and its contents told a historically interesting and significant story of changing styles of American decorative arts during the period of 1730 to 1939. Ickes eagerly proceeded with the use of Blair House as a test case for the Historic Sites Act to fulfill the dream of his friend Gist, and as a way to support Roosevelt's historic preservation objectives. When it came to the actual purchase of Blair House, Hull wanted to put the space needs of the State Department as a higher priority, but by August 1942, he had no choice but to accept Roosevelt's orders to take over the property for a diplomatic guest house.

Logically, the furniture of the newly designated President's Guest House should have followed the stylistic progression from American Empire, through the phases of Victorian revivals, and into twentieth century modernism. But, aside from a few comfortable sofas and easy chairs, the influences of modernism never gained entry into Blair House. Most interestingly, with just a few exceptions, Colonial and Federal styles representing seventy-eight percent of the family furniture collection entered the house only after the mid 1870s when the furniture would have been considered well out of fashion. Most Washington elites would have decorated their homes in "the latest taste" except for the few who still favored colonial taste. Was the well known Blair family out of step? Or, did the last purchases of the second generation and all of the collecting of the third generation identify them among the early champions of the Colonial Revival?[12]

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[11] Laura Blair Marvel. Interview with author December 29, 2008, Greenville, Delaware.

[12] The generations of the Blair family are referred to as **First Generation** to live in the Blair House: Francis Preston Blair and his wife, Eliza Violet Gist Blair. **Second Generation** to live at Blair House: Montgomery Blair and his wife, Mary Elizabeth Woodbury Blair; Elizabeth "Lizzie" Blair Lee and her husband, Samuel Phillips Lee; Francis "Frank" Preston Blair Jr. and his wife Appoline Alexander Blair; James Blair and his wife Mary Jessup Blair. **Third Generation** to live in the house: Minna Blair Richey and her husband,

How does the Blair family furniture collection reflect the influence of the Colonial Revival taste? Within the context of Washington D.C.'s famous families, what inspired Gist and Laura, the final owners of Blair House, to shape their collection between 1909 and 1939? This thesis will examine the Blair family collection of furniture in relation to the colonial survival and revival, the influence of two World Expositions, preservation activities of early Americana collectors, the media, and major museums.

The Blair family collection of just fewer than 160 pieces breaks down as follows: American colonial and federal period furniture most probably made between1730 and 1820 represent forty-two percent. Antiques of the William and Mary, Georgian, and Regency periods purchased in England and Scotland comprise fourteen percent while only two percent are of Continental origin. American Empire and Victorian furniture account for nine percent each of the total. Twentieth century colonial reproductions account for twenty percent; only four percent of the pieces fall into the modern category (Figure 5.).

The Colonial Revival is primarily associated with the United States. Period revivals were also present, in a different guise, in Europe as part of a trend that began in the late eighteenth century as a nod to patriotism, not identified with a particular ruler but rather, with the love of ones homeland. As such, both period pieces and reproductions have repeatedly been in fashion. Gist and Laura Blair traveled in Europe frequently, and

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Stephen Richey; Woodbury Blair and his wife, Emily Wallach Blair; Gist Blair and his wife, Laura Lawson Ellis Blair; Montgomery Blair II and his wife, Edith Draper Blair. **Fourth Generation**: Laura Lawson Blair Boggs Marvel, Percy A. Blair, Dr. Montgomery Blair, Jr.

so, observed the various revivals of Laura's favorite Chinese Chippendale and French furniture.[13]

Richard Guy Wilson defines the Colonial Revival as follows:

> The Colonial Revival is the United State's most popular and characteristic expression. Neither a formal style nor a movement, Colonial Revival embodies an attitude that looks to the American past for inspiration and selects forms, motifs, and symbols for replication and reuse. Under the Colonial Revival umbrella are buildings and architecture, furniture and decorative arts, landscape and gardens, novels and literature, illustration and painting, sculpture and music.[14]

The uniquely American part of the revival movement that most appealed to Major Blair was the focus on the decades before and immediately after the American Revolution. This period reflected arts and architecture that was still largely derived from the cultures brought by the early settlers and adapted to their new environment. American Colonial survivals drew on the European styles, specifically English, Dutch, German, and French.

Nationalism and hero worship of ancestors were at the root of the Colonial Revival. Its characteristics include patriotism, romanticism, sentimentality, curiosity, and elitism. Gist proved himself a pure product of the Colonial Revival. Intensely patriotic and proud to have served his country, Gist continued to use the honorary title of Major following his service as a civilian volunteer Judge Advocate in the U. S. Army during World War I. As a member of the Order of the Cincinnati, Virginia Society, he qualified

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[13] While Laura Lawson Ellis Blair supported and encouraged the collecting of Colonial Revival furnishings, for her own bedroom and sitting room, she chose Louis 15th and Louis 16th furniture styles that she generally purchased in France. None of her bedroom furniture exists at Blair House because it was inherited by Laura Blair Marvel who sold most pieces.

[14] Wilson, *The Colonial Revival House, 6.*

for membership through his great grandfather, Colonel Nathaniel Gist, who fought under George Washington.

A tall, elegant, fashionable-dresser with courtly manners, the Major was always the sought-after extra man for social occasions. He patiently waited thirteen years to marry the woman he loved, all the while writing scores of romantic letters to her. Gist responded to the news-filled letters from his mother with thoughtful messages and gifts. He honored his famous father and grandfather's legacy by his efforts to save his ancestral home. Books on history, literature, and decorative arts filled his large library. His curiosity led him to constantly study American furniture and silver. As author of pamphlets on local history and American silver, he often addressed the Columbia Historical Society where he was a long time member. As a man of faith, he served on St. John's Episcopal Church Vestry and he was seen weekly guiding his elderly mother across Lafayette Park for services. In Washington, D. C., families well settled before the Civil War, were referred to as "antique-residents." Gist relished the connections "antique" status afforded him, evidenced by his membership in every old elite private club he could join.[15] As an ardent conservationist, he tended to the trails of Acadia National Park, near Bar Harbor, Maine.[16] Not of a generation that rebelled, Gist fanned the flame of his family's honor and memory to keep it glowing through his endeavor to leave his ancestral home as an enduring museum.

Through his studies and collecting Gist knew there were two aspects of the Colonial Revival, survival and revival. "Survivals" represented the renewed interest in

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[15] *Who's Who* (Washington, D.C.: Consolidated Publishing Company, 1922), 36.

[16] Marvel, Interview December 29, 2008.

architecture; landscape design; furniture; decorative and fine arts, clothing; and literature actually present and used in the course of everyday life of our forefathers and mothers. Included were old homes with their carefully crafted architectural elements and furnishings built during the colonial and federal period from1620 to 1830. Furniture survivals were the authentic, remarkable or ordinary, refined or vernacular, pieces that quickened the heartbeat of collectors like Major Blair. For example, "survivals" at The Metropolitan Museum of Art's American Wing demonstrated how silver, glass, and porcelain integrated with the furniture. The displays provided inspiration and guidance to Gist and Laura. To the Blairs and their fellow "colonial revivalists," it was survival pieces, inherited and purchased, that supplied insight into the lives and material culture of famous and every-day early Americans.

Gist was also aware of "revivals," as the selection and reproduction of forms and motifs from America's colonial and federal eras applied to architectural elements, fine and decorative arts. Reproductions represented revivals of otherwise unaffordable antiques, with varying degrees of accuracy, produced for the middle class consumer. Revivals also included high-end reproductions which acted as detailed and accurate fill-in pieces bought by people like Gist who inherited, for example, nine dining chairs and needed twelve. Gist owned both "survivals" and "revivals" in his collection.

It is not known if Gist or Laura Blair read the popular 1912 home decorating guide, *Colonial Homes and their Furnishings,* by Mary H. Northend, but they surely would have agreed with her statement: "Colonial is synonymous of the best, and objects created during its influence are always of a higher degree of perfection than the best of

other periods…surely of all types it is the most worthy of emulation."[17] Emulation indeed-- the Colonial Revival was evident in architecture, and furnishings.

The Colonial Revival as interpreted through architecture was witnessed daily by the Blairs, as they watched the 1902 progress of the East and West Wing additions to the White House, still considered the finest work of Charles McKim, William Mead, and Stanford White. McKim graduated from Paris' highly regarded school of art and architecture, The Ecole des Beaux-Arts. The study of revivals of historic styles was part of its basic curriculum. This trio invented "modernized colonial" as a style that was not a slavish copy of the architecture of the colonial and federal era, but recalled its history and adapted it with legendary success all over the East. Their work was seen from The World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, to the northeastern states as well in Washington, D.C.

Colonial survival furniture was publicly displayed as far back as the Civil War. The old pieces viewed in the colonial kitchen exhibits of both the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876 and World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 peaked the interest of early collectors like Gist. Combined with a sense of nationalism following these expositions and World War I, the Colonial Revival was fueled by a well promoted sense of tradition through public school curriculum, museum exhibits, and the media.

[17] Mary H. Northend, *Colonial Homes and Their Furnishings* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1912), 236-237.

The Family: First and Second Generations

Understanding family history, the character of the Blair men and women, and the Blair's place in Washington society is integral to evaluating their furniture choices. As advisors to American presidents, editor Francis Preston Blair and sons, Montgomery a cabinet member, and Frank Jr., a senator wielded power and partisan leadership. In 1933, Blair biographer, William Ernest Smith wrote maybe with some exaggeration,

> The Blairs probably stand second to the Adams family in their political influence on the course of American history. For sixty years they exercised more or less power in politics whether in or out of office. They were usually political reformists who held no grudges….Whatever office either of the Blairs held it was honestly obtained and honestly administered. They lived through a politically corrupt period without having their names stained with dishonor in any form whatsoever….The three Blairs [Francis Preston Blair 1791-1876, Montgomery Blair 1813-1883, Francis Preston Blair Jr. 1821-1875] were bold and positive characters… They were participants in some way in almost every important event in the history of the United States between 1828 and 1876.[18]

Blair's house was the site of historically important meetings, political discussions, and entertainment for nationally powerful figures in public office and business. Each of the first floor rooms served as a stage-set for the drama of state. Thanks to the stewardship of Gist Blair, the family furniture collection of 1830 to 1876 remains substantially intact. Today it provides insight into lives of the first and second generation of Washington Blairs during this period.

Both of Major Blair's, grandparents Francis Preston and Eliza Gist Blair, proudly descended from early colonists who became key contributors to the events leading to

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[18] William Ernest Smith, *The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1969), 495.

nationhood. Francis and Eliza moved to Washington from Kentucky in 1830 at the request of President Andrew Jackson to publish a newspaper supportive of Jackson's administration. Reverend James Blair, grandfather of Francis P. Blair, was commissioned to Virginia in 1685, to represent the Bishop of London as the Rector of Bruton Church Williamsburg, where he served for many years. By order of King William and Queen Mary, he founded William and Mary College in 1692 where he was its first President.[19] James Blair, the father of Francis P. Blair, was a Revolutionary War soldier before he became the Attorney General of Kentucky just four years after its admission to the Union. Eliza Violet Gist was the granddaughter of Christopher Gist, a pioneer explorer served as a guide to George Washington during the French and Indian War. Eliza's father, Colonel Nathaniel Gist of Kentucky, fought among the Virginia troops during the Revolutionary War.[20] Even with their pedigree Francis and Eliza were not immediately "received" into the Washington's upper social circles. Biographer, William Smith wrote, the dignified Adams régime was still very much alive when the Jacksonians established their own social circle in 1829. Fortunately for the Blairs, distinguished families like the Martin Van Burens, the Thomas Hart Bentons, and the Amos Kendalls helped them along and "President [Jackson] took them into his heart immediately."[21]

By 1836, the Blairs were ready to move out of rented space into a permanent home. The home of Stephen Decatur's widow before it was sold to the hotel and tavern owner, John Gadsby, was briefly considered by the Blairs, but they were advised by

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[19] From inscription on Royal Commission hanging in the Blair House

[20] Smith, The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics, 21.

[21] Ibid., 98. At the time the Blairs were settling in Washington, Martin Van Buren was Vice President; Thomas H. Benton was a U.S. Senator and Amos Kendall was the Auditor of the U.S. Treasury and also from Frankfort, Kentucky like the Blairs.

Vice-President Van Buren it might be too grand.[22] Another house in the fashionable Lafayette Square neighborhood soon became available.

The United States Surgeon General, Dr. Joseph Lovell, built his home at 1651 Pennsylvania Avenue in 1824 when the city of Washington was less than twenty-five years old and had only 16,000 residents. The city exhibited a new and raw quality where citizens and visitors complained of the muddy or dusty streets, lack of public sanitation, and barnyard animals creating their own paths. Dr. Lovell chose the community near the White House because of its rapidly emerging dignity, beauty, and proximity to political and social power. Other close-by neighbors included Samuel Harrison Smith, president of the Washington branch of the United States Bank; Richard Cutts, comptroller of the United States Treasury, and his wife, sister of Dolley Madison; John P. Van Ness, president of Bank of the Metropolis; William Winston Seaton, associate editor of the powerful newspaper, the *National Intelligencer;* and William Corcoran, broker, banker and art collector.[23] Architects William Thornton, George Hadfield and Benjamin Latrobe had been employed to design the surrounding homes. At the nearby corner of H Street and Jackson Place, Latrobe designed the first house on Lafayette Square for Commodore Stephen Decatur. Directly across Lafayette Park from Decatur's home stood the house built in 1820 that became the residence for former President James Madison and his wife Dolley. Four blocks southwest of the Lovell's house was the Octagon completed in 1800 by William Thornton for John Tayloe, one of Virginia's wealthiest planters. The architect for Dr. Lovell's home is unknown.

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[22] Ibid., 99.

[23] Katherine Elizabeth Crane, *Blair House Past and Present: An Account of its Life and Times in the City of Washington* (Washington D.C.: United States Department of State, 1945), 8.

The January 1837 advertisement for the Lovell home appeared in Blair's own *Globe* newspaper describing the property as:

> …a spacious two story brick building, with a basement; was built under the eye of the late proprietor for his permanent residence, and has every convenience for a family in and about it; a well of excellent water in the yard; brick stable and carriage house adjoining the alley; flowers and fruit garden tastefully laid out and highly cultivated.[24]

Francis and Eliza Blair purchased the house for $6,500.00 [in today's dollars $3,127,500[25]] and moved in with three of their four children. Elizabeth, "Lizzie", their only daughter at age nineteen was already a favorite of Andrew Jackson and she later befriended Mary Lincoln. James, eighteen, later became a noted explorer and entrepreneur in California. Frank Jr., just sixteen when he moved into the Lafayette Park neighborhood, distinguished himself in his adult years as a Civil War general, U.S. congressman and senator from Missouri, and twice proposed for presidential candidacy. Their eldest, Montgomery, had already left for St. Louis to begin his law career.

Six American Presidents from Jackson to Lincoln sought counsel from Francis and Montgomery Blair between 1837 and 1865 and met with them frequently in the home's first floor office/study, now named the Lincoln Room. Francis Preston Blair was among a group of intimates of Andrew Jackson called the "Kitchen Cabinet" that generally met secretly at the White House or in Blair's home. His son Montgomery served in Lincoln's cabinet as Postmaster General, and Lincoln often came to Blair's house as a retreat. According to family lore, President Lincoln, exhausted by the

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[24] Smith, The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics, 12.

[25] This calculation was made using the gross domestic product per capita at www.measuringworth.com/caculators/uscompare/resultwithad.php#

pressures of office, occasionally accepted an offer from Montgomery to spend the night in one of the second floor bedrooms. Because of his height, the President stretched out diagonally on the "figured maple" four poster bed (Figure 6.). [26]

Between 1845, when Francis and Eliza Blair retired to their twenty-room country home called "Silver Spring," in Maryland,[27] and until their son Montgomery returned from St. Louis to Washington in 1852, they rented the Pennsylvania Avenue home to a series of eminent tenants who also used it for social gatherings and political planning. Their first renter was George Bancroft, the newly appointed Secretary of the Navy. From Blair House he laid plans to establish the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. In 1846 Bancroft left to become the United States minister to England and his successor as Secretary of the Navy, John Young Mason, occupied the home. The next lessee was the first Secretary of the Interior, Thomas Ewing. In May 1850 in Blair's front drawing room, Ewing's daughter Ellen married William Tecumseh Sherman. Eleanor Templeman, author of *The Blair Lee House,* described the occasion, "The wedding was a brilliant social event. The distinguished company gathered in the drawing room included President Zachary Taylor, Daniel Webster, and Henry Clay."[28] When Senator Thomas Corwin became the Secretary of Treasury, Ewing filled Corwin's unexpired term in the Senate. When Ewing moved to Capitol Hill,

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[26] Laura Blair Marvel, Interview with author December 11, 2008, The President's Guest House.

