



TAR HEEL TREASURES

History by Day

Thomas Day adapted Europe's grand furniture styles to create one-of-a-kind rural treasures.

BY LISA MORGAN

Like the clothing designers of today, 19th-century American cabinetmakers kept a close eye on the designs coming out of Europe. Designs trickled down to their counterparts in New York City; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Baltimore, Maryland. Rural artisans copied these styles for their own clientele.

What is it?

The mahogany sideboard constructed by Thomas Day, a free African-American and North Carolina's most famous cabinetmaker, exhibits the uniqueness of North Carolina cabinetry. The visible, primary woods are made of mahogany and mahogany veneer, but the unseen parts (drawer sides, bottoms, and backboards) are made of North Carolina yellow pine, tulip poplar, and walnut.

Day fashioned his sideboard in the late Classical style made popular in Philadelphia by cabinetmaker and French emigrant, Antoine Quervelle. Although the design dates back to about 1825, the sideboard was constructed between 1840 and 1855. Day differentiated his style by using stylized "S" scrolls rather than carved fruit and cornucopias that were popular in the big cities. Another personal touch is the agateware pulls. Day's interpretation of an urban design proved to be popular among his clientele.


Where did it come from?

The sideboard was made in Day's Caswell County shop in Milton for local farmer and manufacturer Caleb Richmond. Richmond lived just outside the town limits at what is today known as the Woodside Inn.

Where is it today?

The sideboard was acquired by the Yarborough family of Locust Hill and was later sold to a private collector, Thomas S. Erwin, who then offered

it to the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh.

Today, it's on display at the museum's "Pleasing to the Eye: The Decorative Arts of North Carolina" exhibit, which features items of North Carolinian craftsmanship and artistic expression from the 17th century to the 20th century. 

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to know more

For a link to the museum's website, go to www.ourstate.com, and click on "This Month's Issue."



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