



17th Century Armchair

Anonymous

This armchair was carved sometime between 1650 and 1700 in New England. It is done in the 17th century style, low and boxy. The pieces of the chair join one another at right angles, making a very square profile. Oak, the material of this chair, was the favored wood as it was sturdy and had been the favorite material back in England. Because the basic form of the chair is so boxy and plain furniture makers often added ornamentation such as carvings or turnings, as seen on this chair. Turned chairs were created with a lathe and were quicker and easier to produce than chairs with carved parts.



William and Mary Armchair

Anonymous

This armchair is done in the William and Mary Style sometime between 1725 and 1750 in New England. William and Mary is an early Baroque form with lighter frame pieces and a taller height. The joinery is dovetail rather than the simple mortise and tenon of earlier furniture. This furniture was much more expensive than the 17th century style and so it was never widely adopted. Most homes still had simpler furniture.



Queen Anne Card Table

by Benjamin Frothingham, Jr.

This table was built sometime between 1755 and 1790 in the Queen Anne Style. The legs are curved in the cabriole style and the surface ornamentation is minimal. Classical proportions and the comfort of the user are paramount in this style. For example, chairs from this period have a curved back to conform to the users spine. The most successful furniture makers were from Boston or Philadelphia and their furniture was exported all over the colonies. The maker of this piece lived in Charlestown, Massachusetts, just outside of Boston. His home and shop were burned down during the attack on Charlestown by the British in 1775. He fought in the colonial army through the duration of the war.



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Gravestone of Israel Leavitt

Anonymous

The earliest Colonial stonework was done on gravestones. This gravestone is from 1690 in Hingham, Massachusetts. It depicts a skull in the center with wings. The wings represent the ability of the soul to fly to heaven and the faith that the person buried under this marker was bound toward God. This was a purely American style, never found in Europe. The New England gravestones reveal the attitudes and beliefs that American Puritans had toward death. Death was a release from a sin bound and evil world, a returning of the soul to its proper sphere. Puritans also liked to be reminded of the inevitability of death and that all must stand before God and make an accounting of their life. The three sections of this headstone are also typical of New England headstone style and was the same shape as the typical bed, representing the final resting place.



Figurehead

Anonymous

This figurehead was mounted on the prow of an American sailing ship. It is now part of the collection of the Joseph Skinner Museum at Mount Holyoak College, South Hadley, Massachusetts. It was probably carved and painted in the 18th century in New England. The figurehead served as a way to identify a ship and to show off the wealth of the owner.

The figurehead would have been carved by a skilled woodworker who had served a long apprenticeship under a master before going into business on his own.



Reverend John Davenport

Anonymous

This is a painting of the Reverend John Davenport by an unknown limner in 1670 with oil paints on canvas. It was painted somewhere in the vicinity of Boston. Rev. John Davenport came from England to America in 1637. He established the New Haven colony and was its pastor for 30 years. He moved to Boston in his old age after New Haven was annexed, amid Davenport's protests, to Connecticut.



David, Joanna, and Abigail Mason

Anonymous

This was painted in about 1670 by an unknown limner, sometimes attributed to the Freake-Gibbs painter. The Freake-Gibbs painter painted about ten portraits that we know of and two of those were of the Freake family and another three of the Gibbs family. All the portraits were painted of people who lived near Boston. Art historians recognize that the artist who painted these ten paintings did so in a recognizable style but no one knows his name. The portraiture of this artist is done in an Elizabethan style of two centuries earlier. This is deliberate as is the flatness and lack of ornamentation. It reflected American values of piety, simplicity, and egalitarianism, a rejection of European ostentation and elitism.



Mrs. Richard Patteschall (Martha Woody) and Child

by Thomas Smith, attr.

This painting was done in about 1679 probably by artist Thomas Smith. Smith was both a mariner and an artist. He was a puritan from Boston. The style of this painting is influenced by the Dutch Golden Age painters and is much more realistic than the Elizabethan influenced portraits of the same period in Boston. The woman in the painting is the daughter of a soap maker and the wife of a fisherman, trader, and justice of the peace in Maine, a frontier region at this period. Martha stayed in Boston, a wealthy and prominent member of society. Paul Revere is a descendant of hers. The peach she holds symbolizes a righteous heart.



Silver Coffee Pot

by Paul Revere

This coffee pot was made in 1773 by the famous American silversmith, Paul Revere. Revere crafted over 5000 pieces in silver during his career. This pot would have been for a wealthy patron. It has ornate details including the crest on the body. Revere's work is easily identified as his mark is always on his pieces.



Embroidered Sampler

by Margaret Grant

This was embroidered with silk and linen on linen cloth in 1737.

Girls would create samplers during the course of their education to show the skills they had developed with the needle. The samplers nearly always included the date and name of the embroiderer and so are easy to attribute. This piece depicts Adam and Eve being thrust from the garden at the bottom, a popular motif from this time period. Colonial women sewed all the clothing and linens for their families. Some of them found time to do more decorative pieces in bed coverings and wall hangings.



The Old Plantation

by John Rose, att.

This painting was done between 1785 and 1795 in South Carolina. It is watercolor on paper. Slaves in the picture are doing a dance or perhaps performing a ceremony of some kind. The instruments you see are West African in origin. So this shows that slaves kept the traditions and culture of their homeland to some extent even under the conditions of slavery thousands of miles from their homes.



George and Martha Washington

Anonymous

This was probably produced sometime around 1800 or perhaps a few years later. The bright vivid colors and simple flat geometric shapes are typical of art that someone might have produced on their own to adorn the walls of their home.

Colonial American Folk Art Cards

American folk art includes useful art created for practical purposes or as decoration on a practical item. Examples are the figureheads of ships, gravestones, furniture, pottery, or metal working. Early America was a place where people had very little leisure for less practical activities, like fine art. Everyone had to work hard just to survive so the earliest art in America was not fine art. As Americans gained more wealth they began to want decorations for their homes. The earliest painters in America were portrait painters known as limners. They were self taught and their style and techniques were similar to European techniques of a few hundred years earlier. The limners were anonymous artisans, not famous portraitists.

Print these art cards and descriptions onto white card stock. Cut the cards out on the solid lines.

Help your kids become familiar with these paintings and artists by playing matching games, sorting the cards, and quizzing over them.

1. Place the cards face down, with images in one group and description cards in another group. Choose one card from each group. Determine if they match. You can read the description of the painting to see if they do.
2. Arrange the art pieces in order of date. Which were done first? Can you see a progression of techniques or style in the cards?
3. Hold up an image card and see if your child can remember the title or details.
4. Go online and find more art by the same artists. Can you tell which artist painted the piece just by looking at the style?