[27] Silver Spring, Maryland, bares the same name and location as the Blair "Silver Spring" property.

[28] Eleanor Lee Templeman, *The Blair Lee House* (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, 1980), 26.

Corwin occupied 1651 Pennsylvania Avenue sharing the home with Attorney General John J. Crittenden of Kentucky.[29]

Gist's parents, Montgomery and Mary Blair, returned in 1852 to reside in the family home. In his earlier years, Montgomery studied law at Transylvania University, his father's alma mater, but upon the insistence of President Jackson and his father, he transferred to West Point, graduating in 1835. As a lieutenant fighting in the Seminole War, he decided military life did not suit him. After resigning his commission in 1836, he completed his law degree and was admitted to the bar. By late 1837 he settled in St. Louis where he practiced law, invested in real estate, became mayor of St. Louis, and served as a judge.

In 1846 he returned briefly to the East to marry Mary Elizabeth Woodbury, a neighbor of the Blairs who lived at 722 Jackson Place on Lafayette Square. Like her mother-in-law Eliza, Mary's family background added additional luster to the Blair family status. Her father, Levi Woodbury, was a life-long public servant who served as both Governor and U.S. Senator of New Hampshire. Under Andrew Jackson, he served as Secretary of the Navy and Secretary of Treasury. By 1845, a year before his daughter's marriage to Montgomery, President Van Buren appointed him to the Supreme Court. Mary's mother, Elizabeth Williams Clapp, brought status and wealth into her marriage as the daughter of the wealthiest man in Portland, Maine, Captain Asa Clapp. Clapp

[29] Gist and Secretary Ickes thought the frequent presidential visits and the several noteworthy renters of the Blair House made a strong case for the historical site designation.

made his fortune in West Indies trade and contributed funds for the War of 1812. His political influence significantly benefited his son-in-law Levi.[30]

Many colonial and federal treasures in the Blair collection descend through the Clapp/Woodbury side of the family. The federal style sideboard owned by Peter Woodbury, Revolutionary War captain, Bunker Hill veteran, and grandfather of Mary Blair, is likely to have been crafted by Samuel Dunlap or one of his sons. The original Dunlap family of cabinet workers settled in the Bedford, New Hampshire area in the same county where Peter resided with his family. The three generations of Dunlap craftsmen had no apparent competition in the various towns of central New Hampshire in which the sons, cousins, and grandsons settled.[31] The elegant serpentine shape and oval detailing make it a good example of popular designs of 1790-1820; aside from the oddly sized corner fan inlays on the doors, Peter ordered for himself a most elegant piece (Figures 7.). The Woodbury sideboard had many costly features representing the highest value piece Mary owned. Add-ons to the standard sideboard design include: its over-sized length requiring six legs; serpentine shape; over-hanging center drawer; concave side doors; convex center doors; banded, fan, and oval inlays; and the triangular veneer pattern on the doors. For a cabinetmaker in a market secondary to Boston and Salem, this piece could have been among the cabinetmaker's most

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[30] Kermit L. Hall. "Woodbury, Levi," *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States*, (New York: Oxford University Press) 2005 and Clapp Ancestors website: http://Katharinesweb.net/Ancestos/Clapp.htm.

[31] Charles S. Parsons, "The Dunlaps of New Hampshire and their Furniture," in *Country Cabinetwork and Simple City Furniture*, ed. John D. Morse (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970), 109-119.

time consuming and elegant product. Proud of this inherited piece, both Mary and her son, Gist, displayed it as the focal point of the formal dining room.

Montgomery as the owner of 1651 Pennsylvania Avenue[32] later expanded the house twice, first adding a small wing to the east in 1852-53 and adding a third and fourth floor to the whole structure 1855-56 (Figure 8). In the winters, to enjoy the social season, Francis and Eliza Blair returned from "Silver Spring" to share the house with Montgomery and Mary's family and Lizzie. By 1859, Francis Blair built a home on the west side of his property at 1653 Pennsylvania Avenue for Lizzie and her husband Samuel Phillips Lee.[33] A naval officer, Phillips Lee was a second cousin to Robert E. Lee.[34] After the Lee's house was completed, Francis and Eliza spent winters there with Lizzie to keep her company while her husband was on lengthy sea duty.

Samuel Phillips Lee, grandson of Virginia Senator Richard Henry Lee, had a distinguished naval career serving with Commodore Matthew Perry in the capture of Tabasco in the Mexican War. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he was assigned blockading duty at Charleston, South Carolina, and then served with David Farragut to capture Fort Jackson, Fort St. Philip and New Orleans. Quickly, he rose to the rank of Rear Admiral and commanded the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron.[35] Lee, along with Lizzie's brother, Frank, Jr., an army

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[32] In 1852, Francis Preston Blair turned over the ownership of the Pennsylvania Avenue house to his oldest son, Montgomery, as was the custom. Smith, *The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics*, I, 291.

[33] Property owned by Francis Blair extended all the way to the current Corcoran Museum of Art where it abutted the land owned by William Corcoran.

[34] The address of the Lee-Blair house was 1653 Pennsylvania Avenue.

[35] **www.arlingtoncemetery.net/sphlee.htm**

major general who served in Sherman's Georgia Battle to the Sea, were both hailed as heroes at the end of the Civil War.[36]

Lizzie Blair Lee, an ardent letter writer, left a rich record of everyday life during the period leading up to and through the Civil War.[37] Her letters were penned primarily to her husband; absent brothers; Southern in-laws; and aunts along the northeastern seaboard. Even Lizzie recognized her own role as "news correspondent" in August 1863, when she wrote, "My letters are a family institution."[38] In them she shared the details of her varied charity work typical of middle and upper-class women. As a woman of strong leadership skills, she was grateful for her opportunities to contribute to the war effort. Washington, south of the Mason-Dixon Line was affected differently than most northern cities during the Civil War because it was constantly under the threat of capture by the Confederate troops.

In the spring of 1861 Lizzie described neighbor after neighbor packing up to leave the city. Notices of auctions of household goods filled the newspapers. Prominent banker William Corcoran rented his luxurious mansion around the corner from the Blairs and waited out the war in France with his daughter and son-in-law, who was the secretary of the Confederate legation in Paris. Another southern-sympathizing neighbor, Mrs. Ogle Tayloe, said that when the world was righted again and her friends returned, "her red silk upholstery would be uncovered and she would receive again."[39] Lizzie's letters talked

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[36] Katherine Elizabeth Crane, Blair House Past and Present: An Account of its Life and Times in the City of Washington (Washington: United States Department of State, 1945), 32-33.

[37] Lizzie Blair Lee wrote over 900 letters during the Civil War years. They are among the Blair Family Papers at the Library of Congress.

[38] Virginia Jeans Laas, *Wartime Washington* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 9.

[39] Kathryn Allamong Jacobs, *Capitol Elites* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 44.

about arrests of prominent citizens just on the suspicion of collaboration with the South. Her heart was heavy with concern about the loyalty of the neighbors near her parent's country retreat.

Eventually, occupied by Southern troops following the Battle of Monocacy (July 9-11,1864), "Silver Spring," Francis and Eliza's summer house, remained standing, but Montgomery Blair's country home, "Falklands," on the same Maryland property was burned by Confederate soldiers under the command of Jubal Early, as symbolic protest against Montgomery's service in Lincoln's cabinet. Celebrating their success along the Monocacy River and awaiting the command to proceed, Early's troops became so drunk on Blair's whiskey, that they never accomplished their capture of Washington City.[40].

Three years following the completion of her new home, Lizzie had not completely furnished it. Discussing how she would decorate their house on October 11, 1863, Lizzie Lee wrote to her husband, Phil:

> I have looked at some furniture place [s] & find that dining room furniture alone will cost four hundred dollars of oil walnut which is as cheap wood as oak. Minna [her niece] reports that she can get carpets here as cheap as in Phila…carpets like that in the office cost $150. the Brussells such as she gave [got] for her parlors two years ago $150, is now sold by Barnes for $255…& Perry asks $262. for the same carpet….Now about fixing up it is expensive to you & troublesome to me—but Mother wants it.[41]

The comment "but Mother wants it," referred to Lizzie's mother Eliza, who signaled her daughter's need to conform to her station in society. While Lizzie's concerns were focused on following the wartime activities, Eliza encouraged her

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[40] Blair family biographer, William Smith, credits Francis Blair's whiskey as a factor for stopping the Confederate advance. As there were many circumstances that prevented the Confederate occupation of Washington, D.C., the reader may regard this as an over statement.

[41] Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 312.

daughter to be prepared to "receive" as was the custom among upper class society in along the Eastern seaboard.

Boston, New York, and Philadelphia elite families maintained leadership positions by virtue of their wealth and early American descendants. Two types of elites existed in the capital city at the time of Lizzie Blair's letter. The term "residential elite" referred to the families like the Blairs, who established themselves in the earliest decades of the city. Architects, bankers, publishers, successful merchants and substantial land owners created the support system that made the town function. Most became wealthy by their strong work ethic, integrity, education and being in the right place at the right time. By contrast, according to the author of *Capitol Elites,* Kathryn Jacob, "official society" described "specific elected and appointed offices, regardless of the pedigree or affluence of their occupants. No matter how low-born or venal, could lay claim to that office's assigned place at the table."[42] Well educated and legitimately of long lineage, many of those officials acted as true patriotic public servants like Levi Woodbury. Their numbers were tainted however, by the few opportunists and scoundrels among them.

Intermingling with both the "residential elite" and "official society" was almost required by the political nature of newspaper publishing and the practice of law. The Blair men and their wives, who entertained on their behalf, invited both residential and official society into their home. It was expected that their houses be well run and comfortable, if not always elegantly furnished, for the continual stream of gatherings. Husbands generally wanted their homes, where most also maintained offices, to reflect

[42] Jacob, *Capitol Elites*, 3.

their breeding, success, good taste and status. The Blair men were no exception. Eliza and Mary saw themselves in supporting roles enhancing their husbands' careers by their gracious hospitality.

Even without clear documentation, establishing possible locations of manufacture of Blair furniture can be more accurate than guess- work. Both city made and country made pieces may have had the same levels of quality and ornamentation such as inlays and carvings, but pieces made in the a large east coast furniture center like Boston, New York, Providence, Philadelphia, and Baltimore were at higher level of sophistication. City made furniture more consistently followed pure design, not intermingling details of a different age. Country cabinet could be of equal quality construction, but often tended to have added flourishes not consistent with the pure period style. It would appear that with just a few exceptions the Blairs chose city-made reasonably high quality and sophisticated design. Refinement of details is another evaluation point related to cost. Evaluating on the basis of the number of refined details indicates furniture owned by the first generation of Blairs: Eliza Gist and Francis Preston, and second generation Mary Woodbury and Montgomery, falls into the following categories: forty percent is of medium quality, forty-five percent is of higher elegance, and fifteen percent is of the very highest refinement (Figure 9.). [43]

Home furnishings as a reflection of status and style can be analyzed by studying price books of the period. For example, *The Price Book of the District of Columbia Cabinetmakers,* published by the Columbia Cabinetmakers' Society in 1831, established a method to codify standard pricing of piece work. It acted like a contract between

[43] The assumption is that lower cost utilitarian pieces did not survive.

employer and employee. The highly detailed price book presented a menu of options chosen by the purchaser. As an example, if the figured or "curled maple" bed Abraham Lincoln slept in was purchased in the early 1830s, (Figure 6, 11, 12.) using the price book (Figure 10.), the "extras" the Blairs chose added 58% to the base price of $3.00 totaling $4.75 (Figure 13.). Curled maple, hardwood rails and canted corners on the posts accounted for the increased price. The Blairs selected about half of the available upgrades moving the value of the bed to a medium category.

Purchases of house wares and furniture recorded in account books contribute clues not only to the expenditures of a household, but what the family valued. On April 26, 1856, Francis Preston Blair entered into his accounts "Cripps for cabinet furniture, $ 765.98."[44] This purchase coincided with the building of the two story addition that Montgomery added to the house. Because the added space allowed his parents more room during their winter visits, it was consistent with the generosity of the senior Blairs to subsidize the furnishings. William McLean Cripps' ware room on the northwest corner of 11th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue was just five blocks from the Blair home. A cabinet maker, Cripps regularly advertised starting in 1821 in the *Daily National Intelligencer* and eventually in Blair's *Globe.* August 3, 1833, Cripps' *Globe* advertisement read:

> I continue to manufacture all kinds of Cabinet Furniture of the best materials and workmanship . . . It consists of marble top pier tables; at remarkably low prices; maple high and low post beds; dressing bureaus; card and dining tables, of both leg and pillar work. . . From my long experience in business I hope I shall be able to please those who are disposed to favor me with their orders.[45]

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[44] Blair Family Papers, carton 1 item 315, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[45] Anne Castrodale Golovin, "Cabinetmakers and Chairmakers of Washington, D.C., 1791-1840," *The Magazine Antiques,* May 1975, 911

Anne Golovin, an associate curator at the Smithsonian, explains in her article, "Cabinetmakers and Chairmakers of Washington, D.C., 1791-1840" that Washington furniture makers were exposed to current fashion and a high standard of craftsmanship through the continuous influx of furniture from the north.

> Local makers extolled the stylishness and quality of their own products: Excellent, in the most modern style, made of the best materials and workmanship' are among the standard claims. . . .While the pieces known to have been produced by specific makers are well crafted and refined, they cannot be placed in a category with the finest American furniture of this period.[46]

William Cripps may have been the maker of the Empire dressing bureau used by both Montgomery and his sons (Figures 14, 15.). From the inside of the drawers, single screw holes reveal that current Chippendale style pulls are not original to the bureau. The simple brass pulls like Cripps often used would have been original to the piece (Figure 16.). Similar to the maple bed, Blairs selected upgraded options that increased the price and resulted in a more refined piece. For example, the charge for a full column bureau was $7.50. According to the District of Columbia price books of 1831, butt jointing on each drawer, the projecting drawer, and the top drawer divided into two would have increased the price to $ 9.85.[47]

Only a few pieces in the Blair furniture collection have labels. The 1833 advertisement (Figure 17.) from New York manufacturer Joseph Meeks provides clues to the possible origin of the two tables. The ad illustrates pieces closely resembling the side

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[46] Ibid., 903.

[47] Wendell Garrett, ed. "The Price Book of the District of Columbia Cabinetmakers, 1831." *The Magazine Antiques,* May 1975, 893. This price book may well have been outdated when their Blairs made this purchase, but is used simply to illustrate that they chose to upgrade pieces in non-public spaces of the house.

table (Figure 18.) and the pier table (Figure 19.). Each of these pieces uses white pine as a secondary wood, giving further evidence of their northern origin. In the 1830s and 1840s Meeks claimed to be the largest furniture manufacturer in the country. He combined designs shown in George Smith's *Cabinet Makers and Upholsterer's Guide* printed in London in 1826 with continental influence. The design and finishing detail of both pieces bear the mark of sophisticated city-made furniture. The Blairs had close family members living in Philadelphia plus Mary Woodbury Blair had family in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and Portland, Maine. Montgomery and Mary vacationed during those years in North Conway, New Hampshire. Their level of wealth and Mary's taste for the finery of her parent's home, make it plausible that they shopped in northern furniture centers to purchase pieces of greater refinement than Eliza and Frances bought locally in Washington.

Center tables became popular in the 1810s and remained fashionable through the Victorian period as replacement for the colonial era tea tables. With a new gas lighting fixture installed early in the 1850s in the center of ceiling, Mary Blair's lady friends, Marcia Van Ness, Julia Tayloe, Hannah Van Buren, and Louise Corcoran gathered around the table for poetry reading, conversing or playing cards. The juxtaposition of rounded and rectilinear shapes of the Blair's center table typifies the American Empire aesthetic. The book-matched mahogany veneer on the table top speaks to the high quality of the materials and care of the craftsman (Figure 20.). The boldly curved splayed legs terminate in stylized brass foliate and animal paw feet with castors (Figure 21.).This enhancement was a costly option that the Blairs valued.

As a reaction to classicism, the Victorian aesthetic includes variety, irregularity, intricacy, roughness, and movement. Not all of these characteristics appear in the shelf clock, shaving stand, side chair, and over mantel mirrors, but in various combinations they are the hallmark of the Victorian era. Revivals of classic forms and motifs with added embellishments denote Victorian design. To Colonial revivalists like Gist Blair, these enhancements appeared to be too fussy, but to consumers of the Victorian era they are regarded as improvements. Due to the relative conservative taste of Mary Woodbury Blair, Gist's wife, Laura regarded her mother-in-law's Victorian era purchases as compatible with the Colonial Revival furnishings. Gist would have kept them in any case, since they reminded him of his childhood and his beloved mother.

The Gothic Revival shelf clock in a steepled case reflected the latest taste of the 1830s and 1840's (Figure 22). Tall clocks of the early nineteenth century gave way to less costly shelf clocks. The eglomisé panel with words "Courthouse St. Louis" on the lower half of the clock helps to date it after 1828 when that courthouse was built. Even without a label or receipt, it is clear the clock was crafted in St. Louis and purchased by Montgomery while he resided there from 1837 to 1852.

A shaving stand belonging to Montgomery was also used by his sons. The pierced scroll work of the tripod base and the spiral turnings of the pedestal, showing movement are distinguishing features of the Elizabethan revival phase (1850-1870) of the Victorian furniture era (Figure 23.). The Blair pieces do not reflect ornate mid Victorian taste except for a pair of mirrors. The Blair's apparently owned no intricately carved pieces like those produced by John Henry Belter, or even pared down versions. Their taste primarily remained with the Empire and early Victorian aesthetic. In an article in the

December 1880 issue of *The Republic,* "Celebrities at Home" the writer reports on the family's achievements and describes the home's interior:

> The interior of Judge Blair's house is old-fashioned and comfortable. The parlors, library and dining-rooms are commodious and are substantially and tastefully furnished. Some rich old heirlooms in furniture attract the eye in every room. There are some modern works of art in bronze, but the style is of the rich old respectability that flourished half a century ago--and all the more attractive…one can not enter the house without being impressed with the appearance of solid comfort. During the winter it is a hospitable mansion to all the best elements of Washington society. No lady at the Capital is more popular than Mrs.[Mary Woodbury] Blair.[48]

This insight into the Blair's style helps to explain why furnishings are tasteful, but not necessarily the "very latest taste." The "rich old respectability" phrase would refer to the Peter Woodbury Federal sideboard, and restrained Empire and early Victorian pieces like the less adorned side chair with its applied anthemia motif rather than a rococo revival highly carved chair with pierced floral ornamentation (Figure 24). It could be Mary's Yankee upbringing probably informed her restrained and conservative taste. Rooms of highly embellished flamboyant furniture may have seemed undignified to her old-wealth New England background.

Her one concession to "the latest taste" was the pair of over-mantel mirrors which probably fascinated Gist as a child (Figure 25.). They originally hung above the fireplaces in the front and rear parlors. The frame made of gilded walnut was heavily carved with foliate, S and C-scrolls; and deeply gouged corner shell-like scrolls. Their massive scale dominated the room and impressed visitors. That single focal point amid the more conservative background of "quiet" pieces may have been just the drama Mary Blair was trying to achieve. The mirrors captured light from the adjacent windows during

[48] "Celebrities at Home: Montgomery Blair," *The Republic* 1880, 18.

the day and reflected light from both overhead ceiling fixtures and mantel candelabra during the evening.

The label of Samson Cariss from Baltimore dates the mirrors to 1854. An 1851 pier mirror and matching window cornices, also by Samson Cariss are at Hampton, the estate of the wealthy Ridgley family north of Baltimore (Figure 26.). The Renaissance Revival (1860-1875) Hampton mirror with open work, and stag cartouches make them far more ornate than the Blair mirrors. The extra detailing and coordinating window treatments were in keeping with Ridgley's station among the nation's elite.

Of the Blair family collection, the over-mantel mirrors are the only purely Renaissance Revival pieces. The Blair collection has no other furniture representation of the Renaissance Revival taste. Explanations could be the death of Montgomery and Mary Blair's eight year old daughter in 1862 when Gist was just a toddler. Conventions of the time would have them adhering to high mourning customs. For more than a year they would not have participated in social occasions nor entertained in their own home.[49] Also several members of the Blair family fought in the Civil War. Collections of their letters and news clippings from the period, focused on war with scant reference to home decoration. Financial considerations may have been another reason to forestall decorating projects. Montgomery resigned from Lincoln's cabinet in 1864 over a dispute with Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase, regarding issues of emancipation of slaves. He then resumed his law practice, which would have taken time to rebuild. Supporting brother, Frank, his wife and their eight children while Frank was recovering from war injuries strained Montgomery's budget. A final reason was the economic Panic of 1873.

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[49] John Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (London: Blue Star House, 1971), 68.

Fueled by a bank failure, several railroads collapsed which led to a long economic depression lasting until 1879. The Blairs, heavily invested in property, probably suffered financial losses. Formative years for teenager Gist Blair, this economic downturn probably had an influence on him. While Gist was a generous man, he was constantly watchful of getting good value whether it was from antique dealers or his household servants.[50]

Both generations of conservative Blairs were unlikely to have made large showy expenditures even though their home was still a center of hospitality. Eliza and Francis Preston Blair, as head of this influential household, along with their daughter and sons, created an environment of continuous hospitality. Their good quality furnishings, conservative but current fashion 1830 to 1876, served as the backdrop to critical decisions debated in the house during Washington's tumultuous decades. [51]

Of the family furniture collection remaining in Blair House, it is most likely that the ten American Empire pieces were purchased by Eliza and Francis Blair, while the Victorian era furnishings came to the house through Montgomery and Mary Blair acquisitions. No matter to whom they originally belonged, the fact remains that notable Late Empire and Victorian pieces have been in the house for over 160 years.[52] In addition to the furniture, the family collection includes substantial amounts of glass,

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[50] Marvel, interview with author December 29, 2008.

[51] Blair House archives reveal that Mary Lincoln gave Montgomery Blair a chair belonging to President Lincoln made and presented to him by a soldier. No such chair is in the Blair House family collection. If it survived, hopefully it is in the hands of a family member who might one day return it to the President's Guest House.

[52] All photographs, unless otherwise noted, were taken by author with permission for academic use by the curator of the President's Guest House, Candace Shireman. The photographs are of the Blair family furniture collection in current locations.

ceramics, and silver from colonial times through the Victorian period. Most of the Colonial and Federal era furnishings came through inheritance and the collecting efforts of the third generation family member to live in the house, Gist Blair (Figures 27. 28. 29. 30.).

The Third Generation

After graduating from Princeton in 1880 and earning his law degree at George Washington University 1882, Gist followed the pattern started by his father. He joined his brother Woodbury as they started their law careers in St. Louis and managed the family's real estate investments. Also, following in their father's footsteps after about fifteen years they returned to their Washington, D.C. roots, mature and experienced public servants and ready to carry on distinguished careers, get married, and start families. When Gist moved back to Washington in 1897, he returned to 1651 Pennsylvania Avenue to share the home with members of the second and third Blair generations. Already filling the house to capacity were his sister, Minna Blair Richey, with her husband Dr. Olin Richey, and his two nephews. His bachelor brother, Woodbury, recently married younger brother, Montgomery II with his bride, Edith, along with their widowed aunt, Virginia Lafayette Woodbury Fox, and a maiden aunt, Ellen deQunicy Woodbury (both sisters of his mother) also lived there.

When the crowded house became too much for Gist, he spent considerable time at his clubs and in Maryland at the family country home, "Falklands," his father re-built following the Civil War. Before ten years had passed, the domestic arrangements began to change. Monty II and Edith with their growing family moved to a new neighborhood. In 1907, lawyer, socialite, and fifty-five year old bachelor, Woodbury, married Emily Wallach, whose father was mayor of Washington. Woodbury brought his bride back to the family home, which motivated Minna and Olin Richey to move around the corner to

10 Lafayette Square (now 716 Jackson Place), where they remained until their deaths in 1919.[53]

By 1909 both of their aunts had passed away and the house was shared only by Woodbury, Emily, and Gist. By then, living two miles north on 16th Street, Montgomery II, still owned an equal share of the house with Woodbury and Gist. Over the years since their mother's death in 1887 much discussion took place about the costs and responsibilities of the upkeep of the family home as well as the "Falklands" property they also shared. Through a silent auction in 1911, Gist outbid his brothers to gain full ownership of the Pennsylvania Avenue ancestral home.[54]

When Gist was not engaged in his law practice and home improvement projects, his two favorite activities were maintaining an active social life and studying his enviable collection of Washingtoniana books. He researched for the historical pamphlets he authored and presented before the Columbia Historical Society of Washington and Order of the Cincinnati, both organizations in which he enjoyed active membership. He attempted to get one of the longer pieces nationally published as a book, but was rejected on the basis of the narrowness of his local Lafayette Square neighborhood topic.

At the turn of the century, newcomers breaking into elite social circles in East coast cities like Boston, New York or Philadelphia were considered nearly unachievable without substantial wealth, but Washington had a different set of rules. A society reporter

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[53] Francis Preston Blair built the home at 10 Lafayette Square (716 Jackson Place) for the widow of his son, James, Mary Jessup Blair. Mary was a very enterprising woman who rented the home, as her source of income, to John Rives, Blair's newspaper partner, and then to her sister-in-law, Minna Blair Richey. Mary Jessup Blair purchased and resided in the home next door at 716 Jackson Place. These houses and her other investments made her a wealthy woman in her own right. She and her daughter, Violet were real forces in Washington's elite social circles.

[54] Blair Family Papers, carton 37, items 7512, 7518, 7527 Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

commented that the national capital's high society was in a constant state of flux. "Every four years a new administration turns the social world topsy-turvy, and the older order gives place to the new. . . .Lucifer himself will be welcome if he will dress well."[55] Many ambitious upper middle class families, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, relocated to Washington to improve their business and social prospects, and, most especially, so that their daughters would have the chance to marry well.

Into this environment the ambitious Laura Lawson Ellis and her first husband Franklin arrived in Washington in the fall of 1900. Both Laura and Frank were from well-to-do families in Cincinnati, Ohio. The 1901 *Washington Mirror* compliments their restrained approach to integrating into Washington's elite.

> Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Ellis, of Cincinnati, who took a house here in the early fall, have given some very excellent dinners. They came to Washington with a few letters [of introduction], and have shown excellent judgment in the friends they have made. . . . The Ellis's did not commence to entertain when they first arrived. They waited, and that is where they have shown a tremendous amount of savôir faire. They are possessed of very large means and are spending it, not lavishly, but judiciously. Mrs. Ellis wears stunning jewels, some of them having belonged to Empress Eugenia, and were bought by Mr. Ellis in Paris when the crown jewels were sold.[56]

It is unclear exactly when Franklin and Laura Ellis first met Gist Blair. They may have met at Bar Harbor, Maine, as early as 1893, were the Ellises were summering, as was Gist. By Christmas of 1900, Laura was sending warm letters his way.[57] Society tabloids, *Washington Mirror* and *Town Topics* reported the three together constantly,

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[55] Jacobs, *Capital Elites*, 149.

[56] *Washington Mirror*. "Society" Washington D.C. March 16, 1901 Section 6.

[57] Blair Family Papers, container 5, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

attending the same parties and traveling frequently together to Europe. Laura Ellis was described as a socially ambitious, charming hostess with impeccable taste in home décor. Several of Laura's letters to Gist asked him to delay his home decorating projects until she advised him. "I know all the latest styles", was a phrase she used frequently.[58] Through international travels, books and fashionable magazines, she developed a talent for interior design. "She just knew how to put things right," said adopted daughter, Laura Blair Marvel, "whether it was a whole room or a pretty dinner table laden with antique silver and china."[59] By the autumn of 1912, with Gist as her attorney, Laura divorced Frank Ellis and by March, 1913 Gist and Laura were married and off on a five month European honeymoon until, they hoped, the gossip blew over. The tabloids finally dropped the subject of their pre-marital relations by 1919 and reported only on their attendance at parties of others listed in the Social Register.[60]

Only slightly diminished by World War I years, Washington social life was quite lively and well recorded in the tabloids and established newspapers. The sentimental collector Gist saved invitations to embassy balls; high society weddings, like that of Alice Roosevelt to Nicholas Longworth; country club events; and the laying of cornerstones. He kept the heavily engraved invitations to White House dinners from

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Marvel, Interview December 29, 2008.

[60] Social Register of Washington volumes 1938. (New York: Social Register Association, 1937), 14, 41, 50, 67, 83, 85,151. According to Laura Blair Marvel during the December 29, 2008, interview, Gist and Laura's closest Washington friends included: Clement and Mary Dunn; George and Ethel Garrett; Henry and Margo Darlington; Reginald and Bessie Huidekoper; President and Mrs. William Howard Taft; Mr. and Mrs. Warren Barbour; Mr and Mrs. Sumner Welles, Mr. and Mrs., Peter Jay; Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Langhorne, Mrs. Cary Langhorne; Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Parin; Mr. and Mrs. Edward Mitchell; Mr. And Mrs. Richard Wilmers; Mrs. Kent Lagare; Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton Fish; Princess Boncompagni; Justice Holmes; Mr. and Mrs. John Dorrance; Mr. and Mrs. Charles Glover; Mr. and Mrs. Truxton Beale Cordell and Frances Hull; Mr. Harold Ickes; Breckinridge and Christine Long; Hamilton and Anstiss McCormick – Goodhart Nathan and Dorothie Wyeth.

Presidents Grover Cleveland, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and more. Laura Blair was a close friend of Helen "Nellie" Taft from their shared childhood years in Cincinnati. The Blairs also developed close friendships with their Bar Harbor summer neighbors who were primarily from Philadelphia and New York.[61]

Gist followed in his mother's footsteps with his interest in the arts. An 1877 letter she wrote to him at Princeton demonstrated her interest and influence. "I have just read in *The World* an extract from a lecture by Parke Godwin in New York before the Princeton Alumni about introducing the study of art into colleges which study I hope will be introduced while you are there. It will so cultivate your taste."[62] With Laura, Gist kept alive his mother's interest in colonial survivals. After their mother's death, the siblings divided her possessions. Woodbury labeled many items of the inventory list, "hold jointly"[63] signifying that those items remained in the house. As Gist's siblings moved, many of those objects also stayed with the house. On August 7, 1907, Minna wrote to Gist, "Family belongings should be kept together with the family name. …we all enjoy keeping the home belongings where we can make our family circle around them."[64] Minna referred to the furnishings of their parents; portraits, books, *Globe Newspaper* political cartoons, photographs, and presidential memorabilia.[65] Gist left the first floor

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[61] Marvel. Interview December 29, 2008. Laura Blair Marvel said they referred to Bar Harbor as "Philadelphia on the rocks."

[62]Blair Family Papers, container 70, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

[63] Blair House- Lee House file 1 drawer 2 "Appraisement of household effects of Mary Elizabeth Woodbury Blair made on February 11, 1888."

[64] Blair Family Papers, container 37, item 7525. Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

[65] Possible late 20th century floor plans in figures 27-30 are based on location information in the Office of the Curator, Blair House.

office of Francis and Montgomery's much like he remembered it as a youngster (Figure 31.). The walls were hung with political cartoons from Blair-owned *Globe Newspaper*, family portraits and the engraving of Lincoln's cabinet, including Montgomery Blair, reading the *Emancipation Proclamation.* For Gist these works reflected the reverence he felt for his family's contributions to nineteenth century America.

Aside from the Federal sideboard Mary Woodbury Blair inherited from her grandfather, most inherited Colonial survival objects came to the Blair House in 1920 when Gist, served as executor for the estate of his cousin, Mary Emerson Clapp. The maple high chest of drawers, slant top desk, Simon Willard clock, and pier looking glass all descended through the Clapp and Woodbury families of New Hampshire and Maine.

If Gist had examined the maple high chest at an auction or antique shop, he probably would have passed it up (Figure 32.). The typically American form from the second third of the eighteenth century appealed to him, and he appreciated the detail of the fan carvings, but his practiced eye would have noticed the slight gap in the molding between the top and bottom cases indicating there had been a "marriage." The pieces were not originally made together. Gist generally collected mahogany furniture. He knew maple, rather than mahogany was used for less expensive New England furniture. So why did the discerning Major Blair keep the high chest? Gist was sentimental, especially when it related to his family. Proud to have descended from the successful Clapp family he did not reject this piece. He would have connected the slightly mismatched maple chest to warm memories of journeys to visit his mother's New England kin.[66]

[66] Unless it was a figured maple, to disguise its light color which was not popular until the last decade of the eighteenth century, stain would be applied to make the wood appear darkly richer. Recipes for coloring stain appear in Robert Dossie's *The Handmade to the Arts* (London, 1758), a maker's guidebook that was widely owned in America in the eighteenth century. The 1764 edition included recipes for many colors

Compared to the maple high chest, the Chippendale period desk made circa 1780 is of higher quality construction and more sophisticated design, indicated by the use of mahogany and serpentine shaped drawers (Figure 33.). These desks typically have plain interiors, so the contrasting birch drawer fronts suggest an additional cost incurred by Gist's great grandfather, Asa Clapp (Figure 34.). The other costly options were the addition of ogee bracket feet rather than plain bracket feet and the bold hardware. In a position to afford the finest, Captain Clapp bought this desk as an emblem of his thriving business.

The most sophisticated clock Gist inherited bears the name of Simon Willard, the highly successful maker of clocks in Roxbury section of Boston. Evidence of Gist's curiosity about Willard clocks comes through a book in his library, *A History of Simon Willard: Inventor and Clockmaker.* Inside the book, Gist wrote "bought at Portland, Maine August 1, 1921," one year after he inherited the clock.[67] In the mid to late eighteenth century tall clocks, especially a Simon Willard clock, would have been among the most costly and luxurious items. Understanding its value Gist and Laura placed it prominently opposite the front door to impress all visitors with its owner's status, wealth, and good taste (Figure 35.).

As much a fan of eighteenth century furniture as Federal era furnishings, Gist appreciated tabernacle pier glasses from the Clapp and Woodbury Estates made between 1790 and 1825 in northern New England (Figure 36.). The proportions of these looking

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"…brown, purple brown, dark brown and a light red brown… will have greatly the appearance of new mahogany. The New Hampshire cabinetmaker, Major John Dunlap (1746-1792) wrote down a recipe 'To stain wood to Resemble Mehogany' [sic]." John T. Kirk. *American Furniture: Understanding Styles, Construction and Quality.* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000) 107.

[67] See appendix I, list of books of Blair family library

glasses reflected the interest in symmetry of Federal era design. The eglomisé image of a mill on one glass, plus the oak leaf and acorns, common symbol of plenty, prosperity and fruitfulness, on the other mirror, added quality to the already expensive pieces (Figure 37.).[68]

The serpentine desk, Willard clock, and tabernacle looking glasses each tell a consistent story of the refined taste of Asa Clapp. Making his wealth in his shipping business, he had an array of choices available to him. His refined taste for elegant quality resulted in treasured pieces that in the twentieth century adorned the home of his great-grandson Gist.

In addition to the books that informed Gist and Laura, the other sources that educated their taste were fairs, expositions and museum exhibits. Those between the 1860s and 1920s had the greatest influence on the growing appreciation of the Colonial survival and revival taste.

[68] Jean Chavalier and Alain Gheerbrant. *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Penguin Group, 1996), 4.

Turning point - Fairs, Expositions and Exhibits

Attendance at and news of Sanitary fairs, the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876, World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, and museum exhibits of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century produced a profound effect on the architectural and interior furnishings of American homes. The Colonial Revival taste gained broader acceptance through these events. Collectors and architects eagerly participated in the continual growth of the Colonial Revival aesthetic. For Gist and Laura Blair, attendance at these noteworthy events shaped their taste and sparked their enthusiasm for collecting.

In the United States, before the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876, a tiny handful of people rejected the "latest taste" in home furnishings in favor of historically-associated objects. Pre-dating Gist Blair, a man with an unusually punctuated name, Ben: Perley Poore (1820-1887) was one of the first collectors of Americana. Like Gist, his strong interest in political history served as the catalyst for assembling his collection. By the 1850s Poore's passion grew into a constant desire to own furniture, china, pewter and old architectural elements of patriots' homes about to be demolished. In addition to his Washington, D.C. home, he had a residence in his old hometown at Newburyport, Massachusetts, called "Indian Hill." Poore decorated it with paneling from the Old Province House in Boston and John Hancock's home.[69] Poore, like other early collectors, was driven by his interest in the stories associated with each object. He enjoyed sharing these stories and thought nothing of displaying unrelated objects as long as each added to

[69] Poore got the paneling from The Old Province House in Boston just before it was remolded in 1851 and additional paneling from the John Hancock home also in Boston before it was demolished in 1863. Poore rescued fluted pillars from a Boston church, and a staircase and mantle from other houses.

the nostalgic atmosphere of "Indian Hill."[70] In addition to his collecting, he was a journalist who worked for the *Boston Journal* and the *Congressional Globe,* the latter published by Frances Preston Blair. Elizabeth Stillinger's *The Antiquers* noted, "He had a wide acquaintance, having known everybody of consequence in the capital for 30 years or more."[71] Poore most certainly would have known the Blair family through his journalism career. He entertained widely as a way of sharing his collection. Montgomery and Mary Blair would, no doubt, have had an early exposure to the colonial survivals during visits to his home in Washington.

Scholars of the Colonial Revival barely mention collectors active before 1876. Most credit the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876 with the invention of the movement, which is not entirely correct. During the Civil War, "Sanitary Fairs" were held in Washington, D.C., and several other cities in the North and South to raise money for the treatment of wounded soldiers. Typically the fairs displayed furniture and other objects associated with admired patriots. The odd name is derived from their sponsor, the city Sanitary Commissions. These commissions were the forerunners of the Red Cross. This patriotically inspired fund-raising was just the type of activity that engaged the Blair ladies. Gist's aunt, Lizzie Blair Lee, was an early founder of the Washington Sanitary Fairs and served as its first Directress. From Washington, December, 1864, Lizzie reported to her husband, "had most successful Fair I hope & with reason that we have made ten thousand dollars."[72]

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[70] Elizabeth Stillinger, *The Antiquers* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1980), 27-34.

[71] "Ben: Perley Poore: The Well known Correspondent Dies in Washington," *New York Times*, May 29, 1887.

[72] Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 447.

In addition to his great-grandfather Woodbury's sideboard, Gist's first look at colonial furniture may have happened when he tagged along with his aunts and mother to Georgetown's 1868 Sanitary Fair that raised funds to build the Aged Women's Home for widows of Civil War soldiers and sailors.[73] As reported in the *Washington Evening Star*, "The New England Kitchen forms quite an attraction, and so does the picture gallery"[74] (Figure 38.). With the exception of Philadelphia's Sanitary Fair of 1874, organized by Benjamin Franklin's great-granddaughter, Elizabeth Duane Gillespie, when the most urgent needs of Civil War soldiers and widows resolved themselves, the Sanitary Fairs faded away. They had accomplished their mission of raising funds by providing interesting attractions of America's past. Until the Centennial Exposition eight years later, the New England kitchen too had a hiatus, but the seeds of interest in the daily lives of our forefathers and mothers grew.

The idea for an 1876 centennial exposition in Philadelphia was born in 1864 at the Smithsonian Institution with the suggestion of John L. Campbell, a professor of geology from Indiana's Wabash College. Even before congressional approval, enthusiasm spread. Secretary of State and Blair family friend, Hamilton Fish, dispatched official invitations to every foreign government. All over the country efforts were underway to support the celebration in Philadelphia. By means of countless teas, bazaars, and benefits, upper-class women raised money for the Centennial Exposition:

> The ladies of official society [in Washington, D.C.] threw themselves into preparation for the nation's upcoming centennial. For

[73] The Aged Women's Home still exists in Georgetown at 1255 Wisconsin Avenue and continues to serve the community with certified care in an independent living environment. They list their opening date as 1870.

[74] Alan Axelrod, ed., *The Colonial Revival in America.* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1985), 173.

> days before the grand opening in May 1876, train after train pulled out of Washington as much of official society migrated to the former capital to watch open the Exposition.[75]

The exhibition was a momentous event that impacted not only those who attended, but those who read and heard about it. People who attended told their friends what a great show it was for the money, just fifty cents for admission. Word of mouth brought many additional visitors, and even the most frugal felt the event was worth the trip.[76] [77] John S. Ingram, author of *The Centennial Exposition* guide booklet, summarized the exhibition:

> It created a wave of nationalism, and also a curiosity of the art and products of other countries, particularly of the Far East. Over its 159 days more than 9,758, 000 people visited the Fairmount Park location.[78] Attendance broke the record set by the 1867 Paris Exhibition by over 1,200,000 people.[79]

Newspapers reported that British, French and German visitors were surprised to find that Americans were so involved in the arts. Beyond how the exhibition impressed foreign visitors, it had a positive effect on how Americans saw themselves. Showing the best of America boosted the country's self-image during President Grant's scandal-filled administration. Pride in the past, optimism, and confidence for the future represented the

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[75] Jacob, *Capital Elite,*113.

[76] Robert C. Post ed., *1876 A Centennial Exhibition.* (Washington, D C: Moore & Moore, Inc., 1976), 13.

[77] Elizabeth Lay Newman, Grandmother-in-law of the author attended the Centennial when she was just a year old. Of course, she did not remember the Exhibition, but she heard so many stories of her family's experience there, she was still talking about it with her grandchildren and their spouses at her 98th birthday party. Her parents were musicians of modest means from Ohio.

[78] J. S. Ingram, *The Centennial Exposition.* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 182.

[79] Post ed. *1876 A Centennial Exhibition,* 21. The Paris exhibition of 1867 had an attendance of 8.7 million and was open 214 days.

spirit of the fair and contributed to the growing national interest in the possessions of leaders past.

Unlike the usually unsorted clutter of the display tables at Sanitary Fairs, the Centennial Exposition placed items in context (Figure 39.). Ingram's guide listed the New England Log-House as one of the most interesting and novel features, where John Alden's desk and a cradle that rocked Peregrin White, the baby born on the *Mayflower* in 1620, were on display. A silver pitcher used by Lafayette and numerous other old relics, many 200 years old, told a story of daily life in the early decades of the country's settlement.

At age sixteen, Gist along with his family attended the centennial exposition. His father collected ten engravings, just larger than postcards, of various buildings they may have visited.[80] The prints of the Turkish, Tunisian, Brazilian Courts and the British buildings indicated the family's curiosity about far off places and America's foreign relations.[81] Ingram's exhibition guide described the lacquer work of the Japanese exhibit as the main center of attraction. The appearance and process of lacquer work must have intrigued the Blairs. The family collection contains a black lacquered sewing table that originally included carved ivory implements (Figure 40.). The table could well have been bought in the Asian pavilion. Also in the family collection is a curious lacquered tall clock that may have been bought following the Centennial Exhibition (Figure 41). The

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[80] Evidence of the Blair family's attendance was kept in Montgomery's scrapbook

[81] Clipping found in Montgomery Blair's scrapbooks indicate their interests about the country's affairs were wide. There were articles from *Harper's Weekly* November 16, 1861; *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*; *The Christian Advocate* March 1861; *New York Times* July 3, 1862; *New Orleans Evening Delta* June 10, 1862; *Baltimore County American* November 27, 1863; *Daily National Intelligencer* August 1864; *The Missouri Republican* October 23, 1865; *Chicago Tribune; Congressional Globe* July 9, 1868; *Philadelphia Inquirer* March 24, 1879 and *Baltimore Sun* December 10, 1880. Blair Family Papers, carton 70, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

case appears to be eighteenth century Netherlandish with works from London[82] It is not known if the Blairs acquired the clock at the exhibition or shortly after.

Soon after returning from Philadelphia, Mary Blair's correspondence with antique dealer, John S. Bailey of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, indicated her developing appreciation for the colonial aesthetic. Mr. Bailey responded to her inquiry regarding old clocks (Figure 42.). Soon after, in another letter of November 18th 1876, he listed andirons he had on hand that were more than sixty years old.

Mary must have spoken to her sons of her growing interest in such colonial objects because, in a letter to Gist, she thanked him for the 1877 Christmas gift of a set of antique William and Mary era andirons[83] (Figure 43.). In another letter of February 6, 1887, she wrote that Gist's brother, Woodbury, gave her an antique lap desk (Figure 44, 45.). Compared to the lap desk which belonged to Thomas Jefferson, now at the U. S. State Department's Diplomatic Receptions Rooms, Woodbury's gift was a more modest version (Figure 46, 47.). Using the Washington, D.C. 1831 price book as a basic reference, Mary Blair's lap-desk would have cost forty percent less than Jefferson's. The extra side drawer and brass corner brackets accounted for the higher price of Jefferson's portable desk. Regardless of it's simple features, Mary must have shared her joy of owning these surviving pieces while she influenced Gist to appreciate historic treasures even when they were not only associated with the family ancestors. Mary Blair's interest in the colonial aesthetic was also evident in the books she collected. A well worn copy of

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[82] After the Philadelphia exhibition, forty-two rail freight cars filled with a variety of objects to made their way to Washington, D.C. to become the nucleus collection of the National Museum of the Smithsonian Institution that opened in 1881.

[83]These letters in the Library of Congress family papers are considered too fragile, so they may not be photocopied.

William Prime's *Pottery and Porcelain: Of All Times and Nations,* written in 1879, bears the inscription in her husband's hand, "from M. Blair, Washington City, 1880."[84]

Sharing her enthusiasm for the marriage of her spinster daughter, Mary Blair wrote to Gist and Woodbury in 1884 about the approaching wedding of their sister, Minna, to Dr. Stephen Richey. She described several gifts Minna received which demonstrated furnishings of the Colonial and Federal era and were valued highly enough to be given by close family members and friends. Mary wrote, "EBL [Minna's aunt Lizzie Blair Lee] sent pretty mahogany writing desk (Figures 48, 49.) & Blair [Minna's cousin, Blair Lee] sent a silver dish after some antique style."[85] The lady's writing desk Minna received was late eighteenth or early nineteenth century survival piece rather than one of the many reproductions that were crafted following the centennial fair.

The Centennial International Exhibition of 1876 was less about establishing a specific style and more about motivating the American people to appreciate their history as distinct and worthy of great pride. The young nation discovered its footing among world industrial powers while it also found value in its past. Like Philadelphia's Centennial Exhibition, the objective of the World's Columbia Exposition in Chicago in 1893 commemorated an historical event, educated and entertained, sold products, and took a peek at the future. An underlying motive was to educate the increasing number of immigrants and Americanize them as quickly as possible. Many newcomers left stifling economic environments to provide their children far greater opportunities for upward

[84] Most Blair family books are now kept in the office of the curator or in Blair House storage room 427.

[85] Blair Family Papers, carton 34 item 6909, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

mobility. They wanted their offspring to be Americanized, but without forgetting the best of "the old country" traditions.

Chicago's Columbia Exposition, which celebrated the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of the Americas, was said to have outshined all previous fairs with its Ferris wheel, full size replicas of Columbus' three ships, and its Colonial Revival buildings and collections. Some 27,500,000 people came to see the displays of fifty-one nations and thirty-nine colonies.[86] There is no indication among the family papers whether Gist Blair or his future wife Laura, attended the Exposition, but it would be safe to assume they did. The record breaking attendance showed visitors came from many foreign counties and all over the United States. Like the Centennial Exhibition, it was a major national and international event. Gist, practicing law in St. Louis, would have been less than a day's trip from Chicago by train. Likewise, Laura Lawson Ellis was living in Cincinnati, Ohio, and also a day's rail ride away. Both had the means and freedom of schedule to attend without a second thought.

Even more than the Centennial Exhibition, the World's Columbian Exposition popularized the Colonial Revival. The exposition was not only about style, but also about regional differences of architecture and furnishings. Gist and Laura would have seen architecture and objects recalling colonial examples in the various state buildings. At the request of the exposition managers, state pavilions were designed in the spirit, if not an exact copy of one, of the state's well-known historic structures. The Massachusetts building (Figure 50.) was modeled after the homestead of John Hancock. The Hancock home had previously been demolished, and so entrance gables and columns from "The

[86] Norman Bolotin and Christine Laing, *The Chicago World's Fair of 1893* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1992), 20.

Lindens," a 1754 Danvers, Massachusetts, home were copied for use on its building. [87] Interior décor included colonial tables and chairs, 1740 embroidery, and a federal era card table. Massachusetts's award winning historical exhibit was extensive, featuring an entire room furnished by the Essex Institute of Salem, in which "there was not a piece of furniture less than a hundred years old"[88] (Figure 51.).

Encompassing thousands of exhibits in twenty-two separate buildings, the Columbia Exposition's homage to reviving interest in the Colonial period demonstrated a wide range of viewpoints and styles. According to an essay by Susan Prendergast Schoelwer, the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition gave notice to the Colonial Revival, but it was not the central theme. Whereas, for the 1893 Chicago Columbia Exposition the Colonial Revival displayed a breadth of "historic research and stylistic vocabulary that had not been codified in 1876… The fair was seen and shared…thus giving colonial revival architecture, decorative styles and artifacts far more exposure than ever before"[89] (Figures 52.,53.).

Another opportunity for exposure to the Colonial Revival came when Laura Ellis visited the Pan American Exposition held from May to November, 1901 in Buffalo, New York. In a June 1901 letter to Gist, Laura wrote about her June 14-15 visit to the Buffalo fair, organized to show the benefits of hydroelectric power made possible by Niagara Falls, "…the Exposition was quite worth seeing Buffalo itself is q [quite] a lovely city." Like the earlier fairs, the exposition supported Colonial Revival themes through the New

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[87] "The Lindens" house was moved in 1934 to Washington, D.C. by George and Miriam Morris.

[88] Axelrod, ed., The Colonial Revival in America, 195.

[89] Axelrod, ed., *The Colonial Revival in America,* 204.

England Building shared by Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island. In each of the states' spaces a colonial mantel and fireplace formed the backdrop to the furnishings. Unfortunately, the exposition was most remembered because of the assassination of President William McKinley there in September.

Following these expositions, New York museums started sponsoring exhibits focused on the Colonial taste. They asserted the most lasting effect on collecting and appreciation of Americana. Among the first, the Hudson-Fulton Celebration was held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in the fall of 1909. Its innovative approach and popularity led directly to the opening of the museum's famed American Wing housing a large collection of American survival furnishings in period room settings. The dual objective celebrated both the discovery of the Hudson River 300 years earlier and Robert Fulton's first steamboat trip of 1807. Its organizers' goal of New York history education was combined with the effort to create brotherhood between its gradually assimilating immigrant population and residents who arrived much earlier.

The museum's part, initially, was just the exhibition of Dutch Masters' paintings to honor the Dutch heritage of early New York. Contemplating the idea, a brave museum staff member, Henry Kent, suggested the display of American decorative arts as counterpoint to the European paintings. The proposal garnered no support from the museum staff who still thought American goods had limited artistic value. Fortunately, the close and cordial relationship Kent had with the Museum Secretary and chairman of the event, Robert de Forest, helped Kent prevail. Kent's other ally was Mrs. Emily Johnston de Forest, a collector with a fondness for American antiques. Her influence,

together with her support of Kent's idea, made the difference that led to the first comprehensive museum exhibition of Americanana. Upon approval of Kent's proposal, top collectors sprung into action gathering and facilitating the loan of silver, furniture, and porcelain for the display. Initially, the press scoffed at the idea of balancing works of the fine Dutch Masters with what was expected to be highly unrefined American decorative arts. Natalie Curtis reported in Gustav Stickley's *The Craftsman* that, "One is struck throughout the exhibit by the element of refinement and good taste, the absence of display, and the dignity of line and curve that characterize Colonial workmanship."[90]

"The Hudson-Fulton Exhibition of American Industrial Arts" permanently impacted American decorative arts and its 300,000 visitors in several ways. It inspired the study of American craftsmen. The precedent-setting vignettes of room groupings displayed furniture, silver and porcelain in context, and resulted in a new standard for museum exhibition (Figure 54. 55.). The display contributed to the appreciation of American antiques as history and culture as well as art. Lastly, it moved a population from pride in specific national heroes to an expanded pride in itself as a nation of skilled artisans. Less than four years after their 1920 British buying trip, Laura and Gist made their first visit to The Metropolitan Museum of Art's new American Wing in New York.

[90] Stillinger, *The Antiquers,* 131.

Gist and Laura Shaping the Collection

In addition to inheriting treasures of Americana, Gist and Laura added to their collection. They did not acquire randomly or just for amusement. Laura and Gist became accomplished students of their favorite survival objects. Following his mother's interest, Gist broadened and refined his furniture, silver, porcelain, and glass collections. Less important furniture pieces were sent to the attic or servant quarters to be replaced by older pieces of higher quality bought on travels to England and Scotland and in New England.

While their collection and focused study continued, Gist and Laura's life changed in 1926 with the adoption of Laura's niece and namesake, four year old Laura Lawson. Sixty-six year old Gist immediately fell in love with little Laura and quickly took on the role of primary parent. As her parents were still living, Laura Lawson Blair[91] addressed Gist and Laura as "Auntie" and "Uncle" still thinking the arrangement was temporary, although, Gist and Laura always referred to her as their daughter. According to young Laura Lawson Blair, Gist spent hours studying silver hallmarks which he, in turn, taught to her.[92]

Gist honed his talent for connoisseurship and became adept in spotting good values and fine pieces. He and his wife both had an eye for quality and made their acquisitions through established dealers, auctions and estate sales. Gist's check book

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[91] Laura Lawson Blair married in April 1942 and became Laura Blair Boggs. She married for a second time to William Marvel. In this thesis she is called "daughter," Laura in her youth. Later she is referred to as Laura Blair Marvel so that she is not confused with her aunt, Laura Lawson Ellis Blair.

[92] He so loved his antiques that he spent nearly every evenings for years reviewing his decorative arts books with his new daughter. Marvel, interview December 29, 2008.

recorded five entries in April through August of 1917 made out to auctions.[93] While it cannot be proven if he purchased anything from the famous antique dealer, Israel Sack, an April 14, 1927, letter and photograph from Mr. Sack to Gist describe a Goddard-Townsend type Chippendale style mahogany block front secretary priced at $4,500.[94] While the Blairs did not purchase this piece, they must have been looking to broaden their variety of eighteenth century forms and inquired about the Chippendale style bonnet-top piece, even though they already owned the double-dome topped William and Mary period English desk and bookcase and the Chippendale serpentine front desk from the Clapp estate.

On the Blair's summertime journeys to Bar Harbor, Maine, Laura Blair Marvel recalled, "Uncle and Auntie stopped in every antique shop from Washington D. C. to Bar Harbor. They were always on the hunt. They did not ever seem to buy much, because Uncle judged many things as fakes and said he could trust very few [dealers]."[95] Many of those journeys to Bar Harbor took place during the "inter war years" of 1918-1940. It was a period when organizations like the Society of the Cincinnati, of which Gist was a member, the Sons of the American Revolution, Daughters of the American Revolution, and The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America enjoyed swelling membership. These patriotic organizations to preserve their cultural hegemony emphasized long standing family residency in the United States, in reaction to the

[93] Blair Family Papers, container 23, reel 17. Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

[94] Blair Family Papers, container 21, reel 14. Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

growing influx of immigrants. Each organization, in its own way, perpetuated the memory of brave patriots, supported education and preserved historic sites.

Gist also wanted to rediscover his original roots in the landed gentry of the British Isles. He and Laura were among many wealthy Americans who went searching for their British heritage in the graveyards and castles of the English and Scottish countryside. The travel journal Gist kept of their 1920 journey to England, Scotland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France is a treasure trove chronicling their exploration of family heritage and increasing their collection with Scottish and English silver and furniture.

After a bit of negotiating they gained entry to Gist's ancestors' Blair Castle at Perthshire, Scotland. At the time, Gist and Laura were told by the current Duke that Thomas Chippendale actually supplied some of the furnishings for Blair Castle, and he had the original receipts. According to Christopher Gilbert, a Chippendale scholar, "James, 2nd Duke of Atholl, who succeeded to Blair Castle in 1724 carried out major improvements during the mid-eighteenth century and ordered a profusion of furniture for his lavishly decorated Rococo apartments from fashionable London firms."[96] On May 8, 1758, Chippendale's account recorded "To a Firescreen of fine French tapestry wt a neat mahogany Pillar & Claw £ 3, a Pair of Large Candlestands neatly carv'd & painted white £ 7.7. . ."[97]

Most American collectors of fine antiques started with London-made pieces as a legitimate part of the revival of Colonial taste. These collectors understood that few early

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[96] Christopher Gilbert, *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, (London: Cassell Ltd. 1978), 129.

[97] Ibid., 129.

colonists brought furniture with them on their voyage to America. As the new colonists became established, however, the wealthier ones imported their furniture through factors from their homeland. Therefore, Gist and Laura, like other collectors, regarded adding British pieces to their collection as completely consistent with their Colonial Revival furnishing objective.

The Blair's inherited collection of furniture contained nothing earlier than the Queen Anne objects. Gist noted in his1920 travel journal the purchase of three William and Mary period pieces: a pair of chairs, and a desk and bookcase. By adding these pieces he broadened the scope of their collection. The walnut desk and bookcase featured typical period elements of the double-rounded pediment with an astragal hood, fitted interior, and slant front writing surface. The original bun feet were likely replaced with the current bracket feet (Figure 56.). According to his travel journal, Gist's hunt of antique shops turned up a rare mid-eighteenth century burl walnut veneer chest in Edinburgh, Scotland (Figures 57.). Gist described another purchase as, "One fine antique mirror formerly at Burton Pynsent & made by Chippendale himself for the Earl of Chatham, £110" (Figure 58.). The attribution to Thomas Chippendale should be questioned, but its design closely followed drawings in *The Gentleman & Cabinetmaker's Director*, particularly plate 169 (Figure 59.). Christopher Gilbert, in *The Life and Work of Thomas Chippendale*, carefully chronicles the work of Chippendale but does not mention the Earl of Chatham, or Burton Pynsent.[98] As discerning as Gist thought himself, he may have purchased a faithful copy made in the eighteenth century, but by a lesser know designer and cabinetmaker. Even with the questionable attribution

[98] Ibid., 114.

of the Chippendale design looking glass, purchases made on the 1920 trip successfully upgraded Gist and Laura's collection.

A turning point in shaping their collection was their 1924 visit to The Metropolitan Museum of Art's American Wing. In the newly opened Wing, they observed period rooms that reflected an early twentieth century interpretation of home life rather than a slavish copy of the true, usually sparsely furnished, reality. The museum introduced Gist and Laura to the new idea of the "whole envelope" approach, wherein the period arrangement of furniture and decorative objects integrated with the corresponding woodwork and ceiling treatments.

After the museum visit on November 11th, they engaged Charles Over Cornelius, the American Wing's associate curator, to advise them on creating a Federal period library and den in their home. After earning a Bachelor of Arts degree at Gist's alma mater, Princeton in 1913, followed by a Bachelor of Science in architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1916, Cornelius joined the New York architectural firm of Frank A. Colby. He stayed briefly before becoming the assistant curator at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. He became associate curator of the American Wing following publication of his books *Furniture Masterpieces of Duncan Phyfe,* and *A Handbook of the American Wing: Opening Exhibition*, the later co-authored with R. T. H. Halsey. He also wrote *Early American Furniture* and published several articles on the decorative arts and architectural history.[99]

[99] "Charles Cornelius, Art Expert, was 46: Associate Curator in Museum Here was also an Architect," *New York Times,* July 15, 1937. Charles Cornelius wrote frequent articles for "The Metropolitan Museum Bulletin," *The Magazine Antiques,* and *Arts and Decoration magazine.*

For the project at Gist's home, Cornelius engaged two architects to facilitate his design. Both Waldron Faulkner of New York and Washington's Nathan C. Wyeth were hired to execute Cornelius's concept. It is likely that after Cornelius presented his vision, Waldron Faulkner drew the plans for converting two bedrooms and a dressing room on the second floor into a long library. Wyeth was the husband of Laura Ellis Blair's niece, Dorothie. He probably was responsible for the interior finishing. Both architects studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and were likely acquainted with each other from that experience. After serving as Supervising Architect of the U. S. Treasury, Mr. Wyeth became chief designer of the Office of the Architect of the Capitol in 1904. During his years as a municipal and residential architect, he championed Colonial and Neo-classical Revival styles. His work included the elegant residences of C. Peyton Russell at 2249 R Street NW (1908) and Charles C Glover, Jr. at 4200 Massachusetts Avenue, NW (1913); the Frances Scott Key Bridge (1923); and the Georgetown (1935) and Petworth (1939) libraries. Following his work on the Blair library, Wyeth designed the District of Columbia War Memorial, a domed neo-classic structure used as a bandstand (Figure 60.). In his early career, Waldron Faulkner also favored Colonial and Federal Revival styles. He started his career in New York, and later he relocated to open an office in Washington, D.C. where he designed private residences (Figure 61.).

The result of the Wyeth and Faulkner collaboration was trim in the first floor office and dining room, a second floor library, and a third floor private retreat surrounded with lighted cases for display of Gist's glass collection (Figure 62.). To accomplish the desired result, historic woodwork was taken from an eighteenth century home in Wiscassett, Maine, and used to create bookcases, door casements and pediments in the

new library. It was also applied to the office and dining room. (Figures 63. 64.). The plaster treatments on and around ceilings of the library, and dining room reproduce federal era shapes of ovals and circles, and urn, swag, and patera motifs (Figures 65. 66. 67.). To further colonialize the house exterior, the Blair's added a portico over the front entrance complete with Ionic capitols above white columns (Figure 68.). The portico may have been Wyeth's design. Colonial Revival taste displayed in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's American Wing, and the growing popularity of collecting, clearly inspired this renovation.

When Laura and Gist could not find the right survival piece to complete a room's décor, they filled in with several high-quality Colonial Revival reproductions made by Nutting, Potthast and other manufacturers. They and some antique collecting contemporaries apparently followed Wallace Nutting's advice, "Copy and avoid bad taste…We love early American forms because they embody the strength and beauty in the character of the leaders of American Settlement….We carry on their spirit by imitating their work."[100] A grand promoter, Nutting was trying to sell his own interpretations of early American styles. Several other furniture manufacturers added "colonial groupings" to their offerings to meet the growing demand. Two of the top producers of high quality Colonial Revival reproduction furniture, with reasonable accuracy, were Wallace Nutting Furniture of New England and Potthast Brothers, a Baltimore company with a showroom and sales office in Washington, D.C. Gist and Laura purchased from both.

[100] Stillinger, *The Antiquers,* 190.

Wallace Nutting had a profound impact on the availability of Colonial Revival styles for America's culturally conservative middle class not inclined to purchase antiques. Initially, it was his hand-tinted photographs of colonial interiors that appeared in *Harper's Monthly, Woman's Home Companion, Country Life* and *The Ladies Home Journal* that brought him recognition with the general public.[101] Writing for the *Winterthur Portfolio,* William Dulaney states, "In the world of antiques between the world wars, Nutting sought and enjoyed the reputation of prolific and authoritative writer, a connoisseur and collector, an overseer of a workshop whose reproductions were sought by both collector and curator."[102] In 1925 Nutting's advertisements appeared in *Vogue* magazine (Figure 69.). The following year, he produced a copy of a Townsend chest-on-chest in mahogany and advertised it in *The Magazine Antiques* by 1927. The reproductions were based on his own extensive collections and authentic survivals recently available in major museums like The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut. So vast was his production, by the middle of the 1930s his staff had constructed over 1,000 different furniture pieces under his watchful eye. Multiple reupholstering has covered the Nutting brand label, but a Blair side chair is possibly a product of one of Nutting's Massachusetts factories. Nutting scholar Thomas Denenberg wrote, "By inventing a sentimental past, imbuing it with moral significance, and selling it at every turn, Wallace Nutting made American history available, attractive and useful for the modern era."[103]

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[101] Joyce P. Barendsen, "Wallace Nutting, an American Tastemaker," *Winterthur Portfolio* Vol. 18, 187.

[102] William L. Dulaney, "Wallace Nutting Collector and Entrepreneur," *Winterthur Portfolio* Vol.13. 47.

[103]Thomas Denenberg, *Wallace Nutting and the Invention of Old America.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003),193.

Also producing reproductions, but at a higher quality, were the Potthast brothers. Initially, they repaired and purchased old furniture. Within only a year of their arrival from Germany in 1891, they assembled enough restored pieces to open an antique shop. From their repair business they transitioned to manufacturing reproductions. Their reverence for handmade pieces was consistent with the Arts and Crafts Movement of that time, but their styles copied the eighteenth century aesthetic. Potthast Bros., Inc. expert, Catherine Rogers Arthur wrote that although their ultimate goal was to boost sales, the Potthasts understood the importance of teaching potential patrons about period styles, designs, and craftsmanship. They believed that educated consumers would be more likely to consider handmade reproductions superior to mass-produced furniture.[104] The Potthast 1930 brochure, "Replicas for Collector's Antiques," states "The thoughtful home furnisher making a choice from these authorative books – connoisseur's collections, and having them reproduced by Potthast's hand-methods, individually-made, like the original antiques, can never err in good judgment…"[105] Like Wallace Nutting, acting as mentor, the Potthasts positioned themselves as educators and arbiters of taste to their well-established, predominately upper-class clientele. Proof of their excellent marketing sense was evident in their brochures, showroom arrangements, advertisements and the Potthast tag line, "The True Antiques for Tomorrow" (Figure 70.).

Several sons of the Potthast Brothers founders joined the firm in the 1920s and 1930s. Greater name recognition brought commissions for furniture for President Woodrow Wilson when he moved out of the White House. The Potthast Bros. firm also

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[104] C Arthur, "The True Antiques of Tomorrow: Furniture by the Potthast Brothers of Baltimore, 1892-1975." (Masters thesis, University of Delaware, 1999), 7.

[105] Ibid., 52.

furnished the Governors' Mansion in Annapolis, Maryland. The eighteenth century craftsmen used the design books of Chippendale, Hepplewhite, and Sheraton, so too did the Potthast Bros. use them as primary design sources. The skill of the four original Potthast brothers and the revival of Colonial taste contributed to the company's stunning success. Laura and Gist probably patronized the Potthast showroom in the Wesley Heights section of Washington, D.C. They may have ordered side chairs to match their period dining chairs, from the Potthast custom department. Ms. Arthur has confirmed that the pair of side tables was a Potthast product (Figure 71.).[106] Nutting and Potthast especially were said to have created consumer demand for the Colonial Revival.[107]

Sometime after their marriage in 1913, but before 1922, Gist and Laura selected a reproduction banjo clock. Wall clocks with a round face and long body terminating in a square pendulum case were called banjo clocks due to their shape. They along with shelf clocks practically replaced tall clocks and offered an alternative that was smaller and equally efficient. Banjo clocks produced as early as the late eighteenth century became widely popular in the 1820s and 1830s. The Blair's banjo clock was made by the Boston firm, Bigelow and Kennard (Figure 72.). Founded by John Bigelow in 1830, the Bigelow and Kennard Company survived until 1922. Based on the still bright coloration of Blair's clock dial and hardware, it is more likely to have been made closer to the 1910s than the 1830s.

The Great Depression took a toll on Gist and Laura's financial resources. While Gist continued to purchase books on the decorative arts until his death, by the mid 1930s

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[106] Catherine Rogers Arthur, e-mail to author, July 14, 2009.

[107]The market for Potthast furniture continued to be strong, but with the retirement of Theodore J. Potthast, Sr. the last family member active in the business, the company closed in 1975.

he only sparingly added to his collection and instead focused his attention on securing the National Historic Site designation for his family home.

Comparison of Contemporary Collectors' Motivations

When Gist started actively shaping his collection of Americana in 1909, he joined the small but fast-growing ranks of other early nationally and locally known collectors. Through the various United States exhibitions between 1876 and 1909 millions of Americans were exposed to the Colonial Revival themes, and collecting Americana progressed from the hobby of a few to the serious business of many. The accumulated Colonial and Federal survivals of early collectors that became museum exhibits, auctions of notable collections, along with restoration and preservation efforts, dramatically enhanced the popularity of the Colonial Revival. Laura and Gist Blair, with opportunities to learn from all of these resources, and their personal relationships with Charles Cornelius, and Henry Francis du Pont, plus local connoisseurs Armistead Peter, Marie Beale and Miriam Morris placed themselves in the midst of an invigorating period for collectors of Colonial and Federal era survivals.

Much has been written about the most prominent collectors of Americana like Horace Eugene Bolles, Charles Hitchcock Tyler and Marsten Perry. Establishing the motivations of those who gave or sold their treasures to museums reveals another aspect of collecting rarely emphasized. In all cases, acquisition of skillfully made colonial and federal survival pieces by these key "Antiquers" fed an appetite that could hardly be satiated. To varying degrees, the common denominators of motives of these eminent collectors, and Gist, centered on patriotism, romanticism, curiosity, and love of fine workmanship. Also a key goal at the heart of most collectors was the establishment or enhancement of gentlemanly good taste. Competition and love of the hunt should not be

underestimated as the fuel that kept these early antiquers running from attics to barns to unearth examples of a style or form they had not yet acquired.

Some collectors had legions of dealers searching for early Americana on their behalf while others hunted rural areas alone with horse and buggy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Competition thrived, but some collectors helped each other with suggestions and introductions to dealers and favorite sources. For a few, improving their social acceptability and status was a motivating factor. Increasing status, for Laura Blair, figured into her collecting motives while Gist was far more motivated by reaching back to his Scotts-English roots and reinforcing his family's contributions to American history and politics by surrounding himself with their trappings or reproductions of them. Men such as Irving Lyons, Henry Erving, and Luke Vincent Lockwood promoted interest in the Colonial Revival taste by making lasting contributions to the education of American material culture. By placing Gist in context with these noteworthy collectors his motivations and success, on a smaller scale, can be evaluated.

Like Gist these collectors turned their backs on the tidal wave of machine made furniture. Though not currently among his books, Gist surely was aware of the 1891 publication of Irving W. Lyon's book, *Colonial Furniture of New England.* Until the book's publication, prevailing knowledge supported the idea that the more sophisticated objects arrived in America as English or Continental imports. Lyon's revelation that large quantities of fine furniture were crafted in the cities of Portsmouth, Salem, Boston, Newport, and New York surprised many and left a lasting impact on the collection movement. As a result, the interest in American-made pieces grew rapidly and has not been dampened even in the twenty-first century. Only periodic economic distress slowed

the growth in collecting fine or even mediocre craftsmanship of earlier American periods by the casual collector. Often the savvy, wealthy collectors took advantage of the economic stress to acquire "good deals." Many collectors became notable through their gifts to major museums or through the houses they turned over to organizations like the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, started in 1910[108] and The National Trust for Historic Preservation, created in 1949.[109] The early "Antiquers" profiled in this chapter each shared elements of their collecting motives and strategy with Gist or Laura Blair.

Henry Wood Erving (1851-1941) and Charles Hitchcock Tyler (1863-1931) spent their lives in New England. They, like New Hampshire native, Mary Woodbury Blair, knew that Yankee habits of thrift prevented the discarding of objects still serviceable. In many well-to-do households, the older furnishings were demoted to servant quarters. In both upper and middle-class homes, old pieces were downgraded for kitchen use or carted to barns and attics. Connecticut collector, Henry Watson Kent (1866-1946) said the greatest motivation of his friend Henry Erving was patriotism. "It was his allegiance to his friends, people, and country, past and present that stood out above the others. And it made him a unique collector. It was loyalty that was at the bottom of his belief in the goodness of American things…Behind his beautiful chests, chairs and tables he saw the men of the times who made them."[110] Like Ben: Perley Poore and Gist, Erving's

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[108] Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, SPENA was formed in 1910 by William Sumner Appleton to preserve and illustrate New England life through buildings and objects of historical interest. It is now called Historic New England.

[109] By a congressional charter in 1949 The National Trust for Historic Preservation was formed to support preservation of historic buildings.

[110] Elizabeth Stillinger, *The Antiquers* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1980), 79.

romanticism for things of the past joined with his abiding interest in the lives and skills of early furniture craftsmen. Like other late nineteenth century collectors, Erving scoured the country-side of rural Connecticut and found valuable surviving treasures in barns and attics. Erving delighted in relating the stories of his acquisitions. In 1922, he delivered a paper to the Connecticut Historical Society called "Random Notes on Colonial Furniture" which the Society later published in 1931. Agreeing with Lyons, Erving's first paragraph declared his belief that "furnishings of early Colonial homes were practically all of domestic [American] construction"[111].

Similar to other turn-of-the century collectors, Erving exhibited little interest in the orderly arrangements of his antiques. He simply derived immense pleasure from surrounding himself with newly found treasures (Figure 73.). Gist and Laura shared Erving's romanticism about their selection of early Americana, but following the decorating books and magazines they owned, the Blair's organized their treasures in hospitable and comfortable room arrangements. Among the books that guided them was the 1926 edition of *The House of Simplicity* by Ethel Seal, who suggested using the rooms of the American Wing of The Metropolitan Museum of Art as inspiration for trim, painted woodwork, arrangement of furniture and upholstery "to add new dignity to old possessions."[112]

In contrast to Erving's random arrangement of his collection, Blair's private retreat, known as the Curio Room, was specifically designed for display by Charles Cornelius along the lines of the ancient Italian studiolo. Following his own Metropolitan

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[111] Henry W. Erving, *Random Notes on Colonial Furniture* (New Haven: Connecticut Historical Society, 1931), 10.

[112] Ethel Davis Seal, *The House of Simplicity* (New York: Century Company, 1926), 163.

Museum American Wing concept, Cornelius installed Federal period woodwork to enhance the furniture and lighted cases that featured Gist's glass collection (Figure 74.). The last sentences of Erving's historical society presentation could just as easily be voiced by Gist, "But of most of the old-time furnishings, we may say that they are at least dignified and respectable. All examples are quaint, and many are beautiful, and as representing the early taste and industry of our forebears [sic], our Colonial furniture is most desirable and worthy of careful preservation."[113]

Like Erving and Blair, motivated by patriotism and nostalgia for times past, Horace Eugene Bolles (1838-1910) assembled a collection of over 600 American Colonial and Federal survivals that were purchased by The Metropolitan Museum of Art to form the core of the American Wing (Figure 75.). He mentored his cousin, fellow Bostonian, Charles Hitchcock Tyler, who shared Bolles' motives of preserving fine examples of American craftsmanship, but had an entirely different approach to collecting. While Bolles would hunt the country-side with his horse and buggy to eagerly explore attics, lofts and cellars, Tyler primarily used dealers to do the hunting for him. Tyler filled three houses and his law office with furniture, bronzes, and engravings. The Blairs attended auctions, scoured Atlantic coastal shops and worked through dealers while they kept abreast of the market through reading *The Magazine Antiques* to augment their collection. Like Tyler, hunting through barns and attics was not their style. Tyler's collection spanned the seventeenth through the mid nineteenth centuries and also included American glass and silver. Gist owned only a few Jacobean chairs representing the seventeenth century while the bulk of his collection in furniture, silver and glass

[113] Erving, *Random Notes on Colonial Furniture*, 60.

primarily covered the eighteenth to mid nineteenth centuries. Unlike Gist, who owned furniture in a range of qualities, Tyler's pieces were consistently in the highest value category. About Tyler, a friend wrote,

> Of his mania for collecting, most of which we could appreciate and which amounted almost to an obsession with him, we still found it difficult to understand why he had extended himself in so many fields. There was hardly a line of Americana in which he did not possess splendid examples, while in some of them he simply stunned one by the completeness of his coverage. . . Probably no one has ever seen all of his collections, for beside his three houses, which were 'crammed to the guards,' he had storerooms full of treasures. It is doubtful if even he could remember what he had.[114]

Upon Tyler's death in 1931, his collection went to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston to form the nucleus of its Americana holdings. The mass of the collection was so large, that the museum promptly held an auction to pear it down to a manageable size. In so doing it sold off his excellent nineteenth century Victorian pieces, a decision, it later looked upon with regret.[115] Gist collected in a measured and organized fashion based on the books and articles he read. Unlike Tyler, who didn't know what he had, Gist made inventory lists in 1911, 1920 and at least once more in the late 1930s. He exercised strict discipline on what he purchased depending on his financial capability at the time of each purchase. Therefore, Blair's furniture purchases generally fell into the "medium" or "high" value categories in the years just before and after World War I. By the 1920s a larger portion of Blair purchases fell into the "very high" bracket (Figure 76.). In the lean 1930s Gist and Laura's acquisition of high value furniture categories slowed substantially, and they invested in smaller items of glass rather than in furniture.

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[114] Lawrence C. Wroth, *The Walpole Society, Five Decades* (Walpole Society, 1960), 49.

[115] Stillinger, *The Antiquers*, 103.

Boyhood friends from Providence, Rhode Island, Richard Canfield (1855-1914) and Marsden Perry (1850-1935) were early antique collectors of an altogether different kind than Blair, Erving, Bolles, or Tyler. The Blairs' status was established by virtue of their "Cave Dweller" place in Washington society. Canfield and Perry, however, collected to improve their status and did everything possible to appear as wealthy connoisseurs of eighteenth century luxury goods. Aspiring to take on the persona of cultured gentlemen, they were more interested in being known for their acquired knowledge of antiques than for any association with America's prominent families. In reality Canfield was a gambler, whose six-month jail stay prompted by a raid on his own gambling establishment, ironically provided him the opportunity to study art, history and literature. As a result, his next gambling house in Saratoga, New York, was fashioned after an Englishmen's club complete with a strict dress code of formal gentlemen's attire, a French chef, and fine antiques.

After Canfield's premature death, Marsden Perry purchased Canfield's Americana collection to combine with his own of English furniture and silver, carpets, books, and Asian porcelains. Later when the scope and size of Perry's collection overwhelmed him, he sold a portion of it to George S. Palmer who in turn sold some of it to The Metropolitan Museum of Art. With just a sixth grade education, Perry focused all his efforts on building a fortune in banking, railroads and public utilities to support his collecting addiction. Unlike those born into distinguished early American families, Canfield and Perry were driven by the desire to create substantial wealth and own notable collections. They strived constantly to improve their station in life, by upgrading their possessions. Perry reached his goal with his 1901 purchase of the John Brown house in

Providence, Rhode Island (Figure 77.). He was well aware that John Quincy Adams had called it "the most magnificent and elegant private mansion that I have ever seen on this continent."[116] Not only had both Canfield and Perry achieved the lifestyle of the eighteenth century English gentleman they craved, but they garnered invitations to join the most prestigious collecting club of all, the Walpole Society. Striving to portray himself as an independently wealthy English gentleman was not Gist's objective though he would have eagerly joined the Walpole Society if asked, more for the exposure to knowledge than for prestige.

The third generation of Blairs had respectable law practices, but they never quite achieved the prominence of their cabinet member father, nor the political influence of their newspaper editor grandfather. Maintaining the essence of the old Washington elite was important to Gist. His membership in several exclusive men's clubs spoke to his desire to reaffirm his family's prominence.[117] Gist and Laura continued to be invited to the White House and other elite occasions, but aside from dinners that included William and Nellie Taft and the 1933 dinner they hosted for President Franklin Roosevelt, presidents no longer streamed through the house seeking counsel in Blair's office (Lincoln Room).

Luke Vincent Lockwood (1872-1951) played a key role in the Hudson-Fulton Exhibition by classifying, cataloguing and later by installing the early American furniture at the Brooklyn Museum. Gist shared two philosophies with Lockwood. They both felt it

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[116] Ibid., 118.

[117] Gist Blair wrote a long scholarly paper about antique silver that the Columbia Historical Society published as a booklet. Gist attempted to have a book he authored about Lafayette Square published by various New York firms, but it was rejected as being too localized to make a successful book. He lectured on the subject before the Columbia Historical Society. Office of the Curator, BH-LH File 1.

was more important to have pieces with provenance than technical masterpieces. In Gist's 1911 inventory, his inherited pieces were carefully identified with the original family owner. His 1920 travel journal detailed the item, date and shop where purchased, provenance, and price. Lockwood and Blair, both students of history, knew that even upper class, eighteenth and early nineteenth century Americans lived with both old pieces and newer furniture. This shared belief allowed Lockwood to combine periods in the Brooklyn Museum of Art and Blair to do the same in his family home. Unlike Henry Francis du Pont, who maintained period specific rooms, each man was comfortable with a William and Mary desk and bookcase and a Federal style chair drawn up to it.

Considered the greatest Americana collector, Henry Francis du Pont and his wife, Ruth, were friends of Laura and Gist. Gist's collecting of Americana predates du Pont's by about ten years. Unsubstantiated stories of Blair and du Pont bidding against each other at auctions have been handed down curator to curator at The Blair House and the Department of State Diplomatic Reception Rooms.[118] At one point, Laura wrote an undated letter to Ruth duPont declining an invitation to spend the weekend at Winterthur. Their initial connection was through Laura's son of her first marriage, Franklin Ellis, Jr., who served as usher in his Harvard classmate, Henry du Pont's, 1916 wedding. Nineteen years later, Laura and Gist's adopted daughter, Laura Lawson Blair, and Henry and Ruth's younger daughter, Ruth Ellen, were classmates at the exclusive Virginia boarding school, Foxcroft.

Like Gist Blair, Henry Francis du Pont grew up in a home furnished with heavy dark American Empire furniture. Du Pont also lived with a mix of English and European

[118] As the story goes, Gist Blair always lost out to H.F. du Pont except on one occasion over an object in glass.

pieces. In 1951 when asked about the origin of his interest in American furniture, du Pont replied,

> A visit to Mrs. Watson Webb's house in Shelburne, Vermont, in 1923, was therefore a revelation. It was the first early all American interior I had ever seen and it captivated me…Seeing Henry Sleeper's house at Gloucester, Massachusetts, a few days later crystallized my desire to start collecting Americana on my own…. In retrospect, I realized how important was this particular week in shaping the course of my life. It was during the 1924 visits to the Metropolitan's American Wing and the Brooklyn Museum's similar space "…it occurred to me to undertake a similar venture, and I decided to add an American Wing to Winterthur, which I inherited at about this time"[119]
> (Figure 78, 79.).

In the development of his collection, du Pont not only used his remarkable sense of design, he also enlisted expert guidance. Of his closest advisors, Bertha Benkhard and Charles Over Cornelius had the greatest impact. Benkhard, a close friend of du Pont's sister started her collecting in 1903 and became a respected authority on all aspects of early Americana. In 1929 du Pont brought Cornelius to Winterthur to catalogue his antiques, but a few years later Cornelius' assignment changed to advising and translating du Pont's vision into complete room settings. According to the Walpole Society, Benkhard had achieved such perfection with her own Long Island home and its collection, that they deemed it was "What all would want but had failed to achieve."[120] Cornelius started on Winterthur and other du Pont properties a few years following his success on the Blair dining room, office, library, and curio room. It is possible Cornelius may have been recommended to du Pont by Blair.

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[119] Stillinger, *The Antiquers*, 118.

[120] Woodhouse, Samuel W. "Further notes on the Invasion of Long Island." Walpole Society Note Book 1940, 56

A non-east coast born collector contemporary of Gist Blair was Henry Ford (1863-1947). Just as Gist wanted to preserve both the fine and ordinary trappings of his family's life, so did Mr. Ford. By 1919, Ford had restored his childhood home out of sentimentality for the mother who died while he was young. The pleasure he took in the project led him to purchase the Wayside Inn of Sudbury, Massachusetts, in 1923. Inspired by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1863 *Tales* about the 1716 inn, Ford expected to find it filled with the objects Longfellow wrote about. Nostalgia the poem created was not Ford's only driving force. He decided the Wayside Inn would serve as a showcase, bully pulpit, and pilot project for the much larger village he planned for Dearborn, Michigan (Figure 80.). On the annual car trips the Blair's made from Washington to Bar Harbor and other trips to the Boston area it was likely they stopped at the Wayside Inn. In a letter to Gist about their planned trip to the Moffatt-Ladd House in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, just a few hours from the Wayside Inn, Laura wrote, "You do know how I so love those old houses."[121] In a report before the Massachusetts Historical Society, Ford researcher, Roger Butterfield, explained,

> At the Wayside Inn he [Ford] worked this out, in a way that profoundly affected historical guardianship in the United States. This was the first place where an individual, possessing all the money needed, set out to restore and put on display not just one famous building, but a sizable, functioning community of homes, farms, school, craft industries, chapel, and village tavern—with the purpose, as Ford stated it, 'to show how our forefathers lived and to bring to mind what people they were.'"[122]

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[121] Blair Family Papers, container 5. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. The Moffatt-Ladd House was one of the early house museums, opening in 1912.

[122] Roger Butterfield, "The Wayside Inn, and the Problem of "History Is Bunk," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, (*Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society Vol. 77 1965), 60.

Henry Ford seemingly never regretted the large sum he invested even though the Wayside Inn proved unprofitable. For Ford, the Wayside Inn property represented the chance to tell his version of history and save the well-traveled Route 20 from becoming a string of coffee stops, hamburger and hotdog stands, while developing the message that later attracted the American public to his larger project, Greenfield Village, in Dearborn, Michigan. The Wayside Inn also served as a model for many similar projects throughout the United States that for over eighty years have interactively engaged families in the life ways of previous centuries.[123] Just as Henry Ford created the Wayside Inn and Greenfield Village as his contribution to history, on a much smaller scale, Gist Blair preserved and protected his family home with its modest and elegant objects as step toward creating his own house museum to be left to the American people.

Those who purchased and protected Americana until the 1920s were the true pioneers of American collecting. With limited guidance, they relied on their instincts. Their motivations of patriotism, nostalgia, and curiosity combined with their reverence for history. They believed in the moral and aesthetic superiority of their old objects over the machine-made, mass-produced products with no story or character. Gist exhibited all of these motivations, but the overriding one was his family tie to the furniture and objects that, he believed, best represented the distinguished achievements of his ancestors. As the steward of his family's heritage, collecting was the most natural vocation for him to have.

Through the expanding popularity of the Colonial Revival taste prompted by pioneer collectors, museum exhibits and commercial enterprise, Gist and Laura stayed focused on shaping their collection and maintaining or improving upon the quality

[123] Ford's model for hands-on observation and learning of history helped shape Williamsburg, Deerfield Village, and Old Salem, in addition to improvements to Mount Vernon and other historic sites.

consistent with their inherited treasures. They did not allow the 1920s early modernism trends to divert them from their objective of presenting their home, not as it was in generations past, but rather as a center of gracious hospitality surrounding its guests with the warm remembrance of family distinction.

Gist and Laura knew other Washingtonians who lived in homes made famous by their notable prior owners. Tudor Place, owned by Armistead Peter III, a descendant of Martha Washington, Decatur House, eventually owned by Truxton and Marie Beale, and Robert Hooper's "The Lindens" owned by George and Miriam Morris are examples of Washington homes with interesting histories. Blair, Peter, Beale and Morris knew each other through their association with the Cosmos Club, Metropolitan Club and Chevy Chase Country Club.[124] Beale, Peter, and Gist Blair shared the status of "Antiques" as defined by Mark Twain. In his 1873 *The Gilded Age,* Mark Twain lampooned the three levels of aristocracy he observed in Washington. According to Twain's definition, first, "Official Society" described the office holders of the government while the second, "Parvenus" made their fortune elsewhere and eagerly came to get into the Washington scene with the hope of securing influence, or opportunity, like Laura Lawson Ellis and her first husband Frank. The third group that Twain refers to as the "Antiques" consisted of families that by 1870s were the elder families in Washington. By 1900 "Cave Dwellers" was the new term used in the press to describe the "Antiques." Defined by Kathryn Jacobs, in *Capitol Elites:* "Relics, with perfect manners and impeccable taste….They had retreated up into their comfortable Federal-period caves, pulled their ladders after them, and, from their lofty vantage point, declared genteel society in the

[124] Social Register of Washington volume 1938 (New York: Social Register Association, 1937), 97.

capital was dead….all those who share the old families' concern for the city, for personal integrity, and for subdued gentility."[125] Indeed Gist Blair, Armistead Peter Jr., his son, Armistead III, and Truxton Beale were "Cave Dwellers."

The first private residence built on Lafayette Square was the 1819 work of Benjamin Latrobe for naval hero, Commodore Stephen Decatur (Figure 81.). Latrobe gained prominence as the architect of the United States Capitol and St. John's Church.[126] Preceding the construction of the Blair house by five years, the Decatur's home was down the street on the southwest corner of Jackson Place and H Street. *Washington Post* reporter, Andrea P. Sckoppeglia in a 1932 article stated that less than a year after Decatur and his bride had moved into their prized residence, Commodore Decatur was killed in a gun duel.[127] In sorrow, Mrs. Decatur gave up the house. A long string of prominent residents occupied the house until 1868, when it was purchased by Civil War General Edward Fitzgerald Beale.

Like neighbor and friend, Montgomery Blair, General Beale did not just expand the house, but altered its exterior features.[128] Beale, less enamored with Latrobe's exterior design, quickly "enhanced" the first floor with Victorian sandstone trim of the current taste. Just as President Lincoln would walk over to the Blair House for a respite from the affairs of state, President Grant spent time in the home with his old Army friend

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[125] Jacob, *Capital Elite*, 224-225.

[126] St. John's Church is the yellow structure on Lafayette Square across from the White House on H Street where most U.S. Presidents have worshiped.

[127] Andrea P. Sckoppeglia, "Decatur House, 113 Years Old, Redolent of Romantic Hours," *Washington Post,* March 20, 1932.

[128] The front of Blair House was altered around 1856 when Montgomery Blair added a third and fourth story to the house and again around 1925-26 when the front portico with Ionic columns was added.

Edward Beale. Like the Blair home, during the Lincoln administration, Beale's house was the center of gracious society gatherings of wealthy newcomers, his old Washington friends, and members of the new Grant administration. Later Presidents Garfield and Arthur were frequent visitors.[129]

Upon the death of General Beale, the house passed to his son, Truxton in 1893 (Figure 82.). Truxton and Marie Beale kept the inherited Victorian furnishings of his parents on the upper floors. On the exterior and especially on the first floor the Beales re-created the era when the house was built while blending their own taste. Like Gist and Laura, Marie bought furniture that reflected the Federal period. To maintain its character, she repainted the house interior with neo-classic colors, as they were known at the time through Williamsburg research. Additionally, under Marie's direction, revival furnishings were added to the dining room. Like the family memorabilia in Blair House, Decatur House contained mementoes of the Beale's many travels which remain amid the Federal era environment they preserved. It was through Marie's preservation efforts, that Decatur house was saved from demolition by the government at the same time as Blair House was similarly threatened. Later Decatur House was preserved through the bequest of Marie Beale, to the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1956.

Just as Gist Blair bid high to win ownership of the ancestral home shared with his brothers, so did Armistead Peter, Jr. gain sole ownership of Tudor Place when he bought it from his four siblings. Armistead, Jr. brought two important things to the house, his deep love of history and great wealth. He modernized the house with twentieth century plumbing and electricity while carefully guarding its architectural integrity (Figure 83.).

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[129] Jacob, *Capital Elites,* 161.

He scavenged woodwork and original bricks from old houses in order to return the home from its Victorianized state back to its Federal era splendor. He used Georgetown cabinetmakers to recreate the sideboard and dining chairs in 1914.

There were many parallels between the Blair, Beale and Peter homes, including the active shaping of their family collections. Each home not only housed early American and Victorian survivals of furniture, glass, and silver, but they co-existed with mementoes of several generations. Gist was also acquainted with the fourth owner of Tudor Place, Armistead Peter, III. Although "Tudor Place" was not threatened, as Gist's house was, by the government's efforts to transform Lafayette Square, the cost of preserving and maintaining the huge property and home was of great concern to Armistead, III and his wife, Caroline. In order to enlarge their collection, they purchased the part of the estate furnishings that were divided among family members at the time of his father's taking over the house.[130] Like Gist Blair, Armistead III, actively shared knowledge of his family home's history and preservation with numerous groups through lectures and publications.

Gist, Truxton Beale, and Armistead Peter, III sought to honor their past by showing their homes filled with accumulated objects and memories of each generation. Thirty-two years after Gist Blair's death, Peter finalized his decision for preservation of his home. In an address delivered to the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association on October 28, 1972, Armistead Peter III stated, "I have organized a foundation to care for Tutor Place after I go. I do not want it to be a period museum. I wish its furnishings to remain as I shall leave them, representing the gradual accumulation over the years of pieces used

[130] Leslie L. Buhler. January 30, 2009 interview with author at Tutor Place, 1644 31st Street, NW Washington D.C.

by succeeding generations, supplemented by additions made with care by my dear wife and myself."[131] Tudor Place opened to the public in 1988. Like Blair House and Decatur House, Tudor Place was not meant to be a period house museum, but instead homage to all of its owners.

In 1936 while the Blairs and Beales were engaged in a campaign to protect their homes from encroaching construction of government buildings, George and Miriam Morris were in the midst of reconstructing the home they moved from Danvers, Massachusetts, to 2401 Kalorama Road just short distance north of Lafayette Square. The Morrises bought the historic structure to house their growing collection of 18th century American furniture. Known as "The Lindens" the house was built in 1754 for wealthy merchant, Robert Hooper, popularly called King Hooper. Parts of his home's design were copied for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. "The Lindens" was on the brink of being sold for parts to museums wanting to create period rooms from its woodwork and other architectural elements when the Morris family stepped in to purchase the structure. It took six rail cars to move the dismantled house and more than two years to reconstruct it. The Morrises hired architect for the reconstruction of Colonial Williamsburg, Walter Mayo Macomber[132] to take on the massive project. Mrs. Morris became a scholar of Americana. She not only had the funds to accomplish the accurate reconstruction of "The Lindens," but also to fill it with superb quality survivals. As example of their value, the auction catalog for the sale of much of George and Miriam

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[131] Tutor Place archives, address delivered by Armistead Peter III to the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association on October 28, 1972.

[132] In his nineties, Walter Macomber helped Clem Conger in the early stages of the transformation of the eighth floor of the Department of State main building into the Diplomatic Reception Rooms.

Morris' collection described item 315 (Figure 84.) as "An extremely rare and important Chippendale mahogany serpentine-back sofa… Approximately eight double-peaked camel-backed sofas are known to exist."[133] So extraordinary was the sofa, it was illustrated and discussed in Jonathan Fairbanks and Elizabeth B. Bates, *American Furniture: 1620-to Present*, Oscar Fitzgerald's *Four Centuries of American Furniture* and in three other publications. Mrs. Morris' ornately carved Chippendale style Philadelphia chest on chest was featured as "Best" in Albert Sack's *Fine Points of Furniture* (Figures 85).[134] Through her collection Miriam Morris paid tribute to the American craftsmen of the 18th century. While her house was not officially open to the public, by the time of Mrs. Morris' death, she had generously shared her collection and knowledge with over 60,000 visitors to her home.[135]

Her collecting objective, in contrast to Gist and Laura's Blair House, the Peter's Tudor Place, and the Beale's Decatur House, was not to show family pieces of many periods, but rather, the finest of 18th century furnishings in period-correct settings. In each case, the Morris furnishings appear consistently of higher value than those owned by the Blairs. Miriam Morris, too wanted "The Lindens" to become a museum, but neighbors rejected the idea.

As good stewards of history and American craftsmanship, each of these families made lasting contributions to our knowledge of the Colonial Revival taste. Sharing their

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[133] Item 315. "The Contents of the Lindens" Saturday, January 22, 1983. Christie, Mason & Woods International Inc. auction catalog, 102.

[134] Ibid., Item 342, 125.

[135] "Mansions Indeed," *Dossier,"* April, 1986.

historic homes and collections through tours and publications, enabled and enriched the study of material culture at a time when it had yet to develop into a formal curriculum.

Conclusion

The second generation members of the Blair family were among the small group of early collectors treasuring the few early American-made objects that descended to them prior to 1876. They did not keep these old furnishings out of necessity; they had the financial capacity to purchase the "latest taste" like Renaissance Revival furniture exhibited at the Centennial International Exhibition by New York and Grand Rapids furniture manufacturers.[136] Mary Woodbury Blair educated herself about the decorative arts. She availed herself of opportunities to be informed not only by her books, but by the Sanitary Fairs and her visit to the Centennial International Exhibition in Philadelphia. Her ownership of colonial period andirons, sewing table, tall clock, and lap-desk and federal style sideboard identified her among the champions of the Colonial Revival taste who owned furnishings with a heritage from the country's creative craftsmen. From Mary Blair's small Colonial period collection to Gist and Laura Blair's extensive assemblage of furnishings, most of which dates between 1730 and 1820, the family collection reflected not just the utility of simpler times associated with early American lineage, but the quality features selected by previous wealthy, discerning owners. The Blair family collection captured a deep respect for the skill and imagination of early American workmanship. Like most early collectors who valued provenance, Gist Blair's primary inspiration sprung from a genealogical orientation toward objects that could illustrate the story of his family's distinguished participation at critical points of

[136] Grand Rapids, Michigan furniture manufacturers of Berkey and Gay, Nelson, Matter and Company, and The Phoenix Furniture Company all won awards at the Philadelphia's Centennial International Exhibition. Fitzgerald, *Four Centuries of American Furniture,* 245.

nineteenth century America. During the period of 1909-1939, Gist and Laura carefully educated themselves and shaped their collection to reflect quality examples of colonial and federal style survivals and revivals.

Little more than a year after Gist's death, Laura Blair, debilitated by Parkinson's disease, was moved early in 1942 to Washington's Emergency Hospital where Gist had been president of the board of directors. The family was preparing for the house to have a future as Gist wished, but they were surprised that the official designation of Blair House as an historic site appeared inadequate to insure its safety. Once again, the State Department wanted to seize property surrounding Lafayette Square, including the Decatur and Blair homes ignoring the historic designation. Architectural plans were drawn up for a new State Department building. The world situation changed rapidly between 1940 and 1942. Funding for many programs including the Historic Sites Act was reallocated to more pressing matters and its personnel, redeployed to the war effort. Even so, pleas for the preservation of the house from the Blair family continued.

Gist's will was clear about his wish for the house and its contents to remain intact as an instrument to appreciate his family and American culture. ". . . keep these articles together . . . [and form] an American museum, deeding it to the City of Washington or the Government of the United States."[137] Gist could not have been more specific; however, a museum was not to be the future of Blair House. In her memoir, *A Child in Blair House* Laura Blair Marvel wrote:

> It was Percy [Percy Blair, Gist's cousin] who came up with the brilliant idea of approaching the State Department to buy the house with most of the interior intact. Percy really set it up, and the Government

[137] "Last Will and Testament of Gist Blair," March 9, 1934, 5-6, Family History File, Legal Papers and Related Documents—Blair Family, Office of the curator, Blair House.

> bought the idea of a nice place to put the visiting dignitaries, as their numbers would be increasing as the war continued.[138]

The idea solved the President's problem of accommodating non-Caucasian foreign heads of state in 1940s segregated Washington, D.C. where "Jim Crow" laws were still in effect for hotels, restaurants and shops. Lacking its own overnight hospitality, the government opened itself to embarrassment if diplomatic guest were exposed to local bigotry. The guest house concept was popular with everyone, but Secretary Hull still grappled with the State Department's urgent need for more space. Finally impatient, Roosevelt with the support of Secretary Ickes, halted all the letters and directives that traveled between the State Department, Public Building Administration, and the White House. On August, 13 1942, less than two months before Laura Lawson Ellis Blair died, Roosevelt wrote his final decision to Cordell Hull:

> I have put through the acquisition of the Blair House by the Government because first, I am convinced that the Government needs it and will continue to need it for the entertainment of distinguished visitors, and secondly, because it has been listed by the Interior Department as an historic monument to be preserved for all time. . . . I think it is important that the contents be preserved in tact [sic] because they represent the furnishings of over a century….[139]

Even before renovations could begin in December 1942, with its colonial survival and revival furnishings remaining practically in the same arrangement as Gist had left them, Blair House started its diplomatic role by hosting heads of state from Peru, Yugoslavia, Greece and Russia.

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[138] Laura Blair Marvel, *A Child in Blair House.* 95.

[139] F. D. R. to Cordell Hull, August 28, 1942, photocopy of original Department of State 110.12/326, BH-LH File 1, Office of the Curator, Blair House.

The Public Building Administration hired New York designer Gladys Miller to decorate the house carrying on the colonial and federal era taste.[140] Ms. Miller authored home interior decoration books and managed a successful interior design business. In her notes from the time she wrote:

> The house being so closely situated to the White House, and the men who lived in it being so much a part of the government, the house has seen a constant flow of important figures sine the time it was bought until it was turned over to the government, October 29, 1942. The house and all its furnishings were purchased intact. . . Not only is it rich in association, but it is also rich in the living quality that comes from four generations of people with money and all the advantages connected therewith, plus a lively curiosity. They not only bought fine things, but they bought many things of interest. They were collectors at heart, and the decoration purist in period or style would be somewhat annoyed in going through Blair House. It is not a Williamsburg restoration. The children of each Blair seemed to fit into the background [of] his or her purchases, and they have all melted into an overall (Figure 86, 87, 88, 89.). [141]

For over 170 years Blair House has been the locus of social and political hospitality. Thanks to the family stewardship, Colonial Revival inspiration, and collector's vision of Gist Blair, and the history-minded, forward thinking President Franklin Roosevelt, its future was assured. As the President's Guest House, where the Colonial Revival survives as a backdrop to international diplomacy, world leaders chart the future surrounded with American decorative arts (Figure 90.).

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[140] Gladys Miller and Irene de Bruyn Robbins were hired in 1942 by the Public Building Administration which was the pre-cursor to the Government Services Administration (GSA).

[141] Gladys Miller notebook number 3. Office of the Curator, Blair House.

Epilogue

As the President's Guest House, Blair House has continued to serve as the home away from home for foreign heads of state on official business with the President. From the street it appears to be one pale yellow house adjacent to a brick home, "Lee House" to its west and two brownstones facing Jackson Place. The Lee House was furnished and used in conjunction with Blair House from 1943 to 1947. It was physically joined to Blair House in 1948. Since 1969 the two Jackson Place town houses have been connected to each other and to the Blair House on the interior. At 70,000 square feet, close in size to the White House, Blair House contains over 450 pieces of furniture including clocks and mirrors. In addition to the Blair family furniture collection, the remaining furniture has come into the house primarily as gifts during various restoration efforts, beginning with the 1942-1945 initial transition of the Blair and Lee houses from private residences to official diplomatic guest house.

Today the Department of State Office of Fine Arts provides the professional curator; the Office of Protocol manages the dedicated multi-lingual hospitality staff; the Office of Facility Management provides a building engineering professional; while the Office of Diplomatic Security provides a team of specially trained security officers. The Blair House Restoration Fund is the private fundraising organization that manages the generous donations of citizens that upgrade and preserve the integrity of The President's Guest House interior decoration and furnishings.

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Gist Blair to President Franklin Roosevelt, undated draft of letter written between November 10, 1933 and January 13, 1934.
President Franklin D. Roosevelt to Gist Blair, January 13, 1934.

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http://www.jgwaarchitects.com/portfolio/monuments/dc-war-memorial/dc-war-

Tudor Place. "Collection overview: Ceramics." Tudor Place.
http://www.tudorplace.org/page.html?pageid=31 (accessed February 15, 2009)

www.measuringworth.com/caculators/uscompare/resultwithad.php# (accessed February 23, 2009)

http://www.buffalonian.com/photo/Pan-am-grandeursof/
http://panam1901.bfn.org/

http://www.oneofakindantiques.com/catalog/5058_english_georgian_yew_wood_oyster_veneer_four_drawer_chest_c1740_1.htm

Appendix I

List of books owned by Gist and Laura Blair found in the Blair House Library and storage room 427.

Barber, Edwin Atlee. *American Glassware: Old and New.* Philadelphia: Patterson and White, 1900.

Blair, Gist. *Irish Silver.* Pamphlet read before the Society of The Friendly Sons of St. Patrick of Washington D.C. December 11, 1928.

Brackett, Oliver. *Thomas Chippendale: A study of his Life, Work and Influence.* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924.
Inscription: Mrs. Gist Blair, Bar Harbor Maine.

Camehl, Ada Walker. *The Blue-China Book: Early American Scenes and History Pictured in the Pottery of the Time.* New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1916.
Inscription: Gist and Laura Blair bought in New York City October 13, 1921.

Cornelius, Charles Over. *Furniture Masterpieces of Duncan Phyfe.* New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1922.
Inscription: Gist Blair November 6, 1922 at St. Regis Hotel, NY from Christine.

Cousins, Frank and Phil M. Riley. *The Colonial Architecture of Old Salem.*

Dyer, Walter. *Early American Craftsmen.* New York: The Century Company, 1915.
Inscription: Gist and Laura Blair from Mary H. Christmas Day 1919.

Halsey, R.T.H. and Charles Over Cornelius. *A Handbook of the American Wing: Opening Exhibition.* New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1924.
Inscription: Gist Blair. Bought Nov. 11, 1924 at the museum.

Hill Harry W. *Maryland's Colonial Charms Portrayed in Silver.* Privately printed, 1938.
Inscription: Bought November 11, 1924 at the Museum.

Hyde, J.A. Lloyd. *Oriental Lowestoft: With Special Reference to Trade with china and the Porcelain Decorated for the American Market.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938.

Jackson, Charles James. *English Goldsmiths and Their Marks.* London: Macmillan and Company, 1921.
Inscription: Gist Blair March 1st, 1922.

Jones, E. Alfred. *The Old Silver of American Churches for the National Society of The Colonial Dames.* Letworth, England: Arden Press, 1913

Kerfoot, J. B. *American Pewter.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin and company, 1924.
Inscription; Gist Blair June 23, 1927.

Latham, Charles. *In the English Home Volumes 1.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907
Inscription: Laura Ellis

Latham, Charles. *In the English Home Volumes 2.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907
Inscription: Laura Ellis

Latham, Charles. *In the English Home Volume 3.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909

Lenygon, Francis. *The Decoration and Furniture of English Mansions During the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909.
Inscription: Franklin Ellis, Laura L. Ellis Washington.

Lockwood, Sarah M. *Decoration Past, Present and Future.* New York: The Literary Guild, 1934

McClelland, Nancy. *Furnishing the Colonial and Federal House.* Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1936.

Moore, N. Hudson. *The Old Furniture Book: Past Ways and Days.* New York: Tudor Publishing, 1936.

Nason, Emma Huntington. *Old Colonial Houses in Maine: Built prior to 1776*. Augusta, Maine 1908. Inscription: Gist Blair bought in Portland, Maine "Lincoln's birthday 1919. For Wiscasset house, see page 100. The two console tables inherited from Mary G. Ray were from there."

Nutting, Wallace. *A Windsor Handbook.* Saugus, Massachusetts: Wallace Nutting, Incorporated, 1917.
Inscription: Bought at Portland, Maine September 16, 1922.

Ormsbee, Thomas Hamilton. *Early American Furniture Makers: A Social and Biographical Study.* New York: Gramercy Publishing Company. 1930.

Percival, Maciver. *The Glass Collector.* New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1919.
Inscription: Gist Blair Portland July 13, 1921.

Peters, Fred. *Clipper Ship Prints by N. Currier and Currier and Ives.* New York: Antique Bulletin Publishing Company, 1930.

Peters, Fred. *Railroad, Indian, and Pioneer Prints by N. Currier and Currier and Ives.* New York: Antique Bulletin Publishing Company, 1930.

Peters, Fred. *Sporting Prints by N. Currier and Currier and Ives.* New York: Antique Bulletin Publishing Company, 1930.

Pleasants, J. Hall and Howard Sill. *Maryland Silversmiths 1715-1830.* Baltimore: Lord Baltimore Press, 1930.

Prime, William C. *Pottery and Porcelain: Of All Times and Nations.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1879.

Sale, Edith Tunis. *Colonial Interiors: Southern Colonial and Early Federal.* New York: Bonanza Books, 1930.

Sale, Edith Tunis. *Interiors of Virginia Houses of Colonial Times.* Richmond: William Byrd Prefs, Incorporated, 1927.
Copy signed by the author.

Shackleton, Robert and Elizabeth Shackleton. *The Quest of the Colonial.* New York: The Century Company, 1908.

Singleton, Esther. *The Furniture of our Forefathers.* London: B.T. Batsford, 1901
Inscription: Purchased in Washington November 7, 1921

Special Silver Catalogue. *The Pennsylvania Museum Bulletin.* Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art. Number 68 June, 1921.
Inscription: Gist Blair at Bar Harbor, Maine August 10, 1924.

Stanard, Mary Newton. *Colonial Virginia: it's People and Customs.* Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1917.

Exhibit at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. *American Silver.* Boston: Boston Museum of Fine Arts 1906

Torrey, Julia Whittemore. *Old Sheffield Plate.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin company, 1918.
Inscription: Gist Blair bought at Portland, Maine June 20, 1922.

Van Rensselaer, Stephen. *Check List of Early American Bottles and Flasks.* New York: 1921.
Inscription: January 2, 1922.

Van Rensselaer, Stephen. *Check List of Early American Bottles and Flasks Revised Edition.* New York: 1926.

Walpole Society *A List of Early American Silversmiths and their Marks: With a Silver Collectors' Glossary.*
Inscription: Gist and Laura Blair bought at Boston June 9, 1919. Contains partial list of my silver and notes.

Willard, John Ware. *The History of Simon Willard: Inventor and Clockmaker.* Boston: E. O. Cockayne, 1911
Inscription: gist and Laura Blair August 1, 1921, cold night.

Williams, Lenore Wheeler, *Sandwich Glass: A Technical Book for Collectors.*
Bridgeport, CT: The Park City Engraving Co., 1922.
Inscription: Gist Blair April 15, 1922.

Appendix II

List of furniture bought in England and Scotland found in 1920 travel journal of Gist Blair among the Blair Family Papers at the Library of Congress.

1. Pair of old Sheraton satinwood card tables painted with garlands of flowers by Pergolesi, bought of Frank Partridge, £170.
2. One Sheraton mahogany inlaid show cabinet owned by Lord Howe & bought & sold to us by J. Rochelle Thomas £125.
3. An antique old mahogany knife box sloping front silver mounts several worked with original London hallmarks, but all not so old, £22.10, bought of Owen Even Thomas, London.
4. One old mahogany boot rack and one old mahogany Hogarth chair, £53.2 sh., bought of F.W. Splaight Hatfield, Hartfordshire, both period pieces.
5. One round table bought through Sir Algernon Craig at shops of Lord Roberts Memorial Workshops for disabled soldiers & sailors, 122 Brompton Road, said to have belonged to Lady Walsey, bought on faith & our judgment for £31.
6. Bought of C. J. Charles London & NY., an old Queen Anne Walnut bureau domed, £265, an old Chippendale tripod pole screen…2 old carved mahogany single chairs, claw and ball feet, 1 old finely carved armchair, ditto £375, also small old chip coffee table with fret gallery, £35, 2 old turned frame walnut stools covered with old needlepoint, Cromwellian period, £75 total £795-all guaranteed –also 2 Jacobean chairs & one old settee for our tapestry, £150.
7. One old root of oyster pattern commode of Wm & Mary period, bought of George Nielsen, Edinburgh, piece guaranteed £49.10.
8. One Sheraton mahogany and satinwood inlay Pembroke table (wheel pattern) & one inlaid satinwood armchair made by Henry Blundale, 1788, & signed, bought of Monday, Kern and Herbert, £150.
9. …One fine antique mirror formerly at Burton Pynsent & made by Chippendale himself for the Earl of Chatham, £110. & 2 antique Hip stuffed back armchairs, £45, bought of Mallet & Son, 40 New Bond Street, London, & guaranteed of the period—also as the facts above stated, 2 mahogany single Chip chairs bought of Lenygon & Morant , 31 Burlington Street, London